Editorial 13.1

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Urban environments provide both the best hope for reducing overall human ecological impacts and for seeing how fully linked the human is to the non-human even when it seems they are separated, as discussed by Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* from 2008, Timothy Beatley in *Green Urbanism* from 2000, and Christopher Schliephake in *Urban Ecologies* from 2015. Schliephake claims that cities are porous sites exchanging materials and energy constantly across their systems so that "material processes constitute a connecting link between the two spheres [the "human-built" and "natural" environments]," and that "Materials like waste, toxics, or petroleum, easily traverse the boundaries between these different forms of environment and illustrate that their boundary is one of porosity and instability" (xiii). While potentially positive for efforts at sustainability and at reducing developmental spread, densely populated cities can certainly contain toxic accumulations and experience rapid spread of disease through their crowded populations; furthermore, coastal cities face ever more frequent flooding with the rising sea levels of the Anthropocene. When discussing portrayals of urban ecologies today, we must face the enormous challenges of representing their rapidly evolving existence in the face of climate change, the increasing threat of global pandemics, and the blatant inequalities revealed by environmental justice studies. Such challenges become increasingly urgent as the polar regions explode with heat so that their cold spreads down into unprepared southern cities like my own San Antonio, Texas, where many people froze to death in 2021; and as the war in Ukraine smashes land, buildings, and people so that human bodies are left scattered about the urban landscape as if melting from missiles and fire. Witnessing urban violence and destruction occurring with brutal speed in real time, we also face the latest IPCC report on the rapidly closing window of opportunity to slow climate disruption across the planet. Yet, I want to feature not just the war-torn, pandemic-damaged, and overheating or flooding cities in these editorial comments but rather the hope that urban communities offer for large numbers of people seeking the possibility of lower-impact lives rich with culture and green spaces alike. While our last volume, *Ecozon@* 12.2, 2021, addresses primarily the dramatic and inspiring implications of both ancient and anthropocenic rural areas depicted in the Eco-Georgic, our current issue considers Hip Hop Ecologies and thus primarily urban environments. In the cities across the world, we see environmental injustice brutally mapped across neighborhoods and yet also the potential for attending to the myriad voices who speak there, and what they say and sing about power, energy, ecologies, and representation.

Our special themed section guest edited by Timo Müller and Alain-Philippe Durand presents an exciting array of essays on the very urban genre of Hip Hop music. Their introduction corrects the overly simplistic assumption that Hip Hop focuses exclusively

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on social issues. They demonstrate in their discussion both the urban origins of Hip Hop as well as its recent reflections on environmentally relevant issues such as race, class, gender, public safety, and urban space. Müller and Durand note "it becomes clear that hip hop has from its origins been much concerned with environments, places and spaces, ecologies, and their effect on humans." In fact, they explain that "eco hip hop" since 2007 addresses such issues as sustainability, veganism, and environmental justice. The articles included in this volume explore Hip Hop's depiction of nature, urban spaces, the metaphors rap takes from the environment, concepts borrowing from or engaging in conversations with nature writing, the ecology of built environments, activism with water issues, and "The Cultural Ecology of Alaskan Indigenous Hip Hop." Through attention to such varied topics, Müller and Durand explain that "hip hop expands the purview of academic study in that it challenges culturally and conceptually limited notions of the environment." This urban music form provides opportunities for global voices of the marginalized and oppressed to be heard, and for us to rethink delineations of interdisciplinary environmental discourse.

With the increasingly apparent importance of studying urban environments in ecocriticism, it is not surprising that the four essays in our general section also include two focusing on urban genres and topics. The first essay by Alejandro Rivero-Vadillo connects nicely to the themed section's music focus with its groundbreaking study, "Greening Black Metal: The EcoGothic Aesthethics of Botanist's Lyrics." While acknowledging some of the darker and more politically problematic aspects of older Black Metal explained his brief history, Rivero-Vadillo provides one of the few discussions of the genre's attention to environmental issues with a focus on the US band Botanist. Using an apt frame of the EcoGothic, this important contribution notes that while "[e]arly Black Metal embraced the questionable dichotomy of "Civilization vs. Nature," and problematic forms of nihilism (environmentally speaking), Botanist, in contrast, poeticizes "a mythical space that seems to sanctify Nature," especially plants. Rivero-Vadillo demonstrates how the dark power of nature in Botanist's lyrics rises up against human industrial destruction and, with EcoGothic overtones, fights back with its monstrous green forest and self-regulating vegetal universe. This verdant realm puts into question, Rivero-Vadillo concludes, the very categories and hierarchies of human and nature in the Chthulucene.

Leonardo Chinchilla Mora's essay, "Capitalism Clothes it: Toxic Resilience and Undemocratization in the Face of Climate Change," also focuses on urban themes, specifically the discourse of flooded cities in the Anthropocene. Studying the two climate-change novels, Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), Chinchilla Mora demonstrates how the rhetoric of resilience is used by capitalistic discourse to continue destructive and toxic practices even in the face of the massive flooding that destroys New York City in the two novels. Furthermore, the essay makes important contributions to urban studies with its focus on how public spaces prove to be far more democratic in terms of helping the most people in times of crisis. Private spaces, on the other hand, are reserved for the "elite" and offer poor long-term and large scale options for surviving urban life in climate change. Chinchilla Mora concludes that these two novels "imply that private-focused economy undermines democracy and (the defense of) public places. It is only by reconfiguring the blueprints for the human envisioning of places *together with* the surrounding environment—*not dominant* to it" that there is potential hope for human and non-human alike.

The two additional essays in the general section offer insights into rural environments and how they connect to urban spaces in terms of interactions with the nonhuman and agricultural practices: Vanesa Roldán Romero's discussion of sheep and post/colonial discourse in Ireland: "Colonising the Nonhuman Other in Anne Haverty's *One Day as a Tiger*," and Jing Hu's study of environmental racism in the Chinese Tibetan-Jiarong author, Alai's 2005-2009 trilogy, *Hollow Mountain: A Story from a Mountainside Tibetan Village*: "La "línea divisoria" en el *hukou*: La injusticia medioambiental y la población rural en *Montaña hueca* de Alai." Roldán Romero studies Haverty's 1997 novel in terms of how the human Martin adopts colonial language and practices in his treatment of his genetically-engineered sheep, Missy, who has human DNA. Exploiting and leaving Missy to die, Martin fails to overcome the colonial past of the Republic of Ireland. Instead, Martin stands in for the "Celtic Tiger Ireland" with its turn to internal colonization deflected onto the sheep: "Physically dominated by the Irishman, the sheep is treated as property to be exploited by the coloniser, Martin, until her usefulness is exhausted. Here, she will be sacrificed, as if mirroring how the British used to sacrifice Irish culture and traditions." Hu's study similarly combines social justice issues with eco-social realities, attending to how Alai "identifies the rural population as one of the potential collectives exposed to great levels of environmental pressure," even as there is little discourse in contemporary China about environmental justice. She looks specifically at "how social inequality established by the *hukou* (system of household registration) led to environment-related consequences for rural communities during the 20th century." The registration allowed a specific division between agricultural and rural populations that led to exploitation and further pressure on those living on the land. These essays thus explore various narratives from across the world about the porous and messy boundaries between the rural and the urban spaces.

The Creative Writing and Arts section expands the discussion of green hip hop, presenting three original pieces of lyrical autobiographical narratives that all link in creative ways different social issues to environmental justice. The first piece by Anthony Kwame Harrison expresses how Black communities are often excluded from environmental discussions. Accompanying his piece are three images by the digital artist Ahad Pace, including the marvelous image on the cover of the issue. Steve Gadet's fictional tale, *Même les Tueurs Dorment* (*Even the Killers Sleep*), describes the life of a young drug dealer in ghetto of Texaco in Martinique's capital city, Fort-de-France. Finally, Leonardo Chinchilla Mora, the author of one of the essays in the general section, also contributes a poem, "Suppose a World," considering the utopian hope for the future alongside fear of ecological devastation with a lyrical call to rethink our current practices.

This volume includes a review essay of *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* and *Mountains and the German Mind: Translations from Gessner to Messner*; and reviews of the following seven books: *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene*; *Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanting the Earth; The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought*; *Deutschsprachiges Nature Writing von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart. Kontroversen, Positionen, Perspektiven; Black to Nature: Pastoral Return and African American Culture*; *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung*; and *Visualizando el cambio. Humanidades ambientales / Envisioning Change: Environmental Humanities.*

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Hip Hop Ecologies: Mapping the Field(s) An Introduction

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Hip hop was not born in Kansas. It was not born on a farm or a ranch, in a forest, or in the jungle. Hip hop was born in the South Bronx, New York, in the United States—a predominantly urban environment. From its origins, and as it kept spreading to new places, images of hip hop have always been closely associated with urban environments, marginalized areas, and housing projects, often at the outskirts of large cities. For example, in France and Germany, where the editors of this *Ecozon@* special issue grew up, hip hop did not first appear in the countryside; it took off in Paris, Hamburg, and Frankfurt's suburbs. Against this background, when the vast majority of people think about any of hip hop culture's elements—rap music (emceeing and Djing), b-boying, or graffiti art—they do not usually associate them with environmental issues such as sustainability, ecology, global warming, water preservation, deforestation, melting icebergs, pollution, displacement of indigenous peoples, or wildlife conservation, nor with people like Henry David Thoreau, Jane Goodall, or Greta Thunberg.

This mental separation, which digital artist Ahad Pace calls out in the cover art for our special issue, can also be observed in the academic field of hip hop studies. Scholars have focused on social debates around race (Jeffries), class (Harkness), gender (Rose), public safety (McCann), urban space (Forman), nationality (Tiongson), and a range of other issues. The artistic development and aesthetic features of hip hop have also been the subject of comprehensive studies (Barret; Bradley; Wolbring). One topic that is rarely discussed, meanwhile, is the relationship between hip hop and the environment.

When one pays closer attention to classic hip hop productions, such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982) ("It's like a jungle sometimes"), A Tribe Called Quest's "Green Eggs and Ham" (1990), Dead Prez's "Be Healthy " (2000), Doc Gynéco's "Dans ma rue" (1996), MC Solaar's "Jane et Tarzan" (2017), Fettes Brot's "Gangsta Rap" (1995) or Sammy Deluxe's "Weck mich auf" (2001) to only name a few, it becomes clear that hip hop has from its origins been concerned with environments, places and spaces, ecologies, and their effect on humans. Nevertheless, as far as we know, there was not a consistent, clearly identified and claimed style of

environmental hip hop. This may be changing with the arrival of artists like Ietef Vita, also known as DJ Cavem, an ex-Black Panther known for coining the term "eco hip hop" in 2007, who focuses his art on food and environmental justice. Originally from Denver, Colorado, DJ Cavem describes himself as a rapper, activist, educator, organic gardener, and vegan chef. His 2012 album *The Produce Section* is "part album, part curriculum," and offers "lessons on organic gardening, plant-based recipes and alternate uses of energy." DJ Cavem founded the Vita Earth Foundation, a non-profit organization "dedicated to promoting wellness, eating healthy and environmental awareness" (Chef Ietef).

It is this relationship between hip hop, well-being, sustainability, and the environment that our special issue sets out to examine. Hip hop does not pursue an environmentalist agenda in any narrow sense. Its focus is traditionally on urban rather than natural life, on the city rather than the country. Nevertheless, an environmental perspective on hip hop promises to enrich our understanding of the ways in which popular cultural forms shape and are shaped by environmental concerns. In this spirit, *Hip Hop Ecologies* situates itself at the intersection of two innovative, fast-growing fields: hip hop studies and environmental studies. Such an approach can direct our attention to important dimensions of hip hop that have been neglected in public and scholarly debates. Conversely, hip hop offers unconventional vistas that challenge narrow conceptions of the environment and its academic study.

The following articles highlight various aspects of hip hop that have remained at the margins of scholarship: its depiction of nature; environmental dimensions of the urban spaces it negotiates; the growing significance of rural hip hop both inside and outside the United States; the environmental dimension of hip hop aesthetics, which manifests in such concepts as 'flow' and 'realness'; the many metaphors rap music takes from the environment; hip hop that enters into dialogue with more established environmental genres such as nature writing; the material and semantic environments of hip hop culture (such as the 'concrete jungle'); the material conditions of hip hop production and reception; the structures of environmental in/justice in which hip hop is entangled on scales ranging from the local to the global; and the growing use of hip hop for environmentalist activism.

Discussion of these issues has remained limited to a handful of articles and book chapters, most of which are predicated on the concept of urban ecology (Mexal; Rosenthal; Ingram; Balestrini). These publications already indicate that the relationship between hip hop and environmental studies works both ways. On the one hand, ecocritical approaches promise a more comprehensive understanding of hip hop. Ingram's survey of environmental issues in hip hop, for example, ranges from environmental justice discourses in 'conscious' or 'reality' rap all the way to the appropriation of hip hop for corporate greenwashing. Since Ingram finds few examples of the former, he widens the scope to include artists like Arrested Development and Michael Franti who combine hip hop with other genres that speak more directly to mainstream environmentalism.

On the other hand, hip hop expands the purview of academic study in that it challenges culturally and conceptually limited notions of the environment. This corrective

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impulse already made itself felt in Debra Rosenthal's pioneering article, "'Hoods and the Woods: Rap Music as Environmental Literature" (2006), which brings Lawrence Buell's classic criteria of environmental literature to bear on rap music. Rosenthal's impulse is exploratory: she wants to identify rap songs that speak to mainstream environmentalism. Her findings are limited in number, partly because she confines her scope to chart-breaking rappers, partly because she relies on Buell's relatively narrow conception of the environmental: he asks for "ethical" descriptions of the nonhuman environment that foreground ecological processes and human-nonhuman entanglement (7). The examples Rosenthal does find—Grandmaster Flash's "The Message," Black Star's "Respiration" (1998), and Mos Def's "New World Water" (1999)—already present a challenge to this definition. Only "New World Water" fits the classic ecocritical framework comfortably, while the two other songs highlight the environmental dimensions of urban space—a realm that was only beginning to draw ecocritical attention at the time.

Both environmental activism and ecocritical scholarship emerged in the predominantly white, educated middle classes of North America and Western Europe. Accordingly, these movements were predicated on environmental experiences shaped by leisure rather than labor, by aesthetic pleasure rather than existential necessity, by the country (or the leafy suburb) rather than the city, and by possession rather than exclusion. Hip hop offers a different perspective by articulating the experiences of racially and socially marginalized groups. These experiences are marked by exclusion from policed middle-class environments, especially in white neighborhoods, wealthy suburbs, and many rural regions. Hip hop negotiates ecologies that lie outside the pale of white environmentalism, especially urban and ethnic ones. It draws attention to issues of unequal access, exploitation, and environmental (in)justice that often remain invisible or underestimated in mainstream environmental discourse. Humans seldom appear as sovereign spectators in these ecologies; on the contrary, their lives and livelihoods depend on their material environment and their knowledge of how to act in it.

As an aesthetically inventive and politically resistant art form, hip hop thus challenges and expands the very meaning of terms like "the environment," "nature," and "ecology." The case studies in our special issue trace how hip hop negotiates human and nonhuman agency, non-dualistic understandings of human-environment interaction, the social practices and cultural knowledge manifest in material environments, and the interdependence of environment and identity. In working through these questions, hip hop challenges conventional understandings of natural but also of cultural environments. The case studies present hip hop that revises historical manifestations of environmental thinking such as Darwinism and literary naturalism; hip hop that weaves ecological principles into cultural assemblages; hip hop collections that work like ecosystems; and hip hop that predates and expands the new materialist recognition that social structures are enmeshed with and shaped by the material world.

Alexander Rüter's "Politics that Matter in Nas's *Illmatic*" starts the issue off with a rereading of an all-time classic. Rüter draws on actor-network theory and new materialism to trace how Nas's *Illmatic* explores the urban ecology of New York's housing projects. The more capacious conceptions of the environment offered by these theories

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enable Rüter to demonstrate that the ecology of *Illmatic* is one of built environments as well as the social practices of its inhabitants. His reading pivots on the term "concrete," which draws out the interdependencies among the material, social, and mental dimensions of Nas's urban ecology. The concrete used to build the housing project shapes the social opportunities and the mental landscapes of those who inhabit them. From this perspective, *Illmatic* emerges as an early negotiation of the systemic incarceration of African Americans, not only in prisons, but in the material, social, and mental containers of black urban environments.

The range of hip hop's environmental scope becomes evident when Rüter's article is complemented by our second contribution, Stefan Benz's survey of "The Hydrocentric Imagination of Hip Hop." Ranging across two decades of rap music, Benz demonstrates the usefulness of classic ecocriticism for highlighting a neglected side of hip hop: its environmental activism. Benz's case studies, songs by Yasiin Bey, Taboo, and Supaman, all address specific water crises in their music. What is more, all of them reveal how racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and anthropocentrism have combined to foment these crises. Benz positions these songs in a longer history of water thinking in hip hop that manifests in such poetological metaphors as the flow. He shows that hip hop not only indicts the systemic inequalities that surface in water crises, but that it actively develops alternative, "hydrosocial" approaches that account for the entanglement of human and nonhuman elements.

Another set of elements integral to hip hop's aesthetics comes to the fore in the third article, Dominik Steinhilber's "Smoking Weed for the Planet." Weed had long been a prominent substance in gangsta rap but became ubiquitous in the lyrics and imagery of Snoop Dogg after his conversion to Snoop Lion. At first sight, Snoop Lion may seem to glorify marihuana use much as he glorified various other gangsta accessories in his earlier career. Steinhilber shows, however, that Snoop's conversion album *Reincarnated* (2013), and especially the track "Smoke the Weed," negotiates the human-environment relationship in a complex, surprising manner. The track draws on metaphors of seeds, weeds, and plant growth to discuss how social and environmental life relate, and how they can be changed for the better. Based on a nuanced close reading of track and album, Steinhilber shows that the quirky environmentalism of Snoop's recent oeuvre opens up new perspectives not only on hip hop but also on key categories of environmental discourse such as nature and the natural.

Such categories are shaped by specific cultural practices and their interaction with the land. The next article, Nassim Balestrini's "The Cultural Ecology of Alaskan Indigenous Hip Hop," therefore steps out of the mainstream of American hip hop and examines rap music by Indigenous youth from Juneau, Alaska. Not only do these rappers act on the margins of the music business, Balestrini shows, but their Indigenous heritage provides them with an understanding of human-environment relations that goes deeper than most mainstream rappers' or environmentalists'. Rather than treating the environment as mere setting, these rappers treat it as a source of cultural and historical knowledge that affects their own relationships with their families, tribes, and societies. Balestrini traces this environmental knowledge with the help of ecocritical approaches such as cultural

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ecology, which that she innovatively combines with Indigenous scholarship on the interrelations among place, language, knowledge, and cultural identity. She offers close readings of three rap songs and videos by a group of rappers around Arias Hoyle and Chris Talley to trace how they combine critiques of settler colonialism with the recovery of locally rooted Indigenous knowledge.

Traditionally a voice of the marginalized, hip hop is excellently suited to articulate concerns about environmental justice. The Indigenous perspectives Balestrini traces are among many that challenge the nexus of social and environmental exploitation. Julius Greve's contribution, "Hip Hop Naturalism: A Poetics of Afro-Pessimism," examines the intersections of hip hop and Afro-pessimism to elucidate the theoretical implications of this challenge. Starting from the observation that many rappers deploy a vocabulary of biological determinism, Greve inquires into the affinities of hip hop with literary naturalism on the one hand and Afro-pessimism on the other. Both of these movements conceive sociality, and indeed the human itself, as predetermined by forces beyond the individual's control. Greve reads rappers such as Mobb Deep and Kendrick Lamar against the Afro-pessimist writings of Frank Wilderson III to argue that Afro-pessimism can be regarded as the philosophy of this naturalist hip hop—much like Darwinian thought was the philosophy of nineteenth-century naturalist literature. This surprising insight will enable researchers to elucidate more thoroughly the ways hip hop negotiates ecological discourses and ideas, especially as they pertain to naturalizations of anti-black racism.

The concluding article, Marta Werbanowska's "Ecojustice Poetry in *The BreakBeat Poets* Anthologies," takes us beyond rap music and beyond the boundaries of the United States to explore how hip hop has shaped the articulation of environmental perspectives in new areas of cultural expression. Werbanowska offers a pioneering analysis of hip hop poetry, an innovative genre that has emerged at the intersection of rap lyricism, written poetry, and performance poetry. The genre was codified by the appearance of *The BreakBeat Poets*, an anthology of hip hop poetry that has inspired a series of four volumes to date. Even more so than rap music, hip hop poetry foregrounds questions of ecology and environmental justice. In close readings of hip hop poems by black women, Werbanowska identifies a range of poetic strategies that these poets employ to reveal the structural inequalities underlying environmental crises: a dramatic monologue that discusses analogies between human and animal exploitation; a childhood memory that restores a culture of place erased by rural gentrification; and a blues poem that forges bonds of kinship between disenfranchised humans and a nature that has never been granted a voice to begin with—but acquires one in this poem.

These poems expand the scope of environmental justice, and thus of hip hop poetry, to the transnational interrelations of human mobility, global capitalism, and the planetary ecosystem. This transnational perspective is underrepresented in our issue, which focuses mostly on hip hop from and within the United States. While hip hop emerged in American inner cities, as we noted in opening this introduction, it was shaped by migrants in its very beginnings and spread quickly around the world. Hip hop is today a global voice of the marginalized and oppressed—that is, of those groups most affected by the environmental damage created by industrialized countries in North America,

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Europe, and Asia. Our issue begins to explore these transnational entanglements by incorporating postcolonial and indigenous perspectives that puncture the boundaries of the nation state, including the English language. Further research into hip hop ecologies will no doubt expand this transnational scope. After all, the environment does not heed national or cultural boundaries. In an age defined by global environmental crises, hip hop is primed to become a voice of the environmentally marginalized and oppressed as well.

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Politics that Matter in Nas's *Illmatic*[1]

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Abstract

This essay focusses on a single, seminal piece of American hip-hop music: Nas's *Illmatic*. Taking prompts from ANT and new materialism, and from Bruno Latour more specifically, I argue that *Illmatic* can and should be read as an exploration of the specific urban ecology from which it originated. This ecology is one of the urban landscapes of New York's housing projects as much as of the social practices of their inhabitants. At the same time, it is a concrete articulation, to borrow Latour's famous phrase, of the racist policies that those who planned and oversaw its construction aimed to enforce. Though Nas's music is often thought of as not as explicitly political as that of Public Enemy or KRS-One, a reading of it in this context reveals that it has no less political potential. Throughout the album, there is a detailed and complex engagement with the housing projects and how they contain and modify the possible mental landscapes of those who inhabit them. Incarceration, a central question for both Nas and Black America, must then be thought of as something that is not limited to the milieu of the prison. Instead, it is the prevailing condition in the urban ecologies of the housing projects. This imprisonment Nas understands in two ways: materially and mentally, working on bodies and working on minds. The very possibilities of thought are limited and formed by the ecologies of concrete that they take place in. Ultimately, through a close and careful reading of *Illmatic*, it becomes clear that the oppression of African Americans is not simply a social one: it is material. The housing projects themselves are an attempt to construct an urban environment that constrains thought, to make impossible the imagination of an alternative.

Keywords: Nas, Illmatic, hip hop, materiality, urban ecology.

Resumen

Este ensayo se centra en una obra fundadora de la música hip-hop estadounidense: *Illmatic* de Nas. Tomando como base las propuestas teóricas de ANT y del nuevo materialismo, específicamente las de Bruno Latour, argumento que *Illmatic* puede y debería leerse como una exploración de la ecología urbana específica desde la cual se originó. Esta ecología es aquella del paisaje urbano de la planificación urbanística de la ciudad de Nueva York tanto como la de las prácticas de sus pobladores. Al mismo tiempo, es una articulación concreta, tomando prestada la famosa frase de Latour, de las políticas racistas de aquellos que la planificaron y supervisaron con el fin de reforzar una situación que les convenía. A pesar de que la música de Nas no se percibe como política en primera instancia, por lo menos no tanto como la de Public Enemy o KRS-One, se revela con un similar potencial político cuando se hace una lectura en este contexto. En todo el álbum hay un detallado y complejo compromiso con la planificación urbanística y con la manera en que se incorporan y modifican los posibles paisajes mentales de aquellos que habitan esos lugares. El encarcelamiento, un tema central para ellos y la América Negra, debe ser considerado entonces como algo que no se limita al mundo de la cárcel. En lugar de eso, afirmo que la prisión es la condición predominante de las ecologías urbanas relacionadas con la planificación urbanística. Nas entiende el encarcelamiento de dos maneras: material y mentalmente, como un trabajo de cuerpos y mentes. Las propias posibilidades de pensamiento están limitadas al tiempo que formadas por las ecologías de hormigón en las que tienen lugar. En última instancia, a través de una atenta y cuidadosa lectura de *Illmatic*, se revela de manera clara que la

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opresión sufrida por los afroamericanos no es únicamente social, sino también material. La propia planificación urbanística es un intento de construir un medio ambiente urbano que limite el pensamiento con el fin de hacer imposible imaginar una alternativa.

Palabras clave: Nas, Illmatic, hip hop, materialidad, ecología urbana.

Hip hop scholarship focused on the Golden Age, especially in the historical or sociological traditions, shows a degree of ambivalence towards its object. Hip hop, so the argument goes at times, has failed to connect with the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black power struggle, has moved away from political and social issues towards a masturbatory celebration of itself and the material wealth it yields, or has become, to put it charmingly simply, part of the problem rather than the solution.[2] As a counterpoint, groups and artists such as Public Enemy, dead prez, KRSOne, Sister Souljah, or even NWA are among those invoked as representatives of what some call "message rap" (Allen 159) and others "socially and politically conscious rap" (Alridge 230). Debates of this kind, often normative, over what African American art is supposed to be like, where on a spectrum ranging from *l'art pour l'art* to political propaganda it should be located, precede hip hop by years and decades, with the scholarship cited above tending towards the latter pole.[3] While more overtly political hip hop is certainly not the only hip hop to have entered academic discourse, it more readily offers itself as the object for readings interested in political potentials. Despite these tendencies, reading the record treated in the following, Nas's 1994 debut *Illmatic*, as political is not breaking news to anyone. It is rather the *way* in which it holds political potential—that is, the ecological dimension of the record rather than questions primarily concerned with representation, documentation or identity—that I aim to shift into focus here.

Throughout *Illmatic*, Nas does not try to directly articulate a political position or even a political analysis. The angle he takes is a more indirect one. In an inversion of Bruno Latour's famous phrase "articulated in concrete" (*Pandora's Hope* 186), Nas articulates concrete. Throughout the album he is concerned with the materiality and geographic specificity of the oppression of African Americans. His poetics attempt to make the housing projects themselves speak of policy, rather than him having to do so. From there, Nas also approaches the difficulty of understanding the connection between this materiality and the seeming immateriality of thought, of what one might call a project mentality. Taken as a whole then, *Illmatic* constructs a complicated mapping of the relations and interactions between materiality, urban space, and thought to ultimately trace what might be called an urban ecology. Further, Nas's poetry draws a line from the individual to the communal and offers something akin to a pedagogy.

[2] See, for example, Allen 159–91, Alridge 226–52. Though these texts may never make their bias explicit, the disregard for any form of hip hop that is not openly and singularly political (and even sometimes for hip hop that is) is a rather easily legible subtext. Outside of academic scholarship, the pathologizing of hip hop as turning its listeners, especially young black men, into violent criminals is so common as to not need reference. For an overview of the arguments commonly fielded against hip hop, see Rose 33–131.

[3] These debates are far too complex to be easily recapped with any brevity. Still, for two prominent and somewhat paradigmatic parts of this ongoing debate, see Du Bois 60–68, Baldwin 11–18.

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To make this argument, I will not only provide a careful reading of passages from *Illmatic*'s songs but will first briefly sketch a theoretical framework to aid in conceptualizing the relation between social forces, politics, and materiality. To do so, I will draw on one of the most important and likely the most famous names in what has come to be known as new materialism, Bruno Latour. Though an adequate assessment of the totality of Latour's material sociology is far beyond the scope of this essay, two key elements of what is commonly referred to as actor-network theory will provide me with a sufficient framework to enter into dialogue with both Nas's poetry and the surrounding scholarship.

Latour challenges what he thinks of as mainstream sociology—a "sociology of the social" (*Reassembling* 8)—in a seemingly simple way: by taking materiality seriously. Objects, things and matter are ignored in sociology, so he contends, in favor of a kind of social constructivism that finds its explanation in itself: society is constructed socially; social factors construct society. Latour does not break with the constructivist argument that "power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed" (*Reassembling* 64) and are not natural or unalterable forces. He argues, however, that while society is constructed, that construction is not a social one, but rather a material one. Society is made of concrete, steel, glass, and other forms of matter. This is how, his argument goes, society has come to be durable at all. To maintain a construction that really is purely social in the sense of subject-subject relations without any mediation through objects takes tremendous effort, as it requires the constant repetition of rituals and performances to install and maintain the order of that society. Drawing on the studies by Shirley Strum of baboons and the social constellations they form, Latour exemplifies this: the apes have no material means of maintaining social relations, thus these relations must be enacted again and again to continue to exist (*Reassembling* 64–70). This continuous repetition of the performance of the social also renders it unstable. Any ritual can change or be disrupted, in fact any purely social society is in a constant process of decay that the constant social construction of that society can only delay but never stop.

What holds society together then, is "the power exerted through entities that don't sleep and associations that don't break down […] and, to achieve such a feat, many more materials than social compacts have to be devised" (*Reassembling* 70). Material things are what shield any society from the rapid decay that a purely social one experiences constantly, as the baboon example illustrates for Latour. For this reason, these things are things only in a specific sense,[4] as making the distinction between humans and things, active subjects and a world of passive objects, may otherwise suggest a general asymmetry in the distribution of agency that does not exist. Human actors exist in a world of non-human actors, living and non-living. All actors are capable of making other actors, human or non-human, act, which is to say that all actors have agency. This does not impose a total symmetry between humans and non-humans in which any actor is as important in society as any other. But it allows for an understanding of the social as not only made up of the agencies of human actors, but also of those of non-human actors.

[4] For Latour's own distinction between the two terms and the implications of this distinction, see "Why Has Critique" 225–48.

Society is social only insofar as the domain of the social is extended to include materiality and the interactions between humans and non-humans. How much materiality comes to bear or how important it is varies from situation to situation, and any assessment of non-human actors thus always has to be time and site specific. To exclude materiality from any study of society is to make an artificial separation that does not correspond to the entanglements of humans and non-humans in the world.

One of Latour's most well-known examples illustrates how the process of delegation, the process of moving purely social interactions (interactions between human actors) into the realm of materiality, works (*Pandora's Hope* 186–88). The policeman observing that the speed limit be obeyed by watching the drivers of the passing cars (human/human interaction) is replaced with a sign spelling out the speed limit for the drivers to see and adhere to (human/non-human interaction). And then, finally, the process involves no human actors anymore, at least not directly: a speedbump is installed. What takes place now is no longer an interaction between the driver and anything at all; rather, the imperative of observing the speed limit is directed at the car itself. If the car goes too fast over the bump, so be it, but the damage done by the interaction of the materials will serve both as punishment and to make the car stop. There is of course a difference here: for an interaction that involved policemen or signs the imperative to obey the speed limit was a moral one to not break the law. Now the imperative is a more coercive one: submit or break your car. Yet from the point of view of an observer, there is no difference: the speed limit is adhered to. This is precisely why objects have agency without there being an "absurd 'symmetry between humans and non-humans'" (*Reassembling* 76) in how agency is employed: what matters for Latour is less the question of consciousness, but rather the question of what can make something or someone else act.

Thus, the speed limit is "articulated in concrete" (*Pandora's Hope* 186). It is still spelled out, perhaps more clearly than ever, and Latour's formulation is of great importance. Somehow, language and materiality seem to intersect at this point. The relation between the speed bump and meaning is a strange one: meaning exists clearly in the imperative to not go too fast over the bump, but this meaning no longer resides in the realm of language, but in that of materiality. To shift intentions, policies, and plans into the realm of the material and out of written or spoken language is the other part of what it means to delegate a task of any kind to objects. Though they are absent both spatially and more importantly temporally, those who put the speed limit into law and those who planned and built the speed bump are present within it. Materiality has made their intentions durable in a way that a purely social construction could not have done. To delegate means not only to shift agency towards non-humans, but also to bridge time and space.

What a careful study of non-human actors attempts then is "to produce *scripts* of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do" (*Reassembling* 79). An account of materiality can reveal which routines of behavior (scripts) it dictates, what it is making other actors do and not do. To obey the speed limit is the script that the speed bump forces drivers to enact and so it is with the entirety of materially constructed

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society: humans and non-humans exist in a world of scripts that are given to them to enact. The writers of these scripts may be long gone, but their imperatives continue to exist in what they left behind. In this sense Latour's theory is an ecological one: it replaces the human subject as center of the world with an infinitely complex web of relations between humans and non-humans, neither of which hold an a priori privileged position. This means that he replaces acting subjects and passive environments as parameters of analysis with a milieu of interrelated humans and non-humans, where there is no position of being absolutely outside.

That materiality, understood through these conceptual lenses, is of extreme importance to an art form as urban as hip hop comes hardly as a surprise.[5] With *Illmatic*, this relation is made explicit in more ways than just the lyrics: both the cover and the LP as object emphasize the link to materiality and a geographically specific urban context. The image on the cover is composed of two superimposed images: a photograph of the Queensbridge housing project in Queens, New York City, and a photograph of Nas himself as a young boy. The two images cannot be easily hierarchized; neither of them seems consistently more important or more in the foreground than the other. While in the lowest quarter of the image the child might be said to be more dominant, as mouth and chin obscure the image of the blacktop, this distinction cannot be made as easily anymore once the middle of the cover is considered. Here, eyes and nose are at best on the same level as the parked cars and the vanishing point of the street, but they might also be seen to be receding behind them. The point here is not to make a clear distinction, but rather to point towards the impossibility of making that distinction in the first place. The child is in the landscape, but the landscape is just as much in the child. Queensbridge is Nas and Nas is Queensbridge. Yet any heroism or triumph that such a claim might imply is squashed right away by the facts of the image: he is a child and not a grown adult; his look is somber at best and neither triumphant nor possessive. This is not a claim to ownership, but one to an origin. And already in this headshot of the child in which the architecture of the project seems to imprint itself both figuratively (in terms of the semiotics of the image) and literally (in terms of its material production) there resides a tension that the songs will go on to explore at length. The head as the place of the brain, the locale of thought, is filled with the concrete of the projects. The question the cover asks is already an ecological one: how does this (built) environment influence and constitute thought?

The record itself is, quite obviously, also material. The sound is engraved, made manifest materially, on the disc. Whatever device is used to play it reverses that process; it moves from materiality to sound. But materiality here matters more than this bit of technological trivia: the two sides of the record, instead of simply being named the A and B side, are called 40th Side North and 41st Side South, which are "the two streets that divide Nas's beloved Queensbridge, the largest housing project in the United States" (Daulatzai 6). Thus, already before listening to the record, it is to be understood as a geography, a mapping even, of Queensbridge. The record is located firmly in the very specific urban

[5] For a historical account of the origins of hip hop in New York, see Perkins 1–45. For a more contemporary complication of hip hop's urban origins, see Jeffries 706–15.

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milieu of a housing project in New York. This is something that any reading of *Illmatic*, even before getting to the songs themselves, must contend with: materiality, especially the materiality of a specific urban environment, is central to whatever will unfold in the songs.

At the center of *Illmatic*'s lyrics, as Matthew Gasteier argues throughout his study of the album, lie paradoxes. These, for him, are constituted by Nas's negotiation of two seemingly mutual exclusives: individual/community, fantasy/reality, and faith/despair. Gasteier argues that on *Illmatic* these binaries are shown to be anything but exclusive, but rather that Nas's poetry finds one in the other. From the individual perspective that is presented in, for example, the passage of first-person narrative in the first verse of "N.Y. State of Mind," Nas moves to writing a communality of experience that unites those who grow up and live in New York's housing projects. The outros of two songs are indicative here: "The World is Yours" and "Represent." In the former, the title of which is another of the paradoxes which are maintained and never resolved on *Illmatic*, Nas ends by shouting out Queensbridge, but moves on to mention uptown, Brooklyn, Mount Vernon, Long Island, Staten Island, and South Bronx. The move here is from the specificity of a single milieu, that of Queensbridge, to a generality that combines all these places, what one might call the metropolitan area around New York City. It is simultaneously a reportage on the reality of life in the environment of the housing projects and an imagining of a utopian community.[6] "Represent" concludes with another way of conceptualizing the movement from individual to community.[7] "This goes out to everybody in New York / That's living the real fucking life and every projects, all over" (2:58-3:06) is followed by a long list of shout-outs, but this time not to geographically determined communities as with "The World is Yours," but to single individuals. This is precisely the paradox at hand: the individuals in the geography, the geography in the individuals. One song is not a correction of the other, but they exist parallel to each other; both versions must be thought simultaneously. They cannot be resolved, as Gasteier argues about the dichotomies that he takes as guides for his reading, to be simply one in the other, a situation that would best be described as a truce. There is ultimately no reconciliation of these contradictions: it is their maintained adversity that makes them paradoxes and that, further, constitutes their poetic potential.

Alas, this argument for the centrality that paradox has in relation to poetry comes as no surprise. Paradox, as Cleanth Brooks argued long before hip hop, let alone hip hop

[6] Dara Waldron argues that these two imperatives, of documentary realism and of utopian imagination constitute the two poles between which the texts of *Illmatic* constantly oscillates. In this back and forth, so his argument goes, lies the political potential of Nas's art: to imagine a different and better place that is not (the two meanings of utopia) and to grapple with the realities of life in the projects. See Waldron 1–19.

[7] "Represent" is also part of a history of songs that aim to represent Queensbridge, especially against attacks in song form from Bronx artists. This history of dispute makes the last shout-out of the song, the one to South Bronx, even more remarkable. In spite of a tradition of conflict, one that Nas is very well aware of as the song's title and references to some of the Queensbridge musicians that preceded him make clear, "Represent" moves from the representation of just Queensbridge to that of a wider community. For the history of the back and forth between Queensbridge and South Bronx see Glaude 179–94. Glaude also offers a short cultural history of the Queensbridge housing project. For a more detailed historical view of housing projects in the U.S. up to the 1980s, see Wright, especially, though not exclusively, 220–39.

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scholarship, is the defining feature of poetic language. Ordinary language is inadequate to the uses that poetry wishes to put it to and thus the "poet, within limits, has to make up his language as he goes" (Brooks 8). What a poem attempts to capture is the inherently contradictory nature of its object and in order not to reduce that contradiction to triviality, language can only resort to paradoxical constructions. The juxtaposition of images and metaphors that appear unconnected, the revitalization of dead language through alien contexts, or seeing the single in the multiple and the multiple in the single are the most prominent examples Brooks notes for this property of poetry. Ultimately, "it apparently violates science and common sense; it welds together the discordant and the contradictory" (Brooks 17). By the deliberate use of paradox that remains—unlike in Gasteier's reading—unresolved, poetry allows thought to go in new directions: it writes complexity where there was simplicity, but this is a complexity that does not replace simplicity, but rather coexists in constant tension with it.

This point has already been made in connection to Nas in service of a very different argument by Graham Chia-Hui Preston. For him the paradox central to *Illmatic* is "Nas's self-construction as a writer exactly through participation in and mastery of an oral culture—[this] is not an example of incoherence but should be seen as a fundamental feature of Nas's poetry" (263). From the position of observer of African American reality inside a housing project and the documentation thereof, Nas creates himself as a writer and poet first and foremost. This places him also in a tradition of African American poets grappling with what Henry Louis Gates calls "the paradox of representing, of containing somehow, the oral within the written" (144). Indeed, Gates's discussion of paradoxes and contradiction serves as a timely corrective for Brooks: what is extraordinary about (good) poetry for the latter is in Gates's reading an integral component of African American literature. Working within this paradox is why Nas's songs follow vectors towards the communal: as an individual he is on the outside, attempting to capture in poetry the lives of those he observes. The pen, Preston argues further, is the central metaphor through which this is manifest in the lyrics. The oral culture of hip hop can only be channeled through the act of writing, and, in turn, the writing only manifests itself as the spoken word on the record, a word that, all too often, speaks of writing. In this way, Nas constructs himself as an authorial figure, as a poet-subject. Among the many examples he cites, the one from the opening of the first verse of "N.Y. State of Mind" is likely the best: "Musician, inflictin' composition / Of pain, I'm like Scarface sniffin' cocaine / holdin' an M16, see with the pen I'm extreme" (0:26-0:33). The point here is that Nas is extreme exactly when he is with a pen, when he is writing. The comparison of himself to Scarface is thus partially moved into the realm of irony: Nas only writes it with his pen, he does not fully embrace it. At the same time, the pen then takes on a parallel roll to the gun: it becomes a weapon, moving away from irony.

Yet, Preston's argument misses an important aspect of the pen metaphor. Pen is not pen; behind the homophony there is not only a writing instrument, but also one of many words for prison. It is at this point that I return to materiality. Within the metaphors of writing and authorship there is a subtext of incarceration, iron bars, and concrete walls. In fact, the first words that Nas speaks on "N.Y. State of Mind," the first song of the entire

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album save for the introductory "The Genesis," set the stage for a reading both of the ambiguity of the pen and of the import that materiality has for the entire album: "straight out the fuckin' dungeons of rap / where fake niggas don't make it back" (0:11-0:17).[8] Ambiguity here abounds: are these dungeons where rap is made or where rap is imprisoned? What does it mean to be fake or real here, and to where can one make it back? By the end of *Illmatic*, on "It Ain't Hard to Tell," few of these questions are answered. Nas concludes the song with "My poetry's deep, I never fell / Nas' raps should be locked in a cell, it ain't hard to tell" (2:41-2:46). This cyclic structure begins and ends in dungeons, cells, imprisonment. But something else does change from the beginning to the end: where at the start Nas appears to be the one coming out of the dungeons, at the end he has removed himself from the equation. Now it is all about his rap, his poetry. From here on, understanding the framing of the entire album as a journey from and to states of imprisonment, my inquiry into the relation of the materiality of the project environment, incarceration, and thought can begin in earnest.

"Memory Lane" is the song that is most exclusively concerned with the relation between Nas's poetry and his milieu. Not only does the first verse open with a semi-ironic ethnographic survey of both Queensbridge and Nas's audience along with repeated mentions and shout outs to Queensbridge, but the song is also filled with the kind of urban documentary that appears again and again throughout *Illmatic*. What is more interesting than the narrative content of the song, however, is the ways in which language is employed. In passages such as

> Sentence begins indented with formality
> My duration's infinite, moneywise or physiology
> Poetry, that's a part of me, retardedly bop
> I drop the ancient manifested hip hop straight off the block (0:36-0:47)

or in Nas describing himself as "disciple of streets" (2:30-2:31), the connection between hip hop and it's milieu, the asphalt and concrete of the streets and blocks of Queensbridge, is spelled out to an almost didactical degree. Moving from "sentence" to "poetry" to "hip hop" and concluding in "off the block" marks the movement from contextless language to contextualized language-as-poetry to further contextualized hip hop, the difference being that poetry here is simply a form that language takes, while hip hop is already part of a socio-political context—that of the block in which the passage concludes. Poetry then can only have become part of Nas because he is the disciple of the street, matter his teacher. The point is the stress on the—at least partially—causal relation between hip hop and the urban ecology that its creator is part of. The non-human actors of this ecology work on the lyrics; their powers to shape are felt in Nas's lyrics.

But there is another mechanism at work in the language of the song: the revitalization of metaphor. Not only is the song's namesake metaphor one that has been thoroughly exhausted, to the point of entering everyday language, but the lines that make up the chorus are also sampled, in a sense making them a double derivative. Yet, with the end of the last verse, "memory lane" is moved into a new context, a new way of utilizing

[8] For an exploration of how "The Genesis" locates *Illmatic* in both hip hop culture in general as well as in Nas's artistic history see Nama 13–31.

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the words, revitalizing it: "True in the game, as long as blood is blue in my vein / I pour my Heineken brew to my deceased crew on memory lane" (2:51-2:57). Besides shifting himself from disciple into the realm of royalty (possibly to be read in connection to "The World is Yours"), Nas makes matter resurface in language. The lane of memory becomes a material place, one of the lanes of Queensbridge. The image of the memory lane is thus recovered from the realm of cliché. Not only does this revitalize the expression itself, it also allows for thought to go into a new direction, much in the way that Brooks argued paradoxical constructions in poetry do. It suggests a parallelism between matter and thought. Memory is a lane, memory can be manifest in a street. Remembering, even thinking, happens in relation to matter, to non-human actors. It is the lane that makes one remember, that makes remembrance possible in the first place. The paradox posed here is then the ecological question of how thought can be personal, individual, and ephemeral like the bits and pieces of memory that the song goes through, but can at the same time be material: tied to the stone, concrete, asphalt, steel, and so on of its environment.

It is this paradox that is brought to an extreme in other moments of *Illmatic*. With the line "Even my brain's in handcuffs" (3:22-3:23), "The World is Yours" already suggest a kind of mental incarceration. This line of thought is soon taken further on "One Time 4 Your Mind": "My brain is incarcerated / Live at any jam, I couldn't count all the parks I've raided" (2:37-2:43). For the first part of this couplet, there are two possible directions a reading can take. First, to claim that the brain is always already in prison documents the reality of mass incarceration in the 1980s, 1990s and onward until today, with arrest rates for young black men, especially in the parts of New York that Nas is both from and writing about, being far higher than any other demographic. The potential for arrest is always there, just around the corner—anyone living in such a milieu must be mentally prepared for that potential to be realized at any moment. The other direction is both more literal and more abstract: the brain itself is incarcerated. An object, a part of the body is in prison. As it was with the head on the album cover, the brain is the material stand-in for immaterial thought. Thought itself, the imagination of anyone living in this environment, Nas suggests, is always already in prison. Thus, prison dictates the kinds of thoughts that can be thought. It is at this junction that Latour again becomes highly valuable in order to understand the dynamics at hand: the scripts that a non-human actor such as a prison dictates to inmates, but also to those whose relatives are inmates or those could-be inmates usually called free citizens, take over their brains and thoughts. In and around the prison, one can only think as if in prison. Indeed, if Nas's argument here is taken to its conclusion, there are no potential inmates at all: everyone already is an inmate, if not bodily then mentally.

The second part of the couplet then might be taken to serve as a contrast to the image of the prison, with the park as a place of community and free movement. But this optimistic reading is immediately denied: raiding a park is arguably not generally an image of peace yet might be argued to require a reading in the context of public music making important to hip hop culture at the time. But a reading of this kind is preempted by the rhyme scheme: the rhyme of incarcerated-raided marks the intimate connection

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between the two. In the omnipresence of imprisonment, a place of utopian freedom becomes an impossibility.

The part of *Illmatic* that is most clearly dedicated to pondering and articulating these dynamics of thought and imprisonment is "N.Y State of Mind." In accord with the theme of omnipresent and possibly internalized incarceration, the song provides a few more lines of stark social commentary: "Cops could just arrest me, blamin' us; we're held like hostages" (3:26-3:30) makes the relation of the inhabitants of the housing projects and the dedicated housing police (with whom Nas mentions having a "beef" [1:36-1:37] on "The World is Yours") or the police in general clear. This always-present tension between a malevolent and powerful police force and the seemingly helpless inhabitants of Queensbridge is further spelled out in the opening of the second verse. Four lines of braggadocio are followed by one line tearing down of all the glorification just built up. After "But just a nigga, walkin' with his finger on the trigger" (2:38-2:41) there is little room left for self-aggrandizement. But the most brutal depiction of the milieu of the housing project follows shortly after. When Nas rhymes that "each block is like a maze / full of black rats trapped plus the island is packed" (3:00-3:04), he is not only in the realm of the metaphorical, likening the African American population to lab rats and invoking moments of American history such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. He is also again documenting the material reality of Queensbridge. The main innovation of the housing project upon its construction were the interconnected Y-shapes of the buildings. Any aerial-view image of the project thus quickly dispels the notion that calling it a maze or trap could only be a metaphor: the layout of the blocks is labyrinthian, a certain aura of no-way-outness is part of the buildings themselves. This notion is further reinforced by invoking the image of Long Island being packed with Black people. Questions of real space and of overpopulation cannot be avoided here. Again, metaphor and materiality coexist in these poetic descriptions, stressing the importance of the latter for any understanding of the former.

Another dimension, this one more metaphysical than physical, is to be found at a different point in the same song. Nas ends the first verse with

> It drops deep as it does in my breath
> I never sleep, cause sleep is the cousin of death
> Beyond the walls of intelligence life is defined
> I think of crime when I'm in the New York state of mind (2:05-2:16)

The paranoia of dying in one's sleep is constructed, a little later on, as parallel to the entirety of New York: "The city never sleeps, full of villains and creeps" (3:46-3:49). The fear of death is a property not of the human subject by itself, but is rather projected onto and by the city around that subject. This is precisely what the line following abstracts and thinks further. Intelligence, the mind, thought itself is walled in and only beyond those walls can life in any defined form exist. What this means is that if life can only be defined outside the walls, then being outside of these walls is the precondition for life. This is the vision of African American existence that Nas constructs. Trapped by the walls of American society, culture, politics, and architecture, by all those policies and scripts of

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racism articulated in concrete, by an entire urban ecology skewed against them, African Americans are from the very beginning excluded from life.

Yet the last line, from which the song takes not only its name but also its chorus, moves again into the realm of unresolvable paradox. The question posed is, put simply, between an upper-case or a lower-case s. Is it a New York state or a New York State of mind? Is there a New York mode of thinking, in the sense that the city of New York itself determines the thoughts of those living within it, or is New York State here an entirely fictional place, one of the mind and not of matter? Put differently, the tension is between matter and space determining thought or thought creating matter and space. This tension, as is the point of paradox in poetry, cannot be resolved. Both are the case simultaneously. The link between materiality and thought is unresolvable, to a point that a place beyond the walls of intelligence becomes an impossibility only one line after it has been raised. The conclusion, however, remains the same: no matter if mind or matter is given primacy, all that can be thought of is crime. There is no good or bad option here; neither lends itself to escaping the dystopian scenes of New York that the songs portraits at length. The impossibility of resolving the paradox is what the slight change of the lyrics at the end of the second verse speaks to: "I lay puzzled as I backtrack to earlier times / Nothing's equivalent to the New York State [state?] of mind" (4:03-4:10). This puzzlement is the only possible reaction in the face of the logical conundrum that the poetics of *Illmatic* construct.

It is here, by way of conclusion, that one can speak to the political potential of Nas's poetry. In raising the question of materiality and of its possibly deterministic force in the life of African Americans, Nas opens up novel lines of inquiry into the sociopolitical situations in the milieus he rhymes about. This newly possible mode of analysis is precisely one that thinks of the projects and their inhabitants as comprising an urban ecology. Instead of subjects whose personal responsibility can endlessly be appealed to (or whose lack thereof can be pathologized), the situation of the project's residents must be understood as preconditioned by their environment and the great number of scripts materially encoded within it. Here, the environment of the housing projects itself prefigures the carceral nature of the prison. Crucially, this ecology consists not only of the materiality of the urban environment and the scripts and policies embodied by it, but also of the practices of those who live within it. In the case of *Illmatic*, hip hop itself takes on this role. This is the point of the community making that is present throughout the songs: even though the specific milieu of Queensbridge is extremely important for Nas in both personal and artistic terms, there is a certain communality in the experience of their (urban) environment that African Americans have which he is aiming to articulate.

Through Nas the projects then become legible in much the same way that the speedbump becomes legible through Latour. In both, history and politics continue to be present materially in the built environment while the individuals responsible for its construction are long gone. In these examples, Nas and Latour each describe a very different situation in terms of political magnitude, but they share the same ecological perspective. This perspective is not one of serene pastorals, but instead one which understands that in an analysis of any given social situation, an entire ecology of

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materiality and the scripts embodied therein has to be taken into account. In this sense, the ecology of concrete that Nas articulates throughout *Illmatic* can well be termed socially deterministic. For him, the urban ecology he describes and analyzes supplies the very infrastructure for thinking within it. In a carceral environment, thought can only be carceral too. To truly understand the question of why America's famed upward (or perhaps rather outward) mobility seems to fail so many of those who grow up to live and die in the housing projects of New York City but ultimately all of America, one has to take into account an entire ecology of redlining, housing discrimination, and racism in urban planning—beginning with the projects themselves, with their material reality, with what they are making their inhabitants do and think.

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"New World Water": The Hydrocentric Imagination of Hip Hop

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Abstract

Water has provided hip hop with a variety of central metaphors by which the genre has enriched its poetic terminology of the flow, denoted spiritual purity, or discussed political and police corruption. Over the last two decades, water-related environmental concerns and catastrophes have prompted hip hop artists to develop a more literal approach. This article showcases how selected songs of black conscious and indigenous rap—Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" (1999), Common's "Trouble in the Water" (2014), Taboo's "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" (2016), and Supaman's "Miracle" (2018)—develop hydrocentric perspectives in order to participate in the negotiation of the cultural and material meanings of water. These songs discuss the relationship between the human and water by working with images of water as "modern water" (Linton), "global water," or "Anthropocene water" (Neimanis), which allows them to address the nexus of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, anthropocentrism, and ecological crises. True to conscious rap's agenda of socio-political criticism, they not only unravel but also indict anthropocentric, racial capitalist, and settler-colonial ideologies and practices as they pertain to water. They further negotiate alternative cosmological approaches that conceive of the human/nonhuman relationship as interconnected and thus unfold "hydrosocial" perspectives (Linton). All the while, they advertise rap music as an important aesthetic tool of political-environmentalist intervention. This becomes particularly evident from the fact that all of them are connected by a specific activist impetus and framing.

Keywords: Hip hop, water, Anthropocene, racial capitalism, settler colonialism.

Resumen

El agua ha proporcionado al hip hop una variedad de metáforas centrales gracias a las cuales ha enriquecido su terminología poética del *flow*, ha destacado su pureza espiritual, o ha debatido la corrupción política y policial. En las últimas dos décadas, las preocupaciones y las catástrofes medioambientales relacionadas con el agua han motivado a los artistas del hip hop a desarrollar un enfoque más literal. Este artículo resalta cómo ciertas canciones de rap de conciencia negra y de rap indígena— "New World Water" (1999) de Yasiin Bey, "Trouble in the Water" (2014) de Common, "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" (2016) de Taboo y "Miracle" (2018) de Supaman—desarrollan perspectivas hidrocéntricas para participar en la negociación de los significados culturales y materiales del agua. Estas canciones hablan sobre la relación entre el humano y el agua a través de imágenes del agua como "agua moderna" (Linton), "agua global," o "agua del Antropoceno" (Neimanis), lo que les permite abordar la conexión entre el capitalismo racial, el colonialismo de asentamiento, el antropocentrismo, y las crisis ecológicas. Fiel a la agenda consciente del rap de la crítica sociopolítica, no sólo descifran los nexos, sino que también acusan a las ideologías y prácticas antropocéntricas, del capitalismo racial y colonialistas en lo que concierne al agua. También negocian enfoques cosmológicas alternativas que conciben la relación humana/no-humana como interconectada y, por lo tanto, revelan perspectivas "hidrosociales" (Linton). Al mismo tiempo, promocionan la música rap como una herramienta estética de intervención político-ecologista. Esto se vuelve especialmente evidente por el hecho de que todas están conectadas por un ímpetus y marco activista específico.

Palabras clave: Hip hop, agua, Antropoceno, capitalismo racial, colonialismo de asentamiento.

In his 2020 autobiography *Vibrate Higher: A Rap Story*, Talib Kweli discusses the notion of vibrations as central for his own understanding of the creation of hip hop music. In this context, he recounts one of his friends gifting him the best-selling book *The Hidden Messages in Water* (2005) by Japanese "science hobbyist" Masaru Emoto, which records its author's experiments with ice crystals that formed within different acoustic environments:

> His experiments reveal that water exposed to positive energy such as classical music […] creates beautiful, well-formed crystals, and water exposed to negative energy such as […] heavy-metal music creates ugly, malformed crystals. He suggests that since human beings are 70 percent water and the earth's surface is 70 percent water, and because water combines with and takes on the properties of everything it comes in contact with, we can purify ourselves by purifying the water on this planet and in our bodies. […] What was interesting to me was that the concept of vibration kept coming up. Everything in the universe creates its own vibration. Since vibrations create sound, they can be measured by water. (7)

Like many critics, Kweli generally dismisses Emoto's book as pseudoscience. He admits, however, that Emoto's experiments and conclusions still "made sense to [his] spiritual mind" (7). Notably, Kweli takes inspiration from Emoto's work to explicate the aspiration and effects he identifies as typical of his own as well as of all hip hop music: the creation of (positive) vibrations that affect an audience in a specific way. Kweli thus employs water as a central metaphor for his reflections on the poetics of (his own) hip hop, and he is far from being the only rapper who unfolds his ideas by thinking with water.

In fact, water has provided hip hop with a wide variety of central tropes. It has served as a metaphor for techniques of rapping encompassed in the term 'flow,' the "rhythmic delivery of MCing" (Kautny 103; Level). It has enriched the vocabulary used to discuss the impact of rap's delivery, as emphasized by GZA's album *Liquid Swords* (1995) and the eponymous title track on which orally produced gushing sounds symbolize the 'swishing' sounds of swords, communicating the idea that rap's social power is as great as swords are lethal. Water has also come to signify the overpowering structures and effects of an oppressive white supremacist social environment, for example, in Talib Kweli and 9th Wonder's "These Waters" (2015), and it denominates the all-encompassing and life-threatening effects of poor, black, urban existence, for instance, in Lil Bibby's "Water" (2013): "Said I gotta keep my head above water / I been goin' hard gotta go a lil harder […] Catch me in the kitchen I be whippin' with the water / Family over niggas, blood thicker than water." Furthermore, hip hop's negotiations of water bodies like the Atlantic and the Mississippi River often resonate with the historical reality of the Middle Passage and Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic, as can be observed in Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" (1999). Songs like Kanye West's "Water" (2019) invoke water as biblical metaphor to discuss spiritual purity, whereas tracks like ScHoolboy Q's "Water" (2019) employ it to foreground the purity and hence value of expensive jewelry, thereby negotiating one of hip hop's most dominant themes: conspicuous consumption. Finally, water has provided and aided a plethora of sexual metaphors, as in Young Dolph and Key Glock's "Water on Water on Water" (2019) and famously in the lyrics and visuals of the video of Cardi B's "WAP" (2020).

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This article represents a first attempt at discerning how rap has concerned itself with water more literally: as nourishment and threat, as material and agential force, and as geographical location, particularly in light of increasing ecological crises. The article studies a selection of black and indigenous rap songs which participate and intervene in contemporary political and ecological discourses on water. In his introduction to the anthology *Writing on Water* (2001), philosopher David Rothenberg purports that "water does not divide; it connects. With simplicity it links all aspects of our existence. We feel its many meanings" (xiii). The tracks under consideration in this article all share this sentiment, echoing Rothenberg's idea that water illustrates human/nonhuman interconnectedness. They suggest that human and nonhuman survival depends on humanity's recognition of human/nonhuman interdependencies and its willingness to reevaluate its ethical perspectives and to act accordingly. At the same time, however, their examinations of humanity's relationship with water forcefully showcase divides. Their hydrocentric perspectives allow these rappers to discuss how the dualist-hierarchical logics of anthropocentrism and racism interlock and engender (racial) capitalist and settler-colonial practices of environmental exploitation and destruction.

Studying the work of Yasiin Bey, Common, Taboo, and Supaman, this article analyzes how hip hop lyricists have created environmentally conscious and environmentally activist music in response to the contamination and shortage of fresh drinking water and to global issues of climate change as they pertain to and affect the world's water bodies. It resorts to concepts and frameworks developed by the emerging field of the Blue Humanities in order to demonstrate how the songs under consideration think with and through water to highlight the imbrication of the nonhuman and the human and to attack the logics of Euro-American anthropocentrism, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism. Following Jamie Linton and Astrida Neimanis, this paper engages rap songs as addressing the question of "what is water, in this place and at this time?" (157). It studies Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" (1999) and Common's "Trouble in the Water" (2014) in order to discern how hip hop music participates in the rethinking of anthropocentric perspectives. Readings of Taboo's "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" (2016) and Supaman's "Miracle" (2018) illustrate how indigenous rap reveals and protests against settler-colonial control claims over water on and around Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota.

Establishing themselves as a prolific field of transdisciplinary inquiry within the last decade, the Blue Humanities have drawn attention to humanity's (including ecocritical scholarship's) terracentrism. In order to dismantle and challenge terra- and anthropocentric patterns of thought, Blue Humanities scholars have reconceived Euro-American modernity as intricately connected to water—more specifically, the sea (Gillis)—and they have shifted their focus toward "ontologies of the sea and its multispecies engagements" (DeLoughrey 32). The rap songs discussed in this paper point out the relationship between central phenomena of Euro-American modernity—above all, slavery and settler colonialism—and bodies of water such as the Atlantic and the Mississippi River. Their hydrocentric perspectives further draw attention to the increased commercialization of water bodies rendered "economic battleground[s] to meet the

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global demands for new energy sources and as waste dumping sites" (457–58), and they lay bare Euro-American "understandings of water as an exchangeable and instrumentalizable resource" (Neimanis 4). Their discussions of water thus add to dominant telluric perspectives on the nexus of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, anthropocentrism, and ecological crises by foregrounding a specifically hydrocentric perspective that negotiates water as "modern water" (Linton 14), "global water," or "Anthropocene water" (Neimanis 155–56).

In *What is Water? The History of Modern Abstraction* (2010), geographer Jamie Linton discusses the emergence and components of a specific complex of ideas on water within Euro-American modernity and globalization. His central argument is that human access to water is defined by both the various material shapes of water and the discursive: "every instance of water that has significance for us is saturated with the ideas, meanings, values, and potentials that we have conferred upon it" (5). Together with Jessica Budds, Linton channels his central ideas into a concept they call the "hydrosocial," by which they respond and contribute to an intellectual "shift from regarding water as the object of social processes, to a nature that is both shaped by, and shapes, social relations, structures and subjectivities" (170). Astrida Neimadis's *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017) uses Linton's propositions as a springboard for the discussion of what she terms "Anthropocene Water" (160). She proposes this concept to draw "attention to the hydrosphere as the ([…] oft-overlooked) fascia that lubricates and connects the Earth's lithosphere to its biosphere and atmosphere, those more popular players in this Anthropocene drama" (160). She highlights that the "current epoch's radical terraforming is often explicitly the work of water—and that these are labours in which we humans are variously entangled" (161). Comprehending water as "Anthropocene water," she argues, allows us to better understand how the current relationship between the human and water is characterized by either human "attempts to control water (damming, irrigation)" or by "out of control response[s] by water to these attempts at control (storms, sea levels)" (161).

This paper shows that Hip hop, too, has begun to discuss the relationship between the human and water by foregrounding the human aspiration to and loss of control over water in light of fresh-water shortages and climate change. In its amplification of the indigenous community's fight for access to fresh, clean drinking water, indigenous rap has discerned that the anthropocenic aspiration to control water is intricately connected to setter-colonial practices and ideology. It pits these against indigenous cosmologies that do not conceive water as an object of exploitation but as part of a complex "socio-natural assemblage" (Linton and Budds 176) that also includes "spiritual dimensions" (174). Indeed, all four songs under consideration in this article point to the necessity of addressing anthropocentric, racial capitalist, and settler colonial ideologies and their material consequences from a hydrocentric and aesthetic perspective. They are further brought together by their—in most cases—explicit motivation to inspire environmental and political activism.

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Yasiin Bey and the "New World Water"

Rap began to formulate its political and ecological concerns via water as early as 1999. On Yasiin Bey's (formerly Mos Def) first solo album, *Black on Both Sides*, the song "New World Water" develops its indictments of anthropocentrism and racial capitalism through a hydrocentric lens. Its mid-speed, driving beat is complemented by five brief sequences of notes played on a xylophone, each progressing down the tonal scale note by note, arguably mimicking the sound of water flowing downstream. This sample is omnipresent throughout the song, echoing the message of its title: rendered a homophone of the phrase 'new world order' by Bey's performance, the phrase "New World Water" establishes a hydrocentric perspective. If understood as the song's thesis, "New World Water" can be read as an appeal to recognize the central significance of water to planetary existence. Indeed, Bey's song points to water as a vital resource on both a local and a global level, a fact which the song alleges is becoming particularly evident because of the increasing scarcity of water due to events such as droughts: in the "New World Water […] every drop counts." The song illustrates the irreplaceability of water not only as life-sustaining liquid but also as essential daily good used for cooking or cleaning, and it discerns that social survival, too, is dependent on water as a protective resource for infrastructure threatened by fire and as a medical resource to treat illnesses. Its increasing scarcity, the song further claims, has turned water into a geopolitical variable to the particular detriment of the Global South (Rosenthal 670) whose peoples are "desperately seekin it" while U.S. Americans are "wastin it." The song further links humanity's unequal access to water to water's commercialization and its contamination with the pollutants produced by Euro-American societies, and it reveals the cynical practices of corporate capitalism: those contaminating the world's water bodies purify it in order to sell it for profit.

"New World Water" thus imagines water as what Neimanis calls "Anthropocene water" (160). For Bey, the contemporary relationship between water and the human is coined first and foremost by humanity's striving for and loss of control over water. While corporate capitalism appears to be able to reverse water contamination for profit, the song emphasizes the various omnipresent and irreversible effects of anthropocenic impact on the world's water bodies. Toxic waste contamination has reached a point at which "the water table" is turned "lopside," and it has rendered oceans, lakes, and rivers the breeding grounds of contagious diseases. Water thus becomes an agential force that is not merely subject to human exploitation but that severely threatens human survival.

