

# Performing the Global Village

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Making Music in the 21st Century

Jonathan Stock

# Introduction

The musical history of the first decades of the new century is yet to be written but already we see some new trends.

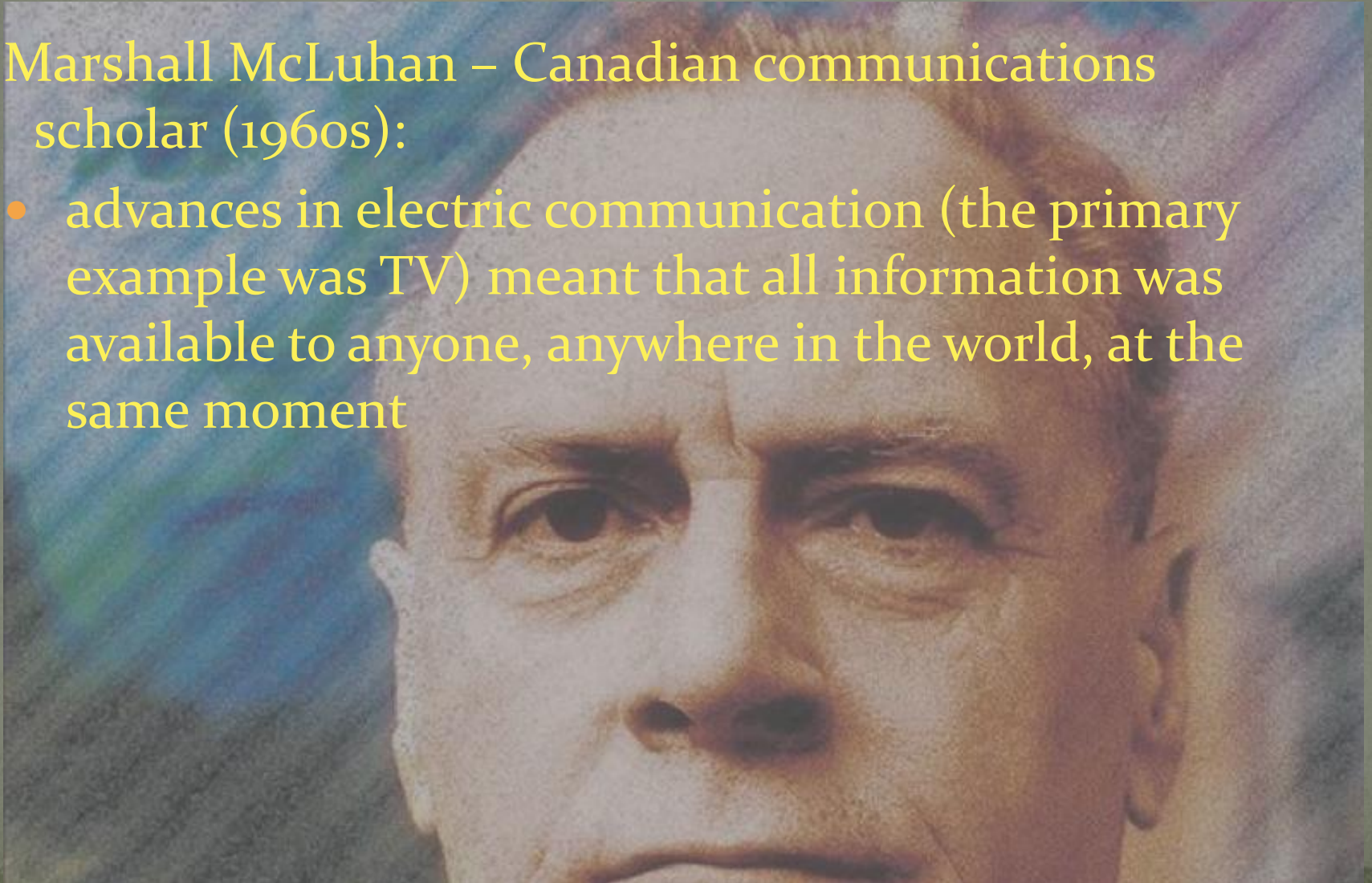
Three case studies:

- the merging of participation and representation in contexts of mediated display in popular music & a marked shift away from musics with a clear, unproblematised sense of national identity and toward those developing more internationalist projections – treated at most length
- globalization acknowledged as a stylistic feature in various types of new fusion music – far shorter
- the acquisition of performance expertise in the cultural traditions of one part of the world by musicians visibly from quite another – again, very brief

# 'Global village'

Marshall McLuhan – Canadian communications scholar (1960s):

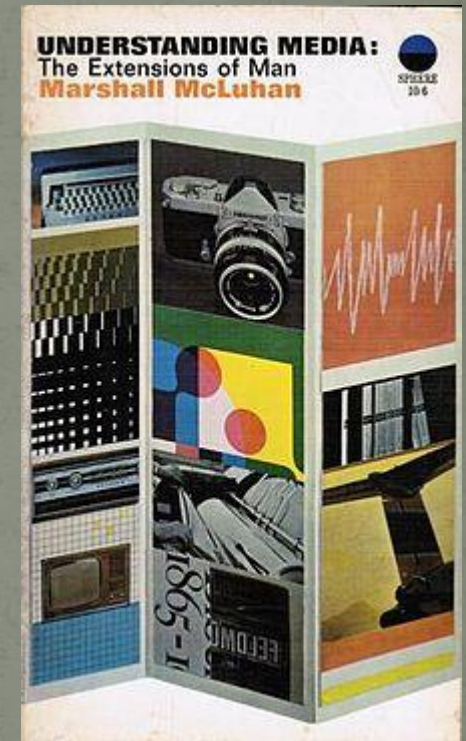
- advances in electric communication (the primary example was TV) meant that all information was available to anyone, anywhere in the world, at the same moment



# McLuhan on the 'global village'

- 'Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned' (1964:3).
- 'As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed at bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree' (1964:5)

Some critics say he's a better poet than futurologist...



McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

# Case study 1a: participation, representation, internationalisation & mediation

the merging of participation and representation

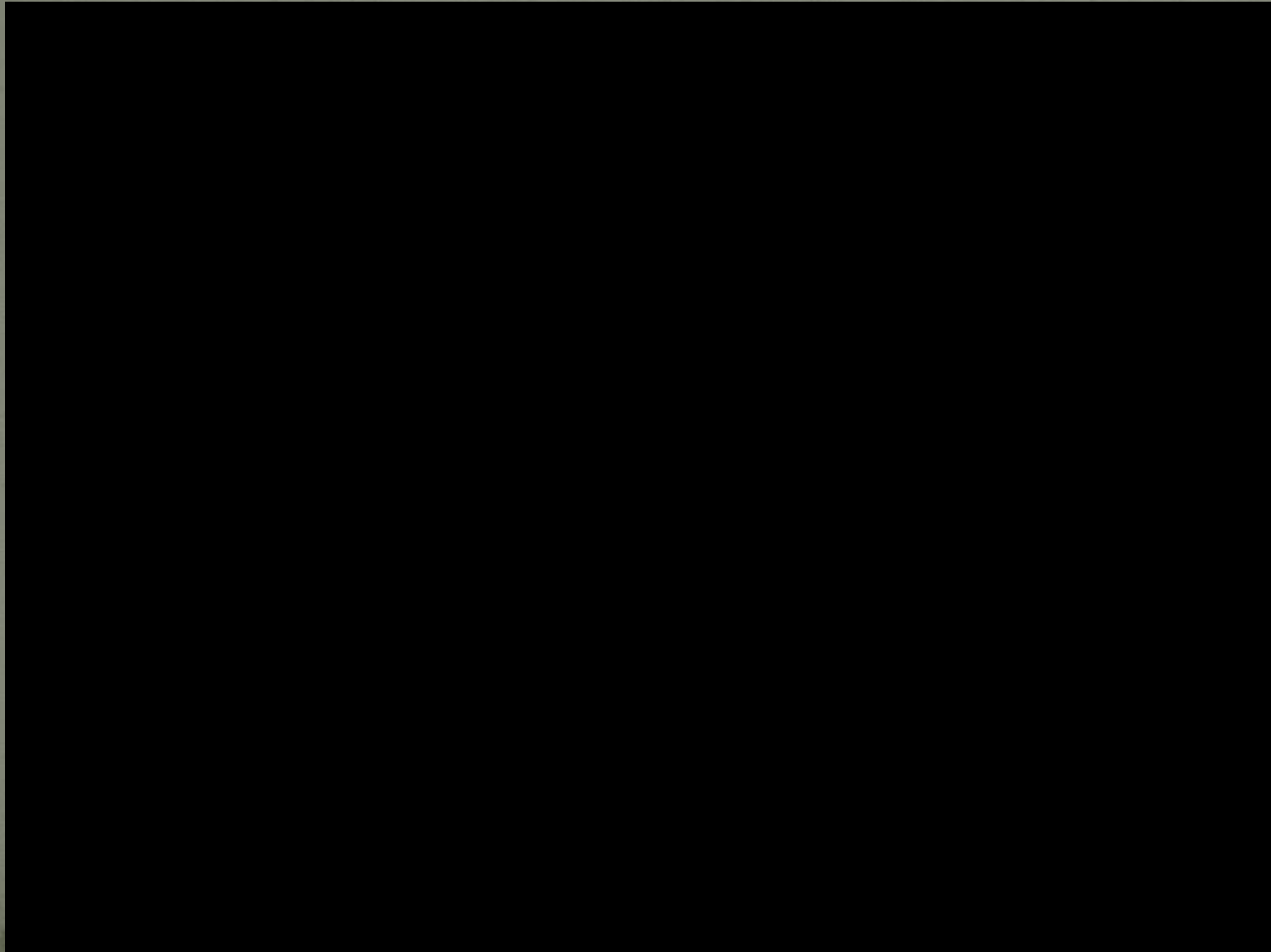
a marked shift away from unproblematised national music and toward more internationalist projections

the key role of electronic and online mediation in all this

‘Regimental Polka’ – Red Army Choir and Dance Ensemble, Tchaikovsky Hall, Moscow, 1992.

