

This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (<http://www.ImaginaryYear.com>) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

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Jakob returns Thomas' call, and on Saturday they meet up at the Flying Saucer, on California, and Thomas shows Jakob how to use the MiniDisc recorder.

After brunch, they are going to make a soundmap. They discussed this before, long ago, but now they actually plan to do it, to walk through a portion of Chicago, pausing periodically to record any interesting environmental noises that they hear. Thomas will copy their path onto his legal pad. Later he'll draw out a more polished version of the route, using the computer. He'll mark the locations where they recorded with a tiny star. When he puts it up on his website, someone in New Jersey or New Zealand will be able to click on a star and hear the archived sound of that Chicago location.

Thomas is interested in documenting the urban dronescape. For a long time he has held a theory that the music he likes is a response to a world where drones make up a considerable portion of the sonic environment.

—You'll probably hear a lot of that kind of stuff, Thomas says, explaining. — Sounds like cars going by, airplanes overhead, fans, vents, air conditioners--almost all of these, at their fundament, create a kind of stable, continuous hum.

—Do you want me to *only* record drones? Jakob asks. He wants to be a good playmate, so he's willing to cooperate with whatever Thomas has in mind. —Or can I record other sounds as well?

—I want you to feel free to record whatever you like, says Thomas. —Whatever interests you.

What interests Jakob is the way that a project like this might help to enable a different conceptualization of the city. The city as fortress, as hub of commerce, as theme park—Jakob would like to see these old conceptions give way, replaced by one ultimately more liberating: the city as *sensorium*, an ever-changing field of impressions through which one could drift, experiencing. He records the tattooed waiter asking them if they're done with their plates. The clatter of silverware on ceramic.

Thomas draws the Flying Saucer on his map.

They exit into the hot space of a June Saturday. Cars bearing giant Puerto Rican flags drive up the street, headed towards the Puerto Rico Day festival in Humbolt Park. Drivers honk their horns in jubilation; girls emerge from the sunroofs to shriek. A block away a string of firecrackers explodes.

—Wow, Thomas says. —We'd better get started.