

From the Jungle to the City: Ecomimesis and Imagining Emplacement in the Music of Jon Hassell

Introduction

Jon Hassell (b. 1937) was born contemporaneously with the major figures of American musical minimalism—La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass—and his music evidences many of the same technical and material preoccupations: improvisation, repetition, electronic effects, consonant harmonies, non-Western influences. In his early career Hassell would perform as a trumpeter with both Young and Riley (after studying with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Germany) before embarking on a solo career as performer and composer in the late 1970s. Known for a distinctive trumpet sound that resulted from a study of Hindustani music (with Pandit Pran Nath), his own compositions/performances have extensively employed experimental electronic effects, and he has sought to combine musical influences from around the world. By 1980 he began to label this style or method of music-making as “Fourth World”—that is, a mediation of “third world” musics through “first world” technology. Although an attraction to cultural difference seems the most apparent element of consistency in his music, concomitant with and deeply implicated in this is an abiding concern over the relation between humans and their environments.¹ The present essay focuses on this latter aspect of Hassell’s music, in particular through the lens of “ecomimesis”—generally defined as evocations of environment or ambience in art.² I proceed chronologically, dwelling first on his early music,

¹ I am considering other aspects of Hassell’s music, including exoticism, more thoroughly elsewhere. Both the exoticist and environmental aspects have received (somewhat cursory) examinations before: in the Orientalist-critiques of Steven Feld (17–18) and John Corbett (175–78) and in the ecocriticism of David Ingram (194–97). While these are insightful and valuable as starting points, there is also much to be learned by making Hassell’s music the center around which a study revolves.

² I borrow this concept from Timothy Morton’s *Ecology without Nature*.

which was preoccupied with imagery of the natural (non-industrialized, non-urban) world and by representations of humans making music within it; through a series of theoretical reflections I transition into an investigation of a section of his later output which thematizes urban life. How do Hassell's ecomimetic musical practices reflect and refract received constructions of nature and environment? What ways of being in the world, actual and possible, are gestured toward by this music?

Landmusic: A Prologue

Although Hassell is most known today for his diverse recorded albums and almost chamber-music-like live performances—albums and concerts being the conventional products of a late-twentieth-century career in music—some of his earliest work was in a (seemingly) much different area: land art. I touch on this here as it demonstrates the profound influence of ecological thought on his artistic sentiments and practice and because, alongside his more conventional projects, he will continue to produce occasional works in this mode into the present.

By the late 1960s Hassell was living in New York and had become acquainted with the musician and sculptor Walter De Maria (b. 1935) (who had made the move at the beginning of the decade from California, along with another to-be Hassell collaborator, La Monte Young). De Maria at the time, along with a small number of other artists, had become disaffected with gallery-bound artworks. In a 1972 interview (apparently the only one he ever granted) he explained,

The doing of your work in New York depended on the state of your studio and it depended on the state of your gallery. It meant that your work was to be judged within the context of the space of the gallery. ... Aesthetically we can't do enough here in the city under this set of rituals. ... How much time does a person spend with a piece of

sculpture? An average of perhaps less than one minute, maximum of five or ten, tops. Nobody spends ten minutes looking at one piece of sculpture. So by starting to work with land sculpture in 1968 I was able to make things of a scale completely unknown to this time, and able to occupy people with a single work for periods of up to an entire day. ... If I go out and do this mile long piece, it's going to be a more powerful experience than just experiencing these few perfect sculptures in the gallery. (De Maria, "Oral History")³

If, according to R. Murray Schafer (104), art in its traditional contexts—the concert hall, the art museum and gallery—provided a visual or aural window onto worlds beyond, the artwork under De Maria and others was now to be exploded out into the world itself: "abstract art," as another early land-art practitioner said, "laid down in the real spaces of the world" (Richard Long, qtd. in Tufnell 12). Captivated by new possibilities for experiencing space, place, and time through art, De Maria also admitted to being disturbed by the "crises of the cities" of the late 1960s. In 1968, far from New York City, he began drawing lines in the Mojave Desert—creating what he called "landworks" (also to be known as "land art" or "earthworks").

Hassell, directly influenced by De Maria (Lowenstein 2003; p.c. 14 May 2011), conceived his *Landmusic Series* mainly between 1969 and 1972, shifting the emphasis from the visual to the sonic. Most projects in this series remained at the level of the conceptual. His notes from this time minimally but evocatively describe: "Powerful transducers plugged into rock, salt lake bed, icecap: an entire mountain or mesa glowing softly with a constant sound"; "Underground thunder spreading across an open field." Or "Ocean–Desert," inspired by De Maria's western desert creations: a pair of microphones at the beach pick up the sounds of the ocean which are to be transmitted 250 miles into the desert near Las Vegas; underground speakers play back the ocean sounds, "like an echo of prehistoric times in which the desert was actually the floor of the sea" (Hassell 1998).

Only one of his *Landmusic* projects was ever realized. For *Elemental Warnings* (1969–

³ I have reordered here the somewhat scattered comments on this topic that emerged through the interview.

70),

Twenty miniature oscillators pulsing at various rates between 4 and 7 cycles per second within a frequency range of 2500–3100 Hz are buried in the earth. At the end of the exhibition these are attached to twenty helium-filled balloons and allowed to “explode” into the atmosphere. The balloons eventually burst and the oscillators drift to the earth on small parachutes, coming to rest on land and under sea—still sounding. (Hassell, “Elemental Warnings”)

The schematics indicate the dimensions of the work: at first confined to a ten foot patch of land, the oscillators were expected to float 20,000 feet in the air before dispersing over fifty miles—almost literally an “explosion” of art into the world. The cumulative effect of the oscillators is something like the sound of chirping crickets,⁴ and one can imagine this chirping cloud dissipating into the atmosphere as the oscillators float away, individual chirps finally coming to rest across the wilderness of Connecticut.

Hassell himself never took this type of work as far as he might have, deterred by the sheer quantities of time and resources needed to bring such projects to fruition (p.c. 14 May 2011). It seems likely that he was also too powerfully drawn to musical sound and performance as somewhat more traditionally conceived.⁵ Still, in this early work one notices incipient manifestations of concerns that suffuse his later work: the interpenetration of places and the interaction of the technological and the natural.

From the Jungle

Much of Hassell’s more traditional music-making during the first twenty years of his career was founded on a paradox, albeit one that is central to the creative imagination which, to

⁴ A clip of the sound was broadcast on KPFA on the program *Source: Sound Show, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York City, October 1969–January 1970*. Available online at <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=SRC.1970.XX.XX.5> (accessed 15 Mar. 2012).

