



PARTICLE PLAYGROUND: An Interactive Multimedia Installation

Created by Jonathan Zalben and Izumi Ashizawa

Filming by Taylor Krauss

4.19.05 to 5.2.05 at the Boston Public Library, South End Branch (<http://www.bpl.org>)
685 Tremont Street, Boston, Massachusetts / 617-536-8241

Part of the Boston Cyberarts Festival 2005 (<http://www.bostoncyberarts.org>)

Particle Playground is an installation with sound, images, and interactivity. Technological elements are integrated with ceramic pieces, and visitors have the opportunity to orchestrate original music and field recordings through interactive monkey bars.

This project is an outgrowth of *Organized Color Intoxication*, which is an inspection of immigration and language on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The visuals focus on open spaces, which serve as the primary location of change in a neighborhood. For the installation, the open spaces center on the sounds and images of playgrounds. This footage is placed alongside New York State Instructional films from the 1950s promoting fitness, play, and open areas in urban settings.

The audio was collected over the course of many years. Some recordings are of Jonathan Zalben and his brother at ages three to seven. Others are from Zalben's personal archive which has been amassed from places as diverse as the elephant parade through the Midtown Tunnel and more recently at Christo's *The Gates* in Central Park.

The original music is of Zalben's concert music, spliced Nintendo samples, and music boxes. The pieces are further processed to give an older feel, and some of the audio was recorded on audio tape with varying speed. In some cases this results in a haunting sound and in other cases a shimmering effect.

There are approximately one thousand audio and video clips stored in the computer with a total of five hours of footage. The clips were created from nearly forty hours of source material. Viewers can spend an entire day at the installation and continually experience new sounds and images.

The monkey bars are wired to a sensor interface and a custom computer program designed in MAX/MSP/Jitter. Touching the bars allows the participant to cue various clips. Furthermore, each bar colorizes the video in different ways. The audio samples brighten and saturate the video giving an added dimension of connectivity to the audio-visual elements.

Ceramic pieces by Ashizawa complement the design of the monkey bar interface and also echo the look of a playground. Each piece is placed on a bed of astroturf to further blur the indoor and outdoor feel of the installation. In fact, many play surfaces in Manhattan are now composed entirely of synthetic materials such as astroturf and rubber. The monkey bars look toward the past of playground equipment through their metal tube construction while leaning toward the future with the addition of technology.

While the bars and ceramics are very stable, they are to be touched and not climbed on, so please be careful. We do not accept any responsibility for injury. Small children should be supervised. INTERACT AT YOUR OWN RISK!

For more information please visit <http://www.jonathanzalben.com>