

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Matthew J. Jager for the degree of Honors International Baccalaureate of Arts in Music presented on June 03, 2009. Title: Aural Experiences in Ecuador – An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound

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Aural Experiences in Ecuador – An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound takes the listener on a unique auditory journey through Ecuador, exploring its diverse sound environment while examining how one’s cultural perspective influences how those sounds are perceived. The process of listening occurs as a mutual dialogue between the listener and the soundmaker, where both the environmental context and unique perceptive state of the listener inherently influence the communicative process. A visitor to a foreign land processes his or her experiences from a distinct cultural perspective, a unique worldview. Consequently, a foreigner’s interpretation of the sound environment is bound to be similarly distinct, uniquely influencing the communicative situation. This soundscape composition investigates this process by exploring an intercultural experience through the sonic medium. Unprocessed sounds recorded in Ecuador are juxtaposed with processed sounds and other composed musical elements, hence the intercultural dialogue takes the form of an aural representation of my experience in Ecuador. The interchange between the objective sounds as I experienced and recorded them, and my subjective response as they provoked an emotion, a gesture, an idea, expressed musically through the same medium. The end result illustrates the process as it naturally occurs—as an unfolding conversation between an explorer and a new sound environment.

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Aural Experiences in Ecuador – An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound

by

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Aural Experiences in Ecuador

An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound

Artistic Statement

Stepping off a plane into a new country and culture often results in sensory overload. Each new place presents an ample palette of sights, sounds, and tastes—a multitude of new experiences, each ripe for exploration. However, as a musician, I find the sonic sphere intrinsically more appealing.

This past winter, I spent five weeks traveling through Ecuador, much like your typical young backpacker, but with one important exception: Instead of carrying a camera, I carried a small audio recorder, and I would wager that no one had an experience like mine.

Over the course of my travels I recorded thunderstorms in Quito, surf in the Galapagos Islands, my own footsteps as I hiked the Volcano Imbabura, as well as conversations with my friends, the laughter of children, and an indigenous woman singing in her native tongue.

I had previously lived in Ecuador for a year, but as I increasingly spent time with my eyes closed, intensely focused on the sound environment, I began to discover aspects of the culture and environment that I had never noticed before. I marveled at the nuance and beauty of birds singing, the whisper of the wind in the trees, and the sound of people going about their daily business. Through this exploration of Ecuador's diverse sound environment I began to dive beneath the surface, and in the process discovered the heartbeat of a nation, the pulse of a culture, and the rhythm of life.

Once back home, I processed, edited, and rearranged the sounds I had recorded into a soundscape composition that provides a unique look at culture by exploring my intercultural experience through the sonic medium. In this project I respond to these voices that called to me

so irresistibly during my year-long study-abroad program in Quito. The idea was to capture the melody that captivated and changed me so completely during my year abroad and to step back and comment on the process; to record the soundtrack of such a momentous time in my life and express how I felt about it through the same medium. The result is as my experience itself was: A chaotic clash of foreign elements, a brusque journey of acute experiences, and the discovery of a kind of harmony. The foreign elements eventually fuse together to form a kind of equilibrium—an uneasy balance between two worlds.

Background/Literature Review

Acoustic ecology is a relatively nascent field, considering that the history of Western Music dates back more than a thousand years. What began in the 1960s with concern over a rapidly changing sound environment has evolved into a multifaceted and ample field, encompassing the work of “academics, city planners, sociologists, activists, and sound artists.”¹ While hailing from diverse disciplines, all address the issue of sound and the role that it plays as a crucial component of the human experience. The factor that distinguishes acoustic ecology from traditional studies of music and sound might best be understood by considering how ecology has broken from the established mechanistic scientific paradigm. The idea that a large complex idea can be understood by breaking it down into small, isolated, and therefore understandable parts, has been a guiding principle of modern scientific inquiry. Ecology however, shifts its focus from isolated occurrences to a holistic or contextual understanding based on simultaneous and symbiotic interaction between varied components. It is precisely this focus on context and process—in this case the dynamic interaction between the listener and the soundmaker and all the different complex factors that influence this interaction—that makes acoustic ecology such an innovative undertaking. This is an idea espoused by Barry Truax in his article entitled *Acoustic Communication*. He notes that traditional studies of sound have been “based principally on the notion of energy transfer as found in the physical sciences. Sound and its behavior is modeled as a series of energy transfers from the source, through the medium, to the receiver and finally to the brain, ending perhaps with a final emotional dissipation of the energy as annoyance and pleasure.”² Similarly, music “is still largely concerned with matters of musical style, analysis of artifacts (the score), abstract works of art that are thought to exist independent of cultural context, and analytical models that assume an idealized listener that

