

Indian oceans of sound

– Raga South is North: Jon Hassell's raga in electric blue

The name **Jon Hassell** is synonymous with *Fourth World*, the other-worldly, technicolour musical collages the man's been creating since the late seventies. This in-depth interview essay explores the sources, ecological and technological connections and possible futures explicit in Hassell's music, dream theory and ongoing book project, *'The North and South of You'*

I

When the first Womad Festival occurred around the summer of 1982, showcasing a dazzling diversity of musicians brought in from around the world, it felt novel and, as it turned out, ahead of its time. Although a large audience manifestly failed to turn up, bringing on sudden bankruptcy for Womad – only saved by Peter Gabriel reforming Genesis for a one-off reunion – the line-up was top-heavy with Western musicians who, along with writers and the independent end of the music business, had been pushing this internationalisation of music for several years. Alongside Gabriel were The Police's drummer Stewart Copeland, a reincarnated Robert Fripp, The Beat, and Don Cherry, Colin Walcott and Nana Vasconcelas, the line-up that constituted the proto world-jazz outfit Codona. Also eagerly awaited and making his debut in the fields of Shepton Mallet that weekend was the avant-trumpeter, Jon Hassell.

Hassell was already a cult figure in Britain brought to the post-blank generations' attention by his collaboration with Brian Eno. In 1980 they had released *Possible Music*. It was Hassell's record but Eno's name headed the cover and Eno took up the promotional tour of duty, talking up Africa as the future of the next hundred years at every opportunity. Alongside the main title was the phrase and promise, *Fourth World Volume 1*. By the time of Womad two summers on, another release had slipped into the world: *Dream Theory In Malaya*, described as volume two in the Fourth World series. And the next summer a third, *Magic Realism* (though without any volume control) completed what for many was a truly inspirational trilogy of records. Before this there had already been a lead up to this triad. In the mid-seventies Hassell released his first record, *Vernal Equinox*, a mellow first step into Fourth World, trumpet raga lines mixed with minimalist electronics, followed in 1977 by the jazz-rock

inflected *Earthquake Island*. All these records, in Hassell's words on *Magic Realism*, proposed a 'contemporary coffee-coloured classical music'. Recently in an attempt to deflect his work from being too closely identified within the all-consuming category of world music, Hassell has taken to the working title of 'worldly music'. All three of the records highlighted the beautiful phased trumpet playing, a glissando effect he had already cultivated for over half a decade, since journeying to the east, and arriving at the feet of the renowned Indian vocalist, Pandit Pran Nath, keeper of the flame of the Kirana Gharana or school. No stranger to technological adaptation, he has repeatedly used a series of devices to multi-track the trumpet so he can play against and alongside himself, techniques that both anticipate and have become a commonplace since the emergence of computers in music.

As rhythmic and textural backing to the trumpet, Hassell built spectacularly intricate soundworlds, intimately reminiscent of musics from any number of gone worlds: Moroccan Mahgreb and the whirling dustworld of the north African desert; the lush swamp-like verdencies of the Indonesian tropics; or the bare heat-ridden plains of north India. In instrumentation these promiscuously mixed both hi-tech futurism and lo-tech ancient tradition, bowl-gongs and the studio as instrument, loops upon loops. The music resembles, yet is never formally connected with, any specific tradition, although Hassell can claim many years of familiarity with the Indian classical raga and drone tradition contained within the bones of this possible music's body. Hassell made this space *sans* any specific place, a key into his fourth world. Within the music fraternity Hassell is seen as a founding father of early ambient, turning up the heat on many a chill-out compilation.

Twenty years on from the Womad debut on UK shores, and Hassell is once again in Britain, this time to



Alexander's Dream by Mati Klarwein

perform with Baaba Maal and Howie B at a special *Only Connect* evening in London's concrete art cavern, The Barbican. The evenings music is, Hassell says himself, ninety percent his, put together in four days 'wall to wall' rehearsals in the run-up to the concert. Much of the evening is a return journey through Hassell's possible musics; a sample from ADJ floats across the auditorium as the evening sets in. But what is different is Maal, a vocalist of unworldly power and focus, who sets up a tension within the sound palette, against the sultry and languid instrumentation. 'An

experiment,' says Hassell of integrating vocals into the palette. He appears keen to continue this vector in the life story of Fourth World, which on the April evening has reaffirmed the influence and prescience, along with a startling originality, of the early Fourth World albums.

If the ambient cognoscenti know these records well, Fourth World is also part of the musical frame, which has borne influence and imitation, becoming a generic term for identifying related sub-genres. Down the years, while this influence has seeped into the minds of

many a young musician, Hassell has used interviews to set out a whole approach to the world, epitomised in the phrase and the music, though not exclusive to it. For, for a long time Hassell has been preparing a 'low temp, long cook time' book, which extends Fourth World into the category of over-arching way of doing. At present a draft version named after an old Cole Porter standard, *The North South of You, An Erotic Worldview* is completed. He begins a next draft any time soon.

The core contention in the book is that perhaps, just perhaps, the source of the present situation of a technologically- and rationality-rich, but rhythm- and sensuality-poor, North – for which read West – dominating the same self-sensuous but technologically-adrift South, has been climate. The global equilibrium between our norths and souths, an out of balance equatorial waistline, has been amplified and externalised into our art, culture and creativity. It is a particular story of cultural evolution where the north's cold climate need to stay warm has overtaken the south's life of joy and celebration of colour, pattern and rhythm. Rather, over the millennia, survival resources turned into technology, which in turn incubated communications technology, one channel amidst a variety by which the north presently exports a frozen, rationalised and abstracted version of itself – in effect the consequences of its struggle to survive – to the south, by whom Hassell means the non-west. Hassell asks us to imagine what would have become of North American movie-making, Westerns as he calls them, if Cameroon or Argentina, perhaps, or Java had been first with their hands on these means of communication? What movies would the world be watching if we we had grown up watching Southern?

It doesn't relate literally to geographic location, rather it is closer to states of mind. Hassell talks of north-headed southern people, and south-headed northerners, offering the psychologically repressed Saudi Arabia, and by contrast Bjork by way of two representative examples. During the course of an ongoing dialogue with Hassell I display some caution towards buying into his all-embracing 'dream theory', initially broadening the dialogue by mentioning both David Rothenberg's poetic words about 'the idea of north' in relation to the idea of the wild, where the former marks a place in the imagination for the latter, and also the oft-made point of the northern rim arctic cultures, from George Dyson's Aleutian Kayak boat-builders, the house-building pacific rim Haida, to Edmund Carpenter's east coast Inuit, where actual technological adaptability is married to a co-evolution with the environment. 'Nature here,' as has been written before, 'is an

elegant strategy for design.' Hassell acknowledges that a straight relation between climate affecting cultural evolution isn't exactly what he is getting at but remains adamant: 'These examples suggest that it wasn't the forbidding climates alone that brought on the headlong rush of a northern technological imperative. It was maybe something else. Certainly it says that there are different responses to forbidding climate but the one "we" got stuck with is problematic. Knowing what we know about the impact of environment on everything, wouldn't it be a mistake to dismiss a view based on observations of different-headedness as a result of physical/emotional responses to the most basic features of environment: "Am I cold? Am I warm?"' He also acknowledges the 'broad brush strokes' of the possible generalisations he is invoking but maintains that the 'geographical north has been the incubation place for,

'the northern hemisphere embarked on a winter of perpetual broadcast'

RICHARD POWERS

by far, the preponderance of mental north: the place where the instinctual is devalued, the place where the dichotomy between human and animal is most strong, the place where the microchip is valued over the samba. Of course the northern mentality has migrated, supercharged by the northern media megaphone. There may even come a time when southern-minded northerners will be called on to be missionaries to re-seed infected populations with their native crop of southern ways long since given up to the smooth-talking media salesmen of the north!

