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# Stefano Marino, Andrea Schembari (Eds.): Pearl Jam and Philosophy

**Kurt Borg, Raylene Abdilla**

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**Author:** Stefano Marino, Andrea Schembari (Eds.)

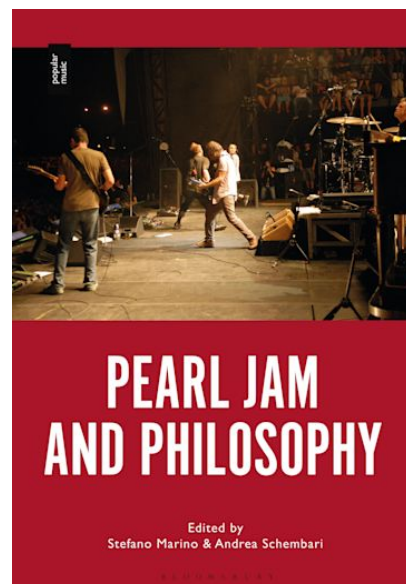
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**Reviewed by:** Kurt Borg (University of Malta),  
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In their introduction to this volume, co-editors Stefano Marino and Andrea Schembari reveal how the idea for this book project was born at a 2017 Pearl Jam concert in Firenze while they were waiting for the band to kick off their gig. They

emphasise how music, particularly rock music in this case, has the power to change and even save a life, echoing Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder's remarks on how he is a living proof of this. Recalling their youth in Sicily, the co-editors note how the bands they followed afforded them "great passion, thrill, euphoria, exaltation, excitement, and enthusiasm" (3). As scholars and fans, the co-editors argue that there is a case to be made for considering Pearl Jam in the growing literature of pop culture and philosophy. Marino and Schembari point out that, rather than a philosophical system of Pearl Jam, what they attempted to point towards through this book was how Pearl Jam's songs and career entail notions and themes that have troubled philosophers for centuries. These include themes of a particularly phenomenological nature such as the notions of experience, temporality, death, the human condition, significance and the meaning of life, authenticity and identity. Other, more broadly philosophical themes covered in this book also include the critique of mass society and the culture industry embodied by Pearl Jam, as well as resistance to conformist pressures. In their introduction, the editors present some pointers to Pearl Jam's philosophy or, rather, their ethos: namely, their fight against censorship and oppression, their endorsement of democratic and progressive values, their attempt to be part of the culture industry without being swallowed by it, and their commitment to ecology, gender issues and human rights. The different chapters attempt different 'gestures'. Some chapters engage with the *ethos* of Pearl Jam, what they stood for, their development over time as a band and the power of their music; while others conduct more specific 'readings' of particular songs or albums. Other chapters draw on Pearl Jam to reflect more broadly on political aesthetics, subcultural authenticity and postmodern fashion, while other authors attempt a more literary engagements with an aspect of Pearl Jam's music.

The book opens with a foreword by Theodore Gracyk, himself the author of various books on the aesthetics of rock music. Gracyk connects Pearl Jam with 'rockism', which is a term that gained prominence in music commentary in the late 1980s. Rockism, as Gracyk explains, is the adoption of a core set of values associated with rock bands, such as refusal to define greatness in terms of commercial success, or an expression of progressive values by rock musicians and their audience, or recognising the value of music to unify, and, importantly, the use of guitars. By these criteria, Pearl Jam qualify as rockist. Gracyk recognises that rockism can also entail a lot of snobbery, sexism and whiteness. Hence, while Pearl Jam can be seen to be exponents of a kind of rockism especially in their early work, they are also a dynamic band that motivate us to go beyond the reductive understandings of rockism. So, if Pearl Jam supposedly moved away from 'rockist' tenets by obtaining commercial success, their 'rockist' ethos was seen in the way they challenged Ticketmaster for over-charging their fans. Pearl Jam defy easy categorisations. They embody contradictions, dynamism and fluidity; this is arguably what makes them a good band to 'philosophise' with.