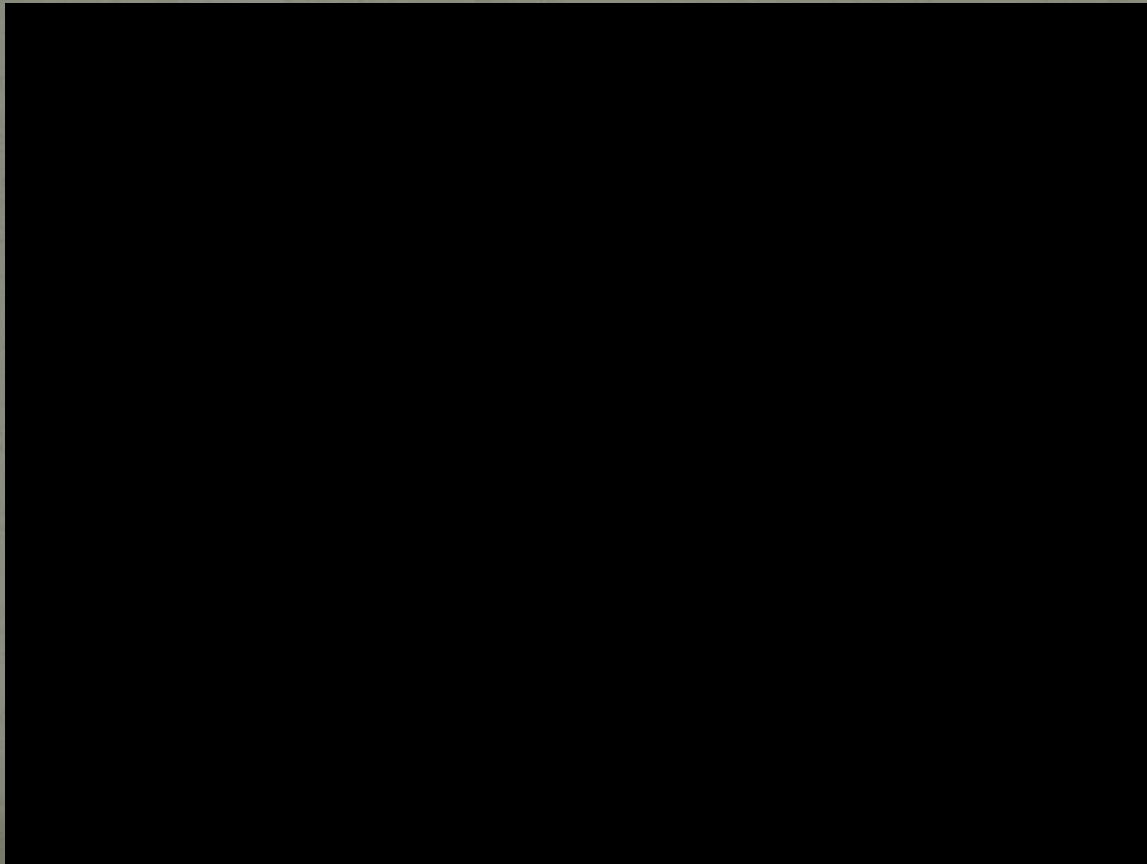
- the clear demarcation of performer and audience
- the folklorized material: it signals the nation’s foundation in the people but very much via the intervention of specialist arrangers—in the Chinese context we’d call it ‘national music’ rather than ‘folk music’
- the professionalism of the performance itself—one might talk of the regimented bodies of the performers (its more than a pun)
- the formal setting of the performance in a hall named for a national culture hero (albeit mediated by TV show camera work)
- that there’s really no space given within the performance to irony or reflexivity

# 'Regimental Polka'



# Case study 1a

Compare all that with this example, which I'll argue is a more typical 21<sup>st</sup>-century performance expression



# Case study 1a

‘Dancing Inmates’ from Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center: Michael Jackson’s ‘They Don’t Really Care About Us’ (2010).

- 0.00 warden as drill sergeant followed by marching—inmates as soldiers, their bodies regimented.... Drumming, but not military percussion or movements
- 0.09 security fence prominently displayed—we’re reminded that we’re outside looking in
- 0.20 marching increasingly becomes reworked as dance. ‘Who’s bad?’
- 1.38 police despatch radio
- 1.45 MJ’s vocals finally begin
- 1.54 chorus
- [3.10 [Martin Luther King’s photo paraded to the tones of Mussorgsky’s ‘Great Gate of Kiev’
- 3.40] Inmates form Peace symbol]





# Case study 1a

'Dancing Inmates' from Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center: Michael Jackson's 'They Don't Really Care About Us' (2010).

- again, clear demarcation of performer and audience
- music from the global pop tradition rather than folklorized: signalling humanity's oneness in adversity & the rights of the oppressed?
- again, this all occurs very much via the intervention of specialist arrangers
- here, bodily regimentation has a different and darker tone, but it's resonances lead all the same to a high-impact spectacle in terms of the performance itself
- the provocative setting of the performance in a place of imprisonment; it's not so much a live event mediated for national TV as one designed first and foremost for world viewers on YouTube
- the space given within the performance to irony / reflexivity: 'Who's bad', 'They don't really care about us', Martin Luther King...

# Case study 1a

And there's more to say on the origins of the material. If the Red Army example points in some generic way for listeners within and beyond the audience into times and events in Soviet and Russian history, the latter riffs very specifically on two of Michael Jackson's own music videos. In the first, he champions the urban favela poor as their rainbow bodies claim the streets before the immobile torsos of (what we're led to assume are) Rio's police; in the second, he's takes the persona of an inmate in a US prison, where his claims about injustice and racism take on even more direct tones.

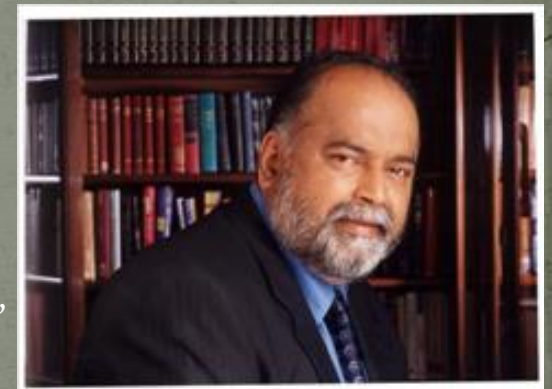


# Case study 1a

What, then, are we supposed to take from the spectacle of the dancing inmates? Yes, the that no one cares for them, and that's an injustice. But beyond that it quickly becomes problematic. Here's some help from Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai argues that McLuhan overestimated the communitarian implications of the new media order:

The world we live in now seems rhizomic [multiple, non-hierarchic]..., even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other...

