



# Harassing Hogwash Scored with Happy Hardcore: The Ruthless Humor of the Dutch *New Kids* Films

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‘In 2008, Batman faced The Joker. In 2010, Harry Potter took on Voldemort. Now, the biggest battle known to mankind will come to a theater near you ...: Maaskantje versus Schijndel’.<sup>1</sup>

The hyperbolic trailer with an American-accented voice-over instantly situates the Dutch feature *New Kids Nitro* (2011, dirs. Steffen Haars and Flip van der Kuil) in a corny comedic context. Measuring the Dutch film up to the named Hollywood productions is excessively exaggerated and incongruous: every element of the movie is *de facto* small scale. The petite villages of Maaskantje and Schijndel will probably not ring any bell with an international audience; even most Dutch citizens would not have known where to locate Maaskantje before the *New Kids* franchise was released. The insignificance of the settlements was already thematized in the preceding movie *New Kids Turbo* (2010, dirs. Steffen Haars and Flip van der Kuil). Even the Dutch Minister of Defence in this film admitted to never having heard of either of them.

A brief lesson in Dutch geography: Maaskantje and Schijndel are two villages in North Brabant, a province in the south of the Netherlands, basically bordering Belgium. Tiny Maaskantje is nowadays part of the municipality of Den Dungen and counts some 1600 souls. It is located about 7.5 kilometers southeast of the province’s capital, ‘s-Hertogenbosch (aka Den Bosch).

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Schijndel is actually a city, dating back to the early fourteenth century, situated some 14 kilometres southeast of ‘s-Hertogenbosch. It is part of the municipality Meijerstad and has close to 24,000 inhabitants. The distance from one town to the other is around seven kilometres, less than four and a half miles. In the two instalments of the franchise, gangs of each of the one-horse towns compete with each other in a comedic struggle of life and death. Despite the hefty and indecorous humour of the franchise, the films gained a real cult status that even sparked tourism to the region. Nowadays, a touristic bicycle tour is offered along Maaskantje’s film locations, starting in Den Bosch and ending at the spot where the local snack bar used to stand (various attempts to save it from demolition as a valuable object of cultural heritage due to the *New Kids* creations ultimately did not succeed). The ramshackle snack bar, with its grotesque menu of fast-food snacks named after nationally known personalities, is one of the central gathering points in both movies. As a result of the franchise’s huge popularity, the village’s name board has been repeatedly stolen by souvenir hunters and subsequently replaced a dozen times.

The *New Kids* franchise is highly controversial, as its critical reception illustrates. Reviews varied from six stars (the film magazine *FHM*) to zero (the more ‘elite’ daily *NRC Handelsblad*). The critics befittingly rebuked the anarchistic and violent nature of the narrative, the discriminative, redneck depiction of social class, the exploitation of people with Down syndrome or suffering from spasms, the physical and sexual display, the glorification of drugs and alcohol abuse, its heteronormativity, and so on. The counterculture humour featured in the films is of the knickers and snaggers type; some jokes are downright politically incorrect, and blood is spilled generously and for no reason. The movies seem to have drawn their inspiration from a savage and malicious display *à la* Quentin Tarantino, and, relevant to the recurrent street race scenes, the *Fast & Furious* media franchise (2001 and counting) immediately springs to mind. The terms ‘turbo’ and ‘nitro’ in the films’ titles refer to the engine power type of the racing cars used by the Brabant buddies. A turbocharger pumps extra air into the cylinders to produce more race power; a nitro engine is powered by fuel that contains nitromethane that gives the car a rocket boost. A *Jackass* (2000–2020) style of physical mutilation can likewise be identified. Then there is the foul language—mostly in an exaggerated Brabantian (local) dialect. The Dutch word for ‘cunt’ is a stopgap uttered numerous times; ‘homo’ or ‘mongoloid’ are just mild qualifications within the floods of abuse, repeated *ad nauseam* in the dialogues as well as in the lyrics of the inserted songs. ‘Camp’ and ‘kitsch’ are appropriate qualifications for the aesthetic representation of the films. And all of the above is situated within a white male, victimhood setting, reminiscent of the sadomasochism genus of ‘white male backlash’ (for this type, see Brayton 2007).

In other words: the *New Kids* films are downright vulgar, over the top, and candidly crude in all corners. So why pay attention to them in a handbook on music in comedy cinema? In spite and despite: the two films are also excessively funny—for many that is, witness their blockbuster status. According to the