With specific focus on the Mississippi River, "New World Water" combines its ecological critique with anti-racism, arguing that the slave trade "upset the Old Man River," because slave traders forced him to "carry slave ships and fed him dead niggers." Significantly, nonhuman nature considers slavery to be a crime so severe that it upsets the balance between the human and the nonhuman: "Now his belly full and he about to flood something." Bey's song generally refrains from linking water with active verbs, attributing the agential potential of water to the chemical toxins and biological agents humans contaminate it with. The song's personification of the Mississippi River, however,

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imbues the river itself with clear motives and hence agency. "Rebelling against racial injustice" (Rosenthal 669), water threatens to "[c]ome inland and make your house go 'Bye' (My house!)" ("New World Water"). Bey's performance underlines the potential threat of flooding by putting emphasis on all words in this line except "and," and the choice of simple, infantile language in the second half of the line underscores the anxiety of those whose livelihoods are at a high risk of being flooded. This is complemented by the multivocal delivery of the word "Bye" and the delayed exclamation "My House!" which indicates that specific individuals have already been affected by flooding. In this instance, water is aesthetically—lyrically and sonically—confirmed as an agential force that withdraws from human control and that responds to racist atrocities such as the slave trade with punishment.

In "'Hoods and the Woods: Rap Music as Environmental Literature," Debra Rosenthal discusses "New World Water" as a predominantly "urban aesthetic […] narrated in terms of its connectedness to the water supply" that "envisions water as a national commodity" (669). While "New World Water" indeed critiques United States history and politics specifically, Bey's hydro-imaginary is more explicitly interested in creating an image of what Linton has termed "modern water" (14) and what Neimanis calls "global water" (155). The song corroborates this by forgoing the clearly local urban settings that characterize the rap genre. It unfolds a national perspective that invokes cities like New York and L.A. as well as unspecified, presumably rural geographical denominators such as "Way up North" or "Down South," and even a global perspective that reiterates the fact that the survival of all humans is dependent on access to clean and fresh water. "New World Water" concludes with a reiteration of its anti-capitalist position by the mantric tenfold repetition of the line "Said it's all about gettin that cash (money)," and it ends by putting an anti-materialist spin on one of the Wu-Tang Clan's most iconic lines from their song "C.R.E.A.M.": "Cash rules everything around me / Move!" The song does not clarify whether or not the imperative it adds ("Move!") to the Wu-Tang Clan's original line is a call to activism, but in light of hip hop's position as a political genre and the activist impetus this article notices in all other songs under consideration, it very well may be understood as such.

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The "New World Water" Revisited

Sixteen years after the release of Bey's "New World Water," the rapper Common, together with Malik Yusef, Kumasi, Aaron Fresh, Choklate, and Laci Kay, recorded a song titled "Trouble in the Water," which positions itself in the direct lineage of Bey's song by virtue of its first line: "water moves, new world order rules." In contrast to Bey's, Common's song was explicitly framed as musical climate activism. It appeared on the collaborative album *HOME* (2014)—an acronym of *Heal Our Mother Earth*—which was marketed as the "soundtrack for the climate movement" in its liner notes. The album was produced and marketed by the Hip Hop Caucus, a music-activist collective that was formed in 2014 and that, according to its website, aspires to "connect […] the Hip Hop community to the civic process to build power and create positive change." *HOME* features

original hip hop and R and B tracks by Malik Yusef and others as well as covers of songs that have become emblems of environmentally conscious music, among them Michael Jackson's "Earth Song." The involvement of rapper Common, whose renown and reputation as a founding and leading figure of conscious rap, rendered the song and the album significantly more marketable as climate activism. Focusing on "Trouble in the Water," this section examines how the hydrocentric imagination of rap has gravitated toward an activist approach in light of exacerbating environmental crises. It argues that the song discusses water as "Anthropocene Water" (Neimanis 155–56) by relying on popular narratives and binary dualisms of human and nonhuman nature, whereby "Trouble in the Water" hopes to convey the necessity and urgency of environmentalist action more clearly.

True to *HOME*'s climate-activist agenda, "Trouble in the Water" unfolds a general criticism of how humans are innately prone to engendering environmental crises such as climate change:

> In the beginning was the word
> [...] then He made water
> Then He made man
> And then came the slaughter.

The song thus reverts to a biblical framework to invoke a popular environmentalist narrative that rests on the Book of Genesis: God created nonhuman nature for humans to dominate and to use as resource. Driven by greed however, humans prove themselves irresponsible. They practice wastefulness by engaging in profane leisure activities such as the "ice water challenge," and they display exploitative behavior like fracking, contaminating the world's water bodies. In its rhetoric, the song shifts repeatedly between a Disneyfication and an apocalyptic dramatization of the effects of ecological crises as caused by humans. It claims that toxic waste contamination turns water both turbid—so that it's impossible to "find Nemo"—and lethal.

"Trouble in the Water" thus elaborates on how humans are responsible for bringing 'trouble into the water.' It is their efforts to control water that have produced ecological crises that threaten survival on earth. The song also uses the image of "Anthropocene water" (Neimanis 160), to raise awareness of the lack of human control over water. "Trouble in the Water" emphasizes this by depicting water as having the properties of a living organism and material agent which becomes "ill" and, as a result, "kill[s] the fish" in response to human waste dumping. This perspective is undermined, however, by the song's personification of nonhuman nature as a passive female and maternal figure, over which humans are able to exert dominating control and whose care they are responsible for: "Trouble in the Water" decries that humans are "messin' with mother nature's ovaries" and demands corrective action in accordance with the imperative that is the album's title, *Heal Our Mother Earth*. The third and last verse frames the song itself and the situation it addresses as an emergency call: "it's the 911 with no ambulance." Here, the absence of an ambulance seems to suggest that responsibility to undertake action and come to the rescue of "*Mother Earth*" lies with the listener.

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In its shifting attribution of agency, "Trouble in the Water" appears to pursue a double-sided strategy: on the one hand, it highlights the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman nature and the agency of nonhuman nature. On the other, it not only underlines anthropocenic impact but also suggests that humans alone are capable of and responsible for preventing and undoing environmental destruction and disasters. It thereby runs the risk of overemphasizing human agency and human capabilities and of reinforcing notions of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Arguably, the song refrains from developing a deeper ecological critique and instead consolidates anthropocentric dualist hierarchies of nature versus the human as well as human exceptionalism, in order to back its activist message. "Trouble in the Water" thus speculates that its (human) listeners' sense of control over the nonhuman is directly linked to their sense of responsibility to participate in climate activism. It also hopes to attract the attention of a wider audience by reverting to Disney movie plots and a basic Christian mythology which mainstream listeners may be familiar with.

The use of relatable, popular tropes and narratives goes hand in hand with the song's and the artists' performative tendency toward didacticism. In its consternation with general and individual human conduct, the song switches between the different voices of the featured rappers who stylize themselves through their lyrics as public critics. All the while, they in turn assume the rhetoric of the biblical passages they reference and thus claim for themselves unchallengeable authority. They thereby strike a tone that appears particularly reprimanding because, in many instances, they identify *all* of humanity as "messin' with mother nature's ovaries," including the listeners. What is more, the song prominently features a chorus that is repeated four times, in which it further patronizes its addressees by identifying them as "children." Thus, it does not seem to recognize its listeners as fully responsible adults, while simultaneously holding them accountable as adults in imperative statements that ask them to "Heal Our Mother Earth." Differently than "New World Water," "Trouble in the Water" eschews explicit identification of the exploitative and racist practices of capitalism, merely referencing an ominous "they" as responsible for practicing fracking and contaminating drinking water. It thus further confuses its listeners on the question of accountability by equating, for instance, the inappropriate disposal of waste by an individual with environmental destruction on a national and on a global scale.

After it became known that government officials in Flint, Michigan, had allowed the use of aging pipes that caused the contamination of Flint's water with lead, the Hip Hop Caucus gathered the artists featured on "Trouble in the Water" to create a music video in order to draw attention to what would become known as the Flint Water Crisis. The video reiterated the song's activist message, stating that "Trouble in the water is now," and it called upon its viewers to sign a petition to "demand" that Michigan Governor Rick Snyder "establish a compensation fund for victims of the Flint water crisis" (Camacho 3:43). More than the song, the video thus puts an emphasis on the political failure that caused the water crisis in Flint and by extension other environmental crises, emphasized by shots of what appears to be US civilians who have to draw their fresh drinking water from a well (1:01). It also underlines the urgent necessity for the general public to act, showing

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images typically connected with the Anthropocene: images of human-made climate change and environmental disasters such as industrial landscapes with factories and chimneys blowing exhaust fumes (0:46), contaminated wet-lands (1:44) and rivers (1:45), and melting icebergs (2:42). Yet, visually, "Trouble in the Water" continues to enforce a dualist perspective on human and nonhuman nature, for while these images capture anthropocenic impact on the nonhuman, they do not feature humans, and only three of them include human-made objects (1:44, 1:45, 2:43). Furthermore, none of these images blends in with the rest of the visual narrative that foregrounds an unidentified yet specifically urban space. Instead, they are shown as mere props that serve as illustrative material for the song's lyrics. When Kumasi claims water to be agential, "kill[ing] the fish" in response to contamination, the image of a stranded fish carcass is shown for a brief second only (2:02–3).

The video's main focus rests on the artists themselves and other members of the Hip Hop Caucus who are presented as a "water revolutionary pirate gang" ("Making of" 1:25–26). The video is shot in what appears to be the gang's headquarters where they are shown devising strategies and collecting clean, bottled water they have stolen and which they prepare for distribution to those in need. Making use of the Robin Hood motif, the video thus portrays Hip Hop (activism) as a voice of those in need, and it seeks to demonstrate to the public the readiness and capability of hip-hop artists and the Hip Hop Caucus to work toward necessary political change when elected officials would not. This is somewhat counteracted by shots of the "water revolutionary pirate gang" celebrating with champagne bottles filled with water that is spilled lavishly in celebratory gestures. Overall, by mixing its message of political urgency with the mainstream hip hop trope of conspicuous consumption, the video appears more juvenile than other recent video productions of water-activist hip hop, such as Taboo's "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" and Supaman's "Miracle." Both convey a more concrete sense of urgency by focusing on real-life footage of on-site protest—images that underscore the credibility of each song's activist message by creating an acute sense of place.

"Water is life"

Between April 2016 and February 2017, protest formed against the pending construction of the so-called Dakota Access Pipeline. The pipeline was opposed by indigenous communities living on and around Standing Rock Indian Reservation, since their clean, fresh water supply was threatened by a pipeline that was to transport oil from North Dakota to Illinois, crossing below the Missouri River. Several thousand people came together to stop the construction work, and their protest drew significant media attention as well as the on-site appearance of then Green Party presidential nominee Jill Stein and democratic members of Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders. While the Obama administration eventually ordered construction to come to a halt and demanded proper consultation of the resident indigenous community, the Trump administration allowed for its continuance and completion by April 2017 via executive order (Crane-Murdoch; Kassam and Smith). The protest against the pipeline continues to this day,

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including celebrity support (Lakhani), particularly since it became known that the pipeline already leaked before it was officially put into operation (Levin).

On December 4, 2016, Shoshone rapper and Black Eyed Peas member Taboo, together with the indigenous rap collective Magnificent 7, Apsáalooke rapper Supaman, and other indigenous musicians, released a song entitled "Stand Up / Stand N Rock." The song's release was backed and marketed as activism by the Hip Hop Caucus, and the accompanying video ends with a call to "sign the petition and learn more" on the Hip Hop Caucus's website (5:05). This is echoed above all by the song's chorus which formulates a rallying cry to inspire further activism, especially among and across indigenous communities: "to all the original people, to all my indigenous people […] Stand up, […] / For Standin' Rock." This is furthered by the song's reference to major events of protest and activism by African American and indigenous peoples: "We're hassling before water has gasoline in it / Malcolm X moment, Martin Luther King with a dream and war bonnet / Wounded Knee and Alcatraz." Wounded Knee is of course remembered for the atrocities committed by U.S. American soldiers against the Lakota in what became known as the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890), which left over 200 Lakota people dead (Greene xiii). In 1973, it was occupied by the American Indian Movement in order to express their protest against the United States government's treatment of indigenous peoples—a move which attracted wide media attention (Reinhardt 3–4). Invoking the impactful lives of Malcom X and Martin Luther King, who—by wearing a "war bonnet"—becomes a spokesperson for the common struggle of black and indigenous Americans, the song seeks to conjure up the protest movement's historical significance and success.

The song thereby presents the conflict at Standing Rock between the United States government, corporate capitalism, and the indigenous community as a pivotal battleground for indigenous rights and survival. Indeed, Shaun A. Stevenson observes that

> from the ongoing mercury contamination of the English-Wabigoon River systems effecting the Grassy Narrows (Asubpeeschoseewagong) First Nation and Wabaseemoong Independent Nations in north-western Ontario, to the decades-long boil water advisories ongoing in dozens of First Nations communities across Canada, to the Standing Rock Sioux and fellow water protectors' fight to protect their waterways from pipeline development south of the border, Indigenous peoples' relationships to water have been a fundamental site of asserting Indigenous rights in Canada and beyond. (94)

"Stand Up / Stand N Rock" thus undertakes two things: first, it draws attention to the disparities with regard to access to clean, fresh drinking water, discussing water as "modern water" (Linton 18), that is, as a site of affirmation for settler-colonial structures of capitalist commercialization. Second, the song negotiates the relation between the human and water via the notion of "Anthropocene water" (Neimanis 160), that is, water as a site of human control and loss of human control over the nonhuman. Stevenson's "Decolonizing Hydrosocial Relations: The River as a Site of Ethical Encounter in Alan Michelson's *TwoRow II*" examines how video art by Mohawk artist Alan Michelson employs a hydrosocial perspective in order to unfold a perspective of decolonializing ethics. "Stand Up / Stand N Rock," too, proposes both a "decolonial hydrosocial relational ethics" (Stevenson 95) and cosmology, highlighting that anthropocentrism and settler colonialism must be viewed as connected issues that both need to be overcome.

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The song draws acute attention to the Dakota Access pipeline's disastrous effects on the survival of the indigenous communities living on and around Standing Rock reservation ("they poisonin' the waters for our sons and our daughters") as well as to the indigenous communities' struggle against the government and major corporations for access to clean, fresh water: "We're hassling before water has gasoline in it." In a brief snippet from an interview that is interspersed within the song's video, Taboo accentuates the song's and the movements hydro- and ecocentric impulses: "it takes a group of people who actually care about, you know, Mother Earth, and life, and water being sacred, and the land being sacred to say we stand up" (2:46–55). Taboo thus suggests the baseline for the development of a "decolonial hydrosocial relational ethics" (Stevenson 95) and cosmology: anthropocentrism and human self-interest are to be relinquished, and, more vaguely, he refers to an indigenous cosmology that elevates the nonhuman by imbuing it with spiritual significance. While this is not taken up further by the song, it would become a more central concern in Supaman's "Miracle" (2018). Notably, "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" concludes with a brief poetic statement: "Take a vow for your sacred grounds / Make a sound that'll shake 'em out." Music, and hip hop more specifically, is thus identified as a proper medium to amplify the decolonial ethics and cosmology and the political-activist message of the protesters at Standing Rock. The Hip Hop Caucus's website reiterates this idea, proclaiming the song's and video's release as a political success: "The day we released the video in December [of 2016], the Army Corps of Engineers under President Obama denied the easement Energy Transfer Partners needed to continue building the pipeline under the Missouri river, effectively stopping the project. It was a tremendous movement victory" (Hip Hop Caucus, "Stand Up / Stand N Rock.").

Among the artists featured on "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" is rapper Supaman, who has become known for renegotiating (urban) indigenous identity by combining indigenous music with hip hop, often performing traditional dance in full regalia. He contributed a verse to "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" in Apsáalooke, and he continues to engage with the Dakota-Access-Pipeline artistically, most notably in his 2018 song "Miracle." The song was not officially supported by the Hip Hop Caucus, but its music video is framed by an introductory comment that clearly connects the song with the protest at Standing Rock: "The Water Wars continue! Many think that the movement at Standing Rock has come and gone, not knowing that was only a wake up call to what is happening around the world!" Supaman thus also follows Yasiin Bey in connecting local with global issues of clean, fresh water supply. The song's chorus repeats the slogan of the protesters at Standing Rock, "water is life," by highlighting that the lack of sufficient clean, fresh water supply is threatening human survival on a global scale: "all around the world / My sisters and my brothers hurt." It substantiates its message's credibility by framing the struggle addressed as various local struggles of poor(er) communities sharing similar fates: "from Flint, Michigan / To my Egyptian friends." Like "New World Water," "Miracle" therefore unfolds a critique of American and global capitalism as a racist and exploitative system that threatens the survival of the less fortunate by commercializing water.

The song's historical perspective connects water more specifically to settler colonialism and the struggle for survival of indigenous people, by reiterating that it was

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cross-Atlantic travels that brought Europeans to the American continent. With reference to the xenophonic rhetoric and policies of the Trump administration, the song expresses its desire for reversing history, imagining to have confronted white colonialists "at the border" and "with a travel ban, pushed them back into the water." This is contextualized visually by the music video which presents shots of the end of the border wall between the United States and Mexico which runs into the sea (4:17–20). The song thus discusses a hydrosocial image formed by past and present settler-colonial structures and indigenous peoples's struggle for rights and survival. Supaman further connects the struggles of indigenous peoples and black Americans symbolically by teaming up with black-indigenous rapper Maimouna Youssef, uniting the voices of those communities historically marginalized by white Euro-Americans.

More elaborately than "Stand Up / Stand N Rock," "Miracle" intermixes its political and historical realism with a "decolonial hydrosocial relational ethics" (Stevenson 95) and cosmology that is decidedly spiritual. It discusses the contemporary political struggle for indigenous rights to clean, fresh water supplies via reference to the Ghost Dance movement, a 19th century religious movement through which several indigenous communities protested the United States government's cutting their food rations. The protests highlighted that these cuts were part of the larger campaign of indigenous eradication; for simultaneously, the most significant food sources for many indigenous communities, the American Bison, was hunted close to extinction (Smoak 3; Estes). The construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline is thus proclaimed, in "Miracle," as a contemporary instalment of settler-colonial practices of cultural and physical eradication of indigenous communities which is to be countered by spiritual protest.

What is more, "Miracle" thereby advocates protest in the form of musical practice. Dancing was believed to have cosmological significance in the Ghost Dance movement's protest against settler imperialism. Similarly, "Miracle" proclaims music, and more specifically hip hop, as an adequate and necessary political tool: "I started to fight, started with mics." In the song's chorus, Maimouna Youssef appeals to an unnamed higher force to ignite the "prayer grass" she carries. She is referring to sweetgrass, a plant used in many indigenous cultures as a "ceremonial plant" in rituals, including praying; its use symbolizes human/nonhuman interconnectedness (Kimmerer 5). Rapping thus becomes a spiritual ritual akin to praying, and music is arguably presented as both a political and a cosmological force that can "affect perceptual transformations, ideological shifts, and amendments in knowledge production" (Oppermann 450). Rap songs like "Miracle" achieve this not only through their hydrocentric lyrics but also through their performative and sonic-material properties as well as their music videos.

Both sonically and visually, "Miracle" propagates a hydrosocial perspective that acknowledges water as an integral and agential element within human-nonhuman relationships, rather than as an object of commodification. The song's music video commences with a shot of a maritime coastal strip at Turtle Island for seven full seconds during which only the sounds of the ocean waves can be heard. These images and sounds are combined with a quote by Chief Plenty Coups that challenges human claims to the nonhuman: "The ground on which we stand is sacred ground. It is the dust and blood of

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our ancestors" (0:00–5). The quote itself remains terracentric, but paired with both the visual and sonic material presented, the song extends its meaning to water. This is further corroborated by the last shot of the video. Here, the music cedes and images and sounds of the waves of the sea take over. Again, a quote proposing human-nonhuman interconnectedness is superimposed on these images and sounds, in this case, a quote by Black Elk: "All things are our relatives / What we do to everything / We do to ourselves. All is really one" (4:42–47). Other than "Trouble in the Water," whose video shows Common, Kumasi, and Malik Yusef rapping in distinctly urban spaces, "Miracle" consistently foregrounds its hydrosocial perspective of interconnectedness by showing both Supaman and Maimouna Youssef rapping by the side of a lake. Finally, and in the spirit of Yasiin Bey's "New World Water," "Miracle" visually emphasizes the connectedness between the local and the global hydrosocial by transmitting real-life footage of on-site protest for access to water at Standing Rock as well as in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (1:06–10), and Egypt (1:51–52).

Conclusion

A close study of Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" (1999), Common's "Trouble in the Water" (2014), Taboo's "Stand Up / Stand N Rock" (2016), and Supaman's "Miracle" (2018) discloses how hip hop has actively participated and intervened in contemporary political and ecological discourses on water. These songs do not only realize rap's distinct potential to challenge dominant anthropocentric, racial capitalist, and settler colonial ideologies and practices, but they also explicitly advertise rap music as an important aesthetic tool of political-environmentalist intervention. This becomes particularly evident from the fact that all of them are connected by a specific activist impetus. While the activist message of Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" is rather implicit and limited to the song's lyrics, Common's "Trouble in the Water," Taboo's "Stand Up / Stand N Rock," and Supaman's "Miracle" are unequivocally framed as activism through their lyrics, their various paratexts, and, in the cases of "Trouble in the Water" and "Stand Up / Stand N Rock," the context of their production.

Scholarship, too, has called upon the hip hop community to create environmentally-activist art. In his 2020 essay "How Hip Hop Can Bring Green Issues to Communities of Color," Thomas Easley argues that by concerning itself more explicitly with environmental issues, hip hop could contribute significantly to the diversification of environmentalist movements, which he still identifies as a "disproportionately white 'green insiders club.'" Easley also lists Common's "Trouble in the Water" as a song that might function as a template for contemporary environmentalist hip hop. Common has released three more albums after "Trouble in the Water," two of which feature many socio-politically conscious tracks that address racism and sexism, but none of the songs formulate an ecological critique. In his 2016 song "The Day Women Took Over," for instance, "The New World Order is fathers lovin' their daughters" not "water moves" as it is proclaimed in "Trouble in the Water." Thus, at least in his work, environmentalism still seems to be understood as a separate issue or perhaps just a fleeting trend. However,

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there is a growing number of rappers who address political and environmental issues through a hydrocentric lens. This includes not only Yasiin Bey's 2006 song "Dollar Day," which discusses the disproportionally more severe impact of Hurricane Katrina on African Americans, but also Snotty Nose Rez Kids' "The Water," whose negotiation of climate change shares concerns with both Yasiin Bey's "New World Water" and Supaman's "Miracle." These and other songs further confirm that hip hop provides a diverse field of interest for the Blue Humanities.

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"Smoke the Weed" for the Planet: Snoop Lion's Green Reincarnation of Hip Hop

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Abstract

While early hip hop could still offer social commentary, global issues began to disappear from the genre by the late 90s and early 2000s. Due to gangsta rap's emphasis on authenticity and on the individual's 'realness,' issues of social and environmental justice seem to have become increasingly inaccessible to rap music: any attempts to address wider, 'real' issues, if they were to happen, took the risk of appearing not 'real' but inauthentic, cynical capitalizations on social issues at best. This paper seeks to outline how Snoop Lion's *Reincarnated* (2013) and in particular its eighth track "Smoke the Weed" employs the imagery of Reggae and Rastafarianism to reconstitute, transform, or "reincarnate" hip hop and thereby once again open it up to social and environmental commentary. While at first sight it is merely another glorification of recreational marihuana use in line with Snoop Dogg's earlier, pre-Lion oeuvre, "Smoke the Weed" offers a highly complex critique of the environment and humans' place and agency within it. "Smoke the Weed" can be seen to discuss, primarily through the metaphors of seeds, plant-growth, and marihuana use, the interconnection between (the necessity for) social action and (the necessity for) environmental action. Snoop harnesses the performativity of gangsta rap to offer a sincere, if never really 'authentic,' vision of green street consciousness. Through his clear lack of 'realness' as a Reggae artist, Snoop Lion can mobilize 'naturalness' for hip hop.

Keywords: Performativity, gangsta rap, Reggae, sincerity, authenticity.

Resumen

Mientras que en sus comienzos el hip hop aún podía ofrecer cierto comentario social, los temas globales empezaron a desaparecer del género a finales de los 90 y comienzos de los 2000. Debido al énfasis del *gangsta* rap en la autenticidad y en lo real del individuo, los temas de justicia social y medioambiental parecen haberse vuelto cada vez más inaccesibles para la música rap: cualquier intento de abordar remas 'reales' más amplios, de darse, corrían el riesgo de parecer no 'reales' sino aprovechamientos cínicos y falsos de temas sociales, en el mejor de los casos. Este ensayo busca esbozar cómo *Reincarnated* (2013) de Snoop Lion, y en particular la pista ocho "Smoke the Weed", hacen uso de la imaginería del reggae y del rastafarismo para reconstituir, transformar o "reencarnar" el hip hop y así una vez más abrirlo al comentario social y medioambiental. Mientras que a primera vista es simplemente otra glorificación del uso de la marihuana recreativa en línea con la obra previa de Snoop Dogg, anterior a Lion, "Smoke the Weed" ofrece una crítica muy compleja del lugar del medioambiente y de los humanos y de la agencialidad dentro de éste. "Smoke the Weed" parece hablar, principalmente a través de metáforas de semillas, del cultivo de plantas, y del uso de la marihuana, de la interconexión entre (la necesidad de) acción social y (la necesidad de) acción medioambiental. Snoop aprovecha la performatividad del rap *gangsta* para ofrecer una visión sincera, si bien nunca realmente 'auténtica', de conciencia de calle ecologista. A través de su clara falta de 'autenticidad' como un artista reggae, Snoop Lion puede activar la 'naturalidad' para el hip hop.

Keywords: Performatividad, rap *gangsta*, reggae, sinceridad, autenticidad.

Intro: Smoke (the) Weed Everyday

Real gangstas cannot rap about the environment. Gangsta rap's central aesthetic tenet of 'keeping it real' appears to have emptied hip hop of its countercultural leanings and replaced these with the neoliberal celebration of the individual as elevated and separated from its community and environment. Although the discourse of 'keeping it real' predates gangsta rap and is also central to early message rap and conscious rap, gangsta rap's 'realness' differs from the understanding of authenticity in other genres of hip hop. As Ogbar notes about the complex racial and ethnic construction of authenticity in hip hop, the "fundamental thrust of the notion of authenticity rests on an essentialist premise that presupposes that there are particular traits or characteristics innate to black people" and "realness (and its corollary, blackness) is thus relegated to poverty, dysfunction, and pathology," the performance of its tropes becoming normative (68–69). Effectively, in gangsta rap 'keeping it real' constitutes a simulated authenticity wherein 'realness' turns from a moral into an aesthetic category measuring the formal ingenuity with which the preconceived image of the 'gangsta' is performed. Although this performance can be aided by reference to the historical reality, e.g., the rapper's biography, 'realness' in gangsta rap is not directly derived from it, nor does its performativity contain an openly satirical undertone that could critically question the status quo or the figure of the 'gangsta.' Representing—in Fredric Jameson's sense—a late capitalist equation of image and reality (Jameson ix–x), the reinterpreted 'realness' of gangsta rap is one integral motor of the commodification and depoliticization of hip hop in the 90s' neoliberal turn of the genre.

Snoop Dogg is a chief figure in this development. As Travis Gosa remarks, commenting on the 1990s "neoliberal turn" in hip hop music, "Calvin Broadus Jr.'s career as Snoop (Doggy) Dogg gestures to the death of socially conscious hip-hop and the birth of the 1990s gangsta rap era in which gun-play, violence against women, and political nihilism were branded as ghetto authenticity" (56). Snoop Dogg's brand of gangsta rap is paradigmatic of the increased commercialization, depoliticization, and commodification of rap in the surfacing of the figure of the neoliberal gangsta, a role model that, rather than advocating Black empowerment and social change, celebrates its own individual success through the exploitation of others. As Dipa Basu argues, "the cultural codes and badges of cultural authenticity embodied by the hip hop credo of 'keeping it real' can survive the circuits of commodification" (372). The two in fact do not contradict one another at all—commercial appeal being a "way of continuing to live by the credo of the 'hood', whose organising principles are 'taking care of business' (making money) and gaining 'juice' (respect)" (374). Commercialization could therefore "revers[e] the not entirely symbolic power relations between blacks and whites in the music industry" (373) and thus serve Black empowerment and cultural visibility. However, gangsta 'realness' appears hardly capable of sustained political, in particular environmental, thought and action. Even though well-selling 'realness' may economically empower rappers and, by extension, their community, the gangsta incarnation of 'realness' does so in a way exclusively centered on the individual as entrepreneur of the self. Within the vocabulary gangsta rap provides, a

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vocabulary centered on the notion of authenticity, social and environmental concerns appear to have little place.

At first sight Snoop Dogg's transformation into Snoop Lion seems to have brought about very little change. Where Snoop Dogg would celebrate the exploitative lifestyle of the gangsta as drug dealer and pimp, Snoop Lion's *Reincarnated* overtly turns toward social and environmental responsibility with tracks advocating one love, community, and non-violence as Snoop[1] swaps his Tanqueray Gin for healthier, nonalcoholic natural fruit juices. This change, however, apparently motivated by an awareness of gangsta rap's social and environmental blind spots, seems hardly authentic. Tracks like "Smoke the Weed" appear to play into the same thematic Snoop had been known for since his rise to gangsta fame in the 90s: the glorification of marihuana use and connected braggadocio Snoop has made his trademark. Snoop, although he now calls himself Snoop Lion, continues smoking weed every day in *Reincarnated*. The song's music video, too, apparently plays into the same commodification and emptying out of hip hop that Snoop is exemplary of: the "Smoke the Weed" video seems little more than an infomercial for Snoop's brand of vaporizers, with images of Jamaican street life, dancing women, marihuana plants, Snoop smoking alone or in company, and so forth. It is repeatedly interspersed with shots of the G Pen Herbal Vaporizer, boxed and unboxed and attractively presented from various angles. In short, the new Snoop (Lion) from 2013 seems completely in line with the 'old' Snoop (Dogg) who gave 90s hip hop its commercial and cynical turn.

Judging from this, Snoop Dogg's reincarnation into Snoop Lion, following his carefully documented trip to Jamaica where he came in touch with Rastafarian culture and Reggae, appears as little more than a well-planned publicity stunt: a clever cashing-in on Rastafarian imagery, and an appropriation of a new, old style of black liberation for Snoop's old, neo-liberal ways. Bunny Wailer, of Bob Marley and the Wailers fame, criticized Snoop's conversion along these lines in retrospect, remarking that "Smoking weed and loving Bob Marley and reggae music is not what defines the Rastafari Indigenous Culture" (Burrell n.p.). Snoop's response to Bunny Wailer did not shine a hopeful light on the authenticity of his conversion into a spiritual leader and advocate of peace and one love: "Fuck that n****. B****-ass n****. I'm still a gangsta don't get it fucked up. I'm growing to a man, so as a man, do I wanna revert back to my old ways and fuck this n**** up, or move forward, shine with the light?" (qtd. in Weiner n.p.).

In this light, the fairly conventional environmentalist talking points of an anthropomorphized (and feminized) "Mother Nature" that needs saving at the hands of man (the simplistic message seems to go: 'if Nature is destroyed by pollution that will result in bad weed') and threadbare warnings about "global warming" and "[a]ll the pollution in this world" (the now environmentally conscious Snoop "just can't stand it" (Snoop Lion) which tracks like "Smoke the Weed" raise, too, appear as little more than thrown-in stereotypical gestures. Framed as products of Snoop's (well-documented and

[1] Unless important for the distinction between Snoop Dogg as gangsta rapper and Snoop Lion in the role of Reggae artist, I will refer to all incarnations of Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr. as "Snoop."

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commercially exploited) immersion into Rastafarian spirituality and environmental consciousness, they appear to be mere commodifications of environmentalist messages without any real value or traction to them. Snoop's environmentalism and overall newfound spirituality appear to lack all authenticity—something the rapper accused of murder certainly had in his role as a gangsta—and seem to be thinly veiled attempts at cashing in on currently relevant topics and the (to Snoop as well as his audience) exotic and foreign culture of Jamaica. In the vein of a critique of a deceptive 'culture industry' à la Adorno (Adorno and Horkheimer), Snoop Lion's environmentalism is easy to dismiss on the grounds of the seeming banality of his continuing business aspirations.

This paper takes a different view. It argues that the tension between Snoop's commercial and environmental aspirations should be viewed as the crucial motor behind his ecoconscious reincarnation. Through recourse to Reggae and the Rastafari spirituality it is informed by, Snoop's *Reincarnated* acquires a vocabulary that allows him to reevaluate the individual's relationship to the other and the environment as a form of naturecultural reciprocity. Whereas gangsta rap highlights separation in the figure of the gangsta as neoliberal entrepreneur of the self, Reggae and Rastafarianism know of a naturality that provides a basic oneness with the other and the ecosystem. As Snoop performs in the role of Snoop Lion, he lets go of gangsta rap's paradigmatic demand for keeping it real in order to be able to address 'real' issues of social and environmental concern.

"Smoke the Weed" retains gangsta rap's quality of performing street credibility yet turns this role-playing toward ends that transcend the individual. Snoop thereby performs a shift away from the "atomistic […] and self-interested […] 'possessive individualism'" of the (gangsta's) liberal self that, as David Ingram notes, "has encouraged in modern Western societies both an anthropocentric disregard for other organisms, and an acquisitive materialism that risks exhausting the Earth's natural resources through overdevelopment" (14). He instead turns toward the construction of "an 'ecological' self that is relational rather than atomistic" (15). The reincarnation effected by Snoop's assumption of the role of the Rastafari Snoop Lion gives ecoconscious flesh to the rapper's signifying images as Snoop's performative recourse to Reggae and Rastafarianism affords him with a social and environmental vocabulary unavailable to gangsta rap. Hence, instead of claiming real authenticity for Snoop Lion, Snoop remains within gangsta rap's performative framework but turns it toward a vision of sustainable living as, in, and with nature. In its evasion of the issue of authenticity, claims to which are increasingly untenable in late capitalism, "Smoke the Weed" thereby offers a more sustainable approach to care for the ecosystem. *Reincarnated*, as the album title implies, is less of a departure from hip hop in favor of a nostalgic turn to Reggae but instead displays an awareness of the necessity of finding a way to talk about nature, climate change, and sustainability from within our cultural climate.

This strategy of reincarnation and reinterpretation becomes most apparent in the way "Smoke the Weed" turns Snoop Dogg's trademark habit of smoking marihuana every day from an act of conspicuous consumption into an ecoconscious attitude. By performatively recasting the consumption of marihuana in the context of Rastafarianism's

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ecoconscious spirituality, "Smoke the Weed" offers a deconstruction of the binary of nature and culture. Metaphors of seeds, light, and growth are employed to present humanity as a part of a naturecultural ecosystem that allows one to understand street consciousness as green consciousness—and care for the community as care for the environment. In doing so, Snoop might no longer be 'real.' Risking inauthenticity, however, allows Snoop Lion to address issues unavailable to Snoop Dogg. Through his clear lack of 'realness,' Snoop Lion can mobilize 'naturalness.'

1st Verse: Don't Smoke the Seed: Snoop's Deconstruction of the Nature-Culture Dichotomy

Only seemingly in contradiction with Snoop's commodification, upon further inspection, "Smoke the Weed" can be seen to present an intricately interconnected ecology which deconstructs anthropocentric notions and instead understands nature and culture as a continuum: as natureculture, to use Donna Haraway's term. The track provides a nuanced reading of environmental and social action at odds with the Snoop of the past. As will be shown, the track uses its central metaphor of "seeds," and the connected imagery of growth and light, to present an ecological web in which humans appear as both part and product of nature. They are, by their natureculture, equipped with the agency to both destroy and save the environment. In this sense, care is constructed in reciprocal terms as a holistic care that understands culture and nature as one planetary network, and thus understands care for the community (hip hop's street consciousness) as care for nature (green consciousness), and vice versa.

Snoop Lion enmeshes the street with the ecological, turning gangstaism toward the social and environmental through his assumption of the performative role of Reggae artist that allows him to speak of 'nature.' While the song's hook admonishes "don't smoke the seed," the first verse in the following addresses the "younger generation." To those familiar with Snoop Dogg, the former piece of advice is nothing new: Snoop Dogg, whose weed self-reportedly contains "no seeds, no stems, no sticks" but is "some of that real sticky-icky-icky" (Snoop Dogg), has repeatedly advised against smoking stems and seeds as it will produce a harsh experience. "Smoke the Weed"'s movement from "don't smoke the seed" to addressing the "younger generation," however, is not a thematic jump but affords Snoop's marihuana consumption with an ecoconscious dimension. Throughout Snoop's lyrics, (marihuana) seeds are metaphorically equated to people. References to seeds, the trees that grow from them, and the 'younger generation' of humans merge seamlessly into one another as Snoop raps about "Fresh trees, young seeds all trying to find the light" (00:47-50) who one has to "help keep their life on track" (00:53-55) by "making sure they stay pure, teach them what's wrong from right" (1:01-04) (Snoop Lion). The cultivation of plants is treated as ultimately the same as the cultivation of people. Importantly, Snoop's lyrics do not address these as similes: people do not act like plants but as plants. The use of metaphor linguistically insinuates the rejection of any dichotomous differentiation between nature and culture: people are natural beings.

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The lyrics therefore interfold spheres of nature and modernity conventionally understood as binary opposites. Hence, the care for these young people/plants is described as "watch[ing] over [them] like a satellite" and "[t]ell[ing] them when to stop and go like a traffic light," similes of city life, human technology, and culture, i.e., the vestige of hip hop's 'streets.' With little differentiation between culture and nature, cultural entities are employed within a natural context. Street life merges with plant life. Notably, however, whereas the interconnection between humanity and nature is realized in metaphor, stressing a sense of oneness, the cultural appears in the form of similes. Human natureculture produces cultural acts—satellites and traffic lights—that help one understand and care for the natural. At the same time, however, it also produces the "obstacles to overcome in the city life" (00:59-1:01) (Snoop Lion). Culture, as a product of human nature, is thus afforded a double meaning as it provides the means and opportunity of *both* preservation *and* destruction. As will be shown further on, Snoop Lion employs street consciousness, gangsta rap's performativity (which, as aesthetic component of an urban genre, can be viewed as a 'cultural' activity), toward the ends of a green consciousness. Snoop Dogg, on the other hand, can be understood as exemplary for the destructive side of street (and culture), the gangsta's ruthless individualism. Human natureculture in "Smoke the Weed" affords humans an agency they hold as natural, and not exclusively cultural, beings. Despite being part of a nature classically conceived of as passive, their natural culturedness gives humans agency as natural cultivators which they can employ to, so to speak, either let nature and the community go to the Doggs or to Lionize a green consciousness.

This sense of agency as a mode of the naturalness of culture can also be seen in the warning that the younger generation must "be careful of the seeds [they] show." Humans and their culture are both 'seeds'—growing and living parts of nature—and that which has the potential to actively cultivate positive or negative effects—seeds. They therefore both grow as part of a nature that is here turned into something active and (as naturecultural beings) may stand against it. The potential that humans, as seeds, may hold shows itself in the way they choose sustainability and thus tend to the future—to their own seeds and those of nature. They care for humanity, the seed metaphor implies, by helping their young—the "Fresh trees, young seeds all tryin to find the light"— "keep their life on track." Thus they cultivate the sustainable environment that allows natural things to grow. To do so is to become aware of one's participation in and generation of a larger ecology. In this sense, the anthropomorphized metaphor of "mother nature" (Snoop Lion) in the song loses its connotations of a humanity substantially different and separated from nature. It turns into a necessary (human) sentimentalism—in Donna Haraway's words, into a "figure of speech necessary to say anything at all" (20). Rather than a trope of separation, Snoop's mother earth takes the shape of a naturecultural entity whose environmental import is easily accessible to the (human) audience. It is an assemblage reciprocally generated both 'out there' and in human culture. As the young generation is imagined as one that at once has to be cared for and shall care for nature, the multilayered metaphor of seeds merges the two actions into one ecology. Man and nature bring each other forth reciprocally as always at once both seed and caretaker.

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In light of this reciprocal interconnection, Snoop's seemingly stale warnings about "all the pollution in this world" and "global warming" are part of the complex environmental relationality "Smoke the Weed" devises. Notably, it is not Earth that "just can't stand" environmental pollution—after all, Earth will survive the environmental cataclysm the Anthropocene may very well have initiated and which may mean the end of humanity. As the next line explains, the speaking subject "Me" cannot stand it either. Similarly, the "whole world" panicking because of "global warming" can be seen as both humanity and, as the next line's reference to the planet implies, "mother earth" (Snoop Lion): both are understood one another, just as one's (human) seed shows itself in one's care for nature's seeds—seeds that are both those of nature (plants, the environment, the future of the climate) and culture (the young, tree-like generation admonished to take care of its fellow trees). Subject and object merge into one another, one defining and bringing forth the other in a continuous cycle. Respect and care for mother nature is care for the community, care for a nature that brings forth and is brought forth by humanity. Sustainability as preservation of nature is inherently self-preservation as a species in Snoop's natureculture. As can be seen in his intricate enmeshment of culture and nature, street-life and plant-life, Snoop's argument for communal care displays a green consciousness through the metaphor of seeds and organic growth.

The first verse thus concludes with the line "seeds bring forth new life" (1:04-06) (Snoop Lion). The future emerges from the 'seeds' human agency shows. If human nature, in its unbounded consumerism, unsustainably smokes away the seeds that are to be found both among other humans and the environment, it will destroy itself. This decision of how to relate to nature, environment and community, in turn, will reveal our own 'seed,' our potential to live (as/in nature). Given that *Reincarnated* draws on the religious vocabulary of Rastafarianism in Reggae music, the extended metaphor of seeds and tree-growth can be seen to reference Matt. 7:16, "You will know them by their fruits" (*The Holy Bible*. New King James Version, Matt. 7:16). As such, it renders human agency part of a larger ecology at once both environmental and cultural. Humankind as part of nature is to be in communion with God, a communion that shows itself in his communion with his neighbor (Matt. 22:39), who is, like a plant, part of nature as well, and thus they are in a communion with a nature we cannot thrive without.

As Snoop *Dogg* proved, it is part of man's nature, in culture, to destroy nature and exploit the other. However, since human nature is invested with agency, this is not our only choice. We (e.g., Snoop *Lion*) can choose not to smoke the seeds but, in awareness of our interconnectedness with nature, preserve them, both in the shape of plant-seed and human-seed. In sustainable, ecoconscious smoking, man is both the seed/tree and the one who consumes the tree. Consumption, and this includes the consumerist music culture Snoop is nevertheless part of as both Dogg and Lion, is not inherently unnatural.

2nd Verse: Hip Hop Reincarnated: Self-Knowledge, Authenticity, and Eco-Sincerity

As one can see, "Smoke the Weed" with its metaphor of seeds activates an imagery of communality, interconnection, and sustainability at odds with the individualistic

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neoliberalization that weed-smoking Snoop Dogg had formerly been known for. Gangsta rap with its aesthetics of 'realness,' individual success, and masculine prowess shifted the genre's focus from the politicized and pedagogical discourse of its roots to the commodified celebration of the gangsta as neoliberal entrepreneur of the self. As Caramanica argues, gangsta rap's 'realness' thereby indicates a movement in rap music "beyond authenticity" (Caramanica n.p.). According to Hagedorn, 'realness' thereby passes into the "realm of simulacra" (100). Commenting on this inherent "performativity of street credibility" (Roks 277) in gangsta rap, Roks similarly notes that in gangsta rap the mantra of 'keeping it real' should now rather be understood as "keeping it hyperreal" (282), something already apparent in Snoop Dogg's 90s gangsta rap.

Such (simulated) authenticity doubly estranges rap from commentary about the real world. On the one hand, as Trilling remarks, within the sphere of authenticity, any statements with the "public end in view" (9) become suspect of bad faith and dishonesty. In addition, issues that exceed the glorification of the individual's neoliberal success cannot be approached—cannot even be made sense of—from within the paradigm of the gangsta image and the cynical vocabulary it provides. Gangsta rap limits itself to the surface level of racial, sexual, and financial self-(re)presentation (reenacting the gangsta trope as a token of one's individual value) and thus to the demands of (hyper-) authenticity. This bars gangsta rap from the value-statements and politicization accessible to earlier forms of hip hop, making it, Tricia Rose argues, "the cultural arm of predatory capitalism" (00:36:11-13). Gangsta rap's ontological saturation with late capitalism's image culture produces a performativity of realness along certain tropes and genre conventions that rejects the discussion of 'real' (important) issues that go beyond the individual and its image (e.g., social and environmental injustice) as not 'real' (authentic) enough. The demand of keeping it (hyper) real in gangsta rap—i.e., the performative role of the gangsta—leaves the rapper with little access to a vocabulary that could touch upon these wider concerns.

Indeed, by *Reincarnated*, Snoop himself seems acutely aware of the blind spots and aporias of gangsta rap's apolitical and cynical aestheticization. In the documentary that records his 2012 trip to Jamaica and rebirth as Snoop Lion, he remarks that after Nate Dogg's death he was "forced to find a new path" and adds that "I don't want to rap" (Capper). Clearly, Snoop's renouncement of 'rap' does not refer to any disillusionment with hip hop music per se: while he incorporates Reggae in *Reincarnated*, he can nevertheless be considered to be a rapper with regards to musical style and techniques, and hip hop can be seen as finding renewal in the rediscovery of is roots in the Jamaican tradition of Toasting, Djayin, Reggae, and Dancehall. Rather, Snoop's dismissal of 'rap' points toward a disillusionment with the 90s gangsta aesthetics which had come to epitomize 'rap.' Documentary and album alike are pervaded by the sense of a need for the reconsideration, renewal, and reorientation of American hip hop music and culture toward the possibility of wider social statements—which, however, does not imply a fall from hip hop's grace. Upon his reincarnation, Snoop retains part of his name, signaling a continuity within change, and he continues to make music. As shall be seen, the tension

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between commercialism and environmentalism, Dogg and Lion, culture and nature, is the central motor behind Snoop's reincarnation.

As Snoop remarks in the documentary, his turn away from rap was because he wanted to "finally be […] able to say something that means something" (Capper). Statements with a claim to meaning cannot appear in gangsta rap's postmodern aestheticization of the gangsta image. Its demand for such hyper-authenticity results in an equation of representation and reality that can only ever cynically and fatalistically accept the status quo. Snoop's recourse to Reggae music and Rastafarian spirituality on the other hand affords him with a vocabulary and imagery that can be used to address issues that go beyond the confines of the neoliberal gangsta individual and touch upon wider concerns. Reggae provides an aesthetic that allows for the moralizing, political, and environmental. Although Snoop cannot be an authentic Reggae artist either, the paradigm of Reggae allows him to at least utter such propositions within a position of (new) sincerity, a position that, aware of its fallibility and inauthenticity, nevertheless dares to produce seemingly naïve statements. As will be shown, Snoop Lion does not revert to either a deeply authentic communication of self or to subversive irony. Instead, the shift from the (hyper)real role of the gangsta to that of the Rasta—yet another role for Snoop Lion—allows for the environmental and political yet remains performative. Snoop hence consciously risks inauthenticity by assuming the role of Snoop Lion. It is, however, only this self-conscious role-playing that provides his music with a context in which sincere, though never to be authenticated, concerns can be voiced meaningfully.[2]

In contrast to mainstream gangsta rap's hedonism and unpolitical, individualistic stance, Reggae and Rastafarianism typically emphasize ascetic restraint, community, dialogue, and harmony with nature. As Anna Waldstein notes, "Rastafari is often described as a livity (lived spirituality) that values, encourages, and draws strength from working with (rather than trying to conquer or force) natural laws and ecological principles, as understood from an African perspective" (904). Rastafarianism thus for instance promotes a loosely defined 'Ital' lifestyle which, in its strictest interpretation, involves a vegetarian diet that avoids all artificial additives, chemically modified foods, and even salt. It holds that food should be natural and directly from the earth in order to enhance the 'livity' all living things share according to Rastafari beliefs: a unity with all of nature also signaled in the emphasis on 'I' in 'Ital,' which derives from the English word 'vital' (Owens 166–69). As a product of the black diaspora, Rastafarianism also has a strong political leaning with its focus on African repatriation and the (re)discovery of Black lifestyles. Reggae, in particular the reality lyrics of Bob Marley's roots reggae that Snoop primarily references in the documentary, serves as the musical mouthpiece of Rastafarian political and spiritual commentary.

The environmental and social concerns of Rastafari come together most apparently in their treatment of marihuana, which serves Rastafari as a sacrament in many rituals. It is consumed in ceremonies meant to further dialogue between believers,

[2] As Adam Kelly's "The New Sincerity" in *Postmodern|Postwar—and After: Rethinking American Literature* shows, such a resurgence of sincerity rather than authenticity is typical of contemporary art. See also Jackson for a discussion of the racial dimensions of the competing terms of authenticity and sincerity.

God, and nature, producing an 'I-n-I' state of consciousness that recognizes interpersonal and cross-ontological oneness in God and nature. The plural 'we,' self and other, is replaced by the double first person singular (Congo-Nyah et al. 267). Thus, whereas marihuana in American hip hop appears as a stimulant which signals the rapper's affluence and hedonistic lifestyle, and thus highlights separation and individuality, marihuana smoking in Rastafarianism—and the Reggae music informed by it—plays the role of both a politically countercultural act and a religious act that establishes oneness with God, other humans, and nature as a whole. In Reggae music, the demand to legalize marihuana is thus oftentimes employed to address social injustice and police brutality. John Holt for instance calls for direct action against the western system of oppression and alienation from Jamaicans' African roots, commonly referred to as 'Babylon,' when he warns in his song "Police in Helicopters" that if the police "continue to burn up the herbs, we're going to burn down the cane fields" (00:34-40) (Holt)—sugar being one of Jamaica's main exports closely linked to the country's colonial past. Marihuana consumption, which Rastafarianism understands as a cultural practice that historically links the diaspora to the African motherland, is thus closely tied up with issues of politics, identity, and religious belief rather than simply being viewed as recreational drug (ab)use.

Reggae music promotes the benefits of marihuana as a gift from God. Marihuana is viewed as not only a recreational but also a medicinal drug. Peter Tosh's "Legalize It" for example praises the plant's many health benefits and naturalness to argue for its legalization: marihuana is "good for the flu, Good for asthma, Good for tuberculosis, Even numara thrombosis"(2:47-3:09) and "Birds eat it, Ants love it, Fowls eat it, Goats love to play with it" (3:40-4:01).The plant's many uses confirm its naturalness and status as gift from God. Similarly, British Rastafarian reggae artist and poet Macka B argues in "Land of Sensi" that "marihuana is not just for smoking" (0:47-49): the plant's versatility—which Rastafarians cite as evidence of its naturalness and holiness—allows for its use as food supplement, ingredient in various products from paper to paint, biomass substitute for fossil fuel, and even cheap and environmentally sustainable building material. The use of marihuana creates a Rastafarian eco-utopia in which "ganja is smoked, drank, eaten, worn, lived in, rubbed on," (2:29-33) curing all ills of Western capitalism. Such arguments appear throughout the Rasta-informed Reggae music, cementing the centrality of social and environmental issues in the cosmos of Rastafarian marihuana-thought.

Furthermore, marihuana provides Reggae music with a vehicle of establishing a dialogic recognition of not only the human other and God but plant-life—nature—itself. Marihuana is an integral component of Rastafari 'reasonings,' ceremonial meditations in which marihuana is smoked in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge through dialogue. Marihuana-aided reasonings are both educative and integral to the generation of new knowledge and thus Black empowerment. Notably, the dialogic insight created during such reasonings does not only derive from the dialogue between human beings, the smokers. Instead, marihuana is believed to "open communicative channels between the smoker and the spirit of Haile Selassie I and/or Jah" as well as between the smoker and the marihuana plant itself, which then serves as a "plant teacher" (Waldstein 913). The smoking of marihuana facilitates cross-ontological interspecies communication

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between humans and plants, further raising the awareness of one's oneness with nature. As Congo-Nyah remarks, smoking marihuana allows Rastas direct access to "the web of collective consciousness that connects all people, the ecosystem, inner-beings from etheric planes of existence and ultimately 'the Most High'" (Congo-Nyah et al. 267). Rastafarianism thus inherently rejects any nature-culture dichotomies in favor of ecological communication and community.

As has been shown above, "Smoke the Weed" exemplarily tells of these connections between people and the ecosystem through its rhetorical enmeshment of plant seeds and young humans. In the documentary, Snoop's reincarnation as the socially and environmentally conscious Snoop Lion is presented as the product of such 'reasonings' having come to reorient his individualistic gangsta approach to one of ecological and social awareness. Through Rastafarian spirituality, Snoop is not only introduced to an alternative history of the Black diaspora but equally to an alternative ecology that can conceive of nature-culture hybridity. Nevertheless, Snoop Lion's recourse to the 'roots' of hip hop and Black identity in Reggae and Rastafarianism should not be understood as a romanticized nostalgic return to a more authentic, 'primitive' pastoralism.

As Leo Marx remarks, the "yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,' […] is the psychic root of all pastoralism" (6). Environmentally oriented folk music, for instance, holds that "authentic folk music is synonymous with the closeness to the natural world of the cultures that produce it" (Ingram 48), as David Ingram outlines in his study *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*. Viewing "the commodification of music [as] a wholly negative process that degrades performers, audience and the music itself" (48), folk music valorizes authenticity as naturalness. In folk music a romanticized return to a 'primal' and therefore more 'authentic' pastoral life is thereby equated to naturalness. Such pastoral Romantic naturalism and anti-urbanism, however, is not viable to the hip hop artist as proponent of a distinctly urban genre. Predominantly an "ideal […] for the white, urban middle-classes," the fetishization of the authentic and primally natural as something to nostalgically return to masks "class, racial and geographical divisions" (56). Hence, whereas pastoral imagery of a return to an innocent, more authentic life close to nature could serve white, middle-class environmentalist music as an ideal of naturalness, Michael Bennett has shown how African Americans have often "constructed the rural-natural as a realm to be feared for specific reasons and the urban-social as a domain of hope" (198).

As we have seen, Snoop Lion continuously enmeshes urban (i.e., 'street') and natural (green) imagery (traffic lights, satellites, trees, and seeds) into a natureculture, thereby constructing a 'naturalness' decoupled from rural-natural, 'primal' authenticity. In contrast, the nostalgically pastoral in Jamaican Reggae and Rastafarianism is not afforded with such negative connotations. Here, the wooded hills and mountains of Jamaica are the place of freedom from slavery and a life in harmony with nature since they are the place where the Maroons, fugitive Jamaican slaves imagined as the original dreadlocks, could live self-sufficiently (Price 31). Snoop, however, never becomes an 'authentic' Reggae artist but only (if sincerely) performs – still a gangsta – as one. Rather

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than positing a return to a fetishized, 'primitive' and thus more authentic Rastafarian spirituality, Snoop Lion's reincarnation remains firmly grounded in the concrete jungles of hip hop as its naturecultural enmeshment of the urban streets with green plant life constructs the eco-sincere vision of a newly-understood 'street-life.'

Snoop Lion's recourse to Reggae hence does not mean a renunciation of hip hop and its various techniques. Rather, Snoop Lion's reincarnation is presented as a transformation of hip hop and street consciousness: both a return to the social activism of hip hop's roots and a continuous succession to its latest mainstream manifestation, gangsta rap. *Reincarnated* can be seen as complying with the fifth element of hip hop as coined by Afrika Bambaataa: knowledge of self. As Gosa explains, "'Knowledge of self' refers to the Afro-diasporic mix of spiritual and political consciousness designed to empower members of oppressed groups" (57). As Snoop travels to Jamaica, he reconnects with the African diaspora and learns about an alternative Black history and spirituality. He puts this self-knowledge into the pedagogical, social action discussed above.

Snoop Lion therefore signals both continuity with the hip hop artist Snoop Dogg and a new, old, social consciousness. "Smoke the Weed" continuously references older Snoop Dogg songs to signal that hip hop is not renounced but (re)turned to global values. This becomes particularly evident in the song's second verse. Opening "around 6 a.m. in'a the morning" (Snoop Lion), a clear reference to Snoop Dogg's 1994 "Gin and Juice," "Smoke the Weed" sets in both thematically and temporally after Snoop Dogg's hedonistic conspicuous consumption. The reference thus functions as both an affirmation of continuity with Snoop Dogg's practices—Snoop Dogg's trademarks are still present in Snoop Lion—and their reinterpretation into green street consciousness. Snoop Dogg's techniques of pastiche and performativity as well as his characteristic gangsta trademarks are employed toward the highly un-gangsta goals of *Reincarnated*. Snoop Lion's music highlights itself as neither statically residing in gangsta rap nor a regression to any earlier style, but as a continuation of (gangsta) rap techniques into self-knowledge and responsibility: a renewal or reincarnation of hip hop that assumes for itself the 'growth' also evidenced in the plant systems described within the song.

Snoop as a human being, and gangsta rap as a cultural product, are, like plants, subjects of growth in natureculture. The (biological) "life streaming through me," Snoop remarks, produces the cultural product of "the bang bang boogie," i.e., Snoop's new music—both a new eco-sincerity and, as the reference to the Sugarhill Gang classic "Rapper's Delight" shows, a reincarnation of hip hop's roots. The reorientation of one's position toward the environment proposed by Snoop in his reinterpretation of daily marihuana consumption—further discussed below—therefore also is a reorientation Snoop enacts upon hip hop. Hence, the ecological organization Snoop references also underlies the "growth" he displays and refers to in his reincarnation into Snoop Lion. What he calls the "universal clock" in "Smoke the Weed" is the natural rhythm all things in the ecosystem share, cycling culture into nature and vice versa: "We keep planting these seeds/Watch them grow a new breed/Cultivating these trees/The cycle carries on." (2:50-3:01). Here he describes humanity as inherently enmeshed with the natural world and thus implies a form of care within which communal care and environmental care,

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street consciousness and green consciousness, become virtually synonymous as forms of facilitating growth and regeneration. As nature's "cycle carries on" (Snoop Lion), both reciprocally imply one another. The naturecultural ecology presented in "Smoke the Weed" establishes a mode of planetary survival and species growth. This implies that Snoop's transformative growth into Snoop Lion is a natural development. The cyclicity inferred from the relationship between humanity and nature also describes Snoop Lion's transformation of hip hop, in which hip hop and Reggae are recycled into a seminal mode that activates human potentiality for environmental agency.

All of these modes involve developing a consciousness both about and based in ecological interconnection such as that of the Rastafarian inter-species reasoning. Plant teachings that speak of and enact the dissolution of subject and object inform 'Snoop Lion' as both a performative role or object through which communication can happen, and as a communicating subject. Snoop Lion's self-conscious use of gangsta rap's performativity to reconceive street consciousness as green consciousness is thus presented as a natural outgrowth of gangsta rap. Snoop Lion shows his seed by actively turning his roots in gangsta rap toward a new, environmentally and socially conscious hip hop. By perceiving his role in and as part of nature, he becomes able to grow. Thereby, hip hop is returned to sustainability, both in the sense of hip hop being opened up to issues of sustainability and hip hop itself being made capable of sustaining ecological criticism.

3rd Verse: "Live to light": Marihuana smoking reinterpreted as social and environmental activism

Snoop Lion's "Smoke the Weed" employs the context of Reggae music and Rastafarian spirituality to reinterpret Snoop Dogg's trademark of smoking marihuana daily from an act of conspicuous consumption into an act of socially and ecologically conscious consumption—an awareness of one's interconnection with the natural environment. Whereas gangsta rap's trope of the gangsta as pimp and drug dealer celebrates the cynical exploitation of others, in Rastafarian-informed Reggae, selling and growing marihuana is understood as a service for the community. This can for example be seen in Black Uhuru's "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" and "Sinsemilla." The Rastafarian 'bush doctor' (Tosh, "Bush Doctor") is welcomed as providing the community with a means of entering a dialogue with the other, God, and the natural world, with "no profit for I and I" (Black Uhuru, "Sinsemilla" 1:49-50). Unlike hip hop's entrepreneurial drug dealers, these bush doctors act in an educational and sacramental role for the community. By shifting his performative role from that of the gangsta to a Rastafarian spiritual leader, Snoop can turn the hedonism of the gangsta's daily marihuana consumption into a socially and environmentally conscious act that raises awareness of the multiple dependencies necessary for sustenance of life. Smoking weed every day thereby becomes integral to a more holistic form of care for the environment and the community, a symbol of resistance and oneness with nature in which consumption is emptied of gangsta rap's consumerism.

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Snoop Lion advocates the use of marihuana as a non-violent weapon ("The smoke is my gun that's how I blow them away" (2:37-39)) against "Babylon," the Rastafarian word for the Western system of exploitation in which Snoop Dogg, too, is implicitly included. By smoking every day, Snoop is "burying the man, like every single day." This depicts the consumption of marihuana not simply as a protest against unjust laws and general social and environmental injustice. Understood as a measure of eco-dialogue that spans ontologies, the consumption of marihuana becomes a lifestyle of its own that is in touch with ecological interconnectedness and cyclicity, thereby countering the linear, neoliberal, consumerist Babylon lifestyle of police and gangstas alike. In "Smoke the Weed," this ecoconscious lifestyle is one where people "live to light" (Snoop Lion), an act that further establishes the deep enmeshment of humans with nature (plants need light to live and grow and Snoop equally needs to light up to live his green lifestyle). As such, Snoop Lion presents it as being in direct contrast to a system of thought that separates humans from the environment and therefore "can never understand" a natural, sustainable marihuana lifestyle.

In keeping with the already established metaphor of humans and seeds, "Smoke the Weed" presents the consumption of marihuana as allowing for the possibility to see oneself as part of the environment, a stance in direct opposition to "the man." The first verse thus tells of "fresh trees, young seeds all tryin to find the light" (0:47-50): like the ecologically conscious daily smoker of marihuana, their life is bound to the light. Within the Rastafarian context of smoking marihuana as a form of communication with nature, to "live to light" is thus to enter a way of living that assumes the multiple dependencies between nature (plants) and humanity. Cyclically, care for seeds in the sustainable consumption of marihuana establishes an awareness of one's oneness with and as seeds; this in turn calls for social and environmental justice. "Cultivating these trees" therefore shifts from cultivation as a cultural act of mastery over nature to an activity in which humanity and nature bring each other forth reciprocally as "the cycle carries on and on and on and on, it don't stop" (2:58-3:01) (Snoop Lion). 'Growth' thereby shows itself in an altered attitude toward the environment as expressed through the reinterpreted act of marihuana smoking—an attitude in which humans can equate themselves to growing plants as parts of nature—and only becomes possible through such a change in perspective.

Understanding the interrelation of trees and humans turns the smoking of marihuana from conspicuous—as it was in Snoop Dogg's hip hop—to conscious consumption. Snoop's self-knowledge is not simply of social but also of environmental nature. This self-knowledge necessarily implies a renunciation of the exploitative techniques celebrated by Snoop Dogg. Hence, the "man" whom Snoop Lion is burying in *Reincarnated* "like every single day"—by "smok[ing] everyday"—is not merely the Establishment but Snoop Dogg himself: consumption, and hip hop, is not renounced but reinterpreted into more sustainable practices.

Rather than claiming full authenticity for his environmentalism by proposing overtly environmentalist direct actions, Snoop advocates green consciousness through and as street consciousness in a basic remodulation of one's relationship to the

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environment. This becomes particularly apparent in the song's final verse, which ends, "They call me Snoop Lion, I smoke everyday" (Snoop Lion). Not Snoop's activities per se have changed—this would open up the possibility of attacking him for a lack of authenticity—but the name or role he is perceived in is altered, allowing for messages of ecological awareness and communality inaccessible to Snoop Dogg. Snoop Dogg and Snoop Lion alike smoke weed every day. However, the latter does so within a context from which a green street consciousness is derived. Snoop's reinterpretation of marihuana smoking into an eco-conscious act resonates with Jane Bennett's call to reorient ecocritical thought from an environmentalism understood as "the protection and wise management of an ecosystem that surrounds us"—which still implies a separation between humanity and the environment—into a mode that "suggests that the task is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages" (111). Actions facing environmental, and social, crises must be rooted in a transformation of one's attitude toward nature and culture, a transformation that both means and allows for 'growth.'

Outro: Green consciousness as street consciousness

Perhaps the environment and its real problems cannot be talked about, let alone rapped about, by 'real' gangstas. As Gosa argues, "the influx of neo-liberal logic makes it difficult for commercial rap music to nurture intellectual or spiritual growth" (66). The gangsta's (simulated) authenticity demands a personal closed-offness and coherency (of image) incompatible with the agentic assemblages of a reciprocally interconnected ecosystem. The late capitalist hyper-authenticity demanded by gangsta rap's focus on keeping it real appears to stifle ecological thought. Rapping about these real things must inevitably be seen as not 'real' enough, at best simply a commodification of environmentalism.

Ecological awareness and action as proposed in "Smoke the Weed," on the other hand, always remain a process. There is no 'getting it right' (or, conversely, being 'fake') when it comes to the environment. Ecoconscious actions must always fall short: because the openness of ecological systems resists the formation of any pure, real, or true environmentalist action; and because the demands of authenticity—exclusively centered on truth to the self as an end in itself rather than a means with "the public end in view" (Trilling 9)—obfuscate intersubjectivity and communication. Sustainability, as well as the sincere commitment to it, can never be pure. Snoop's ecological self is inherently contradictory and inauthentic. Like the ecosystem itself, it is bound up in an inextricable conjunction of opposing terms, nature and culture only being the most prominent of these. This, however, should not be understood as a reason to be skeptical of sincere, sustainable ecoconsciousness. It provides its very possibility. It means the possibility of growth: Snoop's growth from peddling death as Snoop Dogg to Snoop Lion's life-affirming holistic care, humanity's growth toward sustainability and ecoconsciousness, hip hop's growth from a death- to life-affirming performance, and, of course, plant-growth.