In Chapter 1, “Contingency, (In)significance, and the All-Encompassing Trip: Pearl Jam and the Question of the Meaning of Life,” Marino takes his cue from Vedder’s lyrics questioning whether we are ‘getting something out of this all-encompassing trip.’ He connects this with Karl Jasper’s notion of ‘the encompassing,’ that is, reality in its richness and fullness. Marino reads Pearl Jam’s questioning of modernist narratives of progress and evolution through various twentieth century philosophers such as Walter Benjamin, Horkheimer, Adorno and Gadamer. In Pearl Jam, Marino identifies a preoccupation with the act of questioning itself, showing that, in their songs, Pearl Jam often refer to the insurmountable questions and the insufficiency of answers. Marino links this with Wittgenstein’s therapeutic understanding of philosophical questioning as being akin to trying to treat an illness, that is, to overcome the torment of excessive philosophical doubt. Similarly, in Pearl Jam, we encounter conflicting views on the role of philosophising in human life: on one hand, Pearl Jam point toward the questioning nature of mankind while at the same time highlight the eventual futility, if not harm, of excessive questioning which can come at the expense of life or experience. Marino points to the numerous questions asked in Pearl Jam’s lyrics – questions of what is real, what is truth, what is human, who are we? – yet ultimately the lesson he finds in Pearl Jam is that some questions remain open precisely because they are meant to remain open. Marino then turns to the notion of temporality, claiming that the western philosophical tradition (particularly in the modern age) has tended to place primacy on the temporal mode of *the future*. To show this, Marino foregrounds a section from *Being and Time* in which Heidegger identifies the *futurity* associated with being-towards-death, whereby anticipation is tied to Dasein’s authentic being. Marino notes that, through songs such as ‘Present Tense’, Pearl Jam challenge this privileging of the future at the expense of the present. Meaning is found not in omnipotence, but in finitude, contingency, imperfection and ephemerality. Instead of surrendering oneself to a defeatist attitude in the face of insignificance, Pearl Jam call for action, fueled also by anger against oppression. With apologies to Gramsci, Marino refers to how Pearl Jam’s intellectual pessimism is coupled with critical optimism of the will. Marino’s extensive essay ends with a reading of Pearl Jam’s ethos in light of Mark Fisher’s comments on Kurt Cobain. In *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher claims that alternative and independent music had become absorbed by the mainstream, recuperating its subversive potential by transforming it into a commodified lifestyle. For Marino, Pearl Jam recognise this tension and learn to dwell in the ‘in-between’ while surviving in a world of contradictions.

In Chapter 2, “‘Just Like Innocence’: Pearl Jam and the (Re)Discovery of Hope,” Sam Morris draws parallels between Pearl Jam and British Romanticism, arguing that the relationship between the two is not always a smooth and complementary one, not least because romanticism is not easily defined. The early material of Pearl Jam – for example, the *Mamasan* traumatic trilogy of ‘Alive’, ‘Once’ and ‘Footsteps’ – portrays a difficult relationship between the self and others, which Morris reads alongside

some moments from Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* that depict guilt, the inadequacy of society, and innocence as childlike wonder. Yet Morris also notes that in some of their early songs (such as 'Rearviewmirror') there is already a hint of a transition from childhood to adulthood, akin to the transition from innocence to experience described by Blake. There are also traces of hope, Morris writes, in songs such as 'Leash' and 'Not for You', echoing lines from Blake and Wordsworth about the joys of youth and the innocence of nature. Morris argues that *No Code* represents a turning point for the band, which also represents some divergences from the Romantic tradition. He reads Pearl Jam's expression of longing for a lost past innocence as not completely in line with Wordsworth and Blake's critique of the temptation of nostalgia, even if they too acknowledge that the feeling of childhood wonder fades as one grows. However, Morris argues that if the romantic poets placed their hope in embracing mature experience, Pearl Jam seem to go on a search for a lost innocence in *No Code*. Morris reads Pearl Jam's engagement with feelings of anxiety and fear of death as attempts to overcome them so as to not forget the wonder of experience. This attempt to sustain hope in appreciating the beauty in the world is read by Morris as re-connecting Pearl Jam with the British Romantic tradition, even if they diverge from the romantic journey that leads from innocence to experience. The romantic impulse in Pearl Jam is read by Morris in their exhortation of listeners to turn inward for hope and a future-looking utopian energy to be ultimately turned outward to transform the world.

