

BlackBOX:
Painting a Digital Picture of Documented Memory



By Tatiana Pentes
BA *USyd*, M.Art *CoFa UNSW*, M.Litt *USyd*

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Creative Arts
University of Technology, Sydney
2005

Certificate of Authorship

I certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Preface	ii
List of Tables, Figures, and Illustrations	iii
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
PART ONE: <i>Virtual Archive of Cultural Memories</i>	
Chapter One:	
1. My Story	5
2. Writing the Self	12
Chapter Two: The Colonising Gaze	15
Chapter Three: The Computer Mediated Text	24
1. Hypertextuality/ Intertextuality	28
2. Aesthetics of Interactive Multimedia	29
3. Tracing a digital media map	34
4. Think Piece: The gestures of the body in interactive cross-cultural storytelling	41
Chapter Four: Methodological Concerns	47
PART TWO: <i>blackBOX Creative Production</i>	53
Chapter Five: <i>blackBOXES</i> - digital media as a journey of discovery	53
Chapter Six: Mythic and Musical Structure of Project	62
1. Memory Boxes	62
2. Overview of Areas of Content	63
3. Script Development and Production	64
(1) <i>Metropolis</i>	64
(2) <i>chineseBOX</i>	65
(3) <i>jewelBOX</i>	67
(4) <i>pandorasBOX</i>	75

Chapter Seven: Design of electronic surfaces for the interface	80
1. Surface Design and Interaction of Pathways	80
2. Interactivity	81
3. Aesthetics	81
3.1 Treatment of Image	82
3.2 Treatment of Sound	83
3.3 Treatment of Text	84
3.4 Treatment of Time	84
3.5 Emotional Engagement with Multimedia	84
Chapter Eight: Installation- Exhibition of <i>blackBOX</i>	87
Chapter Nine: Conclusion	90
A Selected Bibliography	92
Glossary of Terms	103
Appendices:	
Appendix (i) Reflection on Self and Process	111
Appendix (ii) Keith Gallasch, “Australia Council Restructure: Australia Council Unplugged”, <i>RealTime</i> , February/ March, 2005.	116
Attachments:	
(i) <i>blackBOX</i> Interactive Prototype CD-ROM	
(ii) <i>blackBOX</i> URL http://www.strangecities.net	
(iii) <i>blackBOX</i> installation DVD documentation	
(iv) <i>blackBOX: A digital media script</i>	

Acknowledgments

I wish to express gratitude to my academic supervisor of this thesis, which consists of: an exegesis; an interactive CD-ROM; a gallery installation; Internet site; and DVD documentation: Dr Devleena Ghosh, Writing, Journalism, and Social Inquiry, University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) for encouraging and accepting my *blackBOX* study, for supervising the theoretical and production elements of my doctor of creative arts, and for her academic and moral support. I also wish to thank my co-supervisor Megan Heyward, Department of Media Arts and Production, (UTS), for her consistent assistance, valuable suggestions and advice particularly in relation to the production of new media and digital culture.

I am indebted to Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, Trans/forming Cultures: Key Centre for Communications and Culture, (UTS), for his inspiration with the *Menorah of Fang Bang Lu* online documentary and mentorship in the meeting of social research and interactive multimedia, and also for his support and guidance. I am indebted to Dr Linda Leung, Institute for Interactive Media and Learning, (UTS), and Dr Melanie Swallow, research student Department of Media Arts and Production, (UTS), for providing me with editions of their doctoral dissertations, giving me inspiration, and stimulating many ideas in my own research into creative digital media technologies. I thank Dr Yusuf Pisan, Co-Director Creativity and Cognition Studios, Information Technology, (UTS), for his kind words of support and for fostering my research. I am grateful to Eurydice Aroney, Radio Journalism, (UTS), who has mentored me in concept development, montage and audio production, and provided me with moral support and advice. I wish to thank John Conomos, Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney for his participation, and my husband Geoffrey Weary, Electronic and Temporal Arts, Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, for his participation, encouragement, and generous assistance, without which this work could never have been produced. I wish to thank the musicians and performers whose charitable support made this work possible: Dr Ileana Citaristi, Nirmal Jena, Chitritta Mukerjee, Serge Ermoll Jr, Alexandra Ermolaeff, Matina Pentes, Archie Agropoulos and Rebetiki Ensemble, Padma Raman, Laekhena (Lou-Lou) Sy, Rose Tang, Zhou Xuan, Nina Philadelphoff Puren, Devleena Ghosh and Roch le Berwick.