⁵ Others would more fully explore projects of sounding in or for the natural environment. Consider, among others, the work of David Dunn, fine examples of which can be found on his 1996 compilation *Music, Language, and Environment*.

create newness, can only operate upon the world-as-it-appears. This music was to be “undefinable geographically” (Hassell, interview in *World Music*), the music of an “imaginary country,” an “imaginary place,” an “imaginary culture” (see also Lowenstein). He sought to achieve this, however, by reference to “real” places and environments—regardless of whether he himself had experienced them firsthand or through mediation of some kind. Through the juxtaposition or layering of such real-world references, and through their technical and technological transformation, he sought to transcend the particularities of real places, creating a new (hybrid, virtual) sonic geography.

A sense of place—a culturally- and biologically-mediated subjectivization of the objective world—has been fundamental for much human life, and yet this (post)modern era is seemingly marked by a dissolution or collapsing of distinct places—“place” in this sense could include culture as well as natural (or “wild”) and humanly-constructed environments. Not that places no longer exist: rather they are often stratified or sedimented with other places. Our places are permeated by global flows—of images and sounds, people, styles, flora and fauna, food, merchandise, and so on. Beyond this we are, to an accelerated extent, voluntarily or forcibly mobilized: We are *displaced*, *re-placed*, *poly-placed*. Hassell’s early life, to take an example at hand, was spent shuttling from place to place: Memphis, Rochester (NY), New York City, Toronto, Los Angeles, Venezuela, Colombia, Germany; and then the peripatetic life of a touring musician. David Toop’s Hassell-inspired meditation on the Fourth World of the 1990s reflected this sense of place(lessness) as well: “The stairwell of a Tokyo department store in Shibuya ... A downpour in Ikebukuro ... In Atlanta, subterranean cities extend out from under the hotels ... The Caracas rubbish dump ... A Mexican restaurant in Hong Kong ...” and so on (168–69). We increasingly live in, and in transit between, diverse and divergent places, unsure of whether any

in particular is our home—or whether they are all somehow our home, nodes in a single conurbation sprawled across the globe: “Call it place deprivation, atopia, topic deficit, displacement anxiety ...” (Buell 75). There may be a need in this context to re-imagine place, or emplacedness, in term of an interconnectedness to elsewhere: “At the turn of the twenty-first century, ‘place’ becomes truly meaningful only when ‘place’ and ‘planet’ are understood as interdependent” (77). Hassell’s early music, in which mediated and far-flung visions—or soundings—of place and culture are juxtaposed, is in part such a re-imagining.

Soundscape as Frame and Content

Hassell’s first album, 1977’s *Vernal Equinox*, is a memory and imagining of places: a trip to Venezuela and Colombia; moving from New York to Malibu to New York; playing trumpet on the beach over the sound of the ocean or at Tuna Canyon “with wild deer foraging nearby and hang gliders launching over my head”; “the sound of the conch shell ... blown every night in the temple in Dehra Dun”; “playing alone up on the hill in Altamira”; a basement recording studio in Toronto.⁶ The album opens with the sounds of waves and steadily-rhythmic acoustic percussion (shaker, conga, guiro) over the droning tones of a synthesizer, gently alternating between two harmonic aggregates (in spectral music terminology). Presently a playful trumpet enters—it is heavily treated with an electronic “wah” effect and short delay. It dances in short, undulating gestures, a kite caught in the wind made audible—or perhaps delivering an obscured monologue to the sea, the “wah” effect and narrow pitch-range also subtly iconic of human speech. The basic components of the piece remain relatively constant, the synthesizer occasionally playing shorter pulses instead of the longer sustained tones, and the trumpet occasionally falling away before returning. Forty seconds from the end the trumpet ceases, we expect for good; with fifteen

⁶ See <<http://www.jonhassell.com/atmos01-1.html>> (accessed 15 Mar. 2012).

seconds left the synthesizer has faded out while the trumpet plays a last brief phrase (a final look back?); after which the percussion ceases, and we are left in the final few seconds with only the sound of the ocean: the day has ended and the human has returned to its world, leaving nature to its mystery.

The piece has the "timeless" feel of an afternoon at the beach, away from the clock time and industrial noise of the city; it is calm and calming: The trumpet stays within a narrow range (F to B-flat), the synthesizer is nearly a drone, the percussion is repetitious with minor variations. It also has the feel of nostalgia, of looking back: in the yearning melodic gesture of the trumpet and in its electronic filtering (its distancing), in the sounds of the calmed (not turbulent) ocean which few of us hear in our everyday lives—the beach being for most Americans a place offset from the "real world," a site of touristic relaxation rather than wage-earning labor. This peaceful, reminiscing quality distinguishes "Toucan Ocean" from the following track, "Viva Shona." The latter—which probably grew out of Hassell's listening to ethnographic field recordings of "Pygmies"—is more clearly an imagining of human or animal sounding in the natural environment. The piece opens with a sampled forest soundscape—presumably, based on the variety and density of bird sounds—and the pluckings of an mbira. Hassell's trumpet enters in the upper register. The sound is naturalistic (apparently unfiltered) except for the use of delay, which, rather than indicating electronics, suggests an echo off the forest wall. The only other instrument to enter is a low drum (presumably the "talking drum" indicated in the liner notes). The trumpet calls out in the forest, a loud vocalization with ululations; it swoops and glides up and down its range; the call echoes, returning over a distance. The talking drum attempts to mimic or answer the trumpet's calls. At the end of the track we are again left with a few seconds of naked soundscape. Nothing is marked as electronic here and, with the activeness and greater

melodic/rhythmic variety of the various instruments, we have a greater sense of presence; rather than hearing the scene through a haze of nostalgia (as in "Toucan Ocean") we are virtually emplaced in a scene of immediate activity.

The final track of the album in a way complicates or perhaps deepens these earlier paradigms. Entitled "Caracas Night, September 11, 1975," it is a subdued trumpet solo performed on a hill in Altamira (a neighborhood in Caracas, Venezuela), with the sounds of chirping insects, a barking dog, and other night sounds (credited to the "Night Creatures of Altamira"). Some brief percussion phrases were overdubbed later. The overall sound could be interpreted as present or as real in a sense not applicable to the two previous examples. We are not hearing an imagining or imitation of a real-world experience from within a recording studio. We are hearing a document *of* a real-world experience, a soundworld whose elements were (mostly) all present to be captured at a particular place and in a particular time, rather than a piecemeal studio assemblage. Whether this distinction between real and simulated environmental interaction is discernable to listeners, it was meaningful enough to the performer that the piece—through its descriptive title—was clearly marked as "real" on the album. "Caracas Night" thus clearly demonstrates a powerful function of ecomimesis, as Timothy Morton (37) has described it: the artist's or audience's contact with the environment becomes a content of the work. Hassell's presence in this particular environment is, in fact, the main theme of this recording, its inclusion on the album a nostalgic as well as authoritative gesture: nostalgic in the way the displaying of a personal snapshot evokes the memory of a particular emplacement, a sense of having *been* at a particular place and time (in this case, Caracas on the night of September 11, 1975); authoritative in the way the snapshot tells other viewers, "I was there." Like looking at a stranger's vacation photograph, the recording has the feeling of intense meaningfulness, though

we can only—perhaps with voyeuristic pleasure—speculate on what the meaning might be to he who was there.

