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# **Myths of Rebellion: Afrikaner and Countercultural Discourse**

by

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## **COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of others people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Contents

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## Abstract

## Acknowledgements

## Reader's Note

## Introduction

Background and objective	1
Literature review	3
Key interests	5
The creation of myths	5
The function of rebellion	7
Methodology	9
Chapter synopsis	13

## Chapter One: Principles of Afrikanerdom

Foundations	15
Against the British	19
Religion as distinction	21
The need for self-representation	23
Mythmaking	25
Communism and apartheid	26
Strategies of reinvention	29
Racially inclusive Afrikanerdom	29
Victimised Afrikanerdom	31
Bourgeois Afrikanerdom	33

## Chapter Two: Principles of counterculture

Foundations	36
A post-war shift	38
The rise of countercultural thinking	41
The rise of punk	46
Subversion and recuperation	50
Taste and rebellion	55
The cultural significance of rebellion	66

## **Chapter Three: A tradition of Afrikaner rebellion**

N.P. van Wyk Louw	73
The Sestigers	74
André P. Brink	77
Key features	81
Ambivalence	81
Postmodernism	87
Liminality	91

## **Chapter Four: Engagement with Afrikanerdom in the twenty-first century**

AFDA short films	94
<i>Bokkiesweek of bliksem</i>	95
<i>Senter</i>	96
<i>Vergelee</i>	97
<i>Hemel op die platteland</i>	99
<i>Skaapwagter</i>	103
<i>Party van ons</i>	106
<i>Die Engelsman, die Boer en die dude in die boom</i>	108
<i>Poespas</i>	109
Tendencies in other films	109
CityVarsity short films	110
<i>When tomorrow calls</i>	111
<i>Springbokkie</i>	112
<i>Swing left Frank</i>	114
<i>iBali and Killer October</i>	115
A decade of rebellious music	116
Karen Zoid	117
Fokofpolisiekar	118
“De la Rey”	122
MK as platform	124
Bellville mythology	125
<i>Forgive them for they know not what they do</i>	126
aKING	128
Die Heuwels Fantasties	129
<i>2-21</i>	129
Jack Parow and Die Antwoord	130
<b>Conclusion</b>	134
<b>Works Cited</b>	137
<b>Film Reference List</b>	153

# Abstract

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This study examines tendencies of cultural rebellion by focusing on entertainment that engages with Afrikaner tradition. Examples from music, student films and autobiographies are used to illustrate that artists reclaim signifiers of their cultural heritage in performances of rebellion. New myths are appearing that seem to fulfil a young generation's need for a history outside of apartheid. It is suggested that these myths assist Afrikaners who feel alienated in post-apartheid South Africa to foster a sense of legitimacy and belonging.

It will argue that countercultural thinking plays a major role in the discourse of rebellion. Research is conducted within the framework of communication and cultural studies. Popular texts are considered to constitute discourses that formulate and reproduce ideologies. An analysis of Afrikaner and countercultural discourse is conducted by means of texts. The creative output of rebellious Afrikaners is used to illustrate the manifestation of countercultural ideology in entertainment. Examples of the work of André P. Brink, Fokofpolisiekar, Karen Zoid, Koos Kombuis, Johan Nel, Bok van Blerk, Anton Kannemeyer and Jack Parow are analysed in order to highlight common features.

Despite being positioned on different sides of the political spectrum, countercultural and Afrikaner ideology share similar values. Research on their history demonstrates that oppositional identity formation and the need for distinction were central to their development. This study also shows that rebellion and distinction are central to the development of trends in popular culture. The findings of this research provide some guidance to those interested in maintaining the relevance of Afrikaans language and culture. The discussion of the inner workings of style, taste and popularity may also have implications for strategies in the creative arts. Afrikaner cultural rebellion as a case study is thus relevant in terms of its success in the field of entertainment and as the product of a society in transition.

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Cécanne gave me optimism, motivation, love and nourishment in mass quantities. She also gave me the discipline I needed. I hope that in your academic future, I can do the same for you, *my beminde*.

I am forever grateful to my parents. My father raised me to see that perception is always relative and my mother's passion for Afrikaans managed to conquer my stubborn indifference. Without them none of this would have been possible.

## **Reader's Note**

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All text has been personally translated to English where the original was in Afrikaans. In the rare occurrence that a film did not supply English subtitles, the dialogue was similarly transcribed and translated.

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# Introduction

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## Background and objective

The objective of this study is to identify tendencies in entertainment created by rebellious Afrikaners engaging with their cultural heritage. This work is an extension of a B.A. (Hons) research project that examined the way in which young artists re-employ signifiers of Afrikaner tradition in order to rebel against it and, paradoxically, anchor their identity in that cultural past. Due to the way in which artists from the Sestigers to Fokopolisiekar constitute an opposition to mainstream culture they were referred to as an 'Afrikaner counterculture'. This study will prove that this term is particularly apt because the work of these artists shows the influence of countercultural thinking prevalent in the Western world. Afrikaner counterculture is chosen as subject for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a case for inquiry into the way countercultural ideology manifests in entertainment. Secondly, it aims to contribute to current debates on the post-apartheid reconstruction of Afrikaner identity.

The goal is to confirm the following set of hypotheses:

- Afrikanerdom developed as an oppositional identity reliant on distinction and in this regard has features comparable to counterculture
- Counterculture is founded on an ideology that overestimates the consequences of cultural rebellion and attaches unwarranted importance to authenticity and subversion.
- Cultural rebellion plays an important role in the creation of new styles and stimulates renewal in entertainment.

- Rebellious Afrikaner artists exhibit orthodox tendencies because they draw on a tradition of rebellion.
- From Blood River to *Bellville rock city*, generations of Afrikaners have developed myths to legitimise their identity and foster a sense of belonging in South Africa.
- Post-apartheid music and student films employ the countercultural view of black culture as a source of authenticity and escape.
- Elements of Afrikaner culture are being reconfigured as 'cool' and a source of authenticity in the new millennium.

The disintegration of the dominance of Afrikaner Nationalism has created a gap in that community's consciousness. The Afrikaner's identity was originally shaped by an ideology of racial superiority and a divinely chosen destiny. It also expressed a sense of the vulnerability of a persecuted group at odds with a hostile world. These ideas were encapsulated in myths that circulated through stories and imagery. Myths are expressed in sermons, speeches, schoolbooks, novels, songs and, later, films and television programmes. Such media play a vital role in sustaining the Afrikaners' perception of their purpose and legitimacy. Yet as the ideology has become increasingly fragile so have the foundations of this cultural identity. Myths are essential for survival in society. It seems that without them groups experience difficulty in sustaining cohesion and culture. It is therefore not surprising that a need for new myths has developed in a community that previously had its identity given to it by the apparatus of the Nationalist state. In the absence of such a system, identity formation has been inconsistent and entangled with discursive practices in popular culture. An investigation of some of these discursive practices that arose in entertainment after apartheid can therefore offer insight into this shifting identity.

## Literature review

Afrikaans literary studies provide ample examples of the way in which the arts can serve as an indicator of changing values in Afrikanerdom. This study builds on the work of C.N. van der Merwe who has shown how the output of Afrikaans writers reflects and influences Afrikaner culture. His book *Breaking barriers: stereotypes and the changing of values in Afrikaans writing 1875-1990* (1994) illustrates a three-phase movement wherein writers first supported traditional Afrikaner ideology, then questioned its stereotypes, and finally began to dismantle it. An interesting consequence is that new stereotypes tend to be created in the latter phase to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of traditional ideology. If this is indeed a recurring cycle in culture then it can be expected that current stereotypes and ideologies of post-apartheid South Africa will be dismantled by new generations of artists. Van der Merwe's method of drawing attention to patterns and tendencies is merited by the insight it offers and is thus emulated in this study, especially in the analysis of the work of musicians and student filmmakers.

The demise of apartheid disturbed the sense of certainty and legitimacy that many white South Africans had in terms of their identity. In "*Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*": white identity in a changing South Africa (2001) Melissa Steyn identifies five recurring narratives present in white South African discourse. It analyses questionnaires that a sample of white South Africans answered on their perception of being white in the new South Africa and presents a categorisation of recurring concepts. While Steyn's study does not focus exclusively on Afrikaners, its findings apply to tendencies in the re-negotiation of Afrikaner identity. It offers a discourse analysis of a sample of fifty-nine respondents and serves as a reference point for the analysis of a sample of student films in this study.

A handful of academic articles exist that examine the work of rebellious Afrikaner artists. A paper on the Voëlvry movement published in 2004 by historian Albert Grundlingh redressed the absence of Johannes Kerkorrel and cohorts in Hermann Giliomee's *The Afrikaners: biography of a people* (2003). Leswin Laubscher has

examined the music of Johannes Kerkorrel and shown that it enacts a discourse of identity tension (2005). The work of Bitterkomix artists Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer has been discussed as a rebellion against Afrikaner orthodoxy by several scholars (Barnard, 2004; Kerr, 2006; Leitch, 2006). Annie Klopper has accomplished a thorough analysis of the lyrics of Fokofpolisiekar and their position in the socio-political context of Afrikaans rock music (2009). This study values the significant contribution of these researchers but does not attempt their intensive focus on specific artists. A broader scope with examples from the work of various artists is used instead in order to highlight shared tendencies.

Two books have significantly shaped this study's view of rebellion and counterculture, Norman Cantor's *The age of protest: dissent and rebellion in the twentieth century* (1970) along with Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter's *The rebel sell: how the counterculture became consumer culture* (2006). Cantor published his book soon after the upheavals of the 1960s with the purpose of providing a background to the ideology of dissent as well as exposing its major shortcomings. Heath and Potter substantiate an argument introduced by Thomas Frank in the 1990s that countercultural values play a dominant role in Western society. Like Cantor, Heath and Potter approach rebellion critically and examine the prevalence of countercultural ideology in North American society. In another article, Heath (2001) has shown that cultural rebellion is often driven by the need for distinction, a view shared by Sarah Thornton in her research on youth subcultures (2005). Both Thornton and Heath draw on Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (1984) to show that resistance against mainstream culture is partly motivated by a refusal of the tastes of the general public. This study will apply Bourdieu's theory of distinction to Afrikaner rebellion to prove that it is a useful, albeit neglected, concept in South African cultural studies. The work of Thornton and Heath represents a shift in academia away from what Rupert Weinzierl and David Muggleton labels the "heroic" model of cultural deviance (2003: 6). This study aims to bring research on Afrikaner rebellion up to date with these developments by examining aspects of distinction and status competition.

## **Key interests**

As a result of its underlying interest in the creation of myths and the function of rebellion, this study may link with research unrelated to Afrikaner counterculture. It does not attempt a comprehensive discussion of these two interests, but rather provides examples that may aid further research. This interest in the persistent appearance of myths and rebellion in popular culture is part of the motivation of this study.

### **The creation of myths**

In everyday parlance, 'myth' means a fictitious tale or fallacy. In the study of discourse it refers to narratives that play a significant part in sustaining the identity and ideology of social groups. A structuralist understanding of myths was developed by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who observed that "the apparent arbitrariness [of myths] is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions" (1955: 429). He argued that myths, despite a variation in their content across cultures, have structural similarities because they serve the same function of resolving oppositions in societies. Lévi-Strauss was interested in explaining why humans use stories instead of stating their values directly and concluded that myths encode the desires of a community that are inconsistent with the reality of their environment (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). In *Mythologies* (2000) Roland Barthes analyses cultural myths to illustrate how they maintain socially constructed values. In his view, cultural myths serve an ideology and maintain the bourgeois status quo. This study assumes the connection between myth and ideology but does not share Barthes's Marxist view that myths are primarily an instrument of oppression. Myths may gain prominence if they serve the interests of the powerful, but marginalised communities also create them. The creation of myths occurs in contemporary South African society for the same reason that it does in ethnic groups. Myths serve to reinforce cohesion by justifying the societal order and reminding a community of its own identity (Rapport & Overing, 2007). Unfortunately, they often circulate in the discourse of communities in order to enforce a self-image at the expense of others.

Inequality is a feature of every society and a consequence of the fact that hierarchies between groups increased the chance of survival during the evolution of the human species (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In order to legitimise hierarchies, specific features and values are socially constructed as significant. These are communicated through legitimising myths that provide “moral and intellectual justification for the unequal distribution of social value” (Meyer & Finchilescu, 2006: 72). Such legitimising myths are a vital part of the construction of group identities and nations. An example of this in South African history is the mythology that developed around the Covenant and the Battle of Blood River. It was used in the construction of Afrikaner identity and served as a symbol of the victory of Christianity over “heathendom and barbarism” (Ehlers, 2004: 187). A legitimising myth should not be seen as necessarily detrimental to society. It can play a valuable role in fostering a sense of unity and promoting pride. Nation building in South Africa after 1994, for example, employs the mythology of the resistance struggle, which exalts Nelson Mandela as a hero. Sabine Marschall argues that this construction of a new South African identity is based on a “Struggle for Liberation” which is a foundation myth that legitimises the ANC state (2004: 261). This myth guides the public perception of the contemporary political order and promotes post-apartheid ideology that some sections of the public may struggle to internalise. The consequence may be a need in groups that feel marginalised by the new dispensation to create myths of their own.

The Group of 63, an Afrikaans organisation established after 1994, has encouraged the public to search for new myths to sustain the furtherance of Afrikaans culture. The disintegration of many of the old myths of Afrikanerdom has created a gap in the foundations of Afrikaner identity. In post-apartheid South Africa, this gap is gradually being filled by a variety of narratives that formulate the culture’s worldview and self-concept. There is an evident need for a legitimising past for Afrikaners outside apartheid. This study will show how artists have created new myths by using the pre-apartheid period, the immediate past and the mythology of other cultures.

## **The function of rebellion**

The British social anthropologist Max Gluckman addressed the performance of rebellion in tribal communities on 28 April 1953 when he delivered a Frazer lecture entitled “Rituals of rebellion” at the University of Glasgow. In it, he explained the peculiar practices he observed during his fieldwork with traditional Zulu societies. Gluckman was South African by birth with a particular interest in social mechanisms introduced to deal with conflict. He discovered that there were seasonal periods when members of the Zulu kingdom publicly denounce the king in rituals of protest. The men rebel and the women conduct ceremonies of open lewdness and disobedience. What was extraordinary is that this behaviour was sanctioned by the king. Gluckman wondered why the mutinous behaviour was not seen as a threat to the monarchy. “How does the ritual itself keep within bounds the rebellious sentiments which it arouses?”, he asked. The answer, he learnt, was that the rituals of rebellion were established to ensure stability and prosperity for Zulu society. The sanctioned expression of social tension functioned as a pressure valve and lessened the possibility of revolt by standardising the act of rebellion. Gluckman summarised his findings as follows:

[P]rinces have to behave to the king as if they covet the throne, and subjects openly state their resentment of authority. Hence I call them rituals of rebellion. I shall argue that these ritual rebellions proceed within an established and sacred traditional system, in which there is dispute about particular distributions of power, and not about the structure of the system itself. This allows for instituted protest, and in complex ways renews the unity of the system (1954: 3).

What is key here is the distinction between rebellion and revolt. The rituals of rebellion posed no threat of escalating into revolution because they were public gestures of disobedience. A successful uprising requires either mass coordination or armed conflict and the rituals were unlikely to lead to either. The king and his followers institutionalised the ceremonies because they understood that the acting out of conflict achieves social unity. In Western culture, the public performance of rebellion is seen largely as a step towards the disruption of authority. This is a misguided view that has its roots in the countercultural belief that defiance through art and lifestyle will have progressive political consequences. Dissent, when well organised, has led to improvements in social

justice in cases such as the Civil Rights Movement in America and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Defiance, at worst, has led to a decline in civility when left unchecked and, at best, enabled cultural rejuvenation. Like the rituals of rebellion in Zulu society, cultural defiance in Western society has delivered minimal political results yet plays a pivotal role in periodic regeneration. This dissertation, then, hopes to explore a reconsideration of the function of rebellion.

A central argument to it will be a cynical view of cultural rebellion. There is a tendency in cultural studies to overestimate the socio-political consequences of rebellious entertainment and subcultures. The root of this approach can be found in the 'heroic' model of subculture popularised in the 1970s by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (Weinzerl & Muggleton, 2003). The seminal text of the CCCS, Dick Hebdige's *The meaning of style*, proclaims that subcultures should be seen as a "blockage in the system of representation" (1979: 90). Subsequent studies have argued that rebellious music tastes have "violated authoritarian aesthetic boundaries" (Nehring, 1993: 213), and that subcultures disrupt the "smooth exploitative and demeaning workings" of society (Paris & Ault, 2004: 403). There appears to be a romantic overestimation of any progressive outcomes that gestures and styles might bring about. This is based on the assumption that a refusal of the norms of society poses a significant threat to a supposedly conformist world. It is fair to say that the researchers mentioned above may have idealised the resistance rhetoric of their subjects.

In order to avoid these pitfalls the approach here will not view cultural rebels as saboteurs. Rather, the movements they routinely bring about are analogous to the rituals of rebellion, as observed by Gluckman. This view contradicts the way rebels have often chosen to portray themselves but is strengthened as a theory by its ability to explain the ease with which the rebellious culture has repeatedly become indistinguishable from the dominant culture. It is a truism that those who have been non-conformists in their youth become the cultural elite they formerly detested, a phenomenon which is often mistakenly seen as a betrayal (Cantor, 1970; Brooks, 2000; Lloyd, 2000). This accusation of betrayal fails to see the symbiotic operation of commerce, the dominant culture and the

rebellious vanguard. Members of subcultures often criticise the process whereby the culture industries commodify their styles, values and music and flog it to the 'mainstream' whilst watering down the radical elements as a parasitic act (Thompson, 2004). The truth is that the rebellious cultural vanguard has always relied on media and commerce to spread their ideas, a relationship which should be seen as mutual symbiosis, yet have come to regret this liaison once the distribution reaches the critical mass where their sense of distinction is lost.

History has many instances when rebellion has led to upheaval rather than its recuperation by the mainstream, generally by political organising and mass insurrection rather than by cultural defiance. Even though cultural rebels have adopted the iconography and speech of leaders like Che Guevara and their movements in order to align themselves with their heroism, they are actually dissimilar. When organised political rebellion achieves sufficient support it leads to revolution while cultural rebellion leads to a rejuvenation of arts and culture. It is this distinction between being a rebel and being a political revolutionary that has been blurred romantically and leads to a great deal of disillusionment. This study hopes to clarify this confusion.

## **Methodology**

This study works within the field of cultural and communication studies. It is concerned with competing ideologies in society and makes use of cultural texts to conduct discourse analysis. The definition of texts that is used here is the broad classification accepted in communication studies that includes forms such as films, books, music, speeches, interviews and magazine articles. Ideological analysis is applied to popular texts because they provide insight into the values, beliefs and experiences of a culture. The focus is not on the news media but on entertainment, with a special interest in the output of filmmakers and musicians. The relevance of popular culture texts is assumed for three reasons. Firstly, the artists that create texts are members of a culture and tend to draw on it when producing work. Secondly, entertainment can be a carrier of ideology and thereby

influences the collective consciousness of a community. Lastly, texts seem to achieve popularity when they resonate with the values of a community and represent the way in which its members prefer to see the world. The last point is especially relevant when investigating changing values in a society. The popularity of artists and their work tend to vary over time in patterns that can not only be ascribed to fluctuating quality. It appears that popularity is achieved when artists are able to match not only the demand for new styles but also for content that affirms the developing views of the audience. In this sense, popular entertainment serves as a barometer of cultural values.

This study conducts qualitative research within the framework of critical theory. It sees entertainment as a social and ideological construct rather than an accurate representation of reality. Popular texts constitute discourses that formulate, reproduce and reinforce ideologies. Textual research is directed here at uncovering ideological content. Deliberate sampling of texts was conducted which means that the results are not intended to be generalised. The selection process involved unsystematic monitoring of South African media and researching literature for relevant examples. The selection of AFDA student films for discussion was more systematic. From a catalogue of more than four-hundred student films at the Cape Town campus of AFDA, sixty-eight were selected for viewing based on relevance indicated by title and packaging. Of these sixty-eight student films that were viewed, eight were chosen for discussion based on content. The selection of CityVarsity films was restricted by availability. Five films were selected for discussion from a DVD compilation of student work released by CityVarsity. The selection of rebellious Afrikaans music was informed by monitoring trends in the content of MK, a satellite channel owned by Multichoice, over a period of five years. The examples that are discussed were chosen based on a subjective impression of significance.

The research is a desktop study that used the University of Cape Town Libraries and online sources to access information. The majority of the secondary sources such as journal articles and books that informed the theoretical approach and historical contextualisation were obtained in this way. The primary sources such as the DVDs, CDs and autobiographies that exemplify Afrikaner rebellion are privately owned. The

principles of Afrikaner and countercultural ideology are discussed in two chapters via a narrative structure that is roughly chronological. Interesting developments in the history of these two ideologies are strung together and are not intended as comprehensive accounts. Information was obtained by consulting overlapping sources and included on the basis of relevance to the key interests of this study.

This work is not a survey of all Afrikaner entertainment but specifically those that constitute a discourse of rebellion. The scope is limited to textual expressions of cultural rebellion by Afrikaner artists that work within the context of South African entertainment. A number of studies have positively described examples of Afrikaner rebellion as the free-thinking rejection of insular value systems and orthodoxy (Kerr, 2006; Klopper, 2008; Vestergaard, 2000). Yet this rebellion is firmly rooted in an ideology of its own. This is value system, it will be argued, is countercultural and has been a key force in other forms of Western entertainment and marketing since the middle of the twentieth century. Its core principle is that conformity is a major flaw of society. Significant value is consequently attached to subverting authority and breaking social norms. Gestures of rebellion in Afrikaner entertainment are noteworthy because they emphasise specific values. In fact, the output of those artists that have been deemed 'alternative' appears to draw equally on Afrikaner and countercultural ideology.

In this study the concept 'Afrikaner' is used with a full awareness of its contested nature. It is a subjective social grouping and it is thus difficult to say who is an Afrikaner and prove that such a wide-ranging identity constitutes a formal grouping (Leitch, 2006; Davies, 2009). It can be assumed that many of the artists to whom the term is applied in this study would not identify with the term and prefer to rather be seen as Afrikaans-speaking. Yet this term includes Afrikaans-speakers with a separate history, such as the coloured community, a grouping that is equally contested by that very community. A key assumption made in this study is that people who are referred to as 'Afrikaners' are the inheritors of a specific cultural history. For the sake of consistency, white Afrikaans-speakers who carry this inheritance, even if they wish not to, will be regarded as representative of Afrikanerdom in this dissertation. Certain texts will similarly be

regarded as countercultural, regardless of whether the creator endorses the term, on the basis that it espouses a countercultural worldview. Regular reference to race throughout it may give the impression that its aim is to enforce artificial racial boundaries. This is not its intention. Addressing the question of race in this discourse is imperative because of its prominence in the South African milieu.

The focus on myths, binary oppositions and stereotypes in Afrikaner and countercultural texts makes this study decidedly structuralist. This is not to deny the contributions of thinkers that are deemed post-structuralists, such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Indeed, its approach is informed by Foucault's concept of discourse and Barthes's theory of myths. In order to avoid dwelling on the ambiguity of texts, no consideration will be given to destabilising meaning and open-ended signs. An examination of recurring features and oppositions will highlight tendencies in the texts, while a discussion of cultural developments will result in an emphasis given to current trends. All of this may seem reductionist - which, essentially, it is. Data is interpreted and presented in this study according to the framework of discourse analysis within cultural studies and therefore draws attention to tendencies and similarities. South African popular culture is intricate and needs to be distilled conceptually in order to highlight emerging trends.

There is a tendency in the Humanities to approach subjects related to arts and popular culture in a way that imposes on them a complexity and implications regarding social justice. This dissertation aims to do the opposite by bringing clarity to the subject. It intends to provide a guide to the ideas that have formed rebellion in Afrikanerdom. This guide will highlight the lineage and correspondence of ideas, and try to explain why they persist. On occasion parallels will be drawn between seemingly divergent texts and contexts. Hopefully this will not be seen as a lack of discipline but rather as an enrichment of the discussion that illuminates the interrelations of popular culture.

## Chapter synopsis

The cultural rebellion of contemporary Afrikaner artists draws on the traditions of counterculture and Afrikanerdom. The first half of this dissertation examines the historical foundations and principles of their two ideologies. Chapter One provides an account of the oppositional identity formation that occurred throughout the history of Afrikanerdom. Examples are discussed of opposition to the British, heathens and communism. The rebellion of Slagtersnek is used as an example of the process of mythmaking which reimagines the past in service of the present. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of three strategies of reinvention that have surfaced in Afrikanerdom after the loss of political power.

Chapter Two provides a discussion of key historical influences on the development of countercultural ideology. Critical attention is paid to its manifestation in entertainment and some of its shortcomings. An argument against the notion of 'recuperation', as endorsed by the Situationists and the subcultural theorist Dick Hebdige, is presented by discussing cultural rebels as trendsetters. Phenomena such as trends, distinction and kitsch are looked at in order to address common fallacies regarding style and taste. After this extensive criticism of countercultural principles, a case is made for the relevance of cultural rebellion.

The root of an Afrikaner cultural rebellion can be traced to a critical literary tradition. This is discussed in Chapter Three where the focus is on shared tendencies between this tradition and post-apartheid texts. Attention is paid to the appearance of ambivalence, postmodernism and liminality in the texts as well as the way the farm has been used as a site of conflict.

Rock music and student films provide insight into recent engagement with Afrikanerdom because these forms are more accessible to a younger generation. Chapter Four offers a selection of noteworthy representations of Afrikaner culture in short films and music. The section on student films is divided into the work of two film schools,

AFDA and CityVarsity. It is argued that while some directors from CityVarsity interweave African folklore imaginatively, the approach to Afrikaners frequently relies on stereotypes. The preceding decade of rebellious Afrikaner music is discussed in order to highlight interesting tendencies. Musicians are reclaiming elements of their heritage and constructing new myths. The entertainment created by these musicians appears to have tapped into an enormous pool of alienated Afrikaner youth searching for a past to legitimise their identity.

University of Cape Town

# Chapter One: Principles of Afrikanerdom

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## Foundations

Afrikanerdom is an imagined social grouping subject to historical and contemporary mythmaking. Consequently, the traits and legacy attributed to it varies in the accounts of its proponents and opponents. This chapter aims to map out key developments in the identity and ideology of Afrikanerdom in order to support the analysis of texts that rely on its ideas. While some have portrayed the Boers (or Afrikaners) as a stultified nation (Mbeki 1998: 12), history shows that it has been subject to continuous development and internal disputes because of a changing environment.

Much like the countercultural movements of the Western world, Afrikanerdom promoted a worldview of a group's brave fight against a greater power that has fostered oppositional identity formation. It is this similarity that makes it possible for a conservative leader from Orania to relate to the radical liberalist writing of Naomi Klein. A 'Goliath' is often required for a social group to give meaning to its values and construct a distinct identity. The development of an ethnic identity for Afrikaners involved an adoption of a vocation to stand against an opponent that came to be defined as everything that they were not. In Afrikanerdom - and in the case of other cultural or artistic movements since the nineteenth century's bohemia - this creation of distinction has often been portrayed as a noble imperative. Yet from the customs adopted by the Israelites to differentiate themselves from the Philistines, to the urban sartorial rebel's disdain for mainstream taste, it is evident that opposition is not a unique form of heroism,

but a commonplace method of self-affirmation. Afrikanerdom, needs then, to be seen not as a stagnated culture but as a series of oppositional developments.

“The Afrikaners were both a colonised people and colonisers themselves, both victims and proponents of European imperialism”, writes Hermann Giliomee in the introduction of his biography of a people (2003: xiv). The role of Afrikaners in the history of South Africa is commonly seen as that of oppressor. It is necessary to highlight the experience of subordination to British power, not to pardon wrongdoing or pass on blame for eras of injustice but because of the important effect that it had on the development of Afrikaner identity. Afrikaner nationalism emerged as an ethnic process as a result of competing forces during the era of British imperialism (Van der Waal, 2008: 61). A useful way of approaching the concept of Afrikanerdom is to understand it as an identity that developed in response to a perceived threat from the black population on the one hand and British imperialism on the other. It may seem reductive, but it certainly models the way in which Afrikaners have imagined themselves in terms of their difference to these two groups. Similarly, Wiida Fourie states that Afrikaner Nationalism developed as a strategy to prevent “absorption by the English on the one hand and miscegenation with black people on the other” (2008: 249). The powers that represent the two groups have shifted throughout Afrikaner history. Concerns about English cultural imperialism may have taken the place of British imperialism but the relationship structure is remarkably consistent. The ternary relationship that inevitably exists between these forces is, however, not one of consistent antagonism but rather one in which Afrikaner identity often sought legitimacy through solidarity with the ‘other’.

The first recorded person of European decent to refer to himself as an ‘Afrikaner’ was Hendrik Biebouw. Biebouw was a 16-year old resident of Stellenbosch with an illiterate German father, an orphaned Dutch mother and a half-sister from his father’s illegitimate relationship with a slave. When he was brought before a magistrate and beaten in 1707 for unruly public behaviour, he proved to be a young man with an ill-defined sense of identity. In response to the beating he shouted, “I will not go away, I am an Afrikaner, even if the magistrate beats me to death or throws me in jail, I will not be

quiet” (Giliomee, 2004: 19). Two decades later a soldier of French origin by the name of Estienne Barbier made a similar bold assertion of himself as an Afrikaner in a manifesto calling his fellow “Afrikanders broederen” to unified resistance against the Cape government’s neglect (Giliomee, 2004: 41). What is notable here is that both men asserted an Afrikaner identity in the context of resistance. By proclaiming Africa as their homeland, they were demanding better treatment in their land than the temporarily stationed employees of the Kompanjie were giving them. At the same time, they were asserting that their rights should be superior to those of the natives who were of Africa but not of European descent. Their choice of ‘Afrikaner’ as an identity is still peculiar because up to that time it had been used only to refer to persons who were not white.