Internet Movie Database, *New Kids Turbo* had a budget of an estimated 1.5 million euros and grossed 18 million dollars worldwide, of which 12 million from domestic Dutch sales. *Nitro* started with a budget of some 2.5 million euros and grossed 9.4 million dollars worldwide (more than 5 million in the Netherlands).<sup>2</sup> The films are illustrations of the paradoxical type of “so bad, it’s good” cinema: specimens of guilty pleasure. Peter Verstraten, in his book *Humour and Irony in Dutch Post-War Fiction Film*, suggests that ‘(f)rom an ideological perspective, the problem with the type of off-colour humour in films like (...) *New Kids Turbo* is that they lack explicit signs for reflection. If one just laughs at the ridiculous portrayals of the characters, one obviously acknowledges that they transgress the norm/convention, but this also implies that the norm/convention is implicitly affirmed’ (2016, p. 71). The soundtrack, drenched in ‘happy hip-hop’, forms a perfect match to the movies. This type of hardcore gabber music accentuates the subcultural niche of the films’ storylines. Gabber is slang for mate, pal, or Bro, and it indicates both the style of music as well as the genre’s admirers. At one moment, this hip-hop music comes banging out of the speakers of a fluorescent green Opel/Vauxhall Manta—the “Poor-man’s Ferrari” or “Pauper Porsche”. Another time, it is screened on television while the owner of that same Manta rhythmically jerks off in front of it, watching the video clip of DJ Paul’s ‘The Promised Land’. In the franchise, the gabber group is presented, alongside a permanently pregnant chick Manuela, as if they re-live (or still virtually live in) a 1980s/1990s scheme. The corresponding, dated aesthetic is omnipresent: not just elucidated by their choice of music but likewise by their track suits—“pitbull smokings”—as well as their hairstyle of mallets and flowerpot cuts. The prominent presence of Manta’s is deeply congruent with this image. Rikkert from Maaskantje is the owner of the green one, rival Dave from Schijndel has a black one.

The corresponding, pre-existing music in the films functions as both the marker of social class, as well as of the regressive cultural orientation of the film’s antiheroes from Maaskantje. The franchise smartly makes use of the public image of gabbers by depicting the five Maaskantje buddies highly consistent with the prejudiced view of the corresponding youth culture. In the media, gabbers were noted to be ‘uneducated, inarticulate, violent, racist, homophobic and sexist’ (Marshall 1993, p. 85). When *Turbo* opened in Germany, cinema operators pleaded for a ban on the film being afraid of a tidal wave of shitfaced *New Kids* fans. In their 1998 study on the Dutch youth culture of gabbers, Verhagen et alia concluded, however, that gabbers only slightly deviate from their ‘normal’ peers. ‘The differences are most clearly visible in their taste for music and clothes [the stereotypes magnified in the *New Kids* franchise—EW] and less visible in their ideas about a normal way of life, foreigners, enjoying life, and drugs’ (2000, p. 161). Gabbers eventually even generated a fairly high cuddle factor, and this is what we see reflected in the *New Kids* films as well: whatever their outcast image, the Maaskantje boys are actually cute and embraceable. Not surprisingly therefore, in the *Turbo* narrative, fellow residents of Brabant sympathize, eventually even back the gabbers’ battle with the local authorities (Fig. 23.1).



Fig. 23.1 The Maaskantje gang (from *New Kids Turbo*)

### DUTCH POST-WAR COMEDY FILM

The *New Kids* franchise can be situated in a tradition of Dutch post-war film comedies in which anti-social and anti-authoritarian behaviour is extravagantly celebrated and channelled into full-blown jocular narratives (Verstraten 2016, p. 48). Comedic stories about societal outcasts with explicit sex scenes—for example, the prostitutes of *Wat zien ik?* (What do I see?, 1971, dir. Paul Verhoeven)<sup>3</sup> and the defective characters displayed in *Schatjes* (Army Brads; 1984, dir. Ruud van Hemert) or in its sequel *Mama is boos!* (Mama is Mad as Hell!, 1986, dir. Ruud van Hemert)—are some of the better known examples which also garnered attention outside of the Netherlands. *Schatjes* was proposed as a candidate for Best Foreign Language Film for the 57th Academy Awards, yet ultimately not nominated. Another example is the *Flodder* franchise. Dick Maas directed three feature films between 1986 and 1995 about the dysfunctional family of the title following their relocation to better neighbourhoods, and in one edition, even to the United States, as part of a social experiment. A spin-off television series of five seasons (62 episodes between 1993 and 1998) was directed by Dick Maas as well. Said productions were all box-office hits, adapting “to the proverbial “underbelly of society”” (Verstraten 2016, p. 48).

The *New Kids* films have a reversed television pendant. The movies are an offshoot of the comedy series comprised of short sketches (each one about three minutes length) headlining the same quintet of loitering lads and their (mis)adventures. The films’ pranks are partly remakes of the gags presented in the television series. Between 2007 and 2009, creators Steffen Haars (b. 1980) and Flip van der Kuil (b. 1980) presented 35 episodes over three seasons via diverse TV channels. During the first two seasons, the comedy sketch show was still named *New Kids on the Block*, an ironic wink to the paragon of virtue, the American boy band from the 1980s. After the *New Kids* franchise discussed in

this chapter, directors Haars and van der Kuil continued to produce *Bro's before Ho's* (2013), about two siblings who fall in love with the same girl, and *Ron Goossens: Low Budget Stuntman* (2017). In the *New Kids* films, Steffen Haars interprets the role of Robbie Schuurmans and Flip van der Kuil that of the character of Barrie Butsers. The other Maaskantje men are impersonated by Tim Haars (Gerrie van Boven), Huub Smit (Richard Batsbak), and Wesley van Gaalen (as Rikkert Biemans).

