

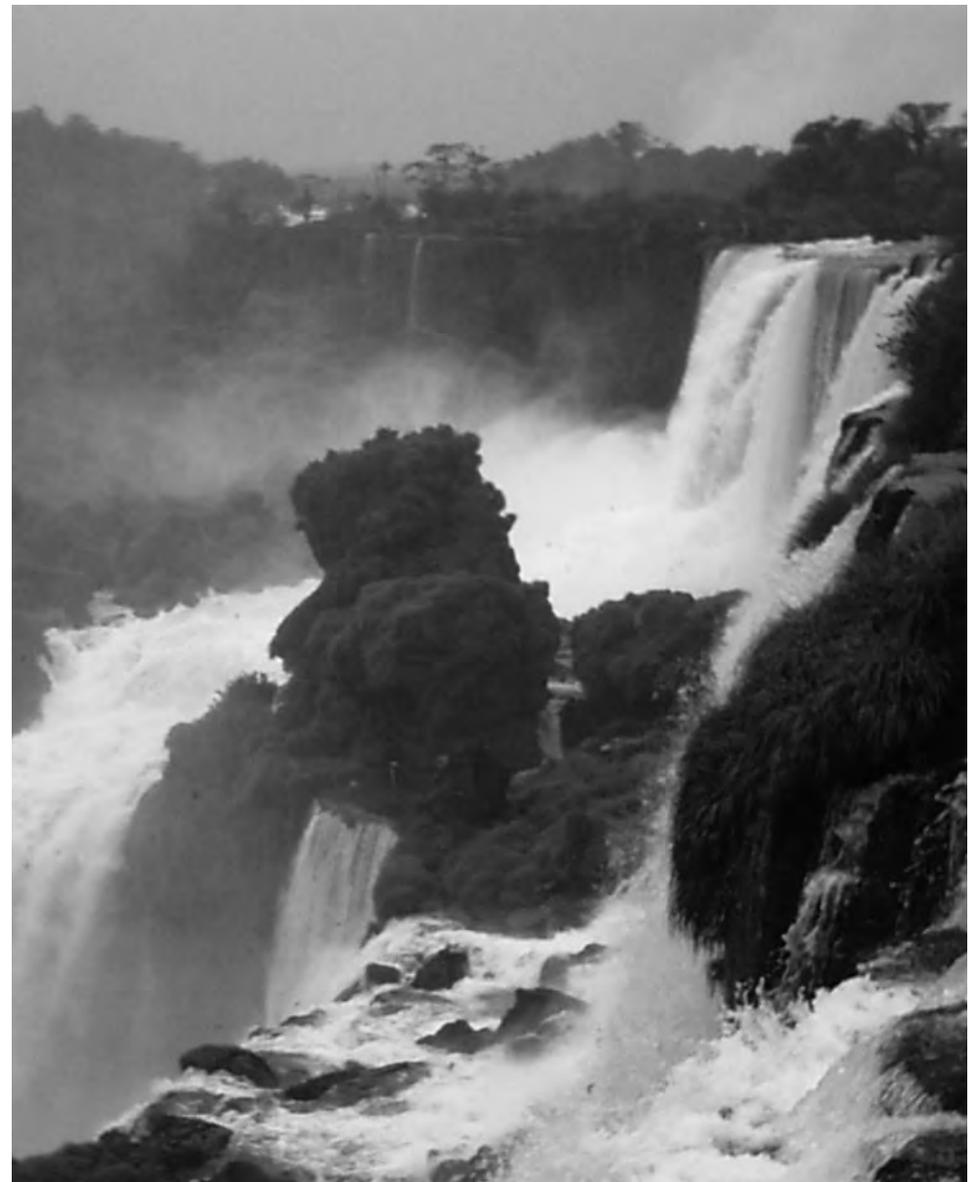
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www.empac.rpi.edu  
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Thurs–Sat  
April 28–30, 2011  
8 pm

PERFORMANCE

## *Hyper-Rainforest*

Francisco López

CURTIS R. PRIEM EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER  
EMPAC

## ***Hyper-Rainforest***

An immersive concert-installation by Francisco López

Duration: 70 minutes

Rainforests are inhabited by an incredibly rich variety of sounds—much like electronic music: the astonishing sound variety comes from concrete, yet invisible sources.

This world premiere of *Hyper-Rainforest*, an EMPAC commission developed in residence, is a monumental piece, both in duration and in how the sounds are projected. This performance stems from field recordings—but it does not simulate the natural reality of the original locations. Instead, the work creates a sonic hyper-reality. The original materials are observed, analyzed, and composed to create a piece that surrounds the audience, moving deep into the sounds themselves and toward new sounds still rooted in their origins.

### **I – IMMEDIATE LEVEL:**

Over the past 20 years, I have worked extensively doing field recordings of sound environments in rainforests all over the world. Rainforests are natural acousmatic environments—while they typically manifest an astonishing sonic variety and complexity, the sources of the sounds are overwhelmingly invisible.

*Hyper-Rainforest* is a monumental sound piece, both in duration and in spatial terms, created from this original sound matter. All of the sounds of this concert-installation are real and non-manipulated. In contrast with most traditional approaches to field recordings, however, this piece does not aim at a representation or simulation of the natural reality of the original locations. Instead, my challenge has been the development of an elaborated form of sonic hyper-reality that gives rise to a self-sufficient virtual world of sound created exclusively with a multitude of these original materials—not only with the actual recordings, but, more importantly, with the phenomenological characteristics of this sonic substance as sound-in-itself, as well as its natural organization and manifestation (an environmental expansion of the Schaefferian concept of *objet sonore*). That is, natural, pre-composed or highly inspirational features, such as the intricacies of the multi-layered sonic complexity, frequency proportions, sound as space, or the pace and manner of the unfolding of environmental transitions.

