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COMP II

Intertextuality in Gorillaz “Feel Good Inc.” and Porter

“...with yo sound/You kill the Inc...”

“Feel Good Inc.” was released in 2005 by the fictional band Gorillaz, deals with issues of freedom, consumerism, and lost dreams. The music video incorporates both animated footage and real life footage, which adds to the surreality of the song. The main storyline of the song is 2D (the lead singer) is trapped in the Feel Good Inc. tower, and dreams of being with Noodle (the guitarist) on her floating island. While 2D looks out the window, Murdoc Nichols (the bassist) and Russel Hobbs (the drummer) play in the background. In the end, however, 2D seemingly returns to his chair, and falls back into his monotonous singing of ‘*feel good*’.

Porter’s article touches on most things to do with ‘Feel Good Inc.’: iterability is used in the main theme of the song and in the actual structure of the song. For example, 2D repeats the chorus ‘feel good’ very robotically, as if he’s being led to say it continuously not of his own accord, but because he’s been brainwashed into thinking feeling good is the only thing in life.

Speaking of feeling good, let’s bring in Porter some more. Porter says that the artist and society are not separate: one feeds the other or “...the intertext exerts its influence partly in the form of audience expectation” (pg. 38, Rhetoric Review Vol. 5 No. 1). So what does the audience think feeling good is? It seems to be that feeling *good* is about consumerism and sex (Murdoc spend the majority of the music video being surrounded by a group of half naked women in the tower), but feeling *happiness* has to do with freedom and making your own choices: in 2D’s case, going to be with Noodle.

Everyone can relate to feeling like they’re missing something in their life, and that the world is crushing them down. ‘Feel Good Inc’ lyrics put words to that feeling. Lyrically, ‘Feel Good Inc.’ uses short references as intertext, as well as endless repetition. Most of the references are obscure and require a bit of reading into, which may confer with the overarching theme of Feel Good Inc. brainwashing the nation subtly, not with brute force.

And the community and fans surrounding Gorillaz respond accordingly, finding the references and putting their own spin on it, feeding the audience <=> artist dialogue. On the Genius lyrics page of ‘Feel Good Inc’ (which allows users to make their own comments), 2D sings “my dreams they got to kiss it/cause I don’t get sleep no”, which one member interprets as “his dreams can go kiss his ass cause they will never become a reality” (bottle_la_licur, Genius Feel Good Inc. Lyrics Page verse 1). Other references are more pop culture based, such as “Play these ponies at the track/It’s my chocolate attack”, which could be a reference to George Orwell’s 1984 in which “big brother” employs chocolate to divert the citizen’s attention from his dictator-like regime.

Furthermore, the intertext of references isn't limited to American idioms or culture. Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, Gorillaz' main creators, are both English, and several of their lyrics play to this point, the most prominent being the windmills featured in the lyrics and in the music video, something Albarn himself pointed out: "...[w]indmill' was one of [key words to help with the lyrical imagery]. It was a trigger to symbolize a different time and also a reference to the 'dark satanic mills' that William Blake wrote about in his verse of "Jerusalem" (Genius Feel Good Inc. Lyrics Page, chorus) The large 'dark satanic' mills could crush smaller independent mill businesses, similar to how mom and pop shops struggle with monopolizing chains like Walmart.

Music about freedom and feeling trapped in society is not new; its a theme that's played upon over and over again in tv shows, novels, and song lyrics. Gorillaz, though, takes a novel approach to it, because *the band itself is fictional*. They were created by two humans, who presumably, were audience members of bands at some point in their life, and have now taken that development of musicality to an extreme: they decide what the abnd does entirely, since the band is fictional. Porter states "...[t]he writer creates a text which produces some change in an audience. A poststructuralist rhetoric examines how audience (in the form of community expectations and standards) influences textual production and, in so doing, guides the development of the writer." (pg. 40, Rhetoric Review Vol. 5 No. 1)

If we're talking about changing the audience, this song was meant to make people in society look around and say "What is the Feel Good Inc. equivalent in my world?" Is it McDonald's which loads our country with extra calories that are addictive? Maybe Wal-Mart and Target, that push us to buy, buy, buy, perpetuating endless consumerism? Or perhaps it's the liquor and tobacco companies, literally supplying the population with drugs. Either way, Gorillaz' creators meant this to be thought-provoking, to get us out of our own consumerism driven world. And where did their observations of this world come from? Their own experiences with the world as they know it. Each one of them (the audience and the artist) are caught in a circle of repeating the same theme back and forth to one another: that the world is dysfunctional.

Finally, a closing thought: If 'Feel Good Inc.' makes a statement on our culture of materialism and that '[b]eing mindful with what you consume can keep us off that hedonic treadmill...' (Dan Harris, Twitter, 18 Apr 2017), and the audience truly does reflect that knowledge back to the artists (as proven by the fictional creation of Gorillaz by two audience members), why hasn't it sunk in? The iterability of the freedom theme is undeniable, but why haven't we gotten it through our heads after hundreds of years that material goods will not make us happy? Maybe we're playing a game of telephone instead of having a conversation between the artist and audience.

WORKS CITED

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LYRICS

Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

City's breaking down on a camel's back

They just have to go 'cause they don't know whack

So all you fill the streets, it's appealin' to see

You won't get out the county 'cause you're bad and free

You got a new horizon, it's ephemeral style

A melancholy town where we never smile

And all I wanna hear is the message beep

My dreams, they gotta kiss it, 'cause I don't get sleep, no...

Windmill, windmill for the land

Turn forever hand in hand

Take it all in on your stride

It is sticking, falling down

Love forever, love is free

Let's turn forever, you and me

Windmill, windmill for the land

Is everybody in?
Laughing gas these hazmats, fast cats
Lining 'em up like ass cracks
Ladies, ponies at the track
It's my chocolate attack
Shoot, I'm steppin' in heart of this here (yeah)
Care Bear rappin' in heart of this here (yeah)
Watch me as I gravitate, hahahahaha
Yo, we gon' ghost town this Motown
With yo' sound, you in the blink
Gon' bite the dust, can't fight with us
With yo' sound you kill the inc
So don't stop, get it, get it (get it)
Until you're cheddar heavy
You watch the way I navigate, hahahahaha
Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good
Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good
Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good
Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good
Windmill, windmill for the land
Turn forever hand in hand
Take it all in on your stride
It is sticking, falling down
Love forever, love is free
Let's turn forever, you and me
Windmill, windmill for the land

Is everybody in?

Don't stop, get it, get it

We are your captains in it (feel good)

Steady, watch me navigate, hahahahaha (feel good)

Don't stop, get it, get it

We are your captains in it (feel good)

Steady, watch me navigate, hahahahaha (feel good)

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good

Shake it, shake it, shake it, feel good