### *Turbo's Plot*

*New Kids Turbo*, the first feature film of the comedy troupe, tells the story of the bunch of buddies from Maaskantje, functioning in jobs of low-societal status: city park service, a fork-lift truck driver, and an assistant mechanic. Resulting from the economic crisis (as much as due to their lazy take on things, misfortune, and lack of responsibility), the protagonists are sacked one after the other. For various reasons, they all move into the rented house of Richard and Robbie. When the unemployment benefits run out—the idea of free money from the government turns out to be a pipe dream—they start to revolt. Upon deciding that they won't pay for anything anymore, they nick fuel for the Manta, walk out of the local supermarket without paying for their numerous six packs of cheap beer, and refuse to compensate for their snacks. They even disobey by not paying their taxes and traffic tickets. When local authorities attempt to interfere, with both repo men and police, a local television station begins portraying them not so much as offenders or defaulters, but as victims of the crisis. Richard, for example, is portrayed as an animal friend who deeply loves his ailing pitbull, but due to his unemployment, he no longer can afford the (fancy) food for his pet. The fate of the gourmet tail-wagger deeply moves the television viewers. Despite their objectional behaviour, the boys become likeable underdogs in the public image.

Long story short, the Brabant citizens commence sympathizing with the five boys and support them in their burgeoning conflict with the authorities. Anarchy spreads. Eventually, the expanding uproar draws the attention of the government who sends in the military to restore law and order. In doing so, the military decides to wipe Maaskantje from the face of the earth ('who's gonna miss Maaskantje?'), yet mistakenly bombs neighbouring Schijndel. This deed of government terror results in closing the ranks among the rivalling gangs and inspire them to forget their battles over girls, cars, and other issues. The Maaskantje buddies become the symbol of resistance against administrative bureaucracy, and equally a symbol of the anger of a disadvantaged, cherished province towards the federal authorities in far-away The Hague, traditionally the seat of political power in the Netherlands. Small-town white male backlash becomes expansive provincial backlash. Blood is shed in abundance on the barricades, nevertheless, the antiheroes eventually vanquish and the military is defeated. Despite all the battles won, the perpetrators of the revolt land in front of a judge. A sheer endless list of legal offences

notwithstanding, in the end they are each only convicted to a modest community service of 240 hours. And all of this nonsensical tale is lavishly spiced with the above-mentioned glorification of drugs and alcohol abuse, aggression, heteronormativity, foul language, intimidating worked-up communication, sex, and, yes: exhilarating banter.

As Verstraten maintains, the crudity of the humour in the *New Kids* franchise ‘can be seen as an attempt to transgress the norms of what Noël Carroll calls, “right moral thinking”’ (2014, p. 80). And ‘(t)his type of humour is clearly targeted at those who hold the opinion that humour can act as the “guardian of relevant norms” (Carroll, 85). Once these norms have been stretched and a new implicit “limit” has been imposed, another film or series will be introduced to abandon this role of humour as “guardian” (Verstraten 2016, p. 74). ‘The only option left for its sequel, *New Kids Nitro*, was to make an overblown version: bigger, louder, more spectacular’ (Verstraten 2016, p. 77).

### *Nitro’s Plot*

Overblown is indeed a way to describe the more complicated narrative structure of *New Kids Nitro*. It picks up the storyline where *Turbo* ends: the gang while doing their community service. *Nitro* basically unites two narratives: the first is the now well-known rivalry between Maaskantje and Schijndel, fought out in streetcar races and scuffles. The second is the joint combat of the two villages’ gabbers against zombies who have taken over the northern province of Friesland. Here, a crashed meteorite has turned the inhabitants into the walking dead. After the Dutch Ministry of Defence has not succeeded in handling the crisis, in desperation, the government seeks rapprochement with the famous and fearless heroes from Brabant for assistance. The viewer has to overcome several suspensions of disbelief here. The government turning to untrained, a-social gabber buddies for military action is grotesque. A local Brabant rivalry which has inspired one-and-a-half films has suddenly evolved into a provincial brothers-in-arms squad is another surprising narrative turn. Richard never knew who his father was, but it now turns out that the man was from Schijndel, making Richard an uncomfortable half-a-Maaskantje, half-a-Schijndel bloke. Following his mother’s death, the opposing tribes unite, dissolving the truce between the two gangs.

Both *New Kids* films also humorously deconstruct the cinematic illusion. In *Turbo*, (real-life) producer Reinout Oerlemans breaks out of the narrative through a cameo from the Eyeworks studio, announcing that the production company has run out of budget. The gang necessarily recounts their adventures from the studio (with inserted illustrated shots from outside) until Oerlemans suddenly returns with the message that he has found the money to finish the movie. In *Nitro*, the narrative suggests a film within a film since the story appears to be watched by misbehaving kids sitting in a cinema.