The “Night Creatures of Altamira,” with whom Hassell performs on “Caracas Night,” reappear on *Fourth World Vol. 1* (1980), on “Rising Thermal 14° 16’ N; 32° 28’ E” (the coordinates reference a very specific place in the Republic of Sudan, pictured via NASA satellite on the album cover). They effervesce here amidst the distant sighs and howls of ghostly synths, a loping horn ostinato, and Hassell blowing airily through the mouthpiece of his trumpet: The sounds of one place—Altamira—further displaced in the act of imagining the ambience of another.

Imagining the Other in Nature

On *Fourth World Vol. 1* and 2 (1980 and 1981) Hassell explicitly invoked representations of non-Western communities interacting through sounding action with their environments. Like a number of artists during the 1970s and after, Hassell was fascinated by recordings of Central African Pygmy groups such as the Ba-Benzélé (see Feld, “pygmy POP”)—in part because of the supposedly intimate connection between their culture and environment. Hassell’s piece that borrows their name, “Ba-Benzélé” (from *Fourth World Vol. 1*), had a definite programmatic or representational intent. Apparently based on an ethnographic field-recording, Hassell tried to capture the “vibe” of the recorded performance, “where they’re all singing [and] dancing then stop suddenly with [the sound of] thunder, then start up again with a new enthusiasm” (p.c. 18 Nov. 2010).⁷ The piece features overlapping trumpet imitations of Pygmy-style vocalizations,

⁷ Hassell recalls a track from an Ocora release, although I have not yet found an Ocora recording featuring thunder. The recording “Elephant Song” from *Music of the Rainforest Pygmies*, recorded by Colin Turnbull and released in 1961, does feature thunder—so loud at one point that it ends the performance; however, the music is quite different than what Hassell seems to be referencing.

congas, electric bass, and Brian Eno's shimmering synthesizers. During the last minute and a half all instruments save the synthesizer cease; the sounds of thunder and rain enter, followed momentarily by the other instruments: human activity invoking (perhaps) and celebrating the rain.

"Malay" from *Fourth World Vol. 2* (1981) also explicitly works with non-Western human-environment interactions, in the form of a sampled recording of a group of Semelai women rhythmically splashing the surface of a body of water. The main body of the track is bookended by what sounds like distant vocalizations—possibly samples were used but it may only be electronically processed trumpet, heavy with reverb and echo, accompanied by subtle, distant gongs. After a brief silence we perceive a much "closer" electro-trumpet sound with gongs (1:15)—having first heard a performance from a distance suddenly we are within it. Presently (2:26) the sampled field-recording enters: chirping birds, a man's voice, an object falling in water, a child's laughter. The splashing of water and a low-pitched drum or idiophone set up a regular rhythm. Hassell describes the origin of this sample: "A book called *Primitive Peoples* had a record inside with little snippets of music recorded around the world by a BBC team accompanying the Queen on her tour of the Commonwealth and one of them is this beautiful watersplash rhythm with giggling children and birds from a tribe—the Semelai ... so I built a rather elaborate musical form by cutting and pasting a few selected bars of this."⁸ The record referred to was also published in 1973 as *The Music of Primitive Man*. Two tracks of the Semelai were included; the notes for the water-splashing read: "The Semelai live in the largest swamp area of Malaya. In this selection, the women splash their hands on top of the water, producing rhythmic patterns such as in drumming." The original track has three sections: a basic rhythm is set up and repeated (thirteen times); there is a transition to a half-speed rhythm (seven iterations);

⁸ See <<http://www.jonhassell.com/atmos04-1.html>> (accessed 15 Mar. 2012).

and a transition back to the original rhythm (fifteen iterations). "Malay" retains the general structure of this recording, alternating the faster and the slower rhythm, albeit in extended fashion.⁹ Drums and "bowl gongs" are added which sparingly emphasize the splash rhythm.

Techno-Naturalism

Place/environment, of course, need not be evoked through actual recordings of real-world ambience (or programmatic titles). We can also find in Hassell's music what seem to me to be ecomimetic representations of kinds of environments or particular envisionings of emplacements via mimetic or anaphonic¹⁰ deployments of instrumental and electronic effects. These are creations of immersive soundworlds, lacking narrative, and with ambiguous or unstable foregrounds and backgrounds—this is the more purely ambient side of Hassell's work. The trumpet is usually de-centered in such pieces, playing sustained tones or ostinatos, sometimes even absent. "Paris II" (from *The Surgeon of the Nightsky*), for instance, is a constantly shifting wash of synthesizers and spare trumpet melodies; background textures slide into the foreground, trumpet lines gradually fade into the distance; halfway through the trumpet falls away almost entirely as synthesizer lines gently undulate against each other; late in the track (6:01), white noise is shaped into the sound of waves rolling onto the shore.

"Courage" and "Dream Theory" (from *Fourth World Vol. 2*), using similar materials, seemingly create an environment as experienced under two different conditions. The three and a half minutes of "Courage" consists of: dense and repetitive acoustic hand-drumming (tribalistic

⁹ The original is ABA. Hassell's version is ABABABA, with the first two A sections greatly extended through looping.

¹⁰ There are various conceptual models that attempt to capture this kind of phenomenon. An "anaphone," according to Philip Tagg ("Towards a Sign Typology"), occurs when the structure of sound in a composition can be interpreted as referring to a structure outside the composition: for example, the sonic structure of a storm ("sonic anaphone"), the movement of waves on the sea ("kinetic anaphone"), and so on. Emerson ("Relation of Language"), writing in terms of mimesis and abstraction, provides another such model. I tend to have a mix-and-match approach to these vocabularies.

flavor); a four-note trumpet ostinato played through a harmonizer (creating fifths); the irregular punctuation of short electric bass notes; and faint, unidentifiable background noises that occasionally percolate through this texture. The effect of the unrelenting repetition and sparseness of the piece is rather of an empty landscape, devoid of sentience, but perhaps experienced through a particular subjective mode (e.g., "courage"). "Dream Theory" reproduces the same harmonized trumpet ostinato with slight variations; it also contains a more regular bass line than "Courage" and a sparser percussion pattern so reduced in volume that it often verges on inaudibility. What is most distinctive about this second piece, however, is the complex web of screeches and "yelps" that emerge after twenty-five seconds—these animalistic noises are, I believe, electronically processed trumpet sounds. The effect of the piece is of immersion into a hallucinatory vortex of animalistic activity—a vast flock of birds, a tribe of monkeys—within an open, perhaps gently rolling, landscape.

