

jewelBOX Visual and Audio Research

The ‘imagined’ Indian community is visualised in documentary video material of classical Indian dance and music performances in Australia. These performances are framed inside images of a silver Indian *spice box*. The *jewelBox* narrative is constructed through the eyes of Rochéle, a young Indian/ Creole woman. We gain access to the *jewelBOX* narrative through images of Rochéle opening the *spice box* and examining the émigré dance objects.

The visual material is composed through the digital animation of photographs and performance sequences of Rochéle and digital video documentation of classical Indian dance performances (*Odissi/ Kuchipudi*) by Ileana Citaristi, Chitritta Mukerjee, and Padma Raman. The generation of digital animation sequences from the temple reliefs and sculpture that depict the ancient dance and music culture include imagery from the *Konarak Sun Temple* at Konarak, Orissa, India. This imagery forms an archive of graphic design motifs and artefacts used in *blackBOX*. These objects include letters from India sent back to Australia and postage stamps; photographic documentation of performances of the dance form; popular Hindu imagery depicting the Sanskrit narratives informing the dance; traditional Indian fabric and the dance costumes; Hindu bronze sculptures; and digital images of the stone sculptures at the Konarak Sun Temple. These ancient sculptures have been studied by contemporary *Odissi* choreographers, as the sculptures preserve a record of the dance gestures and traditional musical instruments in stone.

Texts informing *jewelBOX* have been sourced from literature on classical Indian dance (*Odissi/Kuchipudi*); ancient mythological and religious texts informing the dance forms; a collection of letters sent home to Australia from a young woman describing visits to religious sites and temples; the song lyrics that accompany these dance forms. It is also informed by research of Internet sites on classical Indian dance, portals for musicians forming an online community, many of these profiling of Indian performers, musicians, and organisations.

(4) *pandorasBOX*

pandorasBOX is the third electronic chapter of this interactive narrative. The player, having moved through the *jewelBOX* phase, is then presented with a set of objects emanating from a stone Greek sarcophagus (tomb). The discovery of my Greek past is indelibly caught up in an idealisation of ancient Greek mythology and a longing for a contemporary understanding. The Greek Olympics 2004, and a photo album of a recent visit to Athens and the island of Kythera, Greece by my mother Matina and sister Alexandra also plays a major part.

In developing this chapter, I worked with old family photographs and émigré objects from Greece. I have never been to Greece and my understanding of the culture has always come from strange objects and stories passed down by relatives. Growing up, I associated Greek culture with my grandparents, and the sounds of their favourite music. My grandfather Antonis Pentes smoked cigars and listened to *Rembetika* music. He drank strong Greek coffee and accompanied by sweet biscuits. I remember he played with a set of worry beads (*komboloi*) and always wore a suit with a sharp grey hat when he went out about town. Family lore had it that my grandfather came here by ship in the 1930s and married my grandmother, who was working at her Greek parents fish café in Port Macquarie. My Greek great grandfather opened the first fish café and cinema in Port Macquarie; as economic migrants these ancestors formed part of an entrepreneurial class that developed Australia's Café culture. These facts have left an indelible trace upon the production of *blackBOX* that has been influenced by these memories of cinema and cultural life.

I wanted to evoke these memories and longing in this electronic chapter by incorporating my family's material culture that had survived the immigration. The music, songs and movement of the body provided an emotional connection with this past. My link to Greece seemed to be

severed; in generational terms, I felt disconnected from Greek culture, not having the language and little connection with family members. There was also a feeling of ‘shame’ about being Greek. Greeks did not occupy a position of status in Australian society. Even those who were financially successful were well known as ‘shop keepers’. In many ways I identified with my Russian side much more keenly; however, in this creative work I wanted to articulate the *split* between and the *fusion* of the Greek and the Russian. The sounds of the *Rembetika* blues seemed both oriental and urban. But it was the music I seemed to feel a connection with; its modal tones generate an emotional response inside of me and conjure an *imaginary* landscape of the urban Greek tavern.

The narratives unfold from a virtual ‘Pandora’s Box’ containing a set of virtual émigré objects: (i) Isis necklace; (ii) Madonna and gold cross; (iii) *Bouzouki*; (iv) Kytherian woman; (v) Acropolis pendant; and (vi) Grecian urn. These icons are real objects obtained from my Greek grandparents and trace a history back Greece. Through interaction with these artefacts a non-sequential narrative is revealed.