When I draw another thought, of China and it being a vast reservoir of scientific knowledge, into play, brought to the West's attention by Joseph Needham's multivolume odyssey, *Science and Civilisation of China*, I ponder whether its scientific creativity over thousands of years, many long before Western science got in on the act, contains nothing of this north/south division, whether if anything China is of the south – Hassell responds by stating he believes that 'the parlour game of "is China south or north?" is a plus no matter what. It's not as if the general idea is disproved.'

It would be nice if Hassell's ideas could take their place within the main flow of the history of science and technology, rather than their likely destination as a prop to acritical gadflying tilts by pop writers at the academic establishment and its way of doing things. The relation between climate and cultural evolutionary adaptation is already of considerable interest to others, academics and non-academics alike, and the frame Hassell is working within already has various related advocates. Another West-coaster, though this time a medicine man, neurobiologist William Calvin has written about the evolution of mind during the Ice Age. In *The Ascent of Mind* Calvin tries to show how it was the previous ice ages that triggered the emergence of

consciousness. Climate brings on leaps in evolution, Calvin believes, current climate change being no exception. There again, there are other arguments, providing reasons enough for the possible origins of the West's need, desire or rational reasoning to subjugate the Earth and thus develop technology to 'master' nature.

Lynn White, an academic historian, delighted his environmental contemporaries in the sixties, when he laid the original responsibility of ecological catastrophe with Christianity and its invocation of anthropocentric stewardship as primal cause of the exploitative relationship, which then moved further out of control as the centuries passed. Others relate the origins of a hardened and abstracted rationalism to the rise of the scientific spirit, associated with the move from Earth- to solar-centred cosmologies, the scientific method and the growth of humanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, giving way to the Enlightenment, and ensuring the disappearance of both magic as a way of doing, and enchanted relationships to the natural world. Be this as it may, such approaches, found mainly in the orthodoxies of the history of science profession, feel at kilter with contemplating whether the primal experience of heat and cold, benign or adverse weather, and the conditions of climate, may have, over millennia, brought on an inner migration away from a sensual self that thousands of years earlier, before the emergence of modern Western technology, people all across Old Europe would have been in touch with.

II

It is a thought-provoking way of looking at why things are how they are, and given its aspiration at an all-embracing explanation, it feeds any number of further strands of questioning thought. Part of this relates to music. Since Hassell is first and foremost a musician, it is not surprising to see the question answered symbolically in his kind of southern movie music. Hassell describes Fourth World as 'a viewpoint that provides guidelines for finding forms of balance between accumulated knowledge – "wisdom" – and the conditions created by new technologies, so that music from various cultures whose characteristics are responses to a given "place" (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".' This is a hefty whack of an aesthetic proposition which, if it is seriously unravelled, takes any further reflection on what Hassell is up to into the realms of what is understood by place, both traditionally and in the new topographical mediaspace terrain.

Hassell, seems to be one of a very few musicians actually consciously exploring this specific edge of where technologies of new music meet the place-sensitivities of musics that reach back across the centuries to times long before conditions conspired to render ancient musical traditions apparently obsolete in today's electronic environment.

If earlier Fourth Door pieces have pondered long and hard on what the parameters of an emergent electronic music sensitive to place could be, Hassell has celebrated the creation of artificial worlds, where premedia musical cultures act, 'as chemical elements, building blocks for the new cultural compounds and hybrids', reminiscent but wholly different to the original authentic soundworld. He has described this as a 'desire to weave things together so the end effect doesn't have a geographical association... like a fantasy of what another imaginary country would be'... of 'trying to create something that could have existed if things were in an imaginary culture, growing up in an imaginary place with this imaginary music'.

The music created out of these conditions also suggests much else, evokes any number of other questions, not least the dynamics of hybrids and collaging, the relation between old and new, future and tradition, place and non-place, and cutting across all of these, an aesthetics of environment, given Hassell is sculpting from music and sound rooted in land and geography, and also, centrally, technology: the tools by which his handwork creations are realised. In fact the man has been mucking around with different set-ups of technological gear all through his adult life, including a spell running a television-related company. In conversation he acknowledges that a partial source of Fourth World relates to the technology of the tape recorder, as so much of what Fourth World collaging is about is splicing up the reels of cultures and sticking them back together again in surprising and unanticipated form. All through his journey there is the application of this same splice philosophy – collage techniques – whatever the technology, or at the meta level, the layering of thought forms.



For all the denunciations of the technology-driven aridities of the northern world, technology is a critical further element in Fourth World's composition. 'Don't be misled,' Hassell wrote in an email, 'I'm not a Luddite – not yet, anyway. Among the credentials I'll present on that morning in 2017 when the digerati gangs are sweeping the provinces clean of analog counter-revolutionaries, are the notes (played and written) on *Aka-Darbari-Java*, where I riffed lovingly on the poetic possibilities of digital transformations ("... a background mosaic of frozen moments ... a sonic texture like a Mona Lisa" which, in close-up, reveals itself to be made up of tiny reproductions of the Taj Mahal).' If ADJ was released years ago, 1984, his most recent record, 1999's *Fascinoma* saw the recording happening in a downtown chapel, acoustically and lowering the technological imperative. Here the 'daily contact with "tone" was a blessing and an experience vastly removed from the process of making a computer make a music'. He has also talked of using 'the best of both worlds', while on other occasions the feeling comes across that he is not completely comfortable with the implacable thrust of the across-the-board technologisation that appears as the ineluctable future for this small planet.

Yet his path has repeatedly orbited and returned to the evolution of sampling. From tape splicing to digital morph sampling – highlighting it as a particular and sinewy sub-section, sample even, to be attended to in

any self-respecting philosophy of technology of the late twentieth century. It isn't at all surprising that quite a bit of this comes from the first days of the tape recorder, and the prehistory of the technology of recording. Hassell was part of the mimimalists generation, and any number of other musicians, who saw in tape a world of new possibilities. From Steve Reich in San Francisco, with *It's Gonna Rain*, to Stockhausen in Cologne, with battalions of cassette recorders, the recording angel, from a certain perspective, liberated a generation into any number of new and overlaying choices. When I put this to Hassell as partial reason to how he thinks about Fourth World, the fact that so much of it is essentially about layering and melding one source with another, he casually acknowledges assent. 'Sure, sure,' he says waving my revelation aside. Whether he sees it as so context-driven remains opaque – I think he may not have grasped what I was suggesting – Fourth World derives from immersion in **collage-inducing technologies**.

