

108: Walking through Tokyo at the Turn of the Century

Sarah Peebles & Christie Pearson

108: *Walking through Tokyo at the Turn of the Century* is a walk through sounds and the space between them, in the space between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This audio amble is accompanied by a series of photographs of Tokyo taken by Christie Pearson, offering a slow, meditative reflection of urban spaces and moments against the recorded cries of street sellers and the bells and squeals of pachinko parlours. The photos create a feeling of being so caught up in audible space that the visual world passes by in intense fragmentary moments.

'Walking through Tokyo' was commissioned as an audio piece by Radio-Canada for the show 'L'espace du son', 'The Space of Sound'. The soundwalk is informed by the spatial experience of radio, the sonic "space without walls" evoked by audio artist Jacki Apple, where "sound is the object, the ephemeral trace in the mind of the receiver, a sensation resonating along aural pathways and passageways.... bouncing like a ball through memory, onto the visual field of the inner eye."¹ Apple describes radio as a space in time, and a space to be inhabited. Returning from the space of Tokyo at the turn of the century, it takes a moment to adjust to the quiet brightness of a Christchurch High St in December, disconcertingly, as the Tokyo walk is centred on midnight, midwinter.

Sarah Peebles describes finding herself drawn to the "space between things" in these recordings. She finds this particularly striking in Tokyo, as it is a much more "active and compelling" ambient environment than her home town, Toronto. Or Christchurch. The spatial dimension is evoked by movement past minispeakers placed outside shops, and the periodicity and cyclical elements of train station sounds. "Even the pachinko (Japanese pinball) parlour's wall of sound reveals distinct songs, shapes, recurring themes and momentary spaces, when examined closely through the looking glass of digital signal processing."² The recordings were made between December 26th, 1999 and January 3, 2000, and apart from a small temporal leap back to 1986 for the dawn Kendo practice, the walk flows in the order in which it was recorded.

The '108' of the title refers to the ringing of temple bells at midnight on new year's eve, struck 108 times "representing 108 human desires which may lead to sin, sort of like purging one of temptation for the year."³ The audible Tokyo that Peebles constructs is a traversing of contemporary, traditional, electronic and ritual space.

'Walking through Tokyo' is also available on cd,⁴ creating the possibility of walking through one city while audibly inhabiting a different city at the same time. The process reverses the idea of the walkman - instead of shutting out the environment by creating a private audio space, the recordist soaks it up and re-presents it as a purely audible experience, what Anne McCartney, writing about sharing a recording process with soundwalk pioneer Hildegard Westerkamp, calls a "private amplified perspective."⁵ These practices are one way of realising Futurist Luigi Russolo's desire for "entire symphonies composed of the sounds of everyday life," as a reflection of the changing acoustic environment of modern cities.⁶ The soundwalk, and *trambientsound*, re-present the city as an ambient space, and focus attention on its overlooked acoustic dimensions, described by John Cage as "the subtle harmonies... generated by chance in the natural and built environment"⁷.

Zita Joyce

1 Jacki Apple. "The Art of Radio" in Strauss and Mandl (eds) *Radiotext(e)*. New York, Semiotext(e): 1993 p307

2 Sarah Peebles, "108: Walking through Tokyo at the turn of the Century". Canadian Electroacoustic Community, <http://cec.concordia.ca/econtact/Soundwalk/peebles.htm>

3 Sarah Peebles.

4 Earth Ear. "Urban SoundScapes." <http://www.earthear.com/catalog/urban.html>

5 Andrea McCartney. "Soundwalking in Queen Elizabeth Park with Andrea McCartney and Hildegard Westerkamp." <http://www.emf.org/artists/mccartney00/walk.html>

6 New Media Scotland. "Drift Radio: Resonant cities". http://www.mediascot.org/art/view_art.php?id=78

7 New Media Scotland.

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Image: Christie Pearson