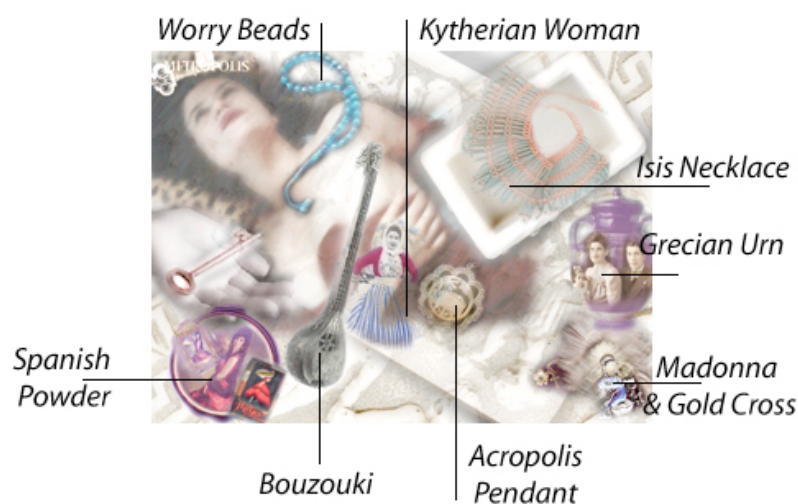


Figure 34b. *pandorasBOX* interface still detailing virtual émigré objects

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The ‘imagined’ Greek community is visualised in fragmentary sequences from an archive of Super 8 ‘home-movie’ footage and family photographs. The material sourced includes excerpts of Greek dancing at

the Enmore Theatre, Sydney. The footage includes fragments of my sister Alexandra Ermolaeff performing *Tsiftateli* (Greek belly dancing), digital video recording a pan across the mirrored wall of candies in a Greek milk bar and images of a family group dancing shoulder-to-shoulder. My grandfather Antonis Pentes worked as a milk bar proprietor all of his life. Visual memories of my grandfather Antonis playing cards and drinking *biriki* (Greek) coffee and *metaxa* (Greek brandy) and smoking his cigars have influenced the construction of the narrative. The audio material was sourced from an archive of *Rembetika* 78" vinyl recordings, courtesy of my grandmother Frances Pentes and contemporary *Rembetika* recordings of the old songs by an Australian group *Rebetiki Ensemble*.

The Greek visual material that was collected and digitised forms an archive of graphic design motifs and virtual artefacts used in the work. These objects include a *Narghile* (water pipe for smoking hashish); antique Greek plate with graphic designs that were appropriated; sweets in a Greek cake shop in Marrickville, Sydney; Greek woven fabric; hand crocheted items; photographic representations of ancient Greek jewellery; a baptismal Orthodox cross and evil eye; an Orthodox icon depicting the Madonna and child); *komboloi* (worry beads); Easter egg coloured powder; consumer product packaging; frankincense burned in the church; a medallion inscribed with the *Acropolis*; photographs of a tavern on the Greek island of Kythera; photographic portraits of 1930's and 1940's *Rembetika* musicians collected from Gail Holst's *Road To Rembetika*, these include Roza Eskenazi, Sotiria Bellou, Nikos Mathesis (Crazy Nick), the *Kalamata* group 1948 (one of the most famous *Rembetika* groups); a group of musicians and refugees in the fish markets at Piraeus 1937; a *laterna* (piano organ covered in decorations) from Constantinople; a great quartet of early *Rembetika* musicians; a Greek pre-Lenten carnival 1930's; a portrait of a *manga*, a 1930s 'Republican' sporting a moustache, a false mole on the cheek, a grey cap; and *Rembetika* instruments and musical handwritten scores.

The textual sources function in the work as fragmentary texts to be read on the screen surface and also form the script for voice-over sound elements providing mythic narratives that inform the creative production. Texts informing *pandorasBOX* have been obtained from literature on *Rembetika*; ancient Greco-Roman myths; testimonials of Australian *Rembetika* musicians and family members; my mothers journey back to Greece and the collection of letters and postcards sent home; and the popular lyrics from *Rembetika* songs that speak of the diasporic experience. Research for *pandorasBOX* included examining Internet sites that are portals forming an online community and profiles of *Rembetika* musicians and organizations. Gail Holst's *Road to Rembetika* provided crucial material and her own testimonial about first encountering this music in Greece provided an inspiration.

...When I first came to Greece in 1966, I had hardly heard any Greek music and couldn't understand a word of Greek...but I settled in the Plaka quarter of Athens, and it was the music of the city I got to know best...The jukeboxes in Athens were my real introduction to *Rembetika*. I had always felt a snobbish antipathy to jukeboxes until I came to Greece. Now I regard them with affection, and feed drachmas into them like a Las Vegas addict...In 1965 you could find jukeboxes all over Athens, which were full of good *Rembetika* records. Young men would come into a Taverna, feed a handful of coins into the juke box and begin to dance...This solo dance was unlike any dancing I'd ever seen – not exuberant...The music would begin, the rhythm insistent, the voice harsh and metallic, and the dancer would rise as if compelled...Eyes half closed, in trance-like absorption, cigarette hanging from lips...¹

I remembered my grandfather listening to this music, but I did not understand its cultural significance. Holst's research provided a pivotal point of entry into an understanding about this music, because she approached her study as an outsider visiting Greece and engaging with cultural difference. I found myself in the same position, trying to form an understanding of a culture with which I was disconnected.

¹ Gail Holst, *Road to Remetika: music of a Greek sub-culture, songs of love, sorrow and hashish*, Denise Harvey Publisher, Limni, Evia, Greece, 1994, p64.



Figure 34b. *pandorasBOX* interface still detailing my grandparents Frances and Antonis Pentes and their child my mother Matina (Stamatia) Pentes

The experience of *jewelBOX*, the process of studying a culture not my own, gave me a model for engaging with Greek culture, which contained for me its own strangeness.