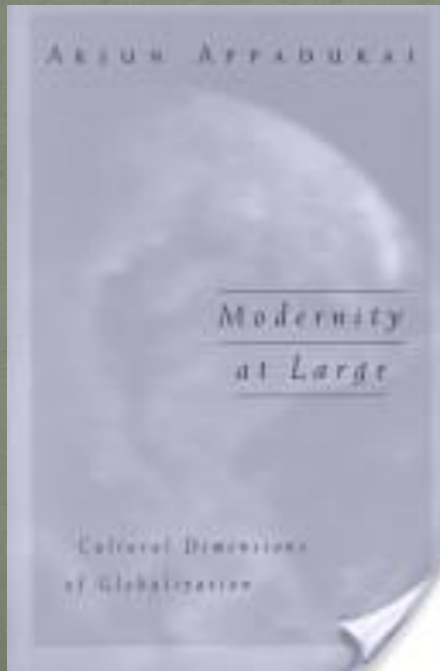
If a global cultural system is emerging, it is filled with ironies and resistances, sometimes camouflaged as passivity... The uncanny Philippine affinity for American popular music is rich testimony to the global culture of the hyperreal, for somehow Philippine renditions of American popular songs are both more widespread in the Philippines, and more disturbingly faithful to their originals, than they are in the United States today. An entire nation seems to have learned to mimic Kenny Rogers and the Lennon sisters, like a vast Asian Motown chorus. But *Americanization* is certainly a pallid term to apply to such a situation, for not only are there more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of some American songs (often from the American past) than there are Americans doing so, there is also, of course, the fact that the rest of their lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world that gave birth to these songs.



# Case study 1a

[Appadurai still]

In a further globalizing twist on what Fredric Jameson has recently called 'nostalgia for the present' (1989), these Filipinos look back to a world they never have lost. This is one of the central ironies of global cultural flows... Here we have nostalgia without memory... Perhaps the most radical postmodernists would argue that this is hardly surprising because in the peculiar chronicities of late capitalism, pastiche and nostalgia are central modes of image production and reception. (pp. 29-30)



Is our example a nightmare only made possible by the 21<sup>st</sup> century's new electronic means? Is it Warden Byron Garcia's fantasy? *Our* fantasy? Are the prisoners creating a pastiche that's empowering or therapeutic to them, or coercive?

And how about the role of the Jackson estate/Sony? Doesn't these inmates' take on Jackson's oppositional song resonate only within a frame that's thoroughly mediated by late capitalism?

Arjun Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

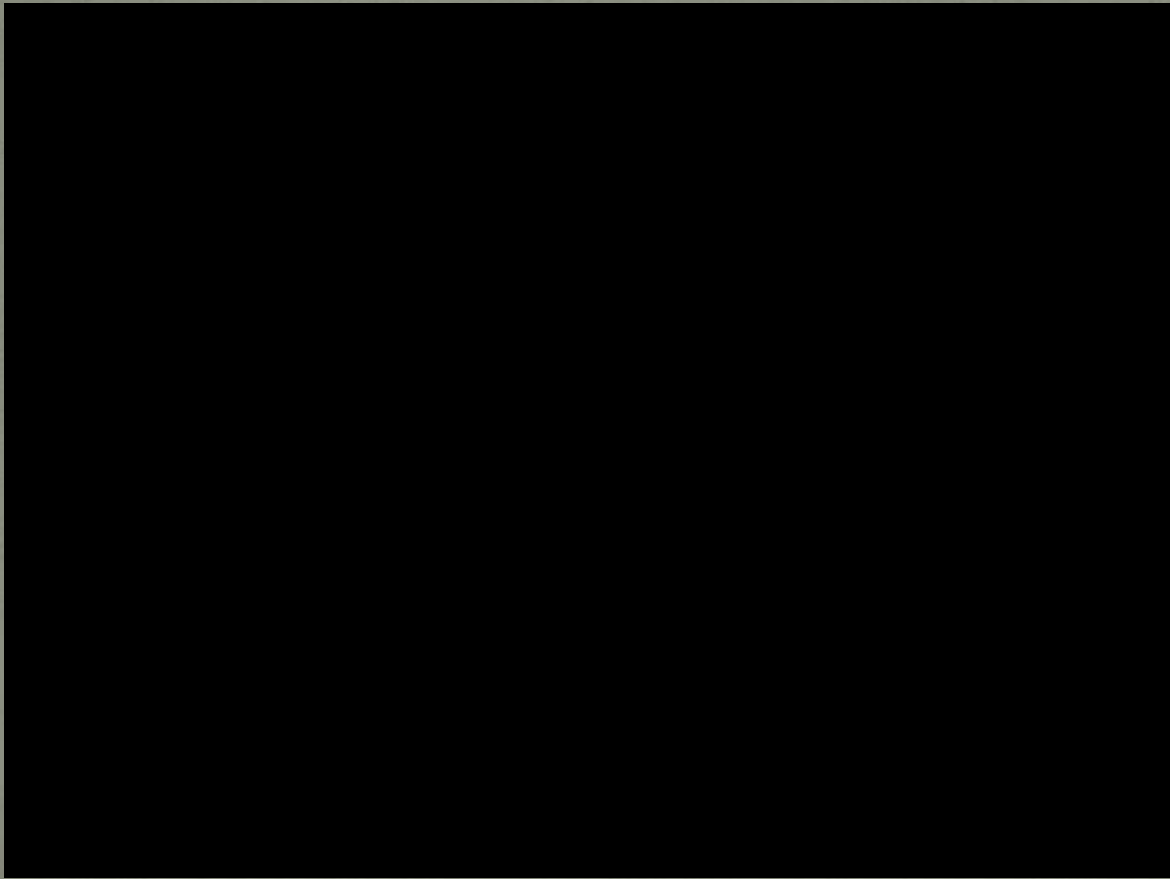
# Case study 1b

In the latter part of the 20th century, musical performance had already become a powerful tool in the mobilisation of international aid. The classic instance is, of course, Band Aid and 'Do They Know It's Christmas' (1984).