scarcely can exist today given the impact of noise, mass media consumption, and audio consumerism.”² Truax sees the empirical approach to understanding communication as overlooking the importance of the perception of the agents involved in the communication process, or more generally, the context in which the communication takes place. “The communicational situation can be modified, either with a change in the physical environment itself, or simply with the listener's perceptual habits. And finally, the notion of context, which is frequently ignored in traditional models, is given a central place in acoustic communication, in the sense that sonic information is dependent both on the nature of the sound itself and its context.”³

Barry Truax teaches at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, the university where R. Murray Schafer began his work in the 1960's. Schafer authored what is widely accepted to be the seminal work on acoustic ecology, The Tuning of the World, published in 1977. The ideas and definitions set forth in this and other earlier works have proved to be the formative basis of acoustic ecology and have inspired or influenced many subsequent studies. Schafer's ideology that ultimately led to the conception of this new field of study is based on a simple suggestion: that we “try to hear the acoustic environment as a musical composition and further, that we own responsibility for its composition.”⁴ This counsel grew out of Schafer's concern for a rapidly deteriorating soundscape, and consequently, a decline in human listening ability, or “sonological competence.”⁴ As a professor, Schafer attempted to draw attention to the sound environment and persuade students to consider what an ideal soundscape aesthetic would be. Noise pollution eventually became the blanket term that encompasses concerns over an overtly saturated soundscape, however Schafer's message goes beyond just the concept of noise.⁴ In the late 1960's he founded an organization to promote the study of “the acoustic environment

and the impact of technology on it.”⁵ The World Soundscape Project (WSP) has since become a prominent international organization, establishing an “international reputation through its innovative approach to sound, as well as its numerous research publications and tape documents. Through systematic and critical study the project has endeavored to contribute to and coordinate research on the scientific, aesthetic, philosophic, architectural, and sociological aspects of soundscape ecology. The project's goal is to find solutions for an ecologically balanced soundscape where the relationship between the human community and its sonic environment is balanced.”⁵ Some of the WSP’s early endeavors include a “study on [sound] level measurements (producing decibel maps), soundscape recordings and the description of a range of sonic features. Further WSP field studies in Europe led to the publication of *Five Village Soundscapes* and *European Sound Diary*,”⁶ some of the earliest and most renowned soundscape documentaries. In *The Tuning of the World*, Schafer also determined a formal vocabulary to denote specific soundscape aspects. “He defines a hi-fi soundscape as an environment where ‘sounds overlap less frequently; there is more perspective—foreground and background’”^{6,4} Hi-fi sound environments are typically characterized by a balanced auditory interplay. In natural habitats for example, verbalizations fill the sonic space in a balanced way, where birds and insects fill “spectral niches.”⁷ A fellow researcher, Bernard Krause noticed that “when a bird sang or a mammal or amphibian vocalized, the voices appeared to fit in relation to all the natural sounds in terms of frequency and prosody (rhythm).”⁸ Low-fi environments on the other hand, lack this definition and interplay. We are probably all familiar with an archetypical lo-fi environment; the urban soundscape. The terms hi-fi and low-fi exemplify the “contrast between pre-industrial and post-industrial acoustic environments.” Unfortunately, since the industrial revolution, an ever increasing number of unique soundscapes have disappeared completely or

submerged into the cloud of homogenized, anonymous noise that is the contemporary city soundscape, with its ubiquitous keynote—traffic.”⁹ Apart from the general aspects of soundscape ecology, Schafer also developed a formal syntax for defining the individual components of acoustic environments. “Background sounds he defined as keynotes (in analogy to music where a keynote identifies the fundamental tonality of a composition around which the music modulates); foreground sounds (intended to attract attention) are termed ‘sound signals.’⁶ Sounds that are particularly regarded by a community and its visitors are called “soundmarks”⁶—in analogy to landmarks. Natural examples of the latter include geysers, waterfalls and wind traps while cultural examples include distinctive bells and the sounds of traditional activities.”⁹ These ideas have important implications in the role of sound in the development of identity, both spatially within a certain physical location, and culturally within a certain behavioral or spiritual context as well. “His terminology helps to express the idea that the sound of a particular locality (its keynotes, sound signals and soundmarks) can—like local architecture, customs and dress—express a community’s identity to the extent that settlements can be recognized and characterized by their soundscapes.”⁹ The exploration of cultural identity through sound is one of the principle topics undertaken by this thesis, and will further investigate intercultural experience through this medium. The last key concept devised by Schafer that is particularly relevant to discussions of sound and its influence on identity is that of “schizophonic sounds.”⁶ These are sounds that have been recorded and therefore separated from their natural environment or context. When these sounds are played back, they no longer pertain to their original context, neither spatially nor temporally. Schizophonic sounds are ubiquitous in modern life. Recorded music, radio ads, televisions, all expose us to sounds that originated in another time or place. Hildegard Westerkamp comments, “although this situation is perceived as 'natural' and 'normal' by many, it