In the early 1700s the term ‘Afrikaner’ (or ‘Africander’) was used only to refer to freed slaves who were born in the Cape and Khoi-Khoi. This continued to be the standard usage with the exceptions of troublemakers such as Biebouw and Barbier until the Cape Patriots began using the term to refer to themselves in petitions to the government (Giliomee, 2004). Thereafter it commonly became a term of self-identification for people not of English but of French, German or Dutch descent. As chosen term of self-identification, it dropped in popularity after the demise of Afrikaner Nationalism. More recently, there have been attempts to disassociate it from the racism of Afrikaner Nationalism. The Broederbond’s decision to rename their organisation the Afrikanerbond and accept members regardless of race is an example in institutional reform, with Brenda Burnit’s “Afrikaner” being one in popular music. Naturally, there are a range of other available self-identification terms such as ‘Afrikaans’, ‘Afrikaans-speaking’, ‘white South African’ and ‘South African’, depending on the extent of exclusivity. In the social anthropological studies on Afrikaner identity conducted by Mads Vestergaard (2000) and Roberta Ann Leitch (2006) a variety of titles arise which the subjects of the studies use to define themselves. They range from ‘Afrikaans-speaking’, ‘Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaner’ and ‘Afrikaner’, varyingly used by a group of middle class white males residing in Stellenbosch (Leitch, 2006), to ‘Boere-Afrikaners’, the term used by the exclusive community of Orania (Vestergaard, 2000). Compared with ‘Afrikaans-speaking’, the term ‘Afrikaner’ has a more conservative connotation. When Franklin Sonn,

a coloured businessman was elected in 2002 as head of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut he stated, “I am not an Afrikaner. I have never been one and neither would I like to be one. But I am an Afrikaans person... We contribute most to the national product, we are most loyal to the payment of taxes” (quoted in Giliomee, 2003: 659). ‘Afrikaanses’ is an awkward term, a neologism introduced to provide a blanket term for all people who speak Afrikaans, regardless of their race. ‘Afrikaner’ is perceived to exclude ‘non-whites’ while ‘Afrikaans’ is racially emancipated. ‘Boere-Afrikaner’ can be positioned to the far right of the terminological spectrum because this identity strictly excludes the Afrikaans-speaking coloured community.

These terms are deceptively meaningful. Research published in 1971 by Professor J.A. Heese on the genealogy of Afrikaners revealed that approximately 1200 marriages were performed between whites and non-whites in the period between 1652 and 1800. Heese concluded that approximately 7.2 % of Afrikaner heritage is non-white. This was an uncomfortable revelation made during a time when Afrikaners were privileged because of their racial purity. While they may have claimed noble entitlement due to their European ancestry, the truth is that many Afrikaner families have a slave as *stammoeder*.

A notable example is the Snyman family, whose ancestor is Christoffel Snyman, the son of Anthony van Bengale and Catharina van Bengale. They were both black slaves and Anthony was the first freed slave to buy land. Although Anthony and Catharina were Christoffel’s married parents it was later discovered that his biological father was Hans Christoffel Schneider, a German soldier who was sent to Robben Island for impregnating the property of the Kompanjie. Intimacy between slaves and burghers decreased when the British arrived and replaced slavery with a system of “racial capitalism” (Terreblanche, 2002: 194).

## Against the British

Afrikaner Nationalism developed in reaction to British imperialism in South Africa. Britain annexed the Cape Colony at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, made English the language of administration and law, and governed it in a manner which the Boers felt made them second-class citizens. It needs to be remembered that in the previous century the Cape burghers and/or Boers were also resistant to the authority of the Dutch Kompanjie. The imposition of taxes and a commando service were grievances under both British and Dutch rule for the Boers who wanted freedom from unsympathetic governance. What made British rule much more intolerable, however, is expressed in the manifestos issued by Piet Uys and Piet Retief in 1937. Uys begins by criticising the rigid application of the laws of the British Parliament as well as the excessive annual rent on farms and then states the main complaint: the erosion of the white Boer's power over black subjects and vagrants. The manifesto protests as follows:

All power of domestic coercion of our apprentices in our houses and on our farms has been taken away from us, which has brought the apprentices into such a state of insubordination as to expose us to the risk of the loss of property and even life....[O]ur power of maintaining order and discipline having been taken away, the masters and mistresses are scandalously treated (quoted in Gordon & Talbot, 1983: 172).

Retief's manifesto similarly bemoans the emancipation of the slaves, the conduct of vagrants and declares:

[W]hilst we will take care that no one shall be held in a state of slavery, it is our determination to maintain such regulations as may suppress crime, and preserve proper relations between master and servant.... We will not molest any people, nor deprive them of the smallest property; but, if attacked, we shall consider ourselves fully justified in defending our persons and effects, to the utmost of our ability, against every enemy (ibid, 1983: 173).

These words, written to appeal to their fellow countrymen, resonate with the official doctrine of Hendrik Verwoerd's apartheid plan. While apartheid was diplomatically presented as a separate development programme designed to promote the wellbeing of all races, history shows the injustice perpetrated to maintain it. We can therefore observe in

Retief's appeal the precursor of a policy that claims to advocate justice and dignity for all, yet will disregard such principles when the status or survival of Afrikaners is threatened.

Afrikaners have exhibited a peculiar sense of entitlement throughout history. An aversion to the loss of a dominant position motivated ventures from the Great Trek to the current pursuit of a Volkstaat. While it may seem that the racist ideology of 20<sup>th</sup> century Afrikaners has its origins in the Trekboer mentality, the matter is complicated by the notable historical realities of the Cape Colony in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Recent historians such as Sampie Terreblanche proposed that the system of racial capitalism, was, in fact, institutionalised by the British settlers (2002). This understanding is at odds with the canonised image of English liberalism in South Africa. Part of the reshaping of the colony by the British was the issuing of the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1841 which criminalised worker disobedience and remained on the South African statute books until 1974. The ordinance applies to subjects who “may be inclined to lead an idle and vagabondising life”, implying thereby ex-slaves, Khoisan and Xhosas whilst avoiding blatant reference to race in a manner typical of the hypocritical liberal tradition at the Cape (Terreblanche, 2002: 196). Under Dutch rule the colony was a stratified society where separate laws applied to different groups and a person's status depended on occupation rather than skin colour. When compared with the colony under British rule, the boundaries between groups in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were surprisingly fluid as a result of intermarrying and the upward mobility of freed slaves (Giliomee, 2004). Yet by the end of the century the fact that no slaves were white entrenched a mentality of white superiority in the burghers. The patriarchal families of the Cape developed an understanding of the relationship between master and slave which was encouraged by Roman-Dutch law. It reinforced a mentality of patriarchal authority in which the master assumed full responsibility for the behaviour of slaves who “were not only his property but also his infant children” (Terreblanche, 2002: 160). The result was that a burgher's identity was dependent upon the ownership of a slave that treated him like a master. It is perhaps here that the beginning of the Afrikaner's aversion to equality and sense of racial superiority can be found.

When the British government passed laws which required the burghers to give up their slaves and defend themselves against their servants' accusations in court, their master mentality was unsurprisingly threatened. When British missionaries called for improvements in the treatment of slaves and servants the burghers felt that their difficult struggle to maintain order was being overlooked. A great number of them, thus, chose to leave the colony and seek a homeland in the wilderness where they could be free of British law. It is during this Great Trek that the notion developed amongst Boer leadership that they were God's chosen people and that their arduous trek was comparable to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt in search of the Promised Land. It was in the Calvinism of the Cape Colony that the foundations for this union of Christianity and political identity were laid.

## **Religion as distinction**

In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the burghers were not as religious as one would expect from the descendants of Dutch Calvinists and French Huguenots. The number of burgher couples who were confirmed church members was small. Religion was so meagrely practiced among the burghers in 1743 that the Dutch official, G.W. van Imhoff, referred to them as a "community of blind heathens". This situation changed as burgher women increasingly became confirmed members of the church. In the Stellenbosch community 90% of the adult women were confirmed in contrast to a third of the men (Giliomee, 2004: 33). This remarkable shift is not explained by a spiritual revival, but rather that Christianity offered a distinct status to white women, one which differentiated them from their non-white counter-parts who were not confirmed. It enabled them to distinguish themselves from the women servants on the farm and also increased their chances of getting married. Men were reluctant to allow their slaves to be baptised because they dreaded the idea of having to worship together with them in church. They feared that this would give the servants equal status and undermine their own authority as masters. Christianity, then, was a mode of distinction for the burghers and rationalised their

superiority. The tradition of Afrikaner Calvinism therefore stems from the development of an identity in opposition to the 'other' who were not white.

The Boers' attitude towards religion contained inconsistencies. They begged for more theological leaders yet only welcomed those that reinforced the presuppositions of the Boers' superiority over the Africans (Templin, 1984). They saw themselves as a force of civilisation in Africa yet opposed the teaching of Africans by missionary schools because it advanced their education beyond that of the Boers and beyond the requirements of their duty as labourers. The notion that they had a God-appointed duty to conquer the interior and establish themselves as a self-ruled nation was central to the justification of the Afrikaner's political pursuits. Paul Kruger managed to canonise this idea in speeches given in the 1880s and 1890s. He revived the memory of the Blood River Covenant into a founding myth. Paul Kruger's beliefs were informed by an orthodox Calvinistic sect, known as the Doppers that endorsed the belief in a bond between the Boer *volk* and the will of God. The words of two observers in the 1850s, W.W. Collins and Andrew Murray, illustrate this conviction:

[They] seem to be possessed with the idea that they too are a Divinely favoured people in the same sense that Israel was, and have been signally endowed by the Almighty with sufficient intuitive knowledge and understanding to undertake any mental or other duties (Collins, quoted in Giliomee, 2004 126).

[They tend] not to distinguish clearly between the relations of Israel and their own to the savages with whom they saw themselves surrounded... They thought that in going forth to conquer they were extending Christianity (Murray, *ibid*).

It is possible to see here the remarkable manner in which a group of people are able to transform the only text at their disposal into a rationalisation of the need to protect their threatened identity. In their version of Christianity the teachings of Christ were underplayed, and the Enlightenment's influence on Calvinism rejected. Biblical narratives - Old Testament ones in particular - were used to make sense of their existence in a hostile environment. This illustrates how narratives that have been edited to exclude

material that does not fit into a desired self-serving perspective are employed to strengthen an identity. The customised Calvinism practised by the Boers did not match the Christianity of Europe at that time. There was thus little truth in the Afrikaners' self-justification that they "carried the light of Christian Western civilization into the southern tip of Darkest Africa" (Grobelaar, 1974: 36). Fascinatingly - and yet unsurprisingly - the Boer *volk's* conviction that they are the couriers of civilisation was one which was shared by the British of themselves.

## The need for self-representation

When the British conquered South Africa they set about developing a historical image that justified their occupation of the land much like the Afrikaners had done. In a manner that can be expected from a group constructing a vindicating self-image, the English accounts mentioned matters that were to their advantage and neglected those that were not. The historian F.A. van Jaarsveld observes that the English propagated a history of South Africa that

...commenced with the "purchase" of the Cape and the beneficent influences the British had extended to non-whites and "backward" whites. The liberal, enlightened and democratic ideas behind British rule had freed the "oppressed" non-whites from the "injustices" inflicted on them by the "Dutch". The Boers were depicted in unflattering terms as a lawless and turbulent community retreating before the advance of civilization...They were denounced for barring the entry of British initiative and progress into the interior. The 'uncivilised' Boer was compared with the "civilised" Englishman (1964: 51).

Van Jaarsveld's observation highlights the act of 'othering', the process by which an individual or group defines their own positive identity through the stigmatisation of another that falls outside of their borders of differentiation. This process serves to give the stigmatiser a false sense of distance and invulnerability from the perceived threat of an individual or group (Campbell, 2006). An othering representation emphasises the attributes that the stigmatiser perceives as different from their own self-image. The representation of the other consequently conveys more about how those creating the depiction would like to define themselves than of the actual characteristics of those depicted.

Othering plays a major role in the self-affirmation of communities and nations in situations where diverse cultures encounter one another, as in the case of the Cape Colony and later South Africa. An added function of othering is the explanation of that which is perplexing or threatening. The projection of negative attributes unto a stereotype enables the individual to construct a less complex worldview that reaffirms their sense of identity and purpose. Othering portrayals may also seem flattering or positive when they create an image of primitive beauty. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau admired humans that lived in tribal communities because he believed that they were uncorrupted by the inauthentic needs imposed by Western civilization (1964). Edward W. Said has also indicated in his writing on Orientalism how the West has portrayed the East as a mysterious place of consciousness and tranquillity in opposition to the image of itself as rational and industrious (1995). It must be acknowledged that it was not only Europeans that were guilty of othering. Indeed, all cultures under threat misrepresent outsiders as part of a process of self-preservation. Groups can become the subject of othering whenever they do not have access to the discourse of power (Ashcroft, Griffiths Tiffin, 1998). In the colonial context, the prevalence of a misrepresentation is therefore determined by who is in control of the means of dissemination.

Much to the dismay of the Afrikaners it was the English who had the power of dissemination in the 19th century. By the last quarter of that century Afrikaners were particularly annoyed at the absence of Boer history in what was taught to their children. One objection was that reference to Afrikaner leaders was minimal or negative, this being a deliberate strategy to suppress Afrikaner pride. A burgher of the Free State Republic voiced this concern thus:

At school the Englishman has taken care to ensure that the history of the Afrikaner and of his heroic forefathers have not been brought to the fore which might have resulted in national pride and self-esteem being aroused (quoted in Van Jaarsveld, 1964: 52).

It was this growing sense that their identity was being subjugated lead to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Leaders realised that they could use history, albeit a selective portrayal of it, to foster national pride and a vision of the Afrikaner's purpose and calling.

## Mythmaking

Once the nationalistic project was envisioned, intellectually-minded Afrikaners began creating a view of the past which could be used in the service of the present. Grudges and grievances of the Great Trek period were revived and forgotten events transformed into legend. A noteworthy example is the rebellion of Slagtersnek. In 1823 a Boer named Freek Bezuidenhout refused to appear in court on a charge of assaulting a servant and withholding his salary. A party of two British officials and twelve Khoikhoi soldiers were sent out to arrest Bezuidenhout and shot him when he resisted. His brother swore to take revenge against the British government and drew other embittered Boers of the area together to stage a revolt. It was a short-lived rebellion that never progressed into a battle. The uprising was neutralised and five of the leaders were hung. The incident was soon forgotten and became historically insignificant. Neither Uys nor Retief referred to it in their Trekboer manifestos.

It was only long after the Great Trek, when British pressure on the Boer Republics intensified in the later half of the century, that the incident was transformed into a myth. It was portrayed as an act of heroic Afrikaner resistance against British cruelty and the executed leaders became martyrs. The more remote the original event became, the more it grew in meaning as the Transvaalers needed a precedent for a rebellion against British imperialism in the run-up to the Anglo-Boer War. Slagtersnek came to symbolise British oppression of the Afrikaner's desire for freedom. The legend unsurprisingly skipped over some of the inconvenient facts about the event. The martyrs, for instance, were not sentenced by an English court but by a judge and jury who were Dutch-speaking people like them (Pakenham, 1981). Furthermore, the rebels had lost the support of their compatriots when they tried to strike a precarious deal with the Xhosa chief, Ngqika. These realities would have brought unwanted ambiguity to the depiction of a stark opposition of Boer martyr against British and black power. Accuracy was subservient to effectiveness because the legend was in service of the project to rouse Afrikaner reaction to British injustice. In this sense the promotion of the legend of Slagtersnek parallels what occurred more than a century later when Bok van Blerk's "De la Rey" delivered a

rendering of Anglo-Boer heroism that ignited Afrikaner sentiment. The song managed to rebuild an image of a minority's dignified resistance from a humiliating period in Afrikaner history.

## **Communism and apartheid**

There was another global power that Afrikaner Nationalism defined itself in opposition to and held as a justification for its acts of oppression. Once the goals of empowering the *volk* and casting off British dominance had been achieved, what remained was oppression, "hidden under the excuse of anti-communism" (Ross, 2004). Communism was seen as a threat to national security that remained relevant in political discourse until the fall of the Berlin Wall revealed the impotence of the once-feared opponent. The fight against communism involved South Africa in military battles in Namibia and Angola, an experience which led to the disillusionment of many young Afrikaners who ultimately became involved in a later cultural rebellion.

An interesting intersection of Afrikanerdom and communism is the case of Bram Fischer, a figure who is noteworthy because, despite being the scion of an Afrikaner Nationalist family, became a *volksverraaier*. Bram Fischer was a leading member of the South African Communist Party and Nelson Mandela's defence lawyer in the 1963-1964 Rivonia trial. "I am an Afrikaner", he declared at his own trial in 1966 where he stood accused of involvement in a conspiracy to overthrow the Nationalist government by external military force and internal guerrilla warfare. A 1966 biography of Fischer written with a blatant anti-communist agenda by Gerard Ludi and Blaar Grobbelaar describes his noble Afrikaner heritage and how he betrayed its values by joining the ranks of his people's worst enemy. Fischer was the grandson of the prime minister of the Orange River Colony and the nephew of a fighter in the Boer commandos. He had the promise of becoming a valuable Nationalist leader, they say, until he traded his birthright for a pot of communist lentil soup (Ludi & Grobbelaar, 1966: 4). In his statement from the dock Fischer explained that he became a communist due to his dedication to ensuring

equal rights for black citizens and that he sought to end apartheid because it was destined to end in a disastrous civil war. He also made a sharp comparison:

In a sense we Afrikaners were the forefront of the liberation movement in Africa. Of all the previous colonies we offered the greatest resistance against imperialistic conquest, a resistance that was, to use modern terms, persisted for three year by a few freedom fighters against the greatest Empire in history.... Now, as we Communists see it, the rulers of South Africa are trying to do the same as imperialism did in the nineteenth century, yet is impossible in the second half of the twentieth century (quoted in Ludi & Grobbelaar, 1966: 136).

Fischer's perspective is noteworthy here, not only because he expounds the idea that apartheid is a stagnation of a libratory Afrikaner spirit but also that it is doomed because it is an outdated policy at odds with the twentieth century. National Party leaders' understanding of communism, the suppression of which was used to vindicate oppressive force, was particularly skewed. The following excerpts offer a fascinating view of the way that communism was represented to the public:

The Communists have succeeded in isolating South Africa from most of his previous allies by means of an immense crusade of lies and misrepresentations. It is they who are responsible for South Africa's suspension from various world organisations. The first phase of this campaign was to convince the outside world that the front organisations in South Africa are the real representatives of the oppressed non-whites (Ludi & Grobbelaar, 1966: 149).

Liberation movements such as the SACP and ANC were thus portrayed as instruments of an external power planning a revolution whilst feigning concern for the democratic rights of the black population. A comparison of Bram Fischer's statements in court and the comments of his Nationalist biographers reveal an intriguing similarity in the representation of the opposing foe. In the discourses of the liberation struggle and the Nationalist defenders there is a tendency to portray the other as machinelike, cold-blooded, deceitful, ideologically inflexible and of themselves as brave defenders of righteousness against a large power. This is a tendency, which, as will be revealed in the next chapter, is also prevalent in countercultural ideology. The key here is to recognise that Afrikanerdom has perceived itself throughout its history as a persecuted minority determined to fight for its safety and cultural survival. In this regard it is possible to draw parallels between the identity formation that occurred with the Jews after the Nazi Holocaust and its concentration camps and Afrikaners after the British concentration camps.

Activists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have, in fact, stressed the similarities between apartheid South Africa and the current State of Israel (Davis, 1987). Of course the extent of violence and dehumanisation varies greatly in these parallels, yet it is difficult to ignore the propensity victims of injustice have to become themselves perpetrators of injustice. In the words of André P. Brink, “[w]e know, with regret, that an abused child all too often develops into an abusive parent” (2009: 281). Brink made this statement in light of the perceived disregard for freedom of speech by the ANC government and the intimidation of its critics. In 2005, for example, the Freedom of Expression Institute accused SABC Group Executive of News, Dr. Snuki Zikalala, of stifling free speech by blacklisting political commentators critical of the ANC’s conduct. The ANC government has disappointed many liberal supporters because of its increasing moral bankruptcy, poor service delivery record and a move away from the values outlined so clearly in the Freedom Charter. These flaws in the ANC government have put many Afrikaner commentators in a difficult position as their civil duty to voice dissent is curbed by the possibility of their being perceived as reactionary. The ANC has been quite successful in writing a South African history in which it is the primary actor, as had the National Party decades before.

This study contends that South Africa has embraced a post-apartheid founding myth based on the struggle for liberation. This founding myth which honours innocent people and political activists killed by ruthless apartheid forces is articulated by means of memorials, public holidays, museums and documentaries. Akin to the Afrikaner myth of the Great Trek, the struggle myth relies on the notion of a deprived and maltreated nation dedicated to a constant struggle for freedom. Sabine Marschall explains the limitations of the post-apartheid founding myth:

Any violence associated with the “Struggle” features only on the part of the apartheid regime. The other side is engaged in peaceful protest action, driven by a quest for freedom. This quest for freedom serves as a motivating force driving the grand narrative of the “Struggle,” just as it drove the Afrikaner narrative of the ‘Great Trek’....As much as the foregrounding – or as some call it – inflation, of resistance appears to be a valid prerogative in post-apartheid South Africa, historians must beware of essentialist representations of the past as a simple, good-and-evil-type dichotomy (2004: 265-267).

The danger of such a representation is not that it fosters hatred but that it gives the impression that injustice occurs as spectacular evils rather than the ambiguous, everyday form in which it commonly appears. Hannah Arendt uses the case of Adolf Eichmann to argue that evil is perpetrated by individuals that view their own actions as normal within an accepted ideology (1963). Ideology is instrumental in making injustice seem righteous and triggering irrational response to things at odds with the dominant ideology. In post-apartheid South Africa 'apartheid' became, like 'communism' under Nationalist rule - a concept that generates disdain. The preoccupation with racism came to the fore in the SAHRC enquiry into racism in the media that took place between 1999 and 2000. Rhoda Kadalie considered the enquiry reminiscent not only of the communist witch-hunt of McCarthyism but also the conduct of apartheid dictatorship (2000). In this climate it became clear that Afrikaner identity needed to break its associations with apartheid and racism.

## **Strategies of reinvention**

### **Racially inclusive Afrikanerdom**

The reinvention of Afrikanerdom since the decline of National Party rule exhibits three evident strategies. Firstly, there is an effort to negate associations with racism and white supremacy by relaxing the ethnic borders of Afrikanerdom. This strategy involves the structuring of an identity around the use of the Afrikaans language, thereby including the larger non-white Afrikaans-speaking public.

The success of this strategy is shown, in particular, by the sustained standing and popularity of media entities such as the *Sarie* periodical and Radio Sonder Grense, originally both products of Afrikaner Nationalism. The undesirable connotations of the term 'Afrikaner' in a post-apartheid environment necessitates that both media entities now emphasise their 'Afrikaans' audience. A vital part of their brand and audience nonetheless comes from Afrikaner Nationalist tradition. The founding purpose of *Sarie*

was, like that of *Die Huisgenoot*, to propagate the emerging Christian National worldview of Afrikaner leaders (Du Pisani, 1997). When the periodical entered the market in 1949, a year after the Nationalist Party came to power, its full title was *Sarie Marais*, named after the popular folk song sung from the perspective of a wistful Boer soldier fighting the British in the Anglo-Boer War. In the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday edition of *Sarie* an article on its milestones explains that Naspers initially held a public competition to name the magazine and that “*Sarie Marais*” was chosen because it was a precise indication of their target market: the “Afrikaans” woman (Van der Spuy & Groenewoud, 2009: 30). This revisionist policy is supported by a racially inclusive selection of featured women. A succinct illustration of this is the article in the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday issue features a personality to represent each of the six decades of *Sarie*’s existence (Labuschagne, 2009). Jody Williams and Tammy-Anne Fortuin are chosen to represent the younger generation while Sonja Herholdt and Sandra Prinsloo embody the older decades.

Radio Sonder Grense (RSG) underwent a similar renovation in 1996 to attract a larger audience and maintain legitimacy in the post-apartheid environment. Prior to reconstruction, RSG was Afrikaans Stereo, a culturally conservative station tied to the Afrikaner establishment. Once rebranded as RSG it discarded its narrowly defined Afrikaner identity for a racially inclusive image focused on Afrikaans as a common denominator. As a result it gained 1.4 million new listeners over a period of seven years and recent statistics show an audience makeup with more than a third drawn from the coloured community (Froneman, 2008). The station now functions as shared zone of public discourse for Afrikaans speakers, regardless of race. Another immensely popular Afrikaans media product is the soap opera *7de Laan* with a viewership of just below 2 million. *7de Laan* presents a vibrant community living and working in and around the fictional eponymous avenue. It features a multiracial cast all of whom speak Afrikaans with the occasional use of Zulu and English. RSG and *7de Laan* are especially noteworthy because they indicate a form of inclusive Afrikaans entertainment which can accommodate the ideology of the ANC-aligned SABC as well as a large Afrikaner audience. Despite concerns from activists about the survival of Afrikaans, the popularity

of such programming promises a future for Afrikaans entertainment that embraces the correct ethos.

### **Victimised Afrikanerdom**

The second discernable strategy involves the fostering of an identity of victimhood and the assertion of rights as a minority. While similar strategies have worked in other instances for nations such as the Israelis or the different language groups of Belgium, Afrikaners have struggled to receive outside support for this approach because it can be seen as a continuation of racist separatism. The perception is that if Afrikaners allow themselves to be defined by the ANC government as post-colonial settlers and solely lay claim to individual rights, they and their language have a slim chance of survival (Du Toit, 1999). Instead, they are encouraged to reconnect with their European intellectual roots and assert their rights as a minority group. However, in South Africa it has been argued that this strategy of marginalisation rhetoric does not match reality (Davies, 2009). The anxious drive to protect Afrikaans culture by pushing for minority rights relies on the assumption that it will become extinct if it has to compete with other cultures.

The Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging's focus has shifted over the last two decades from armed resistance to the portrayal of their people as an oppressed *volk* at risk in a mismanaged country. Six months before his death in 2010, AWB demagogue Eugène Terre'Blanche stated in a *Mail & Guardian* interview that the "days of apartheid are over" and that he plans to take the plight of the Afrikaner to the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Groenewald, 2009: 2). Leaders of rightwing organisations like Terre'Blanche now distance themselves from overt racism because they realise that it lessens their chances of receiving sympathetic support outside their own ranks. In a 2009 interview in *Die Burger* Terre'Blanche asserts that he is not a racist, never espoused violence and that he negotiated with black leaders to achieve divided self-determination. It appears that while the founding leaders of both the AWB and FF+ believed in military force these organisations now hammer on issues such as crime and affirmative action to gain local followers, while realising that diplomacy is required to gain external support.

The current leader of the FF+, Dr Pieter Mulder, was instrumental in getting the Afrikaner people accepted as a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization based in The Hague. Although the FF+ has never regained the support it had at its peak in 1994, it is currently the primary advocate of Afrikaner interests and territorial self-determination. A particular obstacle that organisations such as the AWB and FF+ have faced in their mission to acquire a *volkstaat* is the struggle to get supporters to agree where - and whether - one should be created. Moving to a new state could entail the loss of property and financial security. An armed struggle for territory would also bring about institutional instability and has lost its romantic appeal since the Bophuthatswana fiasco. Most rightwing constituents ultimately chose comfortable dissent as, according to a witty commentator, “the pension proved mightier than the sword” (quoted in Welsh, 1995: 262). Capitalist sensibilities have overtrumped the project of an independent homeland for all but a few Afrikaners.

The town of Orania, founded in 1990 as a separatist enclave, is considered a potential growth-point for a future *volkstaat*. The approximately 1 500 inhabitants of this town in the Northern Cape Province profess to share the common goal of practicing self-sufficiency and preserving their cultural heritage. What is notable about this community of Boer-Afrikaners is that although they are all undeniably racially prejudiced, racism is not their defining feature. Indeed, the reason why they have chosen to move there is because they do not relate to other Afrikaners. Their non-identification with the larger culture and their do-it-yourself mentality makes the people of Orania strangely comparable to the countercultural inhabitants of hippie communes. This is why it does not take too much of an ideological leap for Frans de Klerk, the director of the Orania Movement, to be a vocal devotee of Naomi Klein’s writing. Klein’s most famous book, *No logo*, became the bible of the anti-consumerism movement after it was published in 2000. It combines a call to arms for radical activism with an indictment of materialism’s disintegration of individuality. Klein’s writing ties with De Klerk’s view that South Africa is filled with “consumers” and that capitalism is the reason why “everyone wears the same clothes and speaks the same language, and they make more money, but the communities are not empowered” (quoted in Kirchick, 2008: 80). His quest for

empowerment and aversion to uniformity of dress and speech makes him akin to countercultural rebels the world over. It appears that the reason why people like De Klerk come to Orania is because they see themselves as different from the masses and wish to have a say. A pattern is thus observable in the history of the Afrikaner's struggle for autonomy. The Calvinist burgher's opposition to equality with non-whites, the rise of nationalism in opposition to British imperialism, the people of Orania's separatism and even the cultural rebellion of the younger generation, are all linked by the need for distinction and independence. The community of Orania defines itself as different from other Afrikaners because its members are more conservative, hardy and less materialistic (Pienaar, 2007). The use of materialism as an issue of distinction is noteworthy because it is a key aspect of the Afrikaner's ascension in the twentieth century.

### **Bourgeois Afrikanerdom**

The final strategy in the acclimatisation of Afrikanerdom to the post-apartheid environment involves coming to terms with itself as a bourgeoisie. The advancement of a large section of Afrikaners to middle class status had the effect of diminishing the importance of ethnic affiliation. Materialist concerns began to supplant anxiety about the loss of Afrikaner sovereignty (Blaser, 2006: 4). Ian Taylor argues that the reason for the expedient dismantling of apartheid is that it was "bad for business and the elites at both the national and international level realised this" (2004: 39). International sanctions against South Africa during the 1980s resulted in a financial crisis that made the business elite anxious. Afrikaner factions pressurised the NP to enter into negotiations with the ANC, the goal being to make the country safe for capitalism. The NP consequently set about implementing economic policies in the line with global neo-liberalism such as devaluing the rand and privatising some public assets. These steps insured that the incoming administration would be vulnerable to the pressures of the international business world and would thus have to follow its advice. This essentially set a trap for the ANC which bound it to implementing business friendly economic policies in fear of alienating the market.

As further protection, companies such as Old Mutual, Sanlam and Shell International facilitated presentations to ANC economists and union figures to guide them in the right direction. Ultimately the country managed to make the transition to a new government without scaring off international capital. The ANC was persuaded to drop its long-held anti-capitalist stance and maintain economic consistency. The Afrikaner elite realised that they could exist in a black governed South Africa without much pain as long as they retained their wealth. The then chairman of the Broederbond, Pieter de Lange, revealed this strategy in a candid talk with Thabo Mbeki at a conference in Long Island, New York in 1986:

Look, we Afrikaners thought we needed many things to secure our future: segregated living areas, no mixed marriages, and all that. We thought if we didn't have them, this black continent would swallow us up and the Afrikaners would cease to exist as a people. But the reality is that we can remove the Group Areas Act tomorrow and it's not going to make any difference, because your people don't have the money to move into the expensive white suburbs. So from your point of view it will be a meaningless change, but for us Afrikaners it will mean we will wake up one day and realize that nothing has changed, that we are still all right.... That will open the way to asking the question: Why do we need a white government anyway? (quoted in Sparks, 1995: 73).

De Lange illustrates here the realisation in elite Afrikaner circles that privilege could be maintained by securing their wealth. There was thus a strategy shift from securing distinction and power by means of laws of discrimination to achieving the same by means of the status divisions that capitalism creates. The success of this strategy was ensured because it essentially brought Afrikanerdom up to date with the neo-liberal world. The critical mistake of Afrikanerdom was that it stuck to a form of rule which most of the Western world had long before abandoned in favour of subtler tactics.

