

Chapter Eight: Installation

Exhibition of *blackBOX*

The interactive 'audio-visual' artwork *blackBOX: Painting A Digital Picture of Documented Memory* was installed in the KUDOS gallery space, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September – 2 October 2004. The concept in the exhibition design was to invite the audience to initially view the material objects representing the various music and dance cultures used in the electronic work. After the visitor passed through this space of the exhibition they moved into a (digital) cinematic space. In this space the *blackBOX* computer program was projected cinematically onto a large white screen at the rear of the gallery via a data projector. The real objects, viewed initially, could then be recognised as virtual artefacts in the interactive work.

The interactive work was created to enable participation by the audience. The installation produced a new form of engagement with the artwork, where every visitor 'played' the electronic game to produce a subjective instance of the work. The light from the data projector painted representations onto the artificial wall, forming a new kind of canvass.

The conceptualisation of this installation was influenced by the traditional cinematic conventions. Indeed the projection of the audio-visual data, reflected onto a screen surface mimics early filmic projection of light through celluloid. However, the 'active' participation of the visitors and audience with the *blackBOX* installation offered the possibility of a subjective intervention with the artwork and the ability to alter the sequential flow and duration of the audio-visual material.



Figure 35. *blackBOX*, KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004¹

The subjective intervention of the viewer/user was heightened by the visibility of the computer technology enabling the operation of the *blackBOX* exhibition. A G4 Macintosh laptop computer was positioned directly in front of the data projector and opposite the screen/ wall/ canvass. The computer screen surface formed an additional frame within which to explore *blackBOX*.²



Figure 36. *blackBOX*, KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004³

¹ Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Weary 2004.

² See Attachment (iii) *blackBOX* installation DVD documentation

³ Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Weary 2004.



Figure 37. *blackBOX*, KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004⁴

⁴ Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Weary 2004.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

blackBOX: Painting A Digital Picture of Documented Memory explores the potentials of interactive non-linear story-telling to articulate, through the meeting of scholarly research and artistic creation, a hybrid cultural identity. I aimed to construct an interactive text that could reveal the multiple cultural threads creating my identity. The imaginary protagonist Nina, a name serendipitously common to the Russian, Indian and Greek cultures, stands in for my ethnic and spiritual persona. The bricolage of the identities with which I grew up is revealed in the discovery of performances from three ‘imagined’ Australian diasporic communities: (i) *Rembetika* Greek blues; (ii) classical Indian dance and music (*Odissi* and *Kuchipudi* traditions); and (iii) fragments of Australian jazz performed by *Russian* musicians from China. *Dancing* between and across these cultural forms and theories in *blackBOX* is the method I have employed to structure this research.

The objective of *blackBOX* is to explore and make sense of the cultural influences that formed my cultural, emotional, and spiritual identity. However, the more connections I made between the genres and cultural forms the more gaps became visible. I have woven together these disparate threads to form an virtual collage of media, however this is a fabrication. The production of *blackBOX* confirms that interactive multimedia is an appropriate medium to create a program that is self-reflexive and expresses the ‘open’, ‘ambivalent’, ‘ambiguous’, and ‘fragmentary’ formal qualities of the non-sequential narrative⁵, where the navigable text enables multiple points of view to be conveyed, and multiple perspectives to be programmed into the work to produce an open-ended text, but which admits of neither closure, nor resolution.

Nina’s hybrid identity suggests the ways in which all individuals may be made up “of many threads”, the digital archive providing a collision of narrative and documentary forms that playfully reverse,

⁵ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s relevance for the study of race and ethnicity”, in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (Eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1996.

obscure, and distort the look of the dominating/colonialist gaze. The metaphoric 'composition' and 'choreography' in the design of *blackBOX* gestures towards the telling of one's own story as a biography, revealed through the unpacking of three virtual 'Boxes', containing émigré artefacts and music/dance performances. The songs and musical phrases pieced together by unique participation with this 'game' refer to the dis/connected surfacing of immigrant memories.

The musical motif is symbolic of the way in which the multimedia artist assembles a range of media with software tools, just as the composer arranges musical notes and the conductor orchestrates the rendering of the musical score through musical instruments. Like music, digital media is a time-based medium, where events and actions take place in a spatial and temporal sequence. *blackBOX* experiments with and tests the relationship between the language of music and the production of image, text and sound, utilising multimedia tools programmed for interactivity.

Through exploration of the 'foreign', and incorporation of the 'other' into my understanding, I am aware of the dialectical relationship between self/other and East/West. Returning to my father's place of birth, Shanghai, China; examining the photographic collages of my grandfather Sergei Ermolaeff's Shanghai jazz orchestra; engaging in documentation of classical Indian dance; and re-discovering my Greek grandparents favourite *Rembetika* music have provided me with a lens through which to piece together the dissonant threads of my own fragmentary cultural identity as an interactive story.