

HYBRIDISATION AND TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR
MUSIC. THE CASE OF THE VIRTUAL BAND GORILLAZ

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The virtual band Gorillaz was created by Blur frontman Damond Albarn and the comic book animator *Tank Girl*, Jamie Hewlett, in 1998. Since then, this band has become a reference in the music industry by mixing virtuality and presence in all its expressions (Jeffery, 2017). Indeed, this gang is presented as a group of four cartoons whose image has no reference to the real world or to fantasy, but is shown as a set of symbols through which the band manifests its identity (Prior, 2009). This line-up, consisting of Stuart Pot, Murdoc Niccals, Russel Hobbs and Noodle, has since its inception shown itself to audiences through multiple identities based on intertextual references and postmodern popular culture names (Rambarran, 2016). This multiplicity of identities together with the diversity of animation formats –2D, 3D, virtual reality– and projection –screens, holograms, virtual reality– constitutes the essence of this visual and musical project that has attracted many thousands of fans around the world. This paper aims to determine the band's use of the transmedia narrative, as well as the multiple hybridisations of formats that are shown not only in the recorded formats, but also in their performances. There, they include the most recent technological advances in audiovisual material and continue the conceptual and visual line started in virtuality. We focus on the analysis of their new album, *Cracker Island* (2023), designed as a hybrid and transmedia project, whose narrative moves from virtual to physical spaces. Thus, through a visual and narrative analysis applied to the content related to the new project, we study the transmedia narrative that is being developed on digital platforms –Instagram and YouTube–, from December 2022 to February 2023. It also includes an analysis of three music videos of the first singles from the album and completes with a study of the band's launch performance for the *Skinny Ape* track, held in London and New York. At this event, the band had the collaboration of Google who developed an app where attendees could watch "Gorillaz play in real life as Murdoc, 2D, Noodle and Russel literally tower above them, playing in the middle of two of the world's most iconic skylines" (Mondosonoro, 2022). The findings evidence the storytelling of transmedia and a unique visual universe that connects with audiences, as well as highlight the possibilities of audiovisuals for contemporary music industries, such as video-volumetric (VV),

immersive virtual environments (IVEs) and virtual intelligence or augmented reality, both for recorded and live formats.