This piece has been developed and structured as a site-specific concert-installation for EMPAC's Concert Hall. It operates with a specially installed large multi-channel setup consisting of 82 speakers arranged in two imbricated domes around, above, and below the audience, as well as a sound spatialization system that combines automation and manual live control. It is thus a sonic immersive experience where the traditional tools of illusion (microphones, speakers) that are typically used for mimesis or simulation are instead turned into phenomenological probes and generators of hyper-reality.

The original environmental recordings were done between 1990 and 2010 at multiple tropical, subtropical, and cold rainforests in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Gambia, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Japan, Senegal, South Africa, USA, and Venezuela.

### **II – BEYOND AND WITHIN:**

“Behind every image, something has disappeared. And that is the source of its fascination. Behind virtual reality in all its forms [...] the real has disappeared. And that is what fascinates everyone. According to the official version, we worship the real and the reality principle, but—and this is the source of the current suspense—is it, in fact, the real we worship, or its disappearance?”

—Jean Baudrillard, *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?*  
Translated by Chris Turner, Seagull Books, 2009

All the sounds of this concert-installation are real. That is, the original sounds have not been processed, transformed, or manipulated. This would be the paradigmatic way of referring to field recordings. I intentionally made the statement for the sake of simplicity as a primary level of approach to a work made with sound environments. This type of statement, however, misses the most fundamental determination of what exactly has not been processed, transformed, or manipulated, namely, the indexicality of those sounds; their representational layer. The rest is involuntarily, but necessarily processed, transformed, or manipulated by both our machines

and our choices (microphones, recorders, resolution, channels, locations, directionality, hours, seasons, editing, etc.), and does not exist as an objective, fixed, unprocessed, untransformed, or unmanipulated reality. The rest is mostly Schaefferian *concrète*.

Because of the vividness and presence of the sounds and their spatiality, *Hyper-Rainforest* may be perceived as a simulation. Beyond that immediate reaction to this experience is an entirely different possible territory: the realm of the phenomenologically ineffable. Sounds are not only indexical or referential (the standard view); they have their own life and their own self-sufficiency. They are the potential building blocks (substance, matter, magma) of a self-sustained sonic virtuality not grounded on representation, but rather of a more free world.

Unlearning more than a century of persistent, overwhelming, and totalitarian representational paradigms with recorded sound is not an easy task. If we become aware of the essence of the problem, however, everything is perhaps surprisingly simple. The myth of “reality”—or maybe more accurately, the liturgy about it—an eternal self-delusion based on the ignorance of our model-constellation nature, that became an ethical project with the advent of the post-modern gaze on recording machines.

A persistent mistake consists of judging our recording machines according to their capability to “reproduce” a “reality” of which we know very little. We claim an intuitive, universal, humane, moral knowledge of that “reality,” and we scorn our machines for lacking this fundamental attribute. However, they have something we can rarely reach—a non-cognitive, non-symbolic, non-modeled appraisal of that reality. For recording machines, there is no such thing as “sounds.” Instead, within their perceptive range and resolution, they recognize a steady audio flow, which includes silence, according to their sensory threshold. Not even “sources” exist for them (they would not be able to grasp the concept of “acousmaric”), only a pure perceptive influx.

In their equanimity, in their non-assignment of meaning and their lack of the symbolic, in the purity of their listening, and in their perceptive all-encompassing interconnectedness, one is tempted to say that recording machines are, in fact, “Zen machines.” It is time that we shift our focus and debates on them as tools of simulation. It is time for true cooperation with the machines.

—Francisco López (*Amsterdam, March 2011*)

## BIO

Francisco López is internationally recognized as one of the main figures in sound art and experimental music. He has 30 years of experience in sound creation and environmental recordings, and has developed a personal and iconoclastic sound universe based on profound listening to the world. López has been involved in hundreds of sound installations, field recordings, and concerts in over 60 countries, including international concert halls, museums, galleries and festivals, such as the National Auditorium of Music (Madrid), PS1 Contemporary Art Center (New York), Museum of Modern Art (Paris), International Film Festival (Rotterdam), Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels), Darwin Fringe Festival (Darwin, Australia), Institute of Contemporary Arts (London), Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, Center for Contemporary Art (Kitakyushu, Japan), Reina Sofia National Museum (Madrid), and the Spanish Pavilion at the International Expo Zaragoza (Spain), among others. His extensive catalogue of sound pieces (with live and studio collaborations with more than 130 international artists) has been published worldwide by more than 200 recording companies. He has received three honorary mentions at the Ars Electronica Festival (Austria) and is the recipient of the Quartz Award 2010 (France) for best sound anthology. [www.franciscolopez.net](http://www.franciscolopez.net)





Wednesday  
May 4  
6 pm  
free

TALK+DINNER: OBSERVER EFFECTS

## Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

*Movement and Mirror Neurons:  
A Challenging and Choice Conversation*

An insightful talk by the dancer, choreographer, and philosopher, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, on how the experience of movement shapes our sense of aliveness. Limited complimentary dinners available.



Thursday  
May 5  
8 pm  
\$15/10/5

PERFORMANCE

## Euphorie

An intense 40 minute performance driven by live video, electronic music, movement, architecture and accidents of life.