For a while, in the seventies, Hassell, along with some colleagues, appears to have tried to extend the relation of the splice to video, mirroring his own techno development into a commercial entity. **Bluescreen** happens to be the cinematic technique of filming foreground shots against blue background, which initially became a new metaphor for sampling, similar to the video technique of keying in an alternative, he says to

the 'exploration of ideas reflecting off the surfaces of other ideas.' On *Dressing for Pleasure*, Hassell's sex-fantasy album, for which he formed a band Bluescreen, he expanded the foreground/background effects into the realm of fantasy. 'I was spending a lot of time "blue-screening": excising Girlfriend A and reinserting in Background B (where once resided Girlfriend B or some look alike background from found imagery).' Such torrid fantasy resulted him in the exotic self-description as 'the Leonardo of the Xactoknife' in the pre-Adobe Photoshop era. The idea was to refresh the meaning, the ambience, the flavour by "de-gestalt" the normally wedded fore- and background. And of course to say that the musical sampling process mapped on to the bluescreen process perfectly.'

'Now that I think of it, I had a visual arts leaning, but it was always around sound and sound installations, working with technical materials. I had a piece in the Experiments In Art and Technology Show in New York, that Robert Moog helped me to build. A kind of visual demonstration of tape delay in a way, so I did have that kind of epoch in which I was hanging around people like Walter de Maria, the earth artist. I did some projects, mostly unrealised, dealing with sound and sculptural ideas out in the outdoors, taking off from the Earth Art ideas.'

His earth art projects centred on the creation of 'invisible sonic sculptures' in outdoor settings. Hassell

himself relates them conceptually to the 'Land Art' movement, although it feels as if these sculptures echo many of the concerns of current sound art. The 'invisible sculpture' premise of Solid State was the forerunner, and it is usually included in a list of Landmusic projects. De Maria, contemporary of Robert Smithson, is famous for his New Mexico field of lightning rods, and Hassell's fraternising shows in familial form the parallels and crossovers between the Minimalism/Ambient sound trajectory and the Minimalism-Land-Art evolution.

Years ago in an edition of Andy Warhol's *Interview* Hassell extended his connection with land art territory into related ecological territory. 'I started thinking about the notion of boundary' he stated in the interview. 'The straight line stands for abstraction and abstract thinking, and the land stands for what we've got to work with. And I was thinking how words and language are like the demarcation lines, the boundary lines of emotion and feeling and the dream life. There can be presumed to be a kind of unruly continuum there, which is only crudely demarcated by words. And perhaps in exactly the same proportion that the dream has been forgotten on a general level, this unruly emotional life is only known through the window of the word, unless one gets smart and starts looking behind things...' in another long-forgotten piece Hassell wrote, 'of all magazines, *Heavy Metal*, 'perhaps the result will

Indeed the uses Hassell makes of technology follow the same enabling possibility wherever, be it the sixties tape recorder or the morphing screen pastes of computers. So much so that others talked of *Aka-Darbari-Java* as 'melted through recombinant aesthetics made possible through digital technologies'. All of this, he says of the evolution from the advent of splice/collage technology through to digitisation, was a means to realising long-held collage aims. It is also the sounds he heard, rather than the technology, which precipitated the change in musical form that occurred at the same time for instance, after the *Possible Music/Dream Theory/ADJ* trilogy, with *City* and *Dressing*: 'Since the work comes out of the sound, things that allow you to get different sounds will plant a new seed and then you can grow it. It wasn't as if I was hearing ADJ textures earlier. Theoretically, one could have gone through enormously complicated splicing procedures to get similar results ... so it was the facilitating interface that opened the field. Like the

invention of a "keyboard" in the land of monochords.'

Possible Music began his on-off association with computers, which for a while introduced a new level of integration, so that much of the collage work wouldn't have been possible without computers. 'Mimicking Stockhausen's early electronic pieces and of the musique concrete guys, I used to splice up chords (I remember a Vocal group, the Hi-Los) make them into loop! and run them against one another and check out the cool permutations. I did many tape pieces before digital happened. *Contagious Magic* on *Possible Music* is a live performance over a digital sample (a short "trap" of a section of a Miles concert), whose main rhythm was being clapped by five performers along with some live "trapping" of the (digitally harmonized) trumpet in performance which was then flashed back into the performance. I don't think anybody had done that live sampling before. Of course the primitive The Fairlight sampling synth I used on *ADJ* opened up a lot of possibilities.'

Along with these splice/collage effects Hassell blows the trumpet sound through an elaborate Midi-controlled effects system, allowing him to play chords and draw parallels to monophonic lines. For this he uses a Lexicon PCM70 for reverb, harmoniser and Electro-Harmonix pedal delays for trapping sounds. Given the pedals are low-tech, the two systems can set up a relation between hi and lo tech, enables the spectrum of techedness to become a canvas for collage sampling. 'Oh yes. This exists now on many levels ... There's much love for the lo-fi around ... I relate it to levels of resolution, for instance in printing reproduction. to not avail oneself of the spectrum seems unthinkable to me. Of course this is not arranged in structured "rows" a la serial technique ... it's an inevitable by-product. as are excursions into non-tempered tuning: as a sample is tuned to be in time with another, strange (and happy) variances in tuning happen. Naturally, new algorithms to eliminate those anomalies have been developed.'

'As to the television innovation; the TV screen was just a sidebar which took two years of my life,' he states today. They are a matrix of lens shapes, which went over the TV screen and sort of abstracted the picture. I wish I had a picture ... by masking – sampling if you will – the TV screen... think of a perforated sheet over the screen and then a matrix of cabeshon shapes (a flattened hemisphere) placed on top so that the dots or lines are magnified, distorted ... as the picture moves, there's a watery movement that abstracts the picture (thousands of small dots squeezed into 75 large ones). I made another version where acrylic rods brought the picture (in benday dot form) out in front of the screen six or seven inches. I ran across a note from Roy Lichtenstein the other day thanking me for the 'delightful rod piece' which Walter de Maria had loaned them for a few weeks. It 'harnessed' the stream of graphic power being sent out to millions of TV sets... did TV columns (a stack of seven or eight sets all set to a vertical roll). There were lots of other unrealised versions, buried in earth, face up, etc.'

These sculptures included Sonic Environment Relocations, such as *Ocean-Desert* – where the sound of the ocean to underground speakers was transmitted to just below the surface of the desert floor at a remote location. Hassell wrote that it was 'like an echo of prehistoric times in which the desert was actually the floor of the sea!' More recently he put together a proposal for extending the Ocean-Desert idea into a 'Sound of the World Plaza' (or 12 individual plazas) where a 'spectacularly characteristic sound environment located in each time zone is satellite-relayed 24 hours a day to one central location'. It could also be a video plaza. There is also the Improved Nature Series, with subtle amplification parks placed in trees in a city park, amplifying birds which fly within range of the speakers, and the Frozen (Cinematic) Moments Series which apparently plays on film experience, so that scenes are actualised, for example a 'prepared' tennis court where invisible speakers create the sound of the ball hitting in various places on each side of

the court (homage to 'Blow-Up') and lastly the Architectural Sound Monuments. Hassell describes this last thus: 'An outdoor plaza in which the theoretical "circle of fifths" is realised sonically – as an actual circle with C G D A E B F# C# G# D# A# F emanating from underground sources. As one walks around, different sonic fields, tonalities morph.'

There have been occasional Solid State performances, most recently in 1997 at the Amsterdam Planetarium, organised by the Centre International de Recherche Musical (CIRM) in Nice. In a report about the evening CIRM's director Michel Redolfi wrote that 'we were able to create slow but massive shifts of space... sonic dune effects. The magic of your piece was dramatised by the realistic night sky that was slowly manipulated (subliminal shooting stars – gradual spinning of the sky). Castenada would have loved it! ... After 15 minutes people started to leave their comfortable seats and walked almost religiously in the darkness of the starry night.'