- clear demarcation of performer and audience
- the song content attempts to signal a sense of international care and responsibility (albeit patronising by today's standards and surely even then—of course they knew it's Christmas, they weren't lacking calendars...)
- still via the intervention of specialist arrangers
- again, the performance is marked out by the presence of professional bodies, though here they're more drawn together than regimented, we're supposed to understand
- the formal setting of the performance in a recording studio (mediated by the TV camera)
- no space given within the performance to irony or reflexivity

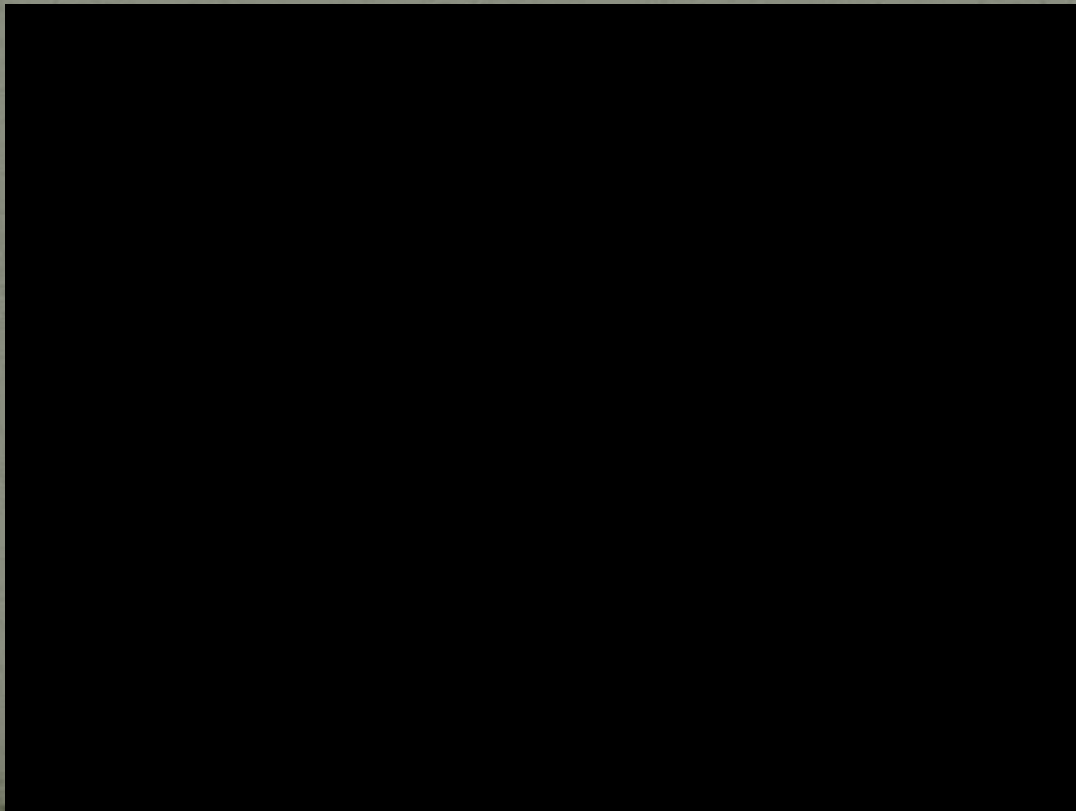
# Case study 1b

Band Aid, 'Do They Know It's Christmas' (1984).



# Case study 1b

In the 21st century, we see campaigns that are more genuinely global, and those with the direct involvement of the target people in the campaign itself. An example is Playing for Change's 'Stand By Me' (2008)



# Case study 1b

- 0.22 Roger Ridley identified: guitarist and singer, Santa Monica, California; note how we get to meet him musically before he's named; we're told, the music comes first
- 1.05 recordist (Mark Johnson) shown, actively "creating" our experience
- 1.11 second musician overlaid: Grandpa Elliott, New Orleans, Louisiana—note how he's now connected by headphones to the recording of Ridley (we assume); and then Washboard Chaz, Louisiana
- 1.38 video takes us back to the Ridley, as if in real time, emphasizing that they're now layers in something bigger that claims 'liveness'
- 1.56 airplane—we're on the road! Internationality signalled
- 1.58 Clarence Bekker, Amsterdam (though it looks somewhere warmer); musicians thicker & faster
- 2.09 Twin Eagle Drum Group, Zuni, New Mexico
- 2.34 Toulouse, France (tambourine), but note how the music has brought in three parts at once—the cellist is especially easy to hear now—all atop what we already have
- 2.38 Rio, Brazil (ukelele)—but a grand square, not a favela this time
- 2.44 Moscow, Russia (cello)—not a Red Army soldier this time; notably, the instruments aren't tied by geography to their locations



# Case study 1b

- clear demarcation of performers and audience, notwithstanding the breaking of the fourth wall
- the song content attempts to signal a sense of international care and responsibility
- the intervention of specialist arrangers, such as the recordist, signalled within the video
- arguably, some of these musicians represent a different kind of professional body, and again they're presented as drawn together (in virtuality) rather than regimented, although we can imagine contractual complexities behind it all
- the informal setting of the performance on the street (as assembled after the event by the recording gear ); it can only be fully experienced via online viewing
- I don't think one could label the performance ironic, despite the nice pun in the song's title—the fellow musicians are standing far away, literally. But there is a clear presentation of reflexivity—the street musicians are shown listening to one another and so experiencing a shared subject position.

If the track builds on idea of street musicians (playing for change) connected to the notion of uniting the world through music (playing for change), there's continuity with older notions of music as a universal language, albeit only via the medium of Western popular music—there's no real attempt at fusion of styles as the song track travels the globe. (Incidentally, 'Stand By Me' was noted in 2012 as the 6<sup>th</sup> highest-earning songs in its 51-year history to that date, so it's an interesting choice in this context.)

