The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game

A Project by the Group Personal Cinema

The idea of [The Making of Balkan Wars](): The Game project came from one of those discussions within the Personal Cinema group about the reality (or virtual reality) presented through official narratives and industrial entertainment, about war games and epic strategy video games, about the primacy of an American Californian industry in the production and complete control of this specific market, which engages millions of people, worldwide. In a desperate search for the creation of local heroes and imagined zones of conflict, the creators of these visually realistic virtual games, very often present a simplified interpretation of human history and culture. As a consequence this form of virtual reality does not adequately describe the experiences of the people who are caught within the actual war games, and by entering homes all over the world threatens the character of national identity and any kind of democratic principles and rights to free opinion. In the live real-time/real-war videos of CNN and in video games, this simplification of culture and history is itself a form of violence.

"The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game" is a project focused on the social and cultural issues within the Peninsula and on the creation of networks between artists, art critics, writers and curators from South eastern Europe. It proposes some new media works created by 51 participating artists investigating the Balkan territory and way of life.

Both geopolitical war games and epic strategy video games are interrelated in this multi-media project. While virtual battle scenes are celebrated for their extreme realism, contemporary warfare has begun to resemble science fiction. The reality (or virtual reality) presented by official narratives and industrial entertainment does not adequately describe the experiences of the people who are caught in the actual war games. In the real-time of global networks, and in video games, the simplification of cultures and history is itself a form of violence. The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game is intended to counteract the sensational spectacle of war presented by the media by deconstructing stereotypes, focusing on the distortion of identities, and revising the dominant logic of explanation.

Project's Basic Elements

"The making of Balkan wars: The game" is based on a network created between artists, curators, theorists and people of the media mostly from the South eastern Europe; a network between people with different and often opposite social, political and religious beliefs but with a common interest in the particular geo-political region who contributed to the project with material as videos, texts, animations, photos and web projects.
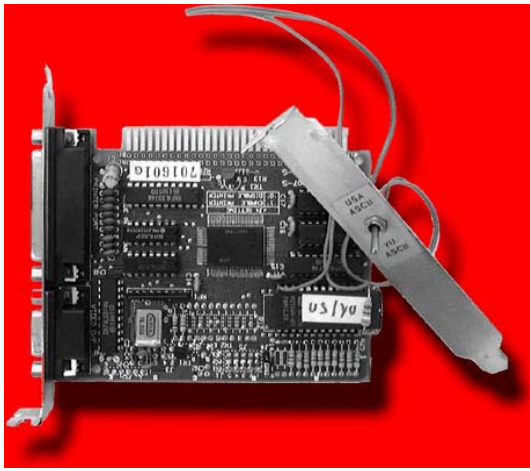
Selda Asal (Turkey)

Vuk Cosic (Serbia-Slovenia)

Robert Alias Dragot (Albania)

The works submitted are one of the core elements of the project as they were actually called to provide alternate representations of Balkan History and Identity and were free to use parody, humour, detournement and irreverence to bring light to themes related to the Balkan Wars: the game. The aim was to put these messages said out in a continuous and constructive dialogue creating different virtual and real levels of conflict; a space of dialogue based on history and personal experience. The presentation and distribution of these work as well as the concept and the main ideas of "the making of Balkan wars: the game" was made possible through the following ways: the Balkan mall video game, the website of the project, the real space installation, the DVD's and catalogues.

Selected Texts
Gulsen Bal: Interview with Personal Cinema
http://www.personalcinema.org/warport/index.php/Main/GulsenBal
Karin Ohlenschlager: Director of Media Lab Madrid, Speech in Art Athina :
http://www.balkanwars.net/KarinOhlenschlager.htm
Ilias Marmaras: Coordinator of personal Cinema 'Si les Balkans n'existaient pas, il faudrait les inventer'
http://www.personalcinema.org/warport/index.php/Main/ReadMore

Selected Articles

El Pais
http://www.balkanwars.net/el_pais.htm
Culture - Republic of Macedonia
http://www.culture.in.mk/story.asp?id=9433
Macedonian press
http://www.personalcinema.org/warport/index.php/Main/CityMuseumOfSkopje

The Balkan Mall, a Multiplayer Videogame.