Mary Jane Collier's comparative study of focus groups held in 1992 and 1999 with Afrikaner adults younger than 32 highlighted interesting developments. Collier observes a continuance of status and wealth for Afrikaners and a developing discourse of individualism opposed to group identity formation (2005). Increasingly, they are choosing to define themselves by means of their consumer choices and withdrawing to an apolitical private existence. The effects of globalisation have made it possible for individuals to cast off allegiance to Afrikanerdom and become part of an uncommitted Afrikaans-speaking bourgeoisie. The penalty of the strategy is that it requires the subjects

to distance themselves from a political identity based on Afrikaner nationalism. Those with sustained Afrikaner solidarity have had trouble adapting to the new South Africa because of a conflict with the identity adjustment necessitated by the neo-liberal ANC government. While initial studies foresaw a bleak future for Afrikanerdom based on the assumption that it would attempt a solo ethnic mobilisation, a rise in economic influence accompanied by acceptance of cultural globalisation has, in fact, been seen (Davies, 2009). While Afrikaners may well move away from political affiliation, Afrikanerdom remains a source of cultural inspiration for those who have embraced a globalised bourgeois lifestyle. The inevitable cost of this strategy is that it is vulnerable to the same attacks that the Western bourgeois establishment have endured during its rise over the last century. This is indeed what happened as Afrikanerdom became the target of a youth with an ill-defined sense of identity (Klopper, 2009). Afrikaner cultural rebels were the heirs of security and materialism who, as will be shown below, took their cue from their overseas peers and began to see their financial security and rising materialism as the source of their discontent.

## Chapter Two: Principles of counterculture

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### Foundations

Many contradictions can be found in the history of counterculture. The antagonistic youth cultures that have epitomised it, such as the hippy movement of the 1960s, the punks of the 1970s, and the contemporary heirs of these traditions have been unsuccessful by their own standards. Not only did these movements fall short in achieving their revolutionary goals but they appear to have consistently revitalized the dominant consumer society which they opposed. Their cultural impact, however, has been immense. Although appearing radical, the countercultures' stylistic innovations and principles have been instrumental in the expansion of consumerism culture (Lloyd, 2000) (Heath & Potter, 2006). An assessment of the entertainment and media texts of Western society reveals that our current ethos has been shaped significantly by countercultural values. This discrepancy between intended and ultimate effect indicates that there are common misconceptions of how counterculture functions in society. It is imperative to recognise that, like Afrikaner Nationalism, the countercultural idea is a misleading ideology. A breakdown of the values and assumptions from which rebels and theorists have developed this system of ideas is necessary. This chapter's discussion of countercultural ideology not only avoids classic pitfalls but also situates Afrikaner rebellion within a tradition of Western counterculture. It thus becomes possible to track and critique the use of countercultural concepts in the selected output of rebellious Afrikaners.

The term 'counterculture' enters the lexicon in 1968 with the publication of Theodore Roszak's *The making of a counter culture: reflections on the technocratic society and its youthful opposition*. While the term essentially refers to the culture cultivated by groups antagonistic to dominant society who show their resistance through the "elaborate

construction of alternative institutions” (Watson & Hill, 1993: 47), it now commonly refers to the rebellious middle class youth culture of the 1960s described in Roszak’s study. In Roszak’s view, society is ruled by the ‘technocracy’, an integrated bureaucracy empowered by science that promotes rationality, planning, efficiency and social security. It is for these reasons, he asserts, this technocracy must be fought to prevent a future anti-utopia, where the oppression of imagination will “render it impossible for men to give any name to their bothersomely unfulfilled potentialities but that of madness” (Roszak, 1970: *xiii*). This irrational fear of efficient principles may seem unsound but it is important to understand the context in which this belief developed. In the 1910s an “efficiency movement” gained momentum in industrialised nations, whereby productive principles applied to machines began to be applied to workers (Heath, 2002: 14). By the 1950s the idea developed that a society as a whole should be efficient, and this, coupled with the compliant ideals of the American Dream, sparked the concern that people’s individuality and creativity was at stake in the grand scheme of making them ‘cogs in a machine’. This anxiety found expression in William Whyte’s 1956 bestseller *The organization man*. In it he observed that creativity and imagination are seen as hindrances in a working environment that demands conformity. It was this bureaucratic conformity, Roszak believed, that the rebellious youth of his day were ordained to oppose. He saw the hippies’ philosophy as the “saving vision our endangered civilization requires” (1970: 1). They railed against consumerism, authority and conformity, the traits which they perceived their bourgeois parents to have.

This countercultural value system that gained momentum in the mid-twentieth century was a further development of bohemian ideals. The bohemian image of deviant artists, living as chosen outcasts with a casual disregard for conventional manners and a “propensity to nurture extravagant moods with drugs and alcohol [as] evidence of artistic eccentricity” emerged in nineteenth century Paris (Lloyd, 2000: 49). The romanticised notion of the impoverished artist is central to bohemian narratives. This can be seen in Puccini’s *La Bohème* (1896) and the *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1845) of Henri Murger on which the opera is based. These were a departure from the usual aristocratic and

bourgeois sensibilities, offering a glorified vision of the hardships endured by free spirited artists to sustain a livelihood in Paris's Latin Quarter.

Long before the recognition of teenagers as an adolescent force in the 1950s or the 1968 student uprisings, the bohemians held the belief that youth could be an ingredient for radical change. The poster child of this bohemian admiration of youth was Arthur Rimbaud, a young poet who was seen by Parisian bohemian literary circles of 1871 as a rebellious prodigy. His poems were full of revolutionary turmoil, anti-bourgeois criticism, pagan mysticism and apocalyptic prophecies, while his public behaviour involved disrespecting elders and venting scatological expletives (Savage, 2008: 25). One of the few remaining photographs of him taken by Etienne Carjat shows a handsome young man with unkempt hair and a determined expression in his eyes. This image of Rimbaud came to represent the legend of the eternally youthful poet after his disappearance in Africa at the age of 21. Rimbaud represents a prototype for the legion of unruly young actors and musicians that have become cult heroes in the twentieth century. James Dean, the icon of 1950s rebellious youth, is similarly romanticised for being at odds with his era and elders. The key principle in the admiration of such figures is that it is heroic to be wild in the context of conformity. The emphasis is on attitude and way of life as opposed to honourable deeds or achievements. The countercultural worldview considers everyday life an arena for potential defiance, thereby making the personal political. This fusion is central to what Richard Lloyd sees as a persistent characteristic of bohemia, the "notion that deviance is virtually coextensive with the artistic temperament" (2000, 49). It is therefore an integral part of the bohemian philosophy that artistic expression and an uninhibited lifestyle can be a challenge to bourgeois society. Decades later this would be a central aspect of the hippies' countercultural belief system.

## **A post-war shift**

The 1960s was a decade of significant cultural change in North-America and Western Europe. A paradigm shift occurred, steered by the middle class youth of Britain and

America. The end of World War II and the recognition of teenagers as a generational force were two notable developments. The sense of triumph in the West which followed the defeat of Germany and Japan was also coupled with a new set of anxieties. The economic dominance of the United States, an increase in mass production and an improvement in living standards in the West did little to obliterate the horrors of the Holocaust and atomic bomb which lay heavily on the collective conscience (Savage, 2008: 464). The catastrophic brutality of these events engendered in the post-war youth a fear of the barbarism that advanced civilizations are capable of. The bombing of Hiroshima heightened the threat of nuclear warfare and raised concerns about the danger of allowing technology and power to go unchecked. The knowledge of Nazi inhumanity, on the other hand, created severe anxieties about conformity. While examples of tyrannical leaders in history are numerous, Nazism was seen as an alarming form of evil because of the synchronised fanaticism that characterised German society. The ability of Nazi Germany to utilise radio to spread fascist propaganda in order to cultivate fanaticism and conformity in its citizens was seen as a pivotal element of the supremacy that made the Holocaust possible (Heath & Potter, 2006: 26). Half a century later the Rwandan radio station, RTLM, similarly broadcasted propaganda that dehumanised Tutsis and thereby legitimised their genocide by the Hutus.

Nazism was particularly concerning, as it could be seen as a consequence, rather than the antithesis, of Western civilisation. Young people observed that Nazism was founded on a mundane bureaucracy and the adherence to instructions. They concluded that modern capitalism and Western democracies are but a subtle version of the fascist state apparatus (ibid, 2006: 28). This contributed to the negativity with which conformity and obedience were increasingly seen. Yet this perception was based on a misunderstanding of the *Zeitgeist* that enabled the rise of Nazism. Hitler and the Nazi movement triumphed due to their ability to exploit “the frustrated yearning for respect and dignity of all those who believed that in politics and society they were held in contemptuous disregard” (Cantor, 1970: 122). The need for identity and respect that has driven subcultures thus also played a central role in German support of Nazism. Further concerns developed in the West due to the effectiveness with which Hitler used his control of the mass media to

sway the population. As a result suspicions of brainwashing developed in democratic societies that remain persistent to this day (Gans, 1999: 58). Of particular concern was the persuasive power of advertising which some viewed as a “dangerous mode of brainwashing” because it creates false desires for products (Watson & Hill, 1993: 2). This view gave rise to deviant consumerism, a typical countercultural practice, whereby products with moderate advertising are preferred as an indication of the ability to think independently.

In post-war America perceptions of adolescence shifted. It was not only a volatile state requiring coercion, but rather a burgeoning captive market (Savage, 2008: 465). This freedom and power to purchase became aligned with the freedom and power to assert one’s individuality. Adolescent consumerism in the United States flourished in the 1950s, along with the burgeoning middle class, thanks to the booming American economy. Yet while 1950s teenagers were supporting the popular entertainment that the era is remembered for, the urban bohemians’ subculture was defining them in opposition to the mass culture.

The Beat Generation was a rebellious group of the post-war period, their views articulated by writers like Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Norman Mailer. It was in this period as demonstrated by the Beat Generation that the artistic lifestyle of bohemianism bonded with a neo-Marxist critique of mass culture. Hippies later exhibited the same dislike of conformity, the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy of the earlier Beat generation, with one notable difference. The Beats were jazz enthusiasts, fascinated by black cultural innovations. It championed the perceived joyfulness of ‘Negroes’ to the extent of racial fetishism. This was a notable step away from the traditional Marxist view of the subalterns of society as victims of material oppression. Instead the Beats envied the marginalised as “the last bearers of authenticity in the mass consumer society of tasteless automatons” (Lloyd, 2000: 61). At the heart of this yearning is the perception that black culture is more authentic than that of the white bourgeoisie.

It is vital to recognise the countercultural developments of the 1960s as a reaction against the conformity that the 1950s represented. Evidence of that conflict can be seen in films like *Across the universe* (Taymor, 2008), where the young adults are positioned against their staid respectable parents as well as the authoritarian forces of government and military. An element worthy of notice in such countercultural narratives, and one that is prevalent in post-apartheid cinema, is that parents are represented as impotent while the organised bodies of government, church, education converge into a spectre of dominant authority. The development of countercultural movements requires the impetus of a perceived societal conformity as well as the deterioration of national ideology. In late 1980s South Africa it was, for instance, not only the moral and stylistic conservatism of Afrikanerdom that inspired the Voëlvry movement's rebellion but also a loss of belief in an NP government that sent men to fight a border war against a diminishing threat of communism. Because the political and cultural adversary often fuse in the countercultural critique of society, lifestyle and, taste preferences take on political significance. Consequently, a deviant lifestyle choice seems a form of activism and the derision of dominant taste sits side by side with political commentary.

## **The rise of countercultural thinking**

The 1960s upheavals in America were the result of a shift in how young dissidents approached activism. The radical students that constituted the New Left had become disillusioned with traditional liberal politics after successive liberal presidents sustained the war in Vietnam. The New Left were disappointed in their liberal elders who they felt had abandoned idealism once prestige and position made them complacent. The young radicals, consequently, advocated an approach that dismissed bureaucratic organisation, valorised civil conflict, and called for the creation of a revolutionary new culture. The perceived ineffectiveness of their predecessors caused them to abandon traditional liberal concerns such as union organising in favour of a social activism focused on defiant gestures instead of pragmatic operations. Political plans were replaced by a form of

personal idealism that conquered differences of opinion by means of moral self-righteousness.

Adherents of the young radicals banded together to form a heroic movement that enabled a strengthened sense of opposition to complacent society and functioned as a form of exclusion. By 1969 the strain of internal dissention and loss of direction after numerous campus protests and hippie honeymoons, such as the Summer of Love and Woodstock, lead to a realisation that a different approach was needed. Although they succeeded in establishing a counterculture, the popularity of their groovy idealism was not leading to a revolution in the practices of government or the larger American populace. Taking on democratic politics would entail compromise and tedious organisation. This was out of the question because it lacked valour and spectacle. The two remaining options were thus to either become more radical or to give up and find comfort in the creation of pessimistic art. Gerald Casale, who started the band Devo after protesting students at his Kent State University were shot by the National Guard, illustrates the perception at that time:

The choices at that point were either join the Weather Underground and start trying to assassinate some of the evil people. Because that was *their* modus operandi – killing anybody who tried to make a difference in this society or give people hope – or have a creative whacked-out Dada art response (quoted in Reynolds, 2009: 43).

What is evident here is a myopic view of ways to create a just society and a naïve belief in student radicalism as an instrument for hope and change. The persistent image of government and other forces of authority as a unified evil ‘them’ is also present. This serves to strengthen the individual’s sense of righteousness and validate whatever path of action they adopt. Bill Flanagan, a regretful former member of the Weathermen, later Weather Underground, echoes this concern about validation by stating, “[w]hen you feel you have right on your side, you can do some pretty horrific things” (Green & Siegel, 2003). The Weather Underground was a radical left organisation that advocated and practiced violence in the form of terrorism against public property and the state. Leaders of the Weather Underground were former office holders of the Students for Democratic Change who grew restless with ineffectual non-violent protest. The aggressive protests

organised by the Weathermen were designed to exceed what was expected from anti-war demonstrations. The Weathermen believed that the reason why even big anti-war protests were ineffectual was because they were containable and predictable. It can thus be seen how activism can fall into the same trap that catches artists and musicians whose success depends on their ability to cause outrage. The potential of any action to shock the public is dependent on its familiarity. The desire to shock consequently leads to escalating extremism due to the diminishing shock value of an act over time. This is an essential dilemma faced by countercultural ideology because it values gestures above pragmatic solutions, as explained by Cantor (1970).

The Yippies (Youth International Party members) were another group at that time that felt the need to go beyond traditional liberal activism. They were psychedelic hippies who planned to shock the public and show their contempt for conventional politics by means of spectacular acts. The public's tolerance of protest made it possible for the Yippies to act absurdly, as when they nominated a pig for president, exorcised Pentagon 'spirits' and threatened to contaminate the Chicago water supply with LSD (Cantor, 1970: 275). It can be assumed that there were many activists who were sincerely dedicated to the civil rights and anti-war movements, yet it is hard to ignore the likelihood that counterculture was for many a way of distinction, something that was used to separate them from the common people they disliked, just like Afrikaners had done by means of Calvinism. The legacy of 1960s counterculture came under scrutiny when the same generation that decried consumerism and capitalist competition became the personification of such values as yuppies (young upwardly mobile professionals) in the 1980s. It was notably a newspaper article about a Yippie activist turned business networking consultant, Jerry Rubin, which established the use of the term 'yuppie'. Many saw the transformation of a generation of hippy idealists into materialistic yuppies as a sign that they had 'sold out'. This criticism fails to notice that no ideological leap was necessary because the hippie and yuppie value systems are essentially the same.

There was undeniable conflict on a cultural level between the reigning bourgeoisie and the counterculture of the 1960s in terms of lifestyle choices because each perceived

the other as its antithesis. However, the counterculture was always aligned with capitalism because its rejection of mass society was driven by individualism and the entrepreneurial spirit. The fact that these are core values of capitalism and consumerism explains the ease with which the hippies became yuppies. Their sense of individualism naturally meant that they had to update their consumer choices in advance of the mainstream assimilation of bohemian style in order to maintain their distinction. So when they became affluent they did not maintain the lifestyle they had once made a moral imperative because they now had to differentiate themselves in a new context. In the same way that the Volkswagen Beetle and Microbus was embraced by the hippies in order to signify their rejection of opulent American culture the yuppies bought four-wheel drives to signify their adventurous spirit and rejection of suburban restraint. These vehicles enabled the purchaser to convince themselves that they are independent spirits, free from society's repressive systems and not just a cog in the machine (Heath & Potter, 2006: 6). The arguments the hippies had once made in favour of the Beetle as opposed to American muscle cars – that they are uneconomical, fuel wasting and bulky – were discarded once adherence to the stance no longer enabled a sense of individualism. The language of 1960 radicalism has been adopted in the marketing of major brands (Frank, 1998). It is especially dominant in brand marketing because the rhetoric of 'daring to be different', 'fighting against the average' and 'sparking a revolution' is extremely attractive to consumers (Brooks, 2000: 110). Companies advocate an ethos of bravery, individualism and adventure because it fulfils costumers' need to see themselves as better than the mediocrity they perceive in mass society.

The assimilation into marketing of radical rhetoric may be reasonably harmless but some of the things endorsed by the counterculture were undeniably irresponsible. Because it was developing a culture in opposition to civil society many things were naively embraced in order to display a rejection of societal norms. Countercultural narratives have a tendency to romanticise criminality and interpret it as a form of social criticism (Heath & Potter, 2006). Acclaimed films of that era presented rebellious criminals as their protagonists such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Pen, 1967), *Badlands* (Malick, 1973), *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* (Forman, 1975). In films such as *Taxi driver*

(Scorsese, 1976) and later proponents of the idea such as *Natural born killers* (Stone, 1994) and *American psycho* (Harron, 2000) the individual's disapproval of society rationalises psychopathic behaviour. Even in the film about the South African criminal, *Stander* (Hughes, 2003), a scene in which Stander experiences the Soweto uprising is inserted in order to forcibly position him against apartheid society. In *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Badlands* and later *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) the involvement of the women in a life of crime offers them an escape from the monotony of a restrictive American life. That these criminal rebels have to die at the end of all these films is not due to an underlying conservative mindset, but rather that the protagonists are heroes for rejecting conformity. The narrative ensures that they will never again be entrapped by complacency, by killing them off. This sustains the romantic notion of the unwavering rebel who is destroyed by a society that could not tolerate his subversive existence. The rebel's absorption into society would be the ultimate disgrace. This same concern seems to have contributed to Kurt Cobain's decision to take his own life, evident by the words "it's better to burn out than to fade away" in his suicide note. The narratives that came out of the 1965-1975 era seemed to suggest that complacency is so great a betrayal of the countercultural ethos that premature death is necessary to avoid it.

The creative atmosphere of that era not only romanticised violent and self-destructive behaviour but also showed an irresponsible acceptance of drug use and mental illness. *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* puts forward the idea that people in mental institutions are not really disturbed but are merely the victims of an oppressive society that casts them out because they are nonconformists. Prominent intellectuals of that era asserted that mental illness was actually a defiance of imposed norms and that schizophrenics "were on the road to discovering their most authentic human self" (Heath & Potter, 2006: 148). Ken Kesey wrote the book on which *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* is based, after working as an orderly at a mental health facility where he used psychedelic drugs and mingled with the patients. Drugs such as LSD were endorsed by influential figures in the 1960s as a beneficial means to expand a person's consciousness and be freed from limitations. Harvard University professors such as Timothy Leary promoted the use of LSD to achieve self-discovery, ecstasy and revelation. For the growing number of users

in the hippie community it was seen as a way of erasing years of social programming and becoming hyperconscious beings in harmony with their inner nature.

The 1960s counterculture could afford such trivial pursuits because they were relatively more financially secure than their parents' generation. Their search for personal freedom as expressed by their clothing, lifestyle and drug use was the next step up from the basic freedom they already enjoyed. The stability offered by prosperity did nothing to satisfy the youth, so they longed for individual freedom and purpose. The historian Norman F. Cantor observed that the rebellion of the youth could be ascribed to their bourgeois environment:

The generation gap in the contemporary United States was not a phoney creation of the mass media. Young people, whether pot-smoking flower children or austere followers of Che Guevara, did violently reject their environment. Their protest took a variety of forms, attaching itself to specific issues, whether genuinely felt or manufactured for the occasion. ....Many student radicals of the 1960s seemed to come from neither the very rich nor the ambitious lower middle class, but rather from the postwar suburban middle class. [The basis of their revolt] lay in the peculiar character of the suburban middle class, who could offer their children security without power (1970: 298-299).

It is possible to notice a parallel here between the American suburban middle class who could offer their children security but not power, and an Afrikaner bourgeoisie who after the decline of Nationalism could offer the next generation affluence but not influence. It appears that the rebellious countercultural spirit seems to take root wherever a generation inherits mundane prosperity along with an ill-defined and ineffective identity. Countercultural ideology thus becomes a useful tool in such environments because it enables participants to disregard restrictions placed on them and make themselves distinct from the mass with which they do not identify with whilst offering a sense of moral superiority and purpose.

## **The rise of punk**

By the mid 1970s the idealism of the hippies had fizzled out. America was in a state of shock after the Watergate Scandal and the end of the Vietnam War. The dream of the

1960s was gradually replaced by apathy and hedonism as disco music took over and anti-establishment idealism made way for the materialism of the 1980s. Across the Atlantic, however, a new cultural rebellion was brewing in England. Punk appeared as a spectacular youth subculture characterised by fast and primitive rock music and 'bricolage' fashion (Hebdige, 1979). In essence the punks were a countercultural revolt against societal norms much like the hippies and therefore needed to differentiate themselves from their predecessors. The punks, who were the offspring of the 1960s counterculture, rejected the values and lifestyle of the hippies whom they considered to have failed in their aspirations. To emphasise their originality punks advocated anarchism and offensive behaviour to replace the hippie mantra of 'peace love and understanding' and adopted amphetamines as their drug of choice. The punks professed to hate the hippies, criticised their lifestyle and accused them of complacency, as the hippies had done in their rejection of the liberal establishment. The icon of punk, Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols, denounced their long hair, bellbottom trousers and lethargic drug use. The hippies, Rotten said,

...were so complacent. They let it all – the drug culture – flop around them. They were all dosed out of their heads the whole time. 'Yeah man, peace and love. Don't let anything affect you. Let it walk all over you but don't stop it.' WE say bollocks! If it offends, stop it. You've got to or else you just become apathetic and complacent yourself" (quoted in Nehring, 1993: 272).

Of course, Rotten is not criticising drug use here, just the wrong type of drugs. His argument is that the hippies failed to overthrow authority because they were not passionate enough in their beliefs and made the wrong stylistic choices. The punks seemed to be convinced that their revolution would succeed because they used amphetamines, wore different clothing and preached nihilism instead of harmony. Although Rotten boldly declared that there would be 'no future', there was indeed a future, one in which Thatcherism took control and Rotten and his fellow rockers also became affluent adults.

It seems, then, as if each rebellious youth movement will arrogantly believe that they will achieve what the previous generation could not by espousing a different style. Movements such as these are doomed to fail in their aspirations. They get replaced by the

next hopeful contenders because of a belief that cultural rebellion is fundamentally subversive. Despite the fact that both hippies and punks failed to ‘subvert the system’, they did make an enormous contribution to the values and styles that circulate in contemporary popular culture. It is perhaps just as well that they did not oust authority, because their lack of appreciation for rules would complicate the task of reconstructing a stable society. Groups that believe that supplanting the enemy will end their dissatisfaction fail to recognise the inevitability of disagreement within their own ranks. Their choice, then, is to either to expel dissidents or to accommodate them and utilise their dissent. This is what occurred in Western society in the twentieth century. The predictable appearance of rebellious youth movements became part of the rejuvenation of culture.

The arrival of a seemingly nihilistic youth movement was signalled by the release of the Sex Pistols’ song, “Anarchy in the UK” in 1976. Later that year interviewer Bill Grundy unwisely challenged the band to “say something outrageous” on live television. This resulted in a string of expletive insults that was unprecedented on British television. The incident caused a furore in the newspapers. This gave the band tremendous publicity and established it and its followers as a spectacular symptom of the decline of British society. It was only after the interview and the resulting media furore that punk was seen as a distinctive identity with its own style. Rebellious young people began to think of themselves as punks (Muggleton, 2002: 133). The Sex Pistols’ second single, “God save the Queen” was released to coincide with Queen Elizabeth’s Silver Jubilee celebrations. Production was halted at first because workers at the factory refused to handle the single. This was due to both the impertinent lyrics and the disrespectful artwork which featured a portrait of the Queen with her features obscured by ransom note styled lettering.

The creator of the “God Save the Queen” artwork, Jamie Reid, was heavily influenced by the Situationists, as was the band’s manager, Malcolm McLaren. The style of postmodernist collage used in the artwork was envisioned as an act of ‘détournement’, and has become a staple of the punk aesthetic. ‘Détournement’ is a technique advocated by the Situationist International , a group of radicals that drew on Marxism and

Surrealism to declare their conviction that art and politics should be part of the practice of everyday life. The high point in the SI's existence between 1957 and 1972 was the French student uprising and wildcat strikes of May 1968. The two key texts of the SI both appeared in 1967. These were Raoul Vaneigem's *The revolution of everyday life* and Guy Debord's *The society of the spectacle*. The latter put forward the idea that we as subjects of advanced capitalism are actually living within a spectacle that subdues our desire for participation and revolution by transforming us into spectators. Central to the SI philosophy was that unsettling action is necessary to challenge the mediocrity of everyday life because "all that was once directly lived has become mere representations" (Debord, 1967: 12). They encouraged the creation of situations that could fulfil their desire for participation. The act of taking an existing text or image and altering its meaning – a common feature of postmodernism – was termed 'détournement' and seen as profoundly subversive. The SI also posited that individuals should free themselves by means of the daily creation of alternative life experiences due to the fake existence which the capitalist mass media has created,

It is not hard to see that the Situationists were endorsing the same flawed worldview that captured the hippie imagination. Reasonable prosperity enables people to afford the basic needs such as food and shelter and therefore live a comfortable existence. Yet further expenditure on goods beyond basic needs does not guarantee happiness because the enjoyment of a luxury is dependent on its relative value. Someone may, for instance, buy a Toyota Camry and derive pleasure from it until everyone else in the community obtains a BMW. The possession of a Toyota Camry will most probably in that context cause dissatisfaction. This inability of non-essential goods to deliver satisfaction is commonly misinterpreted as proof that capitalism creates false desires and has made people victims of consumerism. The boredom that often accompanies comfortable affluence then provides a breeding ground for a perception that it is the stability of their existence that is the cause of their feelings of discontent.

The acceptance of this popular yet flawed notion in the late 1960s is evident in this well-known slogan of the May 1968 revolt, "[d]own with a world in which the guarantee

that we will not die of starvation has been purchased with the guarantee that we will die of boredom". The circumstances that sparked the student riots of 1968 also contained the key ingredients for a youth rebellion: affluence and insignificance. The universities of France were critically overcrowded as almost all were state sponsored and anyone who could pass the *baccalauréat* was eligible to attend. In an era of rising affluence almost everyone did attend which had the result that, "the supposed delights of French student life faded under the weight of numbers" (Cantor, 1970: 317). Much like their American counterparts, the French students had the luxury of not having to worry about financial survival yet felt as if they were part of an insignificant mass. Such a situation inevitably produces a search for distinction and purpose. In a period where the "personal is political" (Redhead, 1997: 45), people could embrace rebellious individualism as a vital step towards civil responsibility and self-differentiation.

## **Subversion and recuperation**

A Situationist notion which gained currency was that radicals straddle a line between subversion and recuperation. If an artist became successful by working together with the mass media and therefore the capitalist system this success could be interpreted either as a subversion of the system from within or as recuperation and neutralisation of the artists' legitimacy. The SI was immensely concerned with the possibility that their members would be assimilated by the establishment, thereby making their radicalism accessible. One such member, Asger Jorn, who became increasingly popular as an artist, was forced to resign and rejoin under a pseudonym in order to protect the uncooperative image of the organisation. With this information at hand it is difficult not to see the Situationist International as merely an exclusive club. This idea that an artist could cooperate with the culture industries and subvert it from the inside particularly appealed to Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren. Once the band had become notorious with the help of the media, McLaren proclaimed its wildly inflated infamy to be an exposé of the general distortions and shortcomings of the mass media (Nehring, 2006). Punk culture's success in disseminating its message of negation by harnessing the culture industries was

presented as a manipulation of the 'society of the spectacle'. The lyrics of many punk songs conveyed a nihilistic outlook, in which the sense of alienation had developed into a desire to see society destroyed. The arrival of punk thus marks a key turn in countercultural ideology at which the hope of creating a new society was nihilistically abandoned in place of the aim of disrupting the existing one. A paradigm shift - from the idealistic rebellion of the 1960s to a rejection of the idea that society could be successfully changed for the better - occurred. Rebellion therefore transformed from a means to an end to an end in itself.

A theorist who played a big role in the appreciation of unproductive rebellion in studies of popular culture is Dick Hebdige. His influential book *Subculture: the meaning of style* (1979) is both insightful and misleading. He opens a chapter with the following attempt at clarification:

Subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy 'out there' but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation. (1979: 90)

Hebdige is adding unnecessary complexity and importance here to what should be relatively uncomplicated. Subcultures are groups of people that adopt a particular code of appearance, behaviour and values in order to produce a social identity that distinguishes them from others. When a subculture adopts an adversarial stance to a perceived dominant culture it can be referred to as a 'counterculture'. When Hebdige interprets it as 'noise' or a 'mechanism of semantic disorder' he shows an overeager certainty in the ability of subcultures to continually disrupt society. Hebdige is part of a tradition in cultural studies which attempts to interpret as subversive elements of popular culture that do not adhere to common taste. Although *The meaning of style* is his most influential work, Hebdige abandoned one of its central arguments in later years. He introduced the idea that style has significant political implications and has the potential to disrupt hegemony. Hebdige became aware of the idea's flaw once he witnessed the arrival of the New Romantic trend in music and the proliferation of style-obsessed magazines in the

1980s (Nehring, 1993: 81) He dismissed these developments and renounced the importance of style when he saw it being used by a new scene which had no political agenda.

Hebdige's short-sightedness is excusable, considering the context in which he was working. Hebdige was doing his research at the CCCS which had a Leftist approach and thus tended to interpret youth subcultures as manifestations of working class conflict. CCCS researchers invested youth subcultures with political meaning and saw them as emblematic of social change within the class conflict (Gelder, 2005: 82). While its counterpart in America, the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, attempted empirical sociology, the CCCS popularised the pursuit of progressive politics in popular culture. Because they viewed subcultures in terms of class conflict, scholars at the CCCS believed that they can develop only from the working class. This might explain why Hebdige dismissed the New Romantic scene in Birmingham as middle class rubbish (De Graaf & Garret, 2005). The class character of British society at that time contributed to the deterministic approach of the CCCS. Because it was felt that a class struggle is either unavoidable or required, the stylistic rebellion of youth groups was interpreted as manifestations of the conflict. It is comparable to the paradigm which has dominated cultural research in South Africa which tends to interpret issues in terms of race and apartheid.

