

# 一〇八 – 東京音歩き

## 108—WALKING THROUGH TOKYO

**Sarah Peebles:** 50-minute soundscape portrait of Tokyo

**Christie Pearson:** 40 images of Tokyo's architecture, public spaces and life

**Yoshimura Hiroshi:** Essay on Tokyo's soundscape past and present

### VISUAL NOTES

Canadian artist/architect Christie Pearson's photographs of Tokyo taken 1999-2000 create synchronized visuals in response to Peebles' audio composition. These images immerse the viewer into an alternative cityscape, composing a staggered narrative that doubles back on itself.

The architecture of Tokyo brings the visitor into a free-fallout of expectations. It is a city constantly reconfiguring itself. Western conventions relating individual buildings to the public realm are absent, while startling adjacencies of scale, function, materials, and age question and reveal codes by which we attempt to read what is of value. Where to direct the eye amidst the simultaneous stimuli? In a cellular city devoid of street addresses, any mental map of monuments quickly becomes a mirage. A hasty consumption of physical forms creates a sense of the material world's evanescence, transient fashions collapsing as quickly as buildings.

The city becomes a reflective pool through which a woman searches for herself. On its surface, advertisements are saturated by cultural fantasies about the feminine; diving in, the city's spaces reflect other aspects of her nature. As in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the narrative reading of the adventure is undermined by its circuitry. By embracing her identity with this shifting maze, she unexpectedly locates herself. The sequence mirrors the audio piece's movement through a city of amplified juxtaposition: Eros and Thanatos; brightness and darkness; engagement and alienation. Tokyo shows us the fullness and void of the electric night.

### AUDIO NOTES

This is a kind of sonic post card. A walk through the city — the microphone directed towards the soundscape in a way one would perhaps perceive the world while walking, one's attention focusing and refocusing in any given moment — it is a work that blends the lines between reality and imagined, electroacoustic and soundscape. These fifty minutes weave together modern and traditional hawking, evangelists' sermons, train riding, video arcade and pachinko parlour sound worlds, kendo en masse, and, at the centre of the piece, "joya no kane" — the annual ringing of temple bells 108 times at 12:00 A.M. each New Years Eve.

In creating this "sound walk" through Tokyo, I wanted to compose a sonic portrait which reflected everyday experiences in this city, yet which also included some special events. I had planned to record New Year's eve events, food vendors' cries at "Ameyoko" and train arrival/departure music at stations while traveling along the JR (Japan Rail) commuter train lines which traverse the heart of the city. All else was spontaneous. My walks through various districts unfold here as they actually occurred, though some sections are edited and changed to various degrees. Nearly everything throughout the fifty minutes flows in the order in which it was recorded between December 26th, 1999 and January 3, 2000, with the exception of the New Years' dawn kendo practice and the subsequent streetcar ride (recorded January 3, 1986).

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## Audio Notes Continued

After returning to Canada, when I assessed and contemplated the sonic environment I heard within these recordings, I couldn't separate the sounds from my physical and emotional experience of having recorded them. But, what I found (unconsciously) was a periodicity inherent in much of the material, and I could feel this periodicity in my body, via my memory, and my intuition guided me towards the space between things. In Tokyo, this space catches my ear as much as does the character of the sounds around me, because the ambient environment of this megalopolis is especially active and compelling, compared to my home, Toronto. Tokyo is a megalopolis without a centre; rather, it is a city with several large centres. The space between sounds in Tokyo can be (physically) spatial, periodic (having periodicity) or cyclical, or all of these. Music emanating from mini-speakers in front of shops comes into and out of focus as one walks toward the evangelist (who is pre-recorded, emanating from a loudspeaker on a pole on a corner) on the way to Shinjuku station. The timbre of his voice changes as one walks through the area; it is "filtered" essentially by the air—which includes the temperature, humidity and pollution of that moment—and the reflective or absorbent surfaces of bodies in motion, cars, bicycles, and buildings. Electronic wicket beeps float through Shinjuku Station (the preacher barely audible in the far distance), as do the wide variety of mini-tunes indicating train arrivals and departures which accompany one's daily commute from station to station. Even the pachinko (Japanese automated pinball) parlour's wall of sound reveals distinct songs, shapes, reoccurring themes and momentary spaces, when examined closely through the looking glass of digital signal processing.

Winter evenings in Tokyo are graced by the distant looping song of the baked sweet potato vendor making his rounds, and the periodic strike of wooden clappers accompanying "Put out your fires" as the neighborhood foot patrol winds through the streets — a sound very nearly but not quite yet vanished from Japan's changing soundscape (not recorded here, though the sweet potato vendor graces Carl Stone's "Kamiya Bar"). And every year the new year is greeted with remarkable sounds in the stillness of night: all temple bells ring between 12:00-12:30 A.M., each struck 108 times by people from the neighborhood (representing 108 human desires which may lead to sin, sort of like purging one of temptation for the year), music is played, lion dances danced and bonfires blaze. At 5 A.M., from January 1st, for seven days, martial arts enthusiasts gather for "kangeiko" (New Years' dawn practice), their cries the only discernible sound during Tokyo's one truly quiet hour.

As the day begins again, the banter of voices selling and announcing things re-emerges on warped cellophane tape-loop, digital chip, cranked P.A. system, and in the flesh. I am engaged by their rhythms, tonal qualities, pace, dramatic delivery (or lack there-of), cyclic nature, and interactions/collisions with one-another and with the sounds in the vicinity. And when they pause, I become aware of the space.

## AUDIO SECTIONS

1. *Fast Kitchen (South Shinjuku area)*

Walking along Koushū-kaidō road, shops with mini-speakers on the ground line the sidewalks; fast-food hawker with microphone and pre-taped advertisement.

2. *Yes, Christo (God is Eternal)*

Evangelist tape amplified from sidewalk, vending stand, beside Shinjuku Station's South Entrance.

3. *Shinjuku Station (south entrance)*

Ticket vending machines, telephone, wicket beeps, train arrival/departure music.

4. *Train Ride on Sobu Line*

Stopping at Shinjuku, Yoyogi, Sendagaya, Shinanomachi, and Yotsuya stations; with train arrival/departure music, announcers.

5. *Three Active Serves (video arcade, Yotsuya)*

A blend of 4 players' activities; pause at Akihabara station.

6. *Pachinko (Yotsuya)*

A secret stroll through a neighborhood pachinko, ejected by management into the very calm night ambiance, serenaded by the sidewalk boutique's mini-speakers and bus (song by Shēna Ringō; see credits).

7. *New Year's Bells (Nishi Nippori)*

From the perspective of a temple graveyard, 12:10 a.m., January 1, 2000; walking through the neighborhood to the 108th bell strike at a nearby temple.

8. *Kendo at Dawn (Japan University of Physical Education)*

Kangeiko New Year's work-out at Nihon Taiku Daigaku as heard from the campus grounds.

9. *Street car Ride (Setagaya Line)*

From Sangenjaya to Wakabayashi/Shimokitazawa stations.

10. *3 for ¥500 (merchants at Ameyoko)*

Along the train tracks from Okachimachi to Ueno stations lies Ame Yoko shopping district. Great bargains, lovely people.

11. *Epilogue*

Processed train rail whines and pachinko; 6 p.m. temple bell at Kokushōji Temple (Agui-cho, Kita-gun, Aichi Prefecture).