

Zeitschrift: Pamphlet
Herausgeber: Professur für Landschaftsarchitektur, Christophe Girot, ETH Zürich
Band: - (2017)
Heft: 21: Sampling Kyoto gardens

Artikel: Teimu (the garden of dreams)
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-984684>

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TEIMU (THE GARDEN OF DREAMS)

Michael Fowler

On the Art of Sound Gardening

The Japanese garden contains a wealth of spatial manipulations—topographic, material, and textural. Certainly these transformations also affect its acoustic properties and sound profile. In fact, we might consider the Japanese garden a type of auditory model. The manner in which it curates particular auditory encounters at its shorelines, waterfalls, ravines, beaches, ponds, and streams is a function of a number of landscape design decisions. Through sound installation and performance, my own work has explored the Japanese garden as a spatial exemplar for activating a diverse series of sites ranging from rooftops, parks, concert halls, and streets to gardens and humble wooden packing crates.

Narrative space presents another alluring site for acoustic activation. “Teimu (The Garden of Dreams)” seeks to emphasize sound and the art of listening as essential elements for understanding any landscape, whether natural or artificial, past, present, or future. The following tale of the protagonist Wang, a futuristic *otoniwashi* (“sound gardener”) is a composite project of my own invention that embraces both notions about the Japanese garden as a series of multisensory encounters, and the role of sound design in the future of the built environment. The specialized role of the *otoniwashi* emerged from a synthesis of ideas, sounds, afterthoughts, and concepts related to Japanese garden design. While fictional, the profession lies at the intersection of what we might today identify as the fields of molecular genetics, audio signal processing, and landscape architecture. As such, Wang’s story is as much about imagining a future world in which the auditory significantly shapes aesthetic experience as it is a fantasia on what Japanese gardening might become in an immersive digital future.

外 Outside

The street was still wet from the rain. All manner of sounds filled the air and reflected off of hard city surfaces: electric motors, sirens, music, advertising slogans, animated conversations, foot traffic. It was a chaotic polyphony of reflections, interjections, inquiries, greetings and farewells. Transportation systems that ran 24 hours a day ferried tired workers, happy eco-tourists, ambivalent managers,

and petulant Generation-Y teenagers through Tokyo, the brightest and loudest city on earth. Wang's first impressions of the city were striking. The auditory signature of this Japanese metropolis was unmistakable; its *Klangfarben* ("timbres"), its sheer noise volumes, and its interlocking rhythms could not have been more different from the state-controlled, near-anechoic, and bland streetscapes of his home.

Though surveillance drones were circling overhead and far into the distance, Wang found them rather aloof. Perhaps they, too, were distracted, similarly caught up in the sonic embroidery of the bustling city. An acoustic quilt stretched itself across the intersections, parks, and playgrounds. He checked his equipment. The readings confirmed what his ears had already told him: The Tokyo streetscape displayed a wealth of sound classes, a high variability of sound strength between instances, and a discrete spectral range to build on. He was sure that his sound garden master Torikai would have been equally excited at the prospect of such a *cantus firmus*.

One could be certain that the spectral readings of the street activities and city sounds would provide fodder for his newly commissioned *otoniwa* ("sound garden"). Wang had arrived at the name *Teimu* (The Garden of Dreams) as a way of paying tribute to his teacher Torikai but also from a deeper sense that he had gained about the relationship between humans and the concept of nature, or *mono-no-aware*. In any case, Tokyo's Asia-Pacific branch of PeakData Mining made a dream client. The company's setting was a chance to experiment and would provide an adequate platform for a new family of sound species that Wang had developed in his virtual lab.

The novel order included a series of cultivars which were a genetic manipulation of his master's favorite, *Nani beati*, commonly known as "happy little dwarfs." Wang had tweaked them ever so slightly as to not only feed on low frequency content but also to morph and evolve their spatial trajectories in response to particular signals, namely components found in the speech patterns of the local inhabitants. This meant that the familiar and curious bleating of *Nanus beatus* remained consistent while its definitive *coloratura glissandi* pitch smear became increasingly reverberant. On top of this he would layer the encircling amplitude modulation sweeps to trace out complex trajectories around the defined site of the *otoniwa*.