I wish to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Technology, Sydney, which provided me with a doctoral scholarship & Trans/forming Cultures: Key Centre for Communications and Culture which provided research publication funding which made this study possible. I wish to pay tribute to my grandparents Frances and Antonis Pentes (Greeks from Kythera) and Sergei and Xenia Ermolaeff (Russians from Shanghai, China), to my loving parents and my son James Antonio Astor Weary, to whom I dedicate this work.

Preface

“It is inscribed as on Pandora’s Box ... do not open ...passions ... escape in all directions from a box that lies open ...
(Bruno Latour, ‘Opening Pandora’s BlackBox’, 1987.)¹



Figure 1. *blackBOX* interface screen depicting Roch le the Creole/Indian girl and Nina the Russian/ Greek girl

¹ Bruno Latour, “Opening Pandora’s Black Box”, *Science in Action: How To Follow Scientists And Engineers Through Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987, pp 1-17.

List of Tables, Figures, and Illustrations

Figure 1. <i>blackBOX</i> interface screen depicting Rochéle the Creole/Indian Girl and Nina the Russian/Greek girl	1
Figure 2. <i>blackBOX</i> menu interface screen depicting Rochéle the Creole/Indian girl	2
Figure 3. <i>blackBOX</i> installation KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004	2
Figure 4. <i>blackBOX</i> installation KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004	4
Figure 5. Portrait of my grandmother Xenia (Ermoll) Ermolaeff in Shanghai, a Russian from China, circa 1930s	5
Figure 6. Ileana Citaristi Italian born classical Indian <i>Odissi</i> dancer 2002	6
Figure 7. Serge Ermoll <i>Free Kata</i> album cover	7
Figure 8. <i>Borobodur, Dhyani Buddha</i> statues and stupas	8
Figure 9a. Serge Ermoll and His Orchestra plays for <i>Pathe</i> Label, China, circa 1930	10
Figure 9b. Portrait of Mao Tse Tung in the former Russian Orthodox Church spire, Shanghai circa 1998	10
Figure 10a. <i>blackBOX</i> menu screen interface screen by Tatiana Pentes	14
Figure 10b. <i>The Suicide of Dorothy Hale</i> by Frida Kahlo In secular ex-votive style Martha Zamora, <i>Frida Kahlo: The Brush of Anguish</i>	14
Figure 11a. Serge Ermoll and His Orchestra, the Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, China, circa 1930	15
Figure 11b. Constructivist Mayakovsky's <i>For The Voice</i> , Soviet Russian poetry	16
Figure 12. Sergei and Xenia Ermolaeff on a city bus Shanghai, China, circa 1930s	18
Figure 13. International Refugee Organisation Far East Mission (IRO) document granting Mr and Mrs Sergei Ermolaeff and eligibility for legal and political protection as refugees, Shanghai, China, 1950.	18
Figure 14a. Russian from Shanghai - Sergei Ermolaeff Snr personal collage on the wall of Punchbowl home, Sydney, Australia, c1980s	19

Figure 14b. Sergei Ermolaeff, permit to drive an automobile in the French Concession, Shanghai, China, 20 October 1930	21
Figure 15a. Sergei Ermolaeff and His Orchestra, The Majestic Hotel, Shanghai, China, circa 1930	22
Figure 15b. Russian Taxi Dancers from General Jiganoff's, <i>The Russian of Shanghai</i>	22
Figure 16. <i>blackBOX</i> interface still from <i>chineseBOX</i> pathway	27
Figure 17. Russian ballerina Asja pictured in <i>blackBOX</i> interface still from <i>chineseBOX</i>	28
Figure 18. Vannevar Bush's Differential Analyzer, 1931 http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/BUSH_BERRNIER.html [accessed 2 February 2005]	32
Figure 19. Vannevar Bush's <i>Memex</i> head camera	32
Figure 20. Vannevar Bush's <i>Memex</i> http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/BUSH_BERRNIER.html [accessed 2 February 2005]	32
Figure 21. Serge Ermoll and His Orchestra postcard Shanghai circa 1950	48
Figure 22. <i>Rembetika</i> dancer in contemporary Athens <i>Taverna</i> (tavern) from Gail Holst's <i>Road To Rembetika</i>	50
Figure 23. <i>blackBOX</i> interface still from <i>pandorasBOX</i> depicting Greek diasporic musical and personal effects	52
Figure 24. Contemporary map of Greece and Islands & Pandora and her box	57
Figure 25. <i>Baglamas</i> a miniature stringed <i>Bouzouki</i> shaped instrument ²	57
Figure 26. A Greek woman <i>Stavroula Petala</i> born Athens 1926 in <i>blackBOX</i> , Cairo, Egypt was her home until she migrated to Australia 1948	58
Figure 27. Lord <i>Jagannatha a</i> , along with his sister <i>Subadhra</i> , and brother <i>Balabadhra</i> , that forms the holy trinity	59
Figure 28. Map of the state of Orissa, Indian sub-continent	59
Figure 29. Ileana Citaristi performs <i>Odissi</i> dance <i>Mangala Charan</i> , 2003	61
Figure 30. Overview of <i>blackBOX</i> CD-ROM areas of content	63
Figure 31. <i>chineseBOX</i> interface still detailing virtual objects	66

