In *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*, by David Ingram, a professor in the School of Arts at Brunel University, London, explores the ways popular music has responded to the modern environmental movement of the 1960s. Musicians, writers, engineers, and producers have used their creative talents to not only write lyrics about the environment, but also to emulate sounds of the environment in genres such as country, jazz, and even electronica. The book explores many theories about ecocriticism and its representation in popular music. In addition, the book surveys multiple genres of popular music, citing specific musicians, albums, and songs that use recording technology and lyricism in order to promote environmental awareness.

Central to Ingram’s work is the concept of “eco-listening.” Put simply, eco-listening is more than just perceiving what is in environmental noises or hearing a musical piece. Instead, eco-listening requires the listener to practice what Theodor Adorno called “immersive listening,” which means that the listener must control their senses in order to take something greater away from the experience. We are usually “regressive” listeners, because we listen as a form of pleasure and sometimes as commodification, but immersive listening allows us to fully analyze the sounds and music we hear. This then allows us to be more critical about what we hear, provides us with evidence to support our beliefs and ideas, and enables us to create our own theories about the relationship between...
Theodor Adorno had an apparent eco-aesthetic opposition to popular music. He felt that the formal structure of popular music courted characteristics of capitalist society and deviations from the norm were standardized in order to create the illusion of something new. For example, Adorno believed that although jazz was portrayed as an improvisatory genre, this was false because improvisations were based on standard musical forms.

Concerning ideas of nature in popular music, Ingram states that musicians and composers harbour two beliefs about their compositions and how these beliefs interact. The first is that the genre of the music, or the performer, must be close to the environment in order for the music to be authentic. People who have a relationship with the past have a tendency to conserve the past or use ideas from the past to create new ideas about or for the future. The second belief concerns representation of nature in popular music, which has typically been through what is called the pastoral mode. Ernst Bloch, composer of numerous string pieces, believed that the pastoral mode could inspire a more humanized natural world requiring a minimal amount of industrialization. While Ernst Bloch was not fond of popular music, his preference for melody and tonality allowed him to explore the possibilities of development in popular music. Some theories also state that the pastoral mode can be a sort of retreat from modernization or opposition to industrialization. Aside from theories of the pastoral mode itself, there are also theories about the broader idea of popular music.

In this book, Ingram presents three theories concerning the relationship between music and environmental ethics. These different theories provide several opposing views concerning the use of modern technologies in popular music as well as opposing ideas concerning musical composition. Ernst Bloch was a supporter of the humanist Marxism theory — the idea that humans should have control over the natural world by using modern technologies to enable social and political progress. Some people believe, however, that the use of modern technologies should be prohibited because of the threat they pose to the environment. Secondly, Susan McClary supports the idea of postmodern musicology and has even criticized Western music because she feels that it reflects the patriarchal attitudes toward sexuality. She believes that this is a contributing factor to the destruction of modernity, as well as the environment, because where once we had stability and balance, we now see overwhelming individualism and extravagance. The third theory is that of post-structuralism developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This theory is based on the idea that a piece of music can develop without a culmination or climax. They believe that music should “branch out” instead of following the ordinary framework that
leads to stagnation. Ingram considers himself a critical realist and states that these theories and concepts are “matters of ethical and aesthetic preference, rather than of necessity.” His subsequent surveys of several genres give the reader an idea of how some of these theories might be applied.

The first genre of popular music Ingram reviews is country music. The ideas of the farmer and cowboy in country music are both used quite frequently, seeing as how these roles are stereotypically associated with country living. Many of the songs that mention farmers focus on the misfortunes that come along with this life, because farmers were seen as being poor. The idea of the cowboy was actually portrayed by country singers who dressed up in cowboy attire and sang songs such as “Get Along Little Doggies.” More specifically, John Denver, a figure in country music, was a great supporter of wilderness conservation. He was also involved in organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society, which shows his even broader support of the environmental movement. Ingram then turns to a genre that was seen as a sort of way to unite classes against fascism.