In Chapter 3, "Who's the Elderly Band Behind the Counter in a Small Town?" Radu Uszkai and Mihail-Valentin Cernea reflect on the metaphysics of the transtemporal identity of a rock band. They ask questions on whether changes in band name, group composition or music style alter a band's identity. Referring to John Searle's notion, the authors point out that the existence of a band belongs to the realm of 'institutional facts', that is, bands can survive severe changes while still being recognized as the same thing, in the same way that a government would still exist despite a change in leadership. The authors draw on conceptual tools such as Robert Nozick's 'closest continuer' theory and Saul Kripke's notion of 'rigid designator' to discuss how metaphysical questions surrounding the transtemporal identity of rock bands can be approached. Uszkai and Cernea argue that the name of a band does not seem to be essential for the identity of a band over time, as otherwise the band Mookie Blaylock – the name under which Pearl Jam played their very first gigs – would not be the same band as Pearl Jam. With lineup changes, perhaps the question complicates itself further, as Pearl Jam had several changes in their drummers and have also been joined by guest musicians such as Boom Gaspar in their live shows. The authors discuss questions such as what happens in the case of a fission of a rock band into two bands, and both claim continuity with the original band. The authors also engage with what changes in music style do to a band's identity. While some 'die-hard' fans may feel that a band is no longer that band if it deviates from its 'original sound', the authors argue that it is quite hard to argue that

a band loses its metaphysical identity due to such aesthetic transformations. The authors conclude by indicating that the cultural recognition of bands is a crucial component of appropriately designating whether a band is the same band or not.

In Chapter 4, “Making a Choice When There is No ‘Better Man’,” Laura M. Bernhardt foregrounds the theme of compromised agency as it is presented in Pearl Jam’s song, ‘Better Man’. Bernhardt engages with the song’s portrayal of a female narrator anguishing about leaving an abusive relationship but ultimately opting not to. She reads this alongside the band’s own struggles with the pressures of commodification at the time when the song was released. Bernhardt analyses such compromised agency through the work of Carisa Showden on how compromised agents, such as victims of abuse, are required to choose from a selection of bad possibilities under circumstances that are not quite of their choosing. The author highlights the complexity of such situations because it is not a matter of the victim not knowing that the situation is not in her interest, but rather that her freedom is constrained in such a way that her autonomy is compromised. The author calls for an outlook to this issue that moves beyond denying the victim’s agency as well as implying that the victim is somehow complicit in her situation. One way out of this conundrum, Bernhardt suggests, is by looking at Simone Weil’s notion of affliction. For Weil, an afflicted person is someone abandoned to misery or isolation, and someone who is reduced to an object by powerful forces, such as a factor labourer working under oppressive and dehumanising conditions. The afflicted person, Bernhardt notes, would resign herself to unhappiness and feel undeserving of salvation from the wickedness to which she is subjugated. For this reason, apart from systemic and material solutions to improve her agency, the author argues that something more is also needed, namely, radical empathy. The author concludes by proposing that recognition of another person as afflicted may help us to better understand the complexity and ambiguity involved in situations involving compromised agency when people stay in situations where they would not necessarily want to remain, such as the character described in ‘Better Man’.

Chapter 5, “That’s Where We’re Living: Determinism and Free Will in ‘Unthought Known,’” by Enrico Terrone revolves around philosophical themes from *FlashForward*. This is a 2009-2010 sci-fi television series that engages with the question of what remains of human free will in circumstances where the future seems to be determined and the characters have had ‘flashforwards’ that showed them the outcome of their future. The Pearl Jam connection is that an edited version of their song “Unthought Known” is used in a scene from one of the episodes of this series. Terrone reminds us that the notion of ‘unthought known’ originated in Freud, and was later developed further by psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas. This concept describes how “one can know things about which one is unable to think” (97). Terrone notes that ample metaphysicians argue that science encourages a conception of the universe as strictly governed by natural laws. This view