中 Inside

He began to implement his planting scheme within the lobby of the PeakData Mining headquarters. The entranceway was long and narrow, with particularly high ceilings. The two marble walls that bridled the corridor were randomly perforated with small windows that brought in light from two adjacent courtyards. Each courtyard contained an exquisite *kare-sansui* (“dry rock garden”). Wang decided to begin with some band-filtered groundcover to provide an auditory foil to the meticulously raked gravel of the neighboring *kare-sansui* with its recognizable feature rock: a depiction of Mt. Fuji.

Wang had recently developed some particularly beautiful strains of *Soni gemerentes* (“creeping chimes”), *Oscula beata* (“blissful kisses”) and *Somnia sonora* (“sonorous dreams”). As masterful genetic manipulations of Torikai’s robust *Cooperimentum terrae* (“groundcover”), the new sound species displayed altered bandpass filters that were driven according to the exterior content of traffic sounds. Wang had found this characteristic particularly satisfying given the natural ebb and flow of the seasonal traffic patterns found in this small corner of Tokyo. The groundcover sounds could be sensibly located along the lower reaches of the corridor. In this way, their hockey-like bubbling sound, sharp envelop drop-offs, and smeared pitch centers would provide an excellent base for the feature sound flowers and sonic roamers that would soon hang down from the ceiling.

Looking up, he noticed that the ceiling had a particularly curvaceous series of metal facets that undulated in a wave-like fashion as they progressed across the top of the narrow space. The geometry and the materiality of the ceiling would make a perfect environment in which to set the interacting trio of *Stellae cadentes* (“falling stars”), *Scintillae pensiles* (“floating sparks”), and *Memoria incancens* (“glowing remembrances”). Each was painstakingly generated by a rigorous crossbreeding program, that is, by Wang’s newly developed DarwinBeta77 algorithm which cycled through nearly one million iterations before reaching these final results. Each of the species’s spatial trajectories was determined by the sound pressure levels of the exterior in combination with the reverberation time of the small corridor. Their rate of sonic blooming would thus be a

calculated measure of a principle Torikai considered of the utmost importance, namely the existence of a porous relationship between the concept of *soto* (“outside”) and *uchi* (“inside”). In his words: “That which is outside the garden is inside the environment, and that which is outside the environment is inside the mind.”

Wang traversed the corridor, imagining the sounds of the final garden. First one would encounter the groundcover: a soft murmuring and bellowing of indistinct pitch smears accented by the occasional, rapid *hocket*-calls across subspecies. At this point, all sounds would be located below waist level. Various resonances, differing according to the room’s diffraction patterns and modes, would gently float, ghosting the lower walls, and occasionally rise up out of the reverberant, timbral mist. Walking further down the corridor, one would discover the feature sound flowers. The rapid zipping of *Stellae cadentes* would be well suited here, too. Yes, and the rich microtonal glissandi tones of *Bulbus natans* (“floating bulbs”) would neatly offset the full-bodied shuffling of *Fuga pensilis* (“glimmering flight”). But also needed would be *Oculi sui afflicti* (“downcast eyes”), the short, interlocking melodic reprises which synthetically recreate both spoken word and bell-like tones sampled from the exterior. Finally, the inclusion of *Memoria incancens*, with its fantastic trajectories, would complete the garden by subtly coloring the sound profile of this highly diverse sound space. And so, with each new traverse, the heavily ring-modulated yet reverberant phasor chatter of *Memoria incancens* would slowly grow to be more dense and the garden ever more opulent.

This carefully layered structure would continue to evolve and bloom throughout the seasons and according to the rhythmic variations, relative frequencies, spectral content, and sound levels of the city just beyond the confines of *Teimu*. Such a tapestry of sonic textures, timbres, and tones would certainly establish a powerful nexus between *soto* and *uchi*. It might even, Wang thought, result in the transformation of the mundane into the beautiful. He hoped that with *Teimu*, a sound garden which consumes and recycles the city’s din, he might actually succeed in uniting *soto* and *uchi*—a skill his master Torikai considered the ultimate goal of any first-order *otoniwa*.

