Towards a global musicology?

The groundplan of the Vienna International Exhibition of Music and Theatre (1892) reveals a symbolic layout that placed the Viennese classics at the centre of the musical world: it was the work of Guido Adler, who had seven years earlier laid out the groundplan for musicology. Adler’s vision of the discipline, which construed Western music as text and relegated the rest of the world’s music to a separate sub-discipline, was remarkably long-lasting. Even the ‘New’ musicology of the 1990s was built on the same assumptions, and in this way the lasting impact of Adler’s text-based ontology and the resulting bifurcation of the world’s musics limited any potential for a more global purview. Much has changed since the 1990s, but perhaps most significant is the foregrounding of performance, that is to say of music as experienced sound rather than sounded writing, and a resulting convergence between musicology and ethnomusicology. This conceptual development has coincided with technological change: digital multimedia and the web have both provided direct access to audiovisual sources across the world and prompted global production (as neatly illustrated by internet memes). The combination of conceptual and technological change has created the potential for a global musicology such as could not previously be imagined, in which—among other things—ontologies are treated not as schismatic assumptions but as objects of investigation. Responding to the organisers’ invitation to brainstorm, I explore what this might mean, envisaging a musicology of interconnectedness that combines local perspectives with global awareness.