Verstraten's qualification of *New Kids Nitro* as the 'overblown version' also accounts for the occasionally over-the-top soundtrack. A remarkable example of this is in the last scene in which Corry Konings sings 'Hoeren neuken, nooit meer werken' (humping hustlers, never work again), in a duet with a certain Ronnie. This song is in all aspects in opposition and incongruent to her significant reputation as a tame singer of tearjerker repertoire, normally iconic for the goody-goody side of the pop-musical spectrum in the Netherlands. But in *Nitro*, she joyfully interprets rather billingsgate lyrics, expressing a male ideal of fucking floosies, while never having to again lift a finger.

### HAPPY HARDCORE

The instalments are not only banded together by following the adventures of the same clique of tracksuited buddies, the music tracks co-define the films' shared identity too. The musical interconnectedness between the two *New Kids* movies is based on a similar aural identity: carbon-copy styles and genres of hip-hop: 'happy hardcore'. The hip-hop styles featured in the *New Kids* franchise are rooted in the Electronic Dance Music (EDM) movement which originated in the American nightclub scenes of the 1980s. Chicago, Detroit, and New York each developed their specific variations: house, techno, and garage (Reynolds 1999, pp. 14–39). Once blown over to Europe, EDM again evolved into new local sub-genres. Breakbeat in London, new beat in Brussels, and in the Netherlands: gabber, a style that flourished in Amsterdam and Rotterdam club culture of the 1990s (van Gageldonk 2000; Mulder 2016). The music is defined by its 4/4 meter, up-tempo bass-drum beats (with an average BPM rate of 180 or even higher); samples are mixed with roaring vocals. In Rotterdam, DJ Paul Elstak (b. 1966), a musician of Surinam descent, was the most prominent artist of the genre. By including more vocal prominence and melodic elements, DJ Paul introduced the 'happy hardcore' variant. With his more commercial releases, he subsequently emancipated happy hardcore from the club scene to the hit parade; his single 'Rainbow in the Sky' sold some 50,000 copies in 1995. This very same song is also featured in the music track of *New Kids Turbo*. Paul Elstak's music connects the two movies non-diegetically as well as diegetically. As DJ Paul, he even has several cameos in the franchise. He is the DJ behind the turntable at an illegal tunnel rave scene in *Nitro*, but even more memorable, he functions as *Deus ex Machina* at the very end of *Turbo*, completing a narrative thread set up earlier in the film. After Gerrie has been sacked, he looks for alternative ways to possess some pocket money. One of his attempts leads him to reconnect with the successful, wealthy kickboxer Peter 'Lumberjack' Aerts (also a cameo played by the real-life heavy-weight champion). Lumberjack lends Gerry money, but he never pays back his dues. When Aerts claims his money back in the concluding scene of the movie, DJ Paul's turntable set comes falling out of the sky crushing Aerts (see Fig. 23.2). Subsequently, Elstak's end title music commences.<sup>4</sup> Elstak received



Fig. 23.2 DJ Paul as Deus ex Machina (from *New Kids Turbo*)

a Rembrandt Award for best film hit song for this track; the record sold gold in the Netherlands.

The style of happy hardcore is considered a ‘cheesy’ sub-branch of hardcore, which, in the gabber scene, was considered rather ‘gay’. ‘Happy is for homo’s’, Simon Reynolds once overheard someone saying (1999, p. 287). When considering this qualification, the choice for happy hardcore as the films’ tonal token does add an ironic and strikingly incongruent layer to the *New Kids*’ narratives with their heteronormativity and verbal abuse of the qualification homosexual as a swear word. The prominent choice of happy hardcore in both soundtracks can also be interpreted as adding yet another referential layer to the franchise’s narratives. For this interpretation, one needs to address the wider connotation: happy hardcore is first and foremost associated with the city of Rotterdam. Rotterdam is the second largest city of the Netherlands and finds itself since time immemorial in a competition with Amsterdam in socio-economic and cultural terms. In this rivalry, on the whole, Rotterdam cultivates an underdog position. This is in some ways consistent and comparable with the underdog position afforded to Brabant/Maaskantje in their revolt against ‘the West’ or the rest of Holland, in *Turbo* symbolized by The Hague.

Paul Elstak also signed for the title track of *Nitro*, but the second instalment *Nitro* makes ample use of yet another hip-hop genre: eurodance, aka Euro-NRG or dancefloor. This musical representation of a multi-ethnic Europe became extremely popular in the Netherlands in the first half of the 1990s. It consists of a mix of house and hip-hop which made a ‘cross-over’ to a ‘radio friendly’ style of pop (Wermuth 2004, p. 219). The music features a danceable beat of house music (average BPM: 140) with slangish rap and vocal parts, generally performed by a white female singer and a black male rapper. The repetitive choruses and rapped verses are accompanied by catchy synthesizer motifs, samples, and drum machine. Successful Dutch representatives of eurodance are the mixed couples of 2 Unlimited and 2 Brothers On The 4th Floor.