can also have a disorienting effect and create a sense of unreality. [This listening experience] is characterized by the fact that the sound source always originates in another place than where it is heard and often produces a mood or atmosphere that is out of context of the listener's physical location.”¹⁰ A unique phenomenon only available since the advent of recording technology, schizophrenic experiences can be extremely influential. A listener's “sense of place may become confused and uprooted through”¹⁰ the intermingling of natural with schizophrenic sounds. Corporations and mainstream media typically use schizophrenic sounds to create an environment that is conducive to consumerism, lulling us into a “state of aural unawareness and unconscious behavior and ultimately into the act of spending.”¹⁰ What’s more, individuals use music as an “audioanalgesic”⁶ or “a sound wall to block the unceasing (and often critical) inner dialogue and the uncomfortable emotions the dialogue evidences.”¹¹ These concerns aside, schizophrenic sound has become a reality of the present day and its affects are not inherently negative. Conversely, we can “make use of the schizophrenic medium to awaken our curiosity and to create a desire for deeper knowledge and information about our own as well as other places and cultures. It is a forum for us as composers to 'speak back' to problematic 'voices' in the soundscape, to deepen our relationship to positive forces in our surroundings or to comment on many other aspects of a society.”¹² The focus on the conversation between the listener and the sound environment has become a central tenet of soundscape composition, one of the many branches of acoustic ecology that have grown from Schafer’s work. Soundscape composition puts schizophrenic sounds to use in order to “create a clearer sense of place and belonging for both composer and listener, since the essence of soundscape composition is the artistic, sonic transmission of meanings about place, time, environment and listening perception.”¹²

An ample field in itself, soundscape composition may pertain to a diversity of methods, techniques, and compositional styles. According to Hildegard Westerkamp, one of the most well-known modern soundscape artists and Schafer's colleague at Simon Fraser University, "A soundscape composition is always rooted in themes of the sound environment...and uses recorded sounds as its instruments."¹² One major factor that differentiates the distinct genres of soundscape composition is the use of processed and non-processed sounds. "Some soundscape works are created entirely with unprocessed sounds and their compositional process occurs in the specific ways in which the sounds are selected, edited, mixed and organized."¹² These pieces would fall into the "soundscape narrative or document" genre.¹² These environmental sound recordings first become popular in the 1970's with Irv Tiebel's Environments series, released as LPs that featured "rich, un-narrated ambiances of specific habitats, recorded and reproduced with state-of-the-art stereo technology, creating a compelling listening experience. When Songs of the Humpback Whale became a best-seller, the doors were opened for a wave of natural sound releases, most of which were close variations on the Environments formula."¹ Other works may be composed of entirely processed sounds. In order for these to be considered soundscape compositions, however, they must "in some way make audible their relationship to their original source, or to a place, time or situation."¹² For Hildegard, "the essence of soundscape composition lies in the relationship between [real (unprocessed) and the abstract (processed) sounds] and how this relationship inside the composition informs both composer and listener about place, time and situation. A piece cannot be called a soundscape composition if it uses environmental sound as material for abstract sound explorations only, without any reference to the sonic environment."¹² Here Westerkamp illuminates how the defining factor of soundscape composition lies in its expository quality. Its distinction from other art forms lies in its

expression of environmental context, the confluence of “place, time, and situation,”¹² and the focus on context, process, and the evolving dialogue between the listener and soundmaker, mediated by the sound environment.