Hebdige's overestimation of the subversive effect of punk style must also be understood in the context of the moral panics that surrounded punk's earliest appearances. The public reaction to the rude language and misconduct of punks made it seem as if they were slowly unravelling the repressive weave of society. Hebdige articulates this as follows:

The limits of acceptable linguistic expression are prescribed by a number of apparently universal taboos.... Predictably then, violations of the authorized codes through which the social order is organized and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb....Similarly, spectacular subcultures express forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgressions of sartorial and behavioural codes, law braking etc.) (1979:91).

Most of what Hebdige says here is true although he makes a sly link between consciousness and rule breaking. The violation of social codes does have the power to disturb, and breaking the law is forbidden in society. Yet what he implies with this passage is that an awareness of class and difference is so suppressed that it must be expressed in delinquency. It is assumed that hegemony requires the subordinates of society to be unaware of their status, thus a consciousness of class is forbidden. It is hard to argue that British citizens of the 1970s were unaware of class and did not recognise societal divisions on the basis of occupation and dialect. What Hebdige is attempting to do is attach profound significance to the delinquent behaviour of subcultures. How he identifies unconventional dress style and behaviour with law breaking is noteworthy. New fashion styles can initially appear shocking to the general public, but once it becomes common it is no longer seen as a signifier of danger and it loses its transgressive significance.

The same applies to behaviour codes unless they are antisocial. If antisocial behaviour proliferates it will inevitably lose its radical meaning and merely become rude. Lawbreaking will remain transgressive as long as the law remains. Most laws exist to prevent people from harming (in the broad sense) themselves or others. Some seemingly mundane laws are enforced in order to make behaviour predictable and informed decisions easier. The convention in every nation of either driving on the left-hand or the right-hand side of the road is an example of such an enforced law. If individuals chose to transgress this law and to drive on whichever side they please road users would have to drive extremely carefully because they would not know from which direction other road users would come (Ball, 2005: 383). This would result in traffic chaos. If everybody wore a particularly transgressive style of clothing it would quickly lose its distinction and come to be accepted as the norm. The ubiquitous T-shirt, for example, was originally considered an item of underwear. If everyone breaks the law it will lead to an overall decline in the quality of life and anarchy. This is something which Hebdige and so many other proponents of countercultural ideology have blurred. Not all forms of transgressions are equal. Some are creative, some selfish and some psychopathic. These very different elements are often articulated together as a form of protest because the countercultural

worldview considers society to be excessively repressive. All forms of defiance are thus creditable because they indicate non-compliance with the system. Anything - from a distinctive jacket, to rude behaviour, to damage to property - can ultimately be politicised if interpreted as a reaction to repressive social conditions.

This is the heroic resistance strand of cultural studies. It appeals because it enables people to see the entertainment that they like as the antagonist of what they do not like, whether it is advanced capitalism, the mass media or their parents. This is a delusion that reduces one's sense of alienation in society. It vindicates one's dislikes and fosters an identity of self-righteousness. A dilemma arises for the subculture and its adherents when the entertainment or lifestyle it has claimed as its own gets adopted by some members of the very society it opposes. This is the danger of recuperation that the Situationists also feared. In an often cited section in *Meaning of style*, Hebdige states the two forms that the process of recuperation takes:

- (1) the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form);
- (2) the 'labeling' and re-definition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form) (1979: 94).

These points are useful, because they accurately outline two inevitable steps in the timeline of a subculture. Yet what Hebdige portrays as a process of recuperation can much rather be understood as the loss of control by the members of what the subculture signifies. This occurrence is bemoaned by followers of the subculture who have invested in the message the subculture sends to society. The second step is usually not regretted quite so much because the bad publicity and labelling is still a form of flattery. It reaffirms their impression that they are a threat to civil society. The first step is a crushing blow yet one which countercultural ideology has managed to reinterpret as proof of the establishment's insatiable ability to absorb and neutralise resistance. The belief is that the purpose of the commodification of the subculture is to empty it of its subversive meaning and then sell a vacuous form of it back to the populace. This, presumably, is the

capitalist culture industries' active strategy, employed to defuse dissent whilst making profits.

This argument is convincing for those who believe that subcultural style is genuinely subversive and that people buy whatever the market delivers to them. The reason why the commodification process is so demoralising to followers of a subculture is not because it strips it of its subversive meaning but because it defuses the distinction it offers them. This is a classic problem faced by most who derive value from a rebellious style that differs from the current norms. The style, if appealing, will proliferate and become popular, not because the capitalist system wishes to neutralise it but because there are others who would also like to benefit from the style.

## **Taste and rebellion**

One of the basic blunders of countercultural thinking is its unwillingness to concede that rational individuals, not monolithic corporations, are responsible for consumerism. The fact that many people buy certain goods each year is not seen as an indication that they actually want those goods but that they are compelled to buy them by the feelings of inadequacy that marketing has implanted in them. This view is held by individualists who believe that they are unique in their possession of independent thought and that the masses are victims of a sheep mentality. This is, in a way, an example of what social psychologists call an 'extrinsic incentive bias'. Studies have shown that people tend to overestimate the extent to which others allow themselves to be influenced by external forces. In one such study done on prospective law students, 63% stated that they believe their peers are motivated by financial rewards while only 12% said that this influenced their choice of profession (Heath, 1999). The perception that others are manipulated by marketing to which oneself is immune relies on the same flawed social reasoning. If it were possible for companies to simply dictate desires to consumers they would be able to predict the success of any product, yet it is clear that this is not the case. There is uncertainty about public reception, even in the fashion industry which tends to be seen as

an elite mill churning out rudimentary styles each season for the absorption of the masses. There was certainly a period in the mid-twentieth century when Paris fashion designers set the world's fashion agenda by means of boutique stores. Yet by the 1990s fashion houses were no longer able to dictate styles as trends began bubbling up from multiple sources and shoppers seemed to be swayed as much by popular culture as by practicality. The failed attempt of the fashion industry to establish the short skirt in 1987 was actively resisted by members of the public, demonstrating that marketeers could not dictate fashion as they used to (Akins, 1999).

Fashion, however, does not rely on blind speculation. Clothing retailers stock a combination of items that had sold well the previous season with fresh pieces inspired by European runway couture. Local retailers rarely stock items as outlandish as those that appear on the catwalks of Milan and Paris. Elements of these showpieces are seasonally incorporated into the conventional clothing stocked by large retailers. This enables them to make this year's range distinct from last year's selection. This constant renewal is undoubtedly good for revenue as it forces those who wish to stay abreast with the latest developments to replenish their closet every season, but it is not mandatory. Some people choose to communicate their good taste by being fashionable and some show their distinctive taste by never being in fashion. Good taste seems to be determined by an ability to make independent judgements on cultural goods. One's position as an epitome of good taste when one chooses something of aesthetic value is negated if that choice is very popular. A good example of this is the artworks of Vladimir Tretchikoff, one of the most commercially successful artists of all time. His famous painting, *Chinese Girl*, has undeniable aesthetic appeal yet because prints of it were immensely popular in the 1960s and 1970s, it is now regarded as kitsch. As the popularity of a cultural artefact increases it says less about the admirer's ability to make sound judgements of taste. It therefore seems that the easiest way to give an impression of good taste is to champion whatever it is that the masses do not like. Yet even this strategy can be tricky, as an arbitrary style choice – such as an unsymmetrical haircut – can often signify a myriad of things. The owner might have a poor-sighted barber, be part of a religious sect, have lice or a

personality disorder. What it requires is for a small number of influential people to adopt the style, thereby narrowing it down as signifier of advanced taste.

An example of the role that influential people play in transforming unconventional style into a sign of good taste is American rapper Kanye West's popularisation of shutter sunglasses. By wearing the unpractical sunglasses in a music video and during live performances, West managed to change the meaning of what had previously been a camp relic of the 1980s to an accessory compatible with black masculinity. It is unlikely that Kanye or the shutter sunglasses would have become popular if he adopted them at the start of his music career. The fact that he was already a respected rapper enabled him to wear and impart credibility to the sunglasses, thereby making them a signifier of advanced taste. A company, Shutter Shades Inc, was consequently established to take advantage of its new popularity and within a year imitations were being sold by South African street vendors.

This case of Kanye West and shutter sunglasses is one of many in which influential people play a crucial role in the rapid transformation of objects into symbols of 'cool'. A style has no guarantee of success simply because it is at odds with common taste. It requires ambassadors, whose taste is considered trustworthy by their peers, to incorporate it into their existing style, thereby framing its meaning. Malcolm Gladwell points out another such example in *The tipping point* (2000). Hush Puppies – a brand of casual footwear – experienced a major revival in 1995 when young trendsetters in Manhattan began wearing them. Up until that stage Hush Puppies was associated with the dull leisure styles of the 1960s and was therefore an outdated brand. Annual sales were as low as 30 000 but once adopted by the trendy, sales skyrocketed. By the end of 1995, 430 000 pairs had been sold, followed by four times that in 1996. This occurred, not as a result of new marketing campaign, but because influential young people wore the shoes because no one else was wearing them at that time. For a period, the shoes became a sign of distinction because only those who moved in the right social circles were aware that Hush Puppies was 'hip'.

A pattern emerges when the development of such trends are examined. A new style is adopted or an old one revived by trendsetters who wish to be distinct from what they perceive to be mainstream style. They have an appetite for regular stylistic renewal. They enjoy making gestures of individualism and are typically artists, musicians, designers or gay men (Vejlgaard, 2008). The trend then spreads from a small group of early adopters to the larger international community of people like them. During that process the trend will be featured in the media which then exposes the style to society outside of the artistic community. Once enough manufacturers begin delivering it to the market it will reach critical mass where after the style will lose its value of distinction. There are exceptions to this pattern however. In some cases the style does not lend itself to mass production and will consequently fail to reach this critical mass. An example of this is the steampunk subculture whose style is inspired by Victorian science-fiction. Because the apparel is too elaborate and eccentric to be adopted by the public in its current form, it will remain confined to a subculture until a way is found to dilute and manufacture it.

Although trendsetters are pivotal to the spread of a style they are not necessarily its inventors. What often occurs is that they copy the style from people who have adopted it for practical or ethnic reasons. They show a long-lasting dedication to their style, unlike their imitators. Motorcycle jackets, for instance, are used by motorcyclists for practical reasons. They were then adopted by rock musicians because of the image of danger and rebellion that biker gangs had attached to it (Quilleriet, 2004). Tattoos in Polynesian cultures serve to indicate status within a tribe. It entered Western society when it was adopted by sailors whereafter it became increasingly popular as a means of decoration and distinction (Kosut, 2006). A generation of young women in the 1920s employed a misreading of Sigmund Freud's theory of society as innately repressive to rationalise a daring new lifestyle of alcohol and sexual freedom (Cantor, 1970: 111). Known as 'flappers', they wore their hair short and provocative clothing to make sure they did not look like someone's wife or mother. For a time they were able to enjoy their status as the rebellious women who discarded convention and frequented bars until the appeal of the lifestyle attracted the older generation and the young flappers lost their sense of distinction. Decades later, an ironic taste for kitsch cultural goods was adopted by the

American gay liberation movement in order to signify a rejection of the norms of society. Cieraad and Porte state that by “pushing the boundaries of good taste to its more vulgar and mischievous margins, male homosexuals wanted to shock and ridicule the bourgeois aesthetics of heterosexual society” yet as this style became common “kitsch lost its rebelliousness” (2006: 284-285). A common dilemma faced by the initiators of a style is thus that it ceases to fulfil its original purpose of signifying an opposition to common taste once it inevitably becomes popular.

Cultural rebels are cursed in that they inescapably function as trendsetters. Even though they develop unique music, design and sartorial styles for ideological reasons, the style will appeal to uncommitted people because it is new and distinctive. The market will respond to the demand from this larger group of people interested in the rebellious style by selling cultural goods derived from it. This is seen, then, not only by the initiators but by a range of adherents along the timeline of a style’s popularisation, as the ruination of a movement due to capitalist interference. They fail to see that recuperation is not something companies do from the outside but “an endogenous effect produced by consumers, a logical consequence of many people seeking to obtain the same positional good” (Heath, 2002: 263). Penny Rimbaud, a member of the Anarcho-punk band Crass, a subgenre of punk that came about in reaction to the movement’s commercialisation, states the common misperception:

Within six months the movement had been bought out. The capitalist counterrevolutionaries had killed with cash. Punk degenerated from being a force for change, to becoming just another element in the grand media circus. Sold out, sanitised and strangled, punk had become just another social commodity, a burnt-out memory of what might have been (quoted in Thompson, 2004: 312).

Cultural rebels like Rimbaud tend to overestimate what the entertainment and gestures they provide will amount to. The argument employed here – that the revolutionary “force for change” was tamed by the capitalist “media circus” – enables them to avoid admitting that their movement was unlikely to have any significant socio-political effect. Rimbaud is making use of the myth that punk started out as a cause free of commercial influence. The reality is that British punk was created in 1976 by a collection of musicians, art students and clothing designers hoping to be noticed (Spicer, 2006). In order to sell

records and expensive trousers, money and the media had to be involved. In fact, the British media and record industry played a crucial role in the structuring of punk as a movement out of a loose contingent of shared impulses. In the same way that newspapers were instrumental in the creation of the English nation by enabling citizens to imagine a community of fellow citizens (Anderson, 1991), the media made followers and detractors aware of punk.

Muggleton also points out that the music and style press are “often staffed with people previously or currently subcultural members”, and that they help compose “subcultural entities from real yet nonetheless nebulous movements and cultural fragments” (2002: 135). The relationship between subcultures and the media is thus more collaborative than this critique of media commercialisation suggests. Punk fans that lament its commercialisation fail to recognise that they are part of its popularisation. There is a false belief that they had come to know of the music or style via a non-mediated manner and that subsequent followers – not themselves – are inauthentic fans. It also relies on the conceited belief in their own independence as opposed to the conformity of others who are subject to mass society.

While Hebdige’s theory of recuperation via commodification may be appealing because it blames the capitalist system for trivialising rebellious style, it is unsound because it misinterprets the manner in which styles become popular. Subcultures come into existence by the production of commodities. The production of commodities derived from a subculture does not seal its fate, it merely weakens its value of distinction. If the reward of the subculture is drawn from its exclusivity then its popularisation may well lead to its demise but that is the fault of its own insecurity and not market profiteering.

The term ‘cool’ may seem a vacuous one, due to its wider use to indicate approval or composure, but in terms of sociology it refers to positive distinction. Cool is the “central status hierarchy in contemporary urban society” and is as a result “the central ideology of consumerism in our times” (Heath, 2002: 262) Countercultural ideology and cool are immensely compatible because both attach importance to being different and making

bold gestures. These principles are communicated in entertainment and advertising and drive competitive consumption. Cool, much like a beachfront house or a rare artefact, is a positional good. Its value is derived from the fact that most other people do not have it. This is why cool is aligned with countercultural rebellion. As it develops styles in opposition to the accepted taste of the general public it delivers an aesthetic which most people – for the time being – do not possess. The pursuit of cool has driven the expansion of stylistic rebellion into trends which lose their cool value as they spread. Yet beyond simply being a synonym for ‘good taste’ cool requires a concealment of any concern with the importance of taste. To be cool an individual or product needs to communicate advanced taste in an effortless manner. This can either be achieved by a relaxed appetite for innovative styles or by masking narcissism within a pose of indifference. In Renaissance Italy, for instance, a philosophy of *sprezzatura* was adopted by the aristocracy. This entailed taking on an appearance of effortlessness combined with vanity and disdain for others (Pountain & Robins: 2000). A popular illustration of *sprezzatura* is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, in which the subject’s smug expression communicates both detachment and self-confidence.

In Bourdieu’s study of taste, working class and bourgeois respondents were asked to judge work of non-figurative modern art. Bourdieu observed that the bourgeoisie showed that concealment was essential for good taste:

The confessions with which manual workers faced with modern pictures betray their exclusion (‘I don’t understand what it means’ or ‘I like but I don’t understand it’ contrast with the knowing silence of the bourgeois, who, though equally disconcerted, at least know that they have to refuse – or at least conceal – the naive expectation of expressiveness that is betrayed by the concern to ‘understand’ (1984: 43).

While the workers were unable to judge a non-figurative artwork because it had no referent other than itself, the bourgeoisie recognized that the value of the work was not determined by its relationship to what it portrays but rather in its relationship to other artworks. To make such a judgment requires familiarity with the art world context in which the piece exists. The workers did not possess this cultural capital and consequently struggled to determine the merit of the artwork. Such disparities in aesthetic judgment

can be immensely divisive between different social classes. The development of distinct taste invariably involves derision of the inferior taste of others. Taste plays a major role in the reproduction of status hierarchies in society because people from different social classes find it difficult to enjoy the same things together and those higher in the social hierarchy believe that theirs is superior (Heath & Potter, 2006: 126). An aversion to the lifestyle and tastes of others plays a crucial role in the segregation of cultural groups and cliques.

There is reason to suspect that these discrepancies in taste are cultivated in order to rationalise exclusion. A group or individual may take advantage of distinct taste to foster a sense of superiority or to prevent association with others. This is visible in nightclubs, where each club plays music that appeals to specific music tastes and in some cases practices gatekeeping by only allowing people wearing certain attire to enter. Nightclub crowds consequently “congregate on the basis of their shared taste music” and “their preference for people with similar tastes to themselves” (Thornton, 2005). In such cases, where a strong group affinity develops, it is likely that members will imbue their likes and dislikes with righteous significance. It can be hazardous for outsiders if an arbitrary style choice is transformed into an ideological imperative. In certain cases people may propagate a style precisely because it is in conflict with the taste of those they dislike. An example occurred in the first years of the twentieth century in the taste reforms of the Netherlands. Here male artists launched an attack on the decorative interiors of Dutch homes and advocated simple designs in the hope of changing public taste. Women were portrayed as the culprits responsible for the poor state of domestic aesthetics because of their “effeminate, sentimental and immoderate taste” (Cieraad & Porte, 2006: 277). Societies to inform the public of the evils of curved and intricate furniture were founded, and went as far as propagating a moral discourse that declared the common style to be ‘dishonest’ and ‘shallow’.

Perhaps all of this was simply a strategy by artists, annoyed that housewives were decorating their houses as they saw fit, to create a market for their new designs. In such cases the proponents will develop a style in opposition to the commonly accepted style

and then argue for the moral obligation of their taste. Bourdieu points out that this is a common strategy of deception by ambitious artists:

At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness. The artist's life-style is always a challenge thrown at the bourgeois life-style which it seeks to condemn as unreal and even absurd, by a sort of practical demonstration of the emptiness of the values and powers it pursues. (1984: 57)

In the act of self-definition and promotion, the artist develops a style in opposition to the bourgeoisie and then argues that the values informing the common taste is ethically or spiritually unsuitable for society's wellbeing. The arbitrary nature of the style choice is proven when it gets supplanted within a few years by another style claiming to be impetorative. Exactly that occurred in the Netherlands when the simplistic styles introduced by the taste reforms inevitably became too common and lost its distinct appeal. It was then time for the reign of a new style aligned with the decorative designs that the reforms had denounced in the first place (Cieraad & Porte, 2006). It is as a result of this principle of reactionary development that the appearance of cultural trends throughout the twentieth century appears to be cyclical. It is therefore possible to predict the basic tenets of a future trend or movement by assuming that it embodies opposite values to what is currently popular. Once dissatisfaction mounts within a generation, a trend or cultural movement will form to respond to their sense of alienation.

Artists often develop a style that is hard to enjoy or can be described as an acquired taste. This is done as a rejection of the dominant entertainment that provides to the public's demand for beauty and thrills. Instead of conceding that it is crafted to be distinct, the artist defends the style by positing it as the outcome of a set of principles. This is observable not only in the discourse of musical movements such as folk and grunge but also in cinema. The quest for cinematic realism exhibits this imbuelement of style with principled significance. Lars von Trier, co-founder of the Dogme 95 avant-garde filmmaking movement, has made use of this strategy. He announced the arrival of Dogme 95 by issuing a manifesto with vows that directors should adhere to. These vows obliged a cinematic style at odds with Hollywood films. Elements that were seen to be

artificial such as props, lighting or superficial action was prohibited. The result was films with the intimacy aesthetic of documentary-filmmaking held together by a compelling editing style reminiscent of the French New Wave. Von Trier asserted that the Dogme 95 style would purify filmmaking of its perceived excess and untruth (White, 2005). Such a goal, as with similar ones that preceded it in film history, was unattainable and would simply result in a distinct style. In the 1999 March issue of *Sight and Sound*, Peter Matthews explained this as follows:

From neo-realism to *cinéma vérité*, film history has reliably proved that authenticity is a chimerical goal. Sooner or later, the impression of raw immediacy congeals and stands exposed as a style like any other (quoted in Kau, 2000).

A style developed as a result of such a goal may give the impression of realism for a limited time period but its ability to continually signify that is unreliable. The cinematic style of Italian Neorealism or *cinéma verite*, for instance, may be described as realistic in comparison with other styles but no style can be the official translation of reality. Most often it is imperfection and limited directorial control which is interpreted as proof of realism. The meaning of a style is also dependent on context in terms of how it differs from its contemporaries. While a film like *Bicycle thieves* (De Sica, 1948) gave the impression of realism or the editing of Jean-Luc Godard's *About de souffle* (1960) seemed rash upon release, these impressions have now declined as the stylistics have been surpassed by subsequent aesthetics.

One way to avoid competing in the aesthetics 'arms race' is by implementing an agreement to downsize. Such restriction may seem at odds with the creative spirit of art. It nonetheless becomes desirable to artists who feel that increasing aesthetic complexity and budgets have left them behind and led to a decline in quality. The fact that Lars von Trier put in place a set of stern rules for himself and his fellow avant-garde filmmakers to follow is understandable in light of his background. He was raised in an extremely liberal family environment where restrictions on freedom were discarded. His communist mother often took him to nudist camps and left him to decide on his own when to do his homework or go to the dentist (Björkman, 2003). His mother wanted him to be a free

individual and brought him up as an atheist with radical social ideas. Yet by the time he had reached middle age he had developed a desperate craving for restrictions and so set up the Dogme 95 vows and converted to Catholicism. This is thus an interesting inversion of the typical biography of an eccentric artist. Instead of finding inspiration from the emancipation of societal restrictions, Trier was accustomed to liberty and constructed restrictions in order to thrive creatively. On the basis of this one can surmise that artists and countercultural rebels may adopt values in opposition to those they were brought up with as an act of self-definition. The reason why rebels tend to advocate the rejection of consumerism, authority and religion is because those are commonly the things which they were subjected to in their formative years. If their environment supported contrary principles then their rebellion would most probably have taken the opposite form, as is seen in the case of Lars von Trier. The need for distinction determines the style of dissent.

Given all this evidence of the somewhat trivial motivations behind styles and movements, it is tempting to dismiss all cultural rebellion as frivolous activity. It is, nevertheless, hard to deny that it has immense significance to rebels and that what they do has enormous impact on entertainment and popular culture. How can this discrepancy between objective and outcome be reconciled? If an artist is inspired by unsound or naïve principles to create works of entertainment, then clearly these very principles have a function even though it may not be what the artist intended. Garry Mullholland has described this issue in music where artists with idealistic intentions often retire with a sense of disillusionment yet leave behind a legacy of influential work (2007). Mulholland uses The Slits, a predominantly female post-punk band, to emphasise this point. Members of The Slits believed that male rhythms were steady and structured. They set about inventing the antithesis - what they saw as female rhythms. While this gendered theory of rhythm was illogical and ungrounded in objective reality it nonetheless inspired them to invent a unique form of reggae-infused punk music. They coupled this with lyrics that advocated freedom from sexism, consumerism and suburbia. While their envisioned improved society never materialised, they made a significant contribution to the development of music.

There are numerous examples of artists who grew tired of their ideals and renounced the style that made them famous. A notable example is Bob Dylan, who spearheaded folk in the first half of the 1960s and convinced a generation that there was hope for social change with songs like “Blowing in the wind” and “The times they are a-changin’ ”. By the end of that decade he was playing loud rock and performing acclaimed songs with little political content. Many fans felt betrayed by his abandonment of socially conscious folk music. Artists can be expected to revamp their repertoire routinely in order to avoid stagnation. This becomes a problem for those who have invested in a particular image of the artist. Change is seen as a rejection of the values previously shared between artist and follower. Through his protest songs Dylan is nonetheless intimately tied to the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s as a documenter of and inspiration for a generation’s convictions. It is in this way that popular music functions as a repository of society’s history and ideals.

### **The cultural significance of rebellion**

It is possible to get from the subjective accounts of those who experienced it an impression of the value of youth movements such as punk. The English political songwriter, Billy Bragg, has stated that he believes his life was changed by the first album of The Clash:

They had this incredible *Zeitgeisty* rhetoric that made me feel being 19 and coming from London was the most significant thing you could ever do. When I bought the album, there was so much on there that reflected the way we felt and the frustrations that we had. ... You know, I find it difficult to recognise the person I was before that album, before the idea that came to me as a result of it. ... Later on I became disappointed in The Clash, because they gave me the impression with that album they could change the world by singing songs about it and I believed them. Now I don’t think music can change the world, but The Clash proved to me that it can change your perspective on the world (Bennett, 2001: 29).

Bragg’s account exemplifies the effect rebellious musical movement can have on a generation. A quarter of a century later Fokofpolisiekar had a comparable effect on alienated Afrikaner youth. Bragg highlights two recurring phenomena in such rebellions: initial identification and later disillusionment. The Clash made Bragg feel that his identity

as a young Londoner was important, despite the saturation of American culture. Punk tapped into an enormous pool of frustration amongst the youth on account of their marginal cultural position. It is noteworthy that he felt that the music voiced his feelings and frustrations and those of his peers. That those cultural texts become cherished as symbols of a generation has less to do with their articulation of pre-existing ideas and more to do with constructing a world view that soothes the youth's sense of alienation.

In the same way that the media brings a movement into existence, entertainment can offer alienated youth an ideology through which to interpret their position in society. Yet the music gave Bragg a groundless belief in its ability to change society. Only when he grew older did he come to recognise that while art may inspire idealistic intent in its followers, there is no certainty that it will lead to constructive results. This is why, as in the case of Dylan's fans, followers feel a sense of betrayal as the artist's career progresses and the advocated revolution never materialises. Music critic Garry Mulholland echoes Bragg's experience, stating that "The Clash was the most important album I ever bought [because] it convinced me music was much bigger than noise and entertainment [and that] I could change the world" (2007: 17). The fallacy of such a belief almost becomes irrelevant in the light of the immense influence it had on their identity formation. For some, cultural rebellion was less an expression of idealism and rather a vehicle for self-determination. Glen Matlock, former bassist of the Sex Pistols, explains this in his autobiography:

We weren't political in the sense of saying: be a Socialist, be a Tory, be a Communist. We were political in the sense that we didn't even entertain the idea of politics, it was below us. It was anarchy in its purest sense: self-determination. We couldn't we felt, do much about changing the system, but we weren't going to let the system do anything to us. We wanted to live our lives how we wanted to live them (1996: 163).

Here can be seen how self-interested apathy can be presented as a form of political activity. The hippies laid the groundwork for this 'personal is political' agenda that justified a withdrawal from democratic politics. It stems from the misguided view that selfish behaviour could be politically progressive. This is the great flaw in countercultural ideology. If it had acknowledged its shortcomings and its role as a facilitator of identity

formation and cultural renewal it would not have given the impression to its followers that it could be a substitute to conventional political responsibility.

Countercultural rebels have believed that their individualistic transgression of norms and rejection of the status quo would be more effective than engagement with institutional politics; and that their emancipation at the cultural level would have profound consequences on major political and economic institutions (Heath & Potter, 2006: 351). This is, then, where counterculture's irresponsibility and failure lies. That this delusion was so eagerly embraced is understandable, for it enabled people to ignore their social responsibility and make the achievement of individual freedom a moral imperative. For some entertainers it means fame and fortune and a continuing sense that they are changing the world. Much of this is actually the quest for distinction disguised as heroic nonconformity. Johnny Lydon, singer of the Sex Pistols, made this ethos of counterculture clear in his autobiography years after he had discarded his Rotten stage name:

Have no rules. If people start to build fences around you, break out and do something else. You should never, ever be understood completely.... I just went my own way. All my friends were people who went their own way. ... Highly individualistic. Unable to fit cosily into systems. (1995: 4,53)

This strategy may have worked for Lyndon but it is hardly an effective approach for society as a whole. Joseph Heath explains in *The efficient society* that it is necessary for society to impose constraints on the pursuit of self-interest because "our attempts to secure our own self-interest are collectively self-defeating" (2002: 49). If everyone stole from one another or tried to be radically different it would result in a situation that defeats the original intention. No-one would have their own property and everyone would be so different that the lack of a comparable conformity would make them essentially the same. That most people in society choose not to do this creates a free-rider incentive that criminals and cultural rebellions exploit. In a sense the acceptance of countercultural principles by certain segments of Western society since the 1960s has, in fact, lead to a situation where the desire to own what is different has developed into a self-defeating arms race. This is known as consumerism.

There are two ways for such an arms race to stop escalating indefinitely. The first is an accepted policy that restricts the competition within boundaries, the second is that the race needs to reach a degree of extremism that competitors no longer find it worth the cost. This is essentially what Johnny Lydon and most other cultural rebels do. They gain fame and sometimes fortune by adopting extreme behaviour eschewed by the average person. For most, the public slander and unstable livelihood is simply not worth it. Others, however, thrive on this, choose a career in entertainment and adopt an identity as cultural rebel. The same incentives count for their followers. If their sense of alienation from society is already so strong that a shared rebellion can increase their self-worth, they will then adopt that style and philosophy. Middle class youth are particularly attracted to this because they possess the key ingredient: affluence without influence. They can therefore afford mild forms of sartorial and lifestyle rebellion if it delivers a sense of significance and righteous existence.

Key to the rebel's sense of self is the image of that which he defines himself in opposition to. This involves the amalgamation of various institutions and value systems of society into a monolithic whole that is hard to pinpoint yet it is seen to be manifested in all things despised. For those involved in stylistic rebellion this adversary is often labelled 'the mainstream'. Dylan Clark points out that this notion functions as a mythological centre from which young people with distinct taste can deviate from:

'Mainstream' is used to denote an imaginary hegemonic centre of corporatized culture.... It serves to conveniently outline a dominant culture for purposes of cultural critique and identity formation (2003: 224).