Time, Space, Emplacement

Time in these examples is momentary rather than historical, both subjectively and materially—we experience an afternoon, an evening, not a lifetime; neither is there any sense of natural (e.g., geological) history. Similarly, within any given piece we experience *a* place, *an* environment—however phantasmagoric or multi-layered it may be—rather than a succession of places. Our experience is of a moment in an eternal nature; natural sounds—ambience—linger after the ephemeral human element has passed; we have the sense that they continue long after the fade out (Morton [41–3] calls this "the Aeolian" characteristic of environmental art). This is akin to our perception of a distant landscape: time stands still; we are aware of the land's ever-variegated texture, but not of its history, nor of the experiences of those traveling through it; and

when we turn away we are sure that it remains.

Hassell's nature is not the sometimes threatening or sublime nature of Romanticism; it is more along the lines of Romanticism's own countering construction of nature as utopia or paradise (see Johnson 232). Hassell's nature never overpowers or destroys. It is the field of sensual activity, of memory and longing, of peaceful relations—the Ba-Benzélé do not fear the coming of the storm, the waves are gently rolling, the birds sing peacefully about their business. This also reflects a particularly modern experience of place. Those of us (like Hassell) from the industrialized West experience a multitude of places temporarily as tourists, vacationers, business-travellers, passers-through; we see them on TV or in films, mediated and safely contained; we experience the natural world similarly, as a weekend escape, in parks framed by city streets, in nature and ethnographic documentaries. We understand little or nothing of long-term lived experiences of these environments.

This way of knowing nature is mirrored in the use of tonality, or perhaps more accurately, sonority; and it is mirrored in structure. Tonality in a functional sense does not quite return post-serialism in Hassell (or in minimalism or ambient music generally). What does return is consonance (as Postmodernist), in opposition to serialism's (Modernist) dissonance. Consonant sonorities and drones in Hassell's music do not evoke, at least in any overt sense, a teleology. They are valued in themselves, as objects to be deployed alongside other objects: "you are taking little, already formed chunked things, a chord, a rhythm, a voice, a cry, something like that, and as you're orchestrating with these chunks of completely different tonalities, you can get very interesting tonal relationships that my ear perks up to" (Hassel, qtd. in Kopf). Gone is the tonal ground against which we perceive the narrative movement of the subject; there is often still ground and subject(s) but they come together in a moment of "globally static but internally

active play," as if the pastoral moments of Romantic era art music were dissociated from the narrative discourse that often contained them (Johnson 232); we now, over the course of an album, move from one to another disjunctively. Likewise, one sonority does not lead logically to another; pleasing sonorities are juxtaposed, strung together pearl-like, or ostinato-ized. There is no telos; any "tonal center" is incidental, or meaningless in a traditional sense, since we do not move from it. It is post-tonal music—"unrooted, decentered, spatial rather than temporal" (Johnson 231)—remade as sensuous.

Unlike much so-called ambient music, many—though certainly not all—of Hassell's pieces have relatively clear foregrounds and backgrounds, particularly those that are trumpet-centric. On a basic level this may relate to Hassell's own history as a specialized instrumentalist (and sometime student of soloistic Hindustani music), a history that remains an active force in his work. Thus in his pieces there often appears the figure of the virtuosic subject, albeit one that rarely "travels" in the course of a performance so much as presents itself (or is presented) in a particular (real-and-imagined) environment. The subject in Hassell's work can be seen not as traveling and returning home, but as multifariously existing in diverse places. To the extent that this subject is Hassell himself over and over again (and even when there is no obvious foreground figure, Hassell is organizing the material), there is a restless insertion of himself into otherness. This otherness is objectified for him in sonic material—the soundscapes, the structures and timbres of non-Western and non-industrialized music-making. Through a mimetic identification with these materials, Hassell produces new sound-objects modeling emplacements both utopic and inscribed with the "as is."

Extra-Musical Sounds

As noted Hassell has often constructed his music from recordings of sounds outside traditional music discourse ("real-world sounds") or various kinds of imitations of such sounds. While both function ecomimetically, sounds from soundscape recordings are likely to be interpreted differently than timbral or syntactic imitations of such extra-musical sounds (e.g., by means of musical instruments). The difference is that recordings of extra-musical sounds—the sounds of waves, birds, trains—are typically interpreted as really being affected by the objects believed to be represented; a soundscape recording is expected to *sound* like reality (it is a dicent-index in Peircean terms). A recording that we recognize as capturing (in some mediated way no doubt) the sound of waves crashing against the shore is believed to have been inscribed *by those waves at the time of their occurrence*. Mimetic constructions of soundscapes with instruments—as found in Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* or Hassell's "Dream Theory"—we believe to be highly mediated by the techniques of the composers/performers, and we delight in the play of their similarity to *and* difference from what we expect of reality. Both soundscape recordings and mimetic constructions may be iconic of reality, but we expect the former to have been *immediately* affected by their objects, while the latter result from artistic reflection, interpretation, and translation.

The use of material in music that has extra-musical significance, such that the "world of everyday perception intrudes into the fabric of musical discourse" (Windsor 144), has the potential to jar us from our reflexive aesthetic standpoint. The "interested" Darwinian ear (Emmerson, "Aural" 136)—which wants to locate us in our surroundings and determine the sources of sounds—jockeys with the "disinterested" (Kantian) aesthetic ear. The manipulation of extra-musical materials in music presents starkly the intractable conflict between art and reality,

between the world-as-it-is and a domain of it that ever threatens to secede, to become an autonomous realm with its own standards of behavior, perception, and possibility. Emulating the action of the *musique concrète* composer or the film editor—Leonardos of the Xactoknife, to borrow a phrase once used by Hassell (qtd. in Lowenstein)—art threatens to take a razor-blade to reality itself (cf. Windsor 145). Recognizing the menace implicit in the artistic process, Hassell described an “attempt to scramble the imagery so much that I couldn’t remember what was real or fictional ... a fun thing to do at home but catastrophic on a worldwide scale” (Hassell, qtd. in Lowenstein).