As previously stated, these ideas have important cultural implications. The acoustic environment can provide vital insights into culture; likewise the unique worldview of the listener inherently influences the communicative process. At this point of dissection between music and culture, the line begins to blur between acoustic ecology and other disciplines devoted to studying the cultural implications of music. There exists a plethora of nomenclature, however, acoustic ecology, ethnomusicology, eco-musicology, etc, while differing in many aspects, all share a central tenet: sound as an integral component of cultural identity. Steven Feld explains that “exploring Kaluli echo-muse-ecology in the Bosavi rainforests lead me to realize that what I was trying to understand all along was that the language and music of nature are intimately connected with the nature of language and music. Shifting from the realm of ritual performances to that of everyday experience and expression I learned that sounds are heard as time of day, season of year, vegetation cycles, migratory patterns, forest heights and depths. Place resounds as a fused human locus of space and time. Local acoustic ecology can thus be considered a kind of aesthetic adaptation, a naturalization of place, or, put differently, a pattern of ecological and aesthetic co-evolution.”¹³ Maria Anna Harley, on the other hand, has her own “ecomusilological approach”¹⁵ in which she expounds, “music ecology focuses on the music's connection to our planet's life, by recognizing mimetic imitations of elements of natural soundscapes in music, and by tracing inspirations with environmental processes and phenomena. Thus, it studies ecological or environmental music, but is not limited to the focus on the music's content or context and may be applied to various musical styles and works.”¹⁴ What these different fields share is an

understanding of the profound connection between sound and a sense of place. Sound is an integral component of cultural identity, and therefore the sonic medium is an ideal avenue for cultural exploration.

This thesis project employs these ideas, providing a unique look at cultural by exploring an intercultural experience through the sonic medium. Hildegard asks “A sound occurs. And is heard. But by which person? From which culture? In what mental state? What physical state? What psychic space? With what intellectual knowledge? Which past experiences? What age? From which gender?”¹⁶ Aural Experiences in Ecuador – An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound is a soundscape composition that explores this question specifically with regard to culture. A visitor to a foreign land processes his or her experiences from a distinct cultural perspective, a unique worldview. Consequently, a foreigner’s interpretation of the sound environment is bound to be similarly distinct, uniquely influencing the communicative situation. This soundscape composition illustrates such a dialogue through my own experience. The narrative of the Ecuadorian soundscape is supplemented by the other half of the dialogue, the response of the listener. My thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the object acoustic experience are expressed through an accompanying musical composition, therefore illustrating the process as it naturally occurs—as an unfolding conversation between an explorer and a new sound environment.

Methodology

The approach that I took to the research was unquestionably non-scientific in a traditional sense. A traveler's experience may follow a rough itinerary, however it is subject to an infinite number of uncontrollable variables, and the episode is surely impossible to replicate. Nonetheless, when I arrived in Ecuador, I had two main objectives that played a large role in determining the sound selection process.

The first objective was to explore this process of sound selection in itself. A central question addressed by this thesis is how one's particular cultural background and worldview affects listening and the response to the sounds encountered. Therefore, I inherently selected for sounds that I found to be indicative of a foreign location and culture—sounds not typically encountered on a day to day basis in Oregon. In Quito, for example, the trucks that lumber through the streets selling gas for cooking have a distinctive honk. If I were born in Quito, it is unlikely that I would consider this sound to be a characteristic soundmark of Ecuador. However, as a foreigner I inherently associate this sound with Quito and also find it indicative of a myriad of other cultural particulars. For me this sound contains information about the infrastructure of Quito, its socio-economic situation, its cultural regard to noise pollution, privacy, and personal space, etc. I also tended to record sounds that accompanied situations of a similar novel nature. A person talking is an exceptionally routine sound. However, when that sound is a component of an uncomfortable experience, such as young children begging for money on the street, it immediately becomes of significantly greater impact. I recorded these sounds and experiences as they occurred during my five week research experience and also sounds or experiences that I remembered being particularly noteworthy from the nine months that I had previously spent in

Quito. While this previous experience in Quito may impede the purity of my research as a replication of a new intercultural experience, it greatly aided the second objective.

The second objective was to promote intercultural understanding by providing unique insight into Ecuadorian culture through the sound environment. This was undertaken by documenting a rough overview of the Ecuadorian sound environment, including soundscapes from different geographical regions and distinctive soundmarks. I was particularly interested in sounds which contain insight into Ecuadorian culture, although as previously explored, this is a largely subjective division. On occasion sounds were selected purely for their aesthetic value.

Ecuador has four main geographic regions, the mountainous region of the Andes (la sierra), the coast (la costa), the western part of the country which is largely rainforest (el oriente), and the Galapagos Islands. Unfortunately I was unable to visit the coast due to time restraints, but managed to record a similar sound environment in the Galapagos Islands. The cultural differences between these different regions are significant, and it is interesting to consider how these disparities are reflected in the sound environment. The difference between urban and rural soundscapes is a topic of general importance in acoustic ecology, and I too documented and will discuss differences between these two ambits. Other cultural themes that I highlighted include diversity, the environment and nature, economic distress and poverty, and relationships.