This idea builds upon the perception of mass society as conformist and ignores the large degree of diversity within. It sees the pervasiveness of certain styles and tastes as a sign that independent thought is lacking; and relies on the idea that that which is popularly enjoyed is of lesser quality than the taste of the 'alternative' individual. It is notable that this disdain for the popular has been prevalent since the word's inception. 'Popular' began to be used in the fifteenth century to mean 'low', 'base', 'vulgar' or 'of the

common people' (Williams, Raymond: 1985). It is possible to see this disdain for the mainstream and the popular as a form of othering. Much like the British considered the Boers to be savages in order to affirm their own sense of civility, cultural rebels view the general public to be conformist to affirm their individuality and uniqueness in taste. For those who target the repressive forces of society, the church, government, education and law enforcement tend to be perceived as the dominant authority. The rebellion against such dominance has been driven by the individual's desire to be freed from the perceived constraints of society.

The focal point of rebellious cultural movements has been to achieve emancipation, although this has mostly been expressed symbolically, and within the limits of culture (Weinzerl & Muggleton, 2003: 13). The interesting difference between a rebellion against taste and a rebellion against repressive authority is that the first will most likely succeed even though it is not in its best interest whereas the latter's intentions - which may be genuine - is unlikely to succeed. If stylistic rebels succeed in getting the dominant taste to accept their values, the mainstream will start to resemble them and they will lose their sense of distinction. Rebels who aim to change institutions of authority by means of art or resistance on a cultural level will struggle to get results. This is because culture simply does not play a powerful role in determining the structure of institutions, especially not those that adhere to financial interests or the law (Heath & Potter, 2006). Culture, on the other hand, is susceptible to movements that bring changes in lifestyle and entertainment, largely because it is in the best interest of the culture industries to allow regular renewal in order to satisfy the shifting demands of the public. In this way the rebellion manages to renew and strengthen the culture it is protesting against.

Cultural rebellion has a paradoxical tendency to revitalise and build upon that which it seems to be attacking. In fact, it is possible to recognize a symbiotic relationship between the cultural tradition and youth movements. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison propose that popular culture changes through the catalytic intervention of social movements. They argue that social movements are "articulators and transformers of culture" and that "they draw upon and revitalize traditions at the same time as they

transform them” (2004: 367). The Sex Pistols illustrate this theory effectively. As the iconic British punk band they attacked the monarchy and British conformity, declaring that there was no future in England. Despite their negative posturing, they facilitated a positive reframing and re-imagining of Englishness (Adams, 2008). It is important to recognise that the Sex Pistols embodied an identity that was decidedly English. They took musical inspiration from the proto-punk bands that were playing across the Atlantic and infused it for the first time into an aggressive articulation of English common language and iconography. Via punk the Union Jack was revitalised as symbol of rebellion as hordes of street punks pinned flags onto their studded leather jackets. Much like the Clash, the Sex Pistols made fans feel as if they were uniquely important *because* they were young Londoners.

This effect has to be read within the context of the supremacy of American culture in Britain in that period. The punks initiated a postmodernist reworking of their national icons. They defiled the iconography, denounced its legitimacy whilst simultaneously grounding their rebellion in the culture that it represented. They could not simply denounce Englishness and discard its signifiers because they required it in order to signify their rejection of American culture, which they were even wearier of. Malcolm McLaren describes how their attack on English iconography was part of a cultural renewal in opposition to American culture:

We took the Queen’s portrait, by Cecil Beaton, we printed it just like a silk screen image no different from Andy Warhol here, we filled in some colors, but we put a safety pin through her nose, and we wrote on the side “God Save the Queen, she ain’t no human being.” We basically didn’t molly-coddle her, we didn’t put her up on a pedestal, we were basically saying “this icon is a joke.” Because right there in the ’70s, we were already demonstrating our resistance against this vacuous, gilded, Hollywood, American way of dominating culture with stories that were genuinely untrue. We were now trying to authenticate our beliefs, move away from American culture, resist and fight it and come up with a culture of our own. That was punk rock, and we wrote the song and equally painted a portrait, our version of the Queen, and got it on the front page of the Daily Mirror, on Queen’s Silver Jubilee day! (Adams, 2008: 471).

Hindsight shows that the Sex Pistols revitalised the signifiers of English heritage by reinscribing their meaning to appeal to the alienated youth, when it appeared that they were subverting and destroying that heritage’s emblems. This is what was done years later in South Africa by Afrikaner artists when they reconfigured the shards of Afrikaner

heritage and ideology into a form that enabled an estranged generation to reconnect to its inherited identity. Even those who consider their cultural history, nostalgia and heritage critically can use these as a way to anchor a sense of self. Roy Strong reflected in 1978 that:

It is in times of danger, either from without or from within, that we become deeply conscious of our heritage...within this word there mingle varied and passionate streams of ancient pride and patriotism, of a heroism in times past, of a nostalgia too for what we think of as a happier world which we have lost...Our...heritage is therefore a deeply stabilising and unifying element within our society (quoted in Adams, 2008: 471).

This statement is as relevant to the Afrikaner nation that emerged a century ago as it is to the current generation attempting to construct myths from its history. In times of uncertainty heritage is revived and infused with new meanings and nostalgic imagery is reclaimed, all in the service of identity reconfiguration. This technique is useful on a stylistic level as well because it makes a range of retro imagery available that has fallen out of usage and therefore has distinctive value.

Western entertainment played a crucial role in exposing discontented Afrikaners to countercultural values. Local rebels found in the music, cinema and literature of overseas artists who had rebelled against the status quo a model for their own resistance. Western counterculture, thus, became a continuous inspiration for Afrikaner artists in terms of principles and style. Yet they also became heir to its flaws and misconceptions. These shortcomings could be concealed when Christian Nationalism was used as worthy target, yet once its influence waned, the limits of the countercultural critique became apparent. At the same time the search for a distinct form of protest drove the modernisation of Afrikaner culture by means of foreign artistic forms. It therefore ensured that renewal would be stimulated routinely, and that it would satisfy the new generation's longing for meaning and distinction.

# Chapter Three: A tradition of Afrikaner rebellion

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## **N.P van Wyk Louw**

In the 1930s a group of Afrikaans writers that became known as the Dertigers rose to prominence. Their poetry was characterised by an eloquent intimacy that was uncommon in Afrikaans writing. Notable poets that preceded them, such as Eugene Marais, wrote in a time period when Afrikaans had not yet been established as an official language and was seen as inferior to Dutch. His goal and that of his contemporaries, such as C.J. Langenhoven and J.D. du Toit, was to prove the merit of the common language. The Dertigers took it upon themselves to contribute to its further development. The most prominent figure of this group, and arguably the greatest intellectual in Afrikaner history, was N.P. van Wyk Louw (1906-1970). Beyond his enormous poetic contribution, he also had a visionary understanding of the significance of cultural renewal. Louw realised that even though artistic movements would continue to appear and assert their approach and style as imperative, their import would be transitory. The reason for this, he observed, was that no art form is capable of expressing the total reality of the world and that successive generations would indefinitely strive to offer a new approach (1964). The arts are therefore subject to the same drive for distinctive renewal that brings about fashion trends.

The seeming triviality of the approach of artistic movements did not concern Louw because he recognised that each generation needs to believe that it is delivering a vital new approach in order to continue the cycle of renewal. He was criticised by commentators such as D.J. Opperman and A.P. Grové for placing too much value on renewal above quality, but Louw remained firm in his conviction that even renewal

without quality serves a function (1986b:176). He asserted that the worth of arts and culture could not be measured by their apparent quality but rather by their ability to satisfy and express the needs of the public. Louw applied the same criteria to his own culture in order to stress the danger of stagnation. He asserted that a group has worth, gains right to existence, through its ability to nourish people's spirits. If it does not satisfy the deepest desires of its people by means of the art that it produces, then Afrikaans culture should rather be discarded as a dangerous form of insularity (1986a: 164-165). He therefore welcomed the artistic renewal that new movements brought because they could express the worldview of the younger generation and serve as a means of distinction. It is for this reason that he was so supportive of the Sestigers and functioned as a mentor even though they made the writing style that his generation developed look outdated.

## **The Sestigers**

The Sestigers were passionate about bringing Afrikaans literature up to date with that of Europe. The enthusiasm with which the generation of young Afrikaners born after WW II welcomed the Sestigers caught the government off guard and made them cautious of not alienating their future voter base (Brink, 2009: 238). Their writing was daringly new in terms of style and content. It was characterised by stylistic experimentation and surrealist imagery, whilst approaching themes of sexuality, racial tolerance and religion in a manner that was at odds with the traditional values of the time. While the Dertigers approached sexuality in a deeply emotional manner, the Sestigers wrote about it explicitly and interwove it with commentary on the anomalies of race and politics in South Africa. Most of the key Sestiger members had developed a strong love for Afrikaner culture in their youth and then got swayed by countercultural principles whilst spending time in Europe. Hennie Aucamp, Chris Barnard, André P. Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Abraham H. de Vries, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie had all lived on the Continent, where they were exposed to a new style and worldview. Breytenbach described the community that developed once the writers returned to South Africa as an innovative group of people who shared the bohemian mentality:

It was an exciting time. The influence came from South Africans who had been to Europe. The ones from Paris had been greatly influenced by existentialism and the avant-gardism. The poets in South Africa were influenced by the 'Vijftigers', the experimental poets of the Netherlands. It was an exciting, roaring, bohemian time....[O]ne thing that is always certain about South Africa is that there is a social hell inside a physical paradise. Of course people knew that then. It led to a hedonistic way of life. We spent every weekend at the beach by Clifton while we knew what was going on behind the mountains or on the Cape Flats (Van Schaik, 2001).

Breytenbach describes the two primary features that made the Sestigers distinct from their predecessors: the incorporation of European avant-garde styles and an artistic interest in injustice. He also mentions how the pursuit of pleasure was a key aspect of their existence. The rationalisation for the merit of such pursuits is that it was part of an unshackling from the repressive restraints of Afrikaner society. Brink, for example, presents his adultery during that period as part of a battle against "the last vestiges of religion" in him (Nogueira, 2007). The Sestigers paralleled the hippies in their belief in the liberating effect of hedonism and their superficial interest in politics. Kenneth Parker described their cultural contribution and shallow political consciousness as follows:

[W]hile those writers had this enormous impact on not only the themes but particularly the forms of writing their attitude towards, as it were, the real politics of what was taking place was virtually negligible (Nogueira, 2007).

This does not mean that their political concerns were illusionary and fruitless. Their rebellion against society inspired their writing and enabled them to redefine themselves. This was beneficial to Afrikaner culture in the growth of literature and beneficial to them as individuals. Being part of such an avant-garde group invigorated their sense of purpose and belonging after they had become alienated from Afrikanerdom. Michael Cope describes the Sestigers and the effect they had on Ingrid Jonker:

They were South Africa's last avant-garde movement, an actual identifiable movement with people with some common artistic purpose. They offered her a whole world that was diametrically opposed to the world of her father and of Nationalist politics and of oppression and all that kind of thing. But which did not require political rebellion because it was engaged in aesthetic and vocational rebellion (Van Schaik, 2001).

Cope suitably highlights the difference between aesthetic and political rebellion. It is the key reason for the appeal and limitations of such movements of cultural rebellion. The

artist observes injustice and is unsatisfied with the state of the world and decides to express this in an artistic form that is daring in its style and content. Their work may have an effect on society but the impact is mainly on the cultural level simply because it is more susceptible to change than institutions are. In such cases it is easy to misinterpret the immediate cultural impact that the artist makes as a blow against socio-political injustice. The inadequate consequences of this rebellion usually become clear further down the line as its style and content's ability to shock decreases. As the shock value dissolves, its stands exposed as an aesthetic rebellion with limited political concern.

In some instances, as with banned books such as Brink's *A dry white season* (1980), the text is indeed a blow against socio-political injustice because it documents activities which the National Party government preferred to keep secret. In such instances the artist is functioning as a reporter whilst making the information engaging by presenting it in an emotional or dramatic manner. There is however a difference between exposing actual injustice and portraying a lifestyle that offends the moral norms of society. In a way the authorities played a role in creating this misunderstanding. The sensors banned certain books because of the perceived pornography, blasphemy and threat to state security contained in them. The last is the only element which could be seen as a form of political rebellion. While pornography and blasphemy may contribute to a relaxation of morality their effect is dependant on their commonality. Art that threatens state security by exposing the operations of government will remain undesirable to it. Repressive government actions tend to strengthen the perception of cultural rebels that all forms of disobedience function as political resistance. Yet despite having limited consequences, the resistance fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity with other likeminded individuals. Jan Rabie described how their revolt enabled them to reconnect with other South Africans:

For the first time the Afrikaans writers were rising up against their own authorities, the oppressive apartheid people and not only did they come together but they found themselves in alliance with the English writers and it was the first time that the two language groups, in literature it was, worked together (Nogueira, 2007).

The rejection of Afrikanerdom necessitates the adoption of a new set of principles to take its place. For many artists countercultural ideology served as a perfect replacement because it appeared to be diametrically opposed to the culture they were moving away from.

## **André P. Brink**

The life of André P. Brink provides an excellent model for the development of an Afrikaner rebel. His life story illustrates numerous tendencies that artists after him have repeated. It follows the pattern of initial loyalty, followed by alienation, the adoption of countercultural principles, ultimate disappointment and criticism of the current regime.

As a boy André P. Brink inherited an Afrikaner worldview that espoused the bravery of the Boers, the cowardice and cruelty of the English, the right to republican self-determination and the establishment of a proud identity. Much like the nationalism that sprang up in Germany in the 1930s, this was a decidedly masculine vision which disregarded the rights of other racial groups. The Calvinistic upbringing of Brink and his peers enshrined in them a respect for authority. Brink describes in his autobiography the dilemma he faced when he had to choose between skipping a lecture and missing the visit of Prime Minister Malan to their town. He chose to disobey his professor and go to see Malan's arrival at the train station. Brink's portrayal of the leader uses the same technique of ironic Christian symbolism that Hunter Kennedy of *Fokofpolisiekar* has developed into a distinctive style. Brink refers to Malan as the "Lord's anointed one", the "Prophet" and, jokingly, argues that his decision to skip class was in line with the will of "God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (2009: 142). He describes the event as akin to the second coming of Christ and compares Malan's speech with the miracle that Jesus performed in Matthew 14:16 of multiplying fish and bread to feed the hungry crowd. The creative technique perverts Biblical symbols into a cynical portrayal. In this manner the artist aims to discredit both the tradition from which the symbols come and the event that is being portrayed. At the same time the artist's familiarity with the

symbolic tradition declares it his cultural inheritance, and conveys the defiant nature of the attack. The artist chooses to use such imagery in order to situate himself not as an outsider but as a discontented individual exercising a rebellion grounded within that tradition.

Brink went through his university years at Potchefstroom presenting a superficial loyalty to Calvinistic tradition whilst having a need to sabotage it. A turning point came for him in Paris in 1960 when he heard of the Sharpeville massacre. Up until then he viewed Afrikaners as a tiny nation heroically at odds with the world but after Sharpeville it became difficult for him to justify its actions. He felt that Afrikanerdom deserved to be obliterated, and wanted to be part of its destruction as a form of exoneration. He was forced to return to South Africa for financial reasons yet did not see it as his home because he felt extremely alienated from South African society. He wished to return to Paris and was uncertain about what role a white man such as he could play in the black liberation struggle. In the meantime he became involved with the Sestigers and befriended like-minded individuals at the home of Jan Rabie and Marjorie Wallace. It is at this house that it was possible for him to develop a sense of belonging, because he could for the first time interact with people of different races in an Afrikaans home. It therefore offered to him freedom of association within the familiarity of an artistic Afrikaans environment. Within this context it was possible to move beyond his Parisian dissent and imagine a rebellion against Afrikanerdom in Afrikaans. He realised that such an approach would be more effective because it is harder to dismiss than English opposition to apartheid. Attacks on the government from the English speaking constituency were expected and Afrikaners felt there was little reason to take criticism from that side seriously. Criticism from within its own ranks, however, was unheard of and amounted to betrayal. While Nadine Gordimer's *Occasion for loving* (1963) presented a relationship across racial barriers before *Kennis van die aand* (1973), Brink's novel was shockingly new because it presented the topic without condemnation and in Afrikaans. Censure of such works was common in that period because ideas foreign to the Afrikaner worldview were seen as undesirable.

This resistance against the restrictions placed on art by the authorities became, in the words of Brink, a “melodramatic, adolescent rebellion” (2009: 226). Resistance was essential to him and his fellow writers. Even though it was largely futile it brought attention to the immorality of the regime and embodied solidarity. Brink returned to Paris in time to experience the great student revolt of May 1968. He identified with the students and was inspired by their misguided idealism. To him the violence that erupted was the logical conclusion of the youth’s dissatisfaction with the state of affairs and the seeming inefficiency of peaceful protests. His interpretation of events was influenced by countercultural ideology to the extent that he accepted Herbert Marcuse’s view that society had become a horde of consumers stripped of individuality and creativity. This view easily fused with a Marxist critique by attributing the riots to the enforced conformity on students and the separation of workers from the product of their labour

Later in his life Brink began to see the shortcomings of liberation struggles founded on radical idealism. He saw in post-1994 South Africa a three-phase transition from the euphoria of rainbow-nationalism, to a phase of being realistic that ultimately spirals down into resentful disillusionment mingled with furious hopelessness (2009: 458). In his view the current ANC government, with its abuse of power, lack of integrity and use of state institutions to silence opposition, has begun to resemble the apartheid regime he had fought against for many years. He admits in his autobiography that in a way he wishes he could have died right after Nelson Mandela confided to him that what he and his peers had written had changed his outlook on the world while in prison. To have died at that point would have spared him the disappointing experience of witnessing the steady erosion of the ANC’s integrity. It would also have ended his life at the point in which his life’s work received vindication as an influence on the icon of South Africa’s liberation.

Anecdotes such as these seem to prove that rebellious art can inspire effective political actions. The documentary *Amandla!* (Hirsch, 2002) shows how music was deeply intertwined with the liberation struggle. Art may have the ability to inspire people but there is no certainty that that inspiration will lead to desirable consequences. The political effect of culture therefore depends on the actions of those that make use of it. An

argument must be made that there is a distinction between art that is resistant because it breaks taboos and that which is progressive because it lays the groundwork for a new ideology. Besides providing the public with entertainment, artists play an important role in shaping the way people interpret the world. Their output is one of the ways in which ideologies are circulated and new ones developed. Most of the time, however, the idealistic visions of artists are not a good blueprint from which to organize society. It appears that it is more useful to individuals in the development of their identity and personal worldview. It is certainly possible for a number of people with a shared radical vision to unite in order to reshape society but this requires a great deal of administration and discipline.

It is for that reason that Brink refers to rebellion expressed in cultural form as the “absurd rebellion” which achieves little but defines the self (2009: 311). Brink’s life story provides insight into the way Afrikaner rebellion tends to develop. He was raised in a patriotic family with an influential father. He came into contact with other worldviews as a young adult and began a career as a resistance artist. Later in life his belief in liberation movements began to wane as the shortcomings of the politics of freedom became apparent. He ultimately becomes a defender of the culture he once distanced himself from. In addition to going through these archetypal phases, Brink exhibits the trait which characterises most works of Afrikaner cultural rebellion: an ambivalent engagement with Afrikanerdom. It is a paradoxical element that is a consequence of the attempt to distance oneself from a cultural tradition whilst grounding one’s work and identity in that very same heritage. Brink was well aware of this paradox and observed that “even when an Afrikaner breaks loose from the laager he still finds it necessary to define himself in relation to the laager” (2009: 331). This conflict is at the heart of nearly all the works under discussion. In fact, in the case of rebellious Afrikaner artists and entertainers, a total rejection of their heritage would mean an inevitable assimilation into the perceived bland culture of the English.

## **Key features**

An overview of the works produced by defiant Afrikaner artists from the time of the Sestigers to the present reveals a number of similarities. There is a pattern in the way they have chosen to portray their culture, engage with its icons and present it within a narrative. This could be attributed to successive influences, since there probably was some cross-generational appreciation amongst artists. A better explanation, however, is that the similarities in their work are the result of a common adversary. It is comparable with the way in which there are parallels between the grunge of the 1990s and the punk movement of the late 1970s. Grunge musicians drew inspiration from punk because both were reacting to a preceding period of glamorous excess in rock music. Because both developed in reaction to similar opponents their style and ethos were similar. The consistencies in defiant Afrikaner works can be ascribed to the fact that it is primarily in reaction to an image of Afrikanerdom as patriarchal, Calvinistic, bigoted and repressed. Despite being somewhat outdated and inaccurate, this image has remained popular amongst rebels because it is a useful target for countercultural defiance. This image of Afrikanerdom shapes the representation of protagonist and antagonist in works ranging from the writing of Jan Rabie, the art of Anton Kannemeyer, the lyrics of Koos Kombuis and Fokofpolisiekar to the short films of directors such as Johan Nel. Afrikaners who are attempting to separate themselves from the traditional culture show a tendency to re-employ the signifiers of that culture as a way to rebel against it and paradoxically anchor their identity in that heritage. It is useful for the purpose of analysis to identify in the works under discussion three principal features: ambivalence, postmodernism and liminality.

### **Ambivalence**

Ambivalence is defined as a state in which the person exhibits contradicting emotions or behaves paradoxically towards something. A boy may for instance hate his parents for the restrictions they impose on him whilst feeling love for them because they nurture him and affirm his sense of self. The conflicting emotions are often not equally visible because

one side is repressed. Many Afrikaner artists reveal the presence of opposing emotions in their attitude toward the culture which shaped their identity. Signs of affection for the language or nostalgia for certain elements of the cultural heritage are noticeable in even the bitterest work. Antjie Krog vocalises ambivalent emotions towards Afrikaans in *Country of my skull* (1998). While reporting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings she asks, “[h]ow can I live with the fact that all the words used to humiliate, all the orders to kill belonged to the language of my heart?” (1998: 238). The ambivalence here is not an inconsistency between two logical arguments but a conflict between motivations that operate on different levels.

It appears that a number of artists feel attached to Afrikaans and Afrikanerdom, not out of choice but as a bond of origin. To deny and discard the language and the culture would be for them to deny a crucial element of their identity. A regretful awareness of the injustice perpetrated by representatives of their culture serves as the counter emotion that brings about the state of ambivalence. The artists wish to disassociate themselves from this history because of the burden of guilt that accompanies it. A tension exists between the choice to distance oneself from an oppressive history and the cultural identity that was not a matter of choice because it was inherited at birth. The individual consequently struggles to reconcile the dark history of their culture with the positive connotations they developed in childhood. It is important to recognise that for many defiant Afrikaners, a complete disavowal of all elements of their culture would mean simply becoming an English-speaking white South African. Such an identity is especially unattractive to some artists because it would require them to compete in a much larger pond without the advantage of being able to draw on their peculiar heritage for purposes of distinction. Part of the appeal of these artists is their unique awareness of the signs and codes of Afrikaner culture which they then deconstruct and revitalise in their work. To be able to do this requires a keen familiarity with the culture which they display a great deal of bitterness towards. This tension plays a crucial role in the creation of their work as they are able source material from the culture they’ve inherited while obtaining a fresh approach by means of defiance.

There is a different form of ambivalence that also features in the texts. This is not the conflict between good and bad connotations as expressed by Krog about her feelings towards Afrikaans. Instead it is a sombre bond of identification to a dysfunctional culture. This ambivalent attachment to Afrikanerdom is seen especially in the work of those that view its past as tragically misguided rather than triumphantly evil. It is an attitude most tenderly evoked by N.P van Wyk Louw:

You love a *volk*, not because it is glorious or the best *volk* on earth; you love it for its misery....With a *volk* that you truly love, you recognise its prejudices, its narrow-mindedness and its spiritual handicap (1986a:424).

A book which exemplifies this sombre bond to Afrikanerdom is Riaan Malan's *My traitor's heart* (1991). Malan's perspective appears to resonate with a younger generation of cultural rebels such as Hunter Kennedy of Fokofpolisiekar, who has argued that the book should be made a prescribed text in high schools (Wiechers, 2006). *My traitor's heart* is a story of bitter disillusionment. Yet it is not about his loss of faith in Afrikaner ideology, this already occurred in his teens, but rather his realisation that the image he had of victimised blacks fighting a noble struggle against an evil white oppressor was inaccurate. He aligned himself with socialism and the black liberation cause at an early stage. Malan writes that "he loved blacks", "sided with them against [his] own people" and decided to prove this by "stepping beyond rhetoric and into bed with a black woman" (1991: 94). He and his friends also smoked marijuana to be like "Afs" and spray painted "Say it out loud, I'm black & I'm proud" on a dam wall. These clumsy gestures of solidarity exemplify the countercultural approach to politics. He perceived his acts of teenage rebellion and pleasure to be in line with the fight against apartheid because it was opposed to the norms of white South African culture.

Malan became a journalist and saw himself as a righteous white liberal that defended black people against the Boers. Yet he harboured fears of the violent black mass and felt belonging to neither side and so he decided to flee overseas. On his return in the mid 1980s to report on the South African situation he discovered the reality did not fit the unambiguous struggle image he and the Western press preferred. Stories of violence

streamed from Soweto, but these were not the usual stories of police brutality. Young Sowetans were attacking one another based on ideological allegiance. Those that supported Biko's strain of Black Consciousness referred to themselves as Zim-Zims and fought against the supporters of Nelson Mandela known as Wararas. Malan tells the story of how Sipho Mngomezulu, a young ambassador of BC, was abducted from his parent's home and stoned to death in broad daylight. At his wake, a group of Wararas arrived, set fire to his coffin and bulldozed his parent's house. Teenagers were targeted by the two factions and forced to swear allegiance to either Biko or Mandela or else face a petrol and car tyre execution. Malan recounts the torture of two teenage brothers, Peter and Philip, whose court case was overlooked by international newspapers. Peter and Philip claim they were abducted by masked gunmen and taken to a shack in Winnie Mandela's backyard where they were ordered to confess to betraying the struggle. Peter was hung from a beam until it broke and half-drowned in a bucket of water with a plastic bag over his head. They carved "Viva ANC" on Philip's thigh and a big 'M' for Mandela on his chest. After that they went over the cuts with sulphuric acid. Malan interweaves the familiar stories of white brutality with unnerving accounts of sadism in black communities. He asserts that to function in South Africa during that time you had to believe in one of two myths; either the Afrikaner myth of entitled supremacy or the struggle myth of Africans fighting nobly against a colossal evil.

In Malan's experience we can see the two phases of disillusionment that occur in the minds of many Afrikaner rebels. The first is a rejection of the values associated with Afrikanerdom. This ranges from conformity, nationalist pride, racism, Calvinism and patriarchy to bad taste. The second phase is marked by a cynical view of the liberal, African Nationalist and countercultural beliefs that took the place of Afrikaner ideology. Individuals then begin to reclaim a link to their cultural heritage in order to anchor their identity. As they become aware of the shortcomings of both these positions - loyal and resistant - to Afrikanerdom, a stance of critical attachment is often adopted that comes across as ambivalence. Malan sympathises and identifies with the motivations that shaped the history of Afrikanerdom because he accepts it as his inheritance. The tension between

acknowledging the injustice and identifying with it is arguably articulated at the first chapter's end:

What would you have me say? That I think apartheid is stupid and vicious? I do. That I'm sorry? I am, I am. That I'm not like the rest of them? If you'd met me a few years ago, in a bar in London or New York, I would have told you that. I would have told you that only I, of all my blind clan and tribe, had eyes that could truly see, and that what I saw appalled me. I would have passed myself off as a political exile, an enlightened sort who took black women into his bed and fled his country rather than carry a gun for the abominable doctrine of white supremacy. You would probably have believed me. I almost believed myself, you see, but in truth I was always one of them. I am a white man born in Africa, and all else flows from there (1991: 29).

Rian Malan offers a candid expression of the ambivalence that characterises much of Afrikaner rebellion. It is not a rational position that has weighed the pros and cons of allegiance to either side. It is expressed as an unjustifiable affection, an undeniable belonging to a culture despite its history of injustice.

An overview of the work of Koos Kombuis shows a rebellion against Afrikanerdom but, more interestingly, reveals an ambivalent attitude towards counterculture. His early writing as André Letoit was inspired by the bohemian idiom of the Beat Generation and depicted girls, hippies and outsiders in a suburban existence without values (Kannemeyer, 1990: 464). His work as writer and musician is characterised by cynicism, satire and parody. In 1989 he rose to prominence as a musician by taking part in the Voëlvry tour along with Johannes Kerkorrel, Bernoldus Niemand and other musicians. Voëlvry formed an "Afrikaans counterculture" reminiscent of the rebellion of the 1960s and attempted to use protest music to reformulate "what it meant to be an Afrikaner during the latter phases of apartheid" (Grundlingh, 2004: 484). In Lloyd Ross' retrospective documentary *Voëlvry – the movie* (2006) Koos Kombuis explains that he felt it was his duty to rebel against the system that stunted his spiritual development. Hanepoot van Tonder also states in the documentary that they were defiant and alienated because Afrikaner culture at that stage was something that was "forced upon them" and was never something "that interested them or made them feel good". It can therefore be said that their rebellion was the result of Afrikaner culture's failure to uphold what N.P. van Wyk Louw saw as its duty to "nourish people's spirits" and "satisfy [their] deepest desires" (1986a: 164). The documentary shows the influence of countercultural thinking on the artists in their belief

in subversion through nonconformity and the advocacy of intoxication. In the same way that the hippies saw drugs as a mind enhancer, Piet Pers is, for instance, remembered for being mentally sharper after four days of drinking than sober people. While Koos Kombuis appears to have been an exponent of countercultural ideology in this period, he later began to see its shortcomings.

A comparison of Koos Kombuis' two memoirs, *Seks & drugs & boeremusiek: die memoires van 'n volksverraaier* (2000) and *Die tyd van die Kombi's: 'n persoonlike blik op die afrikaanse rock-rebellie* (2009b), highlights this change. In the earlier memoir he reminisces about his drug use, affiliation with vagrants and asserts that his subversion was recuperated by the Stellenbosch intellectual "Establishment" (2000: 180). He also displays typical countercultural idealism by asserting that the apartheid regime was scared of him and his fellow musicians and quotes Rodriguez's lyrics "The system's gonna fall soon / To an angry young tune" to emphasise the point (2000: 212). Yet in *Die tyd van die Kombi's* he indicates a sceptical attitude towards this rebellious idealism he once had. He starts the book by dramatising an epiphany:

[In a split-second] I saw my optimism evaporate, my entire youthful optimism flow away like wine from a torn *papsak*, I realised that I'm no where near a freedom fighter, that I would never be Ché Guevara [and] that I smoked away my entire adult life.... In that moment I reconsidered my life [and realised that] the revolution was over before it started. That there never was any revolution. (2009b: 13-14).