problematizes free will as an epiphenomenon which we are unable to do away with simply because it is such a deep-rooted feeling which gives coherence to emotional responses and moral judgements that regulate societies. Various movies and fiction have engaged with the theme of free will and determinism, in which characters are given powers of clairvoyance. Yet, as Terrone argues, some of these artistic attempts are riddled with an obvious inconsistency, namely that although the characters become aware of the future, somehow they manage to contradict what they would have foreseen, which is, of course, untenable with the original clairvoyant 'visions'. Such a move is often done in the spirit of critiquing the deterministic outlook by insisting on a sort of 'humanistic' sentiment that privileges free will over a cold deterministic universe. With regard to the Pearl Jam song and its use in the TV series, "Unthought Known" reflects on the human condition, finitude, the role of the human within the immensity of the cosmos, and ultimately the beauty of the richness of human experience. The author concludes by arguing that the way in which the song is deployed in the context of the narrative points towards the difficulties surrounding a notion of free will, but that its stakes within our practical thought may be too high to let go of it.

In chapter 6, "No Code Aesthetics," Alberto L. Siani engages with Pearl Jam's fourth album, *No Code*, noting that the heterogeneity that marks this album makes for interesting philosophical reflection, not least on the role of 'codes' and their rejection in art. The author reads the aesthetics of this album in terms of the 'end of art thesis,' which holds that the traditional conception of art as an expressive medium that transmits metaphysical and ethico-political content no longer exists. Siani maintains that this 'end of art' is not necessarily something to be decried, because it has emancipatory aspects that allow for veering away from traditional systems of values and embraces plurality. *No Code* complements this thesis insofar as it represents a rejection of various codes, including a break from the code of their preceding three albums. In a point that is also explored in other chapters, Siani reflects on whether this rejection of codes ultimately becomes a code in itself, that is, the code of rejecting codes, which would lead to a contradiction. However, Siani notes that "we should keep in mind that *No Code* is an artwork, not a logical investigation" (116). This is a welcome clarification; rather than excessive and intricate philosophical argumentation, Pearl Jam are embracing this unsolvable existential tension, and in this regard they represent the 'madness' of the decision, and the leap of affirming life in the face of uncertainty. For Siani, this is perhaps what 'no code aesthetics' stands for, that is, the aesthetics of heterogeneity and disharmony which may prompt the listener to a more reflective experience of the music.

Chapter 7, "Can Truth Be Found in the Wild?" by Paolo Stellino focuses on the story of Christopher McCandless, which was made into a movie in 2007 with a soundtrack by Eddie Vedder. In his early 20s McCandless set off wandering around North

America until he hitchhiked his way to Alaska to live in the wild. His decomposing body was found around four months after he entered the wild, with the cause of death being probably starvation or poisoning due to ingesting seeds that contained a toxin. Various critics claim that the story of McCandless is often romanticized, ideologized and commodified, with sympathetic commentators insufficiently calling out his naivety and arrogance. Stellino remarks that Vedder's lyrics too can be seen as contributing to this idealization of McCandless. However, while acknowledging these critiques, Stellino highlights that the appeal of this story does not lie in the specific details of McCandless' life but rather in its universal significance. Interestingly, Stellino also draws on insights from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to analyse McCandless' story, particularly his notion of 'the sick soul'. Stellino argues that McCandless was a 'sick soul' who suffered from the artificiality of consumer society, and thus opted to radically transform his life by seeking an asceticism through which he felt reborn. Drawing on Erich Fromm, Stellino writes that this transition marks McCandless' preference for the authentic 'being' mode of existence, as opposed to the accumulative 'having' mode. The profound insight that McCandless seems to have had at the end of his spiritual search for truth is that authentic existence is relational; it requires the presence of others and is not a solitary mission. Hence, 'happiness is only real when shared', McCandless writes on the pages of the last book he was reading. This is why, Stellino concludes, although one may disagree with the specifics of McCandless' diagnosis of society or with his decision to flee into the wild, what still remains admirable is the courage and honesty of the human pursuit of authentic existence. This is ultimately what Vedder gave voice to in the *Into the Wild* soundtrack, which highlights continuities with some of Pearl Jam's lyrics.