Recording generally occurred under two different scenarios. I carried the field recorder with me, much as a regular traveler would carry his or her camera, and recorded sounds of interest sporadically as I came across them. Concurrently, I executed a number of sound walks or sound explorations where I would venture into the environment solely with the intent of recording. Between these two methods I ended up with a balanced mix between the everyday sound environment and particularly distinctive sounds that caught my attention for their aesthetic

value or cultural significance. Over three-hundred recordings were produced over a five-week period with the recordings ranging in length from less than ten seconds to over an hour. I recorded using an M-Audio Microtrack field recorder and later transferred these files as mp3s to my computer. The sounds were indexed with a description of the location, occurrence, and other notes concerning my feelings about the experience or relevant information. I used almost exclusively Protools for recording of the added compositional elements and sound editing and effects, and Reason was employed in synthesizing sounds.

Compositionally, it was difficult to balance my two objectives as expressed above. I wanted to leave a large amount of sounds unprocessed in order to give an objective representation of the different Ecuadorian sound environments. At the same time, the artistic goal of the piece was to express and interject my half of the dialogue: my personal thoughts and feelings about the events that I was experiencing—inherently influenced by my personal culture and worldview. Ultimately, a fairly even balance was reached with some sections being comprised of non-processed sounds while others were processed rather heavily. In processing I applied a myriad of different techniques, cut, spliced, and generally rearranged sounds and sound levels, and added my own compositional elements both as music and sounds not recorded during my experience in Ecuador. At one point, city sounds, traffic, honking, and loud aggressive talking were repeated and layered, changing rapidly, in order to portray the chaos of a large urban city, and how overwhelming entering a foreign culture can be. In another instance various sounds were processed and used as sample for a kind of drum beat. Music and environmental sounds such as rainstorms, rivers, and ambient sound from the Amazon were then added to express a particularly serene experience in the jungle.

Analysis/Conclusions

Soundscape composition is unique in its use of natural sounds as instruments, yet its most important distinguishing factor lies in its expression of context. Through the sonic medium, both the listener and the composer are informed about a specific place, time or situation. *Aural Experiences in Ecuador – An Intercultural Dialogue Through Sound* builds on this idea, promoting intercultural understanding through a unique view of Ecuador rendered by the sound environment. The composition begins with an overview of the Ecuadorian sound environment in narrative style. The piece opens with a street musician playing “musica nacional” on the accordion—typical folk music of Ecuador. This distinctive soundmark then becomes a unifying backdrop as diverse sounds from Ecuador’s different geographical regions drift in and out. The listener is transported to Galapagos, taken into the Amazon Rainforest, and back to urban Quito. The accordion slowly fades away until all that is left is the sound of a beeping car alarm, the sound that serves as a segue into the following section. The auditory equivalent of a photograph, each sound in this overview has been taken out of context, yet remains a nexus of information about place and culture. When placed together, the holistic composition that emerges goes beyond conveyance to the listener of facts about the sound environment. Soundscape composition employs the power of the schizophonic medium to express the meaning and context of that information as well, therefore promoting understanding of a foreign location rather than mere exposure. A person may be shown a photograph of an indigenous woman singing in her native tongue, but not understand what and why she is singing and the meaning of the particular song. The acoustic environment is indeed a resource rich with cultural insight, and therein lays the beauty and power of soundscape composition.

In many cases the cultural insight that surfaces in the composition occurs naturally throughout the piece, with little manipulation or imposed voice of the composer, since these elements are evident in nearly all narrative or unprocessed sounds. For example, Ecuador's economic situation is particularly apparent in the sound environment. The vocalizations of street vendors dominate almost all urban sound environments and even many rural ones. Women entice passersby to sample their empanadas, choclos, mote con chicharron, or other culinary concoctions. Bus drivers forcefully interrogate travelers as to their destination and are quick to offer a seat. Beggars are also a common sight (or sound in this case) and persistently implore a small donation. Cultural diversity is equally apparent, although more common in large cities or popular tourist destinations. Linguistically speaking the composition features at least six different tongues. Kichwa and Shuar, two different indigenous languages, as well as English, Spanish, French, and other European languages can be heard. The different socioeconomic subcultures that exist within the larger Ecuadorian society also have a means of linguistic expression. Ecuador unfortunately remains rather racist and classist, and these cultural divisions are perceptible in the Spanish accent that a particular group uses—even more so in those individuals that do not speak Spanish at all.