This excerpt shows his disillusionment with countercultural thinking and the rest of the book displays an ambivalent attitude towards the cultural rebellion he was involved in. Yet he recognises the cultural impact they had by rejuvenating Afrikaans and making it 'cooler'. The use of Afrikaans by the Voëlvry musicians as the means of protest was effective because it meant that they were speaking the oppressor's language and therefore could not be dismissed as easily as English liberals. Both memoirs display an ambivalent attachment to Afrikanerdom. In *Seks & drugs & boeremusiek* he explains his ambivalence as a dualism that he was burdened with by the parent generation. He admits, "I am still a *volksverraaier* [and] I love Afrikaans and the Afrikaner tribe" (2000: 273). His self-definition as a traitor of the people is similar to Malan's *My traitor's heart* and Fokofpolisiekar use of *boerebedrieër* in "Ek skyn (heilig)", a song that also expresses

disillusion with rebellion. In all three cases, the artist express a bond to Afrikanerdom despite adopting the label as its enemy.

Like Malan, Koos Kombuis has increasingly expressed a realisation of the shortcomings of the ANC. He explains in an interview that he and his cohorts had a naïve understanding of African politics:

In a superficial way, we did [indulge in African style]. The “Halala Afrika” song by Kerkorrel is a good example of African idealism. We did not actually know all that many blacks, the ones we knew were urbanized, like the Rastas which hung around in trendy white suburbs trying to score white ‘chicks’. Our idea of Africa was a rather kitsch picture post-card thing, we supported anti-Apartheid movements because we really hated our parents and we imagined everything contrary to them would be automatically virtuous (Kombuis, 2009a).

This admission highlights the tendency to believe that an opposition will solve the problems caused by that which it opposes. Kombuis expresses disappointment in *Die tyd van die Kombi's* at the lack of progress that has occurred since 1994 and appears let down by the belief he once had in the ANC. In the booklet of his most recent album *Bloedriver* he says “I never thought it would be necessary to one day make a CD like this one”. The album protests against poor service delivery and the violent crime that the ANC regime has permitted. He is therefore frustrated by the fact that he now feels a duty to criticise the government that replaced the one he rebelled against in his youth. His loss of faith in the ANC has resulted in an ambivalent attitude towards liberation politics. At a 2009 KKNK performance he stated that he is no longer angry at the National Party and seemed politically ambivalent compared to when he was part of Voëlvry. The cases of Malan and Kombuis, therefore, show how ambivalence is often a consequence of disillusionment.

## **Postmodernism**

The core postmodernist virtue is scepticism. As a result of a distrust of structure it has avoided fitting into a consensual framework, which makes it somewhat difficult to define. There are various interpretations of the writing of French masters of postmodernism such as Jacques Derrida, because an obscure writing style was preferred that made heavy use of literary rhetoric. The reason for this was that rationality and clarity were seen as

limitations that “reproduced a bourgeois view of the world” (Butler, 2002:10) The French intellectuals that theorised postmodernism were prone to irrationalism because they aimed to disrupt ‘normal’ forms of perception. A basic understanding of postmodernism can nonetheless be gained by looking at its key features.

The prime target of postmodernism’s scepticism is the notion of truth. Works within the postmodernist tradition therefore attempt to communicate a rejection of grand narratives, myths and rationality. It considers truth to be indeterminate and displays an attitude of relativism towards all subjective viewpoints. Because it strives to not privilege any single truth, postmodern narratives tend to present “different realities which co-exist without a unity of meaning” (Larrain, 1994: 289). Characters in these stories are unsure of their perception of reality, or events are presented from a number of different perspectives. These features do not suggest a nihilistic meaninglessness, but rather trepidation about the difficulty to grasp reality.

The influence of postmodernism has been a vital development in plurality among younger generations of Afrikaners (Davies, 2009: 111) It enables a cynical approach to the rigidity of tradition and state-endorsed identity. Postmodern tendencies proliferated in Western culture in the second half of the twentieth century because it resonated with emerging cynicism. News of cruel deeds and injustice severely damaged people’s trust in national myths and humanist principles. David Lehman argues that the appearance of postmodern features such as irony and cynicism is a result of a disillusionment with society:

[I]n our society knowledge tends to equal disillusionment, and any affirmation of belief must therefore be made in the very teeth of disbelief. Because the legacy of Vietnam, and the continuing saga of racial hatred and rage, have made the old patriotic pieties seem as redolent of childhood as Tinkerbell. Or because there is something fundamentally unserious about our culture. Because you can't write a love scene the same way when the divorce rate approaches 50 percent. And you can't write a well-made morality play, whose idea is that you can't be happy unless you're good, or an old-fashioned detective novel, whose moral is that crime doesn't pay, when the benefits of an insider trading scam or a crude physical attack on a competitor far outweigh the penalties (1998).

The legacy of Vietnam is used here as an example of a disappointing state venture but the Holocaust and apartheid could also be mentioned. Such catastrophes undermine faith in

the progress of Western civilization. Artists mock the ideals of civilization because they come to see its misuse and ineffectiveness. Once the project of apartheid came to be seen as a disgrace, rebel Afrikaners artists began to mock the Christian National ideals that inspired it. Postmodernist techniques proved useful in this regard because it enables a deconstruction of symbols with an opportunity to inscribe them with new meaning.

A postmodernist approach undermines the integrity of a text by means of reflexivity, intertextuality and parody. These techniques destabilize the notion that a text has a single identifiable author and results in what Barthes and Foucault proclaimed as “The Death of the Author” (Butler, 2002: 23). This metaphorical death is celebrated because the author is imagined to be the embodiment of bourgeois and capitalist values. Even if this is disingenuous, it is intended as a challenge to the authority of the author and culture that produced it. When Koos Kombuis wrote poetry in 1980s under the name André Letoit, he did a parody of the “Onse Vader”. His version, which earned him a charge of blasphemy from the NG church, addresses God, wishing him financial prosperity so that the church can stop begging for money (Hopkins, 2006: 108). This was parody not only because it humorously portrayed God as a being with earthly concerns but because of its form. It was seen as blasphemous because it reworked a sacred verse of the church. The postmodern reworking of the text was thus also a challenge to the Christian National doctrine that held it as sacred. Intertextuality is a predominant feature of texts in the postmodern era. It is based on a view that a work has continuity with all other texts and is unavoidably indebted to its predecessors (Butler, 2002: 31). Creators of texts consequently indulge in making reference to other texts within their own text. The intention is not only to enrich a text’s ties to culture but also to comment on and update the meaning of that which is referred to.

Postmodernism displays a playful approach to history. The postmodern approach treats history not as a true reflection of reality but as a text like any other. It re-employs cultural signifiers, “treating the monuments of tradition with particular irrelevance” (Lehman, 1998). Conrad Botes, for instance, presents a postmodernist retelling of the battle of Blood River in the fifth issue of *Bitterkomix*. Botes interrupts the story via the character of Professor Konradski and belittles the story of triumph by exposing it as

constructed myth. At the end of the comic strip the belief that a hero of Blood River carried the blessing of the Almighty is negated when Andries Pretorius is shown suffering in hell as a result of his use of violence. Rita Barnard suggests that this postmodern satire should be read as “symbolic revenge” and “pure negation” (2004: 730). Anton Kannemeyer treats a monument of tradition with particular irrelevance in an illustration of the Taalmonument that originally appeared in a 1995 issue of the porn magazine *Loslyf*. Kannemeyer highlights the phallic resemblance of the monument by redrawing penis-heads on top of the structure (Kannemeyer & Botes, 2005: 69). Bitterkomix portrays Afrikanerdom critically, as part of a rebellion against the legacy of Christian National Education that forced the artists “into the narrow culture of apartheid through a systematic programme of indoctrination” (Kerr, 2006: 136). Kannemeyer sees his postmodernist engagement with the signifiers of this Afrikaner legacy as a form of iconoclasm. In Kannemeyer’s M.A. dissertation, the influence of countercultural thinking on the way he views the significance of his own work is revealed. Bitterkomix is discussed as a subversion of the status quo that makes use of “deviant sexual behaviour in a repressive society” (1997). He defends his work against accusations that its explicit depiction of sex is perverted and repulsive by arguing that it is an emancipation from his “repressive youth” (1997: 51). This is, in fact, a common attitude in countercultural thinking, as explained by Heath and Potter, “[d]eeply exploitative acts are rationalised on the grounds that they are a part of the protagonist’s emancipation from the socially imposed repression of his sexuality” (2006: 74). Kannemeyer admits the influence that artists from the 1960s ‘underground’ comic strip tradition, such as Robert Crumb, has had on his work (1997: 32). There is a rich tradition of alternative comics and zines by American artists that see their work as “politically subversive” and a “resistance to the establishment of a hegemonic (capitalist) culture” (Triggs, 2002: 34). Since the 1990s a number of such publications began to focus their energy on the criticism of consumerism. Publications such as *Lowest comic denominator* and *Adbusters* employed postmodern techniques in parodies of recognisable brands and advertising. The underlying assumption is that such playful engagement with symbols of commerce has political significance; a view also endorsed by South African creator of the Laugh It Off brand,

Justin Nurse (2003). All of these publications employ postmodern techniques to signify a rebellion against authority.

## **Liminality**

The April 2006 issue of the South African literary journal, *Literator*, is dedicated to liminality in South African prose and poetry. It proposes the anthropological concept of liminality as a useful way to understand tendencies in post-apartheid fiction. 'Liminality' refers to the ambiguity, disorientation and indeterminacy associated with the second stage of cultural rituals. Victor Turner first proposed the idea that liminality causes an opportunity for spontaneous bonding termed 'communitas' (1974). In rites of passage the liminal state takes place before the final stage of the ritual. In the first phase of such transformational rituals the participant is detached symbolically from their usual social status. They then enter into a state that is so different and unfamiliar that it can only be expressed through metaphors and symbols. When the transformation concludes in the third phase, the subject steps into a new relation with its community. Hein Viljoen and C.N. van der Merwe, editors of the *Literator* issue on liminality, assert in the introduction that the psyche of new South Africa operates in a liminal stage of confusion and ambivalence (2006). When the threshold of the familiar apartheid era was crossed a stage of uncertainty was entered because two narratives of conviction disintegrated with the transition to democracy. Not only did the master narrative of apartheid disintegrate but the driving narrative of the struggle against a ruling oppressor also ended (Viljoen & Van der Merwe, 2006: ix). The ambivalence and weak sense of identity evident in the work of some post-apartheid artists is an expression of the state of liminality.

The communitas that emerges in liminality can be seen in a number of post-apartheid films. It can take the form of promiscuity or bonding between characters that would have avoided one another in the past. This becomes possible because the subject loses its social status in the liminal phase. Post-apartheid films such as Russel Thompson's *Sexy girls* (1997), Joshua Rous' *Sibahle* (2006), Stefanie Sycholt's *Malunde* (2001) and Johan Nel's *Swing left Frank* (2002) all exemplify the spontaneous camaraderie that occurs when characters step outside their usual social hierarchy. In *Considerately killing me*

(Grobler, 2005) and *Swing left Frank* the unclear social position of the protagonist is expressed through sexual promiscuity. It appears that the characters hope to find the answer to their uncertain identity by bonding with strangers. It can even be suggested that the recurring feature of white protagonists finding their place in society by bonding with a black character is a consequence of post-apartheid liminality. Examples can be seen in student films such as *Spaarwiel* (Du Toit, 2006), *When tomorrow calls* (Du Toit, 2004) and *Swing left Frank*. The message that comes across in the last two student films is that Afrikaners need to bond with other races in order to escape cultural inertia.

The farm is used as a site of conflict in a number of Afrikaner narratives. Farms often appear as liminal spaces in South African literature because they are between civilisation and wilderness. In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), for instance, the farm is situated "at the frontier of conflictual contact" (Smit-Marais & Wenzel, 2006: 26). The farm reappears in the work of generations of Afrikaners as a site where patriarchal authority is challenged. Since the inception of Afrikaans literature the farm as setting has been a predominant element and anchoring symbol of Afrikaner tradition. The 'plaasroman' of the 1930s to 1950s thematised the connection between 'boer' and 'plaas' as a timeless icon of national identity. The function of this discourse was "not only validating an unquestioned right to the land but expressing also the very soul of the Afrikaner's being" (Smith, 2001: 18). N.P.v.W. Louw points out the Afrikaner's romantic view of the rural environment as "healthier, sincerer, cleaner, nobler" and "deeper" than the city (1986b: 631). This corresponds to what anthropologists refer to as the 'rural idyll'. An increasing number of city inhabitants in the twentieth century began seeing the countryside as a repository for ways of life regarded as more natural and harmonious. It became particularly prevalent in the imagination of post-war Britain (Rapport & Overing, 2007: 258). While for most of the twentieth century American literature presented rural communities as reactionary enclaves, countercultural yuppies have begun to re-imagine rural towns as "refreshing oases from mass society" (Brooks, 2000: 105). This attitude is yet to gain prominence in Afrikaner narratives. In the 1980s prose of writers such as Etienne van Heerden, Koos Prinsloo and Eben Venter the farm appears as "the battlefield

for the struggle with the father” (Van der Merwe, 2001: 178). By and large, this approach has remained consistent and is especially evident in student films.

University of Cape Town

## **Chapter Four: Engagement with Afrikanerdom in the twenty-first century**

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### **AFDA short films**

South African student films of the first decade of the 21st century have a number of shared traits. The most common features are a consequence of the inexperience, limited budgets and over ambition that is endemic to student filmmaking. Most of the short films are therefore characterised by a notable imitation of international films, adolescent existentialism, plot holes and an indulgence in violence. Yet these traits can be expected in most countries. What is peculiar about South African student films of this period is that there is a consistent ideological approach to representing racial interaction and the apartheid past. Land ownership and the breakdown of patriarchal authority are recurring themes in student films that represent Afrikaners. Protagonists commonly redeem themselves by adopting values consistent with a post-apartheid ideology.

These features are especially established in the produce of AFDA, the South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance. AFDA is the greatest film school in South Africa in terms of production quality and the sheer number of short films that are made under its roof each year. It was founded in 1994 in Johannesburg and later opened a second campus in Cape Town. Two main narrative categories can be identified in AFDA films. The first appears to arise from the fact that students are given an opportunity to eschew coherent narrative structure in selected assignments that are termed 'experimental'. Here students are encouraged to experiment with different ways of representing reality and to indulge in visual effects. These assignments commonly result in horror films or paranormal settings with a story driven by existential musings.

The other prominent category is films that deal with characters that are learning to adapt to an environment that is changing from an old to a new South Africa.

### ***Bokkiesweek of bliksem***

“Watch the racial divide vanish!” is the tagline for *Bokkiesweek of bliksem*, a short film made by Dave Meinert at AFDA in 2003. It is about a group of white high school rugby players traveling by bus to Bokkiesweek. Bokkiesweek is described in the film as a “sporting event held exclusively for white Afrikaans school children [that is] purely a platform for recognizing the threatened culture of the Afrikaans people”. The protagonist is a timid young man with an English accent who is presented with a moral dilemma when their bus breaks down on a desolate road. The young rugby players and their teacher are stranded until a young black rugby player with the skills to fix a bus luckily walks by. He helps them by fixing the bus, but the teacher is unwilling to give the young black man a lift and instead offers him money. The protagonist takes a stand against this injustice and informs the teacher that if the black pupil can not come along he will not go to Bokkiesweek either. As the bus drives on, the two of them are left on the side of the road, at first on opposite sides. They watch each other with unease until the black student asks “[d]o you think there’s space for me on that side of the road?”. He then joins the protagonist on his side of the road and they play happily as the film ends with music by Vusi Mahlesela playing in the background. It is apparent that the two students are meant to represent the young generation of South Africa who must learn to cross the racial divide in order to work and play together. Rugby is used as a signifier of Afrikanerdom. The protagonist’s refusal to continue riding on the bus indicates that he is willing to give up the white privilege he has enjoyed within Afrikaner culture in defiance of the injustice perpetrated by it.

Most AFDA films follow the classic three act narrative structure. Looking at the content of each act is a useful way to reveal their underlying message. The way in which the narrative is resolved indicates the solution the text proposes to the social problem presented in the conflict of the second act. The first act presents the status quo and

indicates the normal behaviour of the protagonist in an order that will soon become obsolete. This order is then disrupted in the second act by conflict experienced by the protagonist. A climax occurs in this third act in which the protagonist makes an important choice. This enables the establishment of a new order which is presented as an improvement on the status-quo of the first act. This does not apply to films without a happy ending of which a classic example is Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle thieves* (1948). The purpose of such films, where the protagonist is worse off at the conclusion of the narrative, is commonly to critique the shortcomings of society. In films with a positive resolution the requirements of the new order indicates to us what actions and values the film is advocating. In Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi* (2005), for instance, the story ends when the protagonist is caught by the police when he returns the stolen baby. Resolution is therefore achieved with the restoration of the middle class family unit, thereby emphasising family values. Luc Renders also points out that, much like Darrell Roodt's *Cry, the beloved country* (1994), *Tsotsi* is inspired by a Christian outlook that asserts the "the basic decency of man" (2007: 244). What is important to notice in student films that present the legacy of apartheid in the first act, is that the resolution proposes what actions and values are needed to repair the mistakes of the past. The conclusion tends to provide a model for the future wellbeing of South African society.

### *Senter*

Rudi Steyn's *Senter* (2003) is another AFDA short film about rugby and white privilege. The protagonist is an Afrikaner boy who is finding it difficult to concede the position he covets in the team to a black player. While the film does not conclude with the cross-racial camaraderie of *Bokkiesweek of bliksem*, the protagonist does learn to accept the quota system and black players. What is most notable about *Senter* is that it contains the most striking common feature of short films about Afrikaners in crisis. There is a noticeable trend to depict Afrikaner nuclear families with an absent mother and a father that belongs to the past and is unable to assist the son in adjusting to the changing sociopolitical landscape of post-apartheid South Africa (Botha, 2007: 38). The fathers tend to be represented as powerless and stationary. This cliché has actually created an

unexplored opportunity to creatively portray a matriarchal Afrikaner family with an imaginative father similar to the Buendia family in Márquez's *One hundred years of solitude* (1973). Such an image is unlikely until conceptual links between the parent generation and the failed authority of apartheid dissipate.

### *Vergelee*

The stereotypical image of a racist Afrikaner farmer is used in Reinhard Jansen van Rensburg's student film *Vergelee* (2008). Andries van der Merwe receives a visit on his farm from an inspector who informs him that the police are obliged to investigate racial hate crimes under the new dispensation. Andries receives the inspector with hostility and calls him a "white kaffer". He tells the inspector that he views him to be no different from the blacks and that he should have more self-respect. Andries manages to drug the inspector with homemade liquor which makes him have a paranormal hallucination. The inspector experiences a vision in which Katrina, the black servant whose murder he is there to inspect, tells him that "He came to me at night. Andries' blood need to spill so God can replenish the earth". It is revealed that Andries' wife, Sandra, was barren and that this drove him to have sex with Katrina and ultimately murder her. Andries awakens the inspector with a gun in his face and informs him that it is now his turn to pay in blood. The inspector defiantly shouts, "[y]ou're running this farm to the ground". Suddenly, the half-breed offspring of Andries and Katrina appears with axe in hand. The short film concludes as he strikes his father and shouts, "[n]o father, it is you who must pay!".

It is worth recounting in such detail because it exemplifies recurring concepts in Afrikaner stories. The inspector's climatic accusation suggests that the farm is in decline as a result of Andries' mismanagement. Yet there is little evidence that he is referring to agricultural malpractice. It is rather implied in the story that there is a link between his transgressions and the state of the farm. This is not a rare concept. Rural narratives often portray a metaphysical link between the state of the environment and a family's honour. Examples range from *Promised land* (Xenopoulos, 2002) to Disney's *The lion king* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) in which it starts to rain after antagonists in the family are

killed and order is restored. The Moolman family farm in the novel *Toorberg* (Van Heerden, 1986) is also plagued by a drought that worsens with each generation. The drought is the environmental manifestation of the guilt of the Moolman family. The drought is broken by a cloudburst shortly after the death of the patriarch, Abel, who, like Andries in *Vergelee*, was unfaithful to his wife. C.N. van der Merwe points out the symbolic significance of the event:

The rain which then falls, is not only (like the Biblical deluge) a symbol of punishment for sins, but also of mercy. The Moolman dynasty comes to an end with the death of Druppeltjie, yet the seed of the first Abel lives on in the descendents of the coloured man 'Oneday' Riet....The deaths of Druppeltjie and Abel signify the end of an era but also the beginning of a new one. For the "pure whites" it signifies the end of supremacy; and for the coloured people, the erstwhile pariahs, it brings the hope of justice and freedom (1994: 117-118).

This interpretation is also applicable to *Vergelee* in which the illegitimate son provides a continuation of an erstwhile dead-end bloodline. It is uncommon to find a proud continuation of the family name in these narratives. Adultery is committed with non-whites or incest is revealed, as in Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1999). The image that dominates is of Afrikaners unable to procreate with dignity.

The arrival of rain in these farm narratives not only signifies the washing away of evil and sin but also resonates with the ancient belief that the gods reward righteousness with prosperity in nature. The practice of appeasing the gods to ensure rainfall is long-standing agricultural superstition (Frazer, 1907). This belief was also expressed in Afrikanerdom in 1967 when Gert Yssel declared that he was convinced that God will not make the Vaal Dam full until the private parts of women are covered up (Joyce, 2000: 156). In *Vergelee*, the farm is degenerating because of the farmer's sins and tyranny. The implication is that Afrikanerdom has degenerated for similar reasons, particularly when we consider the tradition in which the farm has stood as a signifier of Afrikaner identity. The *plaasromans* written by C.M van Heever in the 1930s presented the devotion of farmer to his land as if he were part of soil (Giliomee, 2003: 351). Here the farmer's stubborn devotion to his land, despite hardship and drought, was portrayed as a heroic struggle.

Towards the end of the twentieth century a shift occurred as the farmer's hardiness began to be seen as conservative rather than noble. As a result, numerous storylines have been about breaking the Afrikaner's ties to the land. Even in *Swing left Frank*, which is not a farm narrative, both Frank and his army friend J.P. willingly give up ownership of Paradise Park in order to attain freedom. Selias, the black assistant that J.P. refers to as his "Captain", becomes the happy owner of the property. In *Vergelee*, the link between farmer and land is broken when Andries is killed by his bastard half-caste son. It serves as the retribution for his immorality. Yet Andries van der Merwe does not carry the guilt alone, as the story implies that Sandra's infertility drove him to immorality. Andries and his wife symbolise that Afrikaners lost entitlement to the land because of their tyranny, immorality and inability to produce something new. The farm represents the legacy that has been tarnished by misconduct. Land ownership and family integrity become the casualties of the Afrikaner's guilt.

### ***Hemel op die platteland***

Discarding traditional Afrikaner values is frequently presented as an individualist pursuit. While Hollywood cinema has a long tradition of emphasizing family values in film endings, the protagonists in farm narratives free themselves from the restrictions of the family. This is the logline for *Hemel op die Platteland* (Smit, 2006) another AFDA farm narrative:

After losing her family farm and her self-respect and dignity, Annabel is free of her deceased father's conservative ideals, and embraces change and sacrifice in the new South Africa.

This short film, that borrows its title from a Fokofpolisiekar song played during the credits, presents an interesting view of the Afrikaner's place in post-apartheid South Africa. What Annabel has to lose in order to embrace the New South Africa and be free is noteworthy. The film emphasises sacrifice as crucial to Afrikaner absolution. Land ownership and loyalty to inherited values needs to be sacrificed in order to adapt to progressive environment. The film's promotional material summarises its approach to Afrikaner identity:

“Hemel op die Platteland” is a coming-of-age drama that explores the Afrikaner minority that still clings to the ideals of the past. In a desolate and small backwater Karoo town, the dramatic narrative explores the resistance to transformation in the Afrikaans Boer Culture, and it questions the future of the next generation of white Afrikaners in the New South Africa. By enforcing the progressive ideals of reconciliation, the victims of the change in society today are the children of those who condemn a unified country.

The new South Africa here is seen here as a place of reconciliation and unification. The inherited identity of a generation of young Afrikaners is consequently at odds with a changed context. Because the older generation appears to be an embodiment of unwanted values, adapting to the new South Africa requires the youth to defy them. This is the rebellion of André P. Brink that “defines the self”.

The film sets up this crisis of self-definition in the opening narration: “Everything you are and believed in for as long as you can remember is all of a sudden under threat because the world around you has changed“. These words are spoken by the protagonist, Annabel Olivier, who must choose between following her father, Hendrik’s, wishes by defending the farm or conceding to Lewis Riley, a representative from the bank who has come to facilitate a hand-over of the farm to the Plaaitjies family in a land reform claim. As with other farm narratives, the property in *Hemel op die platteland* acts as a vessel for the family’s legacy and emotions. This notion is evoked when Annabel says, “[i]t’s hard to see the farm so empty but I believe its better empty than full of regret”. In the climax of the film, Annabel chases Lewis from the farm house and stands over him, threatening him with a rifle against his head. With anger and vulnerability she yells, “[y]ou can’t pretend that we don’t exist”. This statement is noteworthy because it expresses the feeling that Afrikaner identity ceases to exist without land ownership and traditional values. Lewis comes to the farm expecting her to forego these foundations of her identity and she experiences this as a denial of her existence. As she ultimately surrenders the property, Annabel starts to build a new definition of herself, based on her act of sacrifice and reconciliation.

It is important to keep in mind that student films such as these are creating a specific imagining of Afrikanerdom. The values at work in them might seem natural or virtuous

because they are in accordance with post-apartheid ideology but the shortcomings of a viewpoint often become apparent in hindsight. Smit's representation of Afrikaner identity in crisis in *Hemel op die platteland* may have some relevancy in terms of land reforms, but its portrayal of the parent generation as a grey paranoid man is somewhat outdated. The fact that Smit, like so many other young directors, portrays the Afrikaner family with an absent mother suggests that approaches to the topic in student films have been quite limited.

A degree of orthodoxy has developed in the representation of Afrikaner identity. This is at odds with the progressive intentions expressed by the creators of these short films. The recurring portrayals are essentially stereotypes that affirm the distinction between 'old' and 'new'. They form a binary opposition in which characters that represent the past are unfavourably portrayed in comparison to those that represent the unknown future. The main stereotype that has emerged is that of the aggressive conservative father. His power is in decline, he has a pessimistic outlook and he is prone to bursts of rage. His authority is staunchly patriarchal, without a wife to offer support. Most often he is a farmer as in the case of *Vergelee*, *When tomorrow calls* and *Hemel op die platteland*. The use of stereotypes is noteworthy because they operate in the service of an ideology. Stereotypes reflect and confirm the viewpoint of a group. It not only enables us to grasp the complexity of the world via simplification but also serves as guidelines for what we view to be good and bad traits. Groups construct stereotypes as an embodiment of attributes that they wish to disassociate from.

C.N. van der Merwe explains that people "may project unacceptable qualities in their own psyche onto other groups, so that the blame and the rejection may be diverted from themselves to others" (1994: 2). Prominent examples of this are the stereotypes of Jews and African Americans that developed in America in the first half of the twentieth century. Vices such as greed and ambition were projected onto Jews while shortcomings of a physical nature such as aggression and laziness were attributed to the 'Negro' (ibid). Hostile portrayals of fathers has been one of the hallmarks of Afrikaner literature of the 1980s and 1990s (Barnard, 2004: 721). The stereotype of the conservative father in

Afrikaner films seems to be an embodiment of the character traits a younger generation is attempting to deny. Racism, conservatism, paranoia and impotency are projected onto the image of the Afrikaner father. This stereotype is used in film to affirm those features and to serve as the injustices which the developing identity of the protagonist is in opposition to. When the protagonist rebels against parental authority it is not only a coming of age, but more importantly a rejection of the values held by the father.

Hendrik Olivier embodies both aggression and impotence in *Hemel op die platteland*. He fumes with the fear that the government will turn his property into an informal settlement. When Annabel tries to assure him of the unlikelihood of this happening he becomes angrier because he feels she is not listening to him. On his deathbed, after his fury-induced heart attack, Annabel has to repeatedly assure Hendrik that the farm is still in their possession. Hendrik Olivier is thus a paranoid patriarch whose values have not equipped him to deal with a changing environment. It seems that the creators of *Hemel op die platteland* presented such a parental Afrikaner image hoping that it will resonate with the younger Afrikaans generation. In the press release for the film, producer Gareth Hughes explains:

I saw a potential gap in the Afrikaans youth market, a definite need for new-age Afrikaans content for the younger Afrikaans generation. As a group of young South African filmmakers, we wanted to create a film that was culturally relevant and appealing

It is interesting that Hughes refers to the content as “new-age” considering the orthodoxy of the storyline and characters. A land reform tale does not seem to be a commonsense choice when the aim is to be relevant to a suburban Afrikaans youth audience. Compared with the content of the song from which the film borrowed its name, it seems archaic. It appears that the creators chose to draw on the long tradition in Afrikaner narratives of using the farm as a site of conflict. The portrayal of Annabel’s father is stereotypical and evokes an image of powerless patriarchy. Indeed, the use of stereotypes should not be seen as undesirable as it often crucial to storytelling. In order to condense detail, filmmakers rely on the fact that their audience will make assumptions about the characters that they are presented with. If this were not possible, filmmakers would have

to suspend the plot by elaborating on the beliefs and background of characters. Audience prejudice is also vital to maintaining binary oppositions. While the use of stereotypes may be criticised, it is not viable to remove them completely from narrative production due to “existing paradigms of understanding” (Hyde-Clarke, 2008: 150). The orthodox use of stereotypes in these student films, however, indicates an opportunity for inspired renewal.

### *Skaapwagter*

*Skaapwagter* (2008), directed by Michael Bothma, deals with an Afrikaner military agent’s problems in adjusting to a changed South Africa. The opening scene shows sheep behind a fence, and the subtitle “The new South Africa”. Viljoen, the protagonist, is driving a car along a country road. It then cuts to a scene of a farm house with the subtitle, “1979, Paarl, the old South Africa”. It is Viljoen’s childhood home in which a traumatic burglary is taking place. Black criminals have entered his house and bound his family with ropes. After the criminals flee, the young Viljoen frees his family members with a pocketknife. This incident is followed by a scene subtitled “8 years later” in which Viljoen answers the phone in military uniform. The film then skips forward to 1993. Viljoen has captured and bound Anita, a liberal journalist, and is interrogating her. In a tirade reminiscent of what Andries van der Merwe subjected the inspector to in *Vergelee*, Viljoen calls her a “Kafferboetie” and a “waste of white skin”. Much like Hendrik Olivier in *Hemel op die platteland*, he is enraged by her unwillingness to see the danger of the changing political environment. After mistakenly shooting Fatima, a woman who arrives on the scene, Viljoen experiences a moment of crisis. As he raises a gun to his own head, the following dialogue takes place between him and Anita:

Viljoen: I see the truth now. I have become what I hate the most. How does one escape that?  
Anita: Not like this.  
Viljoen: But this is who I am. It was my duty... what? What is my duty now? What else is there?  
Anita: Now your duty is to reconcile.