Chapter 8's title, "‘They Can Buy, But Can't Put On My Clothes’: Pearl Jam, Grunge and Subcultural Authenticity in a Postmodern Fashion Climate" by Stephanie Kramer, makes reference to a verse from Pearl Jam's song 'Corduroy'. Kramer notes how the song was inspired from a corduroy jacket Vedder wore numerous times during his shows, including in their MTV Unplugged, and was remade by the fashion industry. According to Kramer, the song's lyrics reflected the "band's refusal to sell out as a grunge posterchild in the name of corporate greed" (158), with the jacket serving as a literal and metaphorical act of resistance. Kramer links the lyrics of this song with a 'grunge' fashion trend that picked up in 1992 where plaid flannel shirts, flamboyant hats, and other cheap and conventional clothing items that came to be associated with grunge were turned into fashionable icons and sold at higher prices. Kramer draws on the work of media theorist Dick Hebdige to note that although subculture fashion, like punk fashion, highlighted individuality, non-conformity, and resistance to mainstream social norms, with time these subversive trends become absorbed by the mass fashion industry and thus lost their subversive edge. According to Kramer, Pearl Jam refused to partake in the dynamic of fashion altogether and managed to resist artistic commodification itself. Pearl Jam always

chose a convenient style of clothing comprising of t-shirts, shorts, boots or tennis shoes, with Ament wearing his flamboyant headdresses, and Vedder wearing plain t-shirts on which he could scribble political messages. Kramer argues that Pearl Jam did not give much weight to their outfits to the extent that the possible machismo associated with basketball jerseys and other sports symbols were in opposition to the feminist and political messages embedded in the band's ethos and lyrics. The band members, ultimately, were after producing music and not becoming glorified symbols for imitation.

In Chapter 9, "Pearl Jam's Ghosts: The Ethical Claim Made From the Exiled Space(s) of Homelessness and War – An Aesthetic *Response-Ability*," Jacqueline Moulton considers Pearl Jam's references to homelessness and war in their music and actions. She refers to the band's 2018 gig in Seattle which they branded 'The Home Shows' since the band had not played in Seattle for some years. In fact, the juxtaposed theme of home/homelessness was central to this show as Pearl Jam raised money, awareness and knowledge on the homelessness crisis playing out at the time in Seattle. The author elaborates on what 'home' signifies in ethical terms, that is, "the ethical question of contemporary dwelling, the question of who is at home and who is not, of who is living exiled" (165). Referring to how the word *ethos* in ancient Greek signified both dwelling and mode of being, Moulton explores the ethical implications of being at home versus 'not at-home'. She argues that this dichotomy unveils "the ideology of inside versus outside" (166). For this reason, those on the outside pose an ethical question to those on the inside, and for Moulton, the concept of home is always haunted by its constitutive outside – "the sense of being not at-home" (167). This unsettling and displacing feeling of foreignness and familiarity, for Moulton, is best grasped through Freud's notion of *the uncanny* which brings this juxtaposed duality of homeness and foreignness into the realm of the aesthetic. According to Moulton, during 'The Home Shows', Pearl Jam conjured the audience to respond ethically and aesthetically to the ethical claim made from those who are 'exiled'. The aesthetic displaces the hegemonic elements that structure language and helps to invert the antagonistic dichotomy between inside and outside. Indeed, Moulton follows Adorno's assertion that ethics emerges from the outside. Moulton notes how Pearl Jam's songs 'Yellow Ledbetter' and 'Bu\$hleaguer' – embedded with references of war – echo the sense of 'the uncanny' as a haunting from within, "a fear that comes up from within, a fear which is familiar and therefore impactful, fear which is close" (169). For Moulton, this form of haunting cuts across the realms of ethics and aesthetics, and poses a new question of what the ethical claims and responses can be and how to translate them into "communal and equitable structures of living interdependently upon a shared world" (169).