² *Baglamas* from Holst op cit p70.

Figure 32. The Konark Sun Temple at Konark, Orissa, INDIA ³	72
Figure 33. <i>blackBOX</i> interface still from <i>jewelBOX</i> pathway picturing dancer Chitritta Mukerjee, performing <i>Konarak Kanthi Odissi</i> dance performance	73
Figure 34a. <i>jewelBOX</i> interface still detailing virtual objects	74
Figure 34b. <i>pandorasBOX</i> interface still detailing my grandparents Frances and Antonis Pentes and their child my mother Matina (Stamatia) Pentes	79
Figure 35. <i>blackBOX</i> , KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004	88
Figure 36. <i>blackBOX</i> , KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004	88
Figure 37. <i>blackBOX</i> , KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004	89
Figure 38. The Prokopoff Perceptron, circa 1968	104
Figure 39. Serge Ermoll Jr (piano) Quintet, El Rocco Jazz Cellar, Kings Cross, Sydney, circa. 1968	105
Figure 40. Lord <i>Jagannartha</i> , <i>Subadhra</i> , <i>Balabadhra</i> , the holy trinity	106
Figure 41. Hindu Lord of Dance – <i>Nataraja</i> (details of bronze sculpture)	107
Figure 42. <i>Maya Darpan</i> and <i>Odissi</i> dance drama by Ileana Citaristi	107
Figure 43. Rose Tang, Cabaret Taxi Dancer performance, <i>blackBOX</i> interface still	108
Figure 44. <i>Rembetika</i> musicians (refugees) at fish market at Piraeus, Greece, 1937	110

³ Image from *Templenet* <http://www.templenet.com/Orissa/konakona.html> [accessed 10 June 2005].

Abstract

This study investigates and records the production of a digital media artwork *blackBOX: Painting A Digital Picture of Documented Memory*, generated through the media technologies of interactive multimedia, exploiting the creative potentials of digitally produced music, sound, image and text relationships in a disc based and online (Internet) environment. The artwork evolves from an imaginary electronic landscape that can be uniquely explored/ played in a non-sequential manner. The artwork/ 'game' is a search for the protagonist Nina's hybrid cultural identity. This is mirrored in the exploration of random, fragmentary and non-linear experiences designed for the player engaged with the artwork. The subjective intervention of the player/ participant in the electronic artwork is metaphoric of the *improvisational* tendencies that have evolved in the *Greek Blues (Rembetika)*, *Jazz*, and *Hindustani* musical and performative dance forms. The protagonist Nina's discovery of these musical forms reveal her cultural/ spiritual origins. As a musical composer arranges notes, melodies and harmonies, and sections of instruments, so too, the multimedia producer designs an ensemble of audio-visual fragments to be navigated. *Dance* also becomes a driving metaphor, analogous to the player's movement in and through these passages of image/ sound/ text and as a movement between theories and ideas explored in the content of the program. The central concern is to playfully reverse, obscure, distort the look of the dominating/colonialist gaze, in the production of an interactive 'game' and allow the girl to picture herself.

One of my objectives is to explore the ways in which social research can be undertaken by the creation of an interactive program in the computer environment utilising interactive digital media technologies. The study reveals that, through the subjective intervention of the (player) *user*⁴ with the digital artefact, a unique experience and responsiveness is produced with the open ended text. The work is comprised of a website <http://www.strangecities.net>; an interactive CD-ROM; a gallery installation; digital photomedia images; and a written thesis documenting and theorising the production.

⁴ The term *user*, while widely debated has been in usage from the 1980s to refer to the unique human interaction with the digital artefact, electronic screen work, and computer interface.