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As could be shown, "Smoke the Weed" understands growth as a function of (a recognition of) multiple dependencies spanning and enmeshing culture and nature. Snoop Lion consciously evades all claims to authenticity. Instead, "Smoke the Weed" displays an awareness of naturecultural assemblages it derives from and expresses through the Rastafarian spiritual understanding of marihuana. In recognizing that he takes part in such naturecultural agentic assemblages, Snoop Lion cultivates gangsta rap's performativity into a role capable of expressing the ecological and the hybrid. In "Smoke the Weed," Snoop, and the act of smoking that is his trademark, are understood as hybrid, natural, and cultural activities. Gangsta role-playing is not renounced but turned toward a dynamic that enmeshes the cultural and natural into a holistic whole. While "the zeitgeist of late modernity could not tolerate Nature-Culture hybrids" (Ghosh 71), as Amitav Ghosh remarks with reference to Bruno Latour, "Smoke the Weed" advocates to "take a few strands and [...] mix a couple breed up" (1:43-46): that is, to create hybrids of weed (smoking) in which we can also perceive the (nature-culture) hybridity of Snoop Dogg/Lion himself. In the assumption of hybridity and assemblages, Snoop's reincarnation both takes the shape of naturecultural growth and generates a vocabulary capable of representing this natureculture. It is through this seed-consciousness—the consciousness of one's agency as part of nature, being both seed and caretaker—that Snoop plants the seeds for a sustainable future. What shall grow of them, only time will tell.

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The Cultural Ecology of Alaskan Indigenous Hip Hop: "Ix̲six̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)"

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Abstract

In hip-hop studies, Indigenous rap music has been garnering increasing attention alongside other non-mainstream manifestations of this 'glocal' genre, and the field has begun to address the significance of specific locales for artistic expression. Worried about environmental studies research that extracts ecological insights from Indigenous cultures without paying attention to colonial history, Indigenous scholars have been critiquing how non-Indigenous colleagues frequently misconstrue the myriad ways in which place, language, knowledge, and cultural identity are intertwined in tribal cultures. Bringing these discourses into conversation, this article focuses on three music videos produced as part of the Native Connections program of the Tlingit and Haida's Tribal Family and Youth Services department in 2018 and 2019. These videos, which feature the Juneau-based rappers Arias Hoyle and Chris Talley alongside other Indigenous adolescents, verbally and visually convey an understanding of their environment not as mere setting, but rather as a source of cultural-historical knowledge and current intergenerational cultural practice. Both location and language are showcased as repositories of cultural identification. The juxtapositions of seemingly untouched landscapes and settled cityscapes as well as of English and Tlingit can be read as confirming ecocritical theories that emphasize the ways in which cultural products address seemingly dichotomous elements such as nature/culture as interdependent. The hip-hop lyrics and videos examined here balance awareness of the historical baggage of settler-colonialism with the intellectually and spiritually invigorating celebration of a locally rooted Indigenous identity, which is neither stuck in the past nor unaware of the world at large. These works thus participate in the "cultural ecology" (Hubert Zapf) of hip hop by mapping out an artistic place defined by Alaskan Indigenous—and especially Tlingit—culture and community in Juneau, without losing sight of larger geographical and sociopolitical contexts.

Keywords: Cultural ecology, postcolonial ecocriticism, Indigenous hip hop, Indigenous rap music, Tlingit, bilingualism.

Resumen

En los estudios sobre el hip-hop, la música de rap indígena ha ido recibiendo cada vez más atención, junto con otras manifestaciones no convencionales de este género 'glocal', y el campo ha comenzado a abordar la importancia de lugares específicos en la expresión artística. Preocupados por la investigación de los estudios medioambientales que extraen conocimientos ecológicos de las culturas indígenas sin prestar atención a la historia colonial, los académicos indígenas han criticado cómo los profesionales no indígenas suelen malinterpretar las múltiples formas en que el lugar, la lengua, el conocimiento y la identidad cultural se entrelazan en las culturas tribales. Llevando estos discursos a la conversación, este artículo se centra en tres vídeos musicales producidos como parte del programa Conexiones Nativas del departamento de Servicios Familiares y Juveniles Tribales de los Tlingit y Haida en 2018 y 2019. Estos vídeos, en los que aparecen los raperos de Juneau Arias Hoyle y Chris Talley junto a otros adolescentes indígenas, transmiten verbal y visualmente una comprensión de su entorno no como mero escenario, sino como fuente de conocimiento histórico-cultural y práctica cultural intergeneracional actual. Tanto el lugar como la lengua se muestran como depósitos de identificación cultural. Las yuxtaposiciones de paisajes aparentemente vírgenes y paisajes urbanos habitados, así como del inglés y el tlingit, pueden leerse como una confirmación de las teorías ecocríticas que hacen hincapié en las formas en que los productos culturales abordan elementos aparentemente dicotómicos como la naturaleza/cultura como interdependientes. Las letras y los

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vídeos de hip-hop examinados aquí equilibran la conciencia del bagaje histórico del colonialismo de los colonos con la celebración intelectual y espiritualmente vigorizante de una identidad indígena arraigada localmente, que no está anclada en el pasado ni es ajena al mundo en general. Así, estas obras participan en la "ecología cultural" (Hubert Zapf) del hip hop al trazar un lugar artístico definido por la cultura y la comunidad indígena de Alaska—y especialmente tlingit—en Juneau, sin perder de vista contextos geográficos y sociopolíticos más amplios.

Palabras clave: Ecología cultural, ecocrítica poscolonial, hip hop indígena, música rap indígena, Tlingit, bilingüismo.

Introduction

So far, rap music has been predominantly studied as an urban phenomenon, and ecocritical studies of hip-hop culture are scarce (Balestrini). In the early 2000s, ecocriticism began to expand its purview from notions like natural beauty and wilderness to include a more variegated range of environments (Bennet), so that ecocritical readings of urban settings became more widespread. At the same time, postcolonial theory contributed to broadening ecocriticism's scope by shifting the field from primarily white, male, and upper- and middle-class perspectives toward a remarkably larger purview (Cilano and DeLoughrey; Smith; Ruffin; Baldwin; Parham and Westling). This essay focuses on hip hop by predominately Indigenous youth in Juneau, Alaska, that is, in a municipality comprising a small urban area of 36 km^2 plus an immense geographical expanse of over eight thousand km^2 which includes mountains, glaciers, a channel, and islands. It will address how these youths relate to their specific home turf and its Indigenous and colonial histories. It will also discuss how their current local community impacts their artistic processes of meaning-making.

Not surprisingly, studying works by Indigenous artists requires awareness of the sociopolitical power relations that are central to postcolonial theorizations of settler colonialism and that mirror long-standing debates about the relation between nature and culture. European colonists and subsequent generations of settlers relegated Indigenous languages and other media of self-expression to a realm of 'nature' that was strictly separated from the colonizers' claim to defining and possessing 'culture.' As the ecocritical readings in this article show, Indigenous hip hop that engages with the postcolonial implications of such a nature/culture divide can reveal the ongoing impact of settler-colonialism as well as the assertiveness of contemporary Indigenous cultural practice.

Linda Hutcheon argues that particularly non-white artists and scholars (as well as women) have been instrumental in critiquing "emancipatory universality" (124) as one of "modernity's claims" that must be reconsidered for its anything-but-emancipatory impact. Scholars have become cognizant of how the "discourse of colonialism" has employed "signifying practices whose work it is to *produce and naturalise* the hierarchical power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships" (Slemon qtd. in Hutcheon 127). In order to counteract "modernity's impulse to authorize, legislate, systematize, totalize, and synthesize" (Hutcheon 135), we

need to replace "modern *either/or* binaries" with "postmodern *both/and* thinking" (139). I reference Hutcheon's sagacious 1993 article here because the shift from the acceptance of a seemingly clear, simplistically stable binary ("*either/or*") to tolerance for the potentially oxymoronic or otherwise indeterminate and unsettling negotiation of "*both/and*" simultaneity can be fruitfully combined with Hubert Zapf's more recent theory of cultural ecology. Analogous to Hutcheon's suggestions about how scholars can avoid replicating the limitations of hierarchical and universalizing modernity, Zapf's theory offers an alternative to the one-way street of dichotomy-based ecocritical thinking: the exploratory possibilities of dynamic linkages.

According to Zapf, "cultural ecology is distinct from […] universalizing ecocentric theories in that it thinks together the two axiomatic premises of an ecological epistemology, [which are] connectivity *and* diversity, relationality *and* difference" (138). In other words, "cultural ecology" does not regard unifying factors from a universalist perspective. Instead of negating boundaries, it studies their cultural-historical dimension alongside their meaning-making potential. Nature and culture are, consequently, analyzed as interlinked phenomena without collapsing them into one another. Cultural ecology avoids "an ecocentric phenomenology" focused on the physical body in favor of the "basic premise of a vital interrelatedness yet evolutionary difference between culture and nature" (139). The interpretation of literary texts, as Zapf demonstrates, yields "new hypotheses [that] emerge from the explorative dialogic interplay between different domains" so that literature itself becomes "a source of cultural-ecological knowledge" (144). In addition to this double perspective on nature and culture as coexisting rather than indistinguishably boundaryless, Zapf proposes author- and work-specific analyses in light of cultural ecology as a heuristic framework. This approach can help scholars realize that the notion of hip-hop ecologies in the plural asks them to refrain from sweeping claims about hip hop–related artistic genres. Instead, it will be necessary to explore how particular works calibrate the nature–culture relation. In studying works by Indigenous hip-hop artists, this kind of both/and thinking facilitates viewing individual works with the history of colonization in mind, but not entirely defined by it. Furthermore, cultural ecology as an approach encourages attention to individual outlooks on nature–culture relations rather than presupposing that these relations are given—for instance, if one were to regard ethnic or cultural backgrounds as essentialist and thus rigid.

An anti-essentialist outlook encourages meticulous attention to individual artists and artefacts. Similarly, ecocritical readings of Indigenous hip-hop require a non-universalizing approach to space, place, and relationality. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist, argues that non-Indigenous scholars in various ecology-focused fields have extracted useful details through "the documentation of Indigenous Knowledge" ("Anticolonial" 380). They have failed, however, to grasp the significance of Indigenous languages and of "land-based" traditions of "teaching and learning" (380). For Gregory Cajete, who also emphasizes close links between "place as a living presence" (182) and "language" (183), the reciprocal and agentic relation between land and spoken human language culminates in the conviction that places and people are mutually constitutive. This triangular relation of specific locales,

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individuals/communities, and verbal enunciation that Cajete and Simpson promote needs to be part of an ecocritical reading of artistic works that engage Indigenous cultural practices.

This article will focus on three hip-hop videos produced in Alaska's capital, Juneau, in 2018 and 2019 as part of a youth program for Indigenous cultural self-expression. These videos present the city and its environs, the local community's material culture, the Tlingit language, and Indigenous spiritual traditions of the Southeast Alaska panhandle as tightly interlaced in ways that enable a multi-ethnic local population to thrive and to communicate across ethnicities, generations, and regions. In addition to focusing on a group of works from Alaska, a geographical region which has not yet garnered much attention as hip-hop territory—be it by popular music audiences or by scholars—this case study contributes to developing fruitful intersections among ecocriticism, hip-hop studies, and Indigenous studies by explaining how the three music videos interlace local environment, cultural-historical knowledge, bilingualism, and contemporary self-definition in an intergenerational community. Tlingit heritage as found in Juneau serves as a unifying focal point for local youths of multiple ethnicities: locations—ranging from glaciers to museums—visually display heritage and arts as both contemporary and ancient; the same locations also figure as settings for learning and for expressing cultural identification, thus providing physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social nurture.

Indigenous Hip Hop: State of Research

Indigenous hip-hop artists have been confronted with mainstream expectations as to their looks and outfits, the contents of their lyrics, and the ostensibly 'natural' impulse to write exclusively for Indigenous audiences (Amsterdam 53). As scholars in musicology, ethnology, anthropology, history, literary studies, and American Studies have argued, such pigeonholing is frequently rooted in dichotomous understandings of 'modernity' versus 'tradition.' Victoria Levine points out that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European conceptualizations of modernity and Indigeneity have consistently been used to justify settler colonialism and its aftermath by characterizing Western cultures as embodying progress, mobility, and wholesome "break[s] with tradition," whereas the same conceptualizations denigrated Indigenous cultures by claiming that they were cut off from modernity by "antiquated customs and rural lifestyles" (1). As an antidote to such a simplistic perspective on future-oriented progress versus backward pastness, Jeff Berglund, Jan Johnson, and Kimberli Lee stress that "tradition is not a static category, but one that is contested and evolving" ("Introduction" 4). U.S.-based musicologists have also been arguing that the long-standing focus on "*Time*, the original structuring principle of musicological inquiry, is making room for a new organizing framework based on the phenomenology of *space*" (Fink qtd. in Garrett et al. 708). The resulting "emphasis on culture as spatial process" (710) coheres with a parallel development in the history of rap music: for instance, Murray Forman explains the diversification of hip hop as expressing "a more pronounced level of spatial awareness" (250), which has made rap artists "alternative cartographers" (249). The claim that hip hop represents a metaphorical act

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of map-making—a process which is a classic settler-colonial expression of claiming ownership of and power over land—can also be found in studies of Indigenous rap artists. Lauren Amsterdam thus describes how hip hop produces "cartographies of continuity over stolen lands and constricted latitudes of existence" (54). Reading rap as a vehicle for reclaiming Indigenous land does not only cohere with Indigenous notions of historicity which privilege space over time (Nabokov 131); it also encourages ecocritical analyses of how words, sounds, and visual elements do so in rap videos.

The shift toward specific locales and towards artistic acts of mapping on the part of Indigenous rappers is complemented by studying locally anchored Indigenous composers and musicians as participants in larger cultural networks that negate the boundaries created by settler colonialism. Referring to Maximilian C. Forte's work, Jessica L. Horton agrees that "forms of translocal and transnational connectivity were present between indigenous communities in the Americas long before their contact with Europeans. Forte's long view of history is a useful starting point for considering indigenous cultures as potential sources for conceptualizing transnational processes, rather than inert systems under attack by globalization" and for understanding "that definitions of indigeneity are changeable and require significant historical nuance" (Horton; cf. Forte). In his work on Indigenous hip-hop artists, Christopher Aplin describes this phenomenon as Indigenous "cosmopolitanism—their sociomusical mastery of cross-border movement and artistic synthesis" ("Get Tribal" 114; cf. Simpson, "Indigenous" 24). Physical and metaphorical border-crossings ultimately show that Indigenous cultures are neither consigned to the past nor unable to change, evolve, and survive in the present. As Aplin puts it: "The unexpectedness of Native hip-hop presumes the isolation or unchanging timelessness of Native communities, thus depriving them of a sense of Indigenous modernity" ("Expectation" 43). In other words, the act of acknowledging what Aplin calls "Indigenous modernity" is an act of perceiving hip hop from Zapf's and Hutcheon's "*both/and*" vantage point rather than as an oxymoron.

Similar to the social relations of border-crossing cultural exchange, Indigenous popular music performances provide an "interactional structure" (Berglund et al., "Introduction" 5). Vine Deloria, Jr., even claims that "knowledgeable singers use song to alter aspects of the time–space continuum and to alter other natural laws" (qtd. in Berglund et al., "Introduction" 5). An ecocritical understanding of locations as interactants rather than mere geographical coordinates heightens awareness of musical performances as engaging with environments in site-specific ways. According to place studies theory, individual and group experiences, interpretations, and attitudes transform a physical location ("space") into a "place" (Easterlin 228). To understand that humans thus project onto a place specific meanings, functions, and feelings for long or short time periods (232) complements a central trajectory of cultural ecology: to scrutinize how literature intervenes in cultural evolution. Thus, I will discuss how rap lyrics and their performance in significant locations jointly convey "the dynamics of place-in-process" (228) and how these dynamics contribute to the depiction and assertion of place-based identity construction.

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Mediating Alaskan Environments and Indigenous Culture

In recent years, scholars have observed that hip hop is being used to foster appreciation of lived Indigenous heritage. According to Amsterdam, "artists' desires to enroll Native youth in heritage exploration through hip-hop demonstrates that music is action with revolutionary possibilities, for making music fuels the replication of life" (67). Robinson points out that musical genres such as "Indigenous hip-hop, rap, opera, throat boxing […] assert the vibrancy of our cultures on a continuum with Indigenous tradition rather than a break from it. These contemporary genres carry our cultural knowledge into the present, as does [sic] throat singing or Cree hunting songs" (238). This article discusses this productive linkage of cultural tradition and contemporary music in three music videos that were produced as part of a Juneau-based community program for adolescents in 2018 and 2019.

The Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska are headed by a Central Council that reports to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. In July 2018, the Native Connections program of the Tlingit and Haida's Tribal Family and Youth Services department offered "a week-long music video camp" which "focused on providing space for the youth to develop culturally-based social, emotional, mental, and spiritual skills to become healthy and resilient students. […] Each youth participated in writing exercises to help create the lyrics and collaborated to develop the video's aesthetic" (qtd. from description for "Spirit"; cf. *2018 Tlingit and Haida Annual Report* 49). Among the seven adolescents at the center of the music video (Jacob Brouillette, Marcel Cohen, Bradley Dybdahl, Arias Hoyle, Keegan Kanan, Geri Rodriguez, and Kenndra Willard), Arias Hoyle—who goes by the artist's name of Air Jazz—stands out as the lead rapper. He started his own YouTube channel in 2014 and decided to become a hip-hop artist while still in high school (*Air Jazz*). In addition to being the central vocalist, Hoyle also raps, dances, acts, and moves with his rap-duo partner and (then) high-school buddy, Chris Talley, or with larger groups of people.

The three videos present hip hop as a community-building art form and as a purveyor of Tlingit and Haida cultural heritage, thus integrating hip hop's so-called 'fifth element'—knowledge—into a celebration of Indigeneity. This celebration is, I presume, immediately graspable by local/regional viewers familiar with this heritage. Moreover, as this article will argue, the videos enter into an implied conversation with non-Indigenous and non-Alaskan viewers who might encounter them on YouTube.

The lyrics and images mention and show locations which are recognizable to different degrees, depending on viewers' familiarity with Juneau. What any viewer unmistakably realizes, however, is that these locales offer various kinds of interaction: shared experiences of learning and practicing traditions, and opportunities to create self-representations. The songs depict how people live and move within specific locations, and what this means to them. Physical sites are associated with beauty, with bountiful nature that nourishes body and soul, with spiritual experiences, and with a multi-generational and multi-ethnic community. Participating in Indigenous culture in Juneau, then, encompasses not only geographical and social settings but also multiple metaphorical

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environments which fulfil specific functions. They elicit a range of responses, which cohere with ethnological and anthropological concepts such as "memoryscape," "visionscape," "culturescape," and "taskscape" (Sejersen 74–82; cf. Nuttall 54). The language-based discourse as well as the visual and aural renderings of engaging with the Indigenous material culture and aesthetic heritage (such as appreciating art work and clothing, learning crafts, preparing food, dancing, and singing), all of which are brought together in rap lyrics and other elements of hip-hop performance, produce powerful examples of how the preservation of cultural knowledge coexists with contemporary and future-oriented adaptability and malleability.

The three music videos—"Ix̲si x̲án Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)," "Zibit," and "Spirit"—create a "*both/and*" aesthetic on multiple levels.[1] Their bilingual lyrics are, obviously, only fully comprehensible to speakers of Tlingit *and* English. Video footage of the performers in a broad range of environments provides impressions of Indigenous cultural practices and contemporary social situations through visually following the adolescent workshop participants. Significantly, the lyrics and images confront rather than privilege stereotypical 'tourist' perceptions. While the videos express the youths' awareness of how non-Alaskans—like the author of this article or the approximately 6,000 daily visitors to Juneau during the cruise-ship season—might misperceive them, their cultural heritage, and their current lives, they vibrantly assert ancient and current local cultural practices, while playfully responding to outsiders' ignorance and misconceptions. Thus, the videos foreground the youths' Indigenous and local identity formation as the decisive contemporary "place"-defining element of Juneau.

The first song, "Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)," focuses on the adolescent performers' love for family, community, language, and Indigenous culture. The song emphasizes that this living, contemporary, and bilingual culture successfully intertwines appreciation of history and tradition with participation in so-called mainstream culture and specifically in hip hop. The lyrics thus claim Juneau as a formative environment for the performers' sense of self, and they put the city on the map of U.S. hip-hop culture.

The chorus—"I pick those blueberries / I love my Mom / I smoked a phat pound of salmon"—contains the song's central strategic elements: references to the bountiful land and a declaration of love which echoes the innumerable references to mothers in hip-hop lyrics but may also celebrate the matrilineal Tlingit and Haida cultures, and the seventeen-year-old MC's close-knit family. The third line refers back to the first verse: "I'm not smoking cannabis, this is just some salmon meat / You misunderstanding me[,] I do this one for family" ("Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)"). Family, here, goes beyond the nuclear family, and salmon links up with a specific tribal unit. As Hoyle emphasizes in the final section, he identifies as a member of a Tlingit subgroup called the "Chilkat" or "Salmon Cache Tribe," an affiliation that he also highlights by naming his first full-length album, released on 6 January 2021, *Chill Out Chilkat* (Hoyle). Throughout the video, we

[1] For details on the videos, see the works cited. A heartfelt shoutout of gratitude goes to recording artist Arias Hoyle who kindly emailed me the lyrics of the three songs and provided English translations for all of the Tlingit passages. Gunałchéesh ("thank you"), Arias!

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see community members engaged in cutting up salmon and preparing it to be smoked. Thus, the entire song presents bountiful nature and community/family as attractive for the adolescent crew of performers. The pun on "phat"/"fat" expresses this appeal in a memorably homophonic nutshell. Using a term that originated in the early 1960s ("Phat, adjective") and that is frequently used in hip hop provides a good example of how the videos promote the commensurability of traditional Indigenous cultural practices with contemporary popular-music self-expression.

The focus on the Southeast Alaska panhandle as a "culturescape" (Sejersen 81) is established by references to specific locations (Mendenhall Glacier, Juneau, Angoon, Hoonah, Kodiak), to Indigenous people ("Haida Tlingit folk," "Tsimshian," "raven and eagle people," "T&H [i.e., Tlingit and Haida] in my DNA"), and to objects and activities ("totem," "canoeing," "drum," "local native clothing regalia," "hunting or fishing"). Hoyle playfully engages with hip-hop stereotypes when he refers to himself as a "Native gangster youth" and "basketball courter." He connects the worlds of Alaskan tribal culture and of urban hip-hop culture, for example, in a string of assonances in the second verse: "Don't ask to l*ea*ve[,] we could basket w*ea*ve, shoot basket thr*ee*s / and practice thr*ee* man w*ea*ve[,] sounds sw*ee*t" (emphasis added; "Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)"). Traditional Indigenous crafts like basket weaving thus intersect with non-Indigenous contemporary sports like basketball, which is stereotypically associated with African American communities.

In addition to promoting shared heritage-oriented activities and an anti-drug message,[2] the lyrics assert Indigenous rights to the land and to cultural practice. Not only do they live "to the beat of our own drum," but they stress that "this is our land, and it began / with just us, the same it'll end (yeah)" ("Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)"). For the speaker, the art of writing and the act of expressing allegiance to his culture merge toward the end of the lyrics, which are written in Tlingit: he first thanks his pencil and then the similarly shaped, much larger totem pole. Thus, again, the individual artist casts himself as part of a community. The contemporary activity of writing hip-hop lyrics with a pencil is integrated into a sense of historical awareness: as Tlingit elder Judson Brown puts it, "totem poles were our history books. Unfortunately, the missionaries who came early on in the 1800s and the public officials thought that totem poles were our idols. They weren't. They all told a story, usually of achievement or the overcoming of some obstacles" (qtd. in Nabokov 150).

Similar to Brown's correction of non-Indigenous misconceptions regarding the functions of totem poles, the lyrics and the music video offer explicit explanations to non-local or non-Indigenous listeners and viewers. The very first line of the song reads: "Even though we're Northwest[,] we still rep the Southeast" ("Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My

[2] Besides the salmon-instead-of-cannabis motif, the lyrics and the video also play with the proverb of turning life's lemons into lemonade by sporting the soft drink "Sprite lemon lime." According to a self-description of Arias Hoyle and Chris Talley on a website that features Black Alaskan artists, they were both born to cocaine-using mothers, were adopted as infants, and grew up in multiethnic families (see "Chris Talley and Air Jazz"). In addition to the videos being produced by a youth-oriented community program, this personal background may have played a role in emphasizing an anti-drug message here.

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People)"). This verse indicates the potential presence of a non-Alaskan audience from whose perspective Alaska is simply located in a hardly imaginable and remote "Northwest." Relegating all of the state to the Northwest ignores that the ancestral lands of the Tlingit and Haida are part of the Southeast Alaska panhandle, which shares a North-South border with Canada. The song thus highlights the importance of one's vantage point, which involves geographical positioning and cultural knowledge.

The second song, "Zibit," picks up the juxtaposition of outside and inside perspectives on Indigenous culture in Juneau addressed in the first song. The lyrics poignantly contrast a tourist perspective on a local museum with the lived experience of local Indigenous people for whom the museum functions as a community center that represents their history, cosmology, art, and current cultural practices. The single-word title playfully zips the word "exhibit" into two syllables, possibly to highlight the incomplete tourist perspective. On a more practical level, "Zibit" fits neatly into the rhythmic pattern of the hook, which is sung by Chris Talley:

> Welcome to the Zibit (2x)
> Got killer whale
> Eagle bear
> Raven form! Go ribbit!
> Welcome to the Zibit (2x)
> At first you buy a ticket
> And then ya gonna live it.

The exhibit referenced here is located in a building owned by the Sealaska Corporation, one of the Indigenous governing bodies that resulted from the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The lyrics depict the exhibit as a site of lived heritage, not as a dusty collection of items belonging to an ostensibly long-gone past. The first verse merges heritage and modernity in presenting the Indigenous "culturescape" as a "memoryscape," "taskscape," and "visionscape" (to quote Sejersen again). Sonically, this is conveyed through assonance:

> Transforming *ou*r h*ou*se
> into a p*ow*w*ow*
> with surr*ou*nd s*ou*nd
> chant it l*ou*d
> dancing d*ow*nt*ow*n. (my emphasis)

The urban environment of Juneau provides an important canvas for Tlingit and Haida cultural learning and living. The lyrics refer to Juneau with its Tlingit name ("Dzánti K'ihéeni") and ascribe more power to Indigenous culture than to Christianity in this location; they celebrate artefacts such as "Lingít blankets" (which are passed down from one generation to the next) and totem poles (whose cultural centrality is also mentioned in "Ix̲si x̲án, A x̲ K̲wáan," as we have seen). The song also includes shoutouts to Tlingit leader Walter Soboleff (1908–2011), Tsimshian Alaskan artist David Boxley (b. 1952), and "latséen shaawát ([…] our strong women)" ("Zibit"). Non-Alaskans are playfully mocked for their presumed lack of familiarity with Alaskan history, leaders, contemporary culture, and social structures.

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More extensively than the first video, "Zibit" accentuates a stereotypical tourist perspective. Outside the exhibition building, we repeatedly discern massive cruise ships whose temporary residents will—by implication—'take in' Juneau during a one-day visit. Inside the Sealaska Corporation building, the fast-moving camera hurriedly pans across wall displays of carved artefacts. Assuming the visual perceptions of a tourist who simply rushes through the exhibit, the lyrics imagine someone—presumably a non-Indigenous, non-Alaskan visitor without the requisite cultural and historical knowledge—who perceives the exhibited masks and animal shapes as "quite scary," "like [a] messy collage," and a "desert mirage." Fearing another culture's aesthetics and its cosmological origins ("scary"), dismissing an assemblage of artefacts of an unknown culture as looking disorganized ("messy"), and regarding such cultures as unreal or deceptive ("mirage"): such prejudices and preconceptions have been rampant within white-majority settler populations, and Indigenous artists are often confronted with them. In the same ironic spirit, the lyrics characterize Indigenous clothing as "pageantable" and as sporting "beautiful Gucci otter." These emblematic references to a folksy pageant outfit and a glamorous fashion label possibly allude to expectations of Indigenous exoticism and picturesqueness, and to a long history of (ab-)using local resources for non-local luxury items. Otter fur, in particular, conjures up the fur trade as an example of exploiting natural resources to extinction. In the song, outsiders' assumed deficit of knowledge about Alaskan history and culture is neither restricted to day tourists nor to past events. It is also ascribed to persons in power such as the United States president, whose ignorance should be punished, the speaker suggests, by restricting him to a "smaller oval office." More seriously, the lyrics juxtapose the positively connoted Indigenous "clan" with racist "klansmen" whose efforts to undermine Indigenous culture and interethnic harmony must be offset by fostering both.

Despite the title, the video does not solely show the "Zibit" which pays homage to ancestors and historical personages. The museum simultaneously figures as a locale of cultural learning in the present. The video footage of multiethnic groups in the building highlights people who dance, work on crafts, and otherwise engage in community activities centered around shared material and cultural practices. Another element that goes beyond the exhibit is that Arias Hoyle intones some verses outside. He performs in urban-looking sections of Juneau that have an infrastructure, buildings, and monuments. For instance, he is repeatedly shown sitting on an immense wooden "Welcome to Juneau" structure located at the port for cruise ships. Other parts of the performance are set in decidedly non-urban sections of Juneau that emphasize the beauty of (ostensibly or relatively) untouched nature. Despite its small number of residents, the municipality of Juneau is geographically larger than some of the smallest of the contiguous forty-eight states and features natural environments like high mountains, bodies of water, and glaciers. Besides observing Hoyle outside the Sealaska Corporation building, we also see Talley singing the chorus of "Zibit" both in a sound studio and in a mountainous landscape. The visual impression that the video creates is that neither the artists nor their community members are 'stuck in a museum.' They move and perform inside and outside, interacting with multiple generations and ethnicities. Furthermore, the seemingly

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ephemeral outside performance is counteracted by showing Talley in a recording studio, highlighting that the song is archived for repeated listening/viewing and that some of the performers have professional artistic aspirations.

The lyrics of the third song and video, "Spirit," connect with the first two songs by addressing the challenging pursuit of Indigenous identity in the contemporary moment. Reminiscent of earlier references to Indigenous cosmology, this song explores ways of connecting with Tlingit concepts of spirituality and—as in the second song—depicts the main singer in relation to Indigenous artefacts. The nearly exclusively Tlingit lyrics characterize language as a crucial channel for accessing Indigenous spirituality. The closing of "Spirit" returns to motifs introduced in the first song, especially community coherence and connectedness to the local environment. In fact, the adolescent performers indicate that they adopted the first song's title as their group name: "Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan."

As explained in the information posted underneath the YouTube video, a person's Indigenous name links them with their ancestors and encourages them to respect long-standing values in order to pass them on to posterity. The song thus dramatizes Hoyle's conversation with his tribal spirit, as indicated by repeated references to his Indigenous name, "Yawdunéi." The phrases that he speaks do not form a clearly coherent text. They rather read like sentences that a language learner might use to practice idiomatic expressions, as the English translations added here in parentheses indicate. When the spirit reassures him that everything is fine although he is struggling with the language, he responds with "Xát yanéekw! (I'm sick)" and (only in English): "I can't even speak fluently!" Before the last hook, however, the speaker thanks his spirit and goes on to assert his selfhood and his participation in Indigenous culture, when he claims that "Lingít Yoo x'atángi wooch.éen / Ká latséen (Tlingit language is / togetherness and strength)" ("Spirit"). By implication, mastering his Indigenous tongue provides both healing and community.

At the end of the lyrics, the land is given center stage, referring back to the assertion of Indigenous ownership of their territory in "Ix̲si x̲án, Ax̲ K̲wáan":

> Áasgatu Xóodzi / (Forest Bear)
> Dzantík'ihéeni / (Flounders' creek)
> Ax aani áyá / (This land is my land)
> Í aani áyá / (This land is your land)
> Ldakát heew.aan (Everybody)
> Du aani (Their land).

The "forest bear" possibly emblematizes wildlife in the Tongass National Forest, which surrounds Juneau. "Dzantík'ihéeni / (Flounders' creek)" ("Spirit") is the Tlingit place name for Juneau. This Indigenous designation provides an alternative to naming places after notorious gold diggers like the Quebecois Joe Juneau. The poignant hint at Woody Guthrie's classic American folk song "This Land Is Your Land," which has assumed the quality of a national anthem (Butler 5), further pits settler-colonial and Indigenous notions of land ownership and connectedness against one another. More importantly, performing a Tlingit version of the central lines from a perennially popular song that, more often than not, is used to express allegiance and belonging to "America" comes across as a powerful signal of self-assertiveness. One could imagine that, if "Spirit" were

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to become more broadly known, it would spark controversies comparable to the heated debate about singing the national anthem in a language other than English (Garrett 1–4). By referring to specific locations with their Tlingit names and by claiming these locations for the Indigenous community, the lyrics confirm the decolonializing impetus of learning about Tlingit culture. According to an Indigenous understanding of "land as pedagogy" (Simpson, "Land"), such a learning process entails reciprocal land–human interaction and ascribes agentic power to the land.

"Spirit" connects with the previous two songs not only thematically but also through sonic and visual similarities. It thus contributes to a sense of closure and of coherence across the three music videos. Reminiscent of "Ix̲si x̲án, A x̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)," which opens with the sound of Indigenous drumming, "Spirit" begins with tribal music—in this case, a chant. Images of local youths and of a mountainous landscape accompany this opening sequence. The lyrics focus on the lyrical I's conversation with his own tribal spirit. Parts of the video juxtapose Hoyle's voice with a vocoded 'spirit voice' and depict the interlocutors as two head-shaped silhouettes facing one another on either side of an Indigenous work of art, which depicts the world-transforming trickster figure of a raven. Yet the video also shows the main singer in company with others, moving with them, performing for them, and experiencing community with them inside and outside. This embeddedness of the metaphysical spirit dialogue within a materially/physically rooted context of social interaction may have been inspired by "the verbal genre known to folklorists as *memorate*—narratives of personal encounters with the supernatural that become part of family or even community folklore" (Nabokov 106). Visually stressing the importance of social context, the end of the music video shows a bird's eye view of youths lying on the ground in a pattern that forms the letters "I A K" ("Ix̲si x̲án, A x̲ K̲wáan (I Love You My People)"). The camera's lofty distance from and perspective on humans and their environment playfully keeps the spiritual subtext in view. Ultimately, "I A K" does not only display the name of the group and reference the title of the first video, but it also pithily summarizes the incentive of the entire project: to awaken and strengthen love for Indigenous history, culture, and identity within the adolescent workshop participants, and to encourage a positive sense of self alongside community coherence.

Concluding Remarks

Hip-hop scholars have pointed out that throughout the world rap music has become instrumental in strengthening local communities, their cultural affiliation, and their pride in their respective languages. Practices such as sampling have also encouraged artists to mix musical elements and visual components of their own cultures with the transnational aesthetics of hip hop (see, for instance, Verán 337). Imani Perry argues that

> one of the communication elements that resists white supremacy and co-optation has been the self-conscious incomprehensibility of hip hop lyricism. Rappers are misunderstood, both intentionally and unintentionally, not only as a side effect of the fact that we rely on figurative pidgins in the United States to cross borders in popular culture; but incomprehensibility is also a protective strategy. (511)

Here, Perry refers to lyrical and linguistic opaqueness within the English language. The experience of watching and listening to the three music videos discussed in this article invites an expansion of Perry's inquiry. What happens when bilingual hip hop is heard by listeners who only understand one of the two languages? And how can a non-Tlingit speaker respond to the third song which only features two English phrases: "I can't even speak fluently" and "Very sorry" ("Spirit")? Importantly, "Spirit" provides audible access to a language that is not everyday fare when it comes to hip hop and to mainstream experiences in the United States, let alone in Europe. Beyond that, the focus on Tlingit fits into the intense local rootedness of the triad of songs/videos. What better culmination for a program of cultural immersion could be imagined? The same can be said of Hoyle's Tlingit-language music video "Latseen áyá xát (Strong One)" which he co-created in the summer of 2019 "in partnership with Tlingit and Haida Central Council, the University of Alaska Southeast, SHI, and the students enrolled in the Latseen Academy" (qtd. from description for "Latseen áyá x̲át (Strong One)"). Simpson and Cajete would, presumably, applaud all opportunities for local youth to learn from/in their home environment and to express their cultural knowledge in their Indigenous tongue, thus shaking off some of the fetters of depending on English. For viewers who cannot understand Tlingit, however, the verbal meaning cannot be accessed by the visuals alone, so that such viewers are left to work with the song title and the above-quoted phrases about the speaker's struggle with language competency. To my mind, this is a fruitfully humbling experience that will hopefully inspire respect for the bilingual Indigenous community and the adolescents' engagement with their heritage.

The triad of music videos can, thus, be profitably read in light of Zapf's "cultural ecology," which acknowledges the coexistence and even celebration of "connectivity *and* diversity, relationality *and* difference" (138). As in Hutcheon's concept of "postmodern *both/and* thinking" (139), the youths participating in the music video camp represent themselves as decidedly bilingual in a culture that is both current and ancient: a culture that encompasses Indigenous heritage, the colonization of Alaska, and the twenty-first-century present of the Sealaska Corporation and the United States. The future envisioned here asserts the values of family and community in all of their diversity. While I am grateful to have been granted access to an English translation of the Tlingit lyrics, I would like to emphasize how important it must have been for the adolescent performers to assert exclusively in Tlingit that "(Tlingit language is / togetherness and strength)" ("Spirit") without any aural disruption by lyrics sung in English—disruption in the sense that it would privilege outsiders and not foreground the community-building and empowering functions of Tlingit for the artists and the main addressees.

The central elements of "explorative dialogic interplay" (Zapf 144) in the music videos discussed here are taken from contrasting Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or Alaskan and non-Alaskan, knowledges. The conversation between and among different cultural inputs in these hip-hop lyrics and videos, then, relies on Indigenous "cosmopolitanism" (Aplin, "Get Tribal" 114). The visuals make clear that Juneau is a multi-ethnic place; they also demonstrate how the integration of multiple origins can be achieved under the cultural umbrella of specific Indigenous affiliations and dedication to

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the local multi-ethnic community. In Hoyle's case, his afro and his dark skin tone bespeak his African American heritage as much as some of his outfits bespeak his Tlingit heritage. Chris Talley's presence and performance also confirm that Black artists are part and parcel of local Juneau culture.

Beyond this, the videos characterize Indigeneity as a model of appreciating one's environment and of seeking to find a balanced, healthy way of life therein (while being acutely aware of less healthy options that threaten large swaths of Alaskan society). Thus, "Ix̲si x̲án, A x̲ K̲wáan" verbally and visually presents cultural knowledge ranging from taking in specific environments (for instance, by canoeing, as in the opening scene) to enjoying the offerings of the local flora (as emphasized in the blueberry-picking segment) and fauna (as shown through the salmon-smoking event) and to appreciating family and community (as highlighted by the reference to the MC's mother and to the significance of family in general). The videos of "Zibit" and "Spirit" subsequently elaborate on some of these elements. They add historical consciousness and further cultural practices, such as language proficiency, spiritual beliefs, traditional crafts, dancing, and contemporary art.

At the outset, I discussed Hutcheon's critique of modernity's normative incentives as well as musicologists' discussion of contemporary Indigenous music as transcending white settler-colonial notions of Indigeneity, i.e., notions that relegate Indigenous art to the past and to immutable 'tradition.' Reducing Indigenous self-expression to necessarily centering around the rejection of such stereotypes is deficient as well, as Trevor Reed finds: "So much of what we see as Indigenous musical modernity may come across as resistance to settler-colonialism, yet how can we be certain we truly understand all that is happening in modern Indigenous sonic spaces?" (259). I certainly cannot claim fully to understand the verbal and non-verbal sound-related Tlingit elements of the three videos, but the capacious eclecticism of hip hop as well as the paratextual information posted on YouTube provide enough access to grasp the trajectory of the songs. The youth project's videos intertwine Indigenous traditions and survival in the present, assert the sustenance received through their sense of belonging and through linguistic and cultural practices, and express the inspiration they derived from their Indigenous heritage.

This inspiration also thrives in the varieties of hip hop that the lead rappers of these videos mobilize in their subsequent work. In 2020, Hoyle and Talley's performances and recordings as "Radiophonic Jazz" were part of the virtual art exhibition "Black Alaskan Art Matters." Here the duo defined their approach as "Zen Hop" which brings together hip hop, Indigenous sonic worlds, and Asian musical elements. Embedded within their experiences as mixed-race Black men in Alaska, they characterize their music as "an expression of our hope for the future" ("Chris Talley and Air Jazz"). This hope confirms Simpson's notion of Indigenous peoples' "collective resurgence" from the centuries-long impact of settler-colonialism and towards re-establishing "complex, layered, multidimensional, intimate relationships with human and non-human beings" ("Indigenous" 23). The required process involves "Indigenous peoples standing up on our lands in a principled, strategic and articulate way, embodying change" rather than "relying on victim narratives" (31).

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While Simpson addresses political activism, music videos like the ones discussed in this article can similarly encourage change and proclaim a site-centered sense of self. As Zapf argues, understanding literary texts from the vantage point of cultural ecology draws attention to the multiple "discursive modes" that these texts accommodate: (a) "culture-critical metadiscourse," (b) "imaginative counter-discourse," and (c) "reintegrative interdiscourse" (147–48). Zapf ascribes these modes to fiction, but this article has shown that they also occur in rap poetry and music videos: the three songs (a) critique clichés about hip hop as much as clichés about Alaska and Indigenous people; (b) they offer creative alternatives that foreground the relations among place, cultural heritage, language, and intergenerational community-building; and (c) their bilingualism and their accessibility on YouTube indicate the artists' confidence in the impact that their take on hip hop might have—both on/in their community and on/in the performing arts. While the youths who participated in the workshop did not necessarily all plan a career in popular music, this confidence is vindicated by Arias Hoyle's projects and career as a recording artist. The songs he released in 2021 allude to a broad range of cultures across the planet. He recently also collaborated with Indigenous artists in Hawaii, thus emphasizing a cosmopolitan perspective on Indigeneity.

What, then, could be the future of studying Alaskan Indigenous hip hop within an ecocritical framework? Most of all, generalizations should be carefully avoided. Instead, more research on individual artists and works in relation to specific locations would be useful. It will be necessary to discuss in more depth the functions of bilingualism as well as the present and historical dimensions of Indigenous cultures. Scholars also need to consider the expressive options that unfold in the intermedial synergies of rap poetry and music video aesthetics. Since specific environments of producing, distributing, and accessing such hip hop must be studied in detail, dialog with artists and scholars in Alaska is equally desirable. For me, this article is just the beginning.

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Hip Hop Naturalism: A Poetics of Afro-pessimism

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Abstract

This article examines the cross-discursive constellation of hip hop studies, ecocriticism, Black Studies, and literary studies. It proposes the notion of "hip hop naturalism" to come to terms with the way in which current U.S.-American rappers express their social ecologies. Taking its cue from scholars such as Imani Perry, Gregory Phipps, and Kecia Driver Thompson, the article argues for the relevance of literary naturalism in contemporary forms of cultural expression: not merely in the audiovisual archives of TV or film, but in hip hop lyrics. Greve scrutinizes how rap has dealt with themes of social heredity, cultural ecology, and structural racial violence by using similar or even identical diction to that of turn-of-the-twentieth-century American literary naturalists. Furthermore, juxtaposing the essentializing aspects of post-Darwinian discourse with those of Afro-pessimism, the article ultimately argues that what Darwinism was to authors like Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, and Frank Norris, Afro-pessimist discourse is to major representatives of contemporary rap, including Mobb Deep, Danny Brown, Earl Sweatshirt, and Kendrick Lamar. The writings of Frank Wilderson III and other scholars within current Black Studies thus figure as a social-philosophical grounding on which the given lyricist might map his or her own take on the lived experience of the black individual in contemporaneity. While racial inequality has always been a central notion within hip hop literature and culture, it is this naturalist bent that renders possible a more thoroughly ecocritical reading of how rap songs both underscore and subvert, with critical defiance, the systemic naturalization of black life as inferior.

Keywords: Hip hop, American literary naturalism, Darwinism, Afro-pessimism, poetics.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la constelación cros-discursiva de los estudios del hip hop, la ecocrítica, los estudios afroamericanos, y los estudios literarios. Propone la noción del «naturalismo del hip hop» para asimilar la forma en que los actuales raperos estadounidenses expresan sus ecologías sociales. Siguiendo el ejemplo de académicos como Imani Perry, Gregory Phipps, y Kecia Driver Thompson, el artículo defiende la relevancia del naturalismo literario en las formas de expresión cultural contemporáneas: no simplemente en los archivos audiovisuales de televisión o cine, sino en el lirismo del hip hop. Se escudriña cómo el rap ha tratado temas de herencia social, ecología cultural y violencia racial estructural usando un estilo similar, o incluso idéntico, al de los naturalistas literarios americanos de comienzos del siglo veinte. Además, yuxtaponiendo los aspectos esenciales del discurso post-darwiniano con aquellos del afro-pesimismo, el artículo finalmente sostiene que lo que el darwinismo fue para autores como Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, y Frank Norris, es el discurso afro-pesimista para los principales representantes del rap contemporáneo, incluyendo a Mobb Deep, Danny Brown, Earl Sweatshirt, y Kendrick Lamar. Los escritos de Frank Wilderson III y de otros académicos dentro de los estudios afroamericanos actuales representan la base socio-filosófica sobre la que los letristas pueden esquematizar sus propias versiones de la experiencia vivida del individuo negro en la contemporaneidad. Mientras que la desigualdad racial siempre ha sido un tema central en la literatura y cultura del hip hop, es esta propensión naturalista la que hace posible una lectura ecocrítica más minuciosa de cómo las canciones del hip hop enfatizan y subvierten, con resistencia crítica, la naturalización sistémica de la vida negra como inferior.

Palabras clave: Hip hop, naturalismo literario americano, darwinismo, afro-pesimismo, poética.

> "The violence that both elaborates and saturates Black 'life' is totalizing, so much as to make narrative inaccessible to Blacks. This is not simply a problem for Black people. It is a problem for the organizational calculus of critical theory and radical politics writ large."
> —Frank B. Wilderson III

> "Rap music is slave music. … It's just a modern day iteration of it."
> —Earl Sweatshirt

How do hip hop cultures think the interrelation of individuals and their environments? What is the connection of this interrelation to the increasingly growing field of hip hop studies and the scholarly consideration of MCs as lyricists and, thus, poets? Consequently, given the recent debates concerning the literary reframing of this most popular among contemporary forms of musical expression, how to read canonical hip hop acts and artists from the perspective of not only African-American or Black Studies, but also an ecocritically informed literary studies? It is against the backdrop of this short series of broad questions that I will examine one of the multiple points of intersection between hip hop studies and the environmental humanities. More specifically, I want to commend the notion of literary naturalism for an examination of a particular way in which U.S.-American rappers express their urban ecologies and ways of being in the world; a way that can be compared to Afro-pessimist thought insofar as it signals sentiments of both defiance and defeat.

In delineating this constellation of hip hop studies, ecocriticism, and literary studies, as well as specific strands within Black Studies, I am following the lead of a number of scholars in these fields who have already pointed out some of the intersections that interest me here. Eric Carl Link, in *The Vast and Terrible Drama: American Literary Naturalism in the Late Nineteenth Century*, has usefully attempted to expand the category of literary naturalism "by suggesting that naturalism is not a phenomenon restricted to the 1890s and beyond" (xiii). Imani Perry, in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, has connected key themes of literary naturalism—such as urban depravity and the resultant constant struggle between individuals who are oftentimes outcasts within society at large—to rap groups such as Mobb Deep and others (97, 165). Kecia Driver Thompson has described what she deems naturalist aspects in HBO's *The Wire*. She explains how that show depicts the urban experience of Baltimore's black population by using a naturalist form of storytelling. *The Wire* "has at its heart the limited possibilities the city offers to many of its citizens, the crushing blow of heredity and environment, the lost potential in lives that seem doomed by a combination of fate and chance. It shows us violence, grit, poverty, dirt, blood—the seedy underbelly of human existence" (83).

What Thompson hereby ascribes to the TV show in terms of a naturalist aesthetic and type of narration resonates with turn-of-the-twentieth-century literary genre conventions in which "the subject of determinism overlaps with pessimism insofar as both concepts challenge ideas of free will," as Gregory Phipps notes. "Read in relation to late nineteenth-century post-Darwinian society, these concepts emphasize the animalistic foundations of human life—the sense that people tend to follow base desires […] while striving, usually in vain, against forces found in their environments or in nature"

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("Naturalism" 93). In other words, literary naturalism and its narrative set-up generally concerns the tensions between human agency and its negation in the face of external as well as internal forces beyond and beneath the control of the given individual: "These subjects supply aesthetic material for variegated representations of the relationship among the individual, society, and the natural world" (94).

Arguably, this is why what I call "hip hop naturalism" is meaningful in the thematic context of hip hop ecologies, given that, to a certain extent, the question of how the individual relates to its environment and to itself is an essentially "naturalist" issue. More specifically, the notion of ecology employed here will be understood as pertaining to the construction of subjectivity in verse and academic discourse, on the one hand, and to the description of literal households and social conditions, on the other. The present account thus differs from more traditional understandings of ecocriticism as, for example, the analysis of how human beings relate to their non-human environments (Garrard 5) or as the ethico-critical response to a "wild nature [that] exists, first of all, for its own 'reasons,' independent of humans" (Moore 196).

Instead of these approaches to ecocriticism, I relate hip hop literature and culture to the reading of literary naturalism outlined above and its philosophical as well as aesthetic implications, according to which the individual is subject to forces outside of its own will, power, and agency. What Thompson has argued vis-à-vis *The Wire* I apply to a reading of hip hop lyrics that reflect the naturalization of contemporary states of social life in urban centers such as Detroit, New York City, and Los Angeles, with reference to what, in the vein of Frantz Fanon, has been called "black lived experience" (Eubanks 17; Fanon 89–119). Naturalism has taken maximally heterogeneous forms and understandings in past literary discourse from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. I will use the term in Thompson's sense, which underlines a "doomed […] combination of fate and chance" determined by both "heredity and environment"(83): namely, as a figure of thought that thematizes and problematizes human and non-human existence as dire and marked by an unending struggle—an understanding that is especially pertinent to the existence of black individuals. Such a naturalization, more often than not, entails an essentialist reading of those whose tragic lives are at stake. On numerous occasions, writers in Black Studies and African American literature have conceived of, and continue to conceive of, these lives as tragic because of both their surroundings and their innermost dispositions, their cultural ancestry. In some cases, such a characterization is but a small step away from the notion that black lives are inferior in comparison with non-black individuals. Put differently, the line becomes blurred between a critical theory of the social that describes how black ethnicity is constructed as essentially inferior, on the one hand, and a critical ontology that affirms such an inferiority, on the other.

This brings me to the particular strand within contemporary Black Studies that will be at stake here, namely Afro-pessimism. My claim is that the post-Darwinian (and, at times, social Darwinist) issues proposed in the American naturalist novel resonate in peculiar ways with what I term the poetics of Afro-pessimist discourse. Arguably, the violent and often-times drastic narratives of a Frank Norris or a Stephen Crane about the

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changes of human behavior and ways of being in the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century may be usefully compared to the equally essentializing tendencies in Afro-pessimism, especially with respect to the writings of Frank Wilderson III and his autofictional dramatization of the black lived experience in the United States. In this vein, I consider Wilderson's account a "naturalist" reading of that experience, for example when he suggests in his latest book *Afropessimism* that the only narrative framework available to those whose ancestors have been slaves—that is, black Americans—is that of the "slave narrative," irrespective of the literary genre at hand: song lyric, critical essay, autofiction, or any other. Furthermore, the discursive intersection of hip hop, naturalism, and Afro-pessimism has an ecological dimension insofar as Wilderson's writings as well as a number of hip hop lyrics shed light on how blackness, more often than not, has been equated with the realm of the non-human rather than with humanity.[1]

In this essay I want to show how crucial aspects within American literary naturalism pervade hip hop literature and culture from street rap artists Mobb Deep to the Pulitzer Prize-winning Kendrick Lamar. While multiple analytical avenues might be taken in terms of hip hop's richly diverse aesthetics, comprised of the five elements DJing, breakdance, graffiti, rap, and knowledge, I will solely focus on hip hop lyricism and its epistemological aspect. Surely, hip hop cultures think through their social environments via graffiti, too, for example; yet it is by means of reading the lyrics that hip hop's discursive connection of naturalist themes and issues may be illuminated most fruitfully. This is because the depiction of social injustice in urban cultural ecologies as "natural" in literary fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century resonates with a host of hip hop lyrics when it comes to the question of race. While there have been black writers in the first half of the twentieth century who have more recently been linked to literary naturalism, such as W.E.B. Du Bois or Charles Chesnutt (Dudley 176), the more narrowly defined notion of "hip hop naturalism" will index what amounts to a sounded, or musically articulated, version of Afro-pessimist discourse, due, in part, to that discourse's radical "naturalization" of racial inequality.

What I will argue in the following is that there is a type of hip hop lyricism that seems to ascribe a certain inevitability to the current social conditions of black subjects in the United States, due to both urban environmental structures and cultural legacies of blackness. This type of lyrical stance shares key characteristics with both the naturalist fiction of the early twentieth century and with arguments about the black lived experience that can be found in Afro-pessimism. Conversely, Afro-pessimism may be regarded as the socio-philosophical grounding of this hip hop naturalism.

Hip Hop's Naturalist Strand

I want to start contextualizing my approach to rap lyrics—qua poetic writing and in comparison to the narrative strategies of literary naturalism—by pointing out that hip

[1] See Ellis, Jackson, and Yusoff for slightly different takes on Black Studies in the context of the environmental humanities and adjacent fields, such as posthumanism and new materialism.

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hop has, for some time now, emerged not only as one of the most impactful subcultural phenomena to lastingly change the landscape of popular culture within and outside of the United States. It has also, by way of pioneering figures such as Public Enemy's Chuck D, Chicago's Common, and Compton's currently most famous representative, Kendrick Lamar, become an academically studied phenomenon within Anglophone literary scholarship. Two book publications in particular have promoted the alignment of hip hop studies and poetics scholarship: Adam Bradley's *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* and *The Anthology of Rap*, co-edited by Bradley and Andrew DuBois. The latter volume, which really is an anthology of hip hop lyrics from Afrika Bambaataa to Young Jeezy, from the late 1970s to the first decade of the new millennium, also includes a foreword by Black Studies elder statesman Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who somewhat unsurprisingly claims that "signifying is the grandparent of Rap; and Rap is signifying in a postmodern way" (xxii). That is to say, the polysemically inflected, vernacular traditions of African-American literature—and not just the tumultuous and confrontational version of it, expressed, for instance, in the spoken word performances and political lyrics of the Black Arts movement in the 1960s and 70s—have found its latest representative variant in what Bradley simply terms "rap's poetic identity" (*Book* xviii). And "while it is not quite so simple as to state that the spoken word poets such as Amiri Baraka and the Last Poets were somehow the original rappers," Alice Price-Styles writes, "the influence and similarities between the poets that preceded rap and rap innovators are apparent" (13).

Granted hip hop lyricism's entanglement with the tradition outlined by poets and scholars such as Baraka, Bradley, Gates Jr., or Chuck D, however, I am interested in hip hop's place within American literary discourse more generally. I want to compare the content of rap lyrics with the hitherto most drastic form of storytelling when it comes to the emplacement of human individuals within their environments: literary naturalism. Such a comparative move does not come without its problems—including the category mistake of cross-genre conflations between the intricacies of verse and prose fiction, or between the cultural and historical specificities of the writings and songs at hand. Surely, there have been African American naturalist writers of fiction in the past, even though Thompson importantly notes that "the naturalist canon has traditionally not included African American writers before the 1940s and 1950s; before then, black writers tended to be labeled as local color or regionalist writers" (85). "Hip hop naturalism" therefore must come as a loaded term from the get-go, it seems, because of the troubled histories of canonicity and of racially determined genre conventions.

Nonetheless, in proposing a discursive contact zone between hip hop and literary naturalism, I am actually taking my cue from Perry's aforementioned take on the poetics and aesthetics of New York City's rap group Mobb Deep. According to Perry, this type of "naturalism" can be witnessed on their 1995 album *The Infamous…* and especially on tracks such as "Survival of the Fittest" or "Shook Ones, Pt. II." For her, the structural discrepancies between narrative form in prose fiction, on the one hand, and rap music's approach to storytelling, on the other, do not constitute major problems with regard to cross-genre or cross-cultural readings. As Perry states: "Naturalism as a variation on realism appears when the allegorical exegesis provided by the MC makes conflict

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universal and essential. Mobb Deep, who I would call a naturalist group, refrain on one of their songs: 'We livin' this till the day that we die / survival of the fittest, only the strong survive'" (97). In a track like this, as well as others, the rap duo, consisting of the MCs Prodigy and Havoc, "asserts itself as being 'real' in terms of having been involved in violent conflict and the criminal justice system—as opposed to those who rhyme about it but do not really have the experience to back it up" (98). Interestingly, the category of authenticity—as central to hip hop culture as any—is here read vis-à-vis the notions of literary realism and naturalism. "Naturalism as a variation on realism" in Perry's sense here arguably indexes the construction of authenticity in terms of the speaker's verisimilitude concerning the hardship depicted, on the level of form (realism), and, on the level of content, a projected authenticity when it comes to the credibility of the given speaker's actually knowing such hardship (naturalism). Yet, irrespective of this particular reading of these categories, normally used within literary discourse to discern fiction's ability to develop a "critique of social conditions" (97), why does Perry revert to them in the first place? What is the function of this discursive correspondence between literary history and hip hop culture?

In the past, West Coast groups such as N.W.A. would fashion themselves within what they called "reality rap," and the literary category of realism more generally may be useful to come to terms with the highly detailed depictions of social structure, urban poverty, and racial inequality in the majority of hip hop records from "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five all the way to Foxy Brown's "My Life," and from Ice-T's "Colors" to Run the Jewels' collaborations with Zach de la Rocha. Indeed, Adam Krims' definition of reality rap from his seminal book *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* hints at that connection. He writes that "the 'reality'" in reality rap "may designate any rap that undertakes the project of realism, in the classical sense, which in this context would amount to an epistemological/ontological project to map the realities of (usually black) inner-city life" (70). And yet, he cautions,

> the realism of reality rap cannot ultimately be held simply as some sort of current-day equivalent of literary realism (or, for that matter, the very different photo-realism to which the latter is often compared). For […] reality rap departs radically from both literary realism and film documentary in its historical situation and its situation within the social totality (70)

—another affirmation of the site- and time-specificity of hip hop ecologies and the problem of comparing literary forms of expression across genres and periods.

Granted the aforementioned issues when it comes to cross-genre conflation and the transhistorical comparison of fiction and lyrics, the fact remains that the notion of realism has been crucial within the artistic practices of and the scholarship on hip hop. I, too, find the distinction between expanded notions of realism and naturalism useful when reading hip hop lyrics. These notions lead to a perspective that brings to light the entanglement of poetic diction and epistemological concerns; the resonance between rapping and knowledge. My claim is that the conception of literary naturalism, in the context of hip hop, points to a far bleaker and darker understanding of realism's thematizations of urban ecology and social circumstance. To invoke naturalism, rather than realism, might not only be a productive way for rendering rap's oftentimes

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masculinist construction of authenticity—of the respective MC's street credibility—even though in terms of the close proximity of issues of gender and genre, we should take note of John Dudley's helpful reminder that already

> naturalists as diverse as Norris, Crane, London, and Wharton, as well as several African-American naturalists, including Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, and W. E. B. Du Bois, sought to define themselves and their literary endeavors in direct opposition to an 'unmanly' vogue of decadent aestheticism. (4)

In other words, the masculinist tradition of literary naturalism itself is one of many aspects that one might explore in order to examine what hip hop naturalism might mean. Yet, more generally, the category of naturalism might also be useful to describe a given MC's pessimistic reading of urban ecology within a particular track or album, to examine the themes of determinism and heredity, and to trace the internal and external forces exerted upon the individual whose stance and positionality is being explored in the given rap lyric. After all, "the subject of determinism overlaps with pessimism insofar as both concepts challenge ideas of free will" (Phipps, "American" 93).

How does a hip hop version of naturalism work on the level of poetics? When Mobb Deep's Prodigy raps the following verse on the track "Shook Ones, Pt. II," it is not exactly a depiction of hardship in the form of lamenting a social wrongdoing, nor is it a political statement against racial inequality per se:

> The Mobb comes equipped for warfare, beware
> Of my crime family who got nuff shots to share
> […]
> You all alone in these streets, cousin
> Every man for theyself, in this land we be gunnin. (454)

This is neither a realist depiction of hardship for the sake of accuracy, nor a poetics of recognition, oftentimes ascribed to rap's indebtedness to earlier African-American verse forms, such as Langston Hughes's jazz poetry or the writers of the Black Arts Movement. The bleakness and resignation in Prodigy's depiction of street life in mid-90s Queens recall the unflinching poetics of literary naturalism dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. The universalization of human greed, the ethnic struggle, and the centrality of the protagonists' tragic descents into poverty are thematic markers that connect the naturalist novel and gangsta rap record.

I am especially interested in what Mark Seltzer has termed "the naturalist doctrines of determinism and degeneration" (19), and the notion that, according to these doctrines, normative violence and social heredity—in other words, the apparently insurmountable immobility black individuals face in the United States—are actually unchangeable. Tropes of social Darwinist' ideology have been resurfacing in hip hop recently, in parallel with the discursive emergence of what scholars like Christina Sharpe, Jared Sexton, and Frank Wilderson III have termed Afro-pessimism. Perhaps, the latter constitutes at long last the socio-philosophical grounding of or for the poetics of Mobb Deep and others. But before delving into the social and philosophical implications of Afro-pessimist discourse in the second part of this essay, I want to demonstrate a few exemplary cases of what I call hip hop naturalism in contemporary U.S.-American rap.

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In the past decade, artists such as Danny Brown, Earl Sweatshirt, and Kendrick Lamar have each released tracks with the same exact title—"DNA"—which is as naturalist a term as the aforementioned track titles from *The Infamous…* or the album title *Phrenology* (2002), a record on which The Roots collaborated with Amiri Baraka. All of these point to a deterministic and biologistic rendering of what "the human" might mean, "DNA" being one of the most common popular shorthand expressions in debates concerning social cultural heredity: *you are who and what you are, due to your hereditary set-up*.

In Brown's track, the speaker details a scenario of drug addiction and substance abuse as bleak as that depicted by Mobb Deep's violent storytelling. Yet Brown's scenario demonstrates another seemingly naturalist facet within rap lyrics, namely the suggestion that the social degradation of black life in the United States is effectuated by racially marked social structures in general, and by familial tendencies in particular, that are "naturally" irreversible: "It's in my DNA, cause my pops like to get fucked up the same way / It's in my DNA, cause my moms like to get fucked up the same way / DNA, DNA, cause my fam like to get fucked up the same way." This is not to say that Brown himself strictly adheres to social Darwinism or post-Darwinian ideas concerning the subject being at the mercy of her or his lineage. Rather, it is striking that this lyric negotiates black life in Detroit in similarly bleak terms as naturalist fiction that describes the social ecologies of increasing poverty in urban centers and the mental and material forces beyond the individual's control. Brown's speaker indexes what Dudley terms "the interplay of heredity, environment, and chance in the determination of an individual's fate" (5).

On a purely formal level, the anaphoric repetition of these lines, with minor variations, suggests an irrevocability when it comes to social descent, compared to upward mobility. The fact that Brown and most of the other rappers depicted here have been hugely successful in the past decade does not cancel out the poetics nor the politics of their portrayal of black life in the United States. Conversely, the naturalizing imagery of black poverty in contemporary rap lyrics—post-bling era—may be dialectically related to the MC's commercial success. Hip hop naturalism's originary contradiction consists in the correlation of an aestheticized social poverty (and social death, as we will see) with the notion and goal of upward mobility: social descent may not me redeemable, but it is nonetheless commercially viable, as attested to by the popularity of these arguably naturalist MCs. Put cynically, it seems to pay off in contemporary hip hop poetics to use "a naturalistic idiom to dramatize the economic hardship" of black life, similar to the way in which the Jack London of *The People of the Abyss* had described the London poor in 1903 (Berliner 57).

The first verse in Earl Sweatshirt's track "DNA" depicts a social landscape similar to those related by Mobb Deep and Brown, yet it is a mixture of the former's violent streak and the latter's resignation to addiction: "Intercepting a fifth of whisky and necking it 'til I'm dizzy / I never was defenseless, I never hugged the fence / I pick a side and trust in it, stomach full of drugs and shit." Again, this is not a new kind of diction presented by this particular MC, nor is Brown's earlier track lyrically much different than 1990s rap's chronicles of the black lived experience in large North American cities, such as Los

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Angeles, Detroit, or New York City. What is striking, rather, is the framing of these lyrics within the discursive matrix of the laws of heredity. In the hook, Sweatshirt claims that there is no biologically determined weakness in his DNA; a statement that, again, certainly ought to be read with caution, given that Sweatshirt is far from fashioning himself in the niche of gangsta rap. This darker kind of braggadocio—"Bitch nigga, we the train, if you see 'em wave / Ain't no bitch in my DNA"—may be interpreted as a commentary on the carefully crafted personae of some of his peers, such as YG or Schoolboy Q, yet what interests me here is the framing of rap's typical kind of misogynistic boasting along the lines of the naturalist terminology of heredity or biological superiority. Why name this track "DNA"? What, precisely, is the function of naturalist diction within hip hop lyrics such as those by Sweatshirt, which basically reiterate Mobb Deep's notion that in 1990s NYC "only the strong survive"? My reading of Sweatshirt's use of the notion of "DNA" and, hence, my provisional answer to these questions is that the frequency of the use of the notion in the current rap scene itself, together with its correlation with masculinist rap rhetorics, is symptomatic of precisely the poetics and politics in which literary naturalism and hip hop culture meet.

