

9/00

TOKYO FOUR**Description by: Gene Youngblood****3-5/96**

The four channels of *Tokyo Four* were culled from sixty hours of video Steina shot in Tokyo between November 1987 and May 1988 on a fellowship from the US/Japan Friendship Commission. The sixth multiscreen composition in her career, *Tokyo Four* is organized around five categories of imagery: Shinto priests meticulously grooming their Zen garden on New Year's Eve; train conductors monitoring rush hour crowds; elevator girls bringing a superfluous but charming High Touch to the high tech world of the shopping malls as they remind passengers to watch their umbrellas and not forget their children; a segment about food, beginning with the vertiginous fisheye lens in a supermarket; and an emotionally charged meta-choreography of a dance troupe's performance and curtain call. Sometimes one screen is the melody in this quartet and the others are accompaniment, then another screen takes the lead. In one compositional strategy Steina begins by assembling a long single channel segment which represents the "melody" or what she calls the "ground track." She makes three copies of it and inserts new images into each channel as accompaniment. Sometimes she records the ground track in reverse motion, which, in her musical terminology, "breaks the line" (the linear progression) and makes it easier to start inserting other images. She often works on all four channels simultaneously, using timecode to bring them forward synchronously. They don't always have the same edit at the same point, but, like a musical canon, they progress simultaneously toward a unified conclusion. The scenes are flipped, reversed, and played at slightly different speeds before converging at the same speed. These strategies are especially effective in the final movement when the female dancer is bowing. Franz Lehar's *Gold and Silver Waltz*, which the dancers used in their performance, would be merely sentimental without the repetitions of Steina's visual matrix, which makes the spectacle both exotic and poignant.

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