In this dialogue, Anita succeeds in rehabilitating Viljoen after he realises that he has become obsolete. Under the Nationalist regime, he saw himself as a protector of the

innocent, yet in the context of a new dispensation, he is now a threat to society. He feels that he has become like the criminals that raided his house as a child, and therefore that which he despises. As an agent of apartheid his existence is directly opposed to the values of the dawning ANC era. Anita therefore persuades him to abandon the protector function as a source of self-worth and adopt a central principle of post-apartheid ideology: reconciliation. Viljoen indicates that he is ready to comply with this outlook, loosening Anita's restraints. He uses the same pocketknife with which he freed his family, thereby communicating that the skills he used in the past in the service of bigotry will now be better applied. The story then skips one year ahead to 1994 where Viljoen is a changed man and visiting the Taal monument. He discards documents of his work out the car window. This gesture of discarding his former life is followed by his listening to a non-diegetic audio recording of F.W. de Klerk announcing Nelson Mandela's release. In the final scene, Viljoen returns happily to the house of his childhood.

*Skaapwagter* presents a popular understanding of the periods before and after 1994 as two distinct eras, the old and the new South Africa. In a behind-the-scenes documentary that accompanies the film, the director summarises the story as follows:

It's basically a guy's journey. A man coming to terms with his past. The transition of a mindset of the previous generation of our parents and their forefathers to that of a new South Africa, a positive rainbow nation.

Two elements are noteworthy here, namely, the way in which the rejection of a racist mindset is seen as a move away from the parent generation, and the usage of the rainbow nation myth. A landmark study of narratives of whiteness in South Africa by Melissa Steyn (2001) provides a useful guide to the ways in which Afrikaners perceive their position in the country. She identified five recurring narratives in the questionnaire results of a sample of fifty-nine white South Africans asked about their perception of being white in the New South Africa. The viewpoint endorsed by the creators of *Skaapwagter* is in line with the third narrative category identified by Steyn. It is characterised by support for the new ideals of post-apartheid, combined with strong awareness of heritage and use of "discursive repertoires of the 'old Order'" (Steyn, 2001: 83). She points out further traits of this narrative:

[I]t is marked by a vocabulary of greater tentativeness, often ambivalence, definitely greater open-endedness. The task at hand needs to be taken on. The tale certainly contains elements of disharmony; yet the tone tends somewhat toward a qualified optimism. Generally, the tellers communicate a sense of personal validation and faith in their heritage. That provides the necessary stoicism in the face of an uncertain future (ibid)

This viewpoint is not only present in *Skaapwagter* but in also in the other AFDA films dealing with Afrikaners. It appears that this narrative of whiteness provides a useful way to imagine Afrikaners adapting and fitting in. It is a view that embraces the multicultural understanding of South Africa as a rainbow nation. It also sees the 1994 elections as the pivotal point of change, separating the old regime from the new South Africa. The former is seen as period of tyranny and oppression while the latter is welcomed as a time of freedom and reconciliation.

Jakes Gerwel, Director-General in Nelson Mandela's Presidency from 1994 to 1999, has pointed out that the dichotomous understanding of the country's transition is a deceptive myth, albeit a constructive one. He argues that the notion of a new South Africa enabled the imagined birth of a rainbow nation dedicated to reconciliation, and states:

Why I mention this is because there is an implicit temptation in many current discussions of national reconciliation to assume an analogous two stage approach as if national reconciliation is a project subsequent to the conclusion of the struggle for democracy (2004: 13).

Gerwel's point is that although this myth may have proved inspirational it ignores the fact that such processes were at work long before 1994. Charmaine McEachern concurrently stresses the importance of being skeptical of this founding myth "which constructs the nation as a sovereign identity, 'conceived' in the struggle against apartheid and its negotiated settlement, and 'born' in the first democratic elections" (2002: xii). *Skaapwagter* makes use of this myth because it enables the protagonist to cast off his past as he throws away his work documents and joins the new South Africa. While the film does not evoke the election in 1994, it anachronistically plays De Klerk's announcement of Mandela's release in order to signify the handover of power. The message is that a new age has begun and that Viljoen can abandon his old responsibilities and return to his

childhood home without fear. The film therefore envisions an opportunity for Afrikaners to change their mindset, leave the fear of their forefathers behind and reconcile with the rest of the 'rainbow nation'. It is an optimistic view that steers away from the sacrifice required in land claim films.

### ***Party van ons***

*Party van ons* (2006) takes the Afrikaners' struggle for self-discovery away from the farm and brings it to the tradition of matric weekends. In this student film directed by Desmond Denton, a large group of friends go to a holiday house to celebrate the end of their high school careers. While the film is amateurish, it does exemplify certain tenets of suburban Afrikaner youth. It also makes use of Fokofpolisiekar's "Hemel op die Platteland" in its opening sequence in order to frame the matriculants as disaffected youth. The character of Verster is the outsider of the group. He chooses to sleep outside the house in a tent and enjoys probing people with menacing questions. He interrogates an attractive girl named Valentine in bizarre dialogue sequence:

Verster: Don't you get tired of pleasing people?  
Valentine: Excuse me?  
Verster: I know you, Valentine, the pretty popular girl.  
Valentine: What the hell do you know? You just can't handle...  
Verster: Try and run. You'll just make things worse  
Valentine: One hundred million sperm and you were the fastest?  
Verster: Crazy insane or insane crazy. Call me what you like. I'm not the one wearing the mask.

After this exchange, Valentine sheds a tear and walks off. Verster embodies the idea that not conforming is an indication of wisdom. His questions directed at Valentine are not presented in the film as rude but rather as an insightful inquiry into her shallow existence. The film endorses the idea that social interaction amongst the suburban youth is plagued by inauthenticity. The director affirms this viewpoint in the electronic press kit of the film:

The concept of the film "Party van ons" for me started very personal. [It was] a very personal process as well looking into what masks do I carry. Living in this society we always have to put the best foot

forward, having to show the best things of yourself. We often believe in this lie. We actually live it out, not showing the weaker sides, the sad sides the questions that we ask.

What is noteworthy about this explanation is that it is founded primarily upon countercultural principles. Countercultural ideology relies on a fusion of Karl Marx's critique of capitalism and Sigmund Freud's theory of repression. Freud introduced the idea that human instincts are suppressed in civil society and that these primitive desires of the id do not disappear but steadily accumulate. If these unconscious desires do not find a form of release, pressure may build up and cause psychological harm. Restraining our 'inner selves' is, then, an unnatural obligation imposed on us by civil society. According to Freud's theory, the true self that must be renounced in order to make ourselves acceptable in society does not go away but lurks below the surface awaiting an opportunity to reveal itself (Heath & Potter. 2006: 44). The way in which people become more impolite or honest when they are uninhibited by alcohol for instance, validates this idea.

It appears in *Party van ons* when Danny, who is intoxicated and secretly mourning his brother's suicide, responds to an accusation that he is drunk with, "[p]erhaps I am most sober this way". It seems that the director wants to show that society has forced the young to wear 'masks' in order to conceal their hidden emotions. Danny's assertion that he is most clear-headed when intoxicated aligns with the notion prevalent in the American 1960, that inebriation enhances self-discovery and a higher consciousness freed from social programming. Verster functions as the hero of the story because he exposes the conformist inauthenticity of others. Unlike the other characters, Verster is not experiencing an identity crisis. The film therefore endorses rebellion against societal norms as a key step to identity formation.

### ***Die Engelsman, die Boer en die dude in die boom***

The approach to Afrikaner culture is notably different in student comedic films. Chris Hendricks directed *Die Engelsman, die Boer en die dude in die boom* (2005), a short film that contains the most cheerful portrayal of a farm owner as seen in this selection. The film plays with the stereotype that English men are timid and effeminate while Afrikaners are strong and masculine. It also makes use of the age-old portrayal of Afrikaner/English conflict as a contrast between farm and city. C.N. van der Merwe explains that this developed in the early years of Afrikaans literature as a result of urbanisation anxiety and the view that the “identity of the English was formed in the city, the identity of the Afrikaners was formed on the farm and country, and the identity and values of the country had to be preserved” (1994: 17). The premise of *Die Engelsman* is that Matthew has to accompany his fiancée, Charlene, to her father’s farm to ask for permission to marry. Her father welcomes Matthew but explains that he if he wishes to marry Charlene he must first battle another prospective suitor, Gert. At one point Matthew asks Charlene how Afrikaners become so big and she answers, “[w]ell, we eat healthy. And we work out. And we are strong in our values and traditions”. These words are accompanied by visuals that illustrate the strong values of Afrikaners. It is noteworthy that these features of Afrikaner culture are not presented as conservative and obsolete, as it is often portrayed in other post-apartheid texts. Even when three men are shown standing on a mountain in a gesture reminiscent of Afrikaner Nationalism, the image is without scorn or irony. Charlene affectionately presents her culture as that of a noble, albeit peculiar, ethnic group.

Matthew must defeat Gert in order to prove that he is not inferior to an Afrikaner. This is a formidable task since Gert is a muscular and rather aggressive Adonis. Matthew and Gert square off in the Dubbeldoringsfontein challenge, a series of physical and mental contests. Before mud wrestling each other, Gert calls Matthew a “moffie”, while Matthew retorts that Gert smells. This strengthens the binary conflict between Englishman and Afrikaner as a contrast between unmanliness and barbarism. In the end, Matthew is victorious and attains the right to marry Charlene. *Die Engelsman* provides an

example of how rural Afrikaners can be imagined not as an archaic reservoir of close-mindedness but rather as a charmingly principled ethnic group.

### *Poespas*

In *Poespas* (2006), director Annalize van Deijl presents a similar view of the rural Afrikaner male, yet within the opposite context. Jan comes to the city for the first time to visit his Anglicised cousins who dislike his old-fashioned traits. His clothing and use of language fits the stereotype of the traditional *plaasjapie*. His cousin is particularly concerned that he will disrupt her plans to go clubbing that evening, saying “I don’t think a farm boy will like the club’. She grudgingly takes him along that evening and is embarrassed to be seen with him. In the street outside the club she becomes separated from her brother and cousin and is assaulted by a mugger. Jan steps in and gives the mugger a proper hiding because it is his duty to protect a lady. This act of heroism redeems Jan in the eyes of his cousins and they visit the bar to celebrate their new camaraderie. Unlike the characters in other student films, the Afrikaner in *Poespas* finds a place in society because of his traditional values and not despite them.

### **Tendencies in other films**

A number of AFDA films that are either comedies or romances, such as *Sokkie ce chic* (Jacorine van der Westhuizen, 2007), *Rooi rok bokkie* (Kyle Lewis, 2008) and *Ashoopkind* (René Spies, 2008) portray Afrikaner culture as normative. They do not assert that it needs to change as is generally communicated in the drama films. It is noticeable that this approach is prevalent among female directors. This may simply be a result of their preference to lighthearted genres that tend to abstain from condemnation. It does seem, however, that male Afrikaner filmmakers choose narratives that present their cultural identity as one in crisis.

The way in which these AFDA films portray Afrikaner identity and purpose provides insight into a generation’s consciousness. While there appears to be a desire to discard

the traditional mindset in order to adapt to a new South Africa, some see worth in time-honored values and embrace them affectionately. There is also a notable use of farms as sites of conflict, echoing tendencies in Afrikaans literature. AFDA films such as Arnold Snyman's *Niemandtsland* (2005), Desmond Denton's *Vaderland* (2006), James Westcott's *Wine town* (2007) and Brett Melvill-Smith's *Modder koffie* (2005) show that the farm remains a site of identity struggle for Afrikaner characters. Yet a lack of variety appears in the approach of AFDA films to Afrikaner culture. Afrikanerdom tends to be portrayed either as a stagnant tradition or as a source of humorous peculiarities. The latter approach is expected in comedies and indicates an ambivalent mixture of affection and embarrassment. A prime example of this approach outside of film appears in a guide to Afrikaans youth culture written by Erns Grundling (2003). He describes the "ridiculous", "corny" and "baffling" features of Afrikaner popular culture but praises rebellious artists that break with stereotypes (2003: 43). There seems to be a reluctance to see Afrikaner tradition as sophisticated or dynamic. This tendency is most likely a consequence of its association with apartheid. There is an opportunity for filmmakers to break with the orthodox representation of Afrikaners by inverting the stereotypes that are common in these student films.

### **CityVarsity short films**

The CityVarsity School of Media and Creative Arts was established in 1996. Its 'golden era' occurred between 2001 and 2005 when students at the Cape Town campus began producing short films that were innovative in their approach to South African narratives. While the plots are somewhat disjointed, an emphasis on voicing original interpretations of local culture results in a strong sense of auteurism. The most interesting examples are Louis du Toit's *When tomorrow calls* (2004), Lynette Mitchell's *Springbokkie* (2004), Johan Nel's *Swing left Frank* (2002), Harold Holscher's *Ibali* (2003) and Garth Meyer's *Killer October* (2004).

## *When tomorrow calls*

*When tomorrow calls* comes across as a fable of the transition to democracy. Two boys, Johan Fourie and Kagetso Mfasa, are friends but Johan's racist father, Pieter, does not approve because he does not want his son to be mixing with black people. The film opens with narration spoken interchangeably by Johan and Kagetso:

Imagine a country of unnecessary bloodshed. A land of unknown futures. A sky of crimson dreams. Imagine if it could change.

Johan speaks English with an Afrikaans accent while Kagetso says his lines in Xhosa. All of their dialogue are said interchangeably in Afrikaans and Xhosa. While this may be unrealistic it succeeds in bringing across a vision of multiculturalism. In the first scene Johan's father stands on top of a mountain and surveys a wide valley. Pieter narrates:

I looked at my country and saw the colour of lost blood as part of my vision of the world. Blood was spilled as part of my country's history, not religiously, but the result of verbal hate.

The pre-democracy anthem, "Die Stem", then plays along with the opening credits in order to associate Pieter with the old South Africa. The story revolves around a large red book labeled "DIE WET" which Johan's father has forbidden him to share with Kagetso. One evening, as father and son sit solemnly at the dinner table having soup, Johan asks his father why he does not read to him from the red book the way Kagetso's deceased father did. Pieter becomes infuriated at the mention of black people and threatens to give Johan a hiding. When Kagetso appears in the window Pieter throws coins at him to get him to go away. Johan is a prisoner in the house because his father locks the doors at night to protect them from the outside world. Through the window Kagetso tells Johan of the freedom he enjoyed with his deceased father who said that they "should be one with nature". This provides the impetus for Johan to defy his father's authority and break free by means of a key hidden in the red book. After spending time in the field the following day, the two friends return to Johan's house. His father takes the red book from Johan and smashes it on the ground in order to signify that the law has been broken. After Pieter rushes back into the house, Kagetso reassures Johan that his father is probably just tired.

This is a recurring theme, considering that Johan made the same statement the previous night after his father's coin-tossing outburst. It frames his father, the stereotypical Afrikaner, as an individual exhausted by old concerns. His rage is therefore not the result of legitimate fear but of outdated insularity.

The film concludes with the two boys running off towards the horizon holding hands. While the film opened with "Die Stem", it closes with "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" in order to signify that the new South Africa has arrived. This story is in the classic mold of an Afrikaner being drawn to interaction with black culture because of its perceived freedom. Kagetso even evokes the stereotype of black people being 'closer to nature' when he reveals the restrictions that Johan faces because of Pieter's control. Johan joins Kagetso to escape his father's patriarchal Afrikaner rule. Much like *Hemel op die platteland* it is therefore a story about adapting to the new South Africa by rejecting the values and authority of the parent generation.

### ***Springbokkie***

Lynette Mitchell's *Springbokkie* is an Afrikaans horror film about a small town serial killer that processes his female victims into biltong. The film negatively portrays an Afrikaner community's weakness and superficiality. The community is unable to prevent the killings because they are too preoccupied with beauty, religion and food. Mitchell does not criticise Afrikaner ideology but rather the shallowness of its culture. The film displays a snobbish attitude towards its subject matter by depicting Afrikaner women at a beauty salon and outside a *sokkie* club as an indication of their 'low' culture. This is akin to Anton Kannemeyer's portrayal of the majority of Afrikaners as "common degenerates" (2001: 33). Dooming a community because it appears to be preoccupied with shallow activities is a classic counterculture mindset. This type of mocking portrayal of Afrikaners appears to be useful to those attempting to distance themselves from its perceived delusions and bad taste. Much like the othered view of the English and blacks, it is a negative portrayal in the service of distinction. The stereotypical image of Afrikaner fathers also appears in *Springbokkie*. The male protagonist looks for his father

to tell him of the murders and finds him practising a sermon in the church at night. In this scene the father's dedication to religion is presented almost as a delusion. He fails to heed the son's warning and instead scolds him for smoking. In this sense, he is similar to the fathers in *Hemel op die platteland* and *When tomorrow comes* who are unable to assist their child. Adherence to rules restrains their ability to engage proactively with the world.

While *Springbokkie* offers a critical portrayal of Afrikaners, the director also expresses affection for the culture. The music director states in the extra footage that *Springbokkie* "takes the piss out of Afrikaans culture", a description supported by Mitchell. Mitchell also indicates in this extra footage that she is excited and proud about the fact that the film is in Afrikaans because she sees Afrikaans filmmaking as important. The use of "Afrikaans" here should be read as synonymous with 'Afrikaner', because the reference is to white Afrikaner culture and not just the language. Mitchell is both proud and disrespectful of Afrikaner culture and therefore exhibits the same ambivalence expressed by predecessors such as Koos Kombuis and Anton Kannemeyer. *Springbokkie* is a demonstration of Conrad Botes' ambivalent phrase, "I am an Afrikaner, though I hate the Afrikaners" (Vestergaard, 2000: 126). *Springbokkie* takes biltong and *sokkie*, popular products of Afrikaner culture, and imbues them with menace. The way in which this is done within the horror genre is not only humorous but also creates a sense of doom. The small community is slowly being killed off because of *sokkie* parties and biltong. The film seems to communicate that Afrikaner culture is at risk because of its adherence to convention. These conventions are not necessarily conservative or archaic but contemporary features of Afrikaner consumer society. It is significant that the killer is gradually feeding the community to itself by means of human-biltong sold at the butchery. The film presents more of a criticism of consumerism than of conservatism. There is thus a countercultural element to the condemnation of Afrikaners due to their consumption, superficiality and bad taste. *Springbokkie* differs in this sense from the other student films in that it offers no possibility of redemption.

## *Swing left Frank*

Johan Nel's unique engagement with cultural symbols is most commonly seen in the music videos he directed for Fokofpolisiekar. Looking at *Swing left Frank*, which he made while studying at CityVarsity, offers further insight into his rebellious imagining of Afrikaner identity. While the disjointed structure of the film makes it comparable to a *Bitterkomix* strip, its strength lies in the unruly symbolism of the scenes.

Frank Nel is an ex-soldier whose wife, Kiggie, catches him having sex with a black woman. She kicks him out of the house and he goes off with his caravan to visit his ex-army friend who owns a caravan park at the coast. His friend suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and relives the trauma of combat through sporadic delusions. While staying at Paradise Park, Frank encounters Nomvula, the water spirit who ultimately liberates him of earthly possessions and offers him transcendence. Frank is gradually stripped of possessions throughout the film. He loses his car in a betting contest, Nomvula sets his caravan on fire, his friend J.P. leaves him ownership of Paradise Park but after his caravan burns down Frank in turn hands the papers over to Sielas the black assistant. Frank enters the sea at night in the second last scene of the film. Nomvula takes his hand and they disappear into the deep. In the epilogue his father-in-law and wife stand at the burnt-down caravan. His father-in-law declares Frank a good-for-nothing and Kiggie mourns his assumed death. The film ends as Sielas, who is now dresses in expensive clothes, laughs triumphantly whilst tossing the keys of Paradise Park in his hand.

This series of misfortunes may give the impression that the film is a tragedy. It should, however, be read as a liberation adventure. The film comes across as an allegory of how the Afrikaner male can be freed of his burdens. Ownership of property is a recurring concern in the film and possessions are treated like hot potatoes. Neither J.P. nor Frank wants Paradise Park and so they ultimately pass it on. Material possessions seem to embody an Afrikaner privilege that the men wish to escape. Ownership in the post-apartheid environment is a burden to them and limits their freedom. Ownership of

the resort is passed on to Sielas because he represents those that have earned a right to the land through years of servitude. The story therefore endorses handing power and capital over to black ownership as a means of emancipation. The key ingredient to Frank's emancipation is Nomvula. She is the embodiment of an exotic black culture that he experiences as foreign but alluring. The manner in which Frank finds escape through her echoes the familiar motif of a troubled Afrikaner finding emancipation by bonding with a black character. In *When tomorrow calls*, for instance, Johan is freed from his father's tyranny through his friendship with Kagetso.

*Swing left Frank* can be seen as a definitive portrayal of an Afrikaner individual moving through a liminal stage. Several of the features of liminality outlined by Turner (1974) are evident in Frank's journey, from adultery to oceanic transcendence. Societal bonds such as marriage and property come under pressure with the entrance into the liminal phase that forces ties to such things to be sundered. Frank's adultery cuts him off from his family and enables him to enter the liminal space that is Paradise Park. It functions in a similar way to the seclusion lodge used in rituals to accommodate initiates in the liminal. At Paradise Park, he engages in the unstructured bonding that is characteristic of *communitas*. While Frank and Nomvula are representatives of separate worlds, they bond and achieve transcendence.

### ***iBali and Killer October***

The incorporation of Nomvula, the water spirit from African mythology, into a story dealing with male Afrikaner identity indicates that such extra-cultural myths are useful to the restructuring of Afrikaner ideology. Harold Holscher's *iBali* (2003) and Garth Meyer's *Killer October* (2004) are examples of a fascination in post-apartheid filmmaking with African folklore. Both films attempt to approach film narrative via the influence of African oral tales. While *iBali* comes across as a colourful African fairytale, *Killer October* is a dark tale of a young boy's spiritual journey following the death of his mother. The film engages with African concepts of the supernatural in an innovative yet unsettling manner. The fact that the film was shot in Zimbabwe and features Shona as the

main language makes it distinctive amongst South African student films. What is particularly interesting about *iBali* is that the fable is narrated in Afrikaans. The language is thus disconnected from its conservative connotations by its eloquent use as a vehicle for African storytelling. This increases the impression of multiculturalism by combining seemingly opposed strands of Southern African cultural heritage. This purpose is confirmed by Holscher's statement that *iBali* "came from an idea of living one's heritage, one's culture" (quoted in Botha, 2005). This concept can be applied to both the direction and the story. At the end of the film, Kagiso recognises that it is his heritage to live as the Waterbearer, a figure in African mythology. As director, Holscher is also taking it upon himself to channel an element of Southern African cultural heritage into his filmmaking.

There is thus an observable effort in post-apartheid filmmaking by filmmakers to engage with fantastical elements of black culture. This is done in order to show solidarity with the values of a new milieu and to fill the void left after the disintegration of an old ideology. It is clear that, for a number of artists, the rebellion against the founding myths of Afrikanerdom have created a fascination with the myths of other cultures, specifically African folklore.

## **A decade of rebellious music**

The period of 2001 to 2010 saw a cultural movement emerge that revitalised Afrikaner identity by using gestures of rebellion. While many of the agents identified themselves as 'Afrikaans' rather than 'Afrikaner' because of the latter's connotations of conservatism, they nonetheless worked within a continuation of the Afrikaner arts tradition. The movement predominantly took the form of music with a strong focus on imagery engaging with Afrikaner identity. It reached its zenith in 2007. By 2009, while still relevant, it had to make way for entertainment with a different set of values. What follows is a description of the most noteworthy developments.

## Karen Zoid

“Afrikaners is plesierig” from Karen Zoid’s debut album established her as an important female rock musician in Afrikaans. While her approach was reminiscent of Koos Kombuis and Valiant Swart, it was seen as a breakthrough for the alternative Afrikaans scene. This was, firstly, because she was the first female to achieve notoriety in that style and, secondly, because of her sudden popularity amongst young Afrikaners. She managed to combine satirical songwriting with a skillful use of melody to achieve popular appeal. She presents herself as a nonconformist at odds with the staid elements of Afrikaner culture. In order to provoke a reaction from a dull audience and camera operator, she exposed her pubic area during a 2002 Potchefstroom concert organised as an AIDS charity fundraiser (Nel & Ahlers, 2002). The lyrics to “Afrikaners is plesierig” also mock prude Afrikaner *tannies*:

Pardon, madam, what’s going on now?  
I just want to know or is the internet to blame?  
Oops! Your name, your name. I understand madame  
I know you, you’re one those  
You’re a bit shy.

The chorus of the song is a reworking of a classic folk song from the FAK songbook. In Zoid’s reworking, the melody and waltz rhythm of the original is transformed into a rock anthem. Making use of the folk song is both an act of parody and affectionate revival. It exemplifies Zoid’s approach that playfully crosses languages and genres and deals with the tension of Afrikaner identity with “postmodern ease and angst” (Laubscher, 2005: 325). By inserting the FAK song as a symbol of Afrikaner heritage into a loud and witty rock song, it is rehabilitated for use by a new generation. Zoid is therefore involved in a process of redeeming outmoded elements of Afrikanerdom. Yet, as Antjie Krog has pointed out, it is done through a mishmash of South African lingo (2006). Zoid incorporates Zulu lingo and diverse elements of local culture to create entertainment akin to the attempts at multiculturalism shown by filmmakers such as Harold Holcher.

Karen Louise Greeff adopted 'Zoid' as a stage name because she read that it means "a person who doesn't comply to society, norms and expectations" (Roggeband, 2009: 131). It can therefore be assumed that she sees her confrontational approach as a performance of this type of individualism. She states that "Afrikaners is plesierig" was written to express her primary irritation with Afrikanerdom: they forget that they have "major issues" and *braai* with a smile on their face as if everything is 'okay' (ibid). It is evident that her rebellion draws on countercultural principles by championing nonconformity and deriding the widespread phoniness in society. Because it seemed as if Zoid was the embodiment of a new generation's attitude, journalists began to refer to a 'Zoid-generation'. She distanced herself from this responsibility but stated that her generation had to go in search of its identity after the political changes in South Africa, while an identity had previously been prescribed to people (Klopper, 2009: 111). This is an important insight that offers an explanation for the outbreak of 'alternative' Afrikaner identity expressions. A crisis developed when the Afrikaner Nationalist tradition became the 'enemy of the state' in post-apartheid South Africa and could no longer be used as a source of identity formation. Young Afrikaners wishing to adapt to a liberal South Africa were required to define themselves in opposition to their parent's generation. The stance many took was an ambivalent one, cynical and independent yet still yearning for their cultural heritage.

### **Fokofpolisiekar**

Fokofpolisiekar appeared on the scene in 2003. It created a stir immediately, for two reasons: firstly, their name contained a swearword and, secondly, they were considered to be the first Afrikaans punk rock band. In fact, Afrikaans punk bands existed even in the 1980s, although none had the impact of Fokofpolisiekar. An example is Koos, a band of which actor Marcel van Heerden and artist Kendell Geers were members. They performed from 1986 to 1989 and created anarchic music that has been described as the "most powerful Afrikaans punkmusic that has ever been made" (Engelbrecht, 2009: 6). Fokofpolisiekar's punk style is not quite the same. A crucial element of their appeal is that they are not an abrasive punk band but rather a melodic one, influenced by the punk

sound popular in North America. Listening to their debut album, *As jy met vuur speel sal jy brand* (2003), reveals the unmistakable influence of Alkaline Trio, a prime exponent of the Chicago punk sound. Much like the Sestigers had done before, Fokofpolisiekar are bringing Afrikaans art into line with global trends. Since their inception, they have been at the forefront of renewal in Afrikaans rock music and played a vital role in shifting boundaries (Roggeband, 2009: 92). Their public relations, however, have been unstable.

Initially there was a concern that their use of expletives and mockery of religious iconography would have a negative impact on the youth, an issue that was especially controversial in light of the fact that the vocalist's father was a *dominee* in the NG church (Klopper, 2009). Between 2005 and 2006 there was evidence in the media that the band had been redeemed. A feature in *Perspektief* commemorating the 80th anniversary of the official recognition of Afrikaans used Fokofpolisiekar as an example of the language's vitality. Antjie Krog initiated academic interest in the band by referring to them as the "male descendents" of N.P. van Wyk Louw in her address to his 2004 commemorative lecture (2006: 459). In 2005 *JIP* referred to the band as "calmer" (Stander: 3) and an early 2006 article had them pose in formal wear for a Valentine's Day photo shoot which had them talking about plans with their girlfriends (Le Roux, 2006: 3). In this regard, Fokofpolisiekar was involved in the process of recuperation that Hebdige identified in the media's treatment of punks, whereby articles attempt to normalise them by focusing on family and romantic matters (1979: 98). There was thus a gradual rehabilitation of Fokofpolisiekar from 'volk devils' to contributing members of Afrikaner culture. This was soon comprised when Myburgh wrote "fok God" on a fan's wallet. This triggered a public campaign to ban them from performing at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (Punt, 2007). Less than two months after the charming Valentine's Day feature, *Die Burger* portrayed them in a review of their KKNK performance as sinister and disappointing (Pienaar, 2006: 4). The band has thus shifted at times between incorporation and being positioned as outsiders.

Particularly interesting in respect of Fokofpolisiekar is the way in which they engage with their cultural heritage. While they articulate a generation's desire to be "freed from

the institutions and consciousness that was forced upon them by their forefathers”, (Kloppers, 2008: 213) they reinforce a suburban Afrikaner experience. In a press release that accompanied their debut album, a range of nostalgic influences are listed, such as:

Tygerberg hospital. Rodney Seale. McDonalds. Post-Apartheid. Mandela. De Klerk....*Orknie Snork Nie*. Koos Kombuis. Pets. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*....Coffee table books.Art school. School. Headmaster. *Vetkoek Paleis*. Marijuana. *Egoli*. *Loving*. Democracy ...*Bionic Six*. *GI Joe*. *Duke Nukem*. *Wielie Walie*. *Liewe Heksie*. *Swartkat*. Borrie from *Swartkat*. *Dawson's Creek* (quoted in Gawlowski, 2003: 46).

Computer games, soap operas and television cartoons that aired prior to 1994 are mixed together with references to South Africa's transition to democracy. It forms a subjective summary of adolescent experience in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. These influences are listed in order to serve as the foundations for a new identity. They are declared as a cultural heritage in order to take the place of an undesired Afrikaner heritage characterised by racism and injustice. Afrikanerdom is here associated with the restrictive authority of parents, school and church. Dominique Gawlowski has argued that the band's controversial name is “about freedom, liberation and the revolution inside your head” (2003: 9). The lyrics of their debut album also advocate a rejection of the authorities of suburban Afrikanerdom in order to develop an independent identity.

