Introduction

blackBOX: Painting A Digital Picture of Documented Memory is an experimental interactive work created for delivery on the computer, the Internet, and site-specific gallery installation. This immersive digital story emerges from the protagonist Russian/Greek girl's movement through the metropolis. The objective for the player/participant is to explore this computer mediated interactive Metropolis, through the digital experiences and sensations of the girl, and to discover three metaphoric 'Boxes' that contain three symbolic performances. The girl is documented making a digital journey from the interior of her urban apartment into a symbolic city. The cityscape becomes haunted by traces of her past, her memories projected onto the surfaces of her city. What is the girl searching for and what does she discover in the metropolis? She finds performances from three 'imagined' Australian diasporic communities; these resonate for the girl, creating a bricolage of the identities with which she grew up. The participant/player is encouraged to discover performances from (i) *Rembetika* – a politically engaged Greek blues; (ii) classical Indian dance and music (*Odissi* and *Kuchipudi* traditions); and (iii) fragments of Australian jazz performed by *Russian* musicians from China.

Figure 2. *blackBOX* menu interface screen depicting Rochéle the Creole/Indian girl

The focus has been to document Nina's (mine) cultural identity through random fragments, objects, musical memories and ethnic dance forms, which create for her a sense of unity and meaning in relation to her hybrid sense of self. These fragments suggest the development of interdependent and intertwining relationships involved in becoming a social subject, "…it is precisely this very sense of identification, interdependence and community that are the key elements in the development of women's identity…"[1] amongst others. The girl's specific 'melting pot' of cultural forms is a metaphor for the ways in which cultural productions and artefacts blend in the contemporary urban metropolis. The metaphor is extended by a heightened global awareness with access to network technologies and the Internet that have enabled new forms of creativity and communication. My objective in this study is to link social research with the ways in which the interactive, non-sequential narrative structure, mediated through the digital technological environment of the computer interface, can articulate feminine identity, and the notions of self/selves and Others that are refracted through this virtual space.

[1] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, Routledge,
London, 1988, p36.

The interface design metaphor for *blackBOX* is an electronic stage/screen surface where performances appear as if conjured from a dream. The participant/player can explore the digital surface of the stage to reveal musical and dramatic performances, revealing interviews with the musicians and dancers, documentary fragments of performances and statements by artists. She can also uncover hyper-textual documents, newsprint articles and radio archival material, through the devices of iconic symbols and hotspots exposing layers of material beneath the surface of the experimental documentary.

Traditional modes of story-telling and music are challenged in the interface design because the user/player must engage with the music and performances. In the contemporary technological environment, convergence has delivered new possibilities for the creation of non-linear programs in terms of their production, distribution, and reception. The Internet as a site for the broadcast of digitally produced interactive media has created new ways of conceptualising programs, mapping interactive content and producing non-linear narrative experience, where the participant/player is able to participate in screen events.

In addition to the exploration of identity, this research project examines the ways in which discrete traditional musical and dance forms transmute in the current Australian context. This work simultaneously becomes a digital archive and a critically reflective documentation of the metamorphosis of traditional cultural forms, thus exploiting the creative potentials opened up for cultural producers in the digitally manipulated performance, sound, image, and text environment of interactive multimedia. Moving between narrative and documentary, the performances are discovered through the exploration of four interactive

---

[2] *blackBOX* installation KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales,
28 September to 2 October 2004, photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Weary.

'compositions', choreographed so that the player/participant can move in and out of the electronic text.

The creative component involves the production of *blackBOX* interactive CD-ROM, a medium capable of articulating fragmented experience; a digital video DVD documentation of the installation of the *blackBOX* interactive work in the gallery space[3] as means of reportage; and an Internet site *http://www.strangecities.net*. These media have been utilised to both archive and distribute the creative material and information. By virtue of their structures, they provide an analogous virtual environment for the theoretical research where *memory* and the piecing together of *fragmentary* material has a mysterious resemblance to the way in which electronic spaces can be designed for wandering through the computer text.

Figure 4. *blackBOX* installation KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004[4]

---

[3] KUDOS Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 28 September to 2 October 2004.
[4] Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Weary ©2004

This thesis is constructed in two main parts. PART ONE: *Virtual Archive of Cultural Memories* contains a theorisation of the general historical, cultural and methodological concerns framing the creative production, as well as a 'think piece'. PART TWO: *blackBOX Creative Production* examines the specific way in which this particular creative work was produced materially and technically.