A broad interest in extra-musical sounds arose simultaneously not only with the expansion of sound-recording and -broadcasting technology (i.e., new technical means requiring new material), but also with the advent of total or integral serialism which seemed to indicate the total domination of technique over conventional musical material, and, related to this last, with what Adorno referred to as “the aging of the New Music.” “Twelve-tone technique is the inexorable clamp that holds together what no less powerfully strives to break apart,” he wrote; if the material of music does not threaten to exceed the technical attempts to organize it, the use of such techniques is “simply a waste of energy” (“Aging” 185–6). Extra-musical sounds came laden with their own (non-musical) recalcitrant histories. They, like non-Western sounds, provided a new frontier, a virgin wilderness undomesticated by established compositional strategies; extra-musical sound provided a new realm for the unfolding of the dialectics between mimesis and rationality, material and technique. With electronic music techniques the artist can enact his/her enlightened domination of nature (or the world in general),¹¹ removing sounds from their material environments and manipulating them according to subjective desire.

¹¹ For further discussion of mimesis and rationality, material and technique, and domination in art see Windsor (“Autonomy”) and Adorno (*Aesthetic Theory*, e.g., 53–6, 77, 113, 210–6, 288, 314).

But Timothy Morton recently cautioned: "Thinking that you are doing something new by mixing different sounds together from different sources, or inventing new ways of mimicking real or imaginary sounds, is the very form of modern music production, and has been so at least since the emergence of capitalist demands for fresh product" (53). Aestheticization and commodification are two sides of the same coin; the aestheticization of ambience itself, its transformation into an object of appreciation, can quickly lead to its commodification (cf. Morton 165). Yet, in that ambience can be understood as a unique relationship between subject and object, and insofar as evocations of ambience are able to draw our attention to this relationship, aestheticized ambience still retains the possibility of undoing the commodity form from within. Ambience or extra-musical sounds, even reified within the sound-artwork, preserve the clue of our ecological enmeshment. This potentiality is neatly captured in Hassell's own notion of the "tambura of Nature,"¹² a phrase that suggests the use of nature as frame-and-content of the artwork (i.e., as an aesthetic device)—as the sound of the tambura both frames a Hindustani music performance and is a content of the performance—even as it points to the fact that the sounds we interpret as music (like all human actions) necessarily emerge within and against the ever-present "drone" of our environments.

New Organicism and Environmental Determinism

Modern art was born in the modern city, the more industrialized the better. Peter Plagens (oversimplifying, perhaps) correlates the quality of modern art with urban ugliness: "America's greatest modern art center (New York) has been ugliest the longest; Los Angeles's most

¹² This phrase appears in Hassell's plans for a sound-sculpture entitled "Magic Place (Naturalis)" that was part of a 2006 collaboration between the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the Naturalis (the national natural history museum of the Netherlands) (Hassell, p.c. 20 Mar. 2012). The stringed instrument known as the tambura creates the drone that provides the ground for the performance of some types of Indian music, including Hindustani music.

important art appeared (1962–68) only after the city suffused itself in smog and trash architecture.” In contrast, the Bay Area and the Pacific Northwest, possessing spectacular natural scenery, were significantly weaker in this domain (Plagens 9). Modernist art displayed an increasing tendency to abstract itself from the world, and, if there is at least a kernel of truth in Plagens’s remark, with good reason—given, that is, modern society’s aversion to “pollution, miasma, slime: things that glisten, schlup, and decay,” as Morton (159) and others have observed. If, however, modernist artworks often denied overt ecomimesis, the outside world necessarily remains to be glimpsed in them, if only in negated form—at least according to such high-modernist thinkers as Adorno.¹³

Discomfort with many tenets or perceived characteristics of modernist aesthetics—its darkness, austerity, abstractness, formalism, intellectualism, rigorous systematization, and so on—led to the emergence of a “new organicism” (related to Romantic organicism) found, for example, in environmental art (Morton 189) (and further demonstrating that Postmodernism is as much a “rewriting” of Romanticism as of Modernism). If Romantic organicism had involved an internalization of “genius” within the subjectivity of the artist, the new organicism re-externalized genius as *genius loci*—the “spirit of the place” to be expressed in the artwork (Morton 190). New organicism in music or sound art was aided by new technical means and refashioned old ones: soundscape recording and sampling, improvisation, repetition, harmonic stasis, stochastic techniques, free rhythm, randomization and irregularity. It also often depended, paradoxically, on advanced technology. Early examples include Walter De Maria’s “Cricket Music” (1964) and “Ocean Music” (1968), David Behrman’s soundtrack for the Robert Watts

¹³ For example: “The difference of artworks from the empirical world, their semblance character, is constituted out of the empirical world and in opposition to it. If for the sake of their own concept artworks wanted absolutely to destroy this reference back to the empirical world, they would wipe out their own premise” (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 103).

film *Cascade* (1968), and Wendy Carlos's *Sonic Seasonings* (1972)¹⁴—all mixing electronic sounds and/or acoustic instruments with recordings of “natural” sounds. But the environment itself could also become a signal processor or even an active collaborator, as in the early works of David Dunn (e.g., *Nexus I*, in which three trumpet players sound into the Grand Canyon; by the end a group of ravens has joined the performance).

Ambient music, a genre to which Hassell's music is related in a close but somewhat uneasy way, was one outgrowth of the new organicist ideology. It began with a new way of listening: For example, Gordon Mumma's notion of “music that sounds like it was recorded at a great distance” (1971, qtd. in Holmes 244), or Eno's originary myth of listening to nearly inaudible harp music in a hospital room on a rainy day (see liner notes to *Discreet Music* from 1975). The idea of music as determined by environment, and of music as something *organic*, was expanded and expounded upon by Brian Eno during the time of his *Ambient 4: On Land* record (originally released in 1982; re-released with revised liner notes in 1986):

The idea of making music that in some way related to a sense of place—landscape, environment—had occurred to me many times over the years preceding “On Land.” ... In retrospect, I now see the influence of this idea, and the many covert attempts to realise it, running through most of the work that I've released like an unacknowledged but central theme. ...

My conscious exploration of this way of thinking about music probably began with “Another Green World” (1975). On that record I became aware of setting each place within its own particular landscape and allowing the mood of that landscape to determine the kinds of activity that could occur. ... In [*On Land*] the landscape has ceased to be a backdrop for something else to happen in front of; instead, everything that happens is a part of the landscape. There is no longer a sharp distinction between foreground and background.

In using the term landscape I am thinking of places, times, climates and the moods that they evoke. ...