Either Way by Mati Klarwein

be a multiplicity of musics arising from tribes of like-minded people once again with boundaries formed by hills and river beds linked worldwide by satellites.'

Intriguingly this feels like an expression of something, which was in the ecological zeitgeist of the time. As if a whole bunch of people alighted on something similar, albeit from a range of experience and perspectives, which neither made practical headway, nor received any real media attention, beyond perhaps Northern California's then Co-Evolution Quarterly. This slice of Hassell's work resonates with such one-time young Americans, for instance Paul Ryan, Peter Fend and his Ocean Earth Construction and

Development Corporation (OECD), and Gene Youngblood, all three US art-types who explored the **blurred eco-boundary** between new media and expanded consciousness and the further possible reaches of using technology for a future which was closer to, rather than further from nature. The coincidence of Hassell's engagement connected the making of music to this outer counter-cultural ecological consciousness, and its spore trails envisioning how a future might be reinhabited with an admixture of very lo-tech mixed with very high-tech satellites. In time, other alliances came to the fore, particularly apprehending geographies from the bioregional point of view, that is

understanding natural watersheds as organic boundaries, and enabling peoples to re-embed lives within a sense of place.

Once again there was a splice philosophy at work, this time splicing up and recombining musical; place, jumping between, or splicing together, layering places and epochs, using the former as the chemical elements, and waiting to see what hybrid merged out of the alembic and phase transition. 'This was my fervent hope! An attempt to scramble the imagery so much that I couldn't remember what was real or fictional. Of course, this may be a fun thing to do at home but catastrophic on worldwide scale.' The result is a music of imagined places, places of the mind, and places where the mind can go. If there was a splicing up of nature, this wasn't out of not appreciating nature, rather using nature itself as an element in the table of materials to be enacted on. It is technique, in a sense, magical technique, so that what you hear can bring a clarity and intensity to imagined nature so as to make it too real, a kind of technicolour nature. The question for those who believe in the need to rekindle the broken umbilical link to place, is whether there are places of the mind, within which the holding qualities of the pattern of place can both be nurtured, and combine with the creation of the co-ordinates for impossible cartographies. Or whether since 'in imagination's room, all things work out' there is a need to hold onto 'reality'.

If there is any particular location that Hassell became identified with, it is some unidentifiable south-east Asian meeting in the mind; a lush, verdent dream-scape, reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's *Island* utopia, endorsing Brian Eno's declaration that Hassell conjures not only possible music but possible worlds. The initial trilogy of albums, plus the next release – *Power Spot*,

and the live out-takes from a mid-eighties European tour, the incredibly titled *The Surgeon of the Nightsky Restores Dead Things by the Power of Sound*, while emphasising different elements of the Fourth World vision, remain of an imaginative piece and amplify a musical vision prefiguring the growth of combinatorial, cross-hybridised forms, where the very old is mixed in with the latest in studio gizmos and technological knowhow. Listen to the 'watersplash rhythm' that sets the organisational frame for *Dream Theory in Malaya*, and it conjures a joyous other, easy to escape into. And contemplate the 'visionary anthropology' of Jungian Kilton Stewart, which informs the conceptual backdrop to *Dream Theory* (with its knowing tilt to Freud) and consider how twenty-first century gamelan propels the music, even if there is nothing explicitly identifiable with Bali. Rather, it is inspired by, in Hassell's words, a "remarkable highland tribe" – the Senoi, who developed a culture of family dreamtelling'... where a child's fearful dream of failing was praised as a gift to learn to fly the next night and where a dream song and dream dance were taught to a neighbouring tribe to create a common bond beyond differences of custom.'

The mind of the tribal is never far from the man's modus operandi, such that in a further elaboration of the Fourth World way he states that 'since the cultural richness of tribes can be nothing other than the expression of their localities, "going global" is a fearsome slogan, suggesting the eventuality of a "white noise" culture made up of same-sized bits, distributed evenly. The fourth world process imagines another outcome to the inevitable: an equipoise that is based on zooming in (to singularity) and zooming out (to generality) simultaneously.' On *Dream Theory*, and the other recordings this chimes with an ethos of poise, grace and balance

Hassell again dovetailed with this by entitling a record in progress *Ecotopia*, thus spreading the sporeword into the dream lexicon. So much of this relates to the continuation of soundworlds in relation to the lay of the land, seemingly partial organic source of much of the earthmusic of the world, from the deep past to the deep present. Hassell may not have followed any path of shining Bioregionalism, but took the road out beyond geography. That is, he began to conceive of Fourth World music, a music that adhered to virtual rather than geo-physical co-ordinates. Inspired by 'flashes' while listening to third world musics, and using first world technology Hassell felt 'no obligation to be "complete", "accurate", or to provide equal time to all cultures. On the contrary the big lesson to be

learned,' he appears certain, 'from "poetic ethnomusicology" is that musical personality is more the result of excesses, of passions, of obsessions – of a psychological landscape which, once upon a time, was complementary to the geographical landscape. Since telemedia have replaced the geographical landscape, and since telemedia tend toward sameness, anyone who wishes to make music of personality must create a fictional landscape to relate to.' Recently Hassell produced a series of acoustic ecology treatments for the Los Angeles radio programme, *Where Music Comes From*. On these treatments Hassell takes Masai, other voiceprint and environmental soundscape recordings, extrapolating a hypnotic rhythmic soundweave from this core material.

found in tribal cultures, and which Balinese traditional culture took to a particular conclusion through the exemplar of the **gesture of balance**.

By envisioning a steady-state futurism Hassell had perhaps realised at least some of the yearnings of those at the Ecotopian end of the eco-spectrum. If it was inspiring and evocative, whether this vision spoke to many in the mainstream was a moot point. This said, from the mid-eighties he moved on and out of this imaginary terrain.

As sound stream cross-pollination from multiple Cartesian coordinates, both epochwise and geographically, began to seep into the working methods of any number of musicians, Hassell appeared to tire of it. At the same time what Fourth World represented had become a new orthodoxy by the early nineties. Hassell took a sidestep into hip hop, reconfiguring the Fourth World ambit, taking in the sounds of urban USA, with Africa, with *City – Works of Fiction*, and after that the steamy fusion of sexual fantasy with hardwired jazz of *Dressing for Pleasure*. This didn't mean his playing changed. Nor composing, which he describes as **very hands-on**.

Two further examples show how diverse his application of Fourth World was to become. In 1985 the Kronos Quartet asked him to contribute to a record of

contemporary composers. Hassell took as a starting point a book on African textiles, Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit*, which in its larger ambit connected South American black people's visual sensibility to both musical and choreographic modalities, and detailed how African cloth could be seen as 'rhythmised' – or composed textiles – made into larger pieces by combining the narrow-loom strips according to rules about how patterns fall together or not. The piece's title, *Pano da Costa*, refers in particular to the colourful, 'syncopated' textiles of a coastal region of Brazil. Hassell found the piece's composition a new challenge since up to this point in his Fourth World work he had not encountered the divide between composition and performance. Here he was 'suddenly being asked to write music for other musicians to play... I decided on a consciously "primitive" approach to the traditional Quartet roles. I imagined how these instruments might be played if they belonged to a "village" musician where each player would have a kind of fixed role: someone plays a rhythm instrument, someone else plays a melody instrument – without a lot of jumping around and role exchange. In other words, they were just playing – not being composed for.'

