

Foreword

A Tribute to Jonathan Hill

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Shamanism is a poeticizing of the relations between living and dead humans, or between mythic ancestors and human descendants, resulting in a ‘re-membering’ of the world of living people as an imagined political community that includes mythic beings and deceased persons.

—Jonathan D. Hill, *Musicalizing the Occult*

Remembering Jonathan Hill as a friend and colleague is not difficult; he remains very much part of our imagined political community. Knowing Jonathan for the twenty-five years since I was hired at Southern Illinois University during the time when he served as chair, what has struck me most, both then and now, is his passion. Jonathan Hill was a passionate man, and that passion encompassed anthropology, music and the politics of creating a more sustainable future, beginning with the Amazonian rainforest with which he was most familiar.

Jonathan’s work influenced me before I came to SIU, as his groundbreaking collection *Rethinking History and Myth* (1988) was an important piece in anthropology’s challenge to traditional Western historiographies that dismissed those ‘People without History’, and the start of imagining ‘Histories without Europe’, a major ongoing component of his work.

His passion also showed in his love of music, both as a performer and as a theoretician, in developing the concept of ‘musicalization’, or the transposition of music into meaning and verbal form. He described musicalization in Venezuela as an ‘opening up of the world through the movement of musical sounds across the rivers and rainforest [of the Amazon]’ (Hill 2020), a moral economy of musicalized movement in keeping with the themes of this volume. Musicalization, then, is about movement and meaning materialized, just as he notes in his contribution (with Rodríguez) to this volume, in which the movement of Venezuelan migrants provides ‘lessons about the materiality of discursive forms, and their transformation in moments of tension with state apparatuses . . . [and] the ways in which

Venezuelan discourses change and their materiality becomes relevant in the process of creating new diasporic subjectivities’.

Jonathan’s vision of musicalization extended to US folk music as well, as is illustrated in his analysis of Pete Seeger’s performance of ‘Waist Deep in the Big Muddy’ on the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in the wake of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. He showed that such performances, just like the shamanism he had studied so well, exemplified ‘musically performed discourses that open up new spaces for meaning construction through naming power, metaphor, and controlling information flows’ (Hill 2013).

His passion showed equally in his opposition to the extractive economies of government and corporate interests in the Amazon, which he expressed in multiple ways. I think, in particular, of his much-loved class ‘Anthropology and Contemporary Human Problems’, which he taught for many years at SIU, and which introduced students to the significance of Indigenous stewardship of the environment, as well as to the ways that the ‘mythical’ stories that he studied were part of ongoing processes of poetically transforming the other-than-human environment into social relations and relations of sociability.

Like the ancestor and trickster figure Made-From-Bone (Hill 2008), Jonathan remains part of the imagined political community that encompasses past and present, living and dead, human and other-than-human.

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