# Case study 1: conclusions

The songs and tracks selected have shown continuities with their late 20<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors but some distinctions too:

- A new turn in performance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves the designing of music and dance directly for global audiences through the mediation of new technologies. If we had this technology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, we now seem to have learnt how to use it.
- We're more and more seeing performance that draws people from different locales into a working relationship with one another. This is typically downplaying the role of the nation state and emphasizing human interconnectivity, at least in the examples I played.
- There's a turn to more reflexive performance in some of this work, which is to say that space and time aren't being collapsed so much as overlaid in potentially meaning-rich ways.
- This move from doing something 'for them' to doing it 'with them' is still mired in suspicions that, despite the rhetoric, some of us might be doing it primarily for ourselves. That suspicion seems well-founded: even seemingly equal exchanges occur within a world system where Western economic forces and cultural norms remain remarkably formative even when they go (notably) unremarked.

## Case study 2: performing globalization

In this case study I ask what we should make of the dynamics of musical globalization in a series of examples of music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that explicitly seek to capture and represent the hybrid essence(s) of globalization. Again, all this work has plenty of precedent in 20<sup>th</sup>-century performance and earlier.

# Globalization vs. the 'nation state'

The performers I'm thinking of are responding to the old idea of the nation state as a sovereign entity based on historic borders enclosing a population who self-identify as sharing a single history, language and culture.

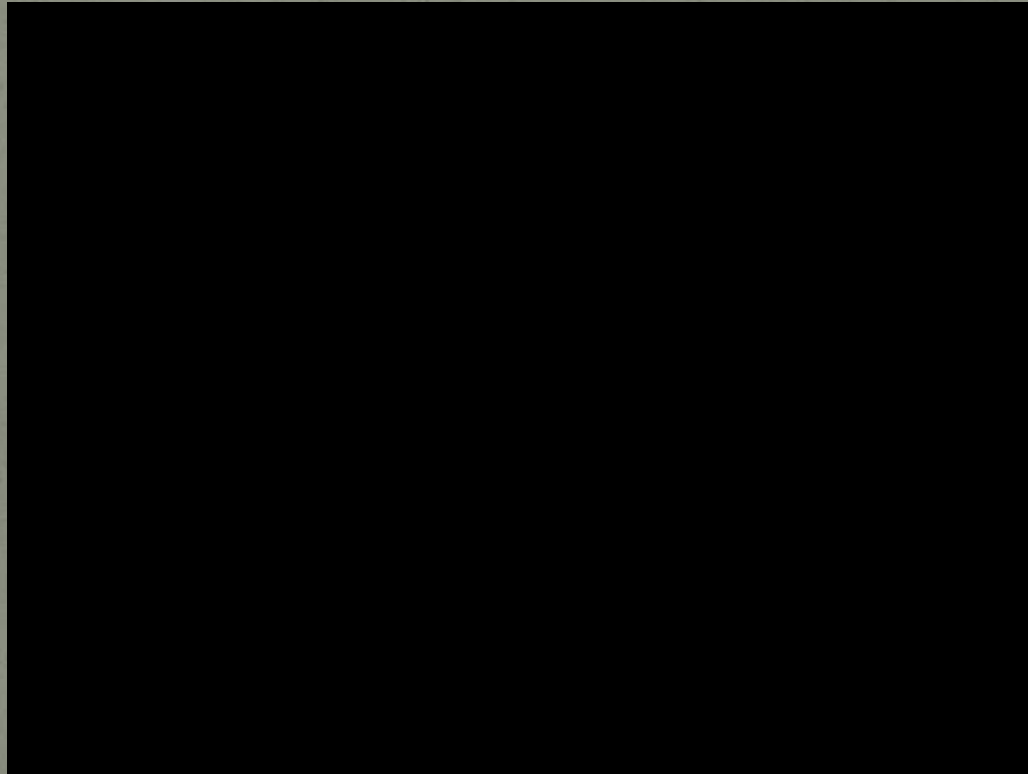
In responding to this idea, these musicians are finding many contradictions and problems inherent in this set of assumptions, e.g.:

- each of these terms is variably understood
- ethnic minorities don't appear in the definition
- bigger nations impact on smaller neighbours
- groupings of nations set rules for group participants

Their new musical practices, however, seem mostly concerned with portraying the realities of multi-ethnicity (and one can often postulate a move occurring from earlier work that was more concerned with making explicit class consciousness).