Lyricist Hunter Kennedy has stated that he wrote the words of the debut album while working at the Tygervalley shopping centre where he loathed watching the “bourgeoisie of Cape Town's northern suburbs” shop (2006). Bassist Wynand Myburgh has asserted that their lyrics criticize the “narrow mindset of people in the suburbs” (quoted in Engelbrecht, 2004: 11). A press release also announced that the band will tear audiences loose from their “middleclass-spectator-apathy” (quoted in Pienaar, 2006: 4) It is thus possible to notice a countercultural element to the band's middle class rebellion against consumerism, authority and conformity. It is also a continuation of the bohemian artist tendency to dismiss the suburbs as sites of cultural death and conformity (Lloyd, 2000: 249). A comprehensive study of the band's lyrics by Klopper (2009) has identified the recurring use of irony, parody and intertextual references to the Christian Bible. The songs also comment on the alienation of the Afrikaner youth. Fokofpolisiekar performs a

rebellion against the bourgeois establishment and remnants of Christian National ideology. Yet it is an ambivalent rebellion, because it is inextricably bound to the language and tradition of Afrikaner culture.

Johan Nel directed a number of music videos for Fokofpolisiekar that engage ironically with Afrikaner iconography. The music video for “Tevrede” features Fokofpolisiekar and friends playing rugby in the rain at night. For generations, rugby has existed as a cultural activity in Afrikanerdom that meant that the sport has attained a religious significance (Grundlingh, 2008). Fokofpolisiekar’s music video approaches the sport via delinquency. This is shown in a forced entry of a sports facility and the fact that players attach razors to their shoes and spanners to their arms in order to make the game even more dangerous than it already is. In this gesture they lay claim to a holy ritual of Afrikanerdom and inscribe it with menace. It illustrates the manner in which a rebellious younger generation approaches tradition ironically, not dismissing, but reclaiming it.

The video for the acoustic version of “Hemel op die platteland” consists of nostalgic 8mm footage showing family gatherings, a parade, a wedding and a school rugby game interspersed with recent footage of the band visiting different places. Of particular interest is that the band is briefly shown visiting the Taal monument in Paarl. This structure was the last of a series of monuments that were erected since the end of the nineteenth century to mark the Afrikaner’s political power in the South Africa (Huigen, 2008). Yet in the video Fokofpolisiekar’s visit to the monument does not result in desecration, members merely stand around passively. Because the scenes of the band resemble the film stock of the family’s old 8mm home videos, the two merge seamlessly. The band and the past is therefore not presented in opposition to each other, but are fused in a way that communicates a shared remembrance. Towards the end of the video, there is a shot of the pathway at the Taal monument which is emblazoned with the words “DIT IS ONS ERNS” (roughly “this is our earnestness”). In the shot, however, a shadow has fallen of the last words making only “DIT IS ONS” (“This is us”) visible. This visual emphasises the desire expressed in the video to anchor an identity in memories of the past.

## **“De la Rey”**

A rather different reclaiming of the past occurred in 2006-2007 because of the immense popularity of Bok van Blerk’s “De la Rey” song. The lyrics evoke the experience of Boer fighters in the Anglo-Boer War and asks “De la Rey, De la Rey will you come lead the Boers?”. The success of the song indicates the romantic appeal of war to some Afrikaners, much as war appealed to a generation of postwar German youngsters who “yearned for action, and the war that they had missed” (Cantor, 1970: 132). The conceptual appeal of war is also illustrated by a recent court case in which three Boeremag brothers have asserted that they should not be tried as criminals but as “soldiers in a liberation struggle” (Venter, 2010: 5). The struggle for self-determination is thus conceived in terms of war.

The choice of General Koos de la Rey as the hero of a supposed Afrikaner uprising is peculiar in the light of the fact that he was a pacifist (McLeod, 2000: 84). It can be assumed, however, that the reason he was chosen by the songwriters instead of Commandant-general Louis Botha or Chief Commandant Christian De Wet is that De la Rey presented better rhyming opportunities. The song sparked a debate about whether it should be seen as positive or reactionary. Singing of the song was banned in 2007 by the principal of a school in Oudtshoorn to avoid racial conflict between pupils (Gerber, 2007). Its association with divisive political forces was later strengthened by the fact that the AWB played it at gatherings (Gerber, 2008: 7). The then Arts and Culture minister, Pallo Jordan, expressed concern about the song’s use:

Sadly, the popular song is in danger of being hijacked by a minority of right-wingers who not only regard De la Rey as a war hero, but also want to mislead sections of Afrikaans-speaking society into thinking that this is a ‘struggle song’ that sends out a ‘call to arms’ (quoted in Groenewald, 2007:12).

Despite these fears, the song’s impact was largely cultural rather than political. There are interesting aspects to the song that go against the assumption that it endorses a reactionary uprising. It should be pointed out that there was little interest in war generals before the “De la Rey” phenomenon. The centenary commemoration of the Anglo-Boer War took place during 1999-2002 and seemed to be a source of contemplation rather than

inspiration (Grundligh, 2008: 177). Bok van Blerk's song, however, managed to transform this history into a myth that assists Afrikaner identity construction.

The Blood River covenant served as a foundation myth that was used to legitimise Afrikaner Nationalism. In the post-apartheid era, it could no longer serve this purpose because its message of victory over blacks is at odds with the ethos of reconciliation. The myth encapsulated by "De la Rey" is much more useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the enemy it chooses is the British Empire. This is useful because it enables an underdog mentality. While Afrikaners were encouraged to see themselves as superior to others during apartheid, "De la Rey" makes it possible for them to imagine themselves as oppressed second-class citizens fighting a brave fight. In this regard it corresponds conveniently with the struggle myth that serves as the foundation of post-apartheid ideology. It is important to recognise that while the Blood River myth celebrated victory, "De la Rey" embraces defeat, albeit with a glimmer of hope. By posing a question in the chorus it creates a feeling of yearning akin to that found in the unofficial Scottish anthem "Flower of Scotland". Bok van Blerk offered an insightful explanation of the relevance of "De la Rey" in an MK award acceptance speech:

Us young people grew with not much to be proud of in our past, obviously we all know the reasons, and [the song] takes us back to a place where the Afrikaner was in a good place (MK, 2007).

The De la Rey myth has been embraced because it offers an opportunity to Afrikaners who feel alienated in the new South Africa to connect with pride to a noble struggle in which they were not the oppressors. The popularity of the song is seen by some as proof that Afrikaners have returned to an apartheid mentality. This is inaccurate because it actually presents a longing for a history prior to the wrongs of apartheid. When they sing "De la Rey" it is an act of rebellion by young Afrikaners that evokes the rebellion of the Boer commandos against the injustice of a larger power. Max du Preez sees it as a venting of frustration by a community that feels insecure and marginalised in an ANC-ruled South Africa (2007: 6). Kathleen McDougall has suggested that the "De la Rey" phenomenon can be seen as akin to the rituals of rebellion described by Gluckman (2007).

“De la Rey” operates as a ritual that uses the past to anchor an unstable and challenging experience of the present. It is a rebellion against a more powerful opponent that fosters and belonging. In this sense it is not that different from the rebellion imagined in Fokofpolisiekar’s work. Both revive elements of Afrikaner heritage and gain a sense of purpose via a rebellion against an oppressive adversary.

## **MK as platform**

The success of “De la Rey” is partially attributable to the existence of the MK music channel that provided a platform for Bok van Blerk’s video. The channel is part of the DSTV bouquet of satellite channels owned by Multichoice/M-Net and was launched in July 2005. By giving prominence to South African music, it has played a significant role in the growth of the industry and driven improvements in the quality of Afrikaans music videos by providing a platform for competition.

A comparison of the MK music video compendiums of 2006 and 2009 shows a notable difference in production quality. There appears to have been an increase in the use of film and HD formats as opposed to lower-cost digital mediums as well as increased spending on lighting and art direction. Competition amongst artists has therefore enabled MK to raise the standard of broadcasted videos. Henré Pretorius, a presenter on the channel, explains the effect of MK:

MK has given local bands a platform for their music videos and thereby caused a revolution in the local music video industry. Our local bands are getting more and more creative with their videos (MK, 2007).

It also provides an opportunity for young directors to gain an audience for their work that they would not otherwise have had in the medium of short films. A sense of auteurism can even be seen in the distinctive styles exhibited by directors such as Sean Else in videos for Bok van Blerk and Lianie May, Johan Nel for Fokofpolisiekar and Foto Na Dans as well as the recent music videos done by photographer Sean Metelerkamp for Foto Na Dans and Van Coke Kartel.

The success of the “De la Rey” video seems to have inspired other musicians to present their own versions of defiant Afrikaner identity. In the music video for Brenda Burnit’s song “Afrikaner” she tries to dispel stereotypes and present a multicultural understanding of the term by showing a diverse array of South Africans singing along to the song. Burnit sees Afrikaners as people that are unsure of their identity because they are ashamed of their dark past and has stated that she believes in “Madiba’s rainbow nation” but opposes prejudiced views of Afrikaners as racist (quoted in Malan, 2008: 3). A class of primary school children defies the teacher’s order to be quiet by performing Klopjag’s “Sal nie langer” in the music video for the song. The lyrics assert, “I know we were wrong” but “I will no longer apologise”. Both Burnit and Klopjag’s videos communicate a frustration with the demands of the post-apartheid environment. Such examples show attempts being made to redefine Afrikaner identity in music videos via gestures of defiance.

### **Bellville mythology**

In 2008, a new myth developed that hailed the suburb of Bellville as a unique site of musical creativity. This idea is encapsulated in the documentary *12 mile stone* (Fell & Leslie, 2008) which accompanied the release of CD/DVD package entitled *Bellville rock city* that showcased the historical talent of its rock music scene. It represents a successful attempt by a white suburban youth cluster to transform their success into a source of pride for local culture. The documentary is a case in point of the media’s role in building cultural movements into myths (Redhead, 1997). Via this process Bellville comes to be seen as a historically significant hub of cultural activity with a distinct mindset. In this regard it underwent a process similar to marginal cities such as Manchester in England and Seattle in Washington, USA. Gerald Casale of the post-punk band Devo comments on how this occurred in his hometown:

I always thought that was totally bizarre. But it’s always been that way: a city is anointed, the media creates a myth and makes it come true (quoted in Reynolds, 2009: 45).

The portrayal of Bellville is clearly not a falsification but the mystique that is built up around such a site via *12 mile stone* and *Bellville rock city* indicates a generation's desire to find anchorage in a history after apartheid. An important question nonetheless is why a place such as Bellville would deliver an exceptional amount of successful musicians. Part of it stems from the way a close community of musicians seems to stimulate creativity and be mutually beneficial. Yet an argument can be made that Bellville's position on the outskirts of the cultural capital of Cape Town played a significant role. The artists were thus close enough to the centre of things to be aware of the trends developing in Cape Town, but removed enough to become isolated and beset by boredom.

Lin Sampson wrote an article for the *Sunday Times* following the release of *Bellville rock city*. In it she portrays Bellville as the "centre of a counter culture" (2009: 8). She recalls that when she and friends were growing up as southern suburb girls in the 1960s they saw Bellville boys as the embodiment of dangerous lower-class masculinity. It was rumoured that the men from Bellville who preferred rock to folk music, could "get you pregnant just by looking at you" (ibid). The article is an excellent example of the way rebellious suburban Afrikanerdom is being re-imagined as a site of authenticity; and these musicians rendered as the embodiment of individualism because they rebelled against their conservative upbringing and blazed their own path. One interviewee with an "alternative air", Deon Cobano points out that "[c]oming from Bellville is like a counterculture thing that has really paid off" (ibid). These depictions also focus special attention on eateries and present the area as an extraordinary place. There is thus a process taking place similar to the passage of the American 1960s counterculture into myth. In South Africa, the creation of a myth of suburban rebellion appears to enable a re-imagining of white cultural history. It creates an image that is useful to identity construction because it emphasizes masculinity, authenticity and individualism.

### ***Forgive them for they know not what they do***

The release of the Fokofpolisiekar documentary *Forgive them for they know not what they do* (Little, 2009) marks the end of an era. Between 2003 and 2007 the band was at

the forefront of not only renewal in Afrikaans youth culture but also the growth of South African rock music. The film is a documentation of their career and presents a noteworthy interpretation of Afrikaner culture. In the opening scenes, interviewee Elisma Roets describes Afrikaner culture as a subculture and offers the following characterisation:

Your typical South African has characteristics like he is narrow-minded, he is conservative, he is protestant, in other words he is a Christian, he has certain pre-conceived ideas about how to raise his children, how to do business and all those kinds of things. He is proud of his family and of his family name. So there's a group of people who are not really sure who they are (Little, 2009).

This description, which is clearly of Afrikaners even though she refers to "South Africans", is placed over nostalgic 8mm family footage from the acoustic *Hemel op die platteland* video. The predominant image that arises in this depiction and other interviews in the film is that Afrikanerdom is an illusionary identity. This is a crucial element to this rebellious identity formation that developed in opposition to Afrikaner tradition.

It is argued in the film that traditional Afrikaner culture was maintained through "brainwash[ing] by the church, with the schools [and] with the government". By viewing it as culture founded on deception this argument draws significantly on countercultural attitudes towards the perceived falsity of society. Yet the documentary expresses an admiration for a community that performs rebellion. Fokofpolisiekar is commended for contributing to the rejuvenation of Afrikaans. One fan of the band, for instance, summed up their significance by saying "I'm not scared to be Afrikaans anymore. I am proud" (quoted in Little, 2007: 38). It therefore becomes apparent that despite the gestures of rebellion and apathy, the movement surrounding Fokofpolisiekar is not interested in the annihilation of Afrikaner heritage but rather concerned with its stagnation. Afrikaner rebellion has often championed the idea of revolution, of leading a heroic renewal in society. Chris Chameleon evokes this feature in the documentary:

The Afrikaners are made of the same stuff that the Americans are made of, that pioneer spirit. The people that came here in the first place are the people that were like "I'm thinking beyond the system I'm caught in. I'm a pioneer. I'm gonna go out there and take it on". So they are brave people, they are intelligent people, they are entrepreneurs (Little, 2009).

This quote illustrates the conceptual continuity between the Afrikaner's historical foundations - the Great Trek pioneers - and contemporary cultural renewal via forces such as Fokofpolisiekar. In both cases, Afrikaners are eulogised for bravely taking a stand against a restrictive system. In this regard, it also shows similarities to countercultural thinking that promoted an entrepreneurial spirit and opposition of societal systems. What should be noticed here is the shared tendency of taking pride in oppositional identity formation.

## **aKING**

By 2008, members of Fokofpolisiekar began to release material through side projects such as aKING, Van Coke Kartel and Die Heuwels Fantasties. While aKING sings in English, the involvement of Hunter Kennedy has resulted in continuity with Fokofpolisiekar in terms of lyrical subject matter. In "Safe as house" from their debut album, Laudo Liebenberg sings:

What a waste this façade/ What a pity we've come this far / The rain will fall and baptise / Our strongholds our sheltered lives / Closed blinds, drawn curtains / And vinyl floors can't hide... Our luscious denial / Our devoured minds / Our thoughts remain impotent

The song laments the success and mentality of suburban Afrikanerdom. The same critical stance towards middle class suburbia present in the music of Fokofpolisiekar is present in this depiction that sees stifling material security as the cause of impotence and denial. It therefore links with Cantor's observation that the American counterculture grew out of a suburban middle class that offered its children "security without power" (1970: 299). Liebenberg states that he and Kennedy wrote the song about their upbringing in the suburb of Welgemoed, which they see as a "horribly ordinary neighbourhood" (quoted in Kennedy, 2009: 74). While aKING's music appears to contain an element of romance in it, it shares Fokofpolisiekar's preoccupation with the need to escape the perceived falseness and conformity of suburban existence.

## **Die Heuwels Fantasties**

Die Heuwels Fantasties is yet another side project that features Hunter Kennedy. This group differs from Fokofpolisiekar not only in its use of electronic instrumentation but also in the imagery it uses. The group has released a series of music videos that emphasise travelling as a form of liberation. The band members are seen travelling through Capetonian neighbourhoods, South African landscapes and to the Mozambique coast. These images of travelling connect with the bohemian impulse to 'hit the road'. There is a sense in these videos that this exploration of the country enables a sense of freedom and belonging. The video for "Pille vir Kersfees" creates an impression of multiculturalism by showing the band visiting a shebeen and drinking with the locals. In "Klein Tambotieboom" they sing "scatter my ashes over the Bushveld" and "the happiest I've ever been was on back in the nature reserve". This liberated adoption of the South African natural environment is notably different from the claustrophobic alienation expressed by Fokofpolisiekar. Die Heuwels Fantasties' sightseeing contrasts with the regret expressed by the line "I'm just a tourist in my land of birth" in Fokofpolisiekar's last single, "Antibiotika". It appears that in the same way that Fokofpolisiekar claimed elements of Afrikaner cultural history in press releases and videos, Die Heuwels Fantasties claims the South African landscapes as the basis of its identity. Interestingly, this desire by rebellious Afrikaner musicians to connect to the natural environment revitalises the old bond between Afrikaner identity and the land.

### ***2-21***

Francois van Coke of Fokofpolisiekar also featured in *2-21*, a play performed at the 2009 KKNK. Jaco Boucher directed it and the script consisted of a fusion of excerpts from the Old Testament and words written by Hunter Kennedy. Stories of scapegoats and angels from Leviticus, Genesis and the apocryphal text Enoch are intertwined with lyrics about penis-infatuation. The way in which the Bible is referenced in a rebellion against Afrikaner Calvinism echoes André Brink's ironic use of Christian imagery. The producers of the play assert that its central theme is "the Afrikaner's need to identify a

scapegoat to propitiate their sins” (Brümmer, 2009:6). By presenting Van Coke as the scapegoat, it comments on the way Fokofpolisiekar was persecuted in the media after the wallet controversy. It also indicates the affinity Afrikaner rebels have for using the framework of traditional Afrikanerdom to position themselves. Fokofpolisiekar have stated, for instance, that they prefer to see themselves as heathens, rather than atheists (Retief, 2006). The negative terminology of Calvinism is used here to place the band in intimate conflict with Afrikaner tradition rather than removed from it. It should be noted not only that the play draws on a preoccupation with Christian sin but the title also references the age restriction system for cinema shows used during apartheid. *2-21* is thus another example of the tendency amongst a generation of defiant Afrikaners to re-employ the signifiers of the tradition that they are rebelling against.

### **Jack Parow & Die Antwoord**

A different preoccupation appeared in 2010 in the form of a new trend in Afrikaans entertainment. Die Antwoord and Jack Parow managed to reach overseas audiences with what is known as ‘zef-rap’. This form of white hip-hop embraces South African low culture as a source of local authenticity. The great paradox is that these artists channel the perceived authenticity of an unsophisticated culture by adopting inauthentic personas. With Die Antwoord, Waddy Jones and his spouse adopt the personas Ninja and Yolandi Vi\$\$er. In creating this identity, Ninja appears to draw from Pollsmoor Prison gangster and ‘white-trash’ Afrikaner culture. To transform from the motivation-speaker character he presented in his previous hip-hop group, MaxNormal.tv, Jones took the step of getting tattoos that resemble the do-it-yourself markings seen on prison gangsters. They also make use of Cape coloured slang in interviews and lyrics. The image Die Antwoord presents in the hugely popular video *Zef Side*, is that of poor whites akin to the Afrikaner family in the film *Triomf* (Raeburn, 2009). Yet Die Antwoord presents this not as a source of disgust but as an authentic feature of South African culture that should be celebrated. They call this hybrid of poor white and coloured culture ‘zef’ and assert that it is the “ultimate South African style” (quoted in Engelbrecht, 2010a: 7). A series of black and white publicity photos for the group also seem inspired by documentation of poor

whites by Roger Ballen, a photographer with whom Die Antwoord plans to collaborate (Engelbrecht, 2010b). The rebellion they perform by means of the zef style is not against authority but against notions of good taste.

Jack Parow is similarly a persona adopted by Zander Tyler to endorse the perceived opposite of cultural sophistication. He promotes zef Afrikaner taste such as perms, Mazdas and frequenting Danskraal, and states that “[p]eople think all Afrikaners are zef” (quoted in Scivous and Zeno, 2010: 58). In “Cooler as ekke” he contrasts his raw originality with the pretentious ‘coolness’ of others. The song constructs a positive/negative binary that champions Pep Stores rather than A Store, sluts instead of models, Hartenbos rather than Quebec, and Klipdrift instead of Peroni. Considering that coolness is a status hierarchy based on distinction it is apparent that Jack Parow does not really present an indictment of coolness but merely an update of it. By presenting a binary that favours things that are less expensive and sophisticated, he is attempting to raise their value and lower the status of that which is preferred by others. This common strategy in status competition is also prevalent in countercultural discourse. Jack Parow’s rebellion against expensive taste is similar to that of hippies and punks, who contrasted their lifestyle with the supposed falsity of high culture.

The extent to which this is a new turn in alternative Afrikaans entertainment is highlighted by criticism these zef-rap musicians have received from older rebels. Koos Kombuis has stated that he opposes what Die Antwoord stands for because he considers the group “shallow”, indicating “dimensionless anarchy” and unable to make listeners “feel more in touch with themselves” (2010). This criticism is significant because Koos Kombuis displays a countercultural understanding of the function of offensive entertainment. He comes from a generation of artists that believed that rebellious style should be used to fight a progressive cause. The thematic similarities between his own work and the zef trend appear to make Koos Kombuis uneasy. He has romanticised the vagrant lifestyle in his work but believes this was part of a political rebellion because he and his cohorts “were anti-apartheid [and their] opponent had a name” (Kombuis, 2010). This type of argument also appears in international debates about the perceived

shallowness of fashionable youth culture. An article entitled “Hipster: the dead end of Western civilization” was published by *Adbusters*, a magazine representative of countercultural thinking. In it, Douglas Haddow argues:

We've reached a point in our civilization where counterculture has mutated into a self-obsessed aesthetic vacuum. So while hipsterdom is the end product of all prior countercultures, it's been stripped of its subversion and originality.... But in 2008, such things have become shameless clichés of a class of individuals that seek to escape their own wealth and privilege by immersing themselves in the aesthetic of the working class (2008).

Haddow is disturbed by ‘hipsters’, a term for fashion-conscious people with an affinity for stylistic irony and lower-class aesthetics, a grouping that Die Antwoord, Jack Parow and their fans are arguably part of. What bothers Haddow particularly is the way in which they use style in a supposedly apathetic manner because it is not subversive and fighting a larger power. It is thus comparable with Koos Kombuis’ argument that Die Antwoord is shallow because they employ transgressive style for purely entertainment purposes. What these critics seem unwilling to concede is that hipsters unwittingly expose the fallacy that distinctive style will have progressive socio-political consequences.

Die Antwoord and Jack Parow make a useful contribution by offering new ways in which whiteness can be imagined as part of South African multiculturalism. It goes against associations of privilege by redeeming ‘white-trash’ as a source of legitimacy. The way in which they present elements of unsophisticated Afrikaner culture as a source of pride and authenticity differs radically from the approach of previous artists who saw Afrikaner culture as a site of falseness. By referencing peculiarities of South African popular culture such as *Egoli* characters, Jack Parow is doing something similar to Fokofpolisiekar’s reclaiming of cultural heritage as a foundation of their identity. Fokofpolisiekar, Die Antwoord and Jack Parow have managed to redeem elements of local culture, most notably the Afrikaans language, as ‘cool’. The work of these artists is part of a process of rehabilitating whiteness in the post apartheid milieu. While artists such as Karen Zoid and Fokofpolisiekar perform a rebellion against Afrikaner tradition, they also reclaim elements of that cultural heritage. It is an ambivalent rebellion because it employs the signifiers of that which it is against. Different approaches have appeared in rebellious Afrikaans entertainment of the last decade. Yet from Bok van Blerk’s

resurrection of the Anglo-Boer war, mythmaking in *Bellville Rock City*, zef-rap's affection for the white lower-class to the exploration of South African landscapes by Die Heuwels Fantasties, these approaches serve the same function. It is an attempt to create a sense of belonging in South Africa by a generation with an uncertain identity characterised by guilt and alienation.

University of Cape Town

# Conclusion

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It is not dangerous that a rebellion may fail; what is dangerous is that a whole generation will go by without protest.

N.P. van Wyk Louw (1986a:66)

The value of cultural rebellion lies in its ability to stimulate stylistic renewal and enable alienated individuals to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. Its success should thus not be measured by the effect it has on that which is rebelled against. It appears that N.P. van Wyk Louw encouraged defiance in Afrikaans arts because he recognised this function of rebellion. Via gestures of rebellion, artists contribute to a revitalisation of Afrikaans culture by creating myths and making the language relevant to a new generation. They also manage to reclaim signifiers of the past and use it as the basis of identity construction in post-apartheid South Africa.

This study has shown that oppositional identity formation is a feature of Afrikanerdom and counterculture. While Afrikaner identity developed in opposition to British domination and the *swart gevaar*, counterculture developed in opposition to the perceived conformity of middle class society and the 'mainstream'. Despite being positioned on different sides of the political spectrum, Afrikaner and countercultural ideology have common values. Both emphasize distinction and cultivate an underdog mentality in resistance to a larger power. These two ideologies have considerable shortcomings, a fact which in the case of Afrikaner Nationalism, became commonsense by the end of apartheid. Countercultural thinking, it has been argued, proves to be more resilient and should be viewed critically because it romanticises nonconformity and unsound approaches to political activism. It sees unconventional styles as subversive within a conformist society and attaches political significance to what is, essentially, matters of taste.

Despite these shortcomings, rebels influenced by countercultural philosophy have contributed to cultural renewal by acting as trendsetters and enabling a reimagining of national identity. In the same way that the Sex Pistols promoted Englishness and The Clash made it seem as if coming from London is significant, Die Antwoord promotes South Africaness and Fokofpolisiekar makes it seem as if coming from Bellville is significant. These artists provide entry points to disaffected youth to reengage with their cultural inheritance. Rebellious entertainment has the ability to reframe cultural signifiers as 'cool' by portraying it as distinct and authentic. In this way cultures accommodate new generations into its renewal and fulfil what Van Wyk Louw called the duty to satisfy people's needs.

This study has examined mythmaking from Blood River, "De la Rey" to *Bellville rock city* as a recurring feature in Afrikanerdom that aids identity construction. It has also shown that attempts have been made in entertainment to connect to black South African culture in order to escape the traditional boundaries of Afrikanerdom. A number of student films from CityVarsity exhibit a fascination with African folklore and portray it as a means of escape for Afrikaner characters, akin to the Beat Generation's fascination with black cultural innovation. The representation of Afrikaner culture in South African student films of the twenty-first century remains beset by stereotypes and a perception of the older generation as stultified and impotent. Most of these student films communicate compliance with post-apartheid ideology and appear orthodox compared to the inventive engagement with Afrikaner culture that appears in music. There is thus an immense opportunity for filmmakers to be inventive with regards to local culture. It appears that a long tradition of Afrikaner rebellion initiated by the Sestigers is now gradually losing ground to a movement that places less emphasis on the political significance of art. A backlash against this shift can be expected, one that will hopefully deliver a new range of styles.

The findings of this research should be of use to those interested in sustaining Afrikaans language and culture. It is necessary that renewal takes place within Afrikaner culture in order not to solidify into an obstinate ethnic group. Cultural rebellion expressed

via entertainment should be seen be as a constructive feature of society, that ensures stability much like the rituals of rebellion observed by Gluckman. This dissertation also intends to serve as impetus for further research. There is especially an opportunity to confirm some of its hypotheses in the field of sociology. The extent to which these new myths are internalised by the Afrikaner community needs to be determined as well as the use of taste as a marker of distinction in South Africa. One path of enquiry could be whether political beliefs correspond to models of cultural preference, such as Vejlgard's model of stylistic innovation (2008). Analysing the discourse of artists and followers offers insight into why some forms of entertainment erupt in popularity. The recent success of Die Antwoord and Jack Parow serve as examples. The reframing of elements of South African culture in order to appeal to an international audience demonstrates a way to sustain the relevance of not only Afrikaans, but also of other marginal cultures across the world.

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*Across the universe* (2008 d/ Julie Taymor)  
*Amandla! a revolution in four part harmony* (2002, d/ Lee Hirsch)  
*American psycho* (2000, d/ Mary Harron)  
*Ashoopkind* (2008, d/ René Spies)  
*Badlands* (1973, d/ Terrence Mallick)  
*Bicycle thieves* (1948, d/ Vittorio De Sica)  
*Bokkiesweek of bliksem* (2003, d/ Dave Meinert)  
*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, d/ Arthur Pen)  
*Considerately killing me* (2005, d/ Willem Grobler)  
*Cry, the beloved country* (1994, d/ Darrell Roodt)  
*Die Engelsman, die Boer en die dude in die boom* (2005, d/ Chris Hendricks)  
*Fokopolisiekar: forgive them for they know not what they do* (2009, d/ Bryan Little)  
*Hemel op die platteland* (2006, d/ Jaco Smit)  
*iBali* (2003, d/ Harold Holscher)  
*Ingrid Jonker: her lives and time* (2007, d/ Helena Nogueira)  
*Killer October* (2004, d/ Garth Meyer)  
*Korreltjie niks is my dood* (2001, d/ Saskia van Schaik)  
*Malunde* (2001, d/ Stefanie Sycholt)  
*Modder koffie* (2005, d/ Brett Melvill-Smith)  
*Natural born killers* (1994, d/ Oliver Stone)  
*Niemandtsland* (2005, d/ Arnold Snyman)  
*One flew over the cuckoo's nest* (1975, d/ Miloš Forman)  
*Party van ons* (2006, d/ Desmond Denton)  
*Promised land* (2002, d/ Jason Xenopoulos)

*Rooi rok bokkie* (2008, d/ Kyle Lewis)  
*Senter* (2003, d/ Rudi Steyn)  
*Sexy girls* (1997, d/ Russel Thompson)  
*Sibahle* (2006, d/ Joshua Rous)  
*Skaapwagter* (2008, d/ Michael Bothma)  
*Sokkie ce chic* (2007, d/ Jacorine van der Westhuizen)  
*Spaarwiel* (2006, d/ Morne du Toit)  
*Springbokkie* (2004, d/ Lynette Mitchell)  
*Stander* (2003, d/ Bronwen Hughes)  
*Swing left Frank* (2002, d/ Johan Nel)  
*Taxi driver* (1976, d/ Martin Scorsese)  
*The lion king* (1994, d/ Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff)  
*The Weather Underground* (2003, d/ Sam Green & Bill Siegel)  
*Thelma & Louise* (1991, d/ Ridley Scott)  
*Triomf* (2009, d/ Michael Raeburn)  
*Triomf* (2009, d/ Michael Raeburn)  
*Tsotsi* (2005, d/ Gavin Hood)  
*Vaderland* (2006, d/ Desmond Denton)  
*Vergelee* (2008, d/ Reinhard Jansen Rensburg)  
*Voëlvy – the movie* (2006, d/ Lloyd Ross)  
*When tomorrow calls* (2004, d/ Louis du Toit)  
*Wine town* (2007, d/ James Westcott)