Cristina Parapar's contribution in Chapter 10, titled "Pearl Jam: Responsible Music or the Tragedy of Culture?" evaluates Pearl Jam's ethos as a form of popular music. Parapar notes how Adorno distinguishes between responsible music and light music,



arguing that light music is standardized, contributes to one-dimensional thinking and, unlike responsible music, plays into a capitalist system that seeks to alienate and passively entertain its consumers. Parapar challenges Adorno's understanding of popular music through French philosopher and music Agnès Gayraud's work, arguing that Adorno seems to ignore the fact that popular music denotes a broad variety of genres that can merge different traditions, scales, modulations, and influences from both high and low culture. Following from this defense of pop music, Parapar argues that Pearl Jam's music can at least on occasion speak to its listeners about their own situation in the same way Adorno speaks of dissonance. Following Terry Eagleton's take on left aesthetics, Parapar argues that a piece of art is in itself subversive because it refuses identification and reveals the impossibility of the union between "form and content, between language and meaning, and between the artistic form and empirical reality" (190). Pearl Jam's music, according to Parapar, serves this purpose. The 'dirty' sounds of grunge, with its partially out of tune music together with its form-content, reflect the *Zeitgeist* of disillusionment with American society in the 1990s. Parapar argues that while some pop music fits within Adorno's critique, other types of music contain the potential for critique. Following Gert Keunen's typology of *pop mainstream*, *underground*, and *alternative mainstream*, Parapar argues that Pearl Jam's music lies within the third category. This is because while they speak to a wider audience through mass distribution they still maintained "the authorship of their pieces, the less familiar sound of grunge, and the rejection of musical recipes" (197). Correspondingly, Parapar argues that Pearl Jam's music requires a certain kind of listening. Pearl Jam listeners are, in a sense, negotiators, "negotiating between intellectualism and catharsis, between adequate and structural listening and enjoyment (*jouissance*)" (199). Thus, for Parapar, Pearl Jam's listener can be best described as the 'postmodern listener', that is, a listener who enjoys the pleasure offered by the music, but at the same time is aware of the way in which the music reveals the ideological fantasy and its symptom. Ultimately, Parapar concludes that Pearl Jam's music is both responsible and authentic.

In Chapter 11, "Pearl Jam/Nirvana: A Dialectical Vortex that Revolves Around the Void," Alessandro Alfieri discusses the dialectic opposition of Pearl Jam and Nirvana. Alfieri argues that, as opposed to the music scene of the 1980s such as glam rock, grunge represented a turn to a sober, existential and introverted music scene that expressed the void experienced by a whole generation. He notes that, paradoxically, this wave of existential dread came at a time of expansion of well-being as discourses around mental health expanded in the 1990s. According to Alfieri, Nirvana was one of the few bands that reflected this existential dissatisfaction with their "message of pain and death" (207), in comparison to that of, for example, Madonna and Michael Jackson. Although both Nirvana and Pearl Jam originate from this sense of existential crisis, the bands have long been seen as rivals. Alfieri notes how on many occasions Kurt Cobain was critical of Pearl Jam, although once he

admitted that he actually liked Eddie Vedder and came to appreciate him more. Alfieri argues that Pearl Jam fall on the side of the *vitalistic* dynamic rock of the 1990s and 2000s, whereas Nirvana was more nihilistic, self-destructive, visceral and transgressive. Alfieri notes how the two bands are caught up in a dialectical vortex. Cobain's aesthetic made Nirvana attractive to mass media even though their ethos was linked to the rejection to success and social prestige. Cobain himself was caught up in this unsolvable contradiction of detesting success while at the same time basking in it and becoming paranoid when it recedes. Pearl Jam turned to mass distribution, but were more reserved in front of the cameras, with Vedder turning down many interviews. Alfieri also argues that Pearl Jam had a more mature stance, with their music reflecting more intellectual and political awareness. For Alfieri, Pearl Jam manage to negotiate the melancholic existential dread of our time through a 'nostalgia for the present' set between "anhedonic nihilism and vitalism" (214) where rage, dissent and a dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs are expressed alongside the life-affirming pleasure that the experience of their music provides.