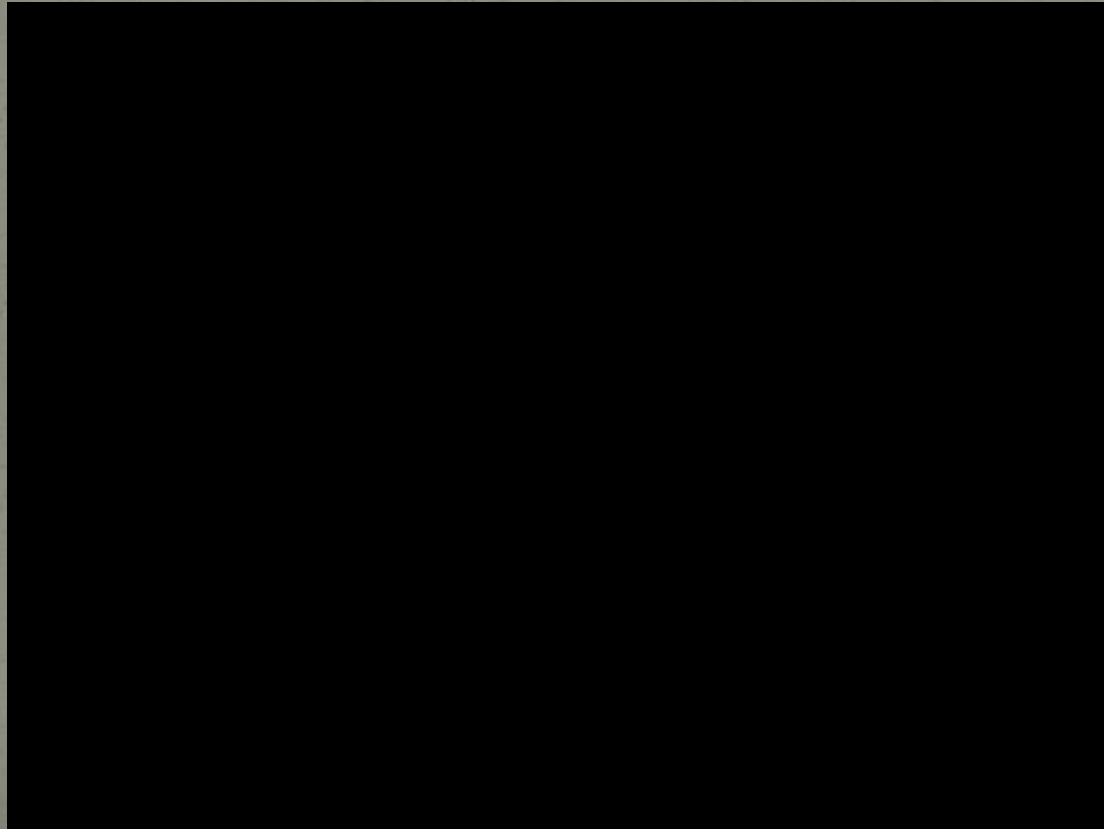
## Case study 2: performing globalization

- The Imagined Village, 'The Handweaver and The Factory Maid' (2010)



# Case study 2: performing globalization

- The Silk Road Ensemble, 'A Playlist Without Borders' (2013)



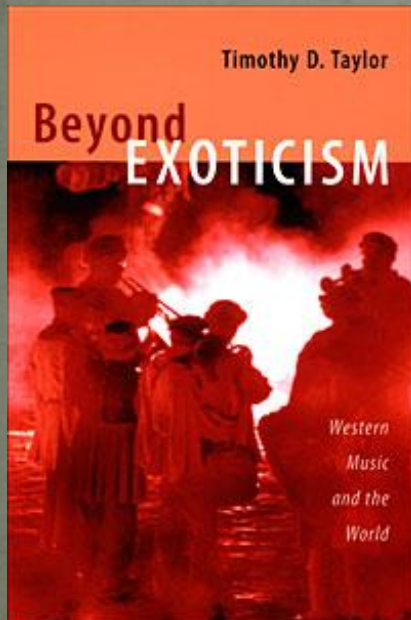
# Case study 2



American musicologist Timothy D. Taylor:

‘Globalization is the term most commonly used to refer to the recent regime under which nonwestern peoples are dominated and represented by the West.... Globalization differs from other regimes in that in the so-called developed countries the nation-state exerts less influence on the day-to-day lives of its citizens than multinational corporations do.’

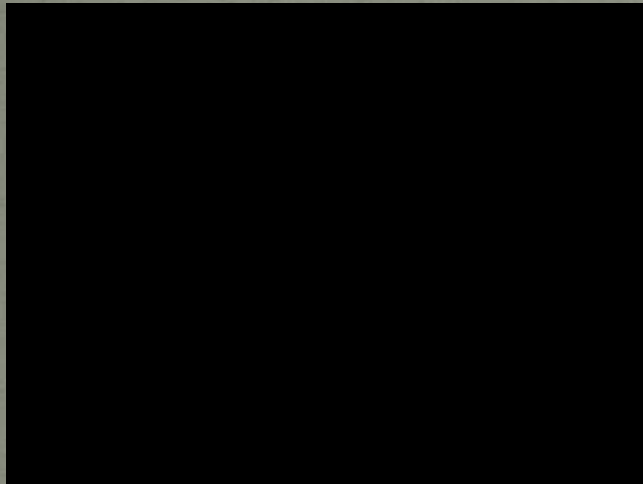
Taylor goes on to say that the state still matters as it sets the rules for the commerce of culture, but those rules increasingly reflect the desires of the multinationals, not of the ordinary people. (p. 113)



Taylor, Timothy D.. 2007. *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

# Case study 2

Let's compare this mostly pessimistic view with that of British ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (via the good offices of the Ethnomusicology Explained YouTube channel)





# Case study 2: observations in place of a conclusion

- the English example is less problematic insofar as it sets out to remind us of the multi-ethnic roots of modern English society, even as it problematizes the notion of the rural as the putative roots of everything English.
- Meanwhile, the Silk Road Ensemble have a harder challenge to overcome, and their turn to the music notation and stands of Western art music doesn't help them evade the criticism of reducing the vitality and distinction of numerous cultures to a colourful kind of contemporary Western music: a tourist show for the discerning listener.
- Both projects are certainly commercial: they involve a touring ensemble that sells CDs but they're both much shaped by the input and musical enthusiasms of the partner musicians who find employment in these projects, and both have rich educational websites and foundations with well-put statements of creative ideology.

# Case study 2: observations in place of a conclusion

- Neither Taylor nor Stokes looked very far outside the most commercial kinds of music in their analyses. Indeed, they were mostly continuing an older furrow of argument from popular music studies related to the illusion of choice in the mass market. That remains relevant. My point would be that we also need to look at these newer efforts at musical hybridity; there's a significant amount of new work this century that's within the commercial world but that's very evidently not simply about making money.
- As we saw, the geographical imaginaries are diverse—the Imagined Village project is conceived as an intervention in UK-centric debates over nationhood, migration, belonging, and cultural plurality; the Silk Road is a more strategic rumination on East-West cultural relations over a much wider timescale.
- And the musical components and target listenerships are equally diverse. We lack analytical scholarship on examples like these.

