



108—Walking Through Tokyo

A portrait of Tokyo for gallery exhibit / theatre screening (January 2006, 50 minutes)

Sarah Peebles

soundscape portrait of Tokyo

Christie Pearson

images of Tokyo's architecture, spaces and life
with **Yoshimura Hiroshi**

essay on Tokyo's soundscape past and present

“108” is a journey where image and sound immerse the viewer in an alternative cityscape. A walk through the city, the microphone reveals the soundscape in a way one would perhaps perceive the world while walking: one’s attention focused and refocused in any given moment, the lines between reality, imagined and remembered, blurred. The architecture of Tokyo brings the visitor into a free-fall 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. Tokyo’s ambient sonic environment is especially active and compelling. Even the space between sounds reveals intriguing aspects of this city, a place which has several large centres, each with their own distinct character, and no one downtown core. This journey weaves together modern and traditional hawking, evangelists’ sermonizing, train riding, a video arcade and pachinko parlour, 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. 108’s visual sequence mirrors the sonic 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.

In writing his introduction to this work, Japanese soundscape scholar and composer Hiroshi Yoshimura penned an intriguing discourse on the nature of human sound from an Asian perspective: “This soundscape seems almost to lose the quality of noise, and comes across more as a smell, almost like body odour, so that the noise of the city that might have been perceived as bothersome becomes soothing. In the globalized digital world only uniform information has come to be communicated. It is lacking in that something extra that we perceive only with our five senses” (excerpt, “‘108’, ‘sound chaos’ and Asian soundscapes”). **A 3-minute video, images, audio links and details at sarahpeebles.net, under “projects”**

Between each evocative street scene, Peebles masterfully creates a palpable sense of the joy of motion through urban spaces - the solid pneumatic hiss of the doors on the JR trains, station jingle and the learned nasal twang of a streetcar conductor. Christie Pearson's street photos add another dimension to an exquisitely sequenced piece of audio verité. —The Wire

What could emerge as self-indulgent noise is instead an absorbing episodic sound collage, recalling a more cohesive version of one of Glenn Gould's 1960s radio documentaries. —Eye Weekly