In the concluding Chapter 12, "The Tide on the Shell: Pearl Jam and the Aquatic Allegories of Existence," Andrea Schembari notes how in their music Pearl Jam express the experience of living through aquatic allegories and metaphors, such as navigation, the ocean and the river. Schembari illuminates these dimensions through the work of other thinkers who, like Pearl Jam, recognized how these dimensions can express the condition of life. Schembari argues that the work of Pearl Jam often reflects an understanding of being as if one is navigating a ship out at sea. He reads this alongside the work of Blaise Pascal who maintains that to live one must always face the opposition between taking the plunge 'into the sea' and the inclination toward stability. However, stability and safety are never guaranteed, as depicted in the band's song 'Force of Nature' and as expressed through the Roman poet Lucretius. The songs 'Oceans' and 'Release' reflect water as a form of energy that directs one to a desired goal, where nothing remains static or unmoving, whereas 'Big Wave' speaks of human adaptation – 'surfing the waves' – to whatever life brings. As Pascal's wager reveals, one cannot avoid making choices, and this inevitability to make choices is outlined in the band's song 'Infallible' which, according to Schembari, denounces "the arrogance and distortions of an economic progress disjointed from a true social and cultural progress" (226-7). The band also explores aquatic metaphors of love keeping swimmers afloat reflected in 'Amongst the Waves'. From allegories of the condition of living to allegories of time, Schembari takes us through instances where Pearl Jam refer to the passage of time as "phenomenological time" and a "time of consciousness" (230) as outlined by Husserl and Heidegger respectively. These allegories of time become more apparent in Pearl Jam's later albums, particularly their 2020 *Gigaton* but also in earlier songs like 'I am Mine'. Finally, Schembari also engages with Pearl Jam's aquatic metaphors on the

meaning of life, such as like murmuring and hollow shells washed ashore, which he reads alongside reflections by Paul Valéry and Italo Calvino.

All in all, Marino and Schembari have completed an interesting curation of high-quality essays that capture the diversity of affects and themes in Pearl Jam songs, as well as their engagement, oftentimes critical, with the culture industry. The title of this project may, at first glance, raise an eyebrow (if not an eyeroll), for example, of those for whom 'low culture' is no place to look for serious theorising; or of those who perhaps due to an anti-intellectualist stance perceive such a project as unnecessary intellectual posturing. But this book strikes a good balance in this regard. In no way does it pretend that an appreciation of such chapters is necessary in order for one to understand the true depths of Pearl Jam. Yet, on the other hand, the authors appreciate that the band that originated in 1990 in Seattle during the golden days of grunge is one of those bands that lend themselves to theoretical engagement. Ultimately, the chapters that compose this book are written by scholars who are also fans. It is not incidental that some of the authors make references to the role, big or small, that Pearl Jam has played in their personal lives. In this positive way that this book seems like it was a *labour of love*.

This is a book for fans: the reader must have great familiarity with Pearl Jam's music, as well as the band's history, actions and position within rock history. Do some of the chapters engage in over-reading? Maybe. And if a listener knows what it is like to feel undone by 'Black', or to feel goosebumps during 'Alive', or to go crazy with 'Porch', then perhaps they may not *need* this book to tell them what they are feeling. But, nonetheless, the chapters that constitute this book will be appreciated by philosophically-inclined fans of the band who, for years, have *lived with* the band's music, or perhaps have even witnessed the *deep experience* that is a Pearl Jam concert; have experienced the *wild exhilaration* that the band provides. In other words, if you *get it*, then you get it. Not unlike a lot of philosophy, ultimately, Pearl Jam can be seen to embody a fundamental question: what does it mean to be alive?

📅 Tuesday March 1st, 2022   👤 Kurt Borg, Raylene Abdilla   📁 Reviews   🔖 aesthetics, Culture Industry, Ethics, Finitude, Grunge Music, Identity, Meaning, Pearl Jam, Popular Culture, Postmodernism, Resistance

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