Much more recently with his last release *Fascinoma*, Hassell abandoned the hi-tech studio approach for

working with trumpet and the natural acoustic ambience of a Santa Barbara church. On the release he works understatedly through a selection of well-known jazz standards, including *Nature Boy*, *Sensuendo* and *Datura*. Produced by Ry Cooder, it uses Cooder's unusual Water Lily Acoustics system, custom-built analogue triode vacuum-tube recording equipment. The press notes talk of building on 'the idea of not creating something from scratch, but having to harmonise with the beauty that's contained in a room'. Hassell notes 'there clearly is a relationship between timbre and what kind of music you play; they're organically related. So, when a certain quota of beauty is already fulfilled when you walk into the room, *Nature Boy* feels as right to do as the B-minor Mass.' He describes this as the conjunction of futures and simplicity, a move which 'basically, I wandered into it, following intuition, not wanting to repeat past formulas' with Cooder acting as a 'savvy usher'. When talking about the record in a 2000 web interview he noted that this was far from a one-off; 'Speaking about using raga and looking through the Fourth World lens, discovering Johnny Hodges curves through this lens. I'm looking more and more at doing this. This would be a natural following up from *Fascinoma*, the sound having been exposed as being a beautiful sound, without any electronic mediation. I

just feel that I could do something incredible in that style – let's call them **lush standards** – which deserves to be heard.'

Today many identify Hassell and Fourth World with the earlier era of his work. A primary part of this identifiable Fourth World way of doing things has been the layering of new on old and what heady brews result. Hassell, who often puts potent metaphor to use, speaks of the many, constituent parts of cultures as being elements originated in a mysterious chemistry, where new element transforms the make-up and composition of the previous set of chemicals in the mix. From this he often goes on to mix in digital – layers, and space – and evolutionary metaphors to arrive at a form of description, which is heady in its mindspace as well as linguistic novelty. In one of those earliest forays into exploring Fourth World, the Heavy Metal piece, Hassell wrote, 'the optimistic view might be that we're going to reach an overload level of symbol density, that we'll be forced to arrive at a new simplicity – an ability via artificial intelligence (computers) to combine many individuals operating in complex chunks of information which can then be treated as a single mega-word ... an overloaded symbol bank breaking up into chunks suggests a similar pattern for a high-density future population breaking into clusters of New

The great anthropologist Gregory Bateson contrasted the West's constant state of being out-of-balance with that of the Balinese. Balinese ethos, manifest in the island's gamelan and culture is an example of a culture in a balanced steady-state. As source to this ethos Bateson returned repeatedly to the importance of postural balance in the life of the islanders. They are 'forever picking their way, like a tightrope walker, afraid at any moment lest they make some mis-step' he wrote. Bateson believed Balinese generalise ideas of body balance into human relations and noted that before the arrival of Europeans, through the islanders' eyes 'the world was steady.'

Bateson used Bali as a steady state mirror to the West out of balance and out of control, where technology rather than being in a steady state is in a runaway condition. Hassell's music doesn't derive directly from gamelan culture. He says, 'Bali just happened to spread its legs – coyly – in my imagination as a place where sensuality and "classical" culture are not at odds ... so I often default to that as an

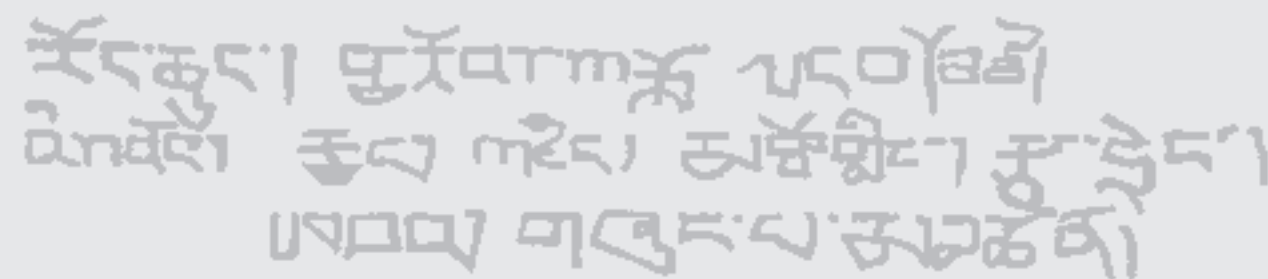
example. I like to think of it as "tropical hindu". That said, much of *Dream Theory* particularly, and many other pieces evoke a futuristic steady-state gamelan culture. And also as a music of and in balance, a distinctive contrast to the rollcall of twentieth century modernist music and an as culture out-of-balance, played out again in almost more extreme form in much popular subculture, both of which evince increasingly desperate attempts at climax tension and resolution. Hassell sees his music as steady-state – 'I'm quite at ease' – and in the draft of his book points to how he believes that a state of mind which respected that *we're all artists* is inevitable in the rebalancing of the equatorial waistline, speculating that 'perhaps "artist" especially in the northern sense' – was the name given to those who kept alive the connection between their 'north' and 'south', individuals who wore themselves 'works-in-progress', incubating a temperament that would later be seen as an evolutionary adaptation toward the kind of person we must all become variants of!'

'I'm only inspired by what I hear... with raga teaching: a phrase is sung, you repeat it; if you grasped it, the teacher moves on to a new phrase, a little more complex, building on the last one. What a joy! how different from the Western system of teaching via the abstraction of scales, etc. Both are useful but it's a matter of leading, with inspiration, to a point where the abstraction can enter the picture instead of vice-versa. Any notation that I do is just to capture a field of pitch possibilities. So working with sound objects (loops principally) and then letting some reaction to that build the next element. I don't really have it dichotomised into rhythm vs pitch system as in Hindustani systems... it's all a matter of smearing things together until it gels – an underlying structure could come from a quirky, slightly out-of-time loop which is squarely periodic in its iterations... another one with a longer cycle and a different character – a harmonic might be added, or a rhythm pattern might be formed around some part of a loop – which could have several strata to it.'

With *Fascinoma* he appears in part to have returned full circle to foregrounding skill. Partially with this in mind, partially with related concerns I put an old chestnut to him: whether hybrids are being generated at rates that meet other cultural forms' disappearance, and the quality of the hybrids set against what is being culturally extinguished. Quite some time ago, he was quoted by David Toop as worrying 'about the contradiction between lengthy study and the instantaneity of Xerox culture'. His teacher, Pran Nath and his years drawing the body-based trumpet playing into his very nervous system are both instances, at heart, where taking in physically embodied dexterity is a gesture, almost

against the collapse of skill. 'Of course this is worrisome to the extreme... again, this is not a manifesto to: "just sit back and enjoy the hybrids, they'll be the next generation's "originals"... it's the zoom in/zoom out simultaneity. More like "please understand that this thing of this place by these people is totally unique and it will never happen again – see if you can find a way to nourish incidences of 'aliveness' like this, either by preserving that which exists or bringing the spirit that you find in it to the thing that you try to do which grows out of it". The unique result of handwork is safe for a few centuries anyway. But maybe the result is not the main point: the process of doing it seems to be good for

us. I smile inwardly when I hear a trumpet sample ... you'll never get it, I say. But then the quality of the sample becomes a cool thing and that gets built on. But it depends on whether that person who likes the cool sample is ever offered the chance to experience the other thing, the "real" thing... It is the era of the producer/DJ: not being tied to inefficient time-consuming practice of a single instrument, the world of the pre-existing is yours for the taking. I accept that. That's a wonderful thing too. I even participate in it as a lover of collage texture but of course I hold my hard-won skill high and delight in thinking of myself as a keeper of the flame; the one thing I can do that no one else can.'