Finally, Lamar's second track from his album *DAMN.* (2017) reiterates some of the themes from the tracks by Mobb Deep, Brown, and Sweatshirt. On Lamar's "DNA," the speaker claims,

> I got, […]
> Loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA
> […]
> I got dark, I got evil, that rot inside my DNA
> I got off, I got troublesome heart inside my DNA.

In this case, compared to Sweatshirt's "DNA," the speaker's self-ascription amounts to an enumeration of aspects of black life that have been formulated from within and outside of hip hop culture. Such an enumeration—mentioning the ancestry of blackness as well as the speaker's traumatic, and seemingly inherent, relation to affectivity—problematizes what Christina Sharpe has termed "the conventions of antiblackness in the present" (21); it generates a critical viewpoint on the legacy of racial segregation by means of a hip hop aesthetic. Lamar's persona, in other words, wears the darkness ascribed to blackness by antiblack rules and regulations, as well as the capacity to be affected, as a badge of honor because it seems futile to escape the social and cultural determination of blackness. On the level of form, too, Lamar's rhyme scheme, which lets "loyalty" be followed by "royalty" and lets "dark" resonate with "rot," "get off," and "troublesome heart," is semantically consistent with what Sharpe describes as "the semiotics of the slave ship," and its "reappearances […] in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, and the school" (21). Those whose ancestors are slaves—supposedly West African royalty, coerced into being loyal to their new masters on American soil—have a bond, a solidarity with other black individuals, that seemingly is as essential to the cultural framing of blackness in history as its derogatory and sexualized ascription, in terms of darkness, rottenness, pleasure, and trauma. Arguably, the speaker both questions and affirms the naturalization of blackness in these terms. Naturalization—understood as the fixed determination of

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what it is, essentially, to be black and why that state of blackness as it is, is necessarily so—is interrogated and presented as a powerful and structurally violent stance that has had and continues to have fatal consequences for black lives. The naturalization of blackness—*you are black, since you got X, Y, and Z in your DNA*—recalls what Phipps has said of American naturalists writers, such as Norris, Richard Wright, or James T. Farrell: they "do not set out to prove that their protagonists' fates are predetermined; rather, they dramatize the conflicts and breakdowns that may lead an individual to adopt a belief in determinism" ("Descendants" xi).

Different from scholarship in which, according to Kevin Eubanks, "Hip hop is said either to effectively challenge the political status quo through various means or to reproduce the terms of its captivity" (6), the present argument holds that the naturalist poetics within hip hop harbors both critique and complicity, defiance and defeat. Flirting with the naturalization of blackness, as it is conditioned by and determined in contemporary society in the United States, these MCs nonetheless imply a wholesale objection to accepting those conditions as fixed once and for all. Instead they demonstrate how "getting off" and having a "troublesome heart" has to be thought through and together at the same time, in the context of blackness. This is supported by theorists like Fred Moten, who in his recent work defines "black study" as an "exhaustive celebration of and through our suffering, which is neither distant nor sutured" (xiii).

Afro-pessimism: A Naturalist Perspective

Hereditary determinism, social ecology, and racial struggle are intertwined in tracks such as "DNA," "Survival of the Fittest," and others. This naturalist poetics within contemporary hip hop—and perhaps the genre-specific strategic essentialism of racial pride in hip hop generally—may be seen as analogous to a current form of Black Studies discourse that demonstrates a similar inclination toward simultaneous defiance and resignation: Afro-pessimism.

In the past decade and a half—contemporaneous with Danny Brown's, Earl Sweatshirt's, and Kendrick Lamar's national and international rise to prominence—Afro-pessimism has become a hugely influential, albeit controversial, discourse within Black Studies. Grounded in the work of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death*, Afro-pessimism interrogates the ways in which the lived experience of black subjects in the United States and elsewhere amounts to an existential anxiety vis-à-vis the perpetual event of structural violence in the social realm. According to scholars such as Frank Wilderson III, Jared Sexton, and others, this violence is unique among the marginalized social groups of people of color. It is unique because blackness, according to Afro-pessimists, forecloses the condition of possibility for social participation and recognition in the first place, in contrast to the agency of white subjects as well as other non-black individuals. Patterson's notion of the social death of enslaved people—the idea of the slave being fundamentally excluded from social interaction—has been taken up by Wilderson, for instance, to argue that the social status of black Americans is beyond and beneath human (225–29). The concept of social death suggests

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a life determined by a deracinated form of subjectivity, and thus of no subjectivity worthy of being called human; in other words, black life is conceptualized as a life fundamentally outside of the world in which human subjects come to be and, therefore, are able to participate.[2]

"Blacks […] cannot claim their bodies, cannot claim their families, cannot claim their cities, cannot claim their countries, they cannot lay claim to a personal pronoun" (Wilderson et al. 8): the logic of a black deracinated subjectivity that implies its non- or inhuman character, delineated by Wilderson's Afro-pessimism and its sounded variant in the works of Brown, Sweatshirt, and others, is of a piece with what Saidiya Hartman has termed "the afterlife of slavery" (6) or what Christina Sharpe has described as "Black being in the wake" of "the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery" (45, 2)—scholars whose writings have had strong connections with those of Wilderson. The historical experience of the Middle Passage, according to this logic, and the multiple histories of enslavement and racially motivated oppression on the levels of both corporeality and language, extend all the way to the black lived experience of contemporaneity and the police and vigilante violence of four years of "Alt-America" and their aftermath, to borrow a term from David Neiwert.

It is this reading of black subjectivity as deracinated or diminished that echoes the naturalist themes of social heredity, cultural ecology, and personal tragedy in the hip hop lyrics examined in the previous section. At the same time, this discursive constellation links up social Darwinism (and its literary upshots) and Afro-pessimism (and its hip hop variant). This argument is counterintuitive since, in the former case, those who espoused the discourse were non-black subjects, whereas, in the latter case, those who identify as Afro-pessimist are black non-subjects (that is, according to their theoretical premises). Nonetheless, I argue that parallels between these discourses can be found on the level of content. After all, the post-Darwinian society in which literary naturalism emerged and thrived was fascinated by "the animalistic [and therefore non-human] foundations of human life," and held that human beings struggle "usually in vain, against forces found in their environments or in nature" (Phipps, "Naturalism" 93). Afro-pessimism clearly echoes this interest in non-human foundations and a vain struggle against individual social ecologies, but in focusing these ideas on blackness, it conceives black being as essentially non-human, rather than merely connected to the non-human world of nature.

In this context, Greg Thomas' highly critical take on Afro-pessimist discourse is insightful. Thomas argues that Afro-pessimism reiterates "Western epistemic frameworks of white academic liberalism," by its exclusion of histories of African anti-imperialist struggle, "thereby ensconcing the colonialism and neo-colonialism it constantly and symptomatically denegates in text after text" (293). I also hold that the characterization of black life as devoid of agency tout court seems to disregard the way in which the aestheticization of black disempowerment may perpetuate racist, imperialist, and colonialist discourses and sentiments. Certainly, the naturalization of black inferiority

[2] See Smith 113–18, for a succinct discussion of the logic of deracination in Afro-pessimism vis-à-vis the critical theory of François Laruelle.

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with respect to a supposedly white humanity in post-Darwinian as well as Afro-pessimist discourse carries different valences depending on the position from which one speaks, yet the diction of the latter oftentimes mirrors, and thus may perpetuate, the former in uncanny ways.

On this view, the way in which the poetics of rappers such as Danny Brown or Earl Sweatshirt treat of themes within literary naturalism—heredity, chance, violence or degeneration—entails that the notion of a deracinated, diminished, or nearly non-existent subjectivity, in the case of black "subjects," amounts to a veritable transformation of the context in which naturalist themes become meaningful. From an Afro-pessimist perspective, the speakers in these tracks by Brown and Sweatshirt do not lack their own "free will" due to their allegedly inborn features and acquired character as human beings, but because of their disposition as non-human beings. In a sense, Afro-pessimism amounts to a de-universalization of naturalist themes in terms of humanity and a universalization or totalization of these themes in the context of blackness—that is, in- or non-humanity. It is not the delineation of the human being as one animal among others that is at issue, nor its reliance on its biological heritage and cultural ancestry, on impersonal drives rather than individual decisions. What is at stake is a description of black persons as non-human non-subjects that are at the mercy of their ancestry and environment. What some naturalists in the early twentieth century understood to be salient features of humankind, in the light of the scientific insights and philosophical trends in the late nineteenth century, Afro-pessimism—and, by the same token, the naturalist poetics of contemporary hip hop—seems to reframe vis-à-vis blackness alone.

"The violence that both elaborates and saturates black 'life' is totalizing, so much so as to make narrative inaccessible to blacks," writes Wilderson (226). By narrative he means the discursive structuration of whiteness that potentially enables the self-empowerment and upward mobility of a non-black individual on the social ladder. Conversely, the structuration of social descent, rather than ascent, is unchangeable for the black non-subject fundamentally steeped in his or her slaveness. And yet: "This is not simply a problem for Black people. It is a problem for the organizational calculus of critical theory and radical politics writ large" (226). The irrefutable fact of descent and ancestry, of socio-ecological determination, is a problem for each and every discourse that would posit concepts such as liberation, empowerment, and resistance in the name of those who suffer. For Wilderson, the logic of narrative structuration applied to individual psychic and social life in non-black cultures does not translate to black people, due to the lasting effect or after-effect of their being cast as commodities: as objects, rather than subjects, in the afterlife of slavery.

I argue that these two correlative notions—the concept of the black (non-human) animal that is caught up in the originary violence of its social descent and cultural ancestry, and the impossibility of having recourse to a narrative structure that would potentially redeem the suffering of such an originary violence—are constitutive of what I call hip hop naturalism. This correlation is precisely what is at stake when Perry reads Mobb Deep's lyrics against the backdrop of literary naturalism, indeed prefiguring the theoretical tapestry of Wilderson's approach to Black Studies: "Naturalism as a variation

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on realism appears when the allegorical exegesis provided by the MC makes conflict universal and essential" (Perry 97). The cross-discursive connections that bind hip hop studies and contemporary Black Studies highlight the linkage between the totalizing impulse of "the violence that both elaborates and saturates black 'life'" (Wilderson 226) and the given rapper's storytelling and interpretation of the black lived experience that "makes conflict universal and essential" (Perry 97). An apparently tragic "interplay of heredity, environment, and chance in the determination of an individual's fate" (Dudley 5), the naturalist variant of hip hop lyrics deals in precisely the same imagery of defiance and defeat Afro-pessimism evokes at every turn; an imagery both critical of and complicit with the structural violence it depicts. Or, as Earl Sweatshirt himself has bluntly stated, when asked about the connections between Afro-pessimism and his approach to writing lyrics: "Rap music is slave music, number one; it's just a modern day iteration of it" (Blunted Soul 0:45–0:53).

This essay (or any other, for that matter) cannot be the place to decide or judge whether hip hop is really the naturalist, and supposedly "natural," music of non-subjects caught in ancestry and environment, however strategic an essentialist statement that might be. While Eubanks has argued for the potential of "an unprecedented confrontation with the oppressive productions of anti-blackness" (8) within classical hip hop from Public Enemy to the present, however, my discussion of Afro-pessimism and hip hop naturalism suggests such a potential cannot be realized in terms of empowerment and resistance—what Eubanks terms "counter-performance" and "Hip Hop 'praxis'" (16). Instead, what hip hop naturalism—one of many potential forms of an Afro-pessimist poetics—presents us with is the defiant regurgitation of disempowerment, the statement of an apparently unchangeable situation in which blackness exists in and "through our suffering" (Moten xiii). Hip hop naturalism is a dual approach to artistic practice that reiterates defeat while projecting defiance at the same time. As Danny Brown puts it: "Murders all the time is all I see / Detroit 187 on you niggas' TV" ("Detroit 187"). The unbridgeable social gap between those that continue to die and those that will keep on watching, Brown implies, finds its parallel in the gap between experiencing homicides oneself and watching them in a TV series like *Detroit 1-8-7* (2010). For Afro-pessimism and hip hop naturalism, what is fiction for some will remain reality for others.

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Toward a Poetics of Afro-pessimism

In the "Acknowledgments" of *Afropessimism*, Wilderson construes his author-narrator as "a Slave" (xi), which results in his book being, essentially, a slave narrative, albeit one of a different kind than what has been called the neo-slave narrative in the realm of fiction. It is by way of framing itself as a slave narrative that Wilderson's work not only theorizes how blackness as an existential condition prevents black people from choosing between partaking in social conduct or not: this self-ascription takes apart the notion that a monograph such as *Afropessimism* could take part in any non-black discourse concerning race and ethnicity to start off with. *Afropessimism* suggests that black narrative is necessarily and essentially steeped in its own ethnically marked

environment, its culturally marked determinism, and its socially defined personal and political tragedies. Unlike non-black narratives, which arguably, too, are determined, to a degree, by their cultural environments, blackness here is predicated upon its immobility, its fixity within the social. The self-ascription of Wilderson's narrator as slave, in other words, suggests that the only form of narrative black people may have recourse to is *slave narrative*. This is fully in accord with his theory concerning the isomorphism of blackness and slaveness qua ontological condition.

I have argued above that this bleak viewpoint on contemporary black life and culture, its conditions of possibility and impossibility, ties in or resonates with the literary naturalist themes in "rap's poetic identity" (Bradley xviii) of recent times. Of these I have listed and examined social heredity, cultural ecology, and structural racial violence, among others; to be found exemplarily in the works of Mobb Deep, Brown, Sweatshirt, and Lamar. What is more, the reflection of naturalist aspects in contemporary hip hop lyrics suggests that if the latter can productively be read as slave narratives—which will have to be seen in subsequent analyses—then Afro-pessimism may prove to constitute retroactively for artists from Mobb Deep to Kendrick Lamar what post-Darwinian naturalist and materialist philosophies represented in the case of novelists such as Dreiser, Norris, London, or Crane, and the critical legacies of their works. In other words, what Darwinism was to the naturalist novel, Afro-pessimism is to major representatives of contemporary rap: a social-philosophical grounding on which the given writer or lyricist can map his or her own take on the human and/or black lived experience in contemporaneity. As in the naturalist novel, the discursive entanglement should not be seen as a strict dogma that a given MC would adhere to. Rather, it is an important strand in today's thinking about the conditions of historically situated subjectivity on display in the given lyric: the subjectivation, or construction of subjectivity, as determined by the environments surrounding that subjectivity (or, rather, non-subjectivity, according to Afro-pessimist discourse).

Works of hip hop naturalism may be seen as sounded versions of Afro-pessimist discourse, all the while echoing, in the expressions of their speakers or narrative voices, Donald Pizer's notion of "the naturalistic tragic hero": "a figure whose potential for growth is evident but who fails to develop because of the circumstances of his life" (6). Whereas it is true that racial inequality has always been a central notion within hip hop lyricism, it is this naturalist bent that enables a more thoroughly ecocritical reading of how rap songs both underscore and subvert, with critical defiance, the systemic naturalization of black life as inferior.

In his editor's introduction to a recent special issue of *Studies in American Naturalism*, called "American Literary Naturalism and Its Descendants," Phipps asks: "What accounts for the ongoing influence of American naturalism in literature, film, television, and scholarship? Also, how does naturalism speak to contemporary social issues in the United States and beyond? Any attempt to answer these questions," he writes, "must take into consideration the versatility of naturalism as a set of ideas" and demonstrate how "films, television shows, and computer games also display naturalist influences" ("Descendants" vii-viii). The present essay has underlined the currency of

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naturalist discourse within and outside academia. It has argued for the pervasiveness of naturalism in hip hop and, by the same token, in Afro-pessimist poetics.

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Ecojustice Poetry in *The BreakBeat Poets* Anthologies

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Abstract

Ecological modes of thinking and an awareness of environmental (in)justice are becoming increasingly pronounced in the ethics and aesthetics of hip hop. One area in which the culture's growing interest in ecology as practice and metaphor is particularly visible is hip hop poetry's turn to ecojustice, or an intersectional concern with social and environmental justice, liberation, diversity, and sustainability. This article examines selected works from the first two volumes of anthologies published by Haymarket Books as part of their *BreakBeat Poets* series, focusing on three ecojustice-oriented poems that address animal rights, gentrification, and (un)natural disasters. Their authors—all Black women—draw from African American history and culture to illuminate the intertwined ideological, political, and economic dimensions of some of the most pressing humanitarian and environmental crises of today. Samantha Thornhill's "Ode to a Killer Whale" takes the form of a poetic monologue by the fictional character of Kunta Kinte, revealing similarities between human and animal subjugation and inscribing animal liberation in the Black revolutionary tradition. Candace G. Wiley's "Parcel Map for the County Assessor" re-members and re-creates a culture of place that permeated the speaker's countryside childhood to present the larger-than-human cost of rural gentrification. Finally, Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie's "Global Warming Blues" juxtaposes the personal and the elemental dimensions of climate change in a blues remix that advocates for ecojustice for the disenfranchised.

Keywords: Ecopoetics, ecojustice, hip hop poetry, African American, Black women poets.

Resumen

Las formas de pensamiento ecológicas y una conciencia de la (in)justicia medioambiental son cada vez más notables en la ética y la estética del hip hop. Un campo en el que el interés creciente de la cultura por la ecología como práctica y metáfora es especialmente visible es el del giro de la poesía de hip hop hacia la ecojusticia, o una preocupación interseccional por la justicia social y medioambiental, la liberación, la diversidad y la sostenibilidad. Este artículo analiza obras seleccionadas de los dos primeros volúmenes antológicos publicados por Haymarket Books como parte de su serie *BreakBeat Poets*, centrándose en tres poemas orientados hacia la ecojusticia que abordan los derechos de los animales, la gentrificación, y los desastres (no) naturales. Sus autoras—todas mujeres negras—se inspiran en la historia y cultura afroamericanas para iluminar los enlaces entre las dimensiones ideológicas, políticas y económicas, de algunas de las crisis humanitarias y medioambientales más urgentes de nuestros días. "Ode to a Killer Whale" de Samantha Thornhill toma la forma de un monólogo poético del personaje ficticio Kunta Kinte, revelando similitudes entre la subyugación humana y la animal e inscribiendo la liberación animal en la tradición revolucionaria negra. "Parcel Map for the County Assessor" de Candace G. Wiley recuerda y recrea una cultura del lugar que permeaba la infancia en el campo de la autora para presentar el coste más-que-humano de la gentrificación rural. Finalmente, "Global Warming Blues" de Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie yuxtapone las dimensiones personal y elemental del cambio climático en un remix blues que reivindica la ecojusticia para los que se ven privados de derechos.

Palabras clave: Ecopoética, ecojusticia, poesía hip hop, afroamericano, poetas negras.

"Turntables in the park displace the machine in the garden" (217)—this opening sentence from Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s 1991 essay sets up a visually compelling starting point not only for his foundational discussion of rap's cultural hybridity but also for rethinking the emergent intersection of hip hop studies and environmental humanities. The statement aptly points to a certain ecological awareness that is inherent to hip hop as an essentially place-conscious art form or, as Debra J. Rosenthal frames it, a "bioregional chronicle" (667). Unlike Nathaniel Hawthorne's narrator who, in Leo Marx's proto-ecocritical study, is forced "to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream" (15) by the intrusive machine in the garden, the deejays and emcees behind Baker's turntables come from a people to whom that "pastoral dream" was, itself, alien. Those predominantly non-white descendants of enslaved and migrant people, some of them immigrants and refugees themselves, are nomadic natives to the always-already hybrid space of the park—an intersection of the urban and the wild. Regardless of the repeated systemic and individual efforts to denaturalize and exclude them, Black and other People of Color continue to barbeque, bird-watch, and turntable in the park, mixing themselves into the urban ecosystem and its elements through emceeing, deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti painting. While environmental concerns do not necessarily take center stage in all these activities, ecological modes of thinking and an awareness of environmental (in)justice are becoming increasingly pronounced in the ethics and aesthetics of hip hop. One area in which the culture's growing interest in ecology as practice and metaphor is particularly visible is hip hop poetry's turn to ecojustice—an intersectional concern with social and environmental justice, liberation, diversity, and sustainability.

In this article, I take an ecojustice-oriented approach to examine a selection of poems from the first two anthologies in Haymarket Books's *BreakBeat Poets* series. To date, the series includes four volumes of poetry anthologies: the 2015 *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip Hop*, edited by Kevin Coval, Quraysh Ali Lansana, and Nate Marshall; *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 2: Black Girl Magic*, edited by Mahogany L. Browne, Idrissa Simmonds, and Jamila Woods and published in 2018; *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 3: Halal If You Hear Me*, edited by Fatimah Asghar and Safia Elhillo, published in 2018; and, most recently, the 2020 *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNext*, edited by Felicia Chavez, José Olivarez, and Willie Perdomo. As their very titles suggest, the latter three volumes share a focus on their contributors' racial, ethnic, and/or gender identities, featuring poetry by Black women, female and (gender)queer Muslims, and Latinx poets, respectively. The first book in the series presents itself more generally (if, perhaps, not entirely accurately) as "the first anthology of poems by and for the hip hop generation." It includes "more than four decades of poets and covers the birth to the now of hip hop culture and music and style" (Coval xv).

For the purposes of this article, my understanding of "hip hop poetry" follows Kevin Coval's explanation of what makes the eclectic, culturally and aesthetically diverse body of work showcased in *The BreakBeat Poets* anthologies "hip hop." As he puts it in the introduction to the first volume, the poems collected therein are not necessarily about hip hop but

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> these poems *are* hip hop. They are engaged in the aesthetic, cultural, and often public practice of the art form. [...] In ways similar to how blues influenced the Harlem Renaissance or the ways jazz influenced the Black Arts Poets, the music and culture of hip hop shape this moment of american letters and create a generation engaged in similar and variant aesthetic principles and experimentations. (xix)

Coval's introductory remarks offer a flexible understanding of hip hop poetry as not necessarily engaged with hip hop music or culture thematically but, rather, as coming out of a generational shift marked by hip hop's emergence and rise to cultural prominence, both within the United States and internationally. He goes on to explain that, while the "BreakBeat Poets are not all strict hip hop heads and some folks in the collection might not consider what they do to be hip hop cultural practice at all," they all come out of a social, historical, and cultural context where hip hop's "participatory, radically democratic culture" invites poets and critics alike to "blow up bullshit distinctions between high and low, academic and popular, rap and poetry, page and stage" and, instead, embrace a diversity of voices and aesthetics that cannot be contained by such binary categories (xix, xviii, xvii). At the same time, like hip hop culture more broadly, hip hop poetry, too, while "open and comprised of every culture and music," is also "rooted in and part of African diasporic cultural histories and practices. Hip hop is Black, therefore hip hop poetics are Black and are created in part as a response to the historic and currently maintained legacies and realities of white supremacy and institutional racism" (xix). As an anthology, then, *The BreakBeat Poets* captures a cultural moment and a poetic movement—if one can call it that—that, although strongly informed by and respectful of its rootedness in Black culture, is not prescriptive but descriptive; curated and cultivated but also organic in its growth; and diverse rather than homogenous in its aesthetic approaches and thematic concerns.

This diversity, in turn, animates a certain ecological, or ecosystemic, quality of *The BreakBeat Poets* series. Echoing Baker's description of hip hop as a "fiercely intertextual, open-ended, and hybrid" form of cultural expression (224), Nate Marshall asserts that "hip hop music is an ecosystem. Hip hop speaks to multiple artistic media and an entire shifting coda of language, dress, attitude, and political thought" (327). In the same essay, he also refers to hip hop as "shark art" in that "when it stops moving it dies" (329). With these metaphors, Marshall brings to the forefront an essentially ecological way of thinking about both hip hop in general and the *BreakBeat* anthologies in particular: one that sees them as "dwelling places that allow for the juxtaposition and interaction of multiple voices—see[s] them, in other words, as ecosystems," as Katherine R. Lynes puts it (202–3). In her discussion of anthologies as ecologies, Lynes argues that just as the "idea of an ecosystem implies a sense of diversity, overlap, interaction, cooperation and, to some extent, debate or conflict," anthologies are "ecosystems of poetry" in which "responses to and uses of nature are—as in a healthy ecology—varied, or at least, they could be, or should be" (203). In *The BreakBeat Poets*, they definitely are, and include modes of engagement with the larger-than-human world that range from environmental justice activism or a strong sense of place to an engagement of ecopoetics as a more organizational, rather than thematic, principle. This article takes a look at a selection of

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works from *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip hop* and *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 2: Black Girl Magic* that align most closely with the first of these categories. In their work, poets Samantha Thornhill, Candace G. Wiley, and Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie address animal rights, gentrification, and (un)natural disasters as ecojustice issues that affect larger-than-human lives in fundamentally entangled ways. As Black women, these authors draw from African American and Black diasporic histories and knowledges to illuminate the intertwined ideological, political, and economic roots of the overlapping humanitarian and environmental crises we face today.

This dual, relational interest in both the nonhuman and the human—as opposed to the more radically ecocentric approaches that attempt to decenter, or sometimes even displace, the *anthropos* altogether—situates these poems in the tradition of *ecojustice,* rather than environmentalist, writing. As proposed by C.A. Bowers, ecojustice offers a conceptual and moral framework for activism and pedagogy that prioritizes "eliminating environmental racism […], revitalizing the local cultural and environmental commons […], and developing an ecological consciousness that respects the right of natural systems to renew themselves" (156). Concerned with biological as well as cultural diversity, ecojustice-oriented approaches urge us to see environmental justice, social justice, sustainability, and ecological conservation as essentially intertwined. Transposing these ideas onto the realm of literature, Melissa Tuckey defines ecojustice poetry as not only "born of deep cultural attachment to the land and […] born of crisis" but, crucially, also as thematically and politically committed to working "at the intersection of culture, social justice, and the environment" (1). Echoing both Bowers's coupling of biodiversity with cultural diversity and Marshall's understanding of hip hop as an ecosystem, Tuckey argues that "cultural diversity is a sign of ecological health" and sees the role of poetry as "an intervention, reclaiming culture and language, and resisting oppressive narratives" that subjugate or discriminate against human and nonhuman Others (2, 9). Consequently, ecojustice poetry promotes ecological intelligence: a way of thinking that departs from the individualist understanding of the self and, instead, "takes account of relationships and contexts, as well as the impact of ideas and behaviors on other participants in the cultural and natural systems" (Bowers 125). Importantly, as the readings below will illustrate, such ecological intelligence in Black ecojustice poetry can often be coupled with fierce, sometimes militant commitment to protect, defend, and liberate these "cultural and natural systems" and their participants from the overlocking forces of societal and environmental exploitation. It is to a discussion of ecojustice-oriented poems by Samantha Thornhill, Candace G. Wiley, and Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie that this article will now turn.

Among the three authors discussed here, Samantha Thornhill's work stands out as most consistently concerned with larger-than-human relations and ecological imagination. For instance, in "Elegy for a Trojan," she compares the effects of emergency contraception on the female reproductive system to those of an atomic blast on a landscape, and in "Ode to a Star Fig," the boundaries between the fruit, human anatomy, and celestial bodies are blurred by their shared elemental materiality. It is from this fluid understanding of the "natural" and the "cultural" as always already enmeshed and

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relational that the poem I discuss here, "Ode to a Killer Whale," unfolds its ecojustice message: it makes a statement for animal and human liberation by employing "the dreaded comparison" between chattel slavery and animal subjugation. In her now classic—although still controversial—book of that title, Marjorie Spiegel argues that "the liberation of animals, while a pressing and worthy goal in its own right, is of importance not *only* to non-human animals," since a wide-spread adoption of a "philosophy of universal respect for others' lives" would make "treating anyone—human or non-human—in a cruel manner […] unthinkable" (27–28). Following a similar reasoning, Thornhill's poem takes the form of a monologue "from the perspective of Kunta Kinte" (184) addressed to a killer whale identified as "Shamu"—a stage name given to several orcas who "performed" for audiences at the SeaWorld theme park between 1970s and 2016. Sampling the two pop-cultural icons and mixing them into a poetic monologue that reveals similarities between their subjugation, "Ode to a Killer Whale" imagines an act of animal liberation informed by the Black revolutionary tradition. In this, the poem suggests that the ecological consciousness advocated by Bowers can lead to action that goes beyond resistance and restoration and into the realm of radical, militant, and larger-than-human liberation.

The African-born survivor of the Middle Passage and ancestor of the protagonist family of Alex Haley's 1976 novel *Roots* (and, later, the TV series under the same title), the character of Kunta Kinte is a Black man enslaved yet unbowed, resilient, and proud. As a speaker in Thornill's poem, Kunta Kinte also assigns these typically human qualities to Shamu, with whom he claims to share the experiences of captivity, subjugation, exploitation, and objectification. Addressing the orca as "Sambo of the sea" (185), he reclaims the derogatory term to stress the ideological continuities between anti-Black dehumanization and inhumane treatment of animals, with the allusion to the "Chicken of the Sea" canned tuna brand—infamously subject to class-action suits for price-fixing and falsely advertising their fishing practices as "dolphin-safe"—suggesting the role of the profit-driven logic of capitalism in perpetuating both forms of injustice. Describing their journeys to the American continent—his own from Africa, the orca's from "the dim waters // of Iceland"—as "the same / passage [that] done borned // we to this troubled mass" (184), the speaker downplays the geographic, temporal, and species differences between himself and the animal in order to focus on their shared experiences and a sense of kinship they generate: "they captured you but are / yet to contain the joy // of your rage" (185). Like the enslaved Africans and their American-born descendants, legally designated as chattel and reduced to less-than-human status in the discourses of scientific racism, the orca retains a sense of dignity, agency, and desire for freedom—his joy and his rage—in spite of his captors' continued attempts at "quelling // all rebellion with rubs / and rewards" but also with "lasso logic and nigger / nets" (185, 184). This "lasso logic" of the oppressors is, crucially, a logic of not only physical but also epistemic capture—another fate shared, and resisted, by both Shamu and the poem's speaker:

> Alas, you signify
> half the name they gave
> you killer—cause bruh
> you ain't no whale. (185)

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Kunta Kinte's focus on the orca's misnaming—killer whales are, taxonomically, members of the dolphin family—clearly echoes his own name being forcefully changed to "Toby" by the American planter who claimed to own him. However, more broadly, it is also reminiscent of the cultural genocide committed against the enslaved Africans through, among others, the separation of families and communities, harsh punishments for cultivating their native linguistic, cultural, and spiritual practices, and imposition of Eurocentric social and epistemic norms.

But the sense of interspecies kinship that the speaker establishes between himself and the orca is rooted not only in their shared histories of capture, exploitation, and dehumanization but, crucially, also in their resistance to those practices. The poem's species-bending opening address to the orca as "Black boy" and "Brother," paired with its reliance on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and hip hop diction ("your mama," "up jump the boogie," "milk / your sperm for the cash / cow you is"), implies that Kunta Kinte's identification with Shamu is not limited to the negative experiences of oppression but also includes their cultural, at times almost familial, affiliation. Thornhill's mixing of contemporary AAVE and references to pop-cultural staples such as the Sugarhill Gang's 1979 hit "Rapper's Delight" into the monologue of a character originally set in the eighteenth century highlights the lasting aftermaths of slavery while, at the same time, suggesting that the orca and the speaker share a fluency in the cultural codes of Black America. By referring to Shamu as a socially gendered and culturally Black "Brother" who might "as well claim // African" (184), the poem effectively humanizes him. In this context, the orca's "signify[ing] / half the name they gave" him also refers to the Black vernacular practice of signifying, or "a way of encoding messages or meanings which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection" and incorporates "a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages" (Mitchell-Kernan 315, 317). Just as a dictionary entry cannot contain all layers of a word's meaning, the name given to him by humans does not contain the orca but rather creates for him an opportunity to signify *on* it: to adapt the ambiguity of its half-truth for his own purposes, keep his true identity concealed, and embrace the moniker to create a rapper-like persona (comparable to Wu-Tang Clan's Ghostface Killah or Run the Jewels's Killer Mike, among others). Thus, the killer whale follows in the footsteps of the signifying monkey and becomes a trickster, a folk hero who outwits his captors by pretending to play by their rules.[1]

Seeing these heroic and tricksterish qualities in the orca, Kunta Kinte closes his monologue with a call to action that inscribes animal liberation into the tradition of Black liberation struggle, suggesting that racial justice and ecojustice share not only the goal of universal liberation but also the sometimes-radical strategies for reaching it. Like the Yoruba trickster deity Eshu-Elegba, who straddles the worlds of the living and the dead,

[1] The significance of the trope of the signifying monkey to the African American literary tradition, as well as the trickster's transatlantic connection to the Yoruba figure of Eshu-Elegba, was most extensively theorized by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his seminal 1988 study *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*.

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he relays to Shamu an ancestral message from "Nat" and "sister Harriet": "you got some dead folk praying / for you! Done seduced your / captors with your kind nets" (185). By evoking the anti-slavery revolutionaries Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman the speaker taps into the "traditions of intergenerational knowledge" that Bowers identifies as crucial to ecojustice efforts (157), and by referring to them only by their first names, he once again assumes the addressee's cultural competency and familiarity with Black history. Kunta Kinte also recognizes the orca as a trickster who, rather than succumbing to his bondage, "seduces" his oppressors with a façade of kindness that those versed in double-speak and signifying see for what it really is: a subversive strategy of casting "nets" to reverse the captor-captive dynamic. In the closing lines of the poem, the speaker joins the "dead folk" in this prayer and a battle cry for Shamu to "do all we tried / in our ways to do" and "grip this ship / by its sail and drag the whole thing down, / down, down, down, down" (186). Rhetorically shifting the site of his mutiny from SeaWorld to an actual seascape, Thornhill imagines Shamu's revenge as an act of historical justice for the victims of the Middle Passage, making a connection between the human and nonhuman victims of—but also agents of resistance to—the modern global capitalist logic of exploitation via the image of the ship as a *multispecies chronotope*.[2] By identifying his revenge with what Black insurgents have "tried to do," she inscribes the orca into the Black revolutionary tradition, making a case for animal and Black solidarity in the struggle for liberation. The political dimension of this revolt is highlighted by the likening of the orca to "a bullet // burning with the president's name" (186). In terms of its message, the poem agrees with Spiegel's argument that "it is vital to link oppressions in our minds, to look for the common, shared aspects, and fight against them as one" (24) but also takes it a step further: while Spiegel nuances her analogy between the subjugation of humans and nonhuman animals by pointing that the latter are incapable of "organized rebellion" (24), Thornhill's capacity as a poet allows her to transcend the limitations of scientific accuracy into the realm of imaginative hyperbole and figurative connections. The resulting vision of a joint human-animal revolution, expressed through the poem's hip hop diction, effectively and affectively conveys a message of ecojustice for all to the hip hop-literate readers of the *BreakBeat* generation(s).

While "Ode to a Killer Whale" returns to the transatlantic history of the Middle Passage to imagine a future of universal, larger-than-human emancipation, Candace G. Wiley's "Parcel Map for the County Assessor" (173) takes an intimate, smaller-scale look at a single locale and, in contrast to the hopeful militancy of Thornhill's poem, nostalgically remembers the possibility of violent resistance against the powers that be as a thing of the past. Sampling from the linguistic register of cadastral surveying, the poem's title refers to the practice of mapping land for the purposes of legal description and administration of real estate. Also referred to as "property" or "tax" maps, this type of

[2] I refer to the ship in Thornhill's poem as a *multispecies chronotope* following Paul Gilroy's idea of the ship as a chronotope of transatlantic modernity: a "a central organising symbol" that focuses "attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts" across the Atlantic Ocean during and after the transatlantic slave trade (4).

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cartographic documentation can be used by investors to assess market value of land for property development. Both the language and the objectives of such mapping construe the land as property to be measured, bought, and sold—an inanimate object whose only value lies in the potential of monetary gain it represents to those who claim its ownership. Subverting the expectations set up by this title, the poem speaks against this instrumental, objectifying, and fragmentary approach with an affectionate characterization of the speaker's rural home as an intricate and interactive ecosystem:

> Ours was the land of pipe organ roosters, who accordioned
> their songs from 4 hours before dawn to 2 hours before dusk.
> Of the hunter's pop echo. Of centenarian pines ricocheting warning
> to deer families crossing backyards.

The speaker's fond, intimate catalog of this bygone place and time goes on to include "horse farmers / who trotted out onto the road, pranced, twirled, and would let us ride / if our granddaddy's home." Where the authorities and business entities—likely users of a parcel map—see real estate, the poem's collective speaker sees a *place*: alive, organic, communal, and familial. However, the past tense, used consistently throughout the poem, implies that the world described therein no longer exists. The poem's only present-tense line is the opening one that suggests a cause-and-effect connection between its title and its largely elegiac mode by asserting that "No one talks about gentrified country in-betweens." As it sets out to remedy this silence, "Parcel Map" also reveals another rarely considered aspect of gentrification: its impact on larger-than-human lives. By re-membering and re-creating in her poem a culture of place that permeated her countryside childhood, Wiley frames rural gentrification as an ecojustice issue that affects human and larger-than-human populations alike.

With its attentive, dual focus on the human and nonhuman through the lens of a particular, emotionally meaningful locale, Wiley's poem develops what bell hooks terms a "culture of place." In *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, hooks draws from Wendell Berry's writings on place-attachment and spiritual bioregionalism to describe this culture as a process of making "a homeplace in a world rooted in respect for all life, earth and community, where there is spiritual grounding and aesthetic celebration of beauty, where there is a pure enjoyment of simple pleasures" (174). In "Parcel Map," the rural homeplace is steeped in precisely such a culture of place: the collective, communal speaker pays close attention to the minute details of human and nonhuman life in the area, remembering the details of roosters' daily schedules, the "matching mailbox and tires half buried and flanking the gravel drive," and the socializing habits of the "old men who walked The Road on warring hipbones, / a quarter mile to the first neighbor, then on to the next. Visiting" (Wiley 173). Recollecting animals, inanimate objects, and people with the same fondness and careful observation, the speaker channels an inclusive, larger-than-human understanding of community. Living at least partially outside of the capitalist logic of labor and resource extraction, its members—such as "grandads who coated the house sunshine yellow for one decade / and peacock turquoise for another, strictly for the joy of it"—find in their dwelling place a space for leisure time, aesthetic appreciation, and enjoyment of life. Homely, happy, and sustainable, the ecosystem once inhabited by the

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poem's collective "we" fosters a "a culture of belonging, a sense of the meaning and vitality of geographical place" (hooks 23). Although remembered with nostalgic tenderness, this community is not idealized into an idyllic, pastoral harmony. To the contrary, the deer are prey to the "hunter's pop," the men's "warring hipbones" suggest their fading health, and the "rusted chainlink knots" in the back of the house hint, perhaps, at financial precarity. And yet, while imperfect, this larger-than-human ecosystem is presented as functional—thriving even—and sustainable rather than exploitative.

In stark contrast to this affectionate survey of land as a place that is both lived and alive stand the surveying practices of the eponymous county assessor, which represent what hooks terms the "culture of enterprise" (45). Because of this cultural logic of for-profit exploitation, what used to be a thriving cultural and environmental commons so fondly recalled by the speaker has been subject to a late-capitalist version of enclosure. In Bowers's definition, cultural commons refers to a local ecosystem that comprises nonhuman nature as well as human-made "forms of knowledge, values, practices, and relationships that have been handed down over generations" to form "the basis of individual and community self-sufficiency" (162). Just as the series of Enclosure Acts in early industrial England deprived commoners of access to land by introducing "private ownership and integration into a money economy, which often led to decision-making being transferred to distant owners" (158), modern-day gentrification monetizes land, displaces the underprivileged, and imposes centralized order on previously organic communities. In the poem, this process extends to nonhuman members of the community, with the "HOAs measuring the width of each blade of grass." The "blade of grass" reference evokes a Whitmanesque understanding of human and nonhuman natures as a continuum operating within a material and spiritual universe that has value in and of itself—an essentially ecological vision shared, among others, by Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Black diasporic conjuring traditions.[3] In the poem, this ecological worldview is contrasted with the controlling approach of the HOA and other administrative, legal, and business authorities that violently impose manmade order on the land by "boxing up" the "hunting and nesting grounds" and replacing them with "readymade, justaddwater houses" (Wiley 173). "Rowed like bottles of Clorox / on store shelves," these forms of housing development are sanitized, standardized, and soulless. More insidiously, they also continue the foundational American settler-colonial project of displacing the land's original inhabitants, both human (the poem's collective "we" of the commons) and nonhuman (the animals who used to nest and hunt in the area).

Replaced by a gentrified, enclosed, and soulless landscape, the commons as mapped by Wiley have been all but erased. Yet, they remain alive in the vernacular memory of the poem's collective speaker whose culture of place, it turns out, includes a

[3] For discussions of indigenous TEKs, see e.g. essays collected in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability* (2018), edited by Melissa K. Nelson and Dan Shilling. While, to my knowledge, no studies of African American and Afro-diasporic practices of conjuration and rootwork as forms of TEK have yet been published, recent work by Kinitra Brooks, Kameelah L. Martin, and LaKisha Simmons lays excellent groundwork for a reconsideration of conjure as spiritual and ecological epistemology (see e.g. their 2021 editorial note to vol. 36 of *Hypatia*, "Conjure Feminism: Toward a Genealogy").

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culture of militant resistance to the powers that be. In the final stanza, the speaker considers the correlation between gentrification and generational change that entails the passing of community elders and, possibly, younger people's city-bound migration. As they observe, the new developments might have appeared

> when the old men crossed over. The vigilantes who paced the pavement
> checking in, patrolling the woods, when possible
> wheezing a belly laugh all over you, when needed
> toting a rifle.

With this ending, the poem's semi-independent "community of care" is revealed to have been made possible by its members' capacity for and commitment to self-defense. The "old men," previously described as horse farmers, house painters, visiting neighbors, and "granddadd[ies]," were also "vigilantes" equipped to turn away hostile outsiders with mockery or armed force. The absence of these renegade-defenders has, as the speaker speculates, at least partially enabled the gentrification that has taken place and, consequently, the breakdown of the (larger-than-human) community. However grim this conclusion may sound, one may argue that the inclusion of the poem in the *Black Girl Magic* anthology is, in itself, a discursive and spiritual counter-measure to the systemic erasure of the "gentrified country in-betweens". The preservation and circulation of memory in the form of the poem constitutes an act of "*re-membering* [as] an alternative to extinction," to use Lauret Savoy's phrasing (186). The foreword and introductions to *Black Girl Magic* describe it as infused with conjuring powers, "not an anthology of verse [but] a manual of glorious sorcery" (Smith xix), and a collection of "mantras, prayers, and promises of our survival" (Browne xxiii) that celebrate and inspire the agency of Black women. Rooted in the tradition of Black women's everyday resistance to the systemic erasure of their historical memories and lived experiences, the anthology's ecosystem of diverse and synergic poetic voices announces itself as, essentially, a cultural commons. From this perspective, the verbal conjuration of Wiley's poem puts the history of Black rural life back on the map, broadening hip hop's perceived bioregional concern beyond what Rosenthal sees as an "urban environmental discourse" (661) and towards a more complex and comprehensive understanding of a historically and culturally Black sense of place.

Where Wiley's poem is concerned with the fate of displaced communities and disrupted ecosystems at a local level, Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie's "Global Warming Blues" (104) approaches the problem of sacrifice zones and disposable lives from a perspective that shifts between the personal and the global.[4] Unlike the fate of rural commons in the American South, global climate change has been—despite decades of documented corporate and political efforts to distort the scale and origins of the threat—widely and increasingly present in public discourses and popular imagination, certainly so by the time of the poem's first publication in 2014. Yet, as Rob Nixon observes, the long-term

[4] For an extended discussion of sacrifice zones—areas disproportionately exposed to environmental damage and inhabited by populations whose lives are deemed disposable within the racial capitalist economic framework—see Robert D. Bullard's foundational publication on environmental justice, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990).

violence of climate change is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive," and thus difficult to represent in its full magnitude through the conventional narrative and visual modes characteristic of the (post)modern Western imagination (2). Consequently, Nixon argues, to make this unprecedentedly colossal threat visible and to conceptualize it for their reader in a way that can lead to an increased "planetary consciousness," an engaged writer must "give figurative shape" and a sense of "dramatic urgency" to otherwise "amorphous calamities" (15, 10). At the same time, it is imperative that such art helps "counter the layered invisibility" of "people whose quality of life—and often whose very existence—is of indifferent interest to the corporate media," big business, and racist environmental and economic policies at (inter)national levels (16). Tallie's poem performs all of the above, juxtaposing the personal and the elemental in a blues remix that brings home the realities of climate change and advocates for ecojustice for the disenfranchised.

As an aesthetic and epistemic framework for Tallie's poem, the blues represents a lived tradition and a cultural perspective from which the climate crisis is presented as a threat to both the speaker and the broader community she represents. Constituting an aspect of the cultural commons and of intergenerationally transmitted knowledge, lived traditions are, in Bowers's definition, culturally determined "forms of understanding that have been encoded in the patterns that underlie current experience" within a particular group or population (17). True to its title, "Global Warming Blues" draws heavily from the musical structures, images, and themes characteristic of this foundational African American musical genre. The poem's first stanza introduces the line pattern, diction, imagery, thematic focus, and ethos typical of the blues aesthetic. Its opening couplet, "The ocean had a laugh / when it saw the shore," is followed by the following lines:

> I said the ocean had a big big laugh
> when it saw the shore
> it pranced on up the boardwalk
> and pummeled my front door

In a traditional twelve-bar blues stanza, the first, expository line is repeated—often with a slight difference, known as "worrying the line" (Williams 546)—and then followed by the third, final line that offers a resolution, conclusion, or a twist. The stanzas in Tallie's poem, visually broken into six lines, sonically and structurally follow the three-line pattern, although the resolution does not appear until the final stanza, repeated twice for emphasis: "seems like for Big Men's livin / little folks have got to die." This folk-wisdom-like conclusion, led up to by a call-and-response exchange between a "Mama working two jobs" and the oceanic water that floods her house, embodies what Sherley A. Williams identifies as "the primary thematic characteristic of all blues songs": an "individual experience rooted in a common reality" and shared history of Black hardship and survival in the United States (546). It also offers "a profound recognition of the economic inequality and political racism of america" that, according to Kalamu ya Salaam, when "clothed in metaphorical grace," becomes a key element of the blues aesthetic and its ethos of humor and resolve in the face of despair (14). Accordingly, the humor in Tallie's poem—for instance, in the woman's plea to the flood to spare her house: "*Please water, I*

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recycle / got a garden full of greens," "global warming ain't my fault"—comes out of the realization of the almost ludicrous insignificance of individual actions in the face of the force of nature but, significantly, also the global industrial, military, and capitalist forces that alter the Earth's climate.

This juxtaposition of scales and agencies—those of everyday, often poor and nonwhite, people versus the colossal powers of both "Big Men" and the elemental powers of nature personified by the ocean—is the main device through which Tallie alerts her reader to the immediacy of global warming as a tangible, rather than abstract, threat. Representing the "little folks," the woman in the poem sees her home and her town turn into "a river / bodies floatin" with a sense of immense helplessness. Knowing that "there's no bargaining with water / so full of strength and salt," she can only watch the tragedy unfold while feeling "too damn mad too cry." The water, fully aware of its physical force, moves around like a bully, enjoying the almost absolute advantage it has over the townspeople. However, for a brief moment, the floodwater and the woman are presented as equally susceptible to—if not both victims of—an even greater force. When, in response to the woman's plea for mercy, the water-as-speaker states that "*big men drill and oil spill / we both know what that means,*" it establishes between itself and its human interlocutor a shared knowledge and suggests that the flooding is not as much an act of its own volition but rather a reaction to the ecocidal operations of extraction capitalism. Consequently, the initially dualistic power dynamic between the "little folks" and the ocean is complicated by the invisible yet immensely powerful presence of a third actor: the "Big Men," representing large-scale industrial and technological capitalists and governmental decision-makers whose profit-driven actions lead to climate change that manifests itself in (un)natural disasters such as this one. The woman and the ocean, though operating on different scales (the intimate/personal versus the planetary/elemental), are briefly in a position of shared vulnerability to the world-shaping forces of not so much the Anthropocene but, more precisely, of what Françoise Vergès terms the "racial Capitalocene": a larger-than-human world fundamentally reshaped not by a monolithically-construed humankind but by "an economic system that privileges profit and fabricates racialized, disposable beings" and that relies a "on an endless access to nature as excess" for both multiplication of this profit and preservation of unequal power dynamics among various sectors of humanity (77–78). Through this layered juxtaposition, the abstract idea of climate change introduced in the title is, by the end of the poem, given a concrete source (the "Big Men," or the most powerful business and governmental actors of extractive racial capitalism), tangible consequence (the flooding), and a relatable, personalized story that, together, help the reader grasp and conceptualize the previously vague scientific concept.

As a blues, Tallie's poem functions not only as didactic literature, although it certainly meets the objectives of giving climate change "figurative shape" and "dramatic urgency" that Nixon sets out for the environmentally-engaged writer-activist. Like a hip hop sample, which often introduces listeners to musical pieces from other eras or cultures, "Global Warming Blues" updates the blues genre to respond to the contemporary challenge of climate change. With the traditional blues trope of the flood, Tallie inscribes

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this planetary catastrophe into the long catalogue of disasters that Black people have faced, survived, and documented with their blues, including Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues" and Memphis Minnie's "When the Levee Breaks," among many others. Through her use of recognizably blue formal and thematic elements, she establishes a rapport with the readers that share the cultural background out of which the poem emerges and invites them to rethink their individual and collective experiences in a broader, planetary context. In other words, the poem opens a conversation about global warming and its disproportionate impact on Black and other marginalized populations. However, as Williams argues, the "internal strategy of the blues is action, rather than contemplation," and "the impulse to action is inherent in any blues which functions out of a collective purpose" (544). Tallie's poem, too, can be interpreted as a call to action on behalf of those disenfranchised communities that are most vulnerable to the immediate effects of planetary climate changes, thus contributing to the broader work of environmentalism of the poor with its culturally-rooted and ecojustice-oriented message.

One shared thread that surfaces in a comparison of the poems by Thornhill, Wiley, and Tallie is their tendency to—implicitly or explicitly—frame ecojustice as a goal whose obtainment may require action that is not only protective and restorative but also resistant, militant, and, at times, violent. Of all three, Thornhill's poem advocates for revolutionary action most explicitly, with Kunta Kinte calling on Shamu to fully embrace the "killer" part of his identity and "drag the whole thing down" (186). The ship, to which "the whole thing" in the poem refers, can also be read to metonymically stand for the larger, globally genocidal and ecocidal system of anthropo- and ethnocentric racial capitalism that historically extends from the transatlantic slave trade to the fishing and entertainment industries of the modern day. Encouraging the orca to follow in the footsteps of Turner and Tubman, the speaker suggests that neither Black nor animal liberation from the racial capitalist order can be achieved without justified violence—just as the slaveholding plantation system was not overthrown by peaceful means. More subtly, suggestions of militancy and resistance are also present in Wiley and Tallie's poems. In the former, the memory of local rifle-carrying vigilantes as possibly the last line of defense from gentrification implies that reviving this tradition of armed self-defense might be one path towards restoring the local cultural and environmental commons. In contrast to the two other poems, "Global Warming Blues" does not advocate for revolutionary violence or militant resistance; it does, however, contribute to consciousness-raising efforts that might lay the groundwork for radical activism. Through its community-rooted cultural framework of the blues and its reframing of individual tragedy in global, systemic terms, the poem invites a critique of extractive capitalism as a force that needs to be resisted in what may be a zero-sum game: if "for Big Men's livin / little folks have got to die" (104), then saving the lives of the latter may entail possibly violent action against the former. Importantly, in all three poems, violence is not hypothetical but already a constant presence in many lives, from the brutality of chattel slavery and animal subjugation to the dispossession and uprooting of communities as a result of economic (gentrification) and/or environmental (flood) violence. In this context, counter-violence of the oppressed and disenfranchised against the oppressive powers

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that be emerges as not only justified but possibly restorative of a different world order, one built around the ecojustice notions of cultural and environmental commons.

Finally, an ecojustice-oriented discussion of these three authors would be incomplete without mentioning how their ecologically intelligent praxis extends beyond the page and into the communities in which they work and live. Thornhill's "public art experiment," Poets in Unexpected Places, arranges poetry readings and performances in everyday spaces in the NYC area. These include subway trains as well as "the Staten Island Ferry, Times Square, Victoria's Secret, Whole Foods, [and] a Brooklyn laundromat" (*Poets in Unexpected Places*). Wiley is a founder of The Watering Hole, a creative writing initiative that "builds Harlem Renaissance-style spaces in the contemporary South" and works to "cultivate and inspire kinship between poets of color from all spoken and written traditions" (The Watering Hole). Tallie, in turn, authors children's books, teaches herbal healing workshops, and creates "self-care posters and healing herbal potions with her daughters" (*Home page*). All three poets see their work as not only rooted in their everyday lives as Black women but also as inextricably interwoven with their local and larger human and nonhuman communities and environments: other writers, students, poetry listeners, environmentalists, advocates, green and built environments of metropolitan city, and particular locales of New York and South Carolina. In their poems, they draw from the archives of Black cultural and political traditions to imagine human and animal liberation, remember cultural and environmental commons, and explore the implications of climate change. They combine poetic craft and social engagement to protest injustice, re-member ecological ways of living, and open up conversations about vital ecojustice concerns. When seen in the broader, ecosystemic context of their educational, outreach, and community-building efforts, their poetry becomes an element of ecojustice activism and pedagogy that not only looks for the language to "address the deep cultural roots of the ecological crisis" (Bowers 1) but also participates in the creation of spaces and communities where this language can be put to action.

While the particular poems discussed in this article are, as I have argued, concerned with ecojustice, it must be noted that the *BreakBeat Poets* series is not a programmatically environmentalist, eco-literary, or ecojustice-oriented project. Most of the poems collected in the anthologies do not make explicit political statements about environmental justice as such nor put the larger-than-human environment at the front and center of their interest. However, especially when viewed in the light of Marshall and Lynes's comments on the ecosystemic qualities of both hip hop and anthologies, the rhizomatic diversity of the styles, themes, politics, histories, and identities featured in the series invites an exploration that sees ecopoetics as a *poetic enactment of ecological intelligence*: a way of thinking and writing that disrupts binaries and hierarchies and privileges relationality and exchange not only among various cultures but also between "nature" and "culture," challenging the very foundations of such dualism. Poet Forrest Gander offers such an understanding of ecopoetics when he describes it as "less interested in 'nature poetry'—where nature features as a theme—than in poetry that investigates—both thematically and formally—the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception" (2). Much like the sonic techniques of hip hop such as sampling (a way of

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"recycling" music), scratching (underscoring the materiality of the vinyl disc), beat mixing (which juxtaposes multiple perspectives and unearths the connections between them), or the break itself (which, arguably, combines all these functions), this type of ecopoetics, as poet Marcella Durand explains,

> recycles materials, functions with an intense awareness of space, seeks an equality of value between all living and unliving things, explores multiple perspectives as an attempt to subvert the dominant paradigms of mono-perception, consumption and hierarchy, and utilizes powers of concentration to increase lucidity and attain a more transparent, less anthropocentric mode of existence. (118)

Similarly, the *BreakBeat* poets often enact or perform an ecopoetics understood as a modality of poetic thinking that is guided by relations, processes, and variations, and that manifests itself not necessarily through explicit thematic references to nonhuman nature and environmental issues but, rather, at the level of language, form, sound, and imagery.

The continuously expanding poetic ecosystem of the *BreakBeat Poets* anthologies and single-author volumes in the series certainly deserves further critical exploration. That most of those works are not overtly engaged with ecojustice does not preclude their ecopoetic, or ecocritical, reading. To the contrary, the diverse and often non-obvious ways of ecological thinking that manifest in the *BreakBeat* universe invite a nuanced critical approach that embraces the layered, expansive, transdisciplinary, and often experimental definitions of ecopoetics as proposed by Gander or Durand. All four anthologies feature a significant number of poems about place, emplacement, and place-consciousness. Some of them take a close look at landscapes of urban decay, often celebrating communities and cultures that thrive in spite of hardship and degradation. Others—particularly in the third and fourth volumes, where writers with migrant experience are broadly represented—explore a diasporic sense of place(lessness) and life across borders and in the cracks of the American empire. Many poems engage with the materiality of language and the human body, focusing on the racialized, gendered, and sexualized "natures" of both as well as on the myriad ways in which human and nonhuman bodies interact with one another to form "interdependent systems, where no organism or action exists on its own" (Bowers 125). At the same time, these material interactions are always negotiated by their cultural signification, ultimately coming together in what Bowers might have imagined as an "ethnically diverse cultural commons" (110). In a true hip hop spirit, many poets represented in the anthologies remix the cultural traditions they come from—Native American, Chicanx, South American Latinx, Middle-Eastern, and African, among others—to explore how the increasingly flexible categories of nationality, gender, sexuality, race, and religion allow for a radical rethinking of our relationship and responsibilities toward one another and the larger-than-human world. Further critical analysis of such hip hop ecopoetics can open up exciting new avenues for culturally relevant scholarship, pedagogy, and activism guided by ecological intelligence and ecosystemic thinking.

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Greening Black Metal: The EcoGothic Aesthethics of Botanist's Lyrics

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Abstract

Environmentalist Black Metal has been a liminal subject of academic ecocriticism during the last decade, but it has rarely been addressed from the perspective of ecoGothic studies. Environmental discourses in Black Metal have taken diverse ideological forms based on the time and place in which they were generated. In the United States, many bands have focused on exploring what Hunter Hunt-Hendrix calls "aesthethics," an affirmative and nihilist sense of transcendentalism carried out through a certain sense of aesthetics, ascetics (spirituality), and ethics. US bands like Botanist have usually been analyzed through the lens of Deep Ecology, that is, as projects depicting a sacralized Nature and a sense of nihilist self-hating humanism. This view, thus, implies an essentialist understandings of Nature/humanity dynamics on their behalf. Botanist's lyrics are characterized by the creation of a demonological/angelical Nature in sempiternal conflict with humanity and its environment-destroying activities. Observing this narrative through an ecoGothic perspective, however, uncovers a different understanding of the romanticized portrayals of Nature depicted by the band, ultimately highlighting humanity and "humanness" as a vital part of its aesthethical construction. This article, therefore, explores the ways in which ecoGothic aesthetics, Val Plumwood's notion of material spirituality and, Donna Haraway's sense of "chthulucenic" ethics connect with each other in Botanist's grim lyricism. The article highlights the importance of Botanist's representation of plant architectures, "Mother Nature's" spirituality, and the environmental ethics involved in the performance of "The Botanist," the protagonist of the band's narrative. This brings to light how the band's depiction of Nature not only drives audiences to reflect on contemporary environmental anxieties, but also to look for onto-ethical alternatives to addressing human/non-human relationships.

Keywords: Botanist, ecogothic, aesthethics, black metal, material spirituality.

Resumen

El *black metal* ecologista ha sido objeto de análisis liminal en la ecocrítica académica de la última década, aunque rara vez ha sido analizado desde la perspectiva de los estudios ecogóticos. El *black metal* de corte ambientalista ha tomado diversas formas ideológicas dependiendo de la época y lugar donde fue generado. En Estados Unidos, muchas bandas han explorado lo que Hunter Hunt-Hendrix llama "*aesthethics*", un transcendentalismo afirmativo y nihilista expuesto a través de su estética, ascética y ética. Formaciones americanas como Botanist han sido normalmente analizadas como proyectos con temas con base en la ecología profunda, es decir, como bandas que muestran una Naturaleza sacralizada y un sentido humanístico nihilista que, por tanto, crean un acercamiento esencializado a las dinámicas Naturaleza/humanidad. Las letras de Botanist se caracterizan por la creación de una Naturaleza demoníaca/angelical, la cual está en permanente conflicto con la humanidad y sus actividades ecosistémicas. Observar esta narrativa a través del prisma de los estudios ecogóticos, no obstante, saca a la luz diferentes perspectivas sobre cómo la visión romantizada de la Naturaleza que imagina la banda acaba incluyendo a la humanidad y a "lo humano" como una parte vital en su configuración. Este artículo explora las formas en las que la estética ecogótica, la ética "chthulucénica" de Donna Haraway, y el sentido de espiritualidad material de Val Plumwood se encuentran conectadas en la lírica oscura de Botanist. El artículo subraya la importancia de la representación que Botanist hace de sus arquitecturas vegetales, la

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espiritualidad de "el mundo natural," y las éticas ecologistas en torno a la figura de "El Botanista," el protagonista de la narrativa de la banda, con el objetivo de desvelar cómo esta representación de lo natural no solo suscita una reflexión en la audiencia en torno a las ansiedades ambientales actuales, sino que también incita a buscar alternativas onto-éticas para entablar relaciones entre humanos y no humanos.

Palabras clave: Botanist, Ecogótico, escética, *black metal*, espiritualidad material.

Introduction[1]

As humanity is dragged deeper into the 21st century, the climate crisis overshadows politics, culture, and our very perceptions of the world. There has never been a better time for apocalyptical discourses, and, therefore, a better time for investigating commentaries on environmentalism exploring "Mother Earth's" revenge against humankind. Black Metal music, although apparently an old-fashioned and ostracized subgenre of extreme metal, has found its way into contemporary ecological discussions with US bands such as Botanist, Wolves in the Throne Room or Skagos engaging in compelling, but nihilistic and bittersweet, depictions of human/non-human relationships. In this sense, Black Metal, usually a subject of anthropological, theological and political exploration, is an interesting subject of ecocritical analysis. This is firstly because, as Başak Ağın Dönmez comments, many metal projects "have spoken out loud to raise environmental awareness" (72) through their lyrics, either explicitly dealing with political issues, or merely emphasizing a representation of environmental objects in their poetics. Secondly, and perhaps more relevantly, the analysis of this kind of pop culture products "highlights the importance of making connections between theory and praxis" (Ağın Dönmez 71). In the next few pages, I delve in the ways in which Botanist musicalizes an ecocritical and Gothic exploration of human conflicts with the "natural" world. Specifically, I emphasize how the ecoGothic[2] components of Botanist's poetics affect the configuration of what Hunter Hunt-Hendrix calls "aesthethics", that is, the sense of distinctive aesthetics, ascetics (spirituality) and ethics inherent to Black Metal (64). Thus, after contextualizing what this genre is and what it implies in ecological discourses, I analyze Botanist's sense of aesthetics, its spiritual proposal and the ethical implications derived from its lyrics. I use this structural understanding of Black Metal (one based on connecting the three different aspects of "aesthethics") to focus on Botanist's solo albums[3], as they provide a homogenous critique to industrialism and allow me to also contextualize and contest previous academic criticism on the project. Contrary to other analyses of the band's lyricism, I argue that, although apparently misanthropic, Botanist's poetics do not displace humanity—and humanness—from an idealistic self-regulated

[1] This research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Universities (*Ministerio de Universidades*) under a national predoctoral contract program for university teaching training (*Ayuda para la Formación de Profesorado Universitario*).

[2] A definition of this field of study is provided in "Section 3" of this article.

[3] *I: The Suicide Tree*, *II* (2011)*: A Rose from the Dead* (2011), *III: Doom in Bloom* (2012), *IV: Mandragora* (2013), *The Hanging Gardens of Hell* (2013) and *VI: Flora* (2014).

sense of ecology and, rather, generate ecoGothic aesthetical, ascetical, and ethical inclusions of "the human" into more environmentally-sustainable ecological paradigms.

(US) Black Metal: History and Academic Approaches

Black metal music has traditionally been categorized as a subgenre of "extreme metal" (along with others such as death, or doom metal). Although its name comes from Venom's seminal album *Black Metal* (1982), and it was initially developed by bands such as Celtic Frost, Hellhammer or Bathory, the subgenre was widely popularized by bands such as Mayhem, Burzum, Darkthrone and some others (the so-called Norwegian Second Wave) during the 1990s. Its sound, and the nihilistic, anti-Christian ethos that nurtures its lyrics earned special worldwide attention after some incidents during its genesis in Norway involving the burning of several churches, suicides, and murders.[4] In musical terms, Black Metal vocals tend to employ high-pitched screams and guttural sounds, which are combined with "extremely rapid tempos, 'tremolo' riffs, a 'trebly' guitar sound, and simple production values" (Kahn Harris 6). Through dissonance, Black Metal materializes its unconformity with the far more palatable melodical forms that characterize the musical establishment. The sonority is meant to conveniently sound grotesque in an attempt to generate a dissenting contrast with commercial music, developing an artistic discourse in absolute opposition to capitalist logics of (musical) consumption. Regarding their lyricism, Black Metal originally explored religious counter-cultural tropes such as satanism, Germanic-Scandinavian paganism and the occult through a misanthropic and apocalyptical view. Lyrics, thus, attack(ed) the dominant Christian background of Western cultures, while also develop(ed) a sense of anti-hegemonic distinctness—as with other countercultural genres like punk music. Playing Black Metal also bears a very specific sense of performativity, particularly in live shows, videoclips and any other visual display of the bands. They, in many cases, "describe their performances as divine worship, communion, or magical rituals, or in other ways connect their artistic activities to ritual magical practices" (Granholm 6). Usually, the musician's performance in music videos, live concerts and promotion photos involves white-face makeup with black lipstick and eyeshadow, and it commonly includes pagan or satanic symbology—such as inverted crosses or pentagrams. Bands tend to dress in black outfit, sometimes also wearing rudimental clothes to enhance its paganist performance. Movement in stage is characterized by an extreme violence that emphasizes the music's demonic ethos. The implications of this hyperviolent performativity, which may find its roots in punk culture, are significant for the analysis of Black Metal. Firstly, it visualizes the counter-cultural messages inherent to the genre, and, secondly, it sets the inherently violent and aggressive premises of whatever imaginary the Black Metal band wants to

[4] Per Yngve Ohlin ("Dead"), vocalist of Mayhem, shot himself in the head after attempting to commit suicide with a knife in a nearby forest. When Øystein Aarseth ("Euronymous"), guitarist of the band, found his body, he took some photos of the corpse that would later conform the cover art of Mayhem's album *The Dawn of the Black Hearts* (1995). Euronymous was later killed by Burzum's frontman Varg Vikerness. More details about these events and their cultural resonances can be found in Moynihan and Søderlind's *Lords of Chaos* (2003).