This last ensemble is prominently featured in the *Nitro* soundtrack with some of their most successful tracks: the number one hit ‘Dreams (will come alive)’ is the title song of their first album (1994). In *Nitro*, it underscores the opening and end credits of the film. Their hit songs ‘Never Alone’ and ‘Come Take My Hand’ are likewise adopted in the music track. We hear ‘Come Take My Hand’ at an illegal rave party, additionally the song receives an abhorrent a cappella rendition by the fictional singer Ronnie, a performance discussed below. The successes of eurodance turned against the artists who were regularly criticized for being (too) commercial and their music (too) simplistic (Wermuth 2004, p. 223). A referential footnote regarding the choice for this type of music for the Maaskantje mob would be that dancefloor incongruently propagates a multi-ethnic Europe while the Brabant gabbers in the film are extremely white, male, racist, and chauvinistic. Moreover, eurodance is commonly associated with ‘urban hipness’ (Wermuth 2004, p. 233), a qualification that hilariously contradicts the hamlet squad from Maaskantje. Nevertheless, the gabbers love this sort of music.

### CAMP

Although dominant, happy hardcore and eurodance are not the only pre-existing pop-musical genres that figure in the films. Both instalments also generate humour through the contradictory incorporation of ‘camp’ music. In *Nitro*, the afore-mentioned Corrie Konings (b. 1951) with her unexpected diegetic contribution possibly expressing the gabber frame of mind when rewarded for the victory over the Frisian zombies, yet the text is thoroughly contradictory to her regular repertoire of schmalz, such as ‘Huilen is voor jou te laat’ (Crying is too late for you, 1970), ‘Ik krijg een heel apart gevoel van binnen’ (I get a pretty weird feeling inside, 1976, remix 2005), or ‘Mooi was die tijd’ (That time was beautiful, 1990), to name but a few of her best-known hit singles (Fig. 23.3).



Fig. 23.3 Corrie Konings (and Ronnie) singing ‘Hoeren Neuken, Nooit Meer Werken’ (from *New Kids Nitro*)

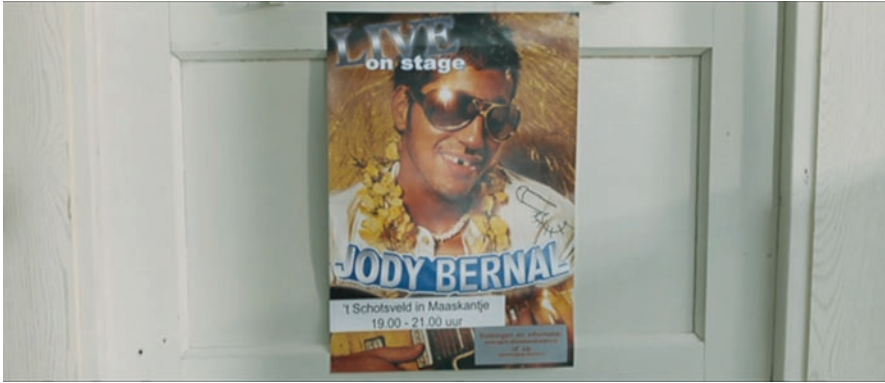


Fig. 23.4 Daubed concert poster of Jody Bernal (from *New Kids Turbo*)

Adopted in the narrative of *New Kids Turbo* as well is the Brazilian-Dutch singer Jody Bernal (b. 1981) and his bestselling song ‘Que sí, que non’ (what if yes, what if no?, 2000). The Maaskantje mob first see his concert announced in the local snack bar on a daubed poster (see Fig. 23.4). In a later scene, Bernal has a small cameo lip-synching his major hit in a tiny Maaskantje party venue before being shot to death in a police raid. The song is a rendition of the Argentinian summer hit of the same name, originally performed by El Símbolo. Bernal’s ‘Que sí, que no’ is still among the longest noted number one hits in the Netherlands and Belgium. The small Bernal thread in the movie is mainly antagonistic in nature, contextualized as kitsch and gay, thusly contrasting the “cool” image of the Maaskantje gang. Michel Chion concluded in his seminal book *Audio-vision* that ‘once a sound is paired with an image, we are no longer dealing with a simple juxtaposition of two elements but rather with the alchemical combination of audio-vision’ (p. 179). Periodically, such alchemical combinations result in audio-visual associations so indelible that they are difficult to neglect. Once you have seen spaceships waltzing on the *Blue Danube*, you can never listen to Johann Strauss’s music again without seeing the visuals from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick). Not with the same intensity perhaps, yet still comparable, is that some of the pre-existing songs used in the *New Kids* franchise have thereafter been glued to the Maaskantje-perception. ‘Que sí, que non’ is one of the most prominent of these, given the comments on YouTube.<sup>5</sup>