I wanted to open out the aural field, to put much of the sound a considerable distance from the listener (even locating some of it “out of earshot”), and to allow the sounds to live their lives separately from one another, clustering occasionally but not

¹⁴ The two De Maria recordings were never to my knowledge commercially released but are widely available on the internet; the Behrman soundtrack is available under the title “Sounds for a Film by Robert Watts” on his CD *Wave Train*; Carlos's *Sonic Seasonings* has also reappeared on CD.

“musically” bound together. . . .

As I made these pieces, I began to take a different attitude towards both the materials and the procedures I was using. I found the synthesizer, for example, of limited usefulness because its sound tended towards a diagrammatic rather than an organic quality. My instrumentation shifted gradually through electro-mechanical and acoustic instruments towards non-instruments like pieces of chain and sticks and stones. Coupled with this transition was an increasing interest in found sound as a completely plastic and malleable material; I never felt any sense of obligation about realism. In this category I included not only recordings of rooks, frogs and insects, but also the complete body of my own earlier work. As a result, some earlier pieces I worked on became digested by later ones, which in turn became digested again. The technique is like composting: converting what would otherwise have been waste into nourishment. (liner notes for *Ambient 4*)

There is a strong sense of *genius loci*, a privileging of imagery such as “landscape,” “field,” “organic,” of sounds “living their lives,” “digesting,” “composting,” “nourishing.” There is correlative play with the distinctions of frame/content, music/sound, sound/silence.¹⁵ Musical sound and noise slip in and out of definition. Ideally, we cannot be sure where background ends and where foreground begins—there is an “intensification or thickening of the transactions” between these realms (Connor 66). When “hearing” a landscape our sense of foreground and background constantly shifts as the soundworld itself changes and as our attention “wanders” within it.¹⁶ This music is a *field* rather than a clearly demarcated form or space; it is *textured* more than structured.

Hassell has not been so explicit in writings or interviews about organicism per se in his music, although it is very much in evidence in the sound itself. Nature or the natural as an

¹⁵ Also consider his directive in the liner notes for *Discreet Music*: “I suggest listening to the piece at comparatively low levels, even to the extent that it frequently falls below the threshold of audibility.”

¹⁶ Regarding *On Land* Eno notes, “with this landscape stuff, your direction can be really quite different on each listening. Maybe the first time you listen to it . . . you are disoriented within it.” With repeated listening (visits?) it becomes more familiar, and “you can then start making the choice about which journey you take through the music” (qtd. in Milkowski 17).

Also cf. Morton (144): “Ambient art plays with what ‘counts’ as either frame or contents, through the play of the re-mark [a Derridean term]. The re-mark establishes (and questions) the differences between, for example, graphic mark/sign, noise/sound, noise/silence, foreground/background.” For Morton, however, there can be nothing between these distinctions: “Something is *either* a noise *or* it is sound”—it cannot be both. Parenthetically he adds that, “The ideological fantasy of ecomimesis and especially ambience, *seems* to suggest that something could be both.”

object(ive) in and of itself seems to have played a relatively lesser role in his thought than the cultural other, yet this is precisely where the idea of nature functions most strongly. In a telling early essay he noted:

Obviously what we have here [in "Euroculture's" denigration of improvisation, musical sensuality, etc.] is a kind of cultural racism that reduces non-European-derived art to "curio" status and thus neatly dismisses it from serious consideration in the same rank as our Western masters—all of whom, it may be pointed out, are white, born in the last three hundred years, and from cold climates. (Hassell, "Artificial")

The last item in the list here is curious. In reactions against the hegemonic hierarchism of Western thought and its dead, white, male thinkers one rarely finds mention of such basic environmental factors as climate. Hassell leaves this notion of a connection between environment and "thought" or "attitude" unelaborated until the very end of his essay.

Although it may, at first, seem as oversimplification, try squinting your eyes to see the big picture without the confusion of detail: what's happened is that cold-climate tribes had to develop technology in order to control a hostile environment, and now that very technology has developed in ways that enable them to impose their attitudes on warm-climate tribes (who have, quite naturally, evolved in other important but undervalued ways).

This is the crux of the matter, a distinction that will continue to underpin Hassell's thinking and music-making for the next thirty years—later under the guise of a North/South distinction—and what might be called a "new environmental determinism."¹⁷

This sort of environmental or climatic determinism is certainly not unique to Hassell, having been expressed in many places and time throughout history and given the sheen of science in the late nineteenth century (Freilich). Walter De Maria, whose influence on Hassell we have already noted, expressed the same belief in his 1972 interview:

I think the reason that Europe developed the culture it did was that it was in a northern region with the relatively cold winters and so forth. If you're in a cold winter situation then you're indoors and you're much more likely to be reading and writing than in the climate that's always conducive to outdoors. In some sense, it's that simple.

¹⁷ Ingram (*Jukebox*, 194) also notes Hassell's connection with climatic determinism.

How this form of determinism should have found its way into avant-garde circles in New York is somewhat mysterious;¹⁸ but the environment and the non-West were both important concerns within the 1960s counterculture, and environmental determinism provided a site for their mutual conceptualization. Of course, whereas earlier environmental determinism sometimes served as an alibi for imperialism (see, e.g., Frenkel), its countercultural manifestation was directed toward a critique of the West, as well as a revaluing of the relationship between West and non-West (or North and South). Thus the North (cold climate), according to Hassell, is overly "rational," its post-tonal music tending towards "psychosis" or "neurosis"; it needs to be balanced by Southern (warm climate) spirit and sensuality (and perhaps vice-versa):

I think of North and South not only in global terms, but also for example, within the body. So the equator is the belt line, and the Northern people spend most of their time above the equator, and Southern people have a more balanced, or perhaps maybe over-balanced lean towards the other side. (Hassell, interview in *World Music*)

The music of the cultural other is the music of the other place: "the cultural richness of tribes can be nothing other than the expression of their localities" (Hassell, qtd. in Lowenstein). The goal is to learn from other cultures' expressions of place how to navigate our own perplexing new "virtual" world:

Music from various cultures whose characteristics are responses to a given "place" (which were isolated in the pre-media epoch) are the "vocabulary" with which we can think about ways to respond to our "place" in the new geography created by our media world—"cyberspace." (Hassell, qtd. in Lowenstein)

The balance between the native identity and the global identity via various electronic extensions is not one that can be dictated or necessarily predicted. One should be very humble and respectful of our lack of knowledge about how those things combine, and be informed by knowledge of the way things used to be in smaller numbers—*that's where it becomes very useful to look at other cultures, small cultures, and try to develop a modus operandi for the new age* (qtd. in Toop 168; emphasis added)

¹⁸ Environmental determinism had its scientific heyday around 1890–1920 (Judkins, Smith, and Keys 19–20) before undergoing something of a resurgence in the late 1990s (22–3). On the other hand, in popular culture it may have exerted a persistent influence owing to its "commonsense" quality (see Freilich 26, Frenkel 144).

