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David Ingram, *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 276 pp.

This welcome book lays the foundations for a new area of ecocriticism potentially comparable to the growth of 'eco-cinema', itself part prompted by David Ingram's previous book *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (2004). It offers an extensive survey of those popular music genres or musicians who represent either the emergence of environmental issues in popular music or a "growing link between music and ecophilosophical thought" in which, so it has been specified, "music, amongst all the arts, has a special affinity with ecological ideas" (11). The book covers the familiar (Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Michael Jackson, Neil Young) and less familiar (Roosevelt Charles, New Riders of the Purple Sage, the Psychick Warriors ov Gaia). Ingram's acquaintance with a vast range of the popular music of the last fifty years might, if nothing else, expand the average reader's musical knowledge.

One of the book's virtues is an openness in accepting that multifarious forms of popular music might be considered ecologically. Ingram takes issue with the concept of authenticity, or 'roots', in music, substituting the latter, a rather "arborescent and fixed" metaphor (222), with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizomatic, a metaphor adapted from plants such as ginger or potatoes that "have no central root structure, and grow by lateral and non-linear movements" (30). In one sense, the most obvious conclusion to be drawn, then, from *The Jukebox in the Garden*, is that it is "difficult to argue that one form of music is more 'natural' or 'ecological' than any other" (233). Accordingly, the book has chapters examining an array of genres (blues and country, folk, rock, country rock, R'n'B and hip hop, world music, electronica, jazz) and, correspondingly, moves across the entire ecological spectrum from radically deep ecological perspectives to a more didactic social ecology. Both can frequently be seen in the same genre. From a depth of historical detail characteristic of this book, we find, for example, that folk music has offered both a tradition of protest song that is "outward looking and social" (106) and has evolved alternative forms, such as the "American Primitive" of the 1990s, which see "the natural world in Romantic terms as a place of enchantment and spiritual revelation" (97). Presenting each side of the deep-social dialectic that troubles ecological thought – paralleled here in Bob Dylan's distinction between two forms of folk music, "Depression songs" and the "mystery tradition" (115) – both receive a fair hearing.

Nevertheless, the main emphasis of the book is towards social ecology and Ingram skilfully dismantles some of the more cherished assumptions about what constitutes, in music, ecological authenticity. He disputes, for example, that authenticity is derived from "the performer or style of music being close to nature" and, more widely, the claims of "ethical naturalism [...], [i.e.] the belief that ethical values may be derived from the principles of the natural world" (47). He rules out arguments asserting that particular forms of music can be analogous to nature noting, for example, inconsistencies in the clarinetist, composer and philosopher David Rothenberg's attempts to formulate a deep ecological aesthetics of music. For example, Rothenberg's criticism that popular music's generic four-four time lacks conformity to nature's lawless state of "confusion" is juxtaposed with his approval for music structured around the "common, organic pulse [...], the catchy beat, the pattern that the drummer and woodpecker can share" (228). Ingram, likewise, downplays

the claims of “immersive listening”. Regarded as a means for “attaining”, through music, “a new, apparently enlightened state of consciousness in which the individual self merges with the rest of the natural world” (59), Ingram argues that immersive listening only ever occurs if one is already pre-disposed towards an environmental sensitivity (70); in other words, music’s affinity to eco-philosophy is “context-dependent” or “socially relative” (70).

The book emphasises, therefore, the interwoven social-environmental contexts from which popular music has emerged. This is underwritten by a paradigm of “critical realism”. Adopted from Kate Soper and Christopher Norris, critical realism argues that, while human conceptions of nature are indeed socially constructed, nature itself is “external to human beings” and “objectively knowable” (33). The latter allows Ingram to restrict his focus to “more or less explicit representations of either ecology or the natural world” (18); the former regards ecologically pertinent forms of popular music as discursive acts that encourage us to think about nature or the social structures that impact upon the nonhuman (and human) world. Particularly influential is the humanist Marxism of Ernst Bloch, notably his book *The Principle of Hope* (1958). Following Bloch’s suggestion, in this book’s conclusion, that music “reflects cracks under the social surface, expresses wishes for change, bids us to hope” (241), Ingram explores the view that art, not least music, embodies what Bloch calls a “Not-Yet-Conscious”, prefiguring (Ingram writes) “the desired society” (25). This view subdivides into an envisioning of either *abstract* or *concrete* utopias, the former escapist, lacking clear social purpose, the latter more engaged and anticipating social transformation (25). Ingram accepts both.