The incorporation of popular songs evidently aided in the success of the movies. Inserting music by DJ Paul or Jody Bernal, for example, or 2 Brothers On The 4th Floor helps in some immediately appealing sequences, but the comedy troupe generated hits themselves as well. In the preceding television series, the greedily and distastefully consuming of a ‘broodje Bakpao’—a fluffy Chinese-Indonesian sandwich—created part of the identity of the characters. A collaboration with the Dutch hip-hop duo The Opposites, most notably rapper Big2, resulted in an internationally acclaimed hit single with that same name

even before the first movie instalment was released (2009). The upbeat elements of the track as well as its prominent arpeggiated synthesizer accompaniment return in *Turbo*. The incorporation in *Nitro* of the song 'Wêr Bisto' (2000) by the Frisian folk-pop group Twarres is another example of shrewd incorporations of popular tunes. Without a doubt, the song contributes to the attractiveness of the soundtrack, while it simultaneously and appropriately directs the viewer to the location of Friesland as the song's lyrics are in Frisian. Twarres's successful record, translated as 'Where are you', was the first Frisian-language single that ever reached the pole position of the Dutch charts. The proliferation of camp also accounts for the rendition of 'Ge kunt de groeten uit Brabant krijgen, Kut!' (Greetings from Brabant, Cunt!), written and performed (in part) by the New Kids in *Turbo*. As a controversial and censored carnival blockbuster, this hustling polonaise with its prominent synths and pumping beat, combines many of the film's one-liners; it was a huge hit in 2010. The song may remind us of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnival.<sup>6</sup> In a carnivalesque reading of popular culture, Gulnara Karimova suggests: it is a celebration of 'laughter for the sake of laughter; mocking the present official political system, religious dogmas and authoritative figures; grotesque realism; billingsgate language; degradation of high images; celebration of the lower bodily stratum' (2010, p. 38). Another strategy for generating (film)musical mirth, as indicated in Chap. 3 of this handbook, is profiling an extremely bad performance, 'a necessary concept for musical pleasure', according to Simon Frith (2004, p. 14). In *Nitro*, this is done with verve by the character Ronnie (Max van den Burg), a campy singer with a golden microphone and a white Mercedes who hangs out with Richard's mother in her trailer park. When the gang realizes that mother Batsbak is killed by the zombies on her holiday bus tour, Ronnie performs the song 'Come Take My Hand' unaccompanied at her empty grave. This rendition of the 2 Brothers On The 4th Floor song is profoundly out of tune and sung in an excruciatingly accented English. Horrendously hilarious. Remarkable, yet narratively consistent is the incorporation of the Horst-Wessel-Lied, the Nazi Party anthem with the well-known opening line 'Die Fahne Hoch! / Die Reihen fest geschlossen' (Raise the Flag!, The Ranks Tightly Closed; 1929). A former collaborator and Nazi admirer sings the anthem when the Maaskant gang turns to him for his weapon collection. During the performance of the anthem in front of a swastika flag, he is coincidentally fatally shot through the head by Gerrie.

The original score of both instalments was provided by Tom Holkenborg (b. 1967). Under his *nom de plume* Junkie XL, Holkenborg made name as EDM DJ and producer, scoring an international hit with his remix of Elvis Presley's 'A Little Less Conversation' (2002), originally from the musical comedy feature *Live a Little, Love a Little* (1968, dir. Norman Taurog). Meanwhile, Holkenborg was also hammering the pavement as a burgeoning film composer. He has since made a name through his collaborations with Hans Zimmer for Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010), followed by *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012, dir. Christopher Nolan), *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016,

dir. Zack Snyder), and other Hollywood blockbusters. For *New Kids Turbo*, Holkenborg composed 23 non-diegetic cues—all one- to two-minute pieces. For the music track of *New Kids Nitro*, he produced another 26 cues. Overall, Holkenborg's music is both consistent and congruent with the narrative and the visuals he underscores. For example, when Richard laments about his ailing dog in *Turbo*, a *Greensleeves* type of harp introduction leads to lush strings in a minor key ('Such a Lovely Dog') which are used for the musical framing of the sequence. When the army attacks Maaskantje, the sequences are underscored by 'Fight the Helmets' part 1 and 2, the first one building tension through threatening, low register synth sounds with percussive accents, while the second profiles marching drums, repetitive strings, and howling horns, not far removed from Junkie's work for the Hollywood *Batman* franchise.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, it is like listening to one of the swashbuckler *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies produced by Jerry Bruckheimer. The same type of varied underscoring is employed in *Nitro*. Additional tracks under the name The Female Lovers were composed by the Rotterdam producer Emile Bode. His number P.R.O.S.T.I.T.U.T.E. basically communicates the same message as Corry Konings's song at the end of the film.<sup>8</sup>