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represent. Regardless of the ideas argued by the band, their defense is not meant to be achieved (or imagined) through peaceful negotiation with the establishment.

Even though the genre's musical performance and depressive themes have not dramatically changed over time, Black Metal's thematic developments and worldwide expansion incorporated elements diverging from the original ideas embedded in the genre. These new tropes explore Western political counter-cultural political movements—from national socialism to anarchy or communism—non-Germanic local or national mythologies, or, as I later explain, also ecology and environmentalism. Regardless of the specific ideological interest, Black Metal has been known to represent extreme political views (from both left and right specters) that protest against the social, cultural and ecological effects of techno-capitalism, globalization and industrialism. In this sense, the US Black Metal scene has generated a diverse amount of Black Metal bands opposing to some of the traditional logics of the genre. The European context, in their origins, was highly influenced by fascist or ethnocentric views that glorified a pagan sense of Aryan/Scandinavian ethnicity (and a supposed natural connection to their national territories derived from that ethnic identity), an aspect that characterizes early Norwegian Black Metal and that has developed a specific school of Black Metal, commonly known as NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal).[5] In the US, nonetheless, many bands digress from this perspective, namely due to the fact that Black Metal is mostly associated with white subjectivities (almost no Black Metal bands include non-white members) and, therefore, the ancestral connection to the local land defended by European Black Metal bands can be difficultly defended in a colonial context.[6]

In this regard, Hunt-Hendrix comments that American Black Metal must differentiate itself from the European variety through the abandonment of the European forms (what he calls "Hyperborean Black Metal") and the adoption of a sense of affirmative transcendentalism ("Transcendental Black Metal"), one that, in her view, would represent a

> double nihilism and a final nihilism, a once and for all negation of a series of negations. With this final 'No' we arrive a sort of vertiginous Affirmation, an Affirmation that is white-knuckled, terrified, unsentimental, and courageous. What we affirm is the facticity of time and the undecidability of future. Our affirmation is a refusal to deny. (61-62)

Although the affirmativeness of his nihilism is vaguely articulated, Hunt-Hendrix proposes an interesting embrace of "an apocalyptic humanism to be termed Aesthethics" (55). The notion of Aesthethics refers to the supposed distinctive essence of American Black Metal,[7] one composed of three interrelated elements: the aesthetic, the ascetic and the ethical (64), which, rather than continuing the negative themes of self-annihilation traditional to Black Metal, propose a positive view of nihilism that ultimately fosters "joy,

[5] A more detailed analysis of this issue can be found in Spracklen (103-117)

[6] There are American Indian Black Metal bands (i.e. Pan-Amerikan Native Front, Necron or Ifernach) that would deserve a different analysis. In this case, the Hyperborean model could potentially be applied, as American Indigenous collectives do assume an ancestral relationship with the land.

[7] According to Hunt-Hendrix, the name "American Black Metal" (rather than US) is a better denomination for this new philosophical interpretation of the genre, since "the US is a declining empire; America [in contrast] is an eternal ideal representing human dignity, hybridization and creative evolution" (54-55).

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health, resonance, awakening, transfiguration and courage" (64). In essence, Hunt-Hendrix's Transcendental Black Metal aims to address self-annihilation (through a pseudo-Nietzchean nihilist perspective) as a positive process of individual transformation. Although Hunt-Hendrix notion has been negatively received by some scholars—Sascha Pöhlmann, for instance, claims that her text (among others in the volume in which it is included) "ended up pretentiously indulging in obtuse academic jargon and dated poststructuralist routines" (5)—I believe that her structurization of the genre's themes is analytically interesting when discussing the development of US Black Metal, since it highlights the three philosophical fields with which, widely speaking, many US bands seem to attempt to separate their work from the European tradition. Despite the existence of some proto-fascist reactionary bands imitating Hyperborean modes, such as Gran Belial's Key or Judas Iscariot (Sauermann 88), there are other bands with political aims that clearly dissociate their themes from classic European Black Metal. Bands such as Feminazgul employ a sense of "vigilante feminism" to oppose patriarchal cultural hegemony (Shadrack 39). Others, like one-man-band Panopticon, reflect on socio-economic aspects of the US rural realities (Lucas, "Kentucky"), and others, like Wolves in the Throne Room, explore Black Metal themes through (eco)anarchist perspectives (Morton). These three Black Metal bands, along with many others such as Agalloch, Nechochwen, or the one featuring this essay, Botanist, have a common element that affects the basis of its aesthethics: a gothic and posthumanist eco-thinking.

Black Metal and the EcoGothic

The fact that Black metal's environmentalism has rarely been explored from an ecoGothic framework contrasts with the suitability of this genre for this type of analyses. Both Black Metal and "the Gothic mode" not only play with dark symbolisms of Western culture but also engage with philosophical commentaries on their epistemological effects over human experiences. A Black Metal depiction of nature under Gothic terms, therefore, should not be read as purely aesthetical but as an attempt to illustrate and politicize human/nonhuman relationships. As Del Principe states, "an EcoGothic approach poses a challenge to a familiar Gothic subject—nature—taking a non-anthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear" (1). With this idea in mind, Elizabeth Parker defines the ecoGothic mode in the following way:

> The ecoGothic is a flavoured mode through which we can examine our darker, more complicated cultural representations of the nonhuman world—which are all the more relevant in times of ecological crisis. It is concerned with texts with a pervasive sense of ecocentric ambience independent of human presence. Transhistorical in its approach, it explores our ecophobic anxieties, our fears of Nature which are so often somewhat tinged with desire. The primary and consistent concern of the ecoGothic is with the deliberate interrogation of the Gothic nature of Gothic Nature. (36)

An ecoGothic perspective, hence, addresses the horrific nature of Nature, the depiction of the natural world as a Gothic monster that is, at the same time, feared and desired. This mode does not only observe and reflect on the aesthetics of "our darker, more complicated

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cultural representations of the nonhuman world," but the connections between this narrative or poetic depiction of Nature and the reasons behind "our ecophobic anxieties."

EcoGothic theorizations connect well to metal's traditional approach to poetics, particularly because of the "common themes of sublimity such as darkness and fear used in [the genre], as well as a deliberate arousal of ecophobic feelings" (Ağın Dönmez 73). In Black Metal modes, dark representations of the natural world are a fundamental element. According to Eric Butler, Black Metal's lyrical vocabulary is commonly composed of references to "the artic tundra, the unyielding night of the northern winter, virgin woods and wastelands, stone, mountains, the moon, and the stars" (28). There is not only a very specific focus on representing Northern, non-anthropogenic landscapes but also on depicting them as bleak, dark and haunted spaces. This depiction transposes the depressive, violent components of Black Metal—along with whatever specific countercultural ideas that each band is interested in—into the ecological aesthetics of the genre, making landscape signify the song's mood. Already in the songs of some the very first Black Metal projects, poetics on ecophobias and ecophilias were one of the main thematic lines of their music. According to González Alcalá,

> in some early lyrics from Emperor and Satyricon, the return to a past when man had a closer communication with Nature is presented as the way to revitalise the individual who is capable of bringing back this creative dark natural force to create a new order after dismantling the modern one. In these works, natural sublimity represents danger only for those untuned with it; on the contrary, those embracing it understand that it can become a response to substitute the artificially manipulated world of humanity. (910)

Early Black Metal embraced the questionable dichotomy of "Civilization vs. Nature," as if the civilizing process was somehow separated from the non-human world. Nature, understood as a separate entity from civilization and "man," following the also hypermasculinist logics of the genre, is observed as a horrifying force that is simultaneously the subject of Black Metal's desire, a nostalgia for a symbiotic communion with the non-human that now terrorizes us. Darkness becomes a captivating aspect and through their embrace, one is meant to adopt a pagan/occult epistemology that makes us heretically (re)construct symbiotic connections with the biosphere. It must be noted that Black Metal is not particularly innovative in this regard, since it is neither the first movement proposing alliances between neo-paganism and ecology-preserving philosophies, nor neo-paganism is a unique form of eco-spirituality, nor all neo-paganisms are inherently ecological (See Rigby 279-283). Rather, Black Metal's dark green ascetics provide yet another perspective on contemporary debates on ways to (re)arrange connections between theological sensibilities and ecological thought.

When specifically observing some of the already mentioned US bands (Wolves in the Throne Room, Panopticon, or Botanist), scholars have highlighted and vehemently criticized the dark biocentric premises in their narratives (Morton; Lucas, "'Shrieking soldiers'"; Woodard). Although these academic explorations tend to delve into the different ecocritical considerations represented by these bands, most of them emphasize their problematic essentialization of Nature/human binaries, linking Black Metal's thematical misanthropy to deep ecology's anti-anthropocentric position. As Woodard states, bands like Wolves in the Throne Room and Botanist "suggest an [ideal] ecological

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model that is alien to dynamics, to energetic modes of existence, as well as to the complexities of feedback loops as they relate to ecological systems" (194). In essence, these bands seem to generate unproductive conceptualizations of ecology and environmentalism. Their nihilist proposals, combined with their deep-ecological sacralization of Nature, see the degradation of humanity's moral value as artificial (since Nature's divine value is given by humans). For Lucas, in the specific case of Botanist, the band's "assessment of plant revolution as justice is a human act of judgment, rather than an ability to 'get beyond' an anthropocentric perspective" (494). However, in the next few pages I intend to illustrate that, contrary to this criticism, an analysis of the ecoGothic aesthethics of Botanist's poetics uncovers a way to observe humans and "Nature" not only in communion but in a rhizomatic configuration, in Deleuzean terms, that decentralizes previous understandings of the band's lyrics as essentialist and romanticized (or, in other words, as anthropocentric).

The EcoGothic Aesthetics of Botanist

Otrebor is the name of the anonymous musician behind Botanist, and he composes, plays, and records every instrument used in his music (following Black Metal's tradition of one-man bands).[8] Botanist's music preserves the original sound characteristics of the genre (high-pitched shrieks, distorted sounds, and simple production values), but adding a singular component: rather than employing a guitar as the main melodic power—at least in the first albums—Botanist uses a hammered dulcimer that is later treated in post-production "to meet the genre's demands for strident din" (Lucas, "'Shrieking soldiers'" 486). Consequently, Botanist's sound results in a distinctive, yet traditional way of producing Black Metal, that, although more percussive than classic stylizations of the genre, perpetuates the equally distorted and cacophonous sound that characterizes Black Metal. Regarding the content of the lyrics, one of the main components that differentiates the band from others is that most of the songs explore plants, its agency, and their different symbiotic properties. The band's poetics, nonetheless, are not descriptive, but, rather, an attempt to link plants' ecological function to common Black Metal themes such as humanity's extinction, apocalypticism and dark spirituality.[9]

Most of Botanist's albums tend to follow a similar ecocritical narrative, one that supposedly confronts an undefeatable Nature with Humanity. According to Otrebor:

> The songs of Botanist are told from the perspective of The Botanist, a crazed man of science who lives in self-imposed exile, as far away from Humanity and its crimes against Nature as possible. In his sanctuary of fantasy and wonder, which he calls the Verdant Realm, he surrounds himself with plants and flowers, finding solace in the company of the Natural world, and envisioning the destruction of man. There, seated upon his throne of Veltheimia, The Botanist awaits the time of humanity's self-eradication, which will allow plants to make the Earth green once again. (Botanist, "Lore")

[8] Although in *Collective:The Shape of he to Come* (2017) and later albums, Otrebor incorporates several other musicians as composers.

[9] The links between plant agency and horror narratives have been extensively explored in the past (See i.e. Keetley and Tanga), and plant studies have devoted much of its academic production to the study of vegetal agency in fiction. For more detailed explorations of this topic see Gagliano et al. (2017).

The lyrics of Botanist poeticize a mythical space that seems to sanctify Nature—and specifically, plants. Thus, in Otrebor's vision, a divine and agentic Nature rises again to punish humanity for the industrial-related crimes committed against the non-human world. The satanic apocalypticism that Norwegian Black Metal historically presented is, in this project, transmogrified and de-Christianized, creating a narrative worldbuilding that observes Nature as a monster to be both feared and praised, since, in the end, it embodies a notion of self-regulated ecology.

Botanist's misanthropic Nature resembles traditional illustrations of the sublime, sacred/demonical forest. Contextualizing, ecophobia in the ecoGothic artistic and narrative panorama has usually been catalyzed through the representation of the forest as a non-human monster. The West's historical view of forests is, as Robert Pogue Harrison comments, "full of enigmas and paradoxes [since] in the religions, mythologies, and literatures of the West, the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray. Or where our subjective categories are confounded" (x), and thus, it has turned to represent both a space of divine adoration or resistance and a location for human discomfort and dread. In the Gothic imagination, the forests "show it to be a 'strange and monstrous' space—to be a mythic environment that is, in varyingly disturbing ways, very much alive" (Parker 46). There is a clear aspect indicating that Botanist's Verdant Realm is constructed through this ecophobic understanding of Nature. Mainly, the forest is a place apparently incapable of developing symbiotic relationships with humanity. As stated in the ending of the song "A Rose from the Dead:"

> One day, the turn will be theirs [plants]
> Downfall of the human filth
> Careless suicide, murder malign
> Their end shall mark a new era
> The age of the Verdant Realm
> Upon the grave of mankind my flowers will grow
> Tear shed only for the loss of the verdurous
> Monolith marking the passing
> Of an age of waste
> And the arrival of a budding dawn[10] ("II"[11])

In line with Lucas's (2019) and Woodard's (2014) perspective, this human-depleted vision of a Post-Anthropocene seems to observe a clear binary between Nature (the age of the Verdant Realm) and humanity (the age of waste)[12] that sees non-human life as radically opposed to human existence on the planet. At the same time, the sacred representation of the forest takes an active role as an invader (or "re-conqueror") of human-dominated territories. Nature is destined to destroy *the homo sapiens* species to

[10] This tone is similar in other songs such as "Invoke the Throne of Veltheimia" from *I: The Suicide Tree*, "Quoth Azalea, the Demon" from *III: Doom in Bloom* (2014).
[11] All the lyrics are taken from Botanist's website.
[12] Although songs like "The Reconciliation of Nature and Man" in *Collective: The Shape of He to Come* and many others in ulterior albums illustrate a shift in this binary toward Nature/Industrialism, setting aside the absolute misanthropy of Botanist's solo albums.

prevent further damage to the Earth and, therefore, as humans we can only tremble before it.

Otrebor's ecoGothic interest is also aesthetical. There are many songs in which either specific plants, or the forest, are constructed as greenified Gothic locations. In the song "Tillandsia", from *The Hanging Gardens of Hell* (2013), Otrebor defines the Tillandsias a living ecological structure on which "A Gothic fortress of moss/ From its lichen parapets beat" ("Hanging Gardens"), evoking the traditional Gothic space of the castle. A similar concept surfaces in the lyrics of "In the Hall of Chamaerops", from *II: A Rose from the Dead*:

> Hallowed halls of Arecaceae
> Adorned in fanned petioles
> Spiny needles sharp
> Just menacing
>
> In the hall of Chamaerops
> Dioecious megametophytic spores
> Scent the air
> Released by flowers obscure
> Borne in clusters dense
>
> Amongst these corridors I wander
> In misanthropic mirth
> Brooding deep
> Flanked by verdant brethren ("II")

Here, the Gothic castle is metamorphosized into a bleak vegetal-like palace. The elements that would normally be part of the setting (stone walls, old paintings, or armors) are here Arecaceae palms adorned with flowers, spines and spores. The poetical context is "biotized," as traditional anthropogenic components of the Gothic are substituted by aesthetically comparable plant-like elements that, nonetheless, transmit the dark and grim essence characteristic to Black Metal. In this sense, even language is contaminated by a Gothic sense of the arcane. Rather than simply mentioning a more common name for dwarf palm, the song employs Latin species denominations (Chamaerops, Arecaceae) and other technical terms (Dioecious megametophytic spores), to evoke an atmosphere representing an antique past, in line with Black Metal's obsession with a return to pre-Christian societies and also, as Lucas comments, with esotericism ("'Shrieking Soldiers'" 487).

What makes Botanist's representation of the ecoGothic woods more significant is atomization of the forest-monster. Botanist solo albums are mainly composed of songs detailing how plant species (as individuals) cooperate in dooming humanity—or, in cases, healing the Earth.[13] Plants, thus, are taken as agentic beings subject to human fear. Although this idea is not new in contemporary mythifications of flora—it can already be

[13] Otrebor has specifically commented on the interest of his project to detach from a more generic representation of the forest. For him: "Making Botanist a concept project about plants felt like the way to do that: 100s of bands were talking about forests, but none were taking it to a specific, scientific level" (Otrebor).

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observed it in Tolkien's fictional universe (See Ryan)—this element contrasts with the mainstream imaginary of plants in Western culture. According to Lucas,

> As organisms, plants are so extraordinarily different from us that mortal terror of them is incomprehensible. Even plants that house lethally toxic compounds strike no real terror; one can simply distance oneself, while they remain rooted to the spot, unable to follow. […] In other words, they are so different from us that we cannot conceive of their subjectivity – we cannot identify with plants. As organisms, they are so different from us that we do not normally even think about being afraid of them. ("'Shrieking Soldiers'" 489)

Botanist's lyrics reverse this idea of passiveness and absolute otherness embedded in our conceptualization of plants by demonizing and "blackening" them. This can specifically be observed in the concept narrative behind *IV: Mandragora*, with lyrics exploring The Botanist's necromantic powers rising a horde of mandrakes "to wipe the earth clean of its enemies" (Botanist, "Lore").[14] From an ecoGothic perspective, this is representative of an ecophobia that is not simply channeled through the forest setting, as in traditional Gothic representations, but also through the forest's inner individualized agency.

Eco-Ascetics as a Technology of Posthuman Communion

The dual composition of Botanist's ecoGothic mode, that of a hallowed forest composed of living active plant-like demons machinating against humanity, bears resonances with contemporary spiritual approaches to planetary ontologies. Although it has already been suggested that "Botanist shows the influence of James Lovelock's popular 'Gaia hypothesis', which considers the Earth as resembling a single complex organism in which all systems and species are interdependent" (Lucas, "'Shrieking Soldiers'" 493), the environmental configuration of the band's bio-paradise, The Verdant Realm, better resembles Donna Haraway's conceptualization of the Chthulucene. Similar to Lovelock's scientific configuration of Gaia, Haraway elaborates on Lynn Margulis's concept of "the holobiont" as the model unit for a multispecies natural collaboration. She defines this term establishing that:

> [Holobionts] interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each another, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages. (59)

For Haraway, holobionts, "at whatever scale of space or time," can be defined by their capacity to influence one another, not always in mutually beneficial or competitive relationships (60). From cells, to organs, to bodies, to ecosystems, living beings operate in symbiotic relationships (58), what she calls "*sympoiesis*." This understanding of the world is, in essence, what she named "the Chthulucene," a view of The Earth in which life cycles are based on "collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages" (101). In this sense, the difference between Lovelock's Gaia and Haraway's sympoietic ecological framework is that the latter works with "multispecies alliances, across the killing divisions of nature, *culture*, and *technology*"

[14] A more detailed analysis of *IV: Mandragora* can be found in Lucas , "'Shrieking soldiers'".

(117-18; my emphasis), as opposed to Lovelock's Gaia, which only considers mathematical models of ecological governance (Lapenis 379).

The reasons why I emphasize these words ('culture' and 'technology') are important for the analysis of Botanist's apparent anthropophobic conceptualization of Nature's ascetics—represented, symbolically, in the location of The Verdant Realm. These two concepts, traditionally associated with "the human" part of the binary, are very present in Otrebor's configuration of Nature. One should not understand Botanist's lyrics as a supposed celebration of the triumph of the natural over the human, as Lucas and Woodard suggest ("Shrieking Soldiers" 494; 197) as if it was a biocentric reformulation of Nick Land's inhumanist machine.[15] Rather, they depict a new biotic paradigm that is neither conceptually nor performatively inhuman. In Botanist's lore, the plant demon Azalea acts as a demonically evil entity talking to The Botanist (a human), who operates as end-of-the-world prophet and agent of its dooming power—"You shall be the prophet of my upheaval./You shall be my sword" ("Quoth Azalea," III). Azalea, nonetheless, does not convince The Botanist to carry out its destructive wishes out of pure misanthropic affiliation, but promises him a sense of eternal life and inclusion in the Chthulucene:

> For yours shall be the final effacement of mankind
> Not in death shall you end,
> But in transmuted life eternal.
> Incorporated into the Chlorophyllic Continuum
> Shall you live on evermore. ("Quoth Azalea", "III")

Azalea's mention to eternal life—possibly one of the main tropes of Gothic narratives and easily identifiable in vampire and ghost narratives—is highly relevant. It not only shows the influence on "the human" through technology (human language) but also through culture. Salvation in the "Chlorophyllic Continuum", the very Gaian body, is an aspiration that cannot be understood without considering the role of Western culture in generating the desire of eternal life. This aspect, along with the countless references to classical elements of the Gothic such as castles, fortresses, realms, and even crowns (as in "Deathcap" from *III: Doom in Bloom*), uncovers the importance of "the technological" (intelligence driven interactions with unanimated entities, language) and "the cultural" (hierarchical structures of power, culturally-driven desires) in Botanist's environmentally-inspired narrative. Mingling green visuals with human traits, the Gothic world created through the narrative, although apparently assuming an environmentalist inhumanist sense of ethics, equals the distinctive components that differentiate Haraway's Chthulucene from other biocentric understandings of the planet's biotic functioning.

[15] Nick Land's sense of "inhumanism" has been widely discussed in the accelerationist/neorationalist philosophical field of the last 30 years. Land's machinic inhumanism refers to the "singularized deliverance of the human to the state of dissolution […] that assigns capitalism an inhuman emancipative role. This model of emancipation is comparable with H.P. Lovecraft's fantastic concept 'holocaust of freedom' which celebrates the consummation of human doom with human emancipation." (Negarestani, Drafting the Inhuman, 184). In essence, Land celebrates capitalism as a techno-industrial machine rapidly and inevitably absorbing planetary carbon-based life (humans included) in an attempt to create a fully-machinic singularity.

The ascetic elements of the narrative engage in other more significant ways with the technological aspects of Botanist's ecological imagination. Although, historically, religion, magic, and the spiritual have rarely been addressed as "technology," contemporary attempts to deconstruct this notion (i.e Haraway 2016; Hui 2016; Holmes 2016) may enlighten Botanist's instrumentalization of spirituality. Christina Holmes, commenting on how spirituality operates in Indigenous environmental ethics, states that it "acts as a technology of connection; it is a way to acquire a sense of ourselves as intersubjectively connected to human—and nature—others through affective works—constructing shared stories, shared emotions, shared visions of just futures" (42). In an eco-conscious framework, spirituality works as an non-material technology interconnecting species and helping to maintain the planet's self-regulating metabolism by either instigating an ecological and multispecies empathy on humans or deterring them from damaging ecosystems by means of fear to the (super)natural.

Although references to spirituality are central to Black Metal, the way in which it is articulated differs greatly from band to band. Commenting on this theme and its role in the lyrics of the classical Black Metal band Emperor, Eric Butler states that

> *the spirit is not in the flesh, but must arrive from somewhere else*. This immersion in darkness suspends the rules that govern walking life, and it rests upon the fundament of another law: the cosmic cycle of seasons, itself a part of the course of astral bodies. The cold wind blows from beyond the Earth's atmosphere–descending from on high. (29; my emphasis)

Early Black Metal, with its focus on the (Western) occult and Satanism was in many ways affected by the transcendental sense of spirituality that affected Christianity, one that distinguishes the material and the immaterial, the flesh and the spirit, and the Earth and Hell. Exploring the differences between Indigenous and Judeo-Christian spiritualities, Val Plumwood pointed out that "post-Christian forms [of spirituality] have been framed in terms that have opposed it to the earth and to the body, [a model] leading us to a higher, non-earthly place" (219). Christian spirituality, therefore, has historically developed a dualist logic that divides the material reality and the spiritual communion in two diametrically opposed spheres, developing a "higher immaterial world which is the real source of sacredness" (219). These forms of spirituality not only create a distinction between material and immaterial realities but also negotiate other positionalities in Christian metaphysics. Thus, this spiritual binary develops new dualisms between soul and body (but also Human and Nature), whose power relations are constantly evaluated through an anthropocentric point of view. Black metal's satanism, in this sense, tends to appropriate this dualistic spirituality to reverse it, to transform itself in a nihilistic and horrid reflection of humanity, Christianity or capitalism.

These dualistic conceptualizations of spirituality, as Plumwood argues, "are not attractive spiritual guides for an environmental culture" (218). Since non-human bodies are rendered as disposable instruments, Christianity develops a worldview that deprives other material beings from any potential agency and so, from the generation of ethical interconnections with human beings. Taking the work of Indigenous philosopher Carol Lee Sanchez as a point of reference, she defends the potential subversive capabilities of Indigenous cosmologies in which the binary material/immaterial is not present. Thus,

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"our spirits and bodies are united in death with the earth from which we came, which grew us and nurtured us, in the same way as those of trees and animals" (227). This sense of "material spirituality," as she names it, destroys the frontiers between material and immaterial and between human and Nature. It creates a different ontological and epistemological framework which is ultimately translated in a more "eco-conscious" attitude toward the world and our existence in it. In light of this, Botanist presents a transgressive approach that differentiates it from old-school bands.[16] Although the band transcribes the visuals of the historical Satan's conspiracy against humankind to a fundamentally biocentric and inhumanist representation of spirituality (transforming plants into demons, for instance), the poetical narrative exposes a vision of spirituality in which "the divine" does not come from an outside sphere but from the world itself. Recuperating Azalea's promise to The Botanist: "Incorporated into the Chlorophyllic Continuum/Shall you live on evermore" ("Quoth Azalea" *III*).

Botanist's representation of spirituality is aesthetically tainted by an ecoGothic essence intertwining ecophobias and ecophilias. In songs like "Amanita Virosa," from *III: Death in Bloom*, Otrebor explores the dangers of the fungus that gives name to the song. Although not part of the plant realm, fungi share many of the ecophobic properties assigned to plants, particularly when acknowledging the poisonous properties of many species, *Amanita Virosa* among them. This specific mushroom is defined as a "destroying angel," a "vengeful seraph," and a "White-gilled death" ("III"), incorporating divine, agentic qualities into its biology. The mushroom species is constructed as a defense system against the inherently anti-ecologic humanity showing us that despite its apparent passiveness, The Verdant Realm has paladins that can purge the toxicity of humanity. Many other songs transmit this ecophobic atmosphere through demonic/divine ways, from Monsteras (in the song "Monstera's Lair"), which are defined as "Tentacle hordes creep upward/Strangling" ("II") to Xanthostemon plants (also in the song "Monstera's Lair"), described as "a chaos god" ("II"). However, this misanthropic panorama still presents components for humans to feel spiritually attracted to. The non-human realm is sometimes defined in non-destructive ways. In "Ganoderma Lucidum," The Botanist sings to a fungi species that grants him immortality through a ritual spell:

> In churning cauldron imbibe
> Pulverized acrid salvation
> To drink immortality
> While the others wither and die
> […]
> May I live for ever
> And ever more
> My flesh sustained
> By the fungus Ganoderma
> Lucidum immortal
> While the others wither and die ("III")

[16] Botanist is not the first black metal band that includes this ecological understanding. The same approach, although pointing their different nuances, might be applied to most environmentalist black metal bands in the US context (Panopticon, Agalloch or Wolves in the Throne Room).

The immortal powers obtained by The Botanist do not come from a transcendental outside but from the material Nature itself. Ganoderma Lucidum is a species known for its healing properties and its depiction as a human-appealing device breaks with the conceptualization of "the human as filth" commonly established by the poetical narrative of the band. Even though there are not many examples of this positive vision of material spirituality, the ambivalence in the representation of this sense of the divine/demonical deeply connects with the ecoGothic ethos that pervades Botanist's lyricism, and eventually clarifies what the band's poetical themes are contesting. Misanthropy does not come from an inherent opposition between human and non-human realities, but from the environment-damaging actions carried out by human systems. There are ways, as shown in "Ganoderma Lucidum," to (re)generate these symbiotic links between human and non-human beings, but, given the aggressive and destructive power of human socio-politics, the narrative presents a reality in which the multispecies Chthulucenic organism is only capable of surviving by "wiping clean the earth" from humans, as in the song "Mandrake Legion" ("IV"). Although the human part of the binary can "naturally" coexist with Nature, proving the human/nature dichotomy wrong, the Verdant Realm pessimistic politics regaring the *homo sapiens* see human destruction as the only alternative for Gaian survivability.

Posthuman Ethics against Humankind

Otrebor's exploration of human/non-human relationships in many ways embodies an environmentalist approach to the idea of Hunt-Hendrix's aesthethics. The ecoGothic visuals, combined with Plumwoodian material spirituality, plant the idea of the necessity of shifting from the current bio-ethical paradigm of the West. In other words, the inhumanist *sympoiesis* of the Verdant Realm, embedded in a material spirituality opened to the *anthropos*—but not to anthropocentrism—suggests a need for radical change in mainstream understandings of how we operate in relation to our ecosystems. A sense of transformative environmental ethics, thus, surrounds Botanist's project, one that provides listeners a model of biotic self-regulation that is desirable for the planet and with which humans, despite their self-destructive actions, can potentially coexist. Botanist's portrayal of ecological ethics has been critiqued Lucas and Woodard for being overly essentialist. The band's depiction of a plant-based utopia apparently depleted of humanity, as already commented, has been usually understood as an example of essentialist deep-ecological politics (Lucas, "'Shrieking soldiers'"; Woodard), an aspect linked to the more general academic tendency to describe environmentalist Black Metal in these terms (Scott 65-66). The ideas intrinsic to Otrebor's production are taken as problematic from different angles. For Lucas, "Botanist's assessment of plant revolution as justice is a human act of judgment, rather than an ability to 'get beyond' an anthropocentric perspective," since celebrating Nature's *sympoiesis* and denigrating humanity's essence, as Botanist does, is, in itself, an act dependent on human perception (494). Woodard goes further and states that both Botanist and Wolves in the Throne Room "over emphasize the thingness (or material stability) of nature, thereby implying

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that the earth is an infinitely regenerative Gaia-like entity and/or that the possibility exists for an unrestricted reversibility of the damage that has already been done to earth (as the privileged representation of nature-for-humans)" (194). This critique could be amplified by also looking at the "human" part of the binary. Contrasting to other Black Metal bands referencing Indigenous ecologies—like Ifernacht or Nechochwen—Botanist's humanity is taken as a homogenous collective, ignoring the existence of non-Western cultural and philosophical understandings of non-human realities that do not engage with the current ecocidal capitalist dynamics. The ethical interrogations of these critiques are pristine: How can we develop an effective notion of environmentalism if we keep differentiating between humanity's geo and bio-transformative actions and Nature? How can we decentralize "human" toxic egotistic interest if the binary Nature/Human is not destabilized?

Lucas and Woodard's claims are compelling. Botanist's attempt to maintain the binary human/earth does not seem to suggest interconnections, alliances, or integrations of the Human into the Natural—or the Natural into the Human. The band acknowledges the possibility of connection but human species annihilation, in the end, seems a better solution for Mother Nature. When observing The Verdant Realm as a representation of deep ecology, this binary comes to light and remains as a ghost haunting the analysis of Botanist's music. The plant-based ecological paradigm that Otrebor illustrates seems to lack clear material representations of human-made technologies, or, in fact, of any other element outside the self-regulating system depicted in the band's narrative. As Woodard states: "what is required is an aesthetics of nature which is always open to an incalculable outside that constantly and consistently eats away at any stable ground beneath it" (198). To put it differently, the mainstream idea of Nature needs to integrate, among other external things, intelligent and conscious driven processes (the artificial, the technological) into its core definition. This is an aspect that has become usual in contemporary reflections on posthumanism, which, widely speaking, tends to deconstruct and incorporate different notions of "technology" in their environmental politics. The works of Rossi Braidotti, Francesa Ferrando, Donna Haraway, Andreas Malm—and many others—exemplify this idea. In this sense, Botanist can be observed through the lens of Haraway's posthuman ethics embodied in her depiction of the Chthulucene not only because, as I have shown earlier, "the artificial" is present through aesthetics (Gothic representations of plant's functioning) and "ascetics" (material spirituality of the Verdant Realm observed as a technology of human/non-human connection), but also through its integration of humanity—and, therefore, the artificial—into its depiction of environmental ethics.

In this sense, Botanist's narrative is in fact not unconditionally misanthropic, since, at the very least, it acknowledges the integration of one human individual into Nature: The Botanist himself. He is defined by Otrebor as a "crazed man of science who lives in self-imposed exile, as far away from Humanity and its crimes against Nature as possible." (Botanist "Biography"), and even though the detailed lore on his figure in the band's web site defines him as an agent planning the destruction of Humanity, Botanist lyrics also describe him as a human being in communion with the non-human world. Already in his

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first albums, the "evil" plants inhabiting The Botanist's world are defined as "brethren" ("In the Halls of Chamaerops," "II"), as if The Botanist was an integral part of a vegetal "family."[17] He is also a productive holobiont in the Verdant Realm, as he is in charge of extending Nature's domains through seeding and sowing —"your germination is my task […] your dominion will I engineer" ("Quoth Azalea, the Demon," "III")—and also the catalyzer of pollination processes by liberating lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) over the Verdant Realm. This action, although "ravag[es] denizens with vicious holes" is nonetheless "a necessary evil" for plants to reproduce themselves ("Lepidoptera", "I"). Thus, The Botanist cooperates with other species to expand and maintain the Verdant Realm's ecosystem. He is not just an agent of doom but a fundamental part of the sustainability of the Gaian machine, an instrument of Nature that, through rationalization of ecological dynamics (seeding, sowing, pollinizing), participates in the stability of the ecosystem. The anthropogenic is also part of the Verdant Realm.

This model of engaging with Nature is rooted in a sense of ethics widely explored by Haraway in her reflections on life during the Chthulucene. For her, our "mammalian job" is to "make kin symchthonically, sympoetically" with the rest of biotic and abiotic beings in the planet, that is, to collaborate with the non-human spectrum of agencies and understand their different parts as people (103). Haraway encourages the idea of "making kin" with non-humans as a way to stimulateethic multispecies assemblages that make us capable of surviving the looming ecocide that industrialism/capitalism/imperialism has triggered. As she states: "One way to live and die well as mortal critters in the Chthulucene is to join forces to reconstitute refuges, to make possible partial and robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition, which must include mourning irreversible losses" (101). The Botanist incarnates this understanding of environmental ethics. He establishes multispecies assemblages and kin relations with "the Natural" infected by Black Metal's rage and hate toward human-driven industrialism. The Botanist's ethical performance is, then, an example of Alder and Bavidge's claims when exploring Haraway's thought in relation with the ecoGothic. As they state: "[when framing Haraway's Chthulhucene in the ecoGothic mode, what] we're getting at is the way that our ecological crises call for new forms of ethical thinking, and writers find resources in gothic language and ontologies" (231). We can read Botanist's ecoGothic misanthropy as a critique of capitalist environmental ethics, rather than a pure and unconditional hate of the allegedly toxic nature of the human species—as is traditional in Black Metal. Botanist's grim and green relations with the Earth, in the end, incorporate the human as a possible (but not necessary) part of the new world that will be left after the collapse of human civilization, providing Black Metal fans with a survival alternative based on a multispecies coexistence whose aesthetics and "ascetics" ultimately result in an ecophilic change of ethics.

[17] An aspect that is emphasized in *Collective: The Shape of He to Come*, in which flora and fauna are described as "his future kin" ("Upon Veltheim's Throne Shall I Wait", "Collective").

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Conclusion

Botanist combines the misanthropic, demonological and nature-worship elements that have traditionally defined Black Metal with contemporary theorizations of ecology and environmentalism. The lyrics and the mythical narrative created by the band's music engage with aesthetical, ascetical and ethical components related to Haraway's and Plumwood's ideas on ecological thinking, ultimately denoting a productive attempt at developing human-inclusive (but anti-industrial) environmental ethics. In this sense, Botanist's poetics are "blighted" by a Gothic modality that pervades the configuration of non-human aesthetics—by darkening and "medievalizing" The Verdant Realm's poetical architectures. This "Gothicness" is fundamental when discerning Botanist's eco-ideological interests. Although the band has been accused of essentialist —by distinguishing a clear dualism between Nature and Humanity—the ecoGothic analysis uncovers the ways in which the notions of "the natural" and "the human" are interrogated. The demonical/angelical Verdant Realm represents a Chthulucene in which certain human-like technologies are employed to establish ethical connections between human species and the rest of living agents. Despite the many claims of "pointless" misanthropy that might be thrown at Botanist, when looking at the project's lyricism through Haraway's posthumanist lens, critical and productive ideas come to light. Botanist's poetical enemy is not the *homo sapiens* but the system's extractive and polluting logics. Therefore, the human figure of The Botanist, as a Harawayan holobiont, survives a damaged Earth both through multispecies alliances and the adoption of a material spirituality that fix their role in the self-regulating processes of the ecosystem's life cycle.

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Capitalism Clothes It: Toxic Resilience and Undemocratization in the Face of Climate Change

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Abstract

This paper addresses the mechanisms by which capitalism thrives in the imagined climate crises in the works of Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017). More specifically, it approaches resilience as toxic resistance that allows capitalism to survive socio-economic and political forces around it. This article also seeks to uncover the ways in which such resilience deters the acknowledgement of capitalism as an unsustainable, life-threatening system. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the tension between public and private places to reveal capitalism's undemocratic practices. This analysis first identifies the role of futurology as a technocratic resource in maintaining the capitalist system running for *Odds Against Tomorrow* as Mitchell's professionalism is manipulated to perpetuate such a system. On the other hand, I correlate two models of place-connectedness with various economic terms described in *New York 2140* to arrive at a hypothesis of how resilience becomes toxic in allowing the habitation of New York despite submerging progressively. The second half of this essay concentrates on public and private places in which *Odds Against Tomorrow* showcases the vitality of public places as they nurture democratic practices. It also demonstrates two possible courses of action after suffering from a climate crisis: recovery and perpetuation of corporate American habits or their relinquishment accompanied by the embracement of an agrarian lifestyle. Finally, in the case *of New York 2140,* the interplay between private and public places seeks to demonstrate the social injustices brought about by eco-marginalization for which the undemocratic practices of capitalism also surface.

Keywords: Resilience, toxic resilience, critique of capitalism, climate change fiction, undemocratic practices.

Resumen

Este ensayo aborda los mecanismos utilizados por el capitalismo para sobrevivir en las crisis ocasionadas por el cambio climático presentes en las novelas *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) de Nathaniel Rich y *New York 2140* (2017) de Kim Stanley Robinson. Más específicamente, aborda la resiliencia como una resistencia tóxica que ayuda al capitalismo a sobrevivir a las fuerzas socio-económicas y políticas a su alrededor. Este artículo busca revelar las formas en las que la resiliencia impide reconocer al sistema capitalista como insostenible y amenazante para la vida. Asimismo, el presente análisis escrudiña la tensión entre lugares públicos y privados para revelar las prácticas no democráticas del capitalismo. En primer lugar, este análisis identifica el rol de la futurología como un recurso tecnocrático a la hora de mantener el sistema capitalista en *Odds Against Tomorrow,* ya que se manipular el profesionalismo de Mitchell para perpetuar dicho sistema. Por otro lado, conecto dos modelos de *place-connectedness* (conectividad de sitio) con varios conceptos económicos mencionados en *New York 2140* para formular una hipótesis de cómo la resiliencia se vuelve tóxica al permitir la ocupación de Nueva York a pesar de que se está hundiendo progresivamente. La segunda mitad de este ensayo se enfoca en los lugares públicos y privados en los que *Odds Against Tomorrow* muestra la vitalidad de los lugares públicos, ya que estos nutren prácticas democráticas. También demuestra que hay dos alternativas al sufrir una crisis climática: la recuperación y perpetuación de una América corporativa, o el abandono de dichas prácticas acompañado de un estilo de vida más agrario. Finalmente, en el caso de *New York 2140,* la interacción entre lugares privados y públicos

busca demostrar las injusticias sociales ocasionas por la eco-marginalización, de la que también surgen las prácticas no democráticas del capitalismo.

Palabras clave: Resiliencia, resiliencia tóxica, critica del capitalismo, ficción de cambio climático, prácticas no democráticas.

Introduction

Flooding the capital of the world, the heart of corporate America, unleashes a myriad themes in a novel, especially if it is a direct result of climate change. For this reason, both Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow (OAT)* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140 (NY 2140)* explore depictions of New York threatened and drastically altered by the city's proximity to water, thus imaginatively constructing a megacity that serves as a platform for the discussion of "place" for both humans and non-human agents (Mączyńska 172). What justifies the need for this additional analysis is my approach to *resilience*, which I claim is a malleable concept from which capitalism feeds to survive climatic crisis in both works as people seek "recovery" of "pre-disaster" conditions with slight adjustments despite the crises experienced (Carrigan qtd. in O' Brien 51). Resilience, thus, is understood as nearly indelible resistance against the socio-economic and political forces. At this level, resilience is no longer *sustainable* since it does not foster life, but *toxic* as it foments decay.

The particular focus of this investigation contributes new insights building on existing analyses. Previously, Rich's *OAT* has been widely analyzed as it was thought to exemplify the term "cli-fi" (Streeby 4). Hence, various investigations have studied the novel's portrayal of resistance to climatic events in the form of 'cultural memory' as a "counterhegemonic" narrative (Crownshaw 131). Similarly, it has also been examined as unsettlingly "deficient" in representing climate justice *outside* north American literary traditions (Schneider-Mayerson 953). Moreover, it has been considered, like many works of cli-fi, to be limited to the representation of heteronormative futures leaving queer alternatives unspoken and unexplored (Evans 95). Two more investigations seem relevant. First, Mardalena Mączyńska has selected these two works and added Rosen's *Depth* in her "micro-archive" in which she discusses the imaginative possibilities of climate fiction (strengths and weaknesses) with more of an eco-centric focus. Her analysis underscores the mechanisms by which readers can see "the post-Anthropolis [New York] as a mutable, techno-biological site of multi-species habitation" (178). Second, Lieven Ameel's analysis of *NY 2140* focuses on capitalist tenets of "appropriation," "distribution," and "production," which showcase the characters' "agency at/of the waterfront" (Ameel 2020). Contrary to prior analyses which mostly focus on representation and style, I align myself with Ameel to look at capitalism, but I do so, first, for both novels *OAT* and *NY 2140* given their economic-laden narrative and, second, from the premise of toxic resilience as explained above. More specifically, this article seeks to uncover the economic patterns of corporate New York to reveal their toxic resilience since it prevents acknowledgement of

capitalism as an unsustainable system. Moreover, I evaluate the role of public places that are targeted by capitalistic threat of undemocratization.

Throughout this analysis, I target the following questions about capitalism and external socio-economic and political forces around it. (1) How does unethical professionalism endorse profit and toxic resilience? (2) How do models of place-connectedness for New Yorkers aid capitalism to resist the will of water? (3) How do these models intersect with economic behavior? (4) How do ideologies travel to determine the inhabitation of public and private places, and (5) how does democracy become the antithesis of capitalism in the intersectional nature of climate change? In that light, this analysis encompasses a mechanism to "seeing things new, seeing new things"—Buell's imperative to "displace to replace" (*The Environmental Imagination* 266).

Resilience through Professionalism

The notion of progress has not only occurred alongside the relentless exploitation of nature—which became a tenet of the capitalist system[1]—but it has also been heavily sustained by futurology[2] by way of assuring "progressive futurism." I believe *OAT* presents a world that largely portrays a "liberal version of futurology" in offering "'possible' futures that helped to explain—and legitimate—many of the 'flexible' planning features of a new economic order" (170). In brief, futurology analyzes current trends and extrapolates future outcomes based on the—sometimes doctored—constancy of variables. Such analysis has been professionalized as a technocratic resource and, in doing so, futurology has become the mechanism by which the elite maintains a capitalist economy running (Waskow qtd. in Ross 178), while disregarding the urgency of ecological concerns and actions. However, (the desire for) predicting the future is not an issue on its own, but rather the main issues derive from these questions: at what point does futurology become a hinderance to recognizing the dangers of a changing climate? How can such a professional branch of forecasting the future be attached to a narrative of resilience? How does capitalism benefit from this? It must be noted that despite these "real world concepts" being analyzed through the lenses of fictional worlds, literature can still create the space for paradigm change to emerge. Indeed, Hubert Zapf comments that literature "is a textual form which breaks up ossified social structures and ideologies, symbolically empowers the marginalized, and reconnects what is culturally separated. In that way, literature counteracts economic, political or pragmatic forms of interpreting and instrumentalizing human life" (138). Given this, fictional worlds that "instrumentalize" futurology and showcase climatic disaster provoked by unchanged ideological systems like capitalism are a suitable means to attempt to solve these inconsistencies in the real

[1] See, for example, Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) and *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (1992*).*

[2] Defined as "a social science of systems analysis created to facilitate military and industrial planning and fully institutionalized today as an instrument for acquiring strategic military and corporate advantage" (Ross 170).

world. Guiding my analysis on the aforementioned questions, I proceed to summarize the world of *OAT.*

Tired of working for a company that does not appreciate his potential, Mitchell Zuckor, the protagonist of *OAT,* is lured into the insurance company "FutureWorld" for which he displays acute adroitness in terrorizing all clients. Briefly, FutureWorld profits by selling exorbitant catastrophe insurance to other rich companies in New York. During his employment, Mitchell is paired up with an assistant, Jane, who is to learn from the master by taking part in successful "terror meetings." However, when a heavy downpour comes to New York, Mitchell's realizes that the city may experience severe flooding. Despite his realizations and predictions, he is forced to work on the day a hurricane called "Tammy" arrives. Thus, he winds up trapped inside his apartment with Jane, and uses a ludicrously expensive canoe, (called *psycho canoe)* which he had bought, to float out of the city in the aftermath of the hurricane.

OAT seems to present a subtle criticism of the ways in which a "future professional" (i.e. an authority on the subject) can actively convince others that the dire capitalist system is a sustainable one despite its foreseeable collapse due to resource depletion and unmeasured accumulation. Accordingly, I argue that Mitchell is dually aware of the usage of his profession as a futurologist, yet the demands of his job at FutureWorld lure him to restrict his predictions to convenient moves that corporations can make in order to continue profiting from ongoing exploitation. This is evident in Mitchell's interactions with Nybuster and in his choice to adopt an alternative lifestyle after hurricane *Tammy*.

Mitchells' identity is largely defined by his job as he believes deeply in what he preaches. Indeed, his paranoid, detailed-obsessed personality, and inclination for imagining the worst-case scenarios surface even in his physical complexion when he interacts with his clients; "he allowed fear to radiate out of his eyes. He would use the fear" (35). Once employed by FutureWorld, his first meeting is a success since he convinces a skeptical client to believe in imminent threats. He states, "'I'd like to tell you what's going happen in about ten years (sic), once Beijing attacks. Before the first missile lands in Times Square, Nybuster, Nybuster and Greene will be ruined. And I don't just mean the firm. I mean your private wealth, your legacy, your next of kin'" (35). Afterwards, he sketches a dystopian end for Nybuster's corporation, which includes dollar inflation, political corruption and kidnapping, and even mentions New York turning into a "radioactive wasteland" (36). Mitchell's mathematical operations are so millimetric that he persuades Nybuster that they are on the verge of inevitable threats, thus, "profitably managing insecurity" (Mehnert 139). In like manner, Mitchell's skilled performance gives readers confidence to identify him as a "form of absolute trust in absolute power," as Bruce would say, since "professional specialization marks a comforting site where the spectator's confidence in the character's performance can be total" (30). Therefore, Mitchell's professionalism serves to manipulate corporations' interests and channel them toward FutureWorld's profit. Coalesced to this, the political interests of futurology grow more visible: "it is easy to see how it [futurologist's research] serviced the corporate need for contingency planning. Such models reduced corporate anxieties by rationalizing the scope of possible control over future trends. The goal was intelligent management and

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control of the unpredictable" (Ross 177). From this perspective, these "surprise-free scenarios" that Nybuster and other clients instrumentalize the future, professionalism, and the environment while prolonging the resistance of capitalism.

While fully aware of the consequences of his predictions, Mitchell, nevertheless, chooses not to disclose such information openly as he has abandoned his professional ethics for profit. For example, he would like to show that outside the ostensibly safe skyscrapers, "temperature," "barefoot beggars," "plague," and "pestilence" are real problems not too far from the "Dark Ages" (38). Thus, Mitchell recognizes the duality of his profession, but he is compromised as a corporate tool. Indeed, Bruce explains the relinquishment of professional's subjectivity while employees work for a company:

> Ethical responsibility, and even more so political responsibility, is assumed to be located elsewhere, at some higher level (the motives of the employer or of the society as a whole) where the professional need not, should not, and perhaps cannot allow himself to be distracted by it. As far as the professional is concerned, ethics are to be provisionally suspended for the duration of the job. (31)

This "suspension" of Mitchell's ethics seems to hint at the kind of futurology present in the novel, as characters seem more interested in the repetition—and exhaustion—of a system than in the adaptation of an alternative ecology prompted by prediction and channeling of such dire natural catastrophes. In the words of Andrew Ross, this would be "liberal futurology" since it pushes a "basic framework of liberal capitalist society" without much room for divergent economies (176).

Despite the sole emphasis on keeping an economic system running, *OAT* does present one instance in which ecological disruption is a threat to humanity's future: hurricane *Tammy*, which is popularly perceived as a blessing for the sultry summer in New York. In the novel, Mitchell carefully considers the propensity of New York to become inundated given its prolonged scarcity of water (70). In this regard, Mehnert has spoken of such a hurricane as "manufactured uncertainty" which Beck defines as "'incalculable, uncontrollable and in the final analysis no longer (privately) insurable'" (qtd. in Mehnert 129). Incorporating their views entails that climate-driven phenomena are too complex and intersectional for their risks to be accurately measured. Therefore, Mitchell's professionalism is not as stable an entity as in the successful "terror meetings," but rather it succumbs to the reality of a "manufactured uncertainty" where he "does not choose between safety or risk but between various risky alternatives" (Beck qtd. in Mehnert 129). Furthermore, the contrast between the ways in which Charnoble and Mitchell process the aggravation of the hurricane showcases their interests. Charnoble says, "'They're *call*ing. They want meetings. And meetings mean more money. Money, money, money—'" (Rich 70; emphasis in original). When the hurricane escalates to category 2, Charnoble increases his excitement even further (72). Mitchell, however, resorts to "math for relief" (73) given his philosophy that "fearing the worst usually cures the worst" (45). Once again, the interest of corporations lies in profiting from others' fears, not in listening to the warnings of ecological disruptions such as *Tammy*.

While Mitchell's predictions do speak of the interconnectedness of humanity in the world since he waxes eloquently about how one factor in the political spectrum may affect

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social relationships (to give one example only), and while he may be aware of how uncertain the risks are, the hurricane is the agent that comes across as transmogrifying. In the aftermath of the hurricane, there are two possible courses of action: either corporate American business is restored and prolonged or there is relinquishment of such practices. To explore these alternatives, Jane and Mitchell epitomize them perfectly. In the case of Jane, the flood affects her in a profoundly personal way as they row in the *psycho canoe* and encounter debris like floating animal carcasses and human bodies. She wonders, "'why is this happening to us? A whole city [. …] All the destruction. The *death*. Everything is dead. This city is dead. It's a graveyard'" (99). Indeed, she discloses to Mitchell that it is not just about the city but also herself as she feels torn apart as well particularly because her dream of succeeding in New York seems unstable (100). Nonetheless, once both make it to dry land safely and learn that Mitchell has been proclaimed the prophet who predicted the hurricane, Jane seizes the momentum of Mitchell's fame to propose the start of a new consulting firm called "Future Days," (114-116). In an instant, Jane moves from grieving the destruction surrounding her to channeling such grief toward (the possibility of) profit, the only way a corporate New Yorker knows. She seems to hark back to what she says earlier in the novel, "the world began without man, and it will end without him. Until then, there's FutureWorld" (64), which assumes that, despite the transgressions corporate America incurs, the business of fear will accompany humanity's affairs till the end of the Anthropocene. Hence, Jane becomes Rich's embodiment of a New Yorker's fidelity to a system even after directly facing an unspeakable disaster. This is capitalism stubbornly resisting the will of water for, as she trusts, New York is "invincible" (108). Remarkably, Mitchell sees Jane's return as something plausible over the short term since he is acutely aware that the current capitalistic system is unsustainable and will cause colossal ecological disbalances in the upcoming years making everything "a lot wetter" (108). For these reasons, Jane is an apparatus to make visible how populations can manipulate the corporate, ecological (and even political) discourses to pretend that capitalism will provide endlessly and ceaselessly, as Timothy Morton would say, as if "resources sprang out of nowhere" (88).

Even though Mitchell initially entertains Jane's idea to start a new firm, he later confesses that he cannot be part of such an unsustainable system any longer. His journey follows the ethic of Elsa Bruner who functions in the novel as a hint that the price he is paying for being a futurist is living a life of perpetual fear entrapped within the skyscrapers' fenestration.[3] Indeed, Elsa is referred to as Mitchell's "paragon of solitary idealism, of single-minded devotion to higher purpose" (159). As it must be remembered, Elsa is Mitchell's opposite since she represents an alternate lifestyle, which Mitchell conceives of as nonsensical and perilous. Their correspondences reveal a tension regarding whose lifestyle is the most appropriate: Mitchell's corporate, controlled life or Elsa's agrarian and free life. Thus, the hurricane allows Mitchell to literally flood out of corporate America into the suburbs to settle for a more agrarian lifestyle; he is unfettered

[3] This "price" I refer to seems to resonate with Mehnerts's mention "affective dimension of fear." See Mehnert, 133.

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from the numerical entrapments of his mind. A shift of this magnitude in the protagonist signifies a collapse of his professional identity and relinquishment of corporate affordances. It also symbolizes the awakening of his sensibility toward a harmonious, sustainable self. This is what Schneider-Mayerson identifies as "a sense of masculinity and Emersonian self-reliance" (952). I, however, go further in view of Merchant's *Reinventing Eden* to claim that Mitchell may be opting out of a relationship of power over nature in which he predicts future events to sustain a system, to embrace a "partnership" ethic with human/non-human agents working synergistically (5). In the words of Merchant, this "partnership" is a "dynamic relationship to nature as a partner" admitting that there is real unpredictability and tangible, observable agency in both humans and nature as they "inject uncertainties into the trajectories of progress and decline" (5).

In essence, *OAT* juxtaposes a stability that is potentially lucrative for capitalism to continue exploiting resources in corporate America to the instability with which natural phenomena threaten that system. This creates a conflict between predictions and realities in which the incongruence will only increase as Mitchell knows. This novel, then, showcases most people's preference to maintain business afloat even when there are alternative ways of life, and the systems they believe in are becoming growingly unsustainable. Toxic resilience has many forms, however; I turn now to the toxic resilience presented in terms of place-connectedness and economic behavior in Robinson's *NY 2140*.

Resilience through Place(full-less)ness in *New York 2140*

Unlike Rich's, Robinson's novel portrays this metropolis with drastic water changes already having occurred. Indeed, lower Manhattan is underwater due to a 50 vertical feet water rise and, consequently, waves make direct contact with buildings in an area called the "intertidal zone," where the MetLife building is located. Given the fervent attachment of New Yorkers to a city that is being progressively submerged, I here analyze models of place and juxtapose them with an analysis of the titles of the novel's parts[4] in order to formulate a hypothesis for New Yorkers' sense of place. This will provide evidence of toxic resilience in their inhabitation and behavior.

To begin with, I shall first establish what is understood by "place." Erica Carter et al., claim that "space" morphs into "place" "by being named" since "the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture [...] and by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population" (xii). Thus, place implies attachment through a sense of identification with concretized structures. Likewise, even if place is an "elusive" concept (Buell 60) and has been used to ground identity and resist "colonizations of capitalist modernity" (Oakes 509), place is a resistance that "seek[s] empowerment within the world economy" (Buell 59). Considering these facts, "place" is, first, grounded in emotion and, second, not necessarily an instrument able to resist the overpowering presence of capitalism (as Timothy Oakes

[4] The novel is divided in "Parts" rather than "chapters" or "sections."

insinuates), but rather a tool used to justify upward mobility within the capitalistic hierarchy and economy as it simultaneously reinforces and nurtures such a system. Consequently, how do New Yorkers inhabit their city?

Lawrence Buell offers two models of place-connectedness that form the basis for understanding attachment to a metropolis: "concentric" and "dynamic." The concentric model envisions "place" as a group of expanding circles of knowledge "from-home-to-society bases"; in other words, the model is like a rippling effect on water (64-65). This creates both an epicenter and an orientation that portrays any other place as secondary since it orbits around the existence of that one epicenter. Indeed, understanding place as the most significant site for one's (inter)actions grounds one's identity in it and simultaneously gives it emotional affect. This can seep into other relational aspects such as the economic system. The succeeding question is, how does such a model ground the belief that capitalism can resist the will of water?

To begin with, Part One, titled "The Tyranny of Sunk Costs" offers an explanation: it refers to stubborn resilience, a result from having invested so much in a business that the attachment impedes recognizing failure and walking away (37). As a result, the mentality of a New Yorker in 2140, from the outset, seems to be one of fierce commitment to resilience. This resilience hinders consideration of alternative ways of managing an economic failure. On that note, when people have been stricken by crisis, a mindset of "recovery" based on a "pre-disaster" world order is sought and endorsed (Carrigan qtd. in O' Brien 51). In this way, resilience can become toxic when facing climate threats since it may be believed that the problem will be solved with minor fixes; as David Harvey would say, "financial crises serve to rationalize the irrationalities of capitalism" (11) and, unfortunately, alternative ecologies are not rational amid crises. Even when the lower part of their metropolis lies now underwater, these stubbornly resilient New Yorkers continue to reside and perpetuate their economic system despite the displacement of citizens, the diminishing public places, and threats to life of such rising waters.

The concentric model of place not only takes root in "The Tyranny of Sunk Costs," but also in New Yorkers' personality as inward-looking and self-centered since their city is the "center of the universe," as Mączyńska comments (168). New York is not just "the spot where the Big Bang occurred" (Robinson 38), but also the land of superlatives, a place where the adjectives "busiest, noisiest, fastest-growing, most-advanced, most cosmopolitan" take origin (38). Notably, the model of place as an epicenter begins to fit in a fictional world with citizens who see their very existence as the most exquisite expression of humanity. The reason behind people dwelling in an area so prone to drowning starts to become clearer: the emotional affect coalesced with a circling model of place-sense dispersed across all aspects of their existence, even their economy. New York is a submerging dream, but it is a dream apparently worth dying for, worth annihilating the life around it for.

Additionally, Buell's second model of place becomes crucial in further understanding that attachment as it regards "place" as dynamic since "places themselves are not stable, free-standing entities but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside" (67). This perspective further argues that places are "open and

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porous networks of social relations" (68) which connects with Carter's et al., conception of "place." I wonder, then, what further impact must economy (a socially created and nurtured concept) have on the attachment to this city? Part Five, titled "Escalation of Commitment," suggests a response since, as an economic term, it explains the behavior of further investing in a business to recover from previous, unsuccessful events. This mentality that ignores possible losses, I argue, is comingled with capitalism since its intrinsic ambition is to expand without regard to shortcomings. As an economic system that is propelled by a "mantras of 'growthism'" (Grgas 74), a system that "undermines the original sources of all wealth" (Marx qtd. in Morton, *Ecology Without* 91), and one which "encrypts labor" and automatizes the worker (Morton 92), capitalism lies in close parallels with a narrative that is always being remade. This is the fabric of New York as a city in the eyes of New Yorkers:

> Anyway there it lies [New York] filling the great bay, no matter what you think or believe about it, spiking out of the water like a long bed of poisonous sea urchins onto which dreamers cling, as to an inconveniently prickly life raft, their only refuge on the vast and windy deep, gasping like Aquaman in a seemingly-impossible-to-survive superhero's fake low point, still dreaming their fever dreams of glorious success. (39)

On close examination, this quotation seems to suggest that capitalism and place-connectedness synergistically feed one another as capitalism finds its expression in New York City with its leading economic presumption and ever-expanding nature. The quotation similarly exemplifies the resilience of New Yorkers "clinging" to that commitment of living in a submerging dream, which has *escalated* to a "poisonous level." I would lastly argue that the idea of New York's ability to endure even in "seemingly impossible to survive" situations is part of the dream of this city, and its success in doing so is its prize and a simultaneous stimulus to reinforce the system despite any crises it produces. In these ways, resilience partly justifies New Yorker's sense of place, but environmental peril cannot be abrogated for too long, unless their city projects the illusion that humans are in control of their surroundings.

Unlike *OAT* where the negligence comes across through Mitchell's professionalism and the corporate deployment of futurology, the sense of alienation in *New York 2140* comes through sophisticated, technological fixes such as skybridges and water-permeating sheets attached to buildings. These changes are part of what Harvey would call "second nature" through the process of "creative destruction" since "nature is reshaped by human action" (185) to isolate both. The sense of externality of the dangers of an "outside world" reassures citizens that they are in control. In fact, Buell contents that place may either be "an insulating or a galvanizing force" (*Writing* 56). The city enables this insulation by offering minimal interaction with their environment through a cunning manipulation of the cityscape. Hence, the existence of an unsustainable capitalism is prolonged as the city limits the spaces of interaction with the decaying surrounding, deterring citizens from facing the need for a change in ecology. *In NY 2140*, New Yorkers interact with their surrounding environments minimally since they move around skybridges and on-water transportation. Furthermore, Derrida's "re-mark" is influential in the backgrounding of such phenomena (qtd. in Morton 48). This "basic gesture"

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concerns the distinction between background from foreground, music from noise, "space" from "place," and so forth. In this case, it is possible that the decision to background the environment and foreground the corporate shelters facilitates this detachment from endangered life, theirs included. Consequently, the city itself is capable of backgrounding the imperative of adequately responding to climate change through those technological fixes while the citizens' attachment to their place and functional-but-pernicious system inhibits their recognition that a change is imminent. Both models of place-connectedness exemplify that resilience can indeed perpetuate unsustainability.

In essence, New Yorkers are characterized by their self-absorption in being "the big bang" epicenter, their superlatives of self-expression, and their self-fabricated blindness for the threats to life. These characteristics emerge from the primacy of their place-connectedness and their adamant resilience to remain residing in a submerging city. Finally, New York seems to be filled with places that are too sacrosanct for the collective whole to consider their abandonment, even in the face of severe floods and threats to life.

Public and Private Places in *OAT*

OAT depicts the tension between private and public places, particularly in the aftermath of *Tammy* as Mitchell and Jane float out of Manhattan. The consequences to place democracy become axiomatic when rich and poor individuals suffer equally from the inaccessibility of public services amid a crisis. In this analysis, I will use Donald Woods Winnicott's concept of "holding environments" to delve into the novel's criticism of how capitalism can threaten democracy. A "holding environment" is comprised of "public things" such as "parks, prisons, schools, armies, civil servants, hydropower plants and/or electrical grids," which are associated with democracy as they remain public places accessible to populations at any given moment (qtd. in Honig 59).

Regardless of Mitchell's socio-economic status, he experiences the dire effects of the hurricane like anyone else since he lacks access to democratic, public places. As these become the only viable option for Mitchell and Jane, they realize how unattended they have been because of corporate America's sole interest in privatizing places and objects. As Honig asseverates, "these things in the world may become ruins. They may decay if untended. They may be sold off, if unguarded, privatized if undefended. They won't be there in a few years unless we commit to maintaining them so that they may maintain us" (65). Given the epiphanous sense of emergency for those public objects, I would argue that, as Jane and Mitchell paddle through the city, they realize that their "holding environment" is incapable of supporting their existence. Further, despite their lives usually being surrounded by private, stable, and efficient objects (now contrarily floating around), the only thing left for them is the publicness of emergency that the storm has created.[5] Here, a further mention of the "holding environment" must be made in relation

[5] Honig remarks that 'emergency' is becoming "the only public thing left to us" when discussing Hurricane Sandy. I agree and claim that such is the case in the imagined catastrophe of hurricane *Tammy* in Rich's *OAT.*

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to its capacity to serve everyone alike through its publicness: the holding environment is inextricably bound to democracy as it is at the service of all individuals regardless of their "backgrounds, classes, and social locations" (Honig 66). Despite this shared aspect, capitalism has rendered invisible the need for maintenance (also read defense) of those public places, even when no private benefit will measure up against the will of water regardless of its resilience. More significantly, the material proliferation of objects creates a "dramatic shift," as Mączyńska argues, since the escape from the drowned metropolis demands recognition of those customary objects "whose overproduction had precipitated run-away climate change" (170). Capitalism is foregrounding the collapse of the metropolis by following primarily consumerist demands, and this is also connected to undemocratic practices from Honig's point of view: "If public things are a constitutive element of democracy, then economies that undermine the thingness of things,[6] as such, and reflexively prefer privatization to public ownership or stewardship, are in relations of (possibly productive) tension with democracy" (61).