Robert Cox has conceptualised environmental communication as a form of critical rhetoric divided between *constitutive* modes, which shape our perception of nature, and *pragmatic* modes designed to “educate, alert, mobilize, and persuade others”. Ingram, correspondingly, in his Afterword, defends both “sentimentalism” and “didacticism” in popular music while also positing their necessary, and attainable, reconciliation. Hence, the sentimentalism of John Denver’s ‘Country Roads’ – “misty taste of moonshine/teardrop in my eye” – is both an enticement “to connect emotionally with the natural world” (233-4) and grounds for Denver’s later environmental activism. Likewise, while the live version of saxophonist Paul Winter’s ‘Wolf Eyes’, jazz improvised from recordings of a wolf, ends, perhaps rather mawkishly, with the audience howling like wolves, it is nevertheless inspirational enough to have been performed live to the General Assembly of the United Nations on World Environment Day in 1985 (224). From such examples, Ingram fashions a reconciliation of imagination and spirit with reasoning and action, that expands our understanding of popular music while offering a necessary foundation for an ecological philosophy combining “deep” and “social” approaches.

While the above outlines what I take to be the central argument of the book, such a sketch can only really glance at the surface of the historical research, knowledgeable case studies, and informed ecological debates offered here. Two other aspects do, however, warrant attention. The first is an explicit belief that popular music justifies this degree of analysis, a gratifying retort to the belittlement of popular culture in critical and environmental theory alike (here illustrated, diversely, by Adorno, Leo Marx and the American “neo-pagan” Lone Wolf Circles).

Ingram is never complacent about popular music and the over-hyped claims sometimes made on its behalf. He notes the tension between a necessary social-ecological collective consciousness and the individualism encouraged by, for example, electronica or rock or the trope of the “cowboy” in country music (91). He is particularly critical of rock music’s countercultural elitism, finding an uncomfortable affinity between fantasies, encouraged by artists such as The Byrds, of “space travel as an escape from an ecologically

damaged world”, and a survivalist tendency, in the wider environmental movement, which has only ever been available to the socially privileged (128). He notes, likewise, some obvious contradictions: Don Henley’s environmentalist concern counteracted by the fact that his most famous song, *Boys of Summer*, celebrates consumer culture (168); or Steppenwolf’s ‘Born to be Wild’ which equates self with nature in its title while having vocals that encourage identification with technology and machinery – “Get your motor running”! (122)

Nevertheless, against Adorno’s familiar critique concerning popular music’s simplicity or standardisation of melody or harmony, Ingram posits the unending diversity of form and performance and aspects such as timbre, rhythm, sonority etc (38). He resists, moreover, the easy rejoinder that this might only apply to more radical instances (citing here the trip hop artist Tricky). Rather, in a spirit “intended to be open to the multiplicity of musical forms that musicians and singers create” (42), he offers somewhat generous readings of mainstream examples, notably Michael Jackson’s ‘Earth Song’ and, more generally, the 2007 Live Earth concerts. These nuances are best exemplified, though, by a discussion, central to ecocriticism, of the pastoral mode within popular music.

Ingram argues that pastoral is the “main mode by which the eco-utopian potential of music has been articulated in American popular music” (52). Taking issue with Leo Marx’s categorisation of pastoral into “imaginative and complex” and “popular and sentimental” (see 54), Ingram argues that both harbour “eco-utopian potential” in a discussion that stretches from John Denver’s nostalgia for rural America to the more critical “dirty realism” of Johnny Cash or Charley Pride. Yet he does not evade the difficulties posed by pastoral. Country music’s cherished “authenticity” – developed around the artist’s “personal experiences of rural life” and tropes of the farmer or cowboy – is convincingly exposed as largely mythical, manufactured construction. Likewise, he analyses the degree to which a sense of “belonging”, or “home”, placed within rural America has been socially and racially exclusionary (85). For in tracing, as well, a long tradition of “anti-pastoral” in American popular music – encompassing Cash, Frank Zappa’s dystopianism (157), Bob Dylan’s “nervous” pastoral (157) – Ingram arrives, thematically, at questions of environmental injustice, and, musically, at African-American music. This ongoing discussion, fruitfully expanding the range of what constitutes environmental concern, includes accounts of the 1927 Mississippi flood in John Lee Hooker’s ‘Tupelo’; Billie Holiday’s ‘Strange Fruit’ (57); Roosevelt Charles’ ‘The Boll Weevil an’ the Bale Weevil’ (76) – which, recorded in the early 1960s, details simultaneously the physical hardship and social injustice endured by the agricultural labourer (76-7); and, latterly, a race and class based experience of and exposure to urban “risk”, in Gil Scott-Heron’s ‘We almost lost Detroit’ (1977), about a nuclear accident south of the city (163), and the “reality rap” of Mos Def’s (1999) ‘New World Water’, concerning the class politics of water supply (180):

The type of cats who pollute the whole shore line
Have it purified, sell it for a dollar twenty-five [...]