#### PARODY

*New Kids* is parody galore. *Nitro* parodies the zombie genre to a significant extent, complete with stiff wiggling persons walking *en masse* towards a target; bloody heads, wounds, and missing body parts all included. The opening of *New Kids Turbo* in turn parodies the beginning of *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis). Whereas Tom Hanks gently picks up a swirling feather to stall it in a book, in *Turbo*, the camera follows a(n animated) butterfly. Swiftly, the butterfly is smashed dead by one of the Maaskantje gabbers: smash at synch point; 'what a cunt butterfly, Bro!' Instead of Alan Silvestri's nostalgic, flowing underscore, the tension in *Turbo* is built up from an electric piano introduction to the subsequent banging beat of 'Luv U More' (1995) by Dutch DJ Paul Elstak. This track is a hardcore remake of the song by the British techno group Sunscreen (1992). The set-up may also recall the butterfly scene at the end of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930, dir. Lewis Milestone), where an Allied soldier is killed by a German sniper while attempting to gently pick up a butterfly. Film scholar Peter Verstraten qualified *New Kids Turbo* as a 'Forrest gone berserk' (2016, pp. 66; 68), inspired by the circumstance that *Forrest Gump* articulated that 'each and every person already has a set destiny' (p. 66).<sup>9</sup> But where Forrest is a rule-obeying, innocent bystander, the Jackass types of the New Kids gang represent a bunch of uncompromising, rule-disobeying, a-social, a-moral, primitives—more such adjectives may be added freely—who provoke both the law and good manners.

A further description of the opening scene of this film is representative for the type of humour employed in the *New Kids* franchise, and the manner in which music is used to frame the cheer. This opening sequence of *Turbo*

immediately sets the tone, musically as well as humorously. The opening title cards are accompanied by the sounds of a mooing cow, a sheep, a chicken, a pig, and a cuckoo. The music adequately marks time period and social class. What we hear is a typical specimen of the above-mentioned, mid-1990s happy hardcore: a 4/4 beat in a fast tempo of some 170 RPM, supplemented with a prominent piano part (here starting with arpeggiated chords of the repetitive, overarching E-E-A-A-C-C-D-D harmonic schedule) which accompanies the uplifting vocals of singer Ingrid Simons.<sup>10</sup> Then, with a metric disruption on the fourth beat (after the phrase ‘let the rainwoods die’), the music suddenly halts, the butterfly is snatched dead at the synch point after which there is a general pause with only birds’ sounds. Subsequently, after a synched explosion, a low voice is heard articulating the film title while the title card displays *New Kids Turbo*. Next, the ‘Luv U More’ cover continues, now with its characteristic pumping beat over a sequence featuring character Gerrie doing clumsy wheelies on his bicycle through the streets of Maaskantje.<sup>11</sup> He then brakes and slips in front of his park friends, takes a few ADHD jumps before a car—the green Manta—crashes into him. The doors open and we hear a fragment of Elstak’s track ‘Blood, sweat and hardcore’, suggestively coming from the vehicle’s radio. Driver Rikkert couldn’t care less about the victim; he merely inspects his grille for a scratch (see Fig. 23.5). It illustrates the boys’ self-centred, ruthless asocial attitude that not only affects society around them, but the members themselves are equally not spared of physical and/or psychological torment. Their behaviour, underscored with appropriate, illuminating, oftentimes referential music, is simply a male gazed, even ‘nearly Neanderthal’, as Noël Carroll would likely describe their attitude (2014, p. 101). And these are exactly the characteristics which led to the supremely negative review in the Dutch quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*.

‘Sublimated bad taste and banal anarchy’, according to the newspaper’s critic Dana Linssen: ‘a waste of government funding’ [they received 74,200 Euro subsidy—EW], ‘especially in a climate in which it already is difficult to



Fig. 23.5 Rikkert inspects his grille (from *New Kids Turbo*)

realize quality films' (9 December 2010). Conclusion: Zero stars. The reviewer stressed that 'humour and morale don't go together well, yet New Kids Turbo! generates moral friction.' Subsequently, these critical lines echo Bourdieusian theory: 'The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 7).

Peter Verstraten grounded his study on humour and irony in post-war Dutch fiction film in 'the proviso that its local flavour, its Dutchness, cannot be described and pinpointed in exact terms, but only circumscribed at most' (Verstraten 2016, pp. 22–23). And '(t)he sheer fact that so many Dutch films contain a fair amount of humour is perhaps culturally ingrained', and links this to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938). 'The implication of his study that the fun of playing can function as a welcome antidote to a predominance of seriousness' (2016, p. 24). Dutch directors seem to have taken this seriously, no pun intended, given the substantial amount of comedy films which have attracted over a million cinema goers.

The two *New Kids* movies belong to those Dutch films with the highest attendance ever, and the first one of the franchise even made it to most popular film of all time in neighbouring Germany, albeit in a dubbed adaptation. The texts of the protagonists were post-synchronized by the actors themselves; their evident accents give the film an undeniable, yet rollicking Dutch flavor. Another interesting detail to add: for the German audience, the original title music of DJ Paul was replaced with a piece by the popular German happy hardcore band Scooter. Their 1995 hit single 'Friends' was reworked as the 'Friends Turbo' theme song. In the weekend of its release, it had already attracted some 200,000 visitors. The *New Kids* creations quickly reached cult camp status, including the local dialects used, their dazzling track suits, the demonstrations of sprays of cheap beer, the fast-food glorification, and the sometimes hilarious cameos of well-known Dutch actors and singers.<sup>12</sup>