Tribal territories.’ On a different occasion he wrote the related statement: ‘Hybrid forms are more obvious now ... perhaps the symbol bank is near capacity and the only alternative is exploration of ideas reflecting off the surfaces of other ideas. Or perhaps this is what the creative process has always been about and now, for some reason, it has become visible in **conscious application**.’

III

Where did Fourth World begin? Hassell, originally a Southern boy, was born in Memphis in 1937, home, as Talking Heads David Byrne once reminded us, ‘of Elvis and the ancient Greeks.’ His family has deep South roots, from English, German, and Irish descendents going back to emigrations in the 1700s. Middle-class, Hassell comments on how his parents played by the rules, as lifetime partners. He describes his father as very guileless, in a ‘courtly’ Southern gentleman sort of way, but seems to have done him a favour of a lifetime by turning Jon onto learning the same cornet ‘he had played in a college band, set me off that path, locking myself in bathroom (for reverb) and picking out *Stormy Weather* or other bluesy tunes. My mother, orphaned at early age, was devoted to home-making, to loving her children.’

As a student in the early sixties he went to the Eastman School of Music, in Rochester, New York State, and at the Catholic University in Washington DC, where he was close to completing a PhD on plainsong. By this time he was deep into Modernist serial music of Schoenberg and Stockhausen, and took himself off to Cologne to study under the tutelage of the original master of electronica. Next something happened, as from there on in he turned his back on Stockhausen as the ‘neurotic music’ (as described by Terry Riley got

under his skin as much as western abstracted rationalism. This suggests something life changing; it isn’t that surprising that in the magical sixties, ecstatic altered states, revolution in the air and the sex as revelation, turning many a head to the east. ‘Having been programmed to follow a nice predictable path – maybe with an academic career or as an orchestral player, after my study with Stockhausen I returned to the USA, dropped acid – the positive aspects of intoxicants are not to be underestimated’ and from there fell in with two of the original minimalists: Terry Riley and La Monte Young. He had already run into La Monte Young, the originator of minimalism, at Darmstadt and this encounter with the minimalist forefathers seems to have underscored his disillusionment with his past.

‘Being around Terry Riley and La Monte Young, coming into contact with people who were concerned about feeling good via music ... (that it was) not just some intellectual exercise. It was more holistic. It spoke to the whole body. I’m talking about what they would later refer to as “minimalism”’. The times were psychedelic, and the birth era of minimalism was the music intellectuals’ covenant with acid.

Alongside this he ‘met a beautiful, young “fourth world” girl, got divorced, started trying to reconcile my daylight world (high culture) with my night preferences (code for “erotic”) ... and began asking why Miles Davies’s music was one place in the cultural scale and, for instance, Philip Glass in another.’

Formally teaching at the Centre for Creative and Performing Arts in Buffalo since his return from Europe, he invited Terry Riley as a guest tutor for a term. Riley’s arrival got Hassell playing trumpet again for the first time in several years. Within months Riley had been asked to record the early minimalist work,

With this provocative take on hybrid emergence, twenty years on I ask Hassell about moving through the glass ceilings of complexity, and whether today he remains as confident about a genuine movement into the floorspace of a new simplicity? And how hybridities relate both to complexity and simplicity, in any new floorplan. Simplicity is a watchword with Hassell, ‘Say things as directly as possible’ one interview has him stating. What they don’t say is the simplicity and elegance of the Fourth World idea. “I think that I was simply saying that it was more optimistic to think that info overload was going to result in ‘chunking’ and that was a better outcome than an infinity of small bits floating around. Look at music sampling: you press a key

and where you would’ve had one note play you now trigger what could be a whole complex of pitches-textures-timbres, let’s call it a phrase, which then becomes a “unit”. Now this cuts both ways: as filtering out the skill formerly required to play the phrase, allowing the unskilled to simulate skill (is that a sin? yes, from the professional and no, from the amateur) ... and as a fabulous new tool for the skilled to carry further into a previously-unheard-of texture.

‘Not that this process of chunking was going to save or destroy the world... but that we could learn from the phenomenon for possible use as a metaphor for the purpose of simplifying our thought processes. Or for developing an appreciation of the kind of wisdom which

is embodied in ‘primitive’ thought – no need to correct for over-atomisation in the jungle – which might become the model for a futuristic version of “primitive”: externally, it appears like the old version but internally its wisdom has been arrived at by having gone through the atomisation and decided there’s a better way. I often use this breakdown: prehip – hip – post-hip, where post-hip may share external features with prehip but the people at that stage have passed through hip – the stage where mass fashion reigns – and come out the other side with their own style based on knowledge of all three. Chogyam Trungpa, the Buddhist teacher spoke of “crazy wisdom”. So think pre-wisdom, wisdom, and crazy wisdom.’



Soundscape by Mati Klarwein

In C and he returned the invitation, asking Hassell to guest on it. Much of the rest of Hassell’s time was spent performing with Young, as collaborator on the latter’s *Just Intonation*. Actually at the turn of the seventies decade, Philip Glass was another obscure avant composer toiling with his minimalist muse while making a living as a New York taxi driver. Across town the other East coaster in the pantheon of minimalists, Young, was extolling the remarkable vocal abilities of an Indian classical singer. Before long Hassell also got to hear the voice of Pandit Pran Nath. It was to change his life.

Pran Nath is the key influence in the musical journey of Jon Hassell and a small coterie of others. Born in Lahore, Pakistan, Pran Nath joined and was taught in

the austere, pure intonation of the Kirana school, or *gharana*. His singing was known as singularly devotional, and throughout his life he showed scant interest in success. The singing, as with all other parts of one’s life, was for God. ‘If you take all the *gharanas* of Indian music,’ Young was to state years later, ‘and place them on a line with a pitch at one end and rhythm at the other, the Kirana *gharana* would be at the extreme end of the pitch end of the line. And Pandit Pran Nath would be at the extreme-pitch end of the Kirana *gharana*.’ By the late sixties Pran Nath had lived a wandering aesthetic’s life, including spending a significant part of the 1940s in a cave temple at Tapekeshwar, a few miles north of the Indian Himalayan town of Dehra

Dun, passing the days apparently naked, bar a covering of ashes, singing to God. After leaving the cave refuge Pran Nath spent much of the fifties and sixties teaching in Delhi, the power of the voice holding all who heard it in literal thrall at the purity and beauty of the singing.

It was the voice which Lamonte Young originally heard on a recording in New York, '... the most beautiful thing I had ever heard' he wrote in the *Village Voice*, determined with his partner Marian Zazeela, to bring the singer to the USA. He did so in the first months of 1970.

Terry Riley had given Hassell a tape of Pran Nath's singing, but they hadn't met. Accompanying La Monte to perform Young's Dream House work, in Rome in 1971, Hassell discovered Pran Nath was also performing the same evening. 'I heard Pran Nath warming up before the Rome show and I started to accompany him, and patterns started to come out which I never imagined were possible. It was like something out of Gurdjieff's *Meetings With Remarkable Men*.'

