

# Paraphrase the sound of light

## INSTALLATION OVERVIEW

*The original is unfaithful to the translation.*  
(Jorge Luis Borges)

### DESCRIPTION

What is the sound of light? **Paraphrase** is an imagined translation of image into sound.

It is a subjective view, a paintbox whose medium is sound. Visitors can interact with the system to create images and compositions by using the camera like a brush.

The installation uses a high-quality miniature camera, suspended site-specifically, for input. What is seen by the camera is analyzed by custom software and synthesized as sound. The process tracks shapes on screen, and measures for a variety of image characteristics while giving video feedback of the resulting sound 'conception'. Pitch, harmonic partials, and spatialization of sounds, for instance, are derived from the composition of elements in the camera's field of view.

Exhibitions: Headlands Center for the Arts, Marin, CA, April 2005; I-5 Gallery @ The Brewery, Los Angeles, October 2005.

### READING

**Paraphrase** is simultaneously an investigation of the parameters of visual perception and of the act of translation itself. The electronics involved continuously track structures and changes within a moving image, breaking down the visual into a series of differentiating parameters. Naturally, these parameters do not begin to sum up the image; no component analysis could fully represent the 'effect' of an image in the human mind. What is critical in this case is that the data give sufficiently articulated cues such that listeners will recognize corollary changes in the soundscape as they view and work their surroundings.

The overall soundscape of **Paraphrase** reflects the sinusoidal vibration which characterizes all sound. A wash of resonating timbre underlies a constantly changing surface of shorter sounds which, with slight gestures, those interacting with the piece may draw in.



*Paraphrase at I-5 Gallery, Los Angeles*

Borges famously questioned the directionality of translation – of the supposition that a translation should by definition be incapable of surpassing the original. Instead, he proposed that the translation – without a judgement of relative value – was perhaps altogether a different artwork, and entirely appreciable in its own right. Of course, he was referring to written languages. But the principle holds across media.

**Paraphrase** inscribes one time-based medium in another, and yet the resulting world – of sound – lives and breathes on its own: it exists beyond the confines of its source.