In a similar way to the criticism of New Yorkers' personality presented in *New York 2140, OAT* criticizes the habits of people and their inhabitation of places through the contrasting depictions of Camp Ticonderoga, property of Elsa's father-in-law. Originally, it was a business, but with deterioration and lack of interest, it became a working farm in which Elsa lived. It also becomes a shelter for refugees after Tammy hits. Throughout the novel, Elsa's epistolary revelations give Mitchell the puzzling sensation that her agrarian experiment in Camp Ticonderoga is succeeding: she is living harmoniously with nature as she plants vegetables, plays outdoors, and paddles canoes. Similarly, she is free from private services like internet and cellphone signals, and she is content with her agrarian lifestyle (23-25). As a matter of fact, one could argue that her life is balanced and freer because her actions toward her surrounding holding environment are grounded in "common love for shared objects and even in contestation of them" (64 Honig). In that way, her life is freer due to the abundance of democracy—friendly accessibility—of her environment. This is evident in the retrospective testimony of a stranger, who states:

> 'It *was* a real good thing,' said the woman. 'For the first couple days at least. If you could make yourself useful on the farm, you could stay. Indefinitely. They didn't pay nothing, but they served food and the cabins have cots. Vegetables in the fields, water from a natural well. The water was clean and fresh. *Cold*. Bottom-of-the-ocean cold.' (123)

There is an abundant shareability of this agrarian life and faith in the publicness of objects that seems to provide everyone with a priceless benefit: "the human world with stability and form" (Honig 60). This stranger's testimony showcases the feasibility of a life dependent on the common goods and relying on an all-accessible holding environment that can flourish given the right mindset, given the right ecology.

Conversely, as Michell and Jane enter Camp Ticonderoga, it looks dismantled by another kind of hurricane, a more anthropogenic one. There is anarchy, massive displays of violence and incivility brought by the city people who migrated to the suburbs, which shows that the biggest issue is not the space to be inhabited but the attitudes of the

[6] Defined by Honig as "[the objects'] capacity to provide the stability and durability necessary to the stable and durable relationships that constitute human flourishing" (61).

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collective toward it. On that note, this incivility of ostensibly "civilized" people represents the corporate derailment of New Yorkers that takes root in disowning private property. I claim this as Merchant recounts that a narrative of progress has been linked to ownership in the following manner: "Ownership of private property became an integral part of the emergence of civilization from the state of nature.[7] To be civilized was to impose order on personal life; *civilization represented the imposition of order on the land*" (68; my emphasis).

Therefore, it can be theorized that losing their private property makes city-minded people feel the loss of a man-made Eden (as Merchant could refer to it); i.e., what most people call "metropolis." Additionally, this same character grievingly speaks of the camp: "'This place was a little treasure, but they've ruined it now. Like the always do.' 'Who ruined it?' 'People. Human beings. Well, to be specific, men. It's the men that did it. They're doing it still'" (Rich 123-124). This quotation seems to ascribe violence to men exclusively; hence, it could be insinuating that men are mostly responsible for the corporate business, so they have little chance of survival in adapting to a sustainable lifestyle with no commodities.[8] The contrasting depictions of this camp demonstrate resilience of their behavior irrespective of whether or not they are in the city. Ideology is resilient and travels through people along with citizens' affiliations and ascription to public or private institutions, which can either nurture a life like Elsa's or one of chaos like that of the savage refugees of the camp.

Public and Private Lands in *New York 2140*

The MetLife building is menaced by environmental factors that come along with its proximity to the intertidal zone. I will approach these threats in two different ways: the induced migratory crises arising after the floods, and the indemnification of private places over public ones.

Part of such a struggle to recover from the devastating Pulses (sea water rise events) is the induced migratory crisis. This is visible as many citizens lost their documentation because of the Pulses, which has caused a reorder of hierarchies and privileges. Even though New York is a city of immigrants, as Charlotte remarks (50), many U.S. citizens are now treated as illegal since they lost their documentation (214). The long-established impervious and impenetrable North American character had literally been washed away and a new migratory crisis ensued from the flood and ebb tides. At this point capitalism has progressively sidelined its New Yorkers. In essence, the Pulses augmented the population that suffers from inequality and the increased number of affected ones evinces social injustice, which is strictly related to the changed climate and perpetuated

[7] This "state of nature" is referring to Thomas Hobbe's primitive state of society of which no civility could emanate.

[8] I ground this claim the opposition Carolyn Merchant traces in her book *Reinventing Eden,* where she explains the role of gender in the narratives of Eden that are out there. Accordingly, women are usually constrained and associated with earth and nature (though this is usually perceived as negative) while men are perceived as the epitome of modern science, thus leading the way toward progress. See Merchant's *Reinventing Eden* pp. 20-22.

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through capitalism. Indeed, Julie Sze remarks "the existence of environmental injustice is a reminder that people's experience of 'nature' are shaped by their experiences of social, economic and political inequalities" (159). As this happens to everyone who is unfortunate to live in an area prone to drowning, it forms a hierarchal displacement that is unsystematic. This shows how the resilience of capitalism threatens life by being a top-down system. This kind of ecological marginalization is a rather powerful message to reveal the tragedy of commons that capitalism can create by menacing to drown everyone in such pyramidal economy regardless of race or nationality. Such is the nature of climate change.

Similar to *OAT, NY 2140* criticizes the unfair advantages that private places possess over the public ones in the face of such environmental degradation and the crises that New Yorkers experience. During the novel's climax, the hurricane, numerous affected New Yorkers wind up sheltering in Central Park, and even when Charlotte personally contacts the mayor to demand that private, vacant buildings in Upper Manhattan be inhabited, the mayor fails to adequately respond to the needs of the people. Hence, Charlotte leads an unsuccessful protest to claim the habilitation of such buildings, which are exempt from the havoc of this phenomenon. This is akin to an "ecojustice" revolt as it "entails the redistribution of wealth through the redistribution of environmental goods and services" (Merchant, *Reinventing* 141). In the case of this novel, "environmental goods" refers to the state of immunity from the dangers of hazardous natural waste that the dry Upper Manhattan towers have. Regardless of the success of the protests, this instance demonstrates to all affected New Yorkers that private corporations (including the venal mayor) do not care to defend the lives of the affected ones, but only their ulterior and unscrupulous, lucrative interests. By the same token, Kristof comments on the tendency to prefer private services over public ones due to their *perceived*, elitist efficiency (qtd. in Honig 66-67). This surfaces as a criticism of private entities as being only ostensibly efficient: they offer benefits for a small number of people, yet in the face of more comprehensive threats, they are manifested as inefficient or poor in coverage. This is exactly what occurs in Robinson's work: while the idea of investing in the "SuperVenice" seems innocuous, it takes a climate-induced crisis to visualize inequalities and the lack of (democratically defended) places that sustain all life regardless of class. Consequently, *NY 2140* criticizes capitalism for disregarding the degradation of the environment even when the great majority is being directly affected, excepting the elite in their private, dry, and impervious buildings. This minority of privileged individuals is constantly growing more elitist since the floods have also caused the social hierarchies to be more marked. For this reason, the Citizen's comments, "A state of revolt against global finance? Democracy versus capitalism? Could get very ugly" (196) making *NY 2140* a stage for the survival of "democracy versus capitalism," a battle in which resilience makes democracy more powerless and capitalism is dangerously relentless and resilient as an economic system that is still nurtured by everyone's ideologies.

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Conclusion

Throughout this discussion, I have answered multiple questions, which emanate from the central question: how does capitalism survive through toxic resilience in the face of changes at socio-economic and political level in both novels? As fictional works highly praised for their potential to awaken the readership's sensibilities and engage in different societal spheres that influence climate action, *Odds Against Tomorrow* and *New York 2140* reimagine the metropolis in immediate and projected futures with great insightful potential for the role of resilience as toxic in the perpetuation of capitalism and the active denial of climate change. In the case of *OAT*, resilience becomes toxic, first, when merged with profiting ends for private interests in corporate America through professionalism. This occurs through the manipulation of futurology as loophole for the paradoxical nature of FutureWorld business in ascertaining insurance over uncertainty. Second, resilience is toxic when attached to the ideological foundations of citizens and people become carriers and destroyers of plausibly different places like Camp Ticonderoga. Third, toxicity is evident when, after the direct experience of climatic disasters, the lure of corporate America ensures the return of the "invincible" city of New York. As for *New York 2140,* resilience is toxic in so far as it is attached to New Yorkers' sense of place, and then, this sense of place is compromised by behavioral patterns that justify their adamancy. Thus, "tyranny of sunk cost" and "escalation of commitment" along with the models of place have fostered the resilience of an elitist capitalism. In like manner, capitalism has fed from its state of crisis to re-emerge and blind the collective from the need of a new ecology.

Prolonging such a model of repairment that seeks to preserve the balances of corporate, unsustainable America will inevitably endanger life—ours included. Indeed, these novels showcase that only *partly* adjusting human behavior does not suffice to solve an issue that is so colossally interconnected. For these reasons, these novels aim to reshape the imagination of space, its subsequent inhabitation, and to detach from cultural resistance to change habits that might blind the collective's understanding of this issue's urgency. Therefore, Mitchell is capable of embracing an agrarian life in the suburbs of New York, and the New Yorkers in Robinson's novel are able to turn New York's economy into welfare with progressive taxation implemented. The novels further imply that private-focused economy undermines democracy and (the defense of) public places. It is only by reconfiguring the blueprints for the human envisioning of places *together with* the surrounding environment—*not dominant* to it by means of futurology research nor by exasperated dire economic behavior—that a sea change will make possible the preservation of the human/non-human world(s), and thus we will thrive.

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Colonising the Nonhuman Other in Anne Haverty's *One Day as a Tiger*[1]

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Abstract

The rise of new ethical anxieties in the interaction between humans and nonhumans alike has not left human social relations and philosophical frameworks unaffected. One such framework might be ecocriticism, a tool of literary analysis that, while not exceptionally new, is not yet widely applied to contemporary Irish literature. In this article, I explore one instance of the animal trope in the novel *One Day as a Tiger* (1997), written by the Irishwoman Anne Haverty. The novel could explore and denounce how Irish society has not totally rejected colonialism and its anthropocentric foundation; instead, Haverty's fictional Ireland seems to have appropriated the colonising discourse once applied to them and turned it against the nonhuman realm, especially animals, to justify their existence as an independent State. Therefore, the aim of this article is to explore whether, and to what extent, the human protagonist of the novel otherises and reduces the nonhuman protagonist, a ewe, into a symbol of Irish nationality.

Keywords: Anne Haverty, ecocriticism, colonialism, Ireland, nonhuman, sheep.

Resumen

El surgimiento de nuevas ansiedades éticas en la interacción entre humanos y no humanos no ha dejado sin afectar a las relaciones sociales y a los marcos filosóficos. Uno de esos marcos podría ser la ecocrítica, una herramienta de análisis literario que, aunque no es excepcionalmente nueva, aún no se aplica ampliamente a la literatura irlandesa contemporánea. En este artículo, exploro una instancia del tropo animal en la novela *One Day as a Tiger* (1997), escrita por la irlandesa Anne Haverty. La novela podría explorar y denunciar cómo la sociedad irlandesa no ha rechazado totalmente el colonialismo y su fundamento antropocéntrico; en cambio, la Irlanda ficticia de Haverty parece haberse apropiado del discurso colonizador que en su día se les aplicó y lo ha vuelto contra el ámbito no humano, especialmente los animales, para justificar su existencia como Estado independiente. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es explorar si, y hasta qué punto, el protagonista humano de la novela alteriza y reduce al protagonista no humano, una oveja, a un símbolo de la nacionalidad irlandesa.

Palabras clave: Anne Haverty, ecocrítica, colonialismo, Irlanda, no-humano, oveja.

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Introduction

The role of the nonhuman in the construction of national identities, including the Irish one, continues to be debated. Donna L. Potts explains that other-than-human animals

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have traditionally been key to Irish identity, both as a colony and as a Republic. For instance, the wolves and their extinction paralleled the colonisation of the Irish and their loss of linguistic and national identity, showing the strong interconnection between the material and the symbolic exploitation of nonhuman animals on the island. In this sense, Potts argues that the material presence of wolves in Ireland, already extinct in England three hundred years earlier, justified the discursive inferiority of the Irish as "savages" (Potts 147). This way, nonhuman animals have been instrumentalised to animalise and colonise the Irish (Kirkpatrick and Faragó 8). Interestingly, the discursive proximity of the Irish to nonhuman animals was not abandoned with the foundation of the Republic of Ireland. Here, William Butler Yeats collaborated on the Irish Free State coinage design, using the image of a number of other-than-human animals. Although one might be tempted to regard such selection as a symbolic gesture of respect towards the lives of the nonhuman animals inhabiting the island, Potts explains that the choice was most likely sought to justify Ireland's "mastery over animals" (144). "Irishness" seems, thus, to be deeply entangled in the colonialist-infused anthropocentric relationship between humans and nonhumans.

Given the paramount role of nonhuman animals in Irishness, it is hardly a surprise that one of the most economically important periods in recent years is known as the Celtic Tiger period, a metaphor clearly influenced by other-than-humans as national symbols. This profitable boom took place between 1995 and 2007, and was unprecedented in Irish history. One of the most immediate consequences was the transformation of the country socially, culturally, and economically. However, the rapid commercial growth came at a high price. According to Catherine Conan and Flore Coulouma, Ireland was no longer the "natural" unpolluted setting it used to be or be perceived as. The Celtic Tiger turned Irish landscape into "that of a dilapidated, polluted environment, symbolised with striking effect by the mushrooming 'ghost states' that now scar the Irish countryside and the suburban areas" (7). Moreover, the Celtic Tiger highlighted the two dominant views of nature in Ireland. On the one hand, the "peaceful Irish pastoralism," based on Catholicism, was tinged with Celtic spirituality and the basis for Irish nationalism. On the other, the colonial representation of Irish humans as simian-looking savages, impervious to the "civilizing forces of progress and inhabiting a wilderness" (Conan and Coulouma 8). Although these two visions may clash, they nonetheless share their view of nature as detached from humans, laying the foundations for a discursive superiority of the human species.

It is becoming commonplace to acknowledge that the Republic of Ireland has embarked on a series of new cultural, economic, and political debates. One such debate could be the use of the figure of nonhuman animals, analysed in the fields of ecocriticism and animal studies. Greg Garrard attempts to define ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" in the seminal work *Ecocriticism* (3). However, Garrard's definition is too broad to convey a specific branch of ecocriticism. Although this might be an issue, it could also be a strength. Serpil Oppermann argues that "ecocriticism's heterogeneity has become its identifying epithet" (154), making any definition circumstantial at best. Within Garrard's general definition,

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Val Plumwood focuses on a critique against the western rationalist schema that systematically naturalises and thus justifies the domination and exploitation of apparently non-rational entities (*Environmental Culture* 26). In this sense, Potts argues that ecocriticism demands a deconstruction of western morality, "because it is rooted in various kinds of subordination—of women to men, of the colonized to the colonizers, and of animals to humans" (155). Esther Alloun states that Plumwood's critique of power and dualism can be applied to Critical Animal Studies (CAS), grounding animal advocacy by "embracing the more-than-human world at large" (153) and foregrounding non-hierarchical intersectionality (158). In both ecocriticism and CAS, the humanist hyperseparation of the human and other animal species could then be challenged under what Cary Wolfe understands to be a posthumanist[2] take (7). Consequently, Plumwood's critique on dualisms, framed by ecocriticism and focusing on other-than-human animals, might become a powerful instrument to unpacking how the figure of the animal has been discursively constructed and used in contemporary Ireland.

Attention to nonhuman animals has not been confined to the academic world. The preoccupation of the Irish population with the nonhumans inhabiting the island has grown in recent decades as the climate crisis has deepened its effects on humans and more-than-humans alike (Smyth 163). In the case of twenty-first century fiction, we can find Irish women writers:

> deploying the landscape and the natural not only as a gesture of resistance to the masculinity regulation of female energies, but also as a self-consciously elaborated stage for the performance of Irish identity, so closely associated with the countryside. Violence inevitably irrupts into the text, whether literary or visually, when utilizing the animal located in an Irish topography, a really "unnatural" cultural construct, shaped by a history of conflict and suffering. (O'Connor 136)

With the current debate on the animal trope, the analysis of nonhuman animals in literature written by Irish women during the so-called Celtic Tiger might shed some light on present constructions of Irishness. This paper approaches Anne Haverty's novel, *One Day as a Tiger* (1997), using the instrument of ecocriticism, whose power resides precisely in its heterogeneity. *One Day as a Tiger* explores the relationship between an Irish man, Martin, and a ewe, Missy, in a fictional rural Ireland during the 1990s. The main issue at play in the novel is, I contend, the anxiety raised by the lack of total rejection of the colonising processes on the island. After publishing *Constance Markievicz: An Independent Life*[3] in 1989, Haverty published her first novel, *One Day as a Tiger,* in 1997.[4] And yet, her writing has barely been analysed from an academic perspective (see Maureen O'Connor's 2010 book, *The Female and the Species,* and Gerry Smyth's 2000 essay, "Shite and Sheep: An Ecocritical Perspective on Two Recent Irish Novels"). The narration of the novel is enacted by its protagonist, Martin Hawkins, who abandons a promising career as

[2] Posthumanism here is understood as a post-anthropocentric and zoe-centred philosophy in which the human(ist) subject ceases to be the focus of study and the human/nonhuman hierarchy is rejected (Braidotti 194).

[3] A Biography of Constance Georgina Markievicz, a committed socialist, feminist, and Irish nationalist Anglo-Irish woman. This might show Haverty's interest in Irish issues, both past and present.

[4] Anne Haverty's arrival in Ireland's literary stage was eventful. *One Day as a Tiger* won the Rooney Prize and was shortlisted for the 1997 Whitbread First Novel Award (Magan).

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an academic historian at Trinity College and returns to a 1990s Fansha, Tipperary, where he was born and raised. The character's return is at least partially motivated by the traumatic and violent death of his parents in a car accident. This way, the text juxtaposes the Celtic Tiger boom and the death of the protagonist's parents from the very beginning of the novel.

In Haverty's fictional Fansha, the narrator seeks rural traditions and Irish "authenticity." However, the fields are fertilised and most farms are full of sheep modified with human DNA. In this sense, the novel is built around the irony of his search, which will bring him no "authenticity" or "essence." That the protagonist was a historian working on the revision of Irish history—and that revisionist historians often highlight the tension between traditional Irish nationalism as a response to British colonialism and contemporary economic aspirations (White 91)—might suggest a strong connection between the history of Ireland as a colony, the construction of the Free Irish State, and the Celtic Tiger through the protagonist and narrator of the novel. Conversely, readers have access to one of the modified ewes, whom Martin turns into the main nonhuman character in the novel (Haverty 24). The choice of species for the other-than-human character is hardly accidental; during the Celtic Tiger period, sheep were a sector in crisis as the Irish left small farms and looked for employment in the cities (Dillon et al. 29). Sheep were thus at the centre of the crisis operating behind the apparent economic boom brought by the Celtic Tiger period. The close interaction between the human and the nonhuman protagonist is therefore the perfect vehicle for analysing the interspecies relationship in Haverty's fictional postcolonial Republic of Ireland. In order to provide fruitful results, the analysis of Haverty's writing will be framed within Plumwood's grasp of ecological culture and William J. Adams's understanding of the colonial mind.

Plumwood contends in her seminal work *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* that models of colonisation can be notably apt to analyse anthropocentrism in western societies if we regard the "earth others as *other nations*" (100). Modern western societies are constructed under a centrist paradigm rooted in the dualism between the centric Self and the peripheral Other. Here, Plumwood argues reason is "the characteristic which sums up and is common to the privileged side of all these contrasts and whose absence characterises the Other" (101). In this vein, the British geographer specialised in conservation, Adams, criticises the "colonial mind," which shaped British colonies, including Ireland. Such "mindset" would defend the superiority of the human species over all other species, setting "nature" as the Other to be controlled and reshaped through strategies such as (re)naming and physical control under the colonial mind (Adams 24). Considering that colonised peoples were often animalised and thus otherised, it is not surprising to observe that the Irish were similarly categorised as not quite animals but not quite humans either, that is, as a kind of human/nonhuman hybrid, by colonial discourse. According to Kathryn Kirkpatrick, the occupation of the Irish was grounded in the construction of a discursive proximity between humans and other-than-humans—including animals—inhabiting Ireland (Kirkpatrick 26). Such colonial and anthropocentric practice has not gone unnoticed. For instance, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley argue that the fields of postcolonialism and

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ecocriticism can work together in the analysis of the connections between the anthropocentric exploitation of nature as well as the colonial exploitation of humans, synchronising the utilisation of colonised peoples, lands, and nonhuman animals (38). In other words, to analyse postcolonial texts such as Haverty's *One Day as a Tiger* from an ecocritical perspective might illustrate how contemporary Irish humans construct and interact with nonhuman animals. One reason why the Irish might be in the middle of a (re)negotiation of their Irishness and their interaction with other animals is that, even today, their discursive animalisation has not ceased. They have been subjected to the heroic yet problematic term Celtic Tiger and the not so heroic P.I.I.G.S after the economic crisis of 2008 (DeMello xi). Plumwood argues one effect of this dichotomist perspective is the subsequent hierarchy in which "it is appropriate that the coloniser impose his own value, agency, and meaning, and that the colonised be made to serve the coloniser as a means to his means" (Plumwood 106). In order to ideologically justify the creation of an independent State, Ireland might have appropriated their former coloniser's processes to otherise the nonhuman. This paper is thus to explore whether the human character of Martin represents the coloniser Self and the ewe, Missy, the colonised Other. Moreover, I aim to discern whether Missy, as a colonised entity, represents the hybridity of Irish identity—past and present, rural and high-tech, Celtic and Christian.

Mirroring the Colonisation Process

Plumwood explains that, within colonising ideology, the Self is embodied by those who represent "reason." The Self would be the "male elite," unconcerned with the corporeal sphere of labour or materiality (20). These representatives belong to the highest spheres of the anthropocentric hierarchy, defending abstract thinking against corporeality, conceived as inferior. One can, of course, find a long list of jobs that could respond to this paradigm, especially in hard sciences and social sciences. And yet, the "rationalist" job *par excellence* could be that of the academic historian, focused on discerning which sources will be accepted and included in official History. This is precisely the occupation of the main character of the novel, Martin, until the beginning of the novel (Haverty 1). Therefore, readers spot a character who could potentially embody the values of the colonising agenda that proposes reason and abstract thought as the justification for the establishment of an anthropocentric hierarchy and the subsequent colonisation of the Other, human or not. More importantly, this protagonist is also the narrator of the novel. He explicitly controls the discourse of the novel, already performing as a historian.

The colonial period witnessed a distinctive pattern of engagement with nature. Adams explains that the European Enlightenment and the fundamental Cartesian dualism between humans and nature justified and promoted the destructive and utilitarian view of the feasibility of exploiting nature for economic gain (Adams 22). The profiteering on the environment was further supported by rationalist anthropocentrism, able to create a radical dichotomy that sharply separates human Self and nonhuman Other (Plumwood 107). This could be slightly problematised by the introduction of an explicitly hybrid character in Haverty's novel, Missy. Missy is a sheep who has been genetically altered with

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human DNA (Haverty 23), and who performs as the co-protagonist of the novel. The choice of the not-quite-other-than-human species in the novel is hardly coincidental. Sheep may constitute one of the most relevant nonhuman animals in colonialism. Lucy Neave briefly mentions how sheep were not only a source of wool and capital but also a symbol of the "progress" of the colonisers and their colony. In this sense, Neave explains sheep have become "unwitting agents of colonial violence," in that they have unwillingly aided the colonising invasion and occupation. Neave states that sheep were a means used by white settlers to "displace responsibility for the fate of indigenous people onto their cattle, and sheep" (Neave 128–29). Through the otherisation of sheep, the animalisation of the Irish by the British was discursively justified. Thus, the interaction of a number of human characters and the ewe in Haverty's fiction can be the perfect vehicle to explore whether colonial processes, if any, are still at work in Ireland.

The human protagonist meets the sheep, Missy, at the Institute, the factory where genetically modified sheep are created and sold to Irish farmers in Haverty's Celtic Tiger Ireland. These sheep are, as cattle often are, unnamed. They are devoid of any kind of name and are treated as numbered goods to be sold and bought. However, the narrator explains that one of these sheep stands out from the rest. With apparent spontaneity, he decides to buy her after naming her "Missy" (Haverty 24). Although readers might be tempted to regard this naming as an attempt to provide her with a proper name and the potential ethical implications thereafter, William J. Adams states that "colonialism promoted the naming and classification of both people and places, as well as nature, in each case with the aim of control" (24). In other words, the naming of the ewe would respond to a colonial mindset, more interested in controlling her ontology than in building inter-species bridges. Moreover, the implications of "Missy" cannot be easily avoided. If one consults a dictionary, "Missy" is often defined as "an affectionate or sometimes disparaging form of address to a young girl" (Collins Dictionary). The fictional ewe is thus readily categorised as "female" and "young." She becomes a "girl" under his command, anthropomorphising her only to cast her as a young female human instead of as a young female ewe. His interpretation of Missy as a girl is meant to emphasise her youth in comparison to himself. The ewe is interpreted as younger than the human character not only through her name, but also through several descriptions of he nonhuman character, always provided by the narrator. For instance, he explains that "she learned to trust me to depend on me" and that he talked to her "as you would talk to a young child" (Haverty 46). Likewise, in Irish nationalist accounts of the landscape, it "came to be personified as Mother Ireland associated Irish women with passivity, and to this the Catholicism added the figure of the Virgin Mary, imposing humility, chastity and obedience of Irish women" (O'Connor 137). Consequently, despite the ewe's hybridity and thus lack of "purity," she is nonetheless conceived as a mirror to the stereotypes of Irish "womanhood" and female "purity," promoting a dangerous hierarchy in which the fictional ewe is clearly deemed inferior and dependent on him, the adult *rational* Irishman.

Apart from its more direct meaning, "Missy" is not a term free of problematic connotations. The positive sense is rather "affectionate," which could precisely lead to a loving relational kinship between humans and nonhumans, able to create a kinship

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between species (Haraway 162). Whilst it is true that at the beginning of the novel the protagonist treats her "affectionately," that is, attending to her needs and trying to imagine her thoughts (Haverty 45, 47), he despises her soon enough. The transition from an, albeit weak, attempt to regard her materiality to a total disregard of her physically is gradual but undeniable. He hates her physical presence in his house (Haverty 132), he forces drugs on her to sleep (Haverty 232), and he finally murders her with no guilt whatsoever (Haverty 261). The use of "Missy" seems then to suggest not affection but something more similar to "disparaging" or distaste, more and more evident as the novel advances. Martin seems to have an ever-worse attitude towards the ewe, no longer pretending to feel any fondness towards the ewe by the end of the novel. Hence, Missy has been symbolically named and classified by the coloniser Self as female, young, and, consequently, unworthy of individuality.

Raymond Murphy argues that thought since the Enlightenment has been characterised by "a radical uncoupling of the cultural and the social from nature, that is, by the assumption that reason has enabled humanity to escape from nature and remake it" (Murphy 12). Consequently, the acquisition of colonies was accompanied by, and partially enabled by, a profound belief in the possibility of restructuring nature and re-ordering it to serve human needs and desires (Adams 23). The restructuring of nature in Haverty's novel can be spotted in the genetically modified sheep. Missy is a hybrid who blends human and sheep DNA. Even though she is presented as a sheep with human DNA and not vice versa, her genetic hybridity should hinder any clear-cut ontology, perhaps pointing to the construction of bridges between species, as Donna Haraway advocates for (162-163). This is nothing new, as literature has been argued to serve to "separate humans from animals, but also to confuse and conflate them" (Ortiz Robles 1). However, that does not seem to be the situation readers find in the novel. If the protagonist and narrator did not regard his and Missy's humanness superior to her sheepness, a non-anthropocentric and relational connection could be established between the two characters indeed. When the narrator reflects on her hybridity, he insists on the importance of Missy being "semi-human" but not semi-sheep for, in his own words:

> Did I not love her precisely because she was *semi-human*? No animal had ever elicited that feeling in me, none among the myriad species I grew up with, none of the dogs and certainly not any other lamb or indeed any other vulnerable young thing. (Haverty 98-99; my emphasis)

The same human DNA the narrator regards as making Missy worthy of his attention *cannot* be "female." He is unable to even imagine that the human side of Missy could be "female," even though nothing is said in this regard by her seller. He is so obsessed with this idea of the human DNA being "male" that he fantasises about this "father" and names him "Harold" (Haverty 125). Whilst Missy is named to convey the picture of a "young girl," the father conveys the image of a strong and adventurous man able to go anywhere without having to worry about his kinship. Such construction of a male human/female nonhuman dichotomy, continuously ignoring the material reality of her hybridity, might echo how British colonisers systematically feminised and otherised the colonised Other (DeLoughrey and Handley 27). This might also remind readers of Plumwood's argument

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regarding how in patriarchal systems the father "is the sole agent and creator, contributing the superior element of mind or form" while the mother "contributes only the inferior element of matter, and is merely a nurse … for the child – which the father alone created in his image" ("The Concept of a Cultural Landscape" 120). The mother of the nonhuman protagonist, on the other hand, is barely mentioned and she remains unnamed throughout the novel. The narrator only state that she rejected Miss because she was forced to give birth at the age of two, too young to become a mother even according to her seller (Haverty 24-25). The narrator may insist not only on the defence of the human/nonhuman dualism in Missy but also of gender dichotomies in which the human and superior side would be male, whereas the nonhuman and inferior side would be female. According to Plumwood, this separation is necessary to avoid the main characteristic of the coloniser Self, reason, to be polluted by the inferior Other's irrational femininity (105). If the coloniser accepted any kind of hybridity or transgression of the boundaries in the coloniser Self/colonised Other, his ontological superiority and actions would be questioned. One of the discursive instruments often used by the coloniser Self to control the colonised Other is mythmaking. According to Moana Jackson, myths help to "justify the status quo by masking the reality or extent of dispossession that shaped the past and present. The myths become an exercise of absolution for the colonizer, and the basis for ongoing denial of the rights of the colonized" (89). The more-than-human character of Missy undergoes a double process of mystification: Irish and Christian folklore, both deeply connected with past and present Ireland. Missy is first directly introduced as a "mythic creature" (Haverty 78). She is likewise described as a creature with no agency whatsoever who depends on the narrator to be "release[d] from her woolly cage and her wrong-shaped skull" (Haverty 99). He elaborates upon the mythical dimension of the ewe character by stating that she was a "sheep, who, it transpired, was under an evil spell, and was really a girl in sheep's clothing all along" (Haverty 81). Such excerpt may subtly resemble the hare and other shape-changing characters central in Irish Celtic folklore.[5] According to Potts, the use of such trope could reinforce the Celtic past and its perception of nature as fluid without "fixity in the identity of species" (170). However, as explained in the paragraph above, the hybridity of the nonhuman protagonist is only acknowledged to reinforce a gendered dichotomy. Moreover, there is not one instance in which the ewe "becomes" human apart from her already altered DNA.

Missy is not only constructed as a myth through subtle references to Irish folklore, but also Christian folklore, as she is said to be "The Lamb of God" (Haverty 109). On one occasion, the narrator is bathing her, and he affirms she does not smell like a regular sheep, but as "clouds of incense that the priest swings" (Haverty 102). Instead of smelling like an organic being, she is reduced to a mythical smell that, if the human protagonist really smelled, it would be originated by the shampoo used to clean her, not from her own body. The incense is clearly reminiscent of Christian churches and rituals, in which it is central, and usually used by the priest in charge of the service. The cleaning of the ewe could thus be read not only as her mythification and consequent denial of her material

[5] See Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's "The Old Woman as Hare: Structure and Meaning in an Irish Legend."

dimension but also as a means to justify Martin's superiority as her "priest." The mythification of Missy likewise romanticises her. As Adams explains, rationalism justifies capitalism to destroy nature, which is paradoxically turned into a precious romantic construction that further justifies its exploitation (29). Thus, the male historian is narrating and romanticising Missy as a myth instead of as a material sentient being with actual needs and agency. Missy is not only materially otherised and colonised by the naming process, but also by mythification and romantisation. Therefore, the narrator ends up embodying the British colonising agenda, controlling the ewe's ontology and ethically justifying her oppression as the colonised Other.

The dynamics of domination over the nonhuman character are likewise physically established at the beginning of the novel, when both characters have just met. After the narrator buys her, he is helped by his brother, Pierce, to force her into the van along with other purchased sheep. She is so desperate that she was "pinning to the point of despair for the fellow [sheepman] at the Institute" as an attempt to escape (Haverty 45). One could argue that this beginning, which might resemble an "eviction" from the farm, reproducing how colonised humans have been systematically expelled from their lands by colonisers (Adams 42), was necessary and that their interaction will differ after this initial moment. Yet, there are several instances in which she is physically dominated and forced to act not for her own benefit, but for Martin's. One of the most striking examples could be spotted in an almost pastoral scene featuring the narrator and the ewe. The male character explains that Missy seems to love staying outside the house, isolated from other modified sheep, in "contemplation" of the flowers (Haverty 81). This peaceful and pastoral-like scene is interrupted when he decides so, perhaps responding to the common critique to the pastoral as focused on how the environment affects the human rather than the other way around (Huggan and Tiffin 29). In this sense, the text presents a scene focused on Missy that is explicitly and violently interrupted by the human character, showing how the human affects the nonhuman; in this case, a ewe. Despite Missy's complaints, who "whimpered softly" at the change of place, he locks her in the house. The reason is not that she could be negatively affected by staying outdoors, as no threat is mentioned, but rather that he wants to go to the bar with other men to drink. In the narrator's own words, he "had to keep with [his] usual habits" (Haverty 82). The reason then for the violent interruption of the ewe's scene is that he does not want to leave her free while he cannot control her.

The physical domination of Missy is further elaborated through the use of medication. Being convinced by another male farmer in the village, the narrator tries to dose Ivomec, a medicine to deworm nonhumans, to Missy. As she resists it and glares at him "more in anger than in terror," he feels "outrage" and he "prised her mouth open, stuck the tube in, and *shot* the stuff into her. This is how you deal with a stupid sheep that won't take its medicine" (Haverty 68; my emphasis). Moreover, after she pukes it up, he wants to "teach her some lesson" for disobeying him as the dominant—human and male—Self. Given that he can see the terror in Missy's eyes and the vocabulary used to describe the dosing is especially violent—"prised," "stuck," and, more significantly, "shot"—, this scene could suggest a total lack sympathy towards the ewe. The cruel description of this

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scene, narrated by the very human who performs it, may likewise indicate that he is mostly interested in asserting his superiority as the human and male Self; when the nonhuman resists, he grows angry and forces the ewe protagonist as if it were a battle he *has to win* and the nonhuman entity, the enemy to be defeated (Haverty 69).

The physical domination of the nonhuman protagonist is also supported by the hierarchical presentation of the human protagonist as her "guardian" or, as he narrates, "[l]ike a patriarch" who indulges her with chocolate treats whenever he sees it appropriate, always "for [her] own good" (Haverty 100-101). The narrator presents himself as a fatherly figure who "knows better" than the more-than-human herself. Just like the Other's independent agency and value is downgraded or denied (Plumwood 105), the nonhuman protagonist cannot help but heavily rely on the human protagonist. She is so dependant that the main character holds no doubts that she will always forgive any abuse because "she had no one else, good or bad, to depend on, or to forgive" (Haverty 71). He has left no space for Missy to know other humans or other-than-humans. Actually, he acknowledges that "[s]he had little choice, I admit, but to love me" (Haverty 99). The narrator controls the ewe, justified by her otherness as nonhuman and non-male; that is, as "irrational." Therefore, one cannot but argue that the relationship between the two protagonists is presented as unequal, reproducing the coloniser Self in control of the colonised Other. After having colonised the ewe in abstract terms as "Missy" and a myth, the protagonist shifts the mistreatment of the ewe to the material in order to assert his superiority over the female nonhuman through beatings and isolation to prevent any kind of revolt.

Instrumentalisation of the Colonised Other

As argued in previous paragraphs, Missy is otherised and symbolically colonised, entitling the coloniser Self, Martin, to exploit her. Plumwood argues that nature as a resource is the subordinated Other in systems of economic centrism, such as the Celtic Tiger period, when the novel is set. In economically-centred systems, the coloniser/colonised dualism can be interpreted as the owner/owned division, in which the Self is entitled to own the otherised property (110). In Haverty's fictional Celtic Tiger Ireland, ewes are key elements in creating a genetically altered sheep market. Missy is first introduced as one of the "new" sheep, who are regularly sold to male Irish farmers. Their modification is not aimed at reducing their suffering in the intensive farms around the island, but to make them more resistant to sickness. This resistance would benefit their human owner: the fewer the number of sick sheep, the greater the economic profit (Haverty 23). The economic exploitation of ewes could be observed in the factory where they are sold. The ewes that are forced to give birth to more sheep are so young that "That young, they're inclined to reject them [children]. Don't know what they're meant to be doing with them. Only young ones themselves" (Haverty 24). Despite their early age, the factory ewes are forced to get pregnant, to breed and produce properties to be sold for their owner's economic benefit. Perhaps mirroring the colonial justification for exploiting nature, in which "nature allows the best possible use of resources," an idea progressively

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exported to Ireland (Adams 22), farmers and the commercial system in the novel's fictional Ireland justify the exploitation of ewe.

Unlike most modified sheep, the protagonist ewe is, according to her seller, totally useless. The narrator's brother, an experienced farmer, strongly agrees on how buying Missy is economically wasteful (Haverty 25). Nonetheless, she becomes a useful instrument for the human protagonist to achieve his major goal throughout the novel: to get closer to his sister-in-law, Etti. Etti is a regular visitor to the narrator's house, always on the pretext of checking on Missy. At the beginning, both the protagonist and Ettie pay attention to the ewe—the protagonist fetches the food the ewe enjoys and Ettie pets her when she visits. However, they gradually ignore her the more time they spend together (Haverty 110). Missy's instrumentalisation for this end proves somehow finally successful by the end of the novel when they flee to France. The elopement occurs just after Etti suggests taking Missy to a sanctuary in France, run by a woman named Brigitte Bardot[6] (Haverty 219), in a clear reference to the French activist. The narrator and his sister-in-law decide to take Missy to the sanctuary immediately, following Etti's urge to go "now" (Haverty 219), without telling Etti's husband, Pierce. Although the two human characters insist that the trip to France is not an elopement, but a mission to get Missy to safety, they nonetheless pretend to be a young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins (Haverty 227). Although one could argue that such a pretense is only for functional purposes, the narrator happily emphasises how they looked "like a young pair at the commencement of their holidays" (Haverty 224). Tellingly, Missy is not mentioned in their description during the journey. Being the male coloniser means to deny the Other's agency, social organisation, and independence of ends, and so to subsume them under the coloniser's ends (Plumwood 105); thus, the human protagonist denies Missy any kind of independence or desire for any end. The narrator simply subsumes her for his own end: to get closer to Etti and justify their guiltless elopement. However, the narrator's plan of elopement is not flawless. If the human characters want to avoid facing the reality of what they are actually doing, that is, eloping and cheating the narrator's brother, Missy must be present to operate as a shield against their moral transgression. Consequently, they are in charge of taking care of the ewe. They, however, dose her sleeping pills so that she does not bother them in their nuptial-like bliss. The first time she is drugged, the narrator fears her death but, as he says, not because he would be saddened by her death, but because if she died "there would be no reason than to drive to Provence in search of Brigitte Bardot" (228-229). The nonhuman character thus seems to be presented as the colonised Other, who is useful insofar as they fulfil the function the coloniser, Martin in Haverty's text, imposes on them (Plumwood 110). Hence, Missy is reduced to the colonised Other,

[6] This extratextual reference might point to the Foundation Brigitte Bardot. It was established in 1987 to fight for animal rights ('Foundation Organization')A controversial figure, as she has made racist, anti-islam and arguably homophobic comments, she is nonetheless an ongoing widely-known symbol in popular imagery easily spotted by most readers. The intention behind such a reference in Haverty's text might be to highlight how, while the narrator instrumentalises a sheep, activists are fighting for animal rights, efforts crytallising in animal refuges such as the one the character of Etti mentions.

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justified by her otherness as nonhuman and non-male, turned into a buffer to avoid the consequences of the moral offence of her coloniser and owner.

The elopement comes to a sudden end when Pierce, Etti's husband Martin's brother, dies in a car accident while driving to France to "fetch [them] back" (Haverty 258). As if mirroring the death of the human protagonist's parents in a car accident, which motivates his return to the village, the sudden death of Pierce puts an end to their elopement, and the illusion provided by the ewe is dispelled. Thus, the two human characters must return to the village to attend the funeral. Taking Missy to the sanctuary would prevent them from attending the funeral of the human character in time. Likewise, since Pierce is already dead and nothing can now shield the eloped couple from the reality of their actions, Missy becomes useless to them. Instead of saving Missy and bringing her to the sanctuary, the nonhuman character receives a deathly dose, ironically echoing the death of Pierce and perhaps the death of the protagonist's parents. The narrator mindfully overdoses and leaves her corpse "under a tree and covered […] with sheaves of grass," as if this were to cover her and avoid her being eaten by a "voracious farm dog or [a] bird of prey" (Haverty 261). The nonhuman animal character of Missy is first instrumentalised to justify the elopement of the two human characters, only to be disposed of once her function for the humans has expired. Given that the colonised Other can be classified as a "resource" or "waste" depending on the utility to the owner (Plumwood 111), Missy seems to be finally categorised as waste at the end of the novel, reaffirming her "wastefulness" as a failed modified ewe, already suggested at the beginning of the novel. Her utility to her coloniser and owner as a disposable resource is over, and so she is disposed of with no guilt or ethical consequences for her coloniser whatsoever.

Moreover, the murder of the ewe is purposely performed in a way that no physical blood is visible. However, a sacrifice has been made anyway; only this time by an Irishman. Timothy J. White has argued how Ireland shifted from a nationalist community with a strong interest in their Celtic past to a neoliberal consumerism society in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger period (White 91). This way, the text could suggest that the other-than-human in contemporary Ireland is sacrificed during the Celtic Tiger period; this time not by the British, but by the Irish, who are turning the colonising discourse against nonhuman animals and destroying their past, Celtic or Christian, in favour of neoliberalism and capitalism. In this sense, Missy as an "almost" human and "almost" sheep animal may be an echo of contemporary Irishness, as a hybrid identity slowly ignored until the "market" or new Irishness as embodied by Martin sacrifices her. The protagonist, as an Irishman, first colonises and then sacrifices an otherised entity, who might symbolise Irish past, after provoking the death of his brother, who could likewise represent Irish farmers and, implicitly, Irish rural past as well. The foreign coloniser no longer needs to perform the sacrifice; the coloniser-turned-Irish performs it themselves for the market.

Conclusions

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Haverty's novel *One Day as a Tiger* engages in dialogue with the colonial past of the Republic of Ireland. Through the constant interaction between an Irishman and a ewe, the text offers some insightful reflections on how Celtic Tiger Ireland is coming to terms with its status as a former British settlement. Sheep—symbols of both colonial and Celtic Tiger Ireland Tiger—are revealed in this article as a useful vehicle to explore the role of nonhuman animals in contemporary Ireland. The protagonist ewe is first classified through her name, only to be readily catalogued as the Other in terms of species, gender, and even myth. Physically dominated by the Irishman, the sheep is treated as property to be exploited by the coloniser, Martin, until her usefulness is exhausted. Here, she will be sacrificed, as if mirroring how the British used to sacrifice Irish culture and traditions. This way, the colonial practices seem to turn away from humans inhabiting Ireland and against its nonhuman inhabitants.

This critique does not offer the reader much optimism; however, it does present a warning against the abusive treatment of nonhuman animals in past and contemporary Ireland. Haverty's novel alerts its readers, especially the Irish audience, against mirroring and replicating the colonisation process once applied to them against nonhumans in the Celtic Tiger. Haverty's fictional Ireland is almost a vision of the future and a warning to Irish people of the dangers of falling for the lure of anthropocentrism and rationalism to embrace colonial discourse. The text warns against the murder of Irish past and present, symbolised in the slaughter of the ewe: past, as it is a clear reference to Christian and Celtic shape-shifting myths, and present, as she embodies the constant modernisation and technification of Ireland. Tellingly, just like the shape-shifting legends that imply that the only hope for salvation is radical transformation and that attempts to reject such fluidity only doom its citizens (Potts 170), the text implies that the narrator rejects the blurring of boundaries and, consequently, condemns Ireland under the Celtic Tiger period. To quote Plumwood: "as the human centred-culture of our modern form of rationalism grows steadily more and more remote and self-enclosed, it loses the capacity to imagine or detect its danger" (100), and so this may be the case for contemporary humans inhabiting Ireland.

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La "línea divisoria" en el *hukou*: La injusticia medioambiental y la población rural en *Montaña hueca* de Alai

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Resumen

A día de hoy, sigue siendo una incógnita cuál es el sector social chino que estadísticamente sufre mayores daños ecológicos. En China actualmente no hay un lenguaje de justicia medioambiental claro como el de aquellos que cargan contra el racismo medioambiental (Chavis 1993) y el clasismo medioambiental (Bell 2020), o que defienden el ecologismo de los pobres (Guha y Martínez-Alier 1997). Sin embargo, la literatura contemporánea puede emplearse como un caso de estudio, particularmente aquellas obras que reflejan la realidad ecosocial del entorno chino. En su trilogía *Kong Shan: Jicun Chuanshuo* [*Montaña hueca: la historia sobre el pueblo Ji*] (2005–2009), el autor chino Alai, de etnia tibetano-jiarong, ayuda a despejar la incógnita acerca de qué potenciales grupos sociales sufren en mayor medida injusticias medioambientales en China. Así, la narrativa de Alai identifica a la población rural como uno de los colectivos que más se ven afectados ecológicamente. Su novela desentraña cómo la desigualdad social establecida por el *hukou* (sistema de registro residencial) se extendió al ámbito ecológico derivando en la injusticia medioambiental contra los residentes rurales en el siglo XX. Alai visibiliza esta desigualdad ecosocial con la "línea divisoria," la cual simboliza la distinción que el *hukou* hacía en torno al estatus civil "no-agrícola" y "agrícola." Un análisis de *Montaña Hueca* y de las semánticas implícitas en el concepto de lo "hueco" a través de la perspectiva de justicia medioambiental sirve para entender la realidad ecosocial vivida en algunas regiones rurales en China. Esta es denominada por Van Rooij *et al.* (2014) como la aquiescencia activista.

Palabras clave: Ecocrítica, (in)justicia medioambiental, *hukou*, población rural, Alai, China.

Abstract

Up to this day, it is difficult to provide objective statistical data about the Chinese social collective that is most affected by environmental violence. In contemporary China, there are no explicit environmental justice discourses, such as those attacking environmental racism (Chavis 1993) and environmental classism (Bell 2020), or those supporting what Guha and Martinez-Alier call environmentalism of the poor (1997). Contemporary literature, in this sense, can be used as a case study to illuminate this question, particularly those works reflecting Chinese ecosocial realities. In his trilogy *Kong Shan: Jicun Chuanshuo* [*Hollow Mountain: A Story from a Mountainside Tibetan Village*] (2005–2009), the Chinese tibetan-jiarong author Alai identifies the rural population as one of the potential collectives exposed to great levels of environmental pressure. Thus, Alai's narrative reveals how social inequality established by the *hukou* (system of household registration) led to environment-related consequences for rural communities during the 20th century. Specifically, Alai illustrates this ecosocial inequality through the literary depiction of the "dividing line," which represents the distinction between agricultural and urban populations established by the *hukou*. An ecocritical analysis of the novel *Hollow Mountain* and the semantics intrinsic to the concept of "hollow" help to understand the ecosocial realities in some rural areas in China. This phenomenon is described by Van Rooij *et al* (2014) as activist acquiescence.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, environmental (in)justice, *hukou*, rural population, Alai, China.

(In)justicia medioambiental y ecocrítica con enfoque ecosocial en China

Hace 40 años, en 1991, la celebración de la Primera Cumbre para el Liderazgo Nacional Ambientalista de Personas de Color en Washington D.C. dio a conocer la historia oficial del movimiento de justicia medioambiental estadounidense. Este movimiento ecologista liderado por la clase obrera y las personas de color, cuya historia se remonta al caso de Love Canal en 1978 y Warren County en 1982, luchaba contra los daños desproporcionados de la contaminación que se localizaban tanto en sus lugares de trabajo como en sus comunidades. Los activistas afiliados a esta organización definen la cuestión ecológica como parte de un movimiento más amplio de justicia social. En este sentido, entienden la justicia social como una cuestión de dignidad, bienestar e igualdad humana, y, en concreto, aspiran a conseguir la distribución justa de los recursos, servicios y oportunidades sociales. Así pues, una justicia distributiva—la asignación justa de los bienes y males ecológicos—es un aspecto fundamental para la concepción de la justicia medioambiental (Schlosberg 12).[1] El líder afroamericano por los derechos civiles Benjamin Chavis acuña el concepto de racismo medioambiental, correlacionando el racismo con el sacrificio de las personas de color en términos ecológicos (Chavis 3). En 1997, el historiador Ramachandra Guha y el economista Joan Martínez-Alier desarrollaron en profundidad el ecologismo de los pobres para denominar a los movimientos populares que no habían sido identificados como ambientalistas hasta 1980 en la India y América Latina. Con el apelativo de los pobres, los autores hacen referencia a la gente de ecosistemas, en su mayoría, poblaciones rurales, campesinos, pastores, artesanos y trabajadores sin tierras, cuya supervivencia depende de los recursos naturales. Los gobernadores, profesionales e industrialistas que viven en las ciudades, así como la élite rural, con su ventaja socioeconómica, se apropian de los recursos naturales vitales de la gente de ecosistemas (12). En 2020, la geógrafa Karen Bell propuso el término clasismo medioambiental para referirse a las políticas y prácticas desfavorables al proletariado británico en cuanto a las condiciones de trabajo y vivienda (3). Hablando sobre los diversos lenguajes conceptuales originados en las movilizaciones populares, Martínez-Alier *et al.* alegan que estos componen lo que se conoce como un vocabulario de justicia medioambiental (9–10). El racismo medioambiental, el ecologismo de los pobres y el clasismo medioambiental son claros lenguajes de justicia medioambiental.

En 1998, el término justicia medioambiental se menciona por primera vez en una conferencia académica en China (Mah y Wang 264). Pasadas tres décadas, la justicia medioambiental, como concepto anglófono importado, presenta ciertas ambigüedades. En primer lugar, las posiciones académicas acerca de qué grupos sufren mayor carga de contaminación en China son dispares: la población rural, los trabajadores migrantes rurales, los residentes en el Oeste o las minorías étnicas. El sociólogo Ethan D. Schoolman

[1] Por bienes ecológicos se entiende el acceso a los recursos naturales vitales para la supervivencia humana y los servicios sociales vinculados a ellos, como la vivienda, los servicios médicos, la salud laboral y pública, entre otros. Los males ecológicos se refieren a la exposición a los perjuicios ambientales—sustancias tóxicas en tierra, aire, alimentos y agua—así como la tendencia a sufrir tales daños, entendida como el riesgo ambiental.

y el economista Chunbo Ma apuntan que los residentes con el *hukou* (registro residencial) vinculado a zonas rurales son quienes sufren una mayor desigualdad socioambiental (141). Pese a este postulado, el sector social chino que estadísticamente acusa mayores daños ecológicos sigue siendo una incógnita. Según Mah y Wang, la injusticia medioambiental es más apta para definir el contexto actual chino (270), pues en éste existe una relativa ausencia de movilizaciones ecologistas civiles (Balme y Tang 167). En segunda instancia, actualmente no hay un lenguaje de justicia medioambiental claro originado en los movimientos de base. Los sociólogos Van Rooij *et al.* denominan las movilizaciones ecologistas en algunos campos chinos como la aquiescencia activista, pues las estrategias, los objetivos y los efectos de dichas organizaciones están restringidos por las asimétricas relaciones entre las comunidades locales y la industria contaminante, que suele contar con el apoyo de las autoridades locales. Es por esto que las movilizaciones estándares, como protestas y bloqueos, suelen fracasar y terminar con la aceptación de la compensación económica, y se suavizan con medidas más individualizadas y menos conflictivas, como usar mascarillas y evitar consumir agua local. Al ser muy limitado y consentir la lógica del poder, en vez de ser un activismo, se trata de aquiescencia. El pesimismo y la pasividad civil caracterizan esta aquiescencia activista (20–21). Admitiendo la limitación resultante de la estructura social, los sociólogos Chen y Cheng revindican que los académicos reconozcan esta agencialidad civil. En vez de no querer hacer nada, las comunidades afectadas toman medidas viables según las circunstancias y la sabiduría popular. Según Chen y Cheng, con estas tácticas, los residentes practican un tipo de taichí, un arte marcial chino que evita contraataques agresivos y resistencias directas en el combate. Al adaptarse o "adherirse" a la fuerza del adversario, los movimientos suaves del taichí, en lugar de ser una evasión simple, permiten que la fuerza adversaria siga su curso buscando una oportunidad adecuada para reaccionar (30–31). Así pues, los lugareños llevan a cabo la infrapolítica. Ésta, según el politólogo James C. Scott, hace referencia a las resistencias practicadas por los subordinados campesinos que pasan desapercibidas por el poder con el objetivo de evitar posibles represalias (*Domination* 19). Los actos como la disimulación y la injuria constituyen en una forma de resistencia encubierta y cotidiana (*Weapons* 284–289). De acuerdo con la antropóloga Anna Lora-Wainwright, estas movilizaciones, al presentar perspectivas y acciones fluidas que oscilan entre el consentimiento y el activismo, constituyen en un activismo menos convencional (loc. 50).[2]

Las discrepancias definitorias sobre este ecologismo apuntan a dos cuestiones. Para empezar, el lenguaje conceptual de la aquiescencia activista describe parte de la realidad ecosocial en algunas zonas rurales chinas: la limitación y la pasividad civil frente al poder y la polución a nivel local. No obstante, la negación académica de la agencialidad civil muestra un pesimismo teórico. Éste también presenta una tendencia

[2] En su *Resigned Activism* (2017), Lora-Wainwright propone el activismo resignado para denominar este ambientalismo. No obstante, la autora ha sido criticada por mala conducta científica al no haber acreditado el trabajo de sus colegas chinos. Con el requerimiento de un panel de la Universidad de Oxford, en 2021 se publicó la versión revisada con las correspondientes citas añadidas. Debido a la polémica, en el presente artículo no se utiliza dicho término.

homogeneizadora al fracasar en reconocer la particularidad local. De tal modo, en segundo lugar, Chen y Cheng, y Lora-Wainwright insisten en pluralizar la definición del "activismo" y considerar las características de la localidad en cuanto a la historia, la cultura y las relaciones de poder (31; loc.381). Se ha de atender a las experiencias ecológicas subjetivas, que en el ámbito rural chino se caracterizan por la sensación de impotencia, en los estudios de justicia medioambiental (Lora-Wainwright 45–48). Así pues, por un lado, contextualizar la limitación y la pasividad rural en los desiguales procesos ecosociales ayuda a entender la realidad teorizada como la aquiescencia activista. Por otro lado, reconocer la agencialidad implícita en las diversas formas del activismo y ese ambiguo activismo es más prometedor que el pesimismo.

La ambigüedad de la (in)justicia medioambiental en China también se refleja en la ecocrítica. A pesar de que, según Scott Slovic, la comunidad ecocrítica en China es posiblemente la mayor del mundo y está floreciendo en todas sus vertientes (15; 19), presenta una tendencia dualista de antropocentrismo/biocentrismo ignorando la cuestión ecosocial (Hu 390; Li 824). De entre los estudios al respecto, caben destacar Cheng Li y Yanjun Liu, que proponen tres pilares de la ecocrítica de justicia medioambiental china: el transnacionalismo, la ruralidad y la etnicidad (44). Shuyuan Lu, que ya ejerció la praxis pedagógica y académica ecocrítica aplicada a la literatura clásica china en 1990, analiza las malas condiciones de trabajo vividas por los campesinos-trabajadores en poemas escritos por estos, tema profundizado por Xiaojing Zhou. Estos análisis apuntan a la existencia de una desigualdad entre lo urbano/rural.

Por un lado, Li y Liu sugieren orientar la ecocrítica china hacia el enfoque ecosocial (36). Por otro, Joni Adamson, una de las primeras ecocríticas anglófonas en abordar la justicia medioambiental, revindica el valor práctico de la literatura como caso de estudio que refleja las realidades socioambientales (216). Siguiendo esta línea, Carmen Flys Junquera, pionera española en aplicar la ecocrítica con enfoque de justicia medioambiental, destaca el rol de la literatura, sobre todo la ficción, para "imaginar y crear un mundo más justo y sostenible" (183). En base a dichas posiciones, este análisis pretende levantar el velo de misterio que oculta la posible incógnita de la injusticia medioambiental china, desentrañar la probable praxis que canaliza la desigualdad social al ámbito ecológico, y examinar un posible lenguaje de justicia medioambiental en algunas regiones rurales chinas a través de la trilogía novelística *Kong Shan: Jicun Chuanshuo* [*Montaña hueca: la historia sobre el pueblo Ji*] de Alai.[3] Nacido en 1959, Alai es novelista, ensayista y poeta de etnia tibetano-jiarong,[4] y ganador del Premio Mao Dun, uno de los galardones literarios más prestigiosos de China. Los tres volúmenes de *Montaña hueca* fueron publicados en 2005, 2007 y 2009, respectivamente. Con una extensión de 959 páginas y compuesta por seis relatos, la trilogía trata la historia de un pueblo llamado Ji, situado en la zona fronteriza de la Región Autónoma del Tíbet y la provincia Sichuan. Los protagonistas, residentes de Ji, también son de la etnia tibetano-jiarong. En el dialecto

[3] Su nombre real es Yongrui Yang. Puesto que la novela no está traducida al español, el título y las citas son traducciones de la autora. Se traduce el título como "montaña hueca" basándose en "hollow mountain", traducción inglesa hecha por Saul Thompson y publicada en 2017.

[4] El grupo étnico jiarong es una etnia no reconocida. Oficialmente se incorpora a la etnia tibetana.

jiarong, Ji significa raíz. Los seis relatos desvelan el desarraigo de Ji como consecuencia de las talas masivas de árboles durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX.

En *Montaña hueca*, Alai identifica a la población rural como uno de los posibles grupos con mayores cargas ecológicas. El autor relaciona la injusticia medioambiental que sufren con el *hukou*. Indicando que la población agrícola ha sido colocada en el "lado incorrecto" de la dualidad, Alai desvela su condición alterizada. La "línea divisoria," símbolo que Alai emplea para referirse a la división civil entre poblaciones no-agrícolas y agrícolas establecida por el *hukou*, da forma a la marginalidad de los residentes rurales. Con la materialización de esta "línea divisoria" en fronteras que encierran socioambientalmente a sus personajes, Alai deja entrever las manifestaciones ambientales de la injusticia social. La traducción del carácter chino "kong" en el título de la trilogía como "hueco" corresponde a la temática novelística pero también contribuye a entender la realidad ecosocial conceptualizada como aquiescencia activista. Este artículo se estructura de la siguiente forma: en la primera sección se analiza la figura de los protagonistas rurales; en la segunda y tercera parte, se aborda cómo Alai visibiliza la injusticia medioambiental sancionada por el *hukou* contra los residentes de Ji; tomando en consideración estos debates y la actualidad, la cuarta parte analiza las semánticas de la palabra "hueco" y la aquiescencia activista; el artículo concluye evaluando la escritura de Alai como un activismo literario.

Población rural: en el "lado incorrecto"

Pese a que está ampliamente asumido que la sociedad funciona en base a la división humana en subgrupos según diferentes criterios, la socióloga Fei-ling Wang apunta que estas categorías son construcciones sociales, es decir, creadas, dotadas de determinados significados y naturalizadas en los procesos sociales (1). La agrupación y segregación según dichos criterios sirven como un mecanismo de control manteniendo la jerarquía social favorable para los grupos dominantes (Rosenblum y Toni-Michelle 2; 28). Por tanto, las construcciones de criterios de diferencia son hegemónicas. Éstas están estrechamente relacionadas con el centrismo humano. Según la filósofa ecofeminista Val Plumwood, el centrismo humano se fundamenta en una mentalidad dualista, caracterizada por una estructura polarizada que distancia radicalmente al Uno, el grupo dominante autoidentificado como el centro, del Otro, los subordinados. Esto es lo que ella denomina hiperseparación, que construye falsamente parejas opuestas como ser humano/naturaleza y hombre/mujer (*Environmental* 100–102). Paralelamente a esta construcción del Uno/Otro, entran en juego más sistemas de distinción binaria como civilización/barbarie, razón/intuición, racionalidad/animalidad, o mente/cuerpo, entre otros. Al Otro se le asignan características despreciativas enumeradas en estas entidades opuestas (Plumwood, *Feminism* 43–45). En *Montaña hueca*, Alai desvela la condición alterizada de la población rural. Con el injusto trato que la gente de Ji recibe, Alai delinea la imagen deteriorada del Otro rural.

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En *Montaña hueca I*, a través de la narración de una leyenda originaria del pueblo de Ji, Alai visibiliza la agrupación y segregación humana fundamentada en la construcción de diferencias:

> La leyenda comienza con un suspiro, y mantiene una cadencia melancólica. Habla de la época cuando, por primera vez, los caballos domésticos se convirtieron en una categoría diferente a la de los salvajes. Describe cómo, debido a las habilidades y técnicas de domesticación y cría de caballos salvajes, surgió la primera distinción humana: la inteligencia y la fuerza. Fue también la primera vez que los seres humanos establecieron diferencias entre ellos. (214)

Alai sigue contando que "la llamada historia humana consiste en imponer diferentes categorizaciones sobre diferentes personas en distintas épocas y lugares" (214). Históricamente esta clasificación era listo/tonto, bonito/feo, rico/pobre y noble/humilde. Posteriormente se inventaron nuevas categorías como religioso/ateo. Más recientemente los criterios son quienes progresan/quienes quedan atrás (214). La historia de Ji refleja el funcionamiento social basado en la división y organización humanas según las diferencias construidas. Las parejas opuestas en la leyenda consisten en variaciones derivadas de la hiperseparación. Aquellos que son listos, bonitos, ricos, nobles y que progresan son construidos como el Uno y los emplazados en el otro lado de la polarización, el Otro. Continúa el autor, "las personas que suspiran constantemente son aquellas que son colocadas en lo más bajo y en el *lado incorrecto* de los nuevos criterios" (214; énfasis añadido). Aquí, el "lado" opera como la línea falsa de la polarización que distancia al Uno del Otro y simboliza las ideas dualistas. El suspiro, denota la pena y la impotencia del Otro frente a la alterización.

En la novela, con la distinción entre las personas que progresan/quedan atrás, Alai hace referencia a la dualidad de trabajador/campesino. El término campesino fue introducido en China a principios del siglo XX como consecuencia de la invasión extranjera. Según los especialistas en la cuestión rural Pan, Luo y Wen, la colonización de China dio origen a una imitación radical del modelo de modernidad occidental. Este radicalismo elitista presenta una negación de la tradición china, arraigada en los campos y la población rural (121). De igual modo, adoptando la construcción occidental del campesino y del campo, se consideró al campesino como símbolo de la tradición (Cohen 166; Kelliher 410–411). Según el politólogo Daniel Kelliher, a principios del siglo XX, a los campesinos se les consideraba primitivos, por una parte, en términos económicos debido a que practicaban una agricultura tradicional de subsistencia, y, por otra parte, en términos culturales, ya que en su mayoría eran analfabetos y creían en religiones populares (389–394). Leída la representación de las personas que quedan atrás en *Montaña hueca*, Alai señala esta alterización de los campesinos como gente retrógrada económica y culturalmente. Tal y como apunta el antropólogo Myron L. Cohen, la élite intelectual imaginaba una sociedad que se diferenciara totalmente de la antigua. En este imaginario, la dualidad de lo nuevo/antiguo se hace más específica generando distinciones binarias como las de modernidad/tradición y economía industrial/agraria de subsistencia. A estas dualidades se aúna la del trabajador, y el campesino (151–154).

Según Plumwood, otros procesos de hiperseparación pueden ser: la homogeneización y la devaluación del valor intrínseco del Otro (*Environmental* 102–106).

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Alai visibiliza estos procesos. En "Fuego celestial," segundo relato del primer volumen, Alai ficcionaliza un incendio forestal en plena Revolución Cultural. En un aviso difundido por el altavoz, se enumeran una serie de nombres para que acudan a una reunión: "Al final del aviso, la voz mencionó a algunos aldeanos. Sin embargo, en vez de llamarles por sus nombres, se limitó a pronunciar sus rangos oficiales" (Alai, *Montaña hueca I* 208). Durante las décadas de 1960 y 1970, el altavoz y las reuniones fueron medios de comunicación monopolizados por las autoridades locales, convirtiéndose en símbolos de oficialidad. De tal modo, el aviso representa un discurso diseñado y pronunciado por el Uno, aquellos privilegiados y cercanos al núcleo de poder. Este Uno se hace patente en "Fuego celestial" en aquellos procedentes de fuera del pueblo, trabajadores de empresas madereras estatales y jefes oficiales. Mientras que este discurso reconoce la identidad individual de los miembros del Uno pronunciando sus nombres, ignora la de los aldeanos, homogeneizándolos con sus rangos oficiales.