# Case study 3: Learning the world's music

Increasingly, we aspire to learn the musics of elsewhere. We're so long used to that in Western classical music, that we no longer remark upon the prominence of many East Asian performers in that tradition.

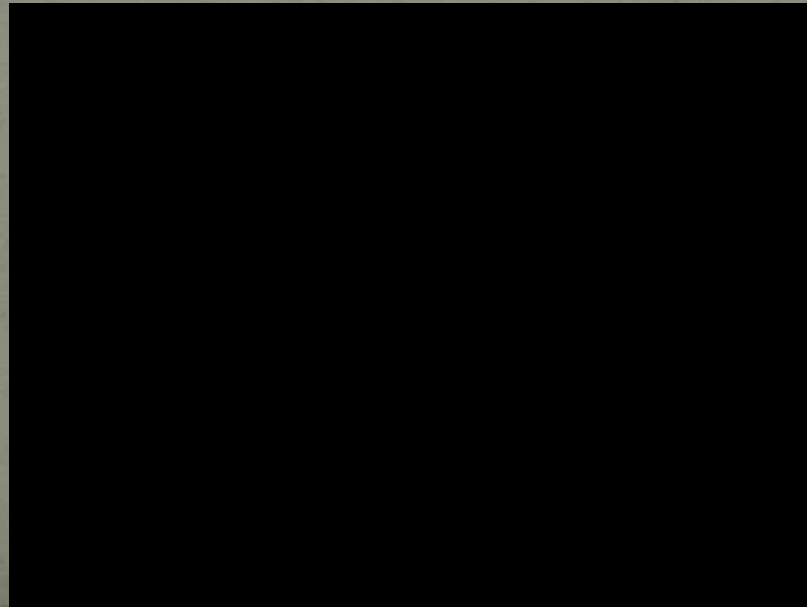


Chinese pianist Lang Lang

# Case study 3: Learning the world's music

Now it's happening the other way around and with world musics too. Think of Ross Daly in Crete (so it's a 21<sup>st</sup>-century intensification, not a new millennial trend), or, in my next example John Ball, an established professional *tabla* teacher in Britain, here playing *santoor* with a group of friends:

- Indus (*sitar, santoor, flute & tabla*), 'Firefly' (2011)



# Case study 3

Critics might see this as yet a further acquisition by the West, but it seems to me that we can't complain about musicians worldwide adopting Western idioms, or reduce that to economic or international status advantage while simultaneously criticising Westerners for taking up other musics. To understand this better, we need to look hard at their personal reasons for doing so, which is to say there's a need for more ethnographic and interview enquiry with these kinds of musicians.

Part of that investigation will be a look at the institutions for learning. Up to now, such learning at the higher levels of proficiency has typically involved international travel, but with diasporic tutors and today's enhanced electronic media, that's less and less necessary. Incidentally, this raises the question as to how far the institutions where many of us study or teach are facing up to such changes and facilitating exactly this kind of new direction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

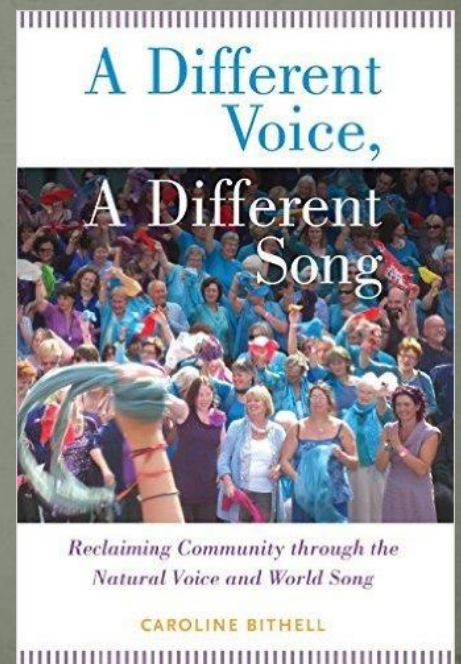


# Case study 3: observations in place of a conclusion

Performers remain inventive and imaginative, striving to shape new musical expressions of who they are (or want to be) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just as before.

In music, this is going beyond hybridity, fusion or pastiche (Appadurai) toward the mastery of musical performance from elsewhere. Concerns about nostalgia for a past we don't share or appropriation likewise don't seem to entirely capture this vector—I'm not sure we've researched it enough to adequately speak for it, although I note recent work by Caroline Bithell.

Caroline Bithell, *A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through Natural Voice and World Song* (New York, 2014).



# Conclusions

- New mediations of performance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are allowing professional musicians of several kinds to place themselves into new collaborations, many of them characterized by an increased reflexivity as compared to 20<sup>th</sup>-century models. Not all of these are unproblematic by any means.
- Appadurai's discussion of the 'rhizomic' nature of some of this activity captures the way it can reference back to former expressions rather well.
- These exchanges occur within a world system where Western economic forces and cultural norms remain remarkably formative even when they stay unremarked. If we're in a global village, then we're mostly near the market place, rather than the church, school or band club.

# Conclusions

- Experts remain in two minds about whether we're seeing steps in new musical performances toward a fairer international environment, or the rise of an even more unfairly stacked multi-national system. To move the argument on, we need to attend, view and download new performances and research how they are being (variously) understood.
- And we need to explore the artistic/musical decisions as well as the social and economic constructions brought into play by these performances, so that we can contribute new analytic viewpoints to what are simultaneously musical and social projections: musical sound matters, and is at once functional and aesthetic: music does something, and it does it in particular ways, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as before.