'I met Pandit Pran Nath, and began to see how raga represented a beautiful balance.' This is understatement. Hassell began to immerse himself in Indian music, and became a student to the Indian Pandit or teacher. Pran Nath's approach offered a way into a vast ocean of sound, integrating the many musical forms into the singularity of the harmonic world of the Indian tambura, where melody in the form of a raga was interwoven into this lattice. He found himself asking, 'Why couldn't there be another form like this in a "contemporary" language?' In entertaining this question Hassell was both laying the foundation of all the music made since he began putting out recordings, beginning with *Vernal Equinox*, and continuing through to *Aka-Darbari-Java*, and to begin to imagine the possible frame of mind for Fourth World. Pran Nath in enabling him to see the 'microworld of connections' between musics, had seeded a journey which continues to this day.

'All I have,' Hassell was to say years later in an interview with Theresa Stern, 'I owe to Pran Nath.' Soon after he died, Jon placed this tribute to his teacher, guru perhaps, on Young's *Otherminds* website. It begins; 'I had a dream about Guruji this morning. I was listening to him sing a montage of raga lines and knew (even as they were being played back effortlessly by my brain or ... were they coming from someplace else?) that I would have difficulty being able to play or sing them back to him as in a lesson and I now become aware, here in recounting this experience, that this was the way I was usually listening to him, trying to grasp the points of pitch around which his aural calligraphy wrapped itself... I'm sitting here now thinking and feeling for

the thousandth time but more intensely than before what a rare man he was and silently praising the delicate tissue of chance that brought me into the presence of a being through whom I could glimpse the kind of devotion to an act – prayer in the form of music, music in the form of prayer – that took many lifetimes to occur, somehow rising above the gravitational pull of physicality!'

What was it that he learnt from Pran Nath? At the Barbican as Hassell's trumpet voice floated high in the layered mix of instruments, I was reminded of the phrase Hassell and others use often enough, of this trumpeting being calligraphy of the air, as the form of the trumpet danced across the aural sketch-pad, reeling gracious thin curves, followed by a chunk of fattened sound, thickening out the sonic ink strokes, before a momentary squall of notes, or the trumpet splitting to play alongside itself, splaying into a multi-tracked haiku across the auditorium. For anyone who has looked into the elegant restraint of Islamic calligraphy something of this sonorisation is understandable.

'I had to find a way to make the *meend*,' Hassell recently told Hungry Ghost's Marcus Boon, 'by using my lips as a secondary voice, transferring the vibration point from the vocal fold to the lips and thinking of it as a conch sound, blowing primitively into it and making the pitches with just the lips and the resonating chamber. The Indian music world has traditionally believed the voice is the ur-instrument from which all other instruments spring. So it is with singing that any musical learning begins. In Indian raga the method of teaching is oral, your teacher sings a phrase, step by step, until you hear this intricate calligraphy going on. In order to do that, I had to learn how to play the trumpet differently. I now related to it in a very primitive way. That is to say, I started with the mouthpiece and just thought of it like a conch shell.'

'The technique is not singing through the trumpet. its transferring the vocal function to the lip, the lip becomes the vocal fold, the lip sings, the lip holds the pitch. It's like a surrogate voice,' which means that unlike almost any other trumpet you might hear, with Hassell it's a unique combination of mouth and voice box; singing with and as if the trumpet is an extension of his nervous system.

'If you have a grid and each one of those lines on the grid is a pitch level, the art is drawing precisely a beautiful curve between one level and another level. It's like calligraphy. When I realised I could have a replica of the trumpet playing with me then it was as though instead of drawing the curves with one pencil I could have a handful of pencil and draw the curves.' It was this technique, first encountered at the feet of Pran

Nath, coming down through a centuries-old oral transmission of singing, which Hassell began to incorporate into his body of musical knowledge. It has continued to develop through years of practice.

'It was such a revelation to me,' he continued with Boon, 'to see that there was this background grid on which these arabesques were being traced – and how it extended the range of possibilities that had been laid out for me in Western musical training ... What it revealed to me was that jazz was a subset, a "raga family" ... because there were a fairly limited set of intervallic variations. But because raga is all about shape-making, it turned me on to seeing African and African-American music, every music through the lens of that shape-making ability. The "calligraphy in air" aspect was such an immense revelation for me.'

On returning to the States, Hassell shipped out to California in 1975, living near the ocean in Malibu, 'practising with my raga lessons and my pause button... and I'd go up into the hills and practise and try to make those curves. I basically studied Tilang for two years or more. The collision of my western training with this raga culture, which is a complete embodiment of sensuality and structure... like Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, where the game was a combination of all science, art all in one thing. If anything came close to that it was raga. And who knows that art? Who

would have the knowledge to understand how many things converge in that, being able to summon up the memory of this particular calligraphic event or situation... Raga is like this smoke in the air that presents the listener with the feeling of being in a dream that imparts knowledge all at once. It reminds me of Terence McKenna's saying that drugs are chemical gifts of the gods ... it's almost like a printed circuit, or an operating system that you may as well consider sacred ... the chemical result of a plant that allows your brain to receive a certain kind of knowledge all in one swoop.'

How does this fit within the larger Indian scheme of things? Well, raga has been at the heart of the Indian aesthetic viewpoint. As Hassell intimates, so much begins and returns to raga, and finds itself repeated across many traditional art forms. Its cyclical and non-sequential characteristics are central to, for instance, both the 'continuous narrative' of the Ajanta frescoes and the dramatic structure of the Sanskrit play (based on the themes of separation and reunion where the ending is the same as the beginning.) Each of these begins from modal music and aesthetic rapture – known as *rase* – where cyclical sequences of movements, scenes, or acts emerge. And each part of such sequences emphasises a single aesthetic mood, another overlapping influence from **raga**.

Richard Lannoy remarks in his groundbreaking study of Indian culture, *The Speaking Tree*, about how raga shares with these other forms 'the cyclic conception of creation flowing from the one into the manifold and returning to its source, (which) appears to have had some influence on the flowing, sinuous, organic forms that swell to the surface in high relief without breaking away from the matrix and appear to melt back into it.'

Such an aesthetic expresses itself in a creativity that has for thousands of years subtly interwoven the architectural with the sculptural, to create an organic, rather than mathematical and structural, synthesis. The result for Lannoy is visionary art, though he relates this to oneiric, the Greek word for dream.

'We do not "see" dreams,' writes Lannoy, 'but experience them as a simultaneity of multiple sensory impressions and memories. Indian art is generally synaesthetic – a mixture of media combined in a manner which resembles, but is not identical with,

oneiric experience!' Which have been uncovered by the many techniques of ecstasy, Yoga, of which, Hassell delights in reminding us, raga is but one form.

If Hassell often uses calligraphy of the air as the core metaphor to visualising raga and his trumpet making, in its context the calligraphy is being drawn across a dense, lush verdant aural sketchpad. Lannoy writes of Indian art as derived from a single original plantlike organic substance, where the 'surfaces are smooth and convex, figures cluster in sinuous stalk patterns, their bodies weaving in poses of the dance their arms like tendrils of creepers terminating in blossoming hands.' With its qualities of the vine, and the creeper, it is common to find the snaking roots of lianas adhering to the surface of rock. This smooth and sinuous form is as common to Indian nature as gnarled tree forms are in Europe. The sculptors spontaneously turned to these most typical natural analogies, as their Romanesque counterparts in Northern Europe studied the growth of oak and elm. One often in India sees the trunk

of one huge tree locked in the embrace of a creeper, or one trunk coiled round another in a marriage of a sensuous as the couplings of the Indian deities.' Lannoy shows how in the sensuous kineticism of Indian art human figures are dwelt upon 'almost as a special kind of plant.'