La actitud, conducta y práctica discriminatoria contra los residentes de Ji revelan la devaluación del subalterno rural. Aquellos externos a Ji, que se consideran nobles y civilizados, menosprecian a los residentes de la aldea como personas humildes y bárbaras (*Montaña hueca I* 218–219) y se les asocia con la suciedad y la vulgaridad. En "Montaña hueca," segundo relato del tercer volumen y situado en las últimas dos décadas del siglo pasado, la administración local reclama la tierra ancestral de Ji para fundar un centro de etnoturismo. A los residentes se les prohíbe la entrada, porque, según el director general, son demasiado sucios y vulgares para la lujosa hostelería y las modernas instalaciones (*Montaña hueca III* 181). En "Trueno ligero," primer relato del tercer volumen, los habitantes de Ji participan en la explotación de sus bosques, seducidos por los intereses económicos que promete la tala ilegal. En dicho relato, los camiones procedentes de la zona rural no tienen permitido entrar en la ciudad sin ser desinfectados. Zeli Laji, un joven de Ji, se pregunta murmurando "¿Somos contagiosos?" (74). La vinculación de los personajes rurales con estos rasgos despreciativos deja claro que los residentes rurales están estigmatizados. Según el sociólogo Erving Goffman, el estigma social hace referencia a una serie de atributos poseídos por un individuo, con los cuales se le identifica como miembro de un grupo social menospreciado. El grupo dominante construye los estigmas sociales definiéndolos como diferencias indeseables, profundamente desacreditadoras e incluso altamente peligrosas. (12–15). Las personas estigmatizadas son discriminadas como seres anormales, inválidos y deshonrados. La población rural es estigmatizada en la sociedad china debido a su bajo nivel educativo, escasa cualificación laboral y origen rural (Wang y He 285). Pese a que, según el célebre sociólogo chino Xiaotong Fei, la tierra es fundamental, tanto material como culturalmente, para la población rural, que ejerce la agricultura sedentaria (37), la élite urbana ha desarrollado un discurso discriminatorio en base a estas relaciones estrechas entre los agricultores y la tierra para referirse a su conducta inculta y de mal gusto. Este vocabulario estigmatizador está configurado, por ejemplo, por términos como *tubaozi* (gente rústica), *nongcunren* (persona pueblerina) y *xiangbalao* (patán). En la novela, la suciedad, la vulgaridad y la contagiosidad, rasgos asociados a las personas de Ji, son manifestaciones de esta violencia simbólica. Al igual

que la hiperseparación, la estigmatización deshumaniza a la población rural deteriorando su imagen.

La pasividad de ser alterizado y la pena revelada por el suspiro visibilizan artísticamente las experiencias subjetivas de aquellos que practican la aquiescencia activista en el mundo real. En la trilogía, El joven activista Suobo es el primero de Ji en darse cuenta de la índole construccionista del campesino: "Sabe que estas diferencias nunca se eliminarán. Lo que uno puede hacer es esforzarse mucho para acabar colocado al otro lado de la *línea divisoria*" (*Montaña hueca I* 217; énfasis añadido). Con la "línea divisoria," Alai hace referencia, en primer lugar, a la línea falsa de la polarización, y, en segundo lugar, a la división del estatus civil en no-agrícola/agrícola establecida por el sistema *hukou*.

"Línea divisoria" en el *hukou*

El *hukou*, que en su momento establecía dos tipos de estatus civil (no-agrícola/agrícola) en el sistema de registro familiar y en función de la zona de registro (urbana/rural), define a la población rural como un ciudadano con otra condición administrativa (Solinger 3–4). A partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, con el objetivo de industrializar el país lo más rápido posible se aprobaron políticas que favorecían la industria pesada. Para garantizar el abastecimiento alimentario estable del campo hacia las ciudades, había que mantener a los agricultores en las tierras de cultivo. Fue bajo este contexto cuando se estableció el *hukou* en 1958. Los residentes no-agrícolas gozaban de beneficios sociales—la asignación de empleo y vivienda, la distribución gratuita de productos básicos, la educación y el servicio médico—inaccesibles para los agrícolas. En las zonas rurales, con la colectivización agraria y el sistema de cooperativas, los agricultores fueron organizados en comunas populares donde trabajaban, vivían y comían juntos. La compraventa entre campesinos y Estado garantizó el abastecimiento alimentario urbano. La *nongzhuanfei* (transformación del estatus civil agrícola al no-agrícola) estaba estrictamente controlada excepto en casos de matrimonio, de ingreso al ejército y a la universidad o de empleo. Este cambio de estatus era difícil para la mayoría de la población rural anclada en las zonas rurales. Sin el permiso de movilidad, estaba prohibido trasladarse a un lugar distinto al de su registro familiar.[5] El *hukou* canalizaba la desigualdad social en dispares intercambios ecosociales entre lo urbano/rural. Hasta los años ochenta, los agricultores rurales servían como proveedores de alimento de la minoría urbana privilegiada, que representaba aproximadamente el 20% de la población nacional (Wen 293). Pese a que en 2014 esta distinción civil fue anulada oficialmente en el *hukou*, la estructura dualista social urbano/rural permanece (Zong y Lin 3).

Alai visibiliza la desigualdad ecosocial establecida por la "línea divisoria" en el *hukou* con los objetos simbólicos de la oficialidad como la carta de recomendación oficial,[6] el vale para cereales, el restaurante y el almacén público. En *Montaña hueca II*, los jóvenes

[5] Con la reforma económica, desde 1978 se ha venido relajando el control de la movilidad poblacional.
[6] En la época de la economía planificada, la carta de recomendación oficial servía como una comunicación que certificaba la colocación del empleado en una institución pública o fábrica estatal.

de Ji esperan ansiosamente la llegada de una carta de recomendación, que les facilitaría la *nongzhuanfei* (transformación del estatus civil agrícola a no-agrícola). Esta *nongzhuanfei*, por una parte, permite que uno escale en su posición social adquiriendo la condición no-agrícola, concebida como una clase alta (Alai, *Montaña hueca II* 6). Por otra parte, indica el disfrute de una serie de beneficios públicos inaccesibles para los residentes agrícolas, sobre todo, en cuanto al reparto alimentario. Tal y como confiesa un habitante: "todos los jóvenes de Ji deseamos hacernos soldados, y así dejaremos de ser campesinos, a quienes no les asiste el derecho a tener el vale para cereales" (12). No obstante, durante años, el único que consigue la carta de recomendación es Dase, sobrino de un alto funcionario. Alai deja claro que la población rural, como ciudadanía con otra condición, venía determinada por el nacimiento y, por tanto, la movilidad de estamentos era difícil.

Alai plasma la injusta distribución alimentaria derivada de la "línea divisoria" en la libreta *hukou* a través de dos edificios simbólicos en la era de la economía planificada: el restaurante y el almacén público. En *Montaña hueca II*, disponiendo del vale para cereales, los trabajadores pueden comer gratuitamente arroz en cualquier restaurante. Sin embargo, los habitantes de Ji, como residentes agrícolas a quienes no conceden el vale, tienen que pagar por el arroz. Un día, Suobo entra a un restaurante llamado "Comedor del Pueblo" y quiere pedir una ración de arroz gratuita. Alegando la condición agrícola de Suobo, el personal se lo niega con soberbia. Suobo, borracho y enojado, se pregunta: "El presidente Mao dice que los trabajadores y los campesinos somos una misma familia. ¿Por qué los trabajadores pueden comer arroz gratuitamente y nosotros los campesinos tenemos que pagarlo? ¿Por qué el país no nos da el vale para cereales?" (*Montaña hueca II* 76–78). Finalmente, los trabajadores insultan y golpean a Suobo. Por su parte, el nombre del restaurante, "Comedor del Pueblo" es simbólico, ya que el pueblo hace referencia al conjunto ciudadano. Así pues, el "Comedor del Pueblo" representa el sistema distributivo alimentario nacional en concreto, la sociedad y la oficialidad en general. Por una parte, el hecho de que a Suobo se le excluya del reparto gratuito de arroz desvela la injusticia distributiva alimentaria contra la población agrícola en la época de la planificación económica. Por otra parte, con el trato discriminatorio e injusto que Suobo recibe en el "Comedor del Pueblo," Alai ilustra la discriminación social contra los agricultores.

En *Montaña hueca I*, puede observarse otro símbolo parecido en el "Almacén del Pueblo." Con la colectivización agraria y el sistema de cooperativas se construye un "Almacén del Pueblo," donde se almacenan los cereales cosechados por los aldeanos para abastecer las ciudades. En este almacén, colocan dos balanzas totalmente nuevas y, desde ese momento, Luosang Zhang, dueño de la única balanza en la historia de Ji, pierde el poder y la importancia social que le daba este instrumento. Trabajando para la comuna popular, los habitantes se quejan de que están arando más tierras, pero tienen menos alimento que en el pasado. Eso se debe a que la mayoría de la cosecha se les suministra a los ciudadanos urbanos (Alai, *Montaña hueca II* 29–35). Al igual que el "Comedor del Pueblo," el "Almacén del Pueblo" deja entrever la dispar distribución alimentaria urbana/rural. La balanza simboliza la justicia, por lo que el reemplazo de la única balanza de Ji por las nuevas recién puestas en el "Almacén del Pueblo" revela, por un lado, la

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imposición de la noción de justicia oficial sobre la local durante la planificación económica. Por otro lado, representa el desequilibrio de la balanza distributiva de alimentos, que favoreció a los habitantes no-agrícolas a costa de la labor y el bienestar de los agrícolas en aquella época.

Hace medio siglo, con el *hukou* se estableció una asimétrica estructura social debilitando a la población rural y favoreciendo a la urbana, la cual permanece actualmente. La "línea divisoria" da forma a esta estructura dualista en la que tiene lugar la resistencia ecologista definida como la aquiescencia activista en el mundo real.

Frontera ecosocial edificada por el *hukou*

Según Wang, el *hukou* fue un tipo de exclusión que mantiene similitudes con el cierre social. Este concepto sociológico se refiere al proceso de establecer fronteras socioeconómicas para construir comunidades y monopolizar recursos para sus miembros (4). El *hukou* se desarrolló en base a unas políticas anteriores a 1958 para controlar la migración rural a las ciudades, que ponía en riesgo el sistema de servicios sociales y la estabilidad urbana. La llamada *mangliu* (población flotante ciega),[7] derivada de dichas políticas, para referirse a los inmigrantes rurales en las ciudades fue una fórmula estigmatizadora. El cierre social edificado por el *hukou*, por una parte, restringió la movilidad espacial y laboral de los residentes rurales, y, por otra parte, canalizó el desplazamiento de los recursos naturales de campos a ciudades y el traslado del coste ecosocial a la inversa.

En *Montaña hueca I* y *II*, ambientadas en la época de control migratorio estricto (1958–1978), Alai visualiza la frontera construida por el *hukou* a través del certificado de pase. "Esparcido en el viento," primer relato del primer tomo, trata del encuentro entre Ji, que hasta ese momento había sido un pueblo de montaña aislado durante miles de años, y el mundo exterior. Este primer contacto marca el "fin de una era de viaje ilimitado" (*Montaña hueca I* 32): para salir del pueblo, cuyas fronteras están ahora vigiladas por la autoridad local, uno tiene que presentar un permiso de movilidad. El joven Gela y su madre Sangdan se ven obligados a abandonar el pueblo para vagabundear debido a su supuesta procedencia feudal y su resistencia a realizar labores agrícolas colectivas. Sin el permiso, han tenido que volver a Ji (*Montaña hueca I* 38). En "Tierra estéril," segundo relato del segundo volumen, debido a la tala de árboles, los flujos de lodo destruyen los campos de cultivo y están a punto de inundar el pueblo entero. Suobo propone ante la autoridad local que trasladem a todo el pueblo, ya que históricamente los ancestros de Ji han migrado constantemente para sobrevivir a pestes, guerras y crisis alimentarias. No obstante, su propuesta obtiene una respuesta en tono irónico y la negativa de sus superiores, quienes alegan que es imposible conceder a cada habitante un certificado de movilidad (*Montaña hueca II* 276–277). El viaje de Gela y Sangdan, así como la conducta migratoria histórica de Ji son prácticas que garantizan la supervivencia en tiempos adversos. Alai recalca que los residentes están prohibidos a viajar: "sin la autorización, no

[7] *Liu mang*, el término *mang liu* leído al revés, significa canalla.

se puede ir a ningún lado libremente" (*Montaña hueca I* 31); "sin el permiso, no tienen ni siquiera el derecho a vagabundear" (38) y "no podrás ir a ningún lugar si no dispones del certificado" (58). Alai deja claro que el desplazamiento no autorizado constituye un acto penalizado. Los aldeanos que intentan viajar sin un permiso son agredidos y capturados (*Montaña hueca I* 30–31; 59–60). El certificado de pase y el *hukou* operan como una frontera administrativa que encerraba a los residentes rurales durante la época de control migratorio estricto.

Pese al relajamiento migratorio después de 1978, la estructura dualista del *hukou* funciona como un techo de cristal que, canalizando oportunidades socioeconómicas desiguales, obstaculiza la movilidad laboral rural. En *Montaña hueca III*, Alai representa este techo de cristal a través de la barrera para el control de transportes y la muralla del centro turístico. En "Trueno ligero," primer relato del tercer tomo, el joven de Ji, Zeli Lajia, abandona sus estudios para montar un negocio de madera en el condado Shuangjiangkou, que ha prosperado gracias a la fundación de una fábrica maderera. Dado que Lajia no tiene contactos en el buró forestal local que puedan favorecerle, no ha podido conseguir la cuota de cosecha forestal. Sin esta autorización, no tiene permiso para que su madera pueda pasar por el paso de coches, controlado por el personal del buró forestal, para que así pueda ser vendida en centros urbanos. En Shuangjiangkou, la cuota de cosecha es un escaso recurso apropiado por aquellos afiliados a la élite urbana. Es por esto por lo que la mayoría de las personas de Ji que llegan a Shuangjiangkou por motivos económicos se ven obligadas a realizar labores físicas peligrosas tales como la tala o el transporte de árboles, haciendo que muchas de estas personas sufran daños o mueran (*Montaña hueca III* 93). Alai compara la barrera para el control de carretera a una "puerta que separa el paraíso del infierno" (4). Si la barrera se levanta, el comercio maderero promete una gran fortuna. En caso contrario, aquellos que sueñan con hacerse ricos con la madera "serán hechos añicos por ella" (4). La barrera para el control de transportes representa el techo de cristal que expulsa a los residentes agrícolas del espacio urbano negándoles oportunidades socioeconómicas. En "Montaña hueca," el segundo relato del volumen, se construye un complejo turístico en las cercanías del pueblo. Éste está cercado por una muralla impidiendo el acceso de los lugareños para garantizar la calidad de servicios prestados a los turistas urbanos (*Montaña hueca III* 183). Así pues, el centro turístico representa un espacio rural apropiado por la élite urbana que viene aquí con el interés etnoturístico. Además, a los residentes de Ji se les niegan la oportunidad de trabajar en este sitio (181). De tal modo, la muralla visibiliza la frontera ecosocial que bloquea el acceso local a los recursos naturales, así como la frontera socioeconómica que obstaculiza el movimiento ocupacional de los residentes rurales. La barrera para el paso de coches y la muralla del centro turístico dan forman a la frontera socioambiental y económica edificada por el *hukou* hace medio siglo.

En *Montaña hueca*, el cierre social de la población rural contrasta con el desplazamiento de los recursos forestales de Ji hacia las ciudades. Martínez-Alier propone el desplazamiento geográfico de fuentes de recursos y daños ambientales para referirse a los desiguales intercambios ecosociales entre el Norte Global y el Sur Global. La creciente y masiva importación de materias primas por parte de los países industrializados desde

el Sur Global, resulta en que "la frontera del petróleo y gas, la frontera del aluminio, la frontera del cobre […] avanzan hacia nuevos territorios." Paralelamente, existe un desplazamiento geográfico del coste ecológico del Norte al Sur, que deriva en la exposición desproporcionada de los pobres a la contaminación (34). Este desplazamiento geográfico de bienes y males ecológicos también se da entre ciudades y campos chinos. Alai presenta la carretera como el lugar donde este injusto intercambio tiene lugar. En "Esparcido en el viento," a la apertura al tráfico de la primera carretera, se le suma la presencia constante de camiones. Según las autoridades locales, los bosques de Ji serán transportados para edificar el gran "Edificio Socialista" (*Montaña hueca I* 96–97), que simboliza la industrialización nacional. Con el tiempo, se van construyendo más carreteras para satisfacer la creciente necesidad de madera. Por ejemplo, en "Trueno ligero," otra carretera muy amplia llega a "lo profundo de la zona de montaña, donde hay varios pueblos y muchas fábricas madereras" (*Montaña hueca III* 40). Durante las "estaciones secas, los camiones cargados de madera pasan por la carretera levantando arena y polvo por todos lados" (40). La creciente cantidad, dimensión y volumen de tráfico de las carreteras ilustra el "desplazamiento geográfico" acelerado e intensificado de la frontera forestal rural hacia zonas urbanas. En paralelo a este desplazamiento, se da el traslado del coste ecosocial a Ji. La carretera, en vez de mejorar la vida de los lugareños, les impone otra labor pesada: la tala y el transporte de sus masas forestales: "Los hombres van cargados de maderas y las dejan al lado de la carretera esperando los camiones. Estas maderas serán llevadas al mundo más allá de la montaña, lugares tan remotos que nadie ha ido" (*Montaña hueca I* 128). Según los aldeanos, el daño físico y el desgaste del calzado, que para ellos es un lujo, derivados de esta labor no están recompensados (97). Esta desigualdad laboral, como se ha expuesto anteriormente, continúa hasta las últimas décadas del siglo XX. No obstante, el mecanismo mercantil ha sustituido al poder administrativo canalizando la desigualdad derivada del *hukou* al ámbito laboral. La explotación de bosques facilitada por la carretera a su vez da como resultado la deforestación, constantes desastres naturales y años de hambruna en Ji. En este sentido, los flujos de lodo que atacan Ji en "Tierra estéril" simbolizan este vertido del coste ecosocial. La carretera, a su vez, opera como un tubo de aspirador que absorbe los recursos forestales. Encerrados dentro del cierre ecosocial edificado por el *hukou*, los personajes rurales de Alai quedan ahogados en el campo, vaciado de recursos naturales vitales y convertido en el vertedero de los residuos socioambientales derivados de la industrialización en el siglo pasado.

Debilitados y marginalizados, los residentes de Ji se entregan a la polarización y se dejan llevar por los impares flujos ecosociales. Su resignación ante las adversidades debido a la debilitación es manifestación literaria de la llamada aquiescencia activista.

Semánticas de "hueco" y lenguaje conceptual de la aquiescencia activista

La trilogía se titula "kong shan": "Kong" significa hueco o vacío, y *shan*, montaña. A diferencia del español, que presenta una diferencia semántica entre hueco y vacío, el

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carácter chino "kong" puede indicar ambos casos.[8] Pese a que las traducciones como "montaña vacía" y "montaña hueca" son aceptables, la palabra "hueco" corresponde mejor a la temática novelística. Ayuda a entender el fenómeno ecosocial teorizado por Van Rooij *et al.* como aquiescencia activista.

La palabra "hueco" visibiliza las consecuencias desastrosas y traumáticas derivadas de la injusticia medioambiental. El "hueco", entendido como algo que tiene vacío el interior, representa al pueblo Ji expropiado de los recursos vitales como bosques y tierras cultivables. En el siglo XX, la China rural experimentó una doble destrucción: la colonización y la interiorización de esta violencia a través de los intentos radicalistas de industrializar el país lo más rápido posible siguiendo el modelo occidental. Las consecuencias de ambos procesos se trasladaron a los campos (Pan, Luo y Wen 122). En la trilogía, las líneas temporales de los seis relatos se superponen y los diversos personajes de Ji aparecen repetidamente en cada relato y, también en otras novelas de Alai. Esto, denominado por los críticos literarios como estructura de pétalo, según Alai refleja lo fragmentado de la historia rural (*Epopeya* 206–207) y también da forma a la destrucción total de los campos chinos durante el siglo pasado. En la novela, la destrucción se concreta como el desplazamiento de recursos forestales y alimentarios de Ji hacia las ciudades. Este proceso absorbe la riqueza ecosocial de Ji ahuecándolo. Este matiz semántico de "hueco" sigue ilustrando la perdida de riqueza socioambiental vivida por muchos campos en el mundo real. Actualmente, entre los problemas medioambientales más destacados en zonas rurales están la desertificación, la deforestación, la apropiación de tierras de cultivo y la contaminación industrial. El "hueco" también apunta a la despoblación rural, fenómeno denominado como *kongkehua* (vaciamiento rural).[9] En la trilogía, el trasporte de recursos forestales y alimentarios entre rural/urbano desarraiga a los árboles y al pueblo Ji. De tal modo**,** el "hueco" se entiende como los agujeros producidos por este desarraigo. Estéticamente hablando, la imagen del "hueco" implica un aspecto desagradable: son heridas causadas por los procesos explotadores en la montaña, el pueblo Ji y los residentes. Tal y como indica Alai, el "vacío" es vinculante con el concepto budista de vacuidad, que está muy reflejado en las obras del poeta clásico chino Wang Wei (701–761). En sus poemas, el "vacío" expresa un sentimiento de paz y serenidad. No obstante, cuando escribía la historia de Ji, Alai sólo veía el dolor, el sufrimiento y la desesperación (*Epopeya* 210). Es por esto que el sentido poético implícito en el "vacío" no corresponde a la entonación dolorosa que marca toda la novela. El "hueco", significando que tiene un sonido profundo, hace pensar el suspiro exhalado por aquellos alterizados, es decir, la gente de Ji, como manifestación de su angustia.

La traducción del "kong" al "hueco" simboliza a Ji, que está exprimido de la riqueza esocosial y desarraigado. Convertido en una cáscara, el pueblo ha perdido el vigor y la fuerza aguantando la injusticia medioambiental. El "hueco" deja ver el trauma de los aldeanos que son sometidos a la alterización y a los impares procesos ecosociales. La pasividad, entendida como la voz pasiva y una emoción negativa, implícita en las

[8] Debido a esta ambigüedad, hay dos traducciones inglesas. Thompson traduce el título al inglés como "hollow mountain." Li y Liu prefieren traducirlo como "empty mountain" (45).
[9] Este fenómeno se denomina en inglés como "rural hollowing."

semánticas del "hueco" representa de forma estética la limitación civil y el sentimiento de impotencia, características del distinto ecologismo de base teorizado como aquiescencia activista.

Conclusión: activismo literario de Alai

Leyendo *Montaña hueca* como un caso de estudio, Alai revela una de las posibles incógnitas que se esconden tras la injusticia medioambiental en la China del siglo XX. Se trata de la subalternidad rural, la cual es posicionada en el "lado incorrecto" de la dualidad de no-agrícola/agrícola. Al visibilizar la alterización impuesta sobre los aldeanos, Alai deja entrever la imagen deteriorada de la población rural. Los símbolos de la oficialidad, la carta de recomendación, el vale para cereales, el "Comedor del Pueblo," el "Almacén del Pueblo" y las balanzas nuevas revelan el estado de alteridad que afecta a los residentes rurales, así como los escasos servicios sociales que se les prestan. Es por eso que la "línea divisoria" desentraña la desigualdad socioeconómica contra los residentes agrícolas. Alai visualiza cómo esta "línea divisoria" se materializa de tres formas: como frontera administrativa—el permiso de pase—, como barrera para el paso de coches y como muralla del centro turístico. Todos estos elementos edifican una muralla que recluye socioambientalmente a los aldeanos de Ji. La carretera y los flujos de lodo dan forma a los dispares intercambios ecosociales canalizados por la "línea divisoria" en el *hukou* entre zonas urbanas/rurales: el desplazamiento de la frontera forestal y el vertido del coste de la industrialización. Estas imágenes visualizan cómo los valores problemáticos naturalizaron una praxis social desigual en el siglo XX que derivó en una injusticia medioambiental contra un sector social marginalizado hace medio siglo.

Pese a que, según Schoolman y Ma, existen similitudes entre cómo el *hukou* y el racismo canalizan la desigualdad social al ámbito ambiental (141), el lenguaje conceptual del racismo medioambiental no es aplicable al ámbito chino. Como producto del colonialismo, el racismo se diferencia esencialmente del *hukou*. Bajo la perspectiva poscolonial, la población china está racializada. Tal y como indican Mah y Wang, a nivel internacional, el imperialismo ecológico, entendido como un racismo medioambiental transnacional que traslada el coste ecológico del Norte Global al Sur Global, forma parte de la problemática ecosocial en China (267). El ecologismo de los pobres y el clasismo medioambiental apuntan a parte de las realidades: la injusta distribución medioambiental urbana/rural y la desigualdad laboral. La encrucijada del ecologismo de los pobres y el clasismo medioambiental con la realidad rural de la China del siglo pasado está reflejada en la trilogía de Alai.

Alai no estaría de acuerdo con el lenguaje conceptual de la aquiescencia activista, porque siempre ha preferido sembrar la agencialidad y la esperanza. Pese a las dificultades, en *Montaña hueca*, el pueblo Ji no desaparece. En 2018, la trilogía se ha republicado con un nuevo título: "jicun shishi" ("epopeya del pueblo Ji"). Con "shishi" ("epopeya") Alai intenta infundir el espíritu heroico, la tenacidad, la resiliencia y la esperanza (*Epopeya* 211). De hecho, al visibilizar la historia de Ji y articular la voz rural, Alai practica un activismo literario. En 2007, Alai se mostró confuso sobre el futuro de los

campos preguntándose: ¿Cuál sería su paradero? (*Montaña hueca III* 222). Casi diez años después, entre 2015 y 2016, salió a la luz una nueva trilogía sobre Ji donde Alai presenta la revitalización del pueblo con sus personajes más resilientes.[10] Esta revitalización rural también está teniendo lugar en el mundo real. En 2017, se ha propuesto oficialmente una estrategia de revitalización rural. Esta estrategia, cuya aplicación comenzó en 2020 y finalizará en 2050, reafirma el valor sociocultural de los campos con el objetivo de vigorizar las regiones rurales en todas sus facetas. Después de las convulsiones en el siglo XX, con esta estrategia se espera que traiga una revitalización de los campos para la segunda mitad del nuevo milenio. Aplastada por las invasiones extranjeras y guerras civiles en los siglos XIX y XX, China se ha industrializado y modernizado aceleradamente sacando a la gran mayoría de su población de la pobreza. Paralelamente al crecimiento económico, la crisis ecológica y la brecha de riqueza se agudizan. Por esta razón, proteger el medioambiente y promover la justicia social configuran pilares de la agenda política actual del país. Bajo este contexto, el activismo literario de Alai permite visibilizar las injusticias medioambientales vividas en zonas rurales chinas y contribuye a la concienciación popular.

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[10] Los dramas de la trilogía, formada por *Mogu Quan* [Anillo de hadas] (2015), *San Zhi Chongcao* [*Tres cordyceps*] (2015) y *He shang Baiying* [Sombra del cedro en el río] (2016), se desarrollan en torno a la comercialización de plantas en la región montañosa.

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Editorial
Creative Writing and Arts

Hip Hop Ecologies

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A *New York Times* article published on July 29, 2001, entitled "Hip-Hop and Green," reports how Michael Diamond, the drummer of the acclaimed US hip-hop group Beastie Boys, just posted on the band's website a public letter meant to organize musicians to battle the then Bush administration's energy plan. As the article details, Mike D.—as the musician is commonly known among his fans—viewed the US President's energy plan as destructive to the environment and therefore decided to act and sent 40,000 signatures to the US Congress to try to stop Bush and his administration to move forward with their policy. The article in question is very short and seems more interested in reporting about a famous New Yorker than in what Mike D. had to say. Yet, it is indicative in its tone, as the author manages to convey an ironic puzzlement regarding the relations between Beastie Boys' boisterous hip-hop and Mike D.'s environmental call to arms.

Such irony may be justified, as many hip-hop songs appear to celebrate consumerism and its lifestyle, but it is ultimately out of tune, especially if one considers how the corporate industry contributed to developing a warped image of this musical genre. As David Ingram has pointed out in *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music*, since the rise of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s, environmental themes have been represented in popular songs (11). It is then not so unusual that some music artists do not see a gap between their music-making and a more traditional political stance promoting a more ecologically just future. This is especially true for hip-hop music, a genre that has been strongly influenced by the creation of usually segregated post-industrial environments simultaneously reflected and resisted by often young artists of color (Rose 59-60). For instance, despite their stylistic differences and diverging approaches, songs as Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five's "The Message" (1982) and "New World Water" (1999) by Brooklyn native Yasiin Bey, then known as Mos Def, share a critical take of an economic system that appears to have created only landscapes of urban disaster (Ingram 179-181).

More recently, the deep entanglement between hip-hop and environmental issues has been offering a transformative platform for community building and resilience in response to rampant climate injustice and racial capitalism. Examples of initiatives responsible for bridging political ecology and grassroot activism with hip-hop include the non-profit organization *Hip Hop Caucus* which promotes political activism through campaigns that bridge Black liberation and environmental justice; the *Foundation,* a *women-centered hip-hop collective* in Detroit that uses hip-hop to create spaces of socio-environmental resistance; and the global media company *Hip Hop Is Green*, utilizing the power and influence of hip-hop to spark socio-ecological change, especially in urban settings. Besides representing a powerful vehicle for political expression, hip-hop has also become a crucial eco-pedagogical tool. As environmental science high school teacher Michael J. Cermak pointed out, hip-hop songs can in fact be very useful in addressing the tensions between the history of racism and the natural world. As Cermak writes, "hip-hop songs provide accessible and relevant messages that could simultaneously address ecological issues and racial inequalities" (76). In a similar spirit, Dr. Thomas Easley who performs under the name RaShad Eas developed a philosophy that he defines "hip hop forestry" aimed at using hip-hop to communicate about the discipline of forestry inside and outside the classroom, thus creating a creative and engaging bridge to environmental issues for students (Easley 279-86).

Yet, the ecological value of hip-hop music does not lie exclusively on its critical insight or ability to address the socio-political implications of the current ecological crisis. Instead, some essential elements of hip hop have more direct positive eco-aesthetic implications: as noted by Ingram, "sampling and scratching, for example, can be seen as forms of musical recycling" (177). Pushing such implications even further, Dj Cavem's latest digital album BIOMIMICZ is the first plant-based, zero-waste, environmental hip hop album that can actually be planted. While the lyrics accessible through a QR code discuss culinary climate action, composting, recycling, soil regeneration, and water conservation topics, the album is issued as a seed pack, thus transforming the words into a vehicle of change that is ultimately incorporated by eating the harvested vegetables and fulfilling the artist's hopes that "the seeds will be planted, literally" (DJ Cavem).

All these elements are represented in the current issue of *Ecozon@* devoted to *Hip Hop Ecologies*. As stated by guest editors Timo Müller and Alain-Philippe Durand in the original CFP, an environmental perspective on hip-hop can "enrich our understanding of the ways in which popular cultural forms shape and are shaped by environmental concerns." Our Creative Writing and Art section includes three original pieces that testify to the potential of oral storytelling and lyrical expression to reconfigure how we communicate about the relationships between social justice and the environment. In fact, each contribution deals first and foremost with strategies of communication that may function as a fundamental driver to get people involved in socio-ecological change. Moreover, the three pieces are connected by a desire to embrace an embodied sense of place cognizant of our multispecies entanglements as well as an intersectional understanding of climate justice.

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The section opens with an autobiographical piece by Anthony Kwame Harrison, an emcee and cultural anthropologist who teaches in the department of Sociology at Virginia Tech. Harrison leads us readers on a personal journey across meaningful experiences that have informed his environmental approach to hip-hop and offers a critique of hip-hop's presumed urban-rural divide, highlighting instead its longstanding presence in rural communities. In doing so, he reverses the traditional association of hip-hop to urban spaces while emphasizing its ancestral bond with African diasporic tradition. The centering of wilderness in his poetics, symbolically encapsulated in his emcee name—Mad Squirrel—serves to blur the line of separation between culture and nature, between human and animal, thus giving birth to a liminal identity that inhabits the artificial separation between cultural categories of space. Hip-hop, then, when characterized by non-anthropocentric lyricism, functions as a recommitment to land and nature, to a new sense of place influenced by nonhuman beings, landscapes, and communities. To help visualize the systematic marginalization of Black communities from environmental discourse, the piece is accompanied by three images created through stylized free-hand illustrations by digital artist Ahad Pace, whose art appears also on the cover of the issue. The stark juxtaposition of cartoon-like human figures over a realistic forest landscape functions as a space reclamation and a renewed sense of belonging for Black communities who not only have been historically excluded by outdoor recreation but also whose hip-hop culture has been erroneously segregated to the cityscape.

The next contribution, "Même les Tueurs Dorment" (Even the Killers Sleep), is another autobiographical piece—fictional this time—written by Dr. Steve Gadet, a writer from Guadeloupe who resides in Martinique. Even in this fictional text, we have a tension between the urban and the rural, as the intradiegetic narrator, the young drug dealer Taïno, reflects on his street life in Texaco, a poor segregated ghetto in the capital city of Martinique, Fort-de-France, that hosts migrants moving into the city from rural areas of the island. Although not exactly hip-hop, this text shares similar features with the musical genre, as readers are directly addressed by Taïno and urged to listen to his testimony of the degraded socio-environmental conditions of the ghetto. Ultimately, though, the text becomes a eulogy for George-Matilde Firmin, a real social justice activist known by her nickname Man Sicot who not only was the founder of the Texaco neighborhood in the 1950s, but also fought for years so that the area could be more hospitable for newcomers from the rural areas. As Man Sicot becomes the embodiment of a positive social change, whose death can even stop the circle of violence embedded in the ghetto, Gadet's story embraces a style of oral storytelling in which an original linguistic ecology seems to rise directly and somehow organically from the neighborhood, thus bearing witness to life even among urban misery.

The third and final contribution is the poem "Suppose a World" by Leonardo Chinchilla Mora, made up of a sequence of couplets built on the anaphoric repetition of the verb "suppose," which contributes to its sing-song tone and emphasis on rhythmic style. The poem offers two options for the future of life on Earth: either renewal or annihilation. While the initial utopic tone is soon replaced by ecological devastation and the expansion of racism and poverty, the text still forces readers to imagine possible

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futures and to act upon the present. As the poem unfolds, the couplets gradually take over the space of the page, mimicking the imaginative power of narrative form to fill with vibrant vitality the white, empty space of the page caused by the anthropocentric flaw of those "smarter bipedals" unable to leave the world "undisturbed." While referring specifically to Indigenous hip hop culture, Julie Gorlewski defines it as an "inherently non-conformist art form [that] engenders alternative visions of the social world, such as one that is free from environmental or land degradation, greed, and exploitation" (49). Similarly, through the flickering of possible worlds oscillating between extinction and survival, Chinchilla Mora urges us to rethink our current socio-ecological order beyond human domination of nature.

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Mad Squirrel Keeping it Rural: Reflecting on Twenty Years of Hip Hop Environmental Awareness and Advocacy

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Abstract

In this autobiographical piece, I reflect on my twenty-year history as an emcee working at the intersection of hip hop and environmental awareness. Since summer 2000, I have recorded and performed environmentally situated hip hop music under the moniker "Mad Squirrel." This includes co-founding two groups—the San-Francisco-based Forest Fires Collective and Washington DC's The Acorns—as well as releasing various solo projects and taking part in a handful of performances. In what follows, I explain the origins of my nature-based performance identity by, first, recounting my experiences growing up as an avid hip hop fan in a rural New England (USA) mountain village and, then, expounding on how Mad Squirrel's forest narratives marked a return to the Black diasporic tradition of animal stories that align with my West African heritage. I go on to describe how this identity and approach became the springboard for a small circle of Bay Area artists to produce a series of critically heralded releases in the early 2000s. After relocating to the East Coast of the United States, I continued to create nature-based hip hop and, notably, performed at several fundraisers and political rallies organized around the movement to stop Mountain Top Removal coalmining in Southern Appalachia. Underlying these narrative accounts, in this piece, I critique hip hop's presumed urban-rural divide by highlighting its longstanding presence in rural communities; I compare and contrast the effectiveness of using didactic versus coded environmentalist lyrics/themes; and I draw attention to the underappreciated connections between environmentalism and anti-racism. While acknowledging hip hop's failure to thoroughly embrace an environmental justice agenda, through this personal case study, I draw attention to some of the groundwork that has been done in alternative hip hop spaces and advocate for fruitful directions through which to move forward.

Keywords: Hip hop, environmentalism, animal stories, Black aesthetics, social movements.

Resumen

En esta pieza autobiográfica reflexiono sobre mis veinte años de historia como rapero trabajando en el cruce entre el hip hop y la conciencia medioambiental. Desde el verano del 2000, he grabado y presentado música hip hop con temática medioambiental bajo el alias «Mad Squirrel» («Ardilla Loca»). Esto incluye co-fundar dos bandas—Forest Fires Collective, con sede en San Francisco, y The Acorns de Washington DC—así como lanzar varios proyectos en solitario y formar parte de un puñado de actuaciones. A continuación, explico los orígenes del sesgo medioambiental de la identidad de mi obra: en primer lugar, relatando mis experiencias como un entusiasta fan del hip hop creciendo en un pueblo de montaña de la Nueva Inglaterra (EEUU) rural, y explicando después cómo las narrativas sobre los bosques de Mad Squirrel marcaron un retorno a la tradición de la diáspora negra de las historias de animales que se alinean con mi herencia del África occidental. Continúo describiendo cómo esta identidad y enfoque se convirtieron en el trampolín de un pequeño círculo de artistas de la región de la bahía de San Francisco para que produjeran una serie de lanzamientos anunciados críticamente a comienzo de los 2000. Después de trasladarme a la

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Costa Este de los Estados Unidos, seguí creando hip hop centrado en la naturaleza y, de manera notable, actué en varios actos políticos y de recaudación de fondos organizados en torno al movimiento para poner fin a la minería de remoción de cima en los Apalaches del sur. Bajo estas explicaciones narradas, en este trabajo analizo la supuesta división urbano-rural del hip hop recalcando su duradera presencia en las comunidades rurales. Comparo y contrasto la efectividad de usar letras/temas moralizadores frente a usar letras/temas con un mensaje ambientalista cifrado, y centro la atención en las conexiones infravaloradas entre el ecologismo y el anti-racismo. Mientras reconozco el fracaso del hip hop a la hora de abrazar la justicia medioambiental, a través de este caso práctico personal, llamo la atención hacia parte del trabajo preliminar que se ha realizado en espacios alternativos de hip hop y propongo unas direcciones fructíferas a través de las que ir hacia delante.

Palabras clave: Hip hop, ecologismo, historias de animales, estética negra, movimientos sociales.

Natural environments are under attack. Our enduring commitments to our current lifestyles are the chief culprits. The devastating effects of climate change are already here—most visible through the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, floods, droughts, uncontrollable wildfires, "hundred-year storms," species extintions, and the like. Experts are pivoting from forecasting what is already occurring to predicting the unpredictability of what is yet to come. With this catastrophic future lurking, other social ills persist. Highly visible incidents of anti-Black racism have led to renewed calls for accountability for past and present racial injustices, which join other calls to address the rampant social inequalities expanding throughout the world.

Hip hop, as a grassroots mode of late-modern Black aesthetic expression that reverberates within marginalized communities and often speaks truth to power, has emerged as the voice and musical catalyst for multiple movements—from the local to the global—against a vast range of societal injustices. Yet, perhaps owing to its common association with urban landscapes or to the fact that its contradictory existence includes generous doses of commercialism, misogyny, and take-no-prisoners capitalist accumulation, those who embrace hip hop as a powerful political force have been slow to acknowledge its potential for calling attention to environmental justice concerns. Similarly, activists, artists, and musicians aligned with environmental movements are only gradually coming to embrace hip hop as an effective contemporary channel for their messaging.

As these connections begin to take root, I want to take a moment to reflect on my twenty years working in such spaces as both a recording and performing artists. The public record of these activities includes over a dozen music releases (CDs, vinyl, cassette tapes, and digital releases) and nearly as many performances at benefits, fund-raisers, and rallies in opposition to Mountain Top Removal (MTR) coalmining and aligned environmental causes. While I should be careful not to overstate the impact of these activities, the fact that, for two decades, my music has been appreciated by listeners on both sides of the hip hop/environmental-justice divide foretells the yet-to-be-realized possibilities for hip hop to develop into a leading aesthetic-political force in response to the most urgent crises of our times. Hip hop music and the expressive traditions that surround it should rightfully be embraced as important voices against environmental

destruction; advocating for the communities that will most directly be impacted by it. The racial/social justice issues that hip hop has most effectively spoken against are intricately entwined with global and local concerns about the environment.

In April 2000, when I arrived in San Francisco to begin a year-long fieldwork stay, many people were puzzled by my decision to "study" hip hop there. As an anthropology doctoral student from Syracuse University (located in central New York), wouldn't it make more sense to look at hip hop in New York City? I had various reasons for choosing the San Francisco Bay Area. But the answer I routinely gave, in large part as a way to move beyond the question, was that I would ideally love to study hip hop on a dirt road if I thought it was feasible. In other words, New York hip hop had been well studied. I was interested in alternative sites of hip hop activity, and the more alternative the better. Whereas the "dirt road" reference was strategic hyperbole, in many respects it was both revelatory and prescient.

I had known hip hop on dirt roads, perhaps too many to remember. One was Howes Road, located just outside the village of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts—a one-time logging trail that sometime during the 1980s, amidst a flurry of newly built homes, became a serviceable dirt road. Howes Road marked the midway point between my house and my friend Eli's. Being two of the more avid hip hop fans in our high school, both rhyme-writers, we sometimes met on Howes Road to talk shit and to talk hip hop. When I mentioned dirt roads to my Bay Area inquisitors, I would often think of these get togethers.

Shelburne Falls may seem as distant from a hip hop mecca as one can imagine. But starting in the 1960s, it developed as a hub for artists, intellectuals, and other creatives choosing to reside in the progressive hills of Western Massachusetts. Less than thirty miles from the quintessential college towns of Amherst and Northampton, growing up I regularly tuned in to the UMass Amherst, Amherst College, and even the University of Connecticut radio stations—not to mention smaller stations housed at various New England prep schools in the area. One of the lesser told stories surrounding hip hop's 1980s emergence is how, prior to the arrival of *Yo! MTV Raps* in 1988, the music was largely promoted and sustained through college radio. Whereas Columbia University's "Stretch Armstrong and Bobbito Show" has been recognized as an important institution in the history of New York City hip hop, throughout the 1980s and even into the 1990s, rurally situated universities and colleges played a major role in bringing hip hop to the American hinterland. In 1988, when I arrived as a freshman on the campus of the University of Massachusetts, my knowledge of the latest hip hop music releases was comparable to that of the friends I was making from cities like Boston, Springfield (MA), New Haven (CT), and New York.

Sometime in the early 1990s, looking out from a mountain vista above Shelburne Falls on a July-Fourth Sunday morning, I first conceived of what years later would become my performing name.

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Fig. 1: Illustration by Ahad Pace. Photographic background by Anthony Kwame Harrison.

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It was a relatively random statement, made to a small group of friends: "If I ever release an album, I'll go by the name Mad Squirrel." At the time, I recall that the dance hall rapper Mad Lion had a popular song out. But other than that, there was no particularly notable or insightful reason for saying this; just a silly comment to pass the time as we watched the sun come over Massaemett Mountain. Seven years later, however, after spending several months around Bay Area hip hop artists, my reasons for resurrecting the name were more thought out.

Despite explicitly stating that I was not embarking on my (participant-observation) dissertation fieldwork with aspirations to rap, I found myself continually encouraged to get on stage at open microphone events or to record music in people's bedroom studios. When I eventually made the decision to embrace the opportunity to

perform and record as an aspect of my research,[1] I felt the need to come up with a performance identity.

My decision to rhyme as Mad Squirrel parallels the transition from imitation to mastery common in many movements of music across social, geographic, and formative lines. For instance, many early examples of non-New-York hip hop—whether on the American West Coast, Europe, or Asia—can be characterized as imitative. Similarly, novice practitioners of a craft often imitate prior to putting their personal stamp on their work. Despite my rural upbringing, the raps I wrote in high school took place in urban settings and included fanciful adventures of crime, violence, and machismo. Years later, with new sensibilities—informed in no small part through graduate coursework on folklore and African orature—I sought to create a hip hop identity that aligned more with my personal background. Squirrels, to me, straddle the line between rural and urban. They are part of the animal world but do well in urban spaces. This paralleled my own self-conception as someone raised on a country road who was capable of thriving in urban music scenes.

Yet I was also a child of Africa, born in Kumasi, Ghana. My Black cultural heritage included growing up with Asante animal stories told to me by my mother and published as children's books by my Aunty Peggy. With an advanced understanding of hip hop as an African diasporic tradition—references to emcees as "modern day griots" are common enough—I reasoned that my hip hop roots were as much in the stories of Anansi the trickster spider, as they were in the Black American oral traditions that are more commonly thought of as forbearers to rapping. I thus conceived of Mad Squirrel as primarily narrating animal stories, with the social interactions of animal characters reflecting the behaviors of human actors. In line with the Black diasporic practice of Signifyin'—most formidably theorized through the work of Henry Louis Gates Jr.[2]—in order to take offense at the telling of a story, one must acknowledge that they in some way recognize themselves in it. As I discuss below, this politics of misdirection through coded language and gesture became a key aspect of Mad Squirrel's environmentalist interventions. I was fortunate that the recording artist I had worked most closely with in San Francisco not only supported the idea of a rapping Mad Squirrel, but was eager to join me in constructing a forest-based hip hop Eldorado.

To help support my research, I had landed a job working at Amoeba Music's San Francisco store—at the time, the largest independent record store in the U.S. Feller Quentin was a Virginia transplant and recent Wesleyan University graduate who started at Amoeba the week before me. On my first full workday, he introduced himself as an emcee, explaining both his music-making practices and ambitions. As a white rapper, who was part of an interracial circle of recording artists that embraced the Do-it-Yourself ethos of Bay Area hip hop, Feller embodied everything I was interested in as a researcher. Beyond this, I liked his music. We quickly settled into a regular routine where I would go to his apartment after work and hang out. I soon became familiar with others in his

[1] Details surrounding this precise moment are recounted in the opening pages of my first book, *Hip Hop Underground*.

[2] See Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*.

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musical orbit, including his producer/deejay roommate Eddie Vic, an emcee who lived on the next block named "Prego with Zest," and a handful of other artists and industry friends. Feller and Eddie Vic had a hip hop duo called "The Latter," Prego guest appeared on several Latter songs, and another emcee named "Simile" was beginning to record in their apartment studio.

For several weeks, Feller and Eddie Vic had been encouraging me to record some of my old high school raps with them. Thus, when I first shared my idea about rapping as Mad Squirrel with Feller, he immediately ran with the idea—coming up with a partnering forest character named "Smif Carnivorous." Smif was essentially a woodsman, who lacked social graces and subsisted by hunting animals. Feller also came up with the name "Forest Fires Collective" (FFC) for our project.

From the outset, Feller hoped to bring Eddie Vic, Prego, Simile, and possibly others onboard. In line with the name and the qualities of his Smif Carnivorous character, he also constructed the plotline that ran through many of our early recordings: to satisfy his gluttonous appetite, Smif devised a plan to start a giant forest fire that would effectively roast all the animals for him to consume. As such, he and Mad Squirrel were natural adversaries. Where Mad Squirrel interacted with nature as a member of an anthropomorphized animal community, "Smif C," as a forest dwelling human, represented a villainous destructive force. The opposition generated a healthy creative tension in our lyric writing.

Clearly, we were not keeping it "real" in any empirical sense. Rather we operated in the realm of the fantastic. Between rapping animals and massive forest-fire cook-outs, our creative endeavors had a cartoon-like quality that was the antithesis to a lot of urban reality-based hip hop. Initially, there was a tension in the apartment between our madcap forest-based musical antics and what I characterize as more-conventional hip hop songs. The Latter had notable industry connections and it was not outside the realm of possibility that at some point these could flower into a recording or distribution deal. Thus, where Eddie Vic and even Prego tolerated the FFC—indeed, Prego's efforts mainly involved saturating his braggadocio rhyming with nature metaphors—they were hesitant about having something so random, childlike, and experimental encroach on their developing reputation as serious artists. Retrospectively, I appreciate how this allowed both Mad Squirrel and the FFC project to develop outside of the more conservative pressures to create hip hop in a specific way. It also spawned an inclusive approach to bringing other artists onboard—including Simile (now going by "Sim the Drunken Owl"), an old college friend of theirs who happened to be sleeping on the apartment couch at the time ("Dr. Lester"), and even Feller's middle-aged father who recited zany Marxist poetry over hip hop instrumentals ("B-Bird").

In February 2021, at the Hip Hop Ecologies Workshop that preceded this special issue of *Ecozon@*, a recurring theme surrounded artists' uses of didactic versus more nuanced and coded environmentalist messaging. Drawing from theories on graffiti-writing, I offer a continuum of politics/aesthetics marked by highly legible writing at one extreme and stylized, largely illegible writing at the other. Following this model, the

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former embraces recruitment to a particular cause or message (i.e. someone might stencil "Stop Global Warming"); the latter, in contrast, only speaks to audiences with the requisite knowledge to decipher its symbolic codes. Accordingly, the most effective hip hop for awakening people to environmental concerns should use easily understandable, didactic messaging.

Yet people are drawn to art, music, and hip hop in particular, for the deep visceral pleasures that producing it and consuming it provide.[3] It therefore might be better to imagine hip hop's environmentalist messaging along a continuum of more or less writerly approaches. Drawing from the work of literary theorist Roland Barthes, *writerly texts* beckon readers to take active roles in constructing meaning. Familiar, linear conventions are destabilized, giving way to generative and perpetually unfinished interpretations. Hip hop lyricists, in this formulation, recognize the intelligence of their audiences and craft songs that cultivate multiple, often intuitive and yet-to-be-fully-grasped understandings—with each additional listening, new insights may arise. Accordingly, effective environmentalist hip hop should guide people's thinking toward environmental topics by engendering an experience—involving emotions, tacit understandings, and the like—where discerning listeners are inspired to make unanticipated and perhaps previously unrealized connections pertaining to environmental awareness, sustainability, and justice.

This second, more-writerly model, in my view, accurately reflects both the Forest Fires Collective's and Mad Squirrel's environmentalist aspirations. You are not likely to find an FFC song stating, "Stop Climate Change." However, Smif Carnivorous's tales of overconsumption and ecological destruction have the potential to stimulate thinking about environmental protections, responsible stewardship, and the consequences of humans' efforts to dominate nature.

> Who gives a fuck about your natural habitat community?
> What'd a few trees ever do for me?
> Set a couple fires, that's just to feed my mouth.
> It ain't based in sheer malice, I can't afford to eat out[. …]
> Fuck Nature. All you preservationists I hate your guts.
> I turn your soft muscle to choice cuts.
> To me shrubbery just conceals my gubbery
> I got a chainsaw. Go ahead and hug a tree, and fuck with me.
> (from "Smif's Theme")

Mad Squirrel, on the other hand, typically detailed his imperfect relations with forest neighbors:

> Now the bees and mees was enemies
> Well to be exact, they didn't like my rap
> And beyond that they didn't like the way I acted
> Jumped off the top branch and landed
> On their hive and I's like "Damn It!" and "Shit!"
> Sting-sting, they're after me but luckily
> I have mastery of the tree, lovely
> Can it be? Mad Squirrel racing through the canopy
> And a bee and a bee and a bee

[3] See Robin D. G. Kelley *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*.

> And a swarm, it ain't that warm
> But off the top branch into a lake I made my escape
> The next day, honey in my cup, they said, "what's up?"
> At the local tree stump, sucking on a fermented grape.
> (from "Go Find the Blaze")

While cataloging the thematic range of FFC songs is beyond the scope of this piece, suffice to say that the above lyrics typify the kinds of environmental themes that dominated our releases between 2001 and 2003. During these early years, we had notable success as an up-and-coming Bay Area underground hip hop group. For example, our first album was an "Amoeba Music Hip hop Pick" for 2001 and a later 12-inch record reached Number One on the University of California, Santa Barbara's KCSB "Urban Beatbox Top 30" chart.[4] Longtime Bay Area hip hop aficionado Billy Jam described the group as "In the true West Coast indie tradition," going on to explain that the FFC represented "an assembly of talented emcees and DJ/producers who are dedicated to the art of hip hop."[5]

The question remains, what made our music well received? I agree with Billy Jam that the core members were talented. Yet I also think that our departure from trite hip hop conventions and our palpable playfulness (i.e. the quality of sounding like we were having fun) led many listeners to experience our music as refreshing and intriguing. Beyond this, centering the wilderness, giving animals voices and having a marvelous villain—too preposterous to take literally—tapped into childhood memories of learning about the animal world and the often fantastic (even fictitious) creatures that reside there. Of course, the Smif Carnivorous satire carried undeniable environmentalist undertones. Pondering this, I am left wondering, was the FFC more successful in turning hip hop fans toward more environmental justice concerns or in attracting non hip hop environmentally-oriented people to a form of non-commercial hip hop that they could wrap their arms around? The answer probably lies somewhere in the middle.

Shortly after leaving San Francisco and taking a position at Virginia Tech, I connected with Washington DC based hip hop producer and Candlewax Records founder, Blake Nine. I met Blake during my first summer in San Francisco. He was actually the first visitor to the city that I recall taking out in a hosting roll. With the 2001 American Anthropological Association meetings taking place in DC, I reached out to Blake to see if I could stay with him. Since that first visit, we've been collaborating in making music under the group heading "The Acorns." Through several Acorns' releases (and Mad Squirrel solo efforts), I have continued the theme of forest-based hip hop—although minus Smif C's partnership, the number of animal stories has gradually decreased. Still, living in Southwest Virginia, in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, my references to specific places and experiences in nature have, if anything, become more pronounced.

Relocating to Blacksburg, I immediately befriended a group of local musicians and activists. Though they mostly played folk and old-time musics, they welcomed my nature-based hip hop—in at least one instance describing it as "insightful."

[4] Some of this success is detailed in *Hip Hop Underground*.
[5] See the liner notes to *Independent Sounds: Amoeba Music Compilation Vol. III.*

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Fig. 2: Flyer Design by Ash Devine.

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As this group of twentysomethings became more active in the movement against Mountain Top Removal (MTR) coalmining, they invited me to perform at several fund-raising and awareness-raising events. Thus began a string of performances, most occurring between 2003 and 2008, where I was usually the lone hip hop artist and often simply used a microphone with instrumental tracks played off of a CD-R. At some of the larger events—for example, an all-day rally against Massey Energy in the state capitol, Richmond—I was especially touched by how warmly activist-crowds and other musicians took to the lone guy rapping about nature with a microphone and boom-box.

More than ten years have passed since I last performed at an environmental justice event. For some time, I remained relatively active in releasing music but, entering 2020, I had only released one cassette-single and one "musical essay" (as part of an arts-based research project) since 2015. Though I wasn't consciously aware of it, noting my declining activity, it seems possible that my emceeing career was nearing its end. Then COVID hit.

My summer 2020 experience sheltering-at-home included finding daily sanctuary in the small woodlands park across the street from my apartment and finding weekly re-creation in hikes with activist-environmentalist-musician friends. At the same time, the murder of George Floyd sparked a summer of racial reckoning that affected me profoundly—even if largely in isolation. Early into the summer, one of my Candlewax Records label-mates reached out to me with stories of marching in the streets of Los Angeles and using his emcee skills to speak up and speak out at several rallies. With a near dizzying series of anti-Black racial violence (largely at the hands of law enforcement) dominating the news headlines, I felt compelled to join him. But my medium would be music. In collaboration with Blake Nine, who enthusiastically supplied a bundle of entrancing hip hop instrumentals, in 2020 I composed and recorded the Acorns third full-length album, *Oak Strong*. In the staid space of a summer without leaving Blacksburg, hip hop's lyrical poetry provided me with a means of putting racial justice headlines in conversation with Appalachian trail-ways. The creative process was simultaneously grounding and exhilarating—thus giving meaning to an otherwise unsettling summer. Indeed, I consider *Oak Strong* my best and most environmental-justice-oriented project to date.

The relationship between hip hop and environmentalism has been historically fraught, in part because the Black and Brown people and communities most associated with hip hop in the U.S. have been systematically marginalized and symbolically alienated from both nature and the most prominent movements to preserve it. It doesn't help that hip hop's supposed urban epicenter and its complex connections to capitalism are often regarded as antithetical to environmental sustainability. Yet these antiquated (dis)associations of people, places, and social practices are beginning to erode. Emerging from a history of valuing urbane sophistication ahead of being "back on the farm," there are increasing calls among Black people to recommit to land and nature; and new movements within environmentalism both transcend and challenge notions of its traditionally white face. While all of this is happening, the pretense of hip hop's urban exclusiveness is beginning to be questioned.

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Fig. 3: Illustration by Ahad Pace. Photographic background by Ash Devine.

Black aesthetics, most recently expressed through hip hop, have been remarkably effective in informing people about, recruiting people to, and catalyzing action within social justice causes. The importance of preserving our planet and the places on it where people live is as much social, political, and ethical as it is environmental. The sooner we realize that responsibility for and enjoyment of the environment should be the purview of all people, the sooner we recognize that calls for social change are wedded to ideas about our changing relationship with nature. The burdens of environmental destruction will likely fall most immediately and powerfully on marginalized, largely Black and Brown communities; places where access to clean water, healthy food, and other life resources are lacking and where threats of toxic contamination are abundant. In many of these communities—from West Africa to the U.S. Gulf Coast—hip hop is regularly embraced as a vehicle for speaking to, for, and through the concerns of collective youth. As the case of the Forest Fires Collective illustrates and the example of my most recent project, *Oak*

Strong, affirms, the partnership between hip hop and environmental justice is ripe with possibilities. This music has a vital role to play in our ongoing efforts to save the planet and to save ourselves.

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"Même les tueurs dorment…"

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Mon quartier n'est pas ce que tu crois. Peut-être que tu es déjà venu acheter de la drogue ou tu es déjà passé devant pendant que tu allais à l'école. Je viens d'un quartier qui ressemble à une favela brésilienne mais on n'est pas au Brésil. On est en Martinique. Oui, en Martinique, je t'ai dit. Pas en France. Des quartiers comme le mien, tu n'en trouveras pas deux. Ni ici ni ailleurs. Et quoi ? Ouais, c'est bien ce que j'ai dit. Laisse-moi nous envoyer des fleurs parce que si on ne le fait pas, personne ne le fera pour nous. Mon quartier a un livre à son nom. Un livre que pleins de gens ont lu. J'oublie le nom du gars qui l'a écrit. Tu en connais toi des ghettos qui font les gens avoir des "prix-Concours" ? Mais ça, c'était avant man. On n'appelle plus le quartier Texaco. On l'appelle Little Jamaica. Je vais t'expliquer pourquoi mais avant, laisse-moi te dire qu'on connait l'histoire de notre quartier. Les grands nous ont raconté comment nos grands-mères et nos grands-pères sont sortis des mornes pour venir se coller au flanc de la ville comme ça. Nous, on est nés dans ce quartier. Il ressemble plus à une forêt de tôle qu'à un quartier normal. Les plus grands détestent le nouveau nom qu'on a donné à notre ghetto mais c'est leur problème. Un copain guadeloupéen m'a dit que c'était la même chose pour eux quand ils ont décidé de rebaptiser la Guadeloupe, Gwada. Les anciens ont envoyé de la boue. Ce petit mot leur enlevait quelque chose. Je ne peux pas te dire quoi mais ils trouvent que les jeunes égratignent le pays avec leur "Gwada". Ce qu'ils n'arrivaient pas à comprendre c'est que c'était notre manière à nous de vivre notre pays en même temps que notre époque. Nous étions des enfants du pays mais aussi des enfants de notre époque.

De là où je suis, je peux voir des clients arriver mais je peux aussi voir la mer qui caresse les pieds du quartier en même temps que la baie de Fort-de-France. Tu peux venir d'en haut ou d'en bas si tu es en voiture. A pied, le quartier est un fromage et les hommes sont des souris. Il y a toujours un trou pour entrer ou sortir. Je ne te parle même pas des passages souterrains. Ce que je préfère ce sont les sounds system[1] du vendredi. Ils sont sauvages comme j'aime. Pour venir là, il faut avoir des couilles ou une grosse chatte. C'est soit tu connais et tu flippes un peu en montant ou soit tu ne connais pas et tu restes saisi en bas comme un tèbè[2]. Pour arriver dans la place, il faut monter un long escalier qui ressemble à un gros caïman. Quand tu montes, tu dois faire attention parce qu'il y a des gens assis à gauche comme à droite. Non, pas de gens man! Des Généraux, donc il faut faire très attention. Il n'y a pas de lumière. Je t'ai dit que c'est soit tu connais, soit tu ne connais pas. Les seules lumières, ce sont des gros Marley qui s'allument dans le noir. Tout ce que

[1] Grâce à de grands haut-parleurs, les organisateurs de ces moments peuvent créer un moment où les gens écoutent de la musique à l'extérieur. Les premiers sounds ont eu lieu en Jamaïque durant les années 1950.
[2] Imbécile

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tu vois ce sont des bouts rouges qui s'allument de temps en temps comme des clindindins[3]. Le gars qui gère la place s'appelle Colonel Khadafi et toute le monde sait qu'il faut bien se tenir avec lui. Je ne suis pas une balance donc je ne vais pas te dire ce qu'il fait vraiment. Tout ce que tu dois savoir c'est que chez nous, on l'appelle un Don. Peut-être qu'il a du sang sur les mains mais quand il y a un problème, quand on ne peut pas acheter le matériel scolaire pour les enfants, je sais que sa main reste ouverte. Je travaillais pour lui avant mais j'ai pris mon indépendance.

Je sais ce que les gens pensent de ce que je fais mais j'en ai rien à foutre. Personne ne m'empêchera de gouter au rêve martiniquais. Tu m'entends ? Personne. Ni le béké,[4] ni le nègre, ni le mulâtre, ni l'indien, ni les haïtiens, ni les sainte-luciens, ni les américains, ni les trinidadiens, ni les blanfrance,[5] ni les espagnols. Ni la BAC, ni les gendarmes et ni le procureur de la république. Le premier qui vient me dire quoique ce soit, je l'envoie voir sa maman et tous les politichiens[6] qui mettent leur main dans la caisse sans jamais prendre l'odeur d'une cellule à Ducos. Nous, on connait trop bien l'odeur de cette pute . La baiseuse de rêves, la fabricante de voyous, l'université des esprits vaillants. On sait ce que ça fait d'entendre les coups sur sa porte à 6h du matin. On sait que ça fait d'être menotté pendant que des chiens montent sur ses affaires comme s'ils étaient dans leur niche. Je vous entends déjà. Si on fait le crime, on doit faire la peine aussi. Ouais, ouais. Ça sonne bien jusqu'à ce que la déveine vous tombe dessus et là, tout ce qu'on veut, c'est retrouver l'air et une vie normale peu importe ce qu'il faut faire. Nous, les ti caca chiens du système, on connait le goût des gardes à vue. Marcher sans lacets dans le tribunal de la personne, on connait ça aussi. On n'est pas des stars mais la dame blanche veut nous poser des questions. Alors, on lui donne nos réponses. Si l'avocat est bon, on peut espérer ne pas manger trop de jours à Ducos. Tu vois, ces gens-là nous donnent des coups de prison mais avec leurs amis, ils fument ce qu'on vend. Ne me raconte pas de conneries. Je sais de quoi je parle. Tous. Quand ils font leur soirée, on vient les livrer. Ils prennent tout : herbe, skunk mango, shit et cocaïne. On prend les risques. Ils prennent le plaisir. Après, c'est à notre tour de prendre du plaisir mais à un moment donné, la machine a soif de condamnations. Elle a besoin de chiffres. Si je pouvais, j'aurais monté un syndicat de petits délinquants. Et ? Laisse-moi, je t'ai dit.

Je suis allé à un enterrement cet après-midi. Pendant que la machine à condamner tourne, au pays et au quartier, la machine à tuer n'est pas enrayée. Elle continue son travail et crois-moi, mes gens et moi, on ne veut pas lui donner à manger. Les petits bouts de bois de Dieu. C'est comme ça que Madame Sicot nous appelait. Non, personne ne la connait sous ce nom. On l'appelait "Man Sicot". Elle était tellement "G" cette femme. Elle nous a raconté comment elle est arrivée au quartier. Elle est sorti des entrailles de Case-Pilote et a atterri dans une petite pièce en tôles chez son cousin. Elle voyait la misère mais pour elle, c'était aussi une façon de recommencer ailleurs, de commencer sa vie de femme libre. Quand elle est arrivée, Little Jamaica ne ressemblait à rien je te dis. Quand son cousin

[3] Des lucioles
[4] Descendants des européens arrivés aux Antilles.
[5] Les blancs venus de France.
[6] Néologisme : politiciens et chiens.