Used to be free now it cost you a fee.

The second aspect concerns whether a predominantly technological form such as popular music can ever appropriately articulate humanity’s relationship with nonhuman nature. Here Ingram defends, notably, electronic music, particularly against arguments made by Lone Wolf Circles and the Greek pianist-composer Sakis Papadimitriou that music should, literally, be an “extension of the body of the musician” – i.e. played on instruments

made from natural materials, generating sound vibrations that resonate out to the audience (see 203). Yet, as Bjork is quoted, “you can be organic and pagan and have ProTools” (204). Accordingly, Ingram offers examples in which digitally produced music has sought to recreate natural processes. In particular, he cites Stevie Wonder’s peculiar 1979 album *Journey through the Secret Life of Plants*, the first album to use a digital sampling synthesizer but also, perhaps – at least until Bjork’s own current *Biophilia* project – the only mainstream record to have explored and depicted the organic life of plants and flowers (161).

This discussion also asks more searching questions about human nature particularly in the last three chapters which examine world music, electronica and jazz. Ingram details how these generally more experimental forms often combine natural sounds (whale or bird song, wolf howls, etc.) with technology (notably the synthesiser). Offering something more than an idealist deep ecology, such music encapsulates a posthumanist understanding, calling to mind the argument of Scott Macdonald, in his similarly titled *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Film about Place*, that in foregrounding the technological processes behind film the alternative filmmaker offers a more credible account of humanity’s dialectical, contingent, but, nevertheless, essential interrelationship with “more-than-human” nature, in turn highlighting the illusoriness of pastoral or wilderness conceptions. This is, perhaps, best exemplified here by the trumpeter Jon Hassell’s ongoing “Fourth World” project – a “creative clash”, rather than a synthesis, between modern, Western, technologically mediated musical forms and folk or indigenous practices (see 194-6). A selection of further examples offer the same posthumanist perspective: Dylan’s “nervous pastoral”; the stylised “American Primitive” of Joanna Newsome, which adapts folk into a darker, more disturbed view of nature (117); and, in an excellent discussion, Captain Beefheart’s *Trout Mask Replica* album (1970). Characterised by psychedelic drug-induced lyrical associations, which conflate nature with modern technology, and challenging musical dissonance – free-blowing horns, clashing cymbals, melodramatic vibrato – nevertheless “All of *Trout Mask Replica*”, Beefheart claimed, “was about ecology” (132).

This book too is *all* about ecology and I can offer only relatively minor quibbles, excepting perhaps a lack of detailed textual analysis. In *Hollywood Utopia*, Pat Brereton argues that “poetic” or “thick” description of texts is necessary so as to “unpack the richness and polysemic nature” of both film and a complex ecology. The same surely applies to a form as richly-layered (as Ingram himself proves) as popular music. However, virtually no song receives more than a paragraph of analysis with even the artists themselves getting, at best, around about five pages. Points of detail are occasionally well made. We find, for example, a sharp analysis of the weakness of overly polemical lyrics when contrasted with the musical drama of Alice di Micele’s ‘If I Was a Wolf’ (113), the use of humour in Joni Mitchell’s ‘Big Yellow Taxi’, or even the gospel style call-and-response arrangement of ‘Earth Song’ which overrides the banality of its “vague, non-specific” lyrics (137, 182). Yet such instances are all too brief. Why, for example, do the eight lines describing the dystopianism of Neil Young’s ‘After the Goldrush’ not mention the song’s rather baleful tone (something my students picked up on immediately)? Any other qualifications are, however, easily answerable. One could take issue with the almost exclusively US focus; but this seems true to the author’s intentions or interests; one might argue that the final three chapters, while extending the book’s argument, seem rather out of step with a narrative which, prior to that, had moved seamlessly and continuously through blues, country, folk, and onto rock, R’n’B, country rock and hip hop.

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Yet what this emergent field needs right now is not so much a narrative of origins but a survey. And that is precisely what this richly detailed, fascinating book delivers. Furthermore, by demonstrating the consonance between “a musical culture characterised by stylistic hybridity” (18) and a complex, posthuman ecology, Ingram offers a conceptual baseline for future studies of “eco-music.”

Works Cited

- Brereton, Pat. *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. Bristol: Intellect, 2005. Print.
- Cox, Robert. *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage, 2010. Print.