For Eno technology needed to be made more organic; for Hassell it needed to be made more non-Western, more warm-climated, more Southern. But the fungibility of these perspectives is helpfully demonstrated by Eno: If for him synthesizers were too much like formica rather than wood (see Milkowski 15), the "problem with computers is that there is not enough Africa in them" (Eno and Kelly).

The Urban Exotic: (Re)turning to the City

"Steppin' Thru Time" (from *Dressing for Pleasure* [1994]) closes not with the sound of ocean waves or forest birds but—a ticking clock. We are now in a new kind of place, a different kind of aural environment. Instead of "ethnic" percussion, trap kits and drum machines predominate; distorted electric guitar, funk and rock bass guitar come to the foreground; looping and repetition, no longer organic and seamless, jitter and jar; telephones, car horns, sirens, automated voices, industrial noise suffuse the soundscape. When we hear this music, we do not imagine the forest, the beach, the desert—this music, we sense, can arise only from the "tambura of the City." In two albums from the 1990s, Hassell specifically turned to his "natural habitat," the city. Hassell had always viewed the natural world inevitably with a city dweller's eyes; how would the city sound to him now, with ears attuned partially elsewhere?

The metropolitan city provided a radically new environment for human beings. It was not totally new in kind but principally in degree, albeit a very large degree. Rural communities and non-industrialized societies, certainly, exist in a mutually transformative relationship with their environments. The modern city, however, is a "second nature" of an altogether different order, banishing first or organic nature to an unprecedented degree, sequestering inhabitants in an almost totally artificial world. But first nature as paradise lingers on in (post-urban reform) city

parks and gardens, and as uncontrollable force and source of dread in vermin and so-called "natural" disasters. Although the metropolis must be tightly structured and integrated to best perform its primary function—the sustenance of the market economy—it also, in the ostensibly autonomous functioning of its parts and in the continuous and fast-paced onrush of external sensory data, can appear as a chaos. And this chaos is contrasted by its denizens to the idealized regularity, continuity, and peaceful simplicity of rural or "primitive" life.

Musical reflections on or of urban life are likely as old as the modern city itself. In recent times, funk, with its densely interlocking, semi-autonomous, precisely subdivided rhythmic parts and lack of organizing teleological form, while drawing from African music-making traditions, homologously evoked urban social organization. Hassell had priorly sampled James Brown (on *Aka-Darbari-Java* [1983]), and the "electric" work of Miles Davis, which drew heavily from and contributed to the funk style, is recounted as a major influence. Brian Eno and David Byrne's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981), inspired by discussions with Hassell on "imaginary cultures" (or "fake ethnic music" [Hassell, interview with Jason Gross]), and also clearly funk-influenced and oriented toward a perception of Africa, provided an early soundtrack to the modern cosmopolis: samples from radio shows and Arab recordings, percussion from around the world (bodhran, Batá, conga, gong), along with various industrial and metallic noises.

City: Works of Fiction (1990) remains Hassell's most explicit thematization of the city. Despite its obvious differences in sound from most of his earlier work, the record did not involve any major overhauls of his method, but rather some shifts in perspective:

I began to see the flaw of thinking that the spiritual equals tranquil. I learned the lesson that the idea of being spiritual is much wider than lighting incense and chanting. It has to do with learning how to move through the world in which you live with grace and poise. That means *doing the right thing*. That is, one can develop a *modus operandum* for walking through the city as one would as a skilful hunter walking through the forest knowing how to negotiate the terrain. (Hassell, qtd. in Kopf)

And:

I was ... realizing that the "exotic" could be right here. It was realizing that there's another kind of music being put together here in my backyard (I'm talking about hip-hop again). Instead of a pygmy waking up in the forest, hearing a bird and trying to imitate it, you're waking up to hear shards of radio. The radio environment was "nature" ... raw material for hip-hop.¹⁹ (Hassell, interview with Jason Gross)

Hassell extends new organicism to the city; the "artificial" is the new "natural"—formica is the new wood. Rather than being a situation we should strive to escape from, Hassell—inspired by hip hop—suggests we explore it, to see if we can find here too a "spiritual," "graceful" way of life.

Hassell, again, was not alone in his fascination with or attempt to make sense of city life. Several strands of cultural production and theorizing, developing since the 1970s and early 1980s and predicated on a post-industrial metropolitan context, reached a kind of culmination around 1990: for example, hip-hop and industrial music, the cross-media cyberpunk aesthetic, and academic theories of postmodernity. Although the metropolis was often conceived as a kind of dystopia, the artists and theorists in these different movements were also struggling to envision a new ethic for living under these conditions (see, e.g., Collins and Potter on hip-hop). In *Border Dialogues*, published the same year Hassell's *City* was released, Iain Chambers wrote:

The metropolis is, above all, a myth, a tale, a telling that helps some of us to locate our home in modernity, there to find the new gods, the new myths, called for by Nietzsche. The metropolis is an allegory; in particular it represents the allegory of the crisis of modernity that we have learnt to recognize in the voices of Baudelaire, Benjamin and Kafka. To go beyond these bleak stories of exile and that grey, rainy country of the anguished soul, is to establish a sense of being at home in the city, and to make of tradition a space of transformation rather than a scene of cheerless destiny. For this metropolis is not merely the final stage of a poignant narrative, of apocalypse and nostalgia, it is also the site of the ruins of previous orders in which diverse histories, languages, memories and traces continually entwine and recombine in the construction of new horizons.

... In the metropolis it becomes necessary to form new habits and habitats; in

¹⁹ Public Enemy is the exemplar of this last point (their "She Watch Channel Zero?!" is sampled on Hassell's "Voiceprint (Blind from the Facts)").

other words, it becomes necessary to form a new sense of ethics. (112)

The extreme form of this thinking, for example as found musically in the industrial rock of Nine Inch Nails, luxuriated among the bleakness, hypercommodification, and fallen gods. It was, however, already the purpose of Hassell's Fourth World to imagine the "new horizons," the "new gods," the "new ethics" that might emerge through the ongoing recontextualization and recombination of the fragments of previous orders. Fourth World itself can be seen as an analogy for the city (the latter having provided the conditions of possibility for the former): both, that is, are sites in which diverse cultures, mediated by technology, collide and intermingle, producing new traditions for new kinds of places. Hassell's turning to the city, then, is also a kind of return.