Pete Seeger was an important figure in folk music who paved the way for environmental references and ideas in this genre. His album, entitled God Bless the Grass, was the first ever entirely devoted to environmental issues. Seeger, in collaboration with Malvina Reynolds, displayed his concerns about the environment by writing songs such as “Cement Octopus.” This song protested the construction of a freeway through the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, expressing concern for overdevelopment. Other songs such as “Seventy Miles” objected to pollution and waste in our bodies of water. While environmental issues seemed to be important in folk music, the genre of rock appeared to be centered on it.

In 1960s rock music, the idea of biocentrism seemed to take over the entire genre. Ingram defines biocentrism as “the idea that the natural world is sentient, and therefore worthy of ecological concern”. For example, Jefferson Airplane displayed their opinions through a song called “Eskimo Blue Day.” The goal of this song was to criticize humans and their neglect of nature because of their focus on material things. The 1970s saw a trend of songs about the “environmental apocalypse.” “Earth Rot,” a song suite produced by David Axelrod, mentions the creation of the world by God but also warns of the destruction of the Earth by humans. Frank Zappa was a rock musician who used satire as a means to address issues with nature. He portrays environmental concerns by using classic songs and changing the title and lyrics to draw attention to certain issues. Ingram covers both rock and country music, but he also focuses on the genre of country rock as well.

Country rock music in the 1960s saw artists return to their “roots,” and
many artists relocated to rural areas. Bands such as The Grateful Dead and Quicksilver Messenger Service moved away from San Francisco to areas such as Topanga Canyons. Many songs expressed the desire to escape the fighting in the city for the luxuries of the country. The Band was a group of musicians in the country rock genre that aimed to play music that was considered alternative to the developments of the time. Not only did their music portray a sense of community and continuity with the past, but they also displayed the idea of the working family man through their *Music from Big Pink* album sleeve.

Rock, R&B, and hip-hop music after the 1960s all contained a large amount of environmental protest. Following the Civil Rights movements, people turned their focus to an array of other issues such as pollution, wilderness conservation, and the protection of endangered species. These political issues especially sparked political action in African-American audiences, who were aware of the need for political lyrics. Indie rock musicians in the 1970s voiced their opinions. One major project was “Cuyahoga” by R.E.M, and the song depicts the progression of pollution in the Cuyahoga River and the resulting fire. Many consider the previous genres to be conventional, even canonical, but Ingram takes care to touch on genres outside of the commercial mainstream as well.

The genre of world music includes the folk music of many indigenous areas outside of Anglo-America. Ingram describes world music as a means to express creativity, fusion, and hybridity. Artists use ideas to create new types of music, sometimes fusing music from two different countries or cultures. These projects allow us to open ourselves to other cultures, creating a greater sense of community. Ingram also mentions that communication with and an understanding of different cultures might help to bridge some gaps and ultimately lead to a revolution of sorts. Ingram then discusses a genre that is even more debatable because of its even greater use of technology.

The genre referred to as electronica is more controversial because of its incorporation of modern technologies. Many people fear that machines are “dehumanizing” and polluting agents. Paul Levinson counters that the digital computer gives us more ways to be creative with music and states that the electric guitar did not get rid of the need for human touch, but rather changed the way in which humans defined the physical characteristics of sound.

While electronica was more concerned with technology, jazz focused more on improvisation and the ability to make instantaneous changes during performance. One concept in jazz involving nature was developed by saxophone player Paul Winter and is called “Living Music.” This idea involves superimposing recordings of nature and jazz improvisation. David Rothenberg developed a type of improvisatory jazz called “Earth Jazz.” Playing this type of jazz requires the musician to have the ability to change directions on a moment’s
notice, to listen, and be flexible with both human and non-human factors.

After a more in-depth look at popular music throughout the past few decades, Ingram shows the connections that have been made between musicians, composers, and environmental concerns. He draws on numerous genres, citing specific people and songs that have incorporated ecocriticism into the popular music of the last several decades. Ingram effectively provides an overview of many different genres of popular music, informing the reader of which musicians have assumed the task of raising environmental issues and emulating nature through music and technology. He also provides evidence that the work of composers and musicians, not only through music but also through organized environmental efforts, can change the way humans interact with nature. While multiple examples are helpful, I question whether or not there is an overabundance of examples for the reader to sort through. The environmental movement in the 1960s lit a spark in many people who, in turn, created their own ideas and scenarios via which to raise environmental awareness for several decades.