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est parti vivre à Morne Calebasse, elle a occupé son terrain. Les gens qui étaient dans le quartier ressemblaient des zombies. Non, je ne te parle pas des jumpy[7] qui marchent en regardant par terre et qui fument du crack comme des bébés boivent du lait. Je te parle de gens qui cherchaient à faire leur vie prendre un bon balan.[8] Les déplacés qu'on les appelait. Elle nous a raconté qu'ils étaient environ une centaine et ils cherchaient un espace où vivre comme des juifs qui partaient en Israël. Je n'ai même pas dit devenir riche, mener la belle vie ou cultiver un jardin. Non, ces gens voulaient juste vivre, respirer dans un endroit qui ne crachait pas à leur figure tous les jours. Mais l'Etat n'entendait rien. Pour lui, Man Sicot et les autres c'étaient des voyous, des gens comme nous. Elle a appelé ça autrement mais moi c'est ce que je comprends. Voilà ! Ils étaient des résidents illégaux. Illégaux ? Mais nous aussi, on est dans l'illégal et l'état veut nous enfermer, nous et notre envie de réussir. Personne ne voulait des déplacés à Little Jamaica. Ils arrivaient comme des parasites. On disait qu'ils allaient dégrader le quartier parce que c'était des "moun vini"[9]. On disait qu'ils allaient prendre le pain des foyalais,[10] ces gens des mornes qui n'avaient aucune comportation.[11] Ils marchaient pieds nus dans la ville. Ils parlaient un gros créole bien fort et bien gras. Tu vois ce que je te dis. C'était des gens comme nous, des gens de la famille des raggas. Les raggas, ce sont les va nu pieds, les sans-rien man. Hé bien voilà, nous sommes de la même famille ! Man Sicot c'est notre grand-mère. Le quartier est sorti de son ventre de femme militante. Elle s'est mise debout comme moi devant la misère et devant tous ceux qui voulaient l'empêcher de s'en sortir. Sans se poser trop de questions, Man Sicot a commencé à défendre les gens des mornes qui avaient débarqué dans la ville. Elle nous a raconté qu'elle avait vu des scènes terribles. Comme ce couple qui vivait avec ses six enfants dans deux petites pièces. Deux des enfants dormaient sur une table. Le couple se partageait un petit lit avec le plus jeune et les autres dormaient entassés par terre. Le coeur de Man Sicot se fendait en deux en voyant ça. Voir la misère de ses gens lui donnait une vibration particulière. Des flammes arrivaient dans ses yeux quand elle racontait cette période de sa vie. J'imagine que l'état devait voir les mêmes flammes dans ses yeux à l'époque. Avec ses camarades, elle trouvait la force de construire des petites cases pour ces gens mais elles étaient détruites le jour d'après par les babylones.[12] Comme si les forces du désordre n'avaient rien de plus important à faire. Eux, ils se rinçaient les fesses dans des douches bien carrelées à Didier et nos vieilles petites crasses de maison, ils envoyaient leurs chiens en laisse les casser. Si j'étais là, j'aurais lâché du plomb dans les fesses de ces enfoirés. Tu sais ce que Man Sicot faisait avec ses gens ? Ils revenaient la nuit pour replacer les tôles et les bouts de bois. Ils étaient "G", plus malins que la police, je te dis ! Ils faisaient ça avec des marteaux entourés de chiffons pour ne pas attirer leur attention. Ay chèché'y an diw ! Aujourd'hui, si tu vois des maisons en dur dans le quartier, c'est grâce à Man Sicot. La maison de ma grand-mère est en dur. Elle a bien connu Man Sicot d'ailleurs. J'ai de la peine parce que Man Sicot a voyagé au pays des gens

[7] Des personnes sans domicile fixe et addicts aux substances.
[8] Elan.
[9] Des personnes venues d'ailleurs.
[10] Des habitants de Fort-de-France, la capitale de la Martinique.
[11] Créolisme pour le mot comportement.
[12] Les gendarmes français.

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sans chapeau cet après-midi. On était tous à son enterrement. Tout le monde, je t'ai dit. Les bandits, les manmans, les papas, les travailleurs, les retraités, les politiques, les cuisinières, les militants, les jeunes, les vieux, les chômeurs. Tout le monde. Elle était la personne de tout le monde. Le quartier est calme mais on sent la tristesse partout. Dans les bateaux des pêcheurs qui sont à terre. Sous l'abri bus où mes gars trainent la journée. Dans les escaliers sans fin. Dans les maisons sur le morne qui se regardent toute la journée sans savoir quoi se dire. Man Sicot est partie. La maman de Little Jamaica est morte. Je crois que je suis là pour une raison mon frère. Tu ne me croiras pas mais c'est ce qui s'est passé. Je n'invente rien. A l'enterrement de Man Sicot, je devais arrêter de respirer. J'ai su le lendemain qu'il y avait eu un contrat sur ma tête. 6000 euros. Voilà ce que la vie vaut aujourd'hui dans notre monde. Seulement, voilà, je suis allé à l'enterrement et je suis revenu sur mes deux pieds. A croire que même les dieux pouvaient avoir tort certains jours. Man Sicot était partie mais moi, je devais continuer à vivre. Lorsqu'on est venu me prévenir, mes jambes ont eu une faiblesse. En sortant de sa nuit blanche, le type avait pris un café. Un café tellement noir qu'il voyait son reflet dedans. Heureusement pour moi, le corps fatigué n'obéit pas toujours bien à la caféine. Peut-être qu'il s'était laissé bercer par la voix du prêtre ou peut-être qu'il n'en avait rien à faire des témoignages que les gens donnaient sur Man Sicot pendant l'enterrement. Moi, ça m'avait secoué. Pendant que mes yeux s'ouvraient sur la racine de nos vies, le colombien qui devait faire le job s'était tout simplement endormi…

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Suppose a World

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Suppose the world is a blank page;
suppose no white, no black nor rage.

Suppose the arsenal's been depleted;
suppose no bombs, no guns, nor litter.

Suppose no cargos with trunk trees in loads.
suppose no heat trapped under paved roads;

Suppose no fenestration shatters any birds' bones;
suppose no exchange of oil for the breath of our lungs.

Suppose no dire waves of water, of sickness or brutality;
suppose no clamor for greenness to abase this anomality.

Suppose the sky was blue and that, for once, *really* meant peace;
suppose such blueish peace could be granted to all countries amidst.

Suppose no shifting clouds make a forest the match of the sun's light-er;
suppose no grudges, no political or religious inclinations made us mighty-er

Suppose these $,€,£ were gibberish out of a child's creative mind;
suppose adults know better than to make of those symbols something sublime.

Suppose there were no maps, nor routes, nor paths; nor north, south, west, nor east;
suppose the unity of unoriented and unsegmented, not machine-driven beasts. Now,

Suppose the world is a green page with a round, translucent blue shaded sky;
a world with withered spots on its brown and fertile skin,
a world with sporadic clusters that turn blazing orange and fulgent, burning-sunset red;
a world with a face that's freckled with mostly four-legged inhabitants and smarter bipedals
a world with ends and where it ends, ocean and running pellucid water abound for marine life to outlive us;
a world with independence who would prefer to shower in snow or rain or hail

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a world that likes dewing its plants at the dawn of every day, undisturbed.

Suppose you needn't have to suppose, and one day,
This very world dies, would you dare blaming it?

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Mountains, History, and Nature: A View Back from the Anthropocene Towards Historical Mountaineering Literature

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Caroline Schaumann. *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 365 pp.

Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, editors. *Mountains and the German Mind: Translations from Gessner to Messner* (Rochester: Camden House, 2020), 361 pp.

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Mountains, mountaineering, and mountaineers have so far not been researched extensively in ecocritical scholarhip, so the publication of two recent (2020) ecocritically oriented books, Caroline Schaumann's monograph *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* and the anthology *Mountains and the German Mind: Translations from Gessner to Messner* edited by Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann is a valuable addition to the hopefully growing body of research on mountains and nature, especially from a historical perspective, and compliments Ireton and Schauman's earlier edited volume on the topic, the 2012 *Heights of Reflection*. Although the titles do not explicitly call forth immediate associations with ecocriticism, the two recent books, Schaumann's monograph especially, repeatedly discuss not only environmental issues in general but contemporary ecocritical questions such as new materialisms, gender, race, and class in relation to outdoor pursuits, and the significance of the term Anthropocene to current understandings of the climate crisis. Indeed, Schaumann convincingly argues that in the Anthropocene, "the pursuit of science or mountaineering without an ecocritical awareness seems ignorant and inadequate" (148). Importantly, Schaumann considers it important in the face of catastrophic climate change to also remember and celebrate things that bring humans joy, arguing that "we need reminders of mountain pleasures, wonder and passion more than ever" (23) both to act and live ecologically but also to enjoy doing so.

Addressed at Anglophone audiences, both books discuss mountaineering history and nature from a Western viewpoint. Schaumann's *Peak Pursuits* focuses on European and Anglo-American experiences in the mountains, and Ireton and Schaumann's edited anthology *Mountains and the German Mind* makes thirteen different German texts

available for the first time for English readers. Aside from the other merits of the work carried out by Ireton and Schaumann, this is also a valuable cultural act and also allows the translators of the texts, the oldest of which stem from the sixteenth century, to extensively comment on them and motivate to the readers their continued and contemporary importance.

While it is impossible to outline any joint main argument in two books of somewhat different premises, there are broad similarities in what is foregrounded in the books. For example, after a thorough, historically informed discussion on Western mountaineering practices in *Peak Pursuits*, Schaumann ends by forcefully arguing for the importance of "celebrating the human creativity" that enables "entanglement" with mountains as a way to combat "carbon emissions rising from industry, transportation, and deforestation" (298). Similarly, in *Mountains and the German Mind* Ireton and Schaumann stress the importance of reflecting on the "double bind" of mountain enjoyment and consumption and consequently, how mountaineering "can continue to exist as we move forward in the age of the Anthropocene" (16).

Before discussing the two books individually, it may be interesting to note some further common threads, beyond environmental issues, between them. To start, both books frequently discuss issues of race, class, and gender in relation to how mountaineering literature portrays mountaineers' efforts and enjoyment in the mountains, and which privileges enable them to do so. For example, the topic of race is foregrounded in both books: In *Peak Pursuits* Schaumann frequently discusses colonialist and racist discourses surrounding European mountaineering adventure and discovery and the frequent backgrounding and subjugation of Indigeneous Peoples, and in *Mountains and the German Mind* questions of race, racism, and Germany's Nazi history are explicit especially when the book discusses the writing of the likes of Eduard Pichl and Leni Riefenstahl. Further, class and other issues related to the often implicit elitism of mountaineering are frequently brought up in both books, especially when discussing those often nameless individuals of the working classes who enabled the wealthy and aristocratic to pursue their ambitions in the mountains but also when describing the rise of the working and middle class mountaineer in the nineteenth century.

As for the importance of gender, and often especially masculinity, both books frequently discuss the implications of the protagonists' gender on their actions, and Schaumann in *Peak Pursuits* also discusses mountaineering as a gendered practice. It may not have been the intention of the authors and editors, but it is in fact even possible to read the two books as a sort of "rogues' gallery," or a "medical record," of toxic masculinity (Kupers) throughout the ages: Many, if not most, of the men in the books embody an array of vices, from outright racism and misogyny through to extreme egotism, quarrelling, and generally acting irresponsibly, for example towards their partners and family. Concerning this, there are at least two, potentially competing readings that immediately seem to suggest themselves for further analysis: On the one hand, many of the men in the books display symptoms of toxic masculinity, but just as often they are also individuals who are original, adventurous, courageous, generous, and who have contributed to both science and culture. Possibly problematically, but perhaps also fruitfully, both readings can be

correct in some contexts. Regarding the role of women in the books, it is close to nonexistent in *Peak Pursuits*, apart from as foils for the men's actions, and of the thirteen authors translated and analyzed in *Mountains and the German Mind*, only two are women. This is to a degree understandable for books with historical perspectives but also unfortunate, as women's mountaineering history has traditionally been undermined and underresearched (Ives). The two women in *Mountains and the German Mind* do, however, offer interesting glimpses into female perspectives into mountaineering history.

To conclude, aside from race, class, gender, and the environment, both books discuss Western mountaineering history, referring to terminology by John Ruskin and Marjorie Hope Nicholson, as a chronological evolution through "mountain gloom" to "mountain glory" (Ireton and Schaumann 2), from the Sublime through science to sport, and eventually, especially in *Mountains and the German Mind*, from art to philosophy. So, the overall scope of the two books is vast but can usefully be thought of in terms of these recurring themes, which will next be discussed further, starting with *Peak Pursuits*.

Caroline Schaumann's *Peak Pursuits* commences with an introduction where Schaumann frames the book's scope and makes an important contribution by placing mountain studies as part of the current discussions around ecocriticism, such as new materialisms and the relations between gender, class, and the environment. Schaumann shows how new, ecocritically aware readings of old mountaineering texts can challenge established "theoretical constructs" and interpretations of framing mountains as "sublime" and instead excavate for example early mountaineers' "material encounters with wind, cold, and thunder" and indeed their "intimate encounter[s] with rock and ice" that our current "post-sublime environment" may use to better understand "our inherent physical dependency on this earth" (3, 5). Importantly, in contrast to (mostly male) mountaineers' intimate connections with nature, Schaumann also establishes that the hegemonic masculinities (Connell) that they embody also enable "men's dominant position" and contribute to the "drive to conquer nature" (22).

Following the introduction, the book is divided into three parts. Part I, "From Europe to the Americas: Alexander von Humboldt," takes the reader on a journey around the world, following naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt's (1769–1859) scientifically motivated mountain excursions, especially in the Andes of South America. Here Schaumann also discusses Humboldt's "escape" from "heterosexual gender roles" (30) and subsequent "queer studies" (52) discussions around his sexuality. The first part also succeeds in uncovering motivations other than purely scientific research behind Humboldt's mountaineering, and Schaumann argues that Humboldt's "quest … teaches us that mountaineering, rather than being an isolated leisure activity, is always embedded in a cultural and historical context" (72). Unfortunately, although Schaumann recognizes that "[i]nhabitants of the Andean regions had long climbed and dwelled in its mountains", Part I in small part fails to challenge Eurocentric conquest narratives by perpetuating the myth, eagerly publicized by Humboldt himself, that he set altitude records on his attempts to climb high mountains in the Andes. However, biomedical (see e.g. Ceruti) and cultural-archeological (see e.g. Bernbaum) research has definitively established that peaks up to 6700 meters high "across five continents, were ascended in prehistoric times" (Echevarría

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190) and Humboldt thus did not climb "higher than any human on this earth has climbed before" (Humboldt qtd. in Schaumann 48) when he climbed to around 5400 meters on the mountain Antisana in 1802. Luckily, much interesting research on indigenous peoples' mountain activities is becoming increasingly accessible, and voices other than white men's can hopefully be included in future mountain narratives and research.

In Part II, "Alpine Adventures," the book's focus shifts to the European Alps and the transformation of mountaineering from scientific research into tourism and sport. The men under discussion in this section, in their respective chapters, are scientist Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799), physicist James David Forbes (1809–1868) and racist biologist Louis Agassiz (1807–1873), author Albert Smith (1816–1860) and judge Alfred Wills (1828–1912, physicist John Tyndall (1820–1893) and explorer Edward Whymper (1740–1799, and author (and father of Virginia Woolf) Leslie Stephen (1832–1904). Similarly to, for example, Robert Macfarlane's *Mountains of the Mind*, Part II discusses the birth of mountaineering largely from a British perspective and describes the Alps as a place first for scientific discovery and later, upper class sport that carries high masculine distinction, and finally, a place where even working class men can enact their "competitive masculinities" (175). Schaumann defines as the focus of the chapter on Forbes and Agassiz "(1) the tension between scientific enterprise and the thrill of climbing, (2) the overwhelming emotional and physical experience [of climbing] that defies spoken or written expression, and (3) the intimacy between males and the desire to escape societal conventions" (120) but these themes reoccur throughout Part II and indeed the entire book, and provide interesting avenues for further research. Also, the chapter on Leslie Stephen is especially pertinent for scholars interested in new materialisms and mountains, as Schaumann convincingly analyzes Stephens's mountaineering in terms proposed by Karen Barad as "intra-action" (225) between human and mountain.

Part III, "Exploring the American West," then discusses how European mountain practices were imported by white settlers to North America after its conquest. Here, Schaumann discusses how privileged men of European ancestry pursue their personal feelings of awe, intimacy, conquest, and connection in the mountains from where the indigenous peoples have been largely displaced, and how "North American identity [is] predicated" (224) on this erasure. Part III does this discussion through focusing on two men, geologist Clarence King (1842–1901) and environmental philosopher and author John Muir (1838–1914). Part III continues discussing questions of gender, race and class and does so by for example both discussing King's abolitionism and "conceited gender identity" (245) and revered environmentalist Muir's myopia towards the suffering of the "Yosemite Miwok, during a time of their extermination" (263). Part III also briefly touches upon the practice of white settlers (re)naming peaks and thus contributing to the erasure of the indigenous peoples' history. As a direction for future research, more explicitly focusing on this could be useful to highlight how important an act naming can be, and how ecocriticism could contribute to discussions around indigenous peoples, places, names, and their connection to current outdoor leisure practices in appropriated lands.

Schaumann concludes the book by providing an "Epilogue" where she discusses her personal history as climber, mountaineer, and scholar. This last section is at times

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poignant when it discusses how "we [climbers and outdoor enthusiasts in general] are destroying the very thing we love" (190), and provides a valuable and courageous personal viewpoint into the intersection between climbing, scholarship, and the current climate catastrophe. Throughout *Peak Pursuits*, Schaumann's prose is lucid and enjoyable, and the book is likely to reach general audiences well beyond specialized ecocritics or mountaineering historians. Overall, the main arguments of the book are convincing; mountains have provided humans with scientific knowledge, joy of discovery, and pleasure. Now is the time to start "securing their protection, acknowledging their resistance, and celebrating the human creativity that comes with such entanglement" (198).

In *Mountains and the German Mind*, Schaumann "ropes up" with Sean Ireton as editors of an anthology that ambitiously promises to bring together mountains and the German mind. "German" is here understood to refer to the larger German-speaking *Mitteleuropa*, not exclusivley the contemporary German state. The book is largely successful in its aim, at least concerning the minds of those German-speakers with the will and means to write about their mountain experiences, and bringing together such varied German-language texts from the Early Modern era to the (late/post) Modern era to English readers, is worthwhile in itself. In addition to its Introduction, the book includes thirteen chapters that cover a swath of time between 1541 (Gessner) and 2009 (Messner). The original German texts and excerpts have been mostly translated by subject matter experts who also provide extensive commentary essays to accompany the original texts.

In the introduction, Ireton and Schaumann establish two important positions. First, they discuss the "intellectual-historical level" of the "periodization of human-mountain engagement" and dismantle the common misconception that early European mountain encounters were purely characterized by "dread" whereas contemporary encounters would be purely characterized by "worship" (2). Instead, they and the chapters in the book offer more nuanced readings and, like Schaumann in her monograph, propose alternatives to the concept of the mountain sublime. Second, Ireton and Schaumann establish that "the problem with the sublime paradigm of awe and fear is that it exalts an experience that can only be savored by a privileged few" (6). Further, they discuss how hierarchical thought models that see mountains and nature as always far off from human residence and activity can ultimately be detrimental, by accepting degradation of the so-called 'ordinary'" (6).

The thirteen chapters in *Mountains and the German Mind* introduce the following authors and texts (translator-experts mostly in parentheses): First, a 1541 text from Conrad Gessner (Dan Hooley) on the admiration of mountains, including a deeply elitist yet highly descriptive and amusingly broad-sweeping characterization of non-mountain-goers as being "of sluggish disposition to whom marvel is dead" (6). The book has a further three texts from the 18th century: First, is Johann Jakob Scheuzer's (Jennifer Jenkins and Christoph Weber) 1716 text on the history of Swiss mountains and how mountains can benefit both human and nonhuman life. Second, Sophie von La Roche's (Martina Kopf) 1787 diary of traveling in the Swiss Alps shows her "as a dual pioneer in both women's mountaineering and women's mountaineering literature" (77). La Roche's experiences

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were especially interesting as she both took part in "the women's emancipation movement" and had "encounters with people from different classes" (78, 79) when ascending Swiss mountains. Third, famed philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's (Sean Franzel) 1796 diary, again depicting travels in the Swiss Alps, shows Hegel's reluctance to "embrace proto-Romantic accounts of the mountain sublime" (99). Instead, the somewhat dour Hegel claims mountain glaciers to be "neither majestic nor lovely" (107) but instead embarks on an interesting analysis of the relationship between the act of seeing and the image itself.

The book contains two chapters from the nineteenth century: First, Schaumann discusses further the attempts by Alexander von Humboldt to ascend South American mountains and his 1802 travel diary description of the attempts, and Ireton introduces excerpts from Hermann von Barth's 1874 accounts of his extensive, militaristically described climbing endeavors. Ireton characterizes von Barth as a "bioregional climber" (147) because of his attachment to climbing almost exclusively in his native Northern Limestone Alps and further describes him as a *Gipfelsstürmer*, that is, "someone who climbed for climbing's sake" (149). Whereas von Humboldt as discussed by Schaumann originally portrayed his mountain exploits as purely scientific endeavors yet seemed to increasingly start reflecting on the joys of mountaineering, von Barth represents a decidedly more contemporary figure who no longer feels the need to couch his desire to simply climb, in scientific goals.

The bulk of the book's chapters are formed by texts from the twentieth century, and as such they provide an interesting chronologial continuation to Schaumann's monograph and represent texts from a significant era of German history. First, Georg Simmel (Jens Klenner) discusses alpine aesthetics and social class in his 1911 text. Several of the following chapters then discuss mountains and the German mind with the significant backdrop of the looming Second World War, the Holocaust, and the thinking that brought Germany to them. Eduard Pichl's (Wilfried Wilms) 1914 and 1923 texts discuss the notion of "German Purity" (210) and the Nazis' (including Pichl) attempts to exclude Jews from German alpine clubs, and Wilms's introduction to the texts critically discusses the history of these attempts.

The inclusion of excerpts from Leni Riefenstahl's (Seth Peabody) 1933 memoir *Struggle in Snow and Ice* (*Kampf in Schnee und Eis*) marks the first of three essays on *Bergfilme*, that is, mountain films, and specifically how they may have contributed to Nazi ideas about race, heroism, and masculinity. Riefenstahl always downplayed her association with Nazism, and Peabody shows in his introductory essay how complicated the links between "Alpinism and fascism" (219) were in pre-war Germany. As Riefenstahl is the only other woman in the two books, it may also be interesting to note how differently she relates (and twentieth century society allows her) to the mountains compared to her 18th century predecessor Sophie von La Roche: Riefenstahl is not carried up mountains by working class men but in enthusiastic prose describes her often impressive and genuinely dangerous adventures in the mountains. She also takes on an active role as director of *Bergfilme*. A further interesting addition to *Bergfilme* authors is Arnold Fanck (Kamaal Haque) whose work played an important part in the popularization

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of skiing and also of disinguishing mountains as places for academically trained, upper middle-class" people (252). The chapter on director Hans Ertl (Harald Höbusch) provides an additional perspective on *Bergfilme* in the 1930s.

The final two chapters of the book discuss more contemporary viewpoints on mountains. The chapter on Max Pentner (Paul Bucholz) may be of interest to ecocritics involved with new materialisms as it discusses the "entanglement" (310) between humans and mountains. The concluding chapter on famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner (Gundolf Graml) is an excellent conclusion to the book and provides provocative viewpoints on elitism, class, material encounters, risk, the effect of climate change on mountain routes, and other environmental issues.

In conclusion, both books succeed in providing the reader valuable new insight into the natural and cultural history of mountains. For ecocritics especially, they also offer contemporary scholarly viewpoints into how the climate crisis affects mountains and mountain cultures in the Anthropocene. Further, Schaumann especially discusses how material human-mountain entanglements can be approached by ecocritical resarch. Otherwise, there is in general very little that could be said to be missing from either book; although for example women's role is minimal, this is largely understandable seeing the historical context here, and both books are in this respect congruent with other books and articles in the field, so this is less a shortcoming and more an opportunity for interested scholars to proceed along other, less traveled routes. Other potential avenues of research that may be inspired by these books perhaps include the role of mountains in cultures beyond Germany and Europe, Indigenous Peoples' and nonwhite mountaineers' narratives, and even more explicitly ecocritical studies on mountains and nature.

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Carmen Concilio and Daniela Fargione, eds., *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (London: Lexington Books, 2021), 298 pp.

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The experience of the pandemic is making me redefine many of the terms of my daily life, like that of "domestic space." I used to think of my house as a place where, thanks to its privacy, I would feel safe, at ease. When the first lockdowns paused my social life and forced me to spend more time indoors, my relationship with this space changed. I started to go more and more often for long walks in the park and soon I became familiar with its trees and plants. The intimacy of this growing relationship, the awareness that we were living through the same crises, helped me find the peace and focus I could not find in my apartment anymore. When I think of domestic space now, it is not the concept of privacy that comes to mind but that of relationality, as *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (2021) has made me realize. Edited by Carmen Concilio and Daniela Fargione, the volume originates from a conference held at the University of Turin, Italy, in May 2019, and can be read as the development of the editors' work on the cultures of the Anthropocene and their previous *Antroposcenari. Storie, paesaggi, ecologie* (2018). The eighteen essays included in the new collection focus on the millenary experience of mutuality and co-evolution that binds together human beings and the vegetal world, and the ways in which it has been represented in world literatures and the arts. In their introduction, Concilio and Fargione suggest rethinking the common ground between human beings and trees through Édouard Glissant's definition of identity as constructed in relation with the Other, and Rob Nixon's "slow violence" (3), that points to the long-term effects of anthropogenic change. Working in and on the Anthropocene, this collection attempts an exercise in a "wider conception of world literature," a "new biodiversity of both ecosystems and cultures" (3) to resist the "plant blindness" (2) that inhibits humans to perceive the vegetal world while transforming trees into inanimate objects, into resources to fuel world capitalism and its systemic exploitation.

The first part of the book, titled "Human-Tree Kinship," focuses on various instances of this relationship, from ancient myths to contemporary literary experiences. In her essay, Carmen Concilio works on the metamorphosis of human beings into trees to renew the connection between literature and psychoanalysis. On a similar note, Shannon Lambert shows how recent literary narratives, like Deborah Levy's *Swimming Home* or

Kang Han's *The Vegetarian*, "turn to vegetal forms to engage with experiences of grief that are depicted as multi-generational and dispersed" (52), developing the idea that "grief both creates and coordinates collectives" (55). The effort to conceptualize alternative, non-anthropocentric collectivities is also at the heart of Emanuela Borgnino's and Gaia Cottino's anthropological contribution, which invites rethinking natureculturescapes in more-than-human terms through the examples of Pacific societies, and Igor Piumetti's study of the influence trees have on national and individual identities in Soviet culture. Later in the collection, Bahar Gürsel returns to a similar idea through Flora J. Cook and her tree-inspired practice of education. By identifying themselves with trees, the author argues, children can "experience the benefits and advantages of communal life" (158).

The second part of the volume, "Spiritual Trees," allows for an exploration of some of the religious and philosophical roots of the relationship between humans and trees. From Bernard Łukasz Sawicki's analysis of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, a fifth century collection of anecdotes that uses trees to symbolize "the elevation from a worldly reality to a spiritual dimension in life" (93), the discussion reaches Alberto Baracco's Buber-inspired ecophilosophy and his focus on contemporary Italian cinema. Stefano Maria Casella addresses the question of Christian mysticism through the image of the ash tree in Ezra Pound, while Irene De Angelis argues that in Seamus Heaney's poetry woods become "an interstitial space where paganism and Christianity coexist" (114). Turning to the history of New Zealand, and to Māori culture in particular, Paola Della Valle brings together various narratives that map out a violent cultural transition, from the sacredness of trees to their transformation into a profitable commodity.

A comparable interest in the uneven effects of modernization emerges from Patricia Vieira's work on the Amazonian "novels of the jungle" in the third part of the volume, titled "Trees in/and Literatures." These "extractive fictions," the author writes, "have broken new ground in their portrayal of an active, sentient forest that . . . is often the main character in the texts" (164). In his article on Romanian poet George Bacovia, Roberto Merlo directs this critique of modernity to its "most distinctive anthropic construct" (175): the city. In the last contribution of this section, Giulia Baselica studies the exoticizing perspective that Russian author Nikolaj Gumilëv adopts in his poems, through the recurring presence of the palm tree.

The volume's theoretical reflections all converge into its fourth part, "Trees in the Arts," where three artists share their personal experience in the field. Italian poet Tiziano Fratus talks about his encounter with American redwoods and his progressive transformation into *Homo Radix* through poetry, that is "a man constantly seeking roots . . . who moves around to get connected with nature" (205). Finnish performative artist Annette Arlander explains her concern with the individuality of each tree, seen as a "first step toward decolonizing our relationship with 'nature'" (212). Marlene Creates, an environmental artist and poet based in Canada, describes her practice of writing site-specific poetry that is performed in the same places that inspired it, together with the challenges to transform it into a digital archive accessible from anywhere in the world.

The last section, "Trees and Time," explores the differences between human and arboreal timescales. On the one hand, Eva-Sabine Zehelein reflects on the history of family

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trees and their significance in the construction of American identities. On the other, Daniela Fargione offers an in-depth analysis of Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, which becomes an analysis of anthropocentric technological development and the recording of collective memory. In her words, this novel is "a colossal photo-book . . . aiming at storing images of a world that will be visualized in the post-Anthropocene, an epoch that will not contemplate human presence, a world without us" (248).

Trees in Literatures and the Arts is an engaged testimony to the physical, intellectual, and spiritual relationship that has connected human beings to trees for thousands of years. The articles effectively juxtapose diverse traces of this long discourse, from ancient myths to more contemporary artistic productions, from indigenous traditions to ignored voices of Western literatures. Thanks to the variety of contributions and their interdisciplinary vocation, the collection moves between different perspectives and scales, by focusing at the same time on local and global experiences; on artistic praxis and the broader development of theoretical frameworks; on the analysis of trees as influential metaphorical elements and their reality as historical beings endangered by anthropogenic change. At times, the broad scope of the volume risks complicating the full integration of some of its chapters and the full development of certain theoretical and thematic threads. However, *Trees in Literatures and the Arts* certainly succeeds in asserting the urgency of comparative approaches that transcend national boundaries together with critical perspectives that rethink the relationship between human beings and the rest of the natural world.

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Bénédicte Meillon, ed. *Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanting the Earth* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021), 354pp.

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Uno de los aspectos más destacados del cambio al siglo XXI ha sido el surgimiento del discurso del "reencantamiento" como una contraposición al desencantamiento weberiano, el cual se define por su intento de racionalizar y desacralizar las sociedades occidentales modernas. No obstante, el reencantamiento ha incitado a una suerte de escepticismo en torno al riesgo de volver a un pasado preindustrial. *Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanting the Earth* (2021) participa en este debate articulando la voz de las humanidades ambientales. El volumen, editado por la ecocrítica francesa Bénédicte Meillon, es una selección de las comunicaciones presentadas en *The International Conference on Ecopoetics* de 2016, evento celebrado en la Universidad Perpignan Via Domitia, Francia. Dividido en 5 partes, el libro demuestra que la cuestión sobre el encantamiento no reside en el prefijo "re-," sino en una concepción antropocéntrica del encantamiento.

La primera parte, y marco teórico del compendio, "Theorizing Ecopoestics of (Re)enchantment," debate sobre el significado del reencantamiento y la función de la ecopoética en relación con dicho concepto. Según Charles Holdefer y Françoise Besson, el reencantamiento no es una vuelta a la época premoderna ni una posición anticientífica. Este es, más bien, una forma de restablecer las relaciones humanas con la naturaleza y funciona como una pedagogía para enseñar a la humanidad a tomar en cuenta la presencia y voz de lo natural, cultivando, así, el sentido de cuidado y responsabilidad hacia ella a través de las palabras. Yves-Charles Grandjeat, Randall Roorda e Isabel María Fernández Alves coinciden en ver la poesía, los textos y las palabras como el lugar para reencantar el mundo. Esta posición común apunta a una ecopoética, que, según Kate Rigby, se ocupa de ayudar a mantener los procesos creativos de todas las vidas ("Ecopoetics" 79).

La segunda sección, "Dwellings of Enchantment in Literatures of Place, Old and New," presenta un nuevo acercamiento a la escritura de la naturaleza. Joshua Mabie señala que, para posibilitar una revitalización de la escritura de la naturaleza estadounidense, se ha de considerar la larga historia medioambiental del continente americano, y en concreto, la historia codificada en las culturas indígenas. Tom Lynch exige cautela sobre "nativizarse en un lugar" ("becoming native to a place") por parte de los pobladores euroamericanos, pues se corre el riesgo de erradicar la presencia indígena (121). Según Lynch, el género de la ecoautobiografía (*eco-memoir*), al cultivar un sentido

de pertenencia arraigado a nivel local, presenta esta lógica de eliminación inherente al colonialismo de asentamiento estadounidense. No obstante, Lynch apunta que Jerry Wilson, al abordar en sus obras las luchas de las comunidades nativo-americanas por la tierra, desaprende esta tendencia colonialista. Por último, Wendy Harding sugiere la creación de una estética pluriversal y atenta a la compleja historia americana en plena era del Antropoceno. Presentando esta tradición literaria anglófona de una forma renovada, los tres colaboradores destacan la cotidianidad y la reciprocidad del reencantamiento.

En la tercera parte, "Of Animal Elusiveness, Death, and Wonder: Zoopoetics and the Quest for Common Ground," se hace una aproximación a la literatura como lugar "desencantado" por las relaciones de oposición entre animales humanos y no humanos. Anne Simon critica que las ficciones sobre mataderos durante los siglos XIX y XX atestiguan el sufrimiento animal presentando escenarios violentos y sangrientos. Eso, según Simon, pese a su función testimonial, no es suficiente para cultivar la simpatía hacia la vida. Seguidamente, Frédérique Spill analiza la figura del periquito en algunas obras de Ron Rush. Los colores brillantes del periquito contrastan con las iniciativas humanas agresivas contra esta especie. Analizando las relaciones entre los cazadores y sus presas en las ficciones de Rick Bass, Claire Cazajous-Augé propone una "poética de huellas" ("poetics of traces") (177). Este lenguaje poético, caracterizado por la fugacidad de la presencia animal y la distancia que los cazadores mantienen con sus presas, refleja una ética que orienta a una coexistencia armoniosa entre los seres humanos y no humanos.

En "Of Postcolonial and Ecofeminist Spellings and Spells," la cuarta sección, se explora el reencantamiento desde la perspectiva del Otro. Carmen Flys Junquera aborda el proceso por el que las protagonistas de Linda Hogan y Barbara Kingsolver "relearn how to communicate and feel with earth others" mediante dos sistemas de conocimiento (194), los indígenas y los científicos. Analizando la liminalidad aplicada a conceptos como la ecotonalidad y la hibridación en las obras de Hogan, Bénedicte Meillon indica que esta facilita un espacio transitorio entre distintos sistemas socioculturales y natural-culturales. Basándose en culturas poscoloniales presentadas por Alexis Wright, Thomas King y Thomas Wharton, Jessica Maufort explora lo que ella llama "compost mágico-realista" ("magic realist compost") (239). Combinando realismo mágico y ecocrítica material, el concepto consiste en la representación de principios ecológicos, estéticos y éticos que fomentan los procesos creativos natural-culturales. Alan Johnson, por otro lado, se acerca a los mundos habitados por las comunidades forestales hindúes en *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014) y "The Hunt" (1974). Estos, ocultados por los aspectos sombríos de la modernidad colonial, presentan una visión más cercana a la naturaleza. Centrándose en *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Rachel Nisbet propone que la protagonista, como diosa de la cuenca Liffey, sirve como un mecanismo retórico para la justicia medioambiental en la Irlanda poscolonial y encarna la ecopoética que fomenta el florecimiento de la vida. En el último artículo de la cuarta parte, Noéme Moutel examina *Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* (1995) en referencia al mito de Frankenstein desde la óptica ecofeminista y ecopsicológica. El volumen termina con el ensayo "Ways to the Cranes" de Linda Hogan, donde se recogen y analizan las interacciones entre las grullas,

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con su gruido, y las tribus indígenas norteñas. La forma de cómo esta ave habita el planeta, según Hogan, inspira "new ways of knowing and belonging" (352).

Con unas referencias interdisciplinarias de lo más reciente y unos textos multiculturales, esta colección proporciona instrumentos teóricos y materiales de gran fuerza e interés para cualquier humanista o lector interesado en la cuestión del reencantamiento. Si la concepción weberiana del desencantamiento vincula el encantamiento con la alteridad, la clave del reencantamiento, tal y como indican los colaboradores del volumen, reside en la articulación de las voces no humanas y las cosmovisiones subordinadas. No obstante, se aprecia cierto nivel de oscurantismo, que no permite una comprensión clara y estricta de algunos artículos. Pese a este detalle, las historias sobre geografías, animales, mujeres y pueblos indígenas (entre otros aspectos) que se abordan en el volumen sirven como un reencantamiento epistemológico e ilustran cómo habitar el planeta poéticamente.

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Samantha Walton, *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 214 pp.

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Nan Shepherd was an early twentieth-century writer who is now recognised as part of the modernist movement of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. With the increased popularity of New Nature Writing and the rise in ecocritical scholarship, Nan Shepherd's writing has been reappraised in recent years by scholars and readers alike. In particular the re-publication of her nonfiction book, *The Living Mountain*, in 2011 has brought Shepherd back into the limelight of public attention. With its focus on the local ecologies and geographies of North East Scotland, and the Cairngorms region in particular, Shepherd's work speaks to a contemporary interest in and concern for local environments and ecological writing. Samantha Walton's monograph *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought* participates in this revival and contextualises the renewed interest in Shepherd's work. Walton's study forms part of a larger environmental turn in Scottish studies in the last decades, exemplified by Louisa Gairn's *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (2008), Camille Manfredi's *Nature and Space in Contemporary Scottish Writing and Art* (2019) and more recently Susan Oliver's ecocritical reassessment of Walter Scott, one of Scotland's major canonical writers in *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland* (2021).

The chapters each tackle one of six larger themes: place and planet, ecology, environmentalism, deep time, vital matter, and being. These larger themes are used by Walton as openings to a kaleidoscope of perspectives from which Shepherd's work is examined. This approach seems very much indebted to Shepherd herself who argues for the value in shifting one's position and looking at the world from multiple perspectives at once. Within each chapter, Walton puts Nan Shepherd's creative works in dialogue with environmental theories and philosophies in order to demonstrate "how her writing might offer new ways of relating to human and more-than-human communities and reimagining humanity's place on earth in the context of the Anthropocene and the environmental and climate crisis" (Walton 2). By discussing Nan Shepherd alongside a range of environmental theories past and present, Walton allows Shepherd to emerge as an ecocritical voice herself and thereby highlights the contributions creative works can make within wider environmental discourse.

Moving through an impressively wide range of topics, Walton demonstrates not only how Shepherd speaks to the theories of her day but also how her writing

complements central theoretical and philosophical ideas about the environment in the twenty-first century. Walton outlines the influence of prominent figures such as Patrick Geddes or Hugh MacDiarmid on Shepherd, but also illustrates how Shepherd inspired later environmentalists through her writing. By locating Shepherd's voice within the environmental humanities and by doing so over the course of a whole book, Walton's monograph shows the value of revisiting the works of (Scottish) modernist women writers and broadening our theoretical perspectives beyond the still dominant categories of gender and the nation. It is to be hoped that it will inspire more scholars to revisit the works of modernist women writers, in Scotland and elsewhere, to discover how they may speak to today's environmental concerns.

The Living World is not only a study on Nan Shepherd's writing and philosophy, but it also provides a comprehensive and accessible overview and a nuanced history of environmental thought in the first half of the twentieth century. Each of the chapters presents a new set of environmental philosophies and theories and contextualises them through Shepherd's writing. The ease with which Walton breaks down often complicated theories will allow even those new to ecocriticism to follow her threads. These theories cover a large terrain of environmental thought: from the concepts of dwelling and topophilia, over considerations of deep time, to vitalism and new materialism. Even though Nan Shepherd features prominently in the book and presents a sort of guiding figure for Walton that allows her to move through a large variety of topics, these methodological choices make her study relevant to everyone interested in early twentieth-century literature inside and outwith Scotland. Walton successfully combines a reading of the work of one writer with a broader outlook and thereby highlights the value of literature, both nonfiction and fiction, in expanding environmental discussions.

While this exploratory mode is clearly a strength of the book from an environmental humanities perspective, it necessarily comes with some limitations, mainly for those who may be more interested in Nan Shepherd's oeuvre as a whole. Shepherd's poetry, her novels and shorter prose writing, do not receive the same kind of attention as *The Living Mountain*, which features prominently in Walton's study, and are addressed only marginally throughout. The risky choice of focusing a whole study mainly on one, rather short nonfiction text, however, cannot really be seen as a weakness. Instead, the result not only highlights Shepherd's impressive skill in condensing into such a short nonfiction text vast layers of meaning, but also demonstrates Walton's perceptive eye for detail and her ability to draw out these layers of meaning in a nuanced fashion while working out their connections with environmental thought.

All in all, Samantha Walton's *The Living World* presents a strong and innovative contribution to scholarship in Scottish studies, modernism, and the environmental humanities. As a well-researched study that covers a wide range of topics through a small lens, it offers something of value to everyone, whether they are already familiar with or new to ecocritical theory and Nan Shepherd's writing.

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Gabriele Dürbeck and Christine Kanz, editors. *Deutschsprachiges Nature Writing von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart. Kontroversen, Positionen, Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2020), 357pp.

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When ecocriticism began in the 1990s, it was with the 'discovery' of nature writing as a literary genre worthy of public interest and critical consideration. Nature writing remains a key field of ecocritical research today. However, it has frequently been observed that the themes, approaches and forms associated with it, which have played a central role in American culture over the last two centuries and recently experienced a remarkable revival in British New Nature Writing, are without direct equivalent in other cultures. It is generally accepted that there is no recognizable tradition of nature writing in the German language comparable with that in America or Britain. Perhaps, it has been speculated, this is because of the exploitation of nature feeling as a substitute for political agency in the German-speaking countries in the nineteenth century, and its ideological misappropriation in the twentieth. Or alternatively, because the functions of nature writing in Anglo-American culture are performed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland by the powerful native traditions of nature poetry on the one hand, and nature philosophy and natural history on the other. Be this as it may, as the collection of essays under review here shows, nature writing in the mould of the personal essay, combining scientific knowledge with descriptions of emotionally charged personal encounters with the wild and reflection on human-nature relations, has existed in Germany since the eighteenth century. And, although it has not achieved the same prominence as in Britain or America, it is also experiencing an unprecedented boom today, driven by widespread public anxiety over climate change and species loss. Since 2013, the Berlin-based publisher Matthes & Seitz has brought out over fifty volumes in their strikingly successful bibliophile series, *Naturkunden* (the plural of a term which is usually only found in the singular, meaning 'natural history' or 'nature study'). Selected and commissioned by the novelist Judith Schalansky, these books include translations of American, British and French works, reprints of German books, new writing and academic studies of writing on nature. Matthes & Seitz has also co-funded an annual prize for German nature writing since 2017, and the genre has been actively promoted at recent literary festivals.

While some of the contributors to *Deutschsprachiges Nature Writing* demonstrate the existence of an admittedly fragmented, but unduly disregarded tradition of aesthetically ambitious non-fiction prose writing in German which aims to foster

attentiveness to the natural world, others argue that the term 'nature writing' must be extended to embrace fiction, even poetry, if it is to be genuinely useful for scholars of German literature. (The term is of course also contested in America and Britain. Key accounts of the genre by Elder, Slovic, Buell and Scheese all place the focus on literary non-fiction, but Lyon's taxonomy of nature writing embraces field notes and philosophy while excluding fiction, and Murphy and Macfarlane have called for the inclusion of novels.) The early nineteenth-century South America explorer Alexander von Humboldt is probably the most important German nature writer. The essays in his *Views of Nature* combine scientific precision and proto-ecological insight with poetic evocation of the wonders of nature, and were read and valued by Emerson, Thoreau, Darwin and Muir. Humboldt's poetic travel writing, in which natural history goes hand in hand with personal observation and philosophical reflection, may be the only German non-fiction nature writing of undisputed international importance, but the tradition which emerges from the pages of this volume stretches from Georg Forster in the 1790s to Ernst Jünger, Wilhelm Lehmann and Horst Stern in the twentieth century, and Esther Kinsky in the twenty-first.

The chapters on these authors constitute the backbone of the book, inasmuch as they bear out what the title promises. However, those asking whether a wider range of German authors should also be regarded as nature writers in the wider sense are equally informative and thought-provoking. Examining the travel writing of Goethe and Fontane, the novels, stories and essayistic prose of Stifter, Handke and Sebald, the poetic nature philosophy of Novalis and Hölderlin, Kafka's satirical-allegorical critique of human-animal relations (*A Report to an Academy*), the nature poetry of Brockes and Kolmar, and popular science writing from Brehm and Bölsche to Peter Wohlleben's recent international bestseller, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, these essays challenge the reader to reconsider the aims, achievements and core features of not only nature writing, but also the wider literature of nature. In this they benefit from being able to draw on the findings of three recently published German studies on the genre, Ludwig Fischer's *Natur im Sinn*, Jürgen Goldstein's *Naturerscheinungen*, and Simone Schröder's *The Nature Essay* (reviewed in *Ecozon@* vol. 12, no. 2, Autumn 2021).

Drawing attention to overlooked works, new dimensions of familiar texts (for instance the anticipation of aspects of environmental philosophy in Stifter's mid-nineteenth-century narratives), and hitherto unremarked transnational links (e.g. Thoreau's debt to Goethe and Humboldt, and his importance in turn for more recent German writers), the book is effectively an experiment, exploring the merits of transposing literary categories from one culture into another, and asking what consequences the lack of recognition has had for the reception of individual texts.

In their substantial and insightful introduction, the editors argue that German nature writing possesses special qualities, because (mindful of the problematic role of nature and Heimat in German history) it celebrates local landscapes rather than that of the nation, and is more concerned with those humanly shaped (and frequently polluted) than with wilderness. However, as elsewhere, the best German writing about nature is characterised by a refinement of language which opens readers up to nature's beauty,

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autonomy and agency. Building resonances between the experiencing subject and nature, it engenders wonder and ethical reflection, and incites readers to action. Ethics is inseparable from aesthetics: an engagement with nature which makes creative use of language is essential if we are to save it. While Vietta shows that this 'poeticisation' of nature finds direct expression in Novalis's *Novices of Sais*, a complex text exemplifying the Early Romantics' critique of modern civilisation, their attentiveness to the threat which science and technology pose to nature, and their belief in the power of imaginative empathy, Malkmus reads Lehmann's *Bucolic Diary* as a series of literary 'spiritual exercises' in resonance with nature. Written in response to his experiences in the First World War, the seemingly innocuous columns which Lehmann originally penned for a weekly paper constituted an important alternative to the current of New Sobriety which dominated German culture in the 1920s. Lehmann may be primarily remembered as a poet, but the combination of precise empirical observation with sensitive depiction of the subject's emotions, an ethic of humility, and reflection on the biological determinants of human life in his *Bucolic Diary* make him a key exponent of German nature writing.

Nature writing of this kind cannot be dismissed as either ecological propaganda or an aesthetic sedative in times of crisis: the counter-narratives of today's 'critical writing on nature' (Kinsky's preferred formulation) are a necessary corrective to scientism in the Anthropocene. (Kinsky's *River* and *Grove: A Field Novel* promote anthropocenic awareness by exploring the disturbed terrain between city and country, a transitional zone in which nature is as precarious as the people who live there.) With their tight focus on the forms of nature writing found in Germany and their functions, the seventeen case studies in this volume make a significant contribution to the development of ecocriticism as a cross-cultural field of scholarship. While the book is addressed to German literary scholars (the essay on Humboldt is the only one in English), its findings have clear implications for ecocritics working in other languages and cultures, and would merit presentation in English in a publication drawing out the lessons for non-German readers in greater detail than has been possible in this review.

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Stefanie K. Dunning, *Black to Nature: Pastoral Return and African American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 193 pp.

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In a 2019 *Edge Effects* podcast focused on the question, "What Is Land," environmental justice scholar Dr. Monica White replies, "It's a scene of a crime and a strategy of freedom and liberation" (Hennessy 4:52). White's response sums up the argument of Stephanie Dunning's new book, *Black to Nature: Pastoral Return in African American Culture,* which investigates how "Black people and nature are mutually othered" (95). Just as nature has been targeted for exploitation and abuse for centuries, so have Black people. Anti-Blackness and the destruction of the earth are the building blocks of Western civilization; they are how civil society "constitutes itself and operates" (Dunning 109). Though civil rights, equity programs, and diversity movements can temper the violence of white supremacy, the ongoing shooting deaths of Black adults and children and the aggressive destruction of the physical environment suggests, Dunning contends, that "civilization, in every iteration, is always the opposite of freedom" (Dunning n58 178). Focusing on twentieth and twentieth-first-century Black writers and artists, Dunning explores these ideas in texts that circumvent civil society's toxic anti-Black and anti-nature ideas, signaling a "pastoral return" in African American culture.

Dunning begins with an analysis of primitivism, chattel slavery, and lynching as the primary causes of Black people's alienation from nature as well as the stereotypes of Black people as "naturally" urban and environmentally indifferent. The bulk of the book, however, examines Black texts that "reclaim the natural world for the Black person via the abolition of civil society" (Dunning 23). Using Zen philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of interbeing and African-centric nature-human entanglements, Dunning surmises that the "appearance [of nature] in Black texts is a gesture toward another world and another space of being" (20). Black art and culture have consistently responded to the lethal violence of the state by illustrating a bond between nature and Black people, despite civil society's efforts to sever that connection. Dunning draws on poet Lucille Clifton's assertion that the earth "is a black and living thing/ is a favorite child/of the universe" as an example of Black literary culture as a site of healing (6). In addition to Clifton's poetry, African land-based cosmologies, and Zen philosophy, Dunning draws on Black feminism, Afro-pessimism, literary and film studies, and the author's own reflections of personal nature-based experiences to illuminate the rich dimensions of Black ecological literary traditions (4).

In chapter one, the author explores Beyonce's visual album *Lemonade* (2016) and Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), showing how each portrays lavish images of Black women and girls enmeshed in nature. This visual strategy challenges white supremacist and patriarchal ideas of Black women's and girls' bodies as defective and excessive in civil society. While both *Lemonade* and *Daughters of the Dust* operate as resistant narratives, they also celebrate the beauty of Black women, girls, and communities, aligning them with water, light, sky, green space, and ancestors. By evoking "African-inflected-woman-centered existence," Dunning says both artists question assimilationist urban progress narratives, white Christianity, respectability politics, and the moral "uplift" of Black women (Dunning 42).

With a focus on Hurricane Katrina, chapter two compares Benh Zeitlin's film, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), to Jessym Ward's novel, *Salvage the Bones* (2011). Dunning scrutinizes how each text addresses race, white supremacy, and Black children in the context of environmental catastrophe. Hushpuppy, the protagonist in *Beasts*, reproduces the familiar trope of the mythical, precarious Black girl. With no specific community or support, Hushpuppy's character is an emblem of environmental degradation symbolized by the spectacle of Black suffering (Dunning 64). Though Ward's Black girl character, Esch, also inhabits a world of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and environmental injustice, her life is replete with nurturing ties to siblings/family, nature, animals, and community. While Hushpuppy is a static, ahistorical figure, Esch is a dynamic and evolving character who grows and changes in relation to other children, history, and nature.

Organized around Ana DuVernay's television series *Queen Sugar* (2016) and Kaitlyn Greenidge's novel *We Love You, Charlie Freeman* (2016), chapter three investigates how Western concepts of land ownership, private property, and "the self/the human" are problematic categories for achieving Black freedom. *Queen Sugar* suggests this by subtly tracing a clash between the African Indigenous idea of "the earth as a communal place, rather than a 'thing' that can be owned" and the American dream of endless capital accumulation (Dunning 101; 98). Dunning also discerns the racial underpinnings of Western culture's human/animal dichotomy and the way anti-Blackness aligns Black people with apes and monkeys. Greenidge's novel focuses on a Black family who participate in a scientific experiment in which they teach a chimpanzee sign language, symbolizing the underlying racism built into the categories of human and animal and suggesting how "both Black people and animals" are held captive (Dunning 118). Western society's model of the superior white human/self are entangled in enslavement and anti-Blackness and is therefore "always already destined to fail" (Dunning 94).

In chapter four, Dunning looks at Black responses to apocalypse and end-of-the world scenarios, arguing these narratives offer an opportunity to imagine a world based in human/nature interbeing. Juxtaposing Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) with Colm McCarthy's horror/thriller film, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2016), Dunning explores how *Parable* operates as a guide to surviving the end of the world and *The Girl With All the Gifts* promotes human/plant hybrids as models for post-civilization

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flourishing (149). *Black to Nature*'s final chapter, entitled, "Take Me Outside," is a short Black feminist ecological analysis of Laura Mvula's song, "Green Garden." Mvula's video depicts women and men departing urban space for a rural area, illustrating a pastoral return. With light streaming through the trees, the characters dance and play drums as Mvula sings about a garden and the wings of butterflies, lyrics presenting nature as a place of safety and joy. Mvula's work shows how nature can "mitigate the brutalities of the state" even as it also offers "a deeper critique of Western civilization and society" (Dunning 157).

Though Dunning's book offers a stunning meditation on Black nature-culture relations, it misses an opportunity to explore Black lesbian ecologies. In *Daughters of the Dust* (discussed at length in chapter one), Yellow Mary and her lover, Trula, arrive on the sea island lovingly featured in the film only to be met with condemnation. Trula is referred to in non-human terms—"What's that [Yellow Mary] got with her?"—and other community women verbally abuse the couple, rebuking their lesbian relationship and calling them "heifers" because of the sex work they do. These attacks bring to mind queer theorists Dana Luciano and Mel Chen's oft-cited article, "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?," which explores the ways white colonizers violently imposed Christian settler sexualities and gender conformity onto the "uncivilized" and "unnatural." Despite this oversight, Dunning's book is a poignant, unforgettable, and layered study of the power and promise of Black ecologies.

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Hannes Bajohr, ed., *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 244 pp.

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Hannes Bajohr's essay collection *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän* may be read as part of an ongoing response to Bruno Latour's questioning of the extent to which the Anthropocene is a "poisonous gift" to the humanities and anthropology in particular (cf. Latour 35). The volume, largely based on the communications presented at a conference held in Berlin in 2019, comes not as a critique of the Anthropocene as concept or analytical tool, nor as another argument suggesting a new set of its causes or beginnings. Instead, its essays, from a range of humanities and social science disciplines, focus on "the human," the title's broadly understood *anthropos* of the Anthropocene. Assembled under the heuristic hypothesis of this figure's supposed ultimate vanishing (12), the contributions ask what the signifier "human" means in a discourse that thinks our species, like volcanos, cyanobacteria, or plate tectonics, as a geophysical power. What makes the volume particularly valuable is the way in which it inscribes itself in a range of anthropological responses to the Anthropocene by drawing attention to the potentials of a specific, somewhat underrepresented German tradition of "philosophical anthropology."

Three main parts, which include four essays each that are in part reprints, interlink this tradition with well-known questions and thinkers of the Anthropocene, and debates of neo- and post-humanism. The essays in the first section, by Joachim Fischer, Marc Rölli, Daniel Chernilo, and Katharina Block, start out by reflecting on the potentials of philosophical anthropology as it emerged in early-twentieth-century Germany in response to phenomenological theory, bringing representatives of this tradition such as Günther Anders, Arnold Gehlen, or Helmuth Plessner in conversation with current debates. The second part, seeking to explore different figures of "the human" more broadly, addresses prominent issues of Anthropocene thought, among them questions of scale (Philip Hüpkes) and the relation between categories of the human and the non-human (Mariaenrica Giannuzzi). Less familiar to most readers might be the perspectives of Frederike Felcht, who discusses the *anthropos* in the context of Foucauldian biopolitics, and Sebastian Edinger, whose chapter proposes exploring Anthropocene politics as telluric politics using Panajotis Kondylis' theory. The essays in the third section, by Christian Dries and Marie-Helen Hägele, Arantzazu Saratxaga Arregi, and Stefan Färber, return explicitly to German philosophical anthropology through the idea of a "negative

anthropology" (10-12). Dipesh Chakrabarty's broader outlook on the future role of the humanities in the Anthropocene (a reprint translated into German by Bajohr) closes the volume.

Overall, the collection, compiling a wide range of views from various disciplines, could have benefited from a more thorough interlinking of single chapters, which often appear somewhat disconnected and arbitrarily conjoined. While the resulting redundancies in terms of general introductions to the Anthropocene and the book's bulkiness might be expectable given its breadth of perspectives, the excessiveness with which the essays revolve around "the human" as connective term raises the more serious question of an overly strong focus on the discursive dimension of the Anthropocene. Such a focus is, of course, neither per se inadequate nor entirely surprising in this case, considering that the bulk of Bajohr's volume explicitly sets out to explore a German anthropological tradition that views the human as a creature distinguished from others by technologically and cognitively (i.e. discursively) constructing its environments. Yet, it thereby almost paradigmatically displays how humanities approaches might risk an overemphasis of the discursive that loses sight of the defining material dimension of the Anthropocene, abandoning its truly innovative perspective of seeing humanity as an earth system force that brings the geobiological into view. After all, the Anthropocene is not simply a new discourse, but fundamentally changes the status and function of discourse, something that, I feel, the volume at points does not stress enough. That the Anthropocene not only represents a rupture regarding the stable ecological conditions of the Holocene, but also breaks with the status of discourse as such in unprecedented ways, vanishes from view—also through the idea, partially criticized by contributors (35, 78, 118), that "the human" was ever gone, which figures as a purely discourse-related repressive hypothesis.

This said, however, the merits of Bajohr's volume outweigh such a broader critique and the fact that the book is somewhat unwieldy if read from cover to cover. Some articles, for instance those by Chernilo or Hüpkes, may be useful as primers for German readers not yet familiar with the Anthropocene. The collection's main achievement, however, is no doubt spotlighting the potentials of an early-twentieth-century German philosophical anthropology—a gesture that this review modestly hopes to extend to an Anglophone audience. Especially the chapters of the first and third main parts introduce and promote what one contributor calls the "German path" ("deutscher Sonderweg") of philosophical anthropology (179), which, reread in an Anthropocene light, deserves more critical attention. More broadly, this might also increase awareness of the ways in which debates over the Anthropocene may profit from reconsidering particular national traditions in coming to terms with central concepts of nature, culture, history, or the human. Unwrapping the "poisonous gift" (Latour 35) of the Anthropocene also means exploring the new epoch and multiplying the *anthropos* through different lenses of the past that have addressed the human as "biological" force and that must now be translated into a view of the human as "geological" force, crucially also via a reinterpretation of the discursive. If, as Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests in the introduction to his most recent book, the humanities need to engage in "collectively thinking our way toward a new philosophical anthropology" (Chakrabarty 20), reassessing 'old' philosophical

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anthropologies such as the German tradition presented in Bajohr's volume seems vital as part of the multidisciplinary conversation on the Anthropocene.

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Alejandro Rivero-Vadillo y Carmen Flys-Junquera, editores. *Visualizando el cambio. Humanidades ambientales / Envisioning Change: Environmental Humanities* (Vernon Press, 2021) 263 pp.

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Con el auge de disciplinas como la ecocrítica, el ecofeminismo o las humanidades ambientales, desde las humanidades se aboga a favor de un nuevo paradigma ecosocial. En los últimos años se han publicado numerosos volúmenes en esta línea. Entre los publicados en el contexto angloparlante cabría mencionar *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene* (Oppermann y Iovino, eds., 2016), *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (Heise, Christensen y Niemann, eds., 2017), *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction (*Emmett y Nye, 2017*) o Imaginative Ecologies: Inspiring Change through the Humanities* (Villanueva-Romero, Kerslake y Flys-Junquera, eds., 2022). Desde la publicación de *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente* (Flys Junquera, Marrero Henríquez y Barella Vigal, eds., 2010) en la última década han proliferado también los volúmenes en español. Entre los más recientes destacan *Humanidades ambientales. Pensamiento, arte y relatos para el siglo de la gran prueba* (Albelda, Parreño y Marrero Henríquez, eds., 2018), *Naturalezas en fuga. Ecocrítica(s) de la ciudad en transformación* (Lorente y de Diego, eds., 2021) o el volumen bilingüe *Toward an Eco-social Transition: Transatlantic Environmental Humanities / Hacia una transición ecosocial. Humanidades ambientales desde una perspectiva transatlántica* (Pérez Ramos y Lindo Mañas, eds., 2021).

El volumen *Visualizando el cambio. Humanidades ambientales / Envisioning Change: Environmental Humanities*, editado por Alejandro Rivero-Vadillo y Carmen Flys-Junquera, se suma a los previamente mencionados. Se trata de una obra bilingüe que refleja el carácter del evento académico del que surgieron las aportaciones al volumen, el Congreso Internacional de Humanidades Ambientales: Relatos, Mitos y Artes para el Cambio (UAH, 2018). La obra se divide en cinco grandes bloques a los que precede una introducción. En el primer bloque nos encontramos con el ensayo marco del filósofo Jorge Riechmann, quien efectúa un acercamiento teórico-filosófico a las Humanidades Ambientales y proporciona al lector reflexiones derivadas de la necesidad de un cambio de paradigma en la sociedad actual. El segundo bloque lleva por título "Pensando" y recoge tres capítulos. Dos de ellos, a cargo de Inés Villanueva Pérez y Manuel Ruiz Torres, abogan, en línea con los Estudios de Futuro, por la promoción de un nuevo relato ecologista, basado en un futuro atractivo y esperanzador, y que para ello promulga

fomentar los valores sociales, la sensibilidad, el conocimiento y la ética. El tercero, a cargo de Francesco Carpanini, sugiere que la crisis ecológica debería ser considerara en primera instancia como un problema de índole político, y hace alusión al racismo medioambiental al afirmar que aunque su impacto sea global, no es el mismo en todos los lugares ni para todas las personas.

El tercer bloque se titula "Interpretando". Lo inaugura Javier Mohedano Ruano, quien considera que la obra de Riechmann activa políticamente el anhelo de naturaleza y defiende la biomímesis como el hecho de aprender de la naturaleza para resolver problemas y generar alternativas en las que los sistemas humanos y naturales convivan en armonía. Los dos siguientes capítulos abordan la investigación etnográfica y el papel de la traducción. Carmen Valero-Garcés analiza los dilemas de la investigación etnográfica y defiende que la traducción es un factor que afecta a la objetividad de la investigación y subraya que los dos mayores dilemas son el posicionamiento del traductor y su ética. En la siguiente propuesta Katharina Kalinowski efectúa un acercamiento a la obra de Sarah Kirsch, reflexiona en torno a la problemática de la traducción, y advierte que esta es un ejercicio de negociación entre dos lenguas.

El cuarto y más extenso bloque lleva por título "Contando", y recoge aportaciones desde la narrativa. Abre el bloque el capítulo de Lorraine Kerslake, en el que se efectúa un interesante recorrido histórico de la figura de Pan, y en el que la autora defiende que Pan es un símbolo de la naturaleza y, por ende, personifica el intento de reconectar la naturaleza con la humanidad. En el siguiente capítulo Jing Hu efectúa un análisis de la obra de Guo, pionero de la escritura china en clave medioambiental, que defiende que no hay justicia medioambiental sin justicia social. A continuación, Montserrat López Mújica nos acerca a las leyendas alpinas y a los mitos fundacionales que forman parte de la conciencia colectiva de la Confederación Helvética. Su recorrido por las mencionadas leyendas, mitos y fiestas populares subraya la importancia de estos en la salvaguarda del patrimonio cultural y natural. Nuria Cabellos González, en línea con los Estudios de Futuros, subraya la necesidad de historias que presenten alternativas esperanzadoras ante el colapso ecológico. Acerca al lector a la realidad de Bután, y analiza diversos cuentos tradicionales butaneses que ensalzan el desarrollo sostenible, la interdependencia, la resiliencia o la importancia de la cooperación. Cabellos González defiende que los cuentos tradicionales y populares son la forma más antigua de activismo, por lo que pueden contribuir a crear conciencia. Eni Bulcvjubašić nos acerca a la literatura infantil y juvenil croata y analiza un corpus de siete relatos publicados en el volumen *Fairy-tales for a Better Tomorrow* (2011), en el que se efectúan reescrituras de cuentos tradicionales para situar a sus protagonistas en historias con trasfondo medioambiental. Bulcvjubašić defiende el uso de los textos literarios como herramienta a favor de cambio y afirma que la reelaboración de estos clásicos desde una perspectiva ambientalista supone una aportación de gran valor.

El último bloque, "Viviendo", recoge diversas propuestas artísticas. En la primera José Albelda y Chiara Sgaramella subrayan la potencialidad del formato documental para generar empatía y al mismo tiempo visibilizar y difundir el mensaje ambientalista. Analizan diversos documentales innovadores cuyo hilo conductor es el ecologismo y efectúan un viaje que nos traslada desde tierras peruanas a la huerta valenciana, al tiempo

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que destacan que una de las virtudes de *Carrícola, pueblo en transición* (2018) es superar la denuncia para presentar una alternativa real y viable. En el siguiente capítulo Nuria Sánchez-León analiza el papel que el arte puede desempeñar en el cambio de paradigma. En este caso se aborda desde el Movimiento de Ciudades y Pueblos en Transición, que subraya el valor del arte como medio para comunicar y sensibilizar. Sánchez-León enumera una serie de intervenciones artísticas y finalmente se centra en el caso de la iniciativa de Almócita, Almería, y nos presenta las intervenciones artísticas llevadas a cabo en la citada población, entre las que se encuentran murales, poemas, obras escultóricas, un museo al aire libre y festivales artísticos. En el último capítulo, Paloma Villalobos Danessi propone un ejercicio epistémico en el que, mediante la observación de diversas fotografías, reflexionemos sobre ecosistemas que hoy en día siguen siendo salvajes, como es el caso de la Antártida y el océano Antártico.

El presente volumen recopila una serie de aportaciones de carácter heterogéneo, que han de ser comprendidas desde una perspectiva holística que nos permita identificar nuevos modos de habitar el mundo. En esencia, los capítulos tejen un nuevo relato cuya finalidad es defender la necesidad de un cambio de paradigma que nos conduzca hacia una realidad sostenible. Al inestimable marco filosófico se le suman varios capítulos que versan sobre la ecopoesía y la traductología, así como aportaciones desde la literatura infantil y juvenil, o aportaciones que superando el eurocentrismo nos muestran propuestas ecocríticas formuladas desde el continente asiático. Cabe subrayar que este tipo de propuestas no suelen estar presentes en compilaciones de índole ambientalista. Se echan de menos aportaciones desde el hemisferio sur, que hubiesen completado el volumen, pero incluso así, sin duda alguna supone una aportación de gran valor para las Humanidades Ambientales.

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Mission Statement

This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

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