Accompanying these naturally occurring cultural elements are sections deliberately composed to communicate a cultural theme. The importance of family and friends and general capacity to enjoy life is highlighted in a short section where many different samples of laughter were selected and layered on top of one another. In another section, natural diversity is featured through a rapidly changing exposition of diverse soundscape samples and other natural sounds, such as the singing of birds. Overall the piece proves to be extremely informative and provides a comprehensive view of Ecuadorian culture through a unique medium.

While one of the composition's goals was to promote intercultural understanding, the other goal was to explore an intercultural experience in itself, specifically with regard to how one's particular cultural background and worldview affects the communicative process. The previous example of the laughter section is an example of how this idea was put into practice. Soundscape composition gives the composer the opportunity to speak back to the sound environment. In the manipulation, editing, or processing of environmental sounds, the composer utilizes the sound environment as his or her inspiration, instrument, or canvas, and then uses these elements as a means of self-expression.

For example, one section of the piece was composed in order to express the indecipherable cacophony of emotion, sound, and general experience that I felt when I first arrived in Quito, acerbated by the rapid pace of the urban environment. Sounds recorded in Quito and other urban settings were edited, arranged, layered, and processed to create an atonal piece that strongly communicates a broad lack of comfort and sense of unease. Towards the end, the sound of traffic slowly grows into a deafening drone before abruptly ending and slowly fading away. I then selected the same city sounds and combined them with various other sounds to create an organic drum beat. Just as I slowly began to make sense of the linguistic and cultural chaos that surrounded me, this transition creates an analogy to the process of adjustment. The rapid fire Spanish became understandable, as did the underlying rhythm guiding people's movements throughout the city. This rhythm becomes the beat that guides us into the next realm where we begin to discover the more subtle cultural elements and underlying beauty of what was originally so overwhelming. In other sections, the feeling that I wished to express was much more ambiguous. In the previous example, the piece was composed in order to convey a very specific idea. The expression of commotion was its central tenet, and all musical/aesthetic

considerations took deference to this design. Other sections became much more musical compositions, where the aesthetics of timbre took the highest priority, although other elements were interspersed in order to maintain the connection to the context. During my experience, the synchronistic hum of the Amazon Rainforest proved particularly moving. Therefore, I utilized the ambient soundscapes of Ecuador as the foundation of the composition in one particular section. I interspersed this natural symphony with the sound of the surf in Galapagos, different rainstorms and thunderstorms that I managed to record, along with a menagerie of other natural sounds. The different sound environments are the keynote, the foundational element of the piece, while sound signals are layered on top and mainly composed of distinct bird and animal sounds. While aesthetically pleasing as a standalone musical composition, other compositional elements were then added to the foundational texture in order to further convey information about an intercultural experience. Acoustic and electric guitar and electronic music were added to fortify the musical aspect. I then added conversational elements—excerpts from a talk I had with a fellow traveler in which we discuss a fast-pace lifestyle versus a simple life lived peacefully in a beautiful place. Through this we manage to pull to the surface many important themes: questions about happiness, meaning, direction, and the purpose of life, rooting the piece to its underlying meaning and questions that prove to be so fundamental to cultural distinction that they become unavoidable in an intercultural experience.

In its final form, the composition became a journey in itself. While the original intent was to promote intercultural understanding through the sonic exploration of an intercultural experience, it also had another unexpected outcome. I personally found the experience very enriching and through the process of creation managed to also process my transition back to my home country and culture. Recording in Ecuador, I experienced many beautiful moments where,

intensely focused on the sound environment, I was brought more closely into touch with the present moment. I began to take pleasure into the simple beauty of sounds and have maintained this new perspective in my present life.

Acoustic Ecology sees the listener and soundmaker as equally important components of any communicative situation. Therefore, in the exposition of this composition, I as well must heed my own advice and acknowledge that the listener will bring their own cultural background, worldview, and perceptive state into the conversation. Although they will likely hear the composition just as I do, they will almost certainly take away a different meaning. Whether or not I succeed in communicating any meaningful information with regard to my intercultural experience or Ecuadorian culture is ultimately up to them. In either case, setting aside a few minutes to explore a new sound environment and consider listening will ideally urge people to consider just how big of a role sound plays as part of the human experience. Hopefully we can become more active and aware participants in an activity that we partake in every day: the co-creation of our mutual sound environment.

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