Music of the City and the City as Music

City: Works of Fiction and the album that followed it, *Dressing for Pleasure* (1994), present complementary views of urbanity, the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. We have again here slices of time and space: in the former, it seems to me, of the lives of the city; in the latter, of lives in the city.

Immediately striking about *City* is its increased tempo compared to Hassell's earlier works: a greater quantity and variety of things happen in a given amount of time. The sonic palette is of a different nature as well: his trumpet evokes car horns or the bellowing of trains more than human voices, animals, or wind; metallic sounds reverberate as if off hard surfaces; acoustic percussion is not entirely absent, but electronic percussion—tending toward dehumanized drum-machine sounds—is emphasized; snatches of incomprehensible voices occasionally penetrate through the noise. Instruments—slap bass, muted electric guitar—are played in ways that highlight noise and rhythm (and point to urban genres such as funk, disco,

and acid jazz). Dissonance is also given freer rein: As if in rejection of the fourths and fifths that often dominated the harmonies of his earlier work, the chord that opens "Pagan" is built with a tritone. The electronic harmonization of the trumpet, which on previous albums also emphasized fourths and fifths, is now denser: often, as on "In the City of Red Dust," thirds are added. There is still the sense that, compositionally, chunks of harmony are being juxtaposed or strung together; however, the harmonies are no longer so serene but are timbrally harsh, harmonically dissonant, sometimes even nauseatingly detuned.

The macrocosmic feel of *City* derives in part from a reduction in melody and from the types of timbres utilized, both of which tend to curtail a sense of active, individualized subjectivity. The trumpet, doing most of the melodic work on the album, tends to play solitary long tones or short, staccato phrases (mimetic again of train and car horns); even when lengthy melodic lines occur they tend to consist of few pitches, and are "distanced" through a use of cool, glassy, metallic timbres (combinations of these melody types can be heard on most of the tracks). One perceives the city as an observer, as one taking in the atmosphere of it, inside it but at a remove: bursts of movement here and there perceivable against the city's incessant motion, the yelps and chatter of humans or animals, the clatter of whistles, bells, or rain occasionally breaking through to audibility against the city's insistent hum.

The observer and the actor, the macrocosmic and microcosmic, the environment and the subject within, are of course not fully separable—for subjective states color environmental observations even as those states themselves are colored by the environment—and a single composition can switch between the two positions or otherwise entangle them. Yet *Dressing for Pleasure*, it seems to me, emphasizes the *personal*, draws attention to particular states of mind, to the lives lived within the cityspace. In part this is due to the greater prominence of the human

voice and to speech on the album; and, concomitantly, a relative emphasis on "humanistic" instrumental playing and melodic development. The shift in the use of instruments is especially palpable in the saxophone, trumpet, and piano performances: in the jazz-hued ambience of *Dressing* they evoke jazz improvisation's conventional interpretation as an expression of individual subjectivity. Voices and instruments both, however, are subjected to technical procedures of looping and cutting and splicing, and thus veer between, on the one hand, the exhibition of a mechanical kind of repetition and passive susceptibility to manipulation and, on the other, a relative freedom of melodic-rhythmic and timbral activity—anaphonic representations, perhaps, of the experience of the individual subjectivity in the city, which is at times overwhelmed and forcibly acted-upon by the violent torrent of urban objective culture, but at other times finds spaces of respite and repose, of erotic fulfillment.

Indeed, Hassell's treatment of urban sexuality on this album is particularly striking. "Personals" features samples from a telephone dating service and mysteriously erotic female narration over dance rhythms; "Sex Goddess" samples the voices of Hassell's past lovers (Hassell, interview, *BBC*), as well other voices, telephones, camera shutters, etc., backed by dance beats and cooing vocals. The topic of personal ads, in particular, could easily degenerate into a rumination on urban alienation; yet the piece's quick tempo, playful acoustic bass slides, and syncopated, major-key motifs present the recorded personal advertisements in a space of enabled sociality. Hassell, I think, can hardly be heard as condemning or despairing of modern mating or sexuality *per se*, and even seems to be celebrating them. This is in stark contrast to the dystopic, frustrated, commodified, or instrumentalized sexuality explored in the darker popular music of the time (e.g., nu and industrial metal, gangsta rap), in which eros seems irrevocably corrupted by commercialism, pop-culture frivolity, and technological mediation. Despite his

general hopefulness Hassell does give vent to misgivings about metropolitan culture, including its forms of sexuality, most notably on "The Gods, They Must be Crazy"—one of the more darkly-timbred pieces on the album. Here Hassell monotonically tells, in juxtaposed religious and mangled pop-culture imagery, of abuses personal, social, and political. In this context, the stuttering edits have an unsettling rather than stimulating effect, as if the world is arbitrarily shifted beneath our feet under the sway of human forces spun out of control; the melodic female vocal, a sample from Les Baxter's "Oasis of Dakhla" (from the record *Tambo!*), does not coo seductively but wordlessly pronounces a critique; and Hassell's final trumpet solo is not so much a vital reclamation of individual subjectivity under the urban onslaught as a quiet groan of pain.

Conclusion: Beyond the City

I have sought to explicate some of the ways Jon Hassell has musically reflected upon the ecological lifeways of his own experience and those he has perceived in the experiences of others. I have emphasized his shifting fascination with rural and urban environments and suggested that his music can be seen as reassembling fragments of cultural experience in order to find a better way to "move through the world." This analysis could be extended further still. At the beginning of the Internet age Hassell asked us to "imagine a grid of national boundaries, and onto those project a new, non-physical communications-derived geography" in which "tribes of like-minded thinkers" commune (qtd. in Toop 168). Indeed, much music (and much else) is now produced as well as enjoyed largely in this "non-physical communications-derived geography." If Hassell could once say *where* his music was made—the pieces on *Surgeon of the Nightsky*, for example, are named after the places they were recorded—this is becoming for many artists increasingly more complicated. The interpenetration of places that Hassell's music has often

suggested has recently reached new extremes, perhaps obviating the very notion of place.

Hassell's two most recent albums, *Maarifa Street* and *Last Night the Moon*, were assembled from bits and pieces recorded across several countries on two continents to the extent that, in the end, no one involved could be certain where any particular element originated (see Ross, "Beautiful Dislocation"). It is not clear to me that, as Hassell seems to believe, "other cultures, small cultures" can provide much guidance in this situation. Can platiality of some sort still emerge within the supra-geographic space in which much contemporary culture is being produced? Or is the experience of place to be something only of the memory and imagination? It remains to be seen what ethics for this new world are hinted at by the music of Hassell and other "like-minded thinkers."

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