The likelihood of a culturally ingrained humour in Dutch fiction films may be remarkable. Elements of a certain Dutchness can also be found in the choice of music employed in the *New Kids*' soundtracks: happy hardcore, eurodance, a carnival song and one with Frisian lyrics—all repertoire firmly rooted in a pop culture of the Netherlands. A discussion of Dutch identity or about the specifics of Dutch (pop) music, however, lies beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>13</sup> What we nonetheless can conclude is that music is an essential ingredient in the Dutch comedy films discussed here. When the music track offers a certain amount of congruency with the visuals and the narrative, this is often realized via a gross exaggeration which satirizes the scene. An example is the diegetic campy music in support of a sequence, or the abundance of strings underscoring a sentimental moment. The same occurs through the use of happy hardcore for over-stereotyping the habitus of the protagonists. Satire here is the stepsister of parody. When the music frames a scene with seemingly contradictory

references, it is exactly this incongruity which generates the wit. Stereotypical, multi-ethnic music for white trash? Sure, but something is off here. But, as pointed out before, *New Kids* is parody *pur sang*.

A bit of *hineininterpretieren* could reveal us that the soundtracks of the franchise display at least four strata of incongruent musical parody. There is, first and foremost, the over-arching allusion to the American boy band The New Kids on the Block, famous for their bubble-gum pop songs. The New Dutch Kids from the bad-ass block are of a completely other species, ‘nearly Neanderthal’, with their tracksuits and foul language, while the hardcore and gabber genres have not the slightest resemblance to the idiom of the American boyband. Second, the heteronormative attitude of the men from Maaskantje contradicts with their preference for happy hardcore, considered rather gay by their hip-hop peers. Third, the tremendously out-of-tune performance by the Ronnie character is a pastiche of the type of folkish fair singer who is often of trailer park origin, always with (too) much cash on hand, golden watches and ditto teeth, a perm, and expensive cars. A fourth incongruent parodic element forms the incorporation of singers from a completely deviant background, mostly with an impeccable image: Corry Konings expressing a male-centred ideal of fucking floosies while never having to work again is complete bollocks, and therefore, rather funny.

Having arrived at this point in the conclusion, a remark on musical taste and class may be appropriate. Relevant to this much-debated topic, cultural sociology commonly makes a distinction between a homology theory and the cultural omnivorism thesis. ‘The homology thesis claims that class positions throughout the class hierarchy are accompanied by specified cultural tastes and specialized modes of appreciating them while the cultural omnivorism thesis contends that elites are (increasingly) characterized by a breath of cultural tastes of any and all kinds’ (Veenstra 2015, p. 135). The *New Kids* franchise evidently embraces the homologist paradigm of lower classes displaying a musical taste that is considered lowbrow—adhering to the terminology coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984). The rap, admired by the Maaskantje mob, belongs to the lowbrow stratum as does hip-hop (Veenstra 2015, pp. 134, 145),<sup>14</sup> while the same can be said, by extension, for the camp music as featured. The filmmakers themselves, however, may be cultural omnivores due to their embracing exactly this cliché of musical taste. A sliver of superiority theory may, therefore, be relevant for understanding the humour at stake in the *New Kids*’ productions, augmenting the already distinguished incongruent elements of whimsicality. This double-bill could at least explain the broad popularity of the franchise with a still growing number of viewers, especially now that streaming services like Netflix are offering the films. And perhaps the fact that the franchise increasingly attracts scholarly attention could also be taken into account? Comedy film is not solely for the low-minded anymore; professors don’t shy away from it either, even embracing those movies that are downright vulgar, over the top, and crude in all corners.

## NOTES

1. <https://halal.amsterdam/item/new-kids-nitro/> accessed 2 December 2022.
2. IMDb Pro figures from 2 December 2022.
3. Verhoeven subsequently made fame in Hollywood, which could be seen as evidence of the films' success abroad.
4. Via the continued narrative thread of still owing money, Aerts also returns in *Nitro*.
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBZ8LM4ofS8> accessed 2 December 2022.
6. For him, the phenomenon of carnival offers a universe of ambivalent festive amusement, uniting oppositions, sublimating mortality and shying away from agony by assembling birth and death (Bakhtin 1984, p. 51).
7. <https://www.soundtrack.net/album/new-kids-turbo/> accessed 2 December 2022.
8. <https://www.soundtrack.net/album/new-kids-nitro/> accessed 2 December 2022.
9. In his very solid analysis of the New Kids films, musical references are largely missing, whereas the title sequence track of *New Kids Turbo* is erroneously identified as Elstak's 'Rainbow in the Sky' instead of 'Luv U More'.
10. The official clip features singer Shaydie (Saskia de Geus), but she was lipsynching.
11. The music track slightly diverges from the original single version.
12. Augmenting those already named, other famous Dutch actors who participated include Theo Maessen, Frank Lammers, Hans Teeuwen, Peter Faber, and the late Antonie Kamerling.
13. Boomkens (2018) could provide a start.
14. A trigger warning: Veenstra's study was conducted in urban, English-speaking Canada. Without having repeated this study in the Netherlands, I have, however, transferred it to the Dutch situation to create a point of reference.

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