Which feels not too dissimilar to a music close to Hassell's heart, Miles Davies' *Bitches' Brew* '... the luxuriant jungle of *Bitches' Brew* is like so many dark blossoms and dangling vines to me', he wrote once. There is an organic, steamy verdant quality to much of Hassell's work, gradually moving its way further into the foreground, as he tries to up the sexy anti, and downplay anything too tranquil in his music. The synaesthesia of the music is also very much in the mix of Hassell's work, and the multi-layering of the senses, in the way Lannoy attempts to express the Indian sensibility, feels closer to how Fourth World operates as a whole, than the various attempts to frame it in Western descriptive language.

'Art is to community as the dream is to the individual'

THOMAS MANN

All this by way of a master singer who spent significant periods singing to God, in a cave temple, in North India, in point of fact a well-known and long-held practice in a country where the intensity of devotional activity accepted as a path of life is a commonplace. Hassell does not know whether the Kirana school is particularly revered or influential in the Indian musical world, but what Pran Nath did, strangely, was seed the school amongst a group of, albeit profoundly alienated, Western musicians, which has led to the vines of the form growing in a completely new way. The influence is unusual, given this group of musicians holds a particular currency of credibility with so much of the Western new music world, whereas it perhaps shows less interest in maintaining a traditional, classical culture like that of India. This said, it is Hassell's old friend and fellow musician Terry Riley who has done most to extend Pran Nath's legacy into the present day. Hassell describes Riley as Pran Nath's foremost disciple in the West, having studied with a singular intensity and duration. At one juncture he talks of Riley's son, a classical guitarist, who up until recently has shown scant interest in Hassell's work.

Could this mean that Fourth World is of its time, and even it evokes a strong musical futurism for many, that musical futures change, and may fade into sand, an abandoned city, its markers untaken by musical generations to come?

It's possible, though also possible is of Fourth World as a strange mutated offspring of Pran Nath, through the interpretational tens of Hassell, and thus also a Western, Southern Northern part of the Gharana. Possibly. Hassell relates the memory of playing *Charm*, from *Possible Music*, to Pran Nath, and being profoundly moved when the singer indicated his liking for the piece. Its remaking in a contemporary idiom and with contemporary technologies was irrelevant. 'For him,' Hassell told Boon, 'there was no backwards or forwards, there was no *avant garde*,' a perspective beguilingly alien to the Western modernist outlook, at once captive to the arrow of time, while stranger to the eternal present.

Of course Fourth World, although immersed in raga, has been an attempt to create something new. Hassell has talked elsewhere of how he moved 'from the path of *avant-garde* minimalism and towards something that began as a painting in of the essential raga elements drone background, drumming, solo line – with something new; the drone could be electronic, the drumming could be Afro-Brazilian, and the solo line was the trumpet with its electronic shadow.' What might this new relationship be to the tradition of Indian raga? So at the core of Fourth World is raga, although also something very different, which begs the question, can Hassell's music be seen as part of a future tradition of Indian music?

In the second half of the twentieth century Indian classical music underwent a remarkable renaissance, this energy at the beginning of a new century has perhaps reached its high tide mark. Part of this renaissance involved its planetary dispersal, a transmission, which feels entwined in aspects of the cultural evolution of consciousness. But as new forms of communication make their way into more and more of the planet, the soil for this transmission began to disappear. Devotional ragas for particular times of day are marginalised in a 24/7 world wide web culture. In turn the uncertain future Indian music faces, in a new century, including its possible disappearance, can be related to the Western driven technologisation, both of making music and more generally, a particular instance of globalisation upending a regional culture, bringing chaos to how to maintain that particular musical culture. But also part of this story is the literally thousands of Western people who have been so moved by exposure to Indian music, be it the North or South traditions, that their lives have taken a new path, with immersion in particular schools, instruments and skills. Some of this has borne a generation of classical Indian musicians in the West, but also at the same time the seeds of people looking at ways of carrying on the traditions into the contemporary world.

A way of looking at Fourth World, and Jon Hassell's work, is as part of a Western splinter of the Indian musical tradition, with its engagement with technology, invoking a possible future of the Indian musical tradition in the twenty-first century wired world. Will it be possible for these musicians, and others, to create a relation between the arctic cool electric blue technology, absorbed into the deep brown heart of Indian music, so it develops a way of surviving, indeed flourishing, in the next decades? Or will such a Western sourced splinter created out of the Indian palette, soon become, if it isn't already, something other; completely separate, distinct and over time unrelated, unfolding during the coming century. Perhaps, *de facto*, the transformation into the Western context makes for something entirely different. There is not much space in the West for oral transmissions of music, let alone a technological adaptation of that oral transmission. However, if this harbinger of a post-Indian electric blue earthmusic maintains its links to its umbilical mother tradition, it may yet feed, replenishment and renewal into the Indian musical tradition. Maybe it is doing this already.

IV

'I have something more to say before I leave you,' Sotuknang told the people as they stood at their Place of Emergence on the shores of the present Fourth World. This is what he said: The name of this Fourth World is Tuwaqachi, World Complete. You will find out

why. It is not all beautiful and easy like the previous ones. It has height and depth, heat and cold, beauty and barrenness; it has every thing for you to choose from. What you will choose will determine if this time you can carry out the plan of Creation on it or whether it will it must in time be destroyed too.'

These are the first words of the chapter on the Fourth World, where the myths of the four worlds of Hopi Indians were recorded in their sacred Book of the Hopi at the turn of the twentieth century. I have never seen an interview with Hassell being asked about the connection between his Fourth World and that of the Hopi (which means peace) people, but it seems clear that he picked it up from its late seventies currency, when absorption in Indian American culture was pretty much unparalleled. It also relates to it being the next stage on from third world, where cultures are not developing towards the conditions of first worldom. This is another shard in the crystal of all-pervading primitivism, which is part of the heartland of Hassell's world. We must make vivid again those fading regions of our being which lie 'beyond description' he writes in the work in progress, vivid being the operative phrase. How similar this feels to these words: 'the sense of reality is heightened to the point where it sometimes seems to blaze.' This is Stanley Diamond on primitive life's experience of nature and bodily functions,

another anthropologist who turned to the deep past in the sixties for resolution from the modern. Fourth World's many mirror images emerged from only one wayfarer of many in a generation who travelled that way, beating a path away from the tribulations of modernity. His story and the world he makes from it, sits well with so many others in the unusually gifted, anthropologically tempered early-sixties generation who came of age and education before the decade began to turn properly upside down. If, today, the journey for Hassell includes technology, recombinant aesthetics, and sex-fantasy, it began with that decade-long migration into the east and the old earth world, places where the lived experience was vivid, technicolour and blazing. In the technology-saturated west today there is an apprehension of this past, though scant sense of how to bring it into our contemporary lived lives. Fourth World's mix of chemistries draw on the sensibilities of the many souths of our bodies and mind, into a planetary future, which if at present is beyond reach in this world, holds true and clear to a dreamed ideal of what could come to be. OL

Marcus Boon's *Hungry Ghost* webmagazine is at www.hungryghost.com
See also www.otherminds.org

