

## "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 marijuana 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 marijuana 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 temas '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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 marijuana 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, marijuana 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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."

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 marijuana every day from an act of conspicuous consumption into an ecoconscious attitude. By performatively recasting the consumption of marijuana in the context of Rastafarianism's

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.'

### **1<sup>st</sup> 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.

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.

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.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> 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

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 its 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

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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>2</sup> 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

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

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,

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.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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

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 marijuana 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.

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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