Multiple computers are connected to a network and each user is assigned a character (avatar), which the other users can see in the virtual space. The virtual space contains the videos, sounds, images and texts created by artists (as described above). Each player/avatar has the ability to interact with the other avatars by shooting or throwing various symbolic objects. The players can chat between them, using a specific chat box present on the interface of the game.

To log in, the player is asked to enter his nickname and then to proceed and answer a questionnaire. Then, he/she selects three words out of 16 words-choices in order to form his/her avatar. Depending on what the player chooses, he/she gets one of the 9 avatars that are available.

While the player explores the spaces, the factor of Balkanisation changes according to what the player is doing within the game. The Balkanisation factor alters depending on which video, animation or text the player is watching and how much time he or she is standing in front of them. Balkanisation's balance is also influenced by the interaction between the avatars. The ideal is to maintain a balance between Balkanisation and De – Balkanisation (detachment). The player is informed about her/his level of Balkanisation from an indication on the interface of the game.

Photos
http://www.balkanwars.net/photos.htm

The Real Space Installation

The project is ideally presented in the real space as an installation. A computer network is set up that hosts the multiplayer "Balkan Mall" video game. Around this system and within the exhibition space the other elements of "the making of Balkan wars: the game" are displayed: video projections, computer animations, photos, posters, texts submitted by the participant artists and the website of the project.

The presentation of the project varies depending on the space given and the hosting geographical region.
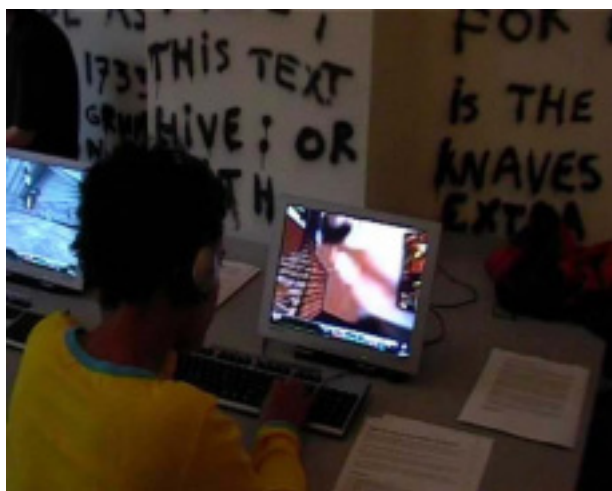

Skopje, City museum.

Media Lab Madrid installation (Quick time VR)
http://www.balkanwars.net/QT.VR/installation.htm

The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game Previews / Presentations

Previews/Round tables

-Forum 2002, Thessalonica
-Conversations, art and society in Europe, Athens
-Forum 2003, Thessalonica
-Presentation at the exhibition "In the Gorges of the Balkans. A report"
Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel, Germany
-Academy of Fine Arts, Madrid, Round table discussion
-City Museum of Skopje, Round table discussion

Amsterdam Montevideo.

Presentations

- MediaLab Madrid , February-March 2004 ,Spain.
- Art Athena, May 2004, Athens
- Skopje ,City museum, May 2004
- Channel Zero, Netherlands Media Art Institute Montevideo, August 2004
- Casa Tranzit ,Cluz, Romania, November 2004
- REX Cultural Center, Belgrade, December 2004

Cluj Romania.

The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game Credits

Curated by: "Personal Cinema"
Coordinated by: Ilias Marmaras and Nina Vagic .
Web site : Maya Bontzou
Communication : Daphne Dragona

The Balkan Mall video game was created by:

Script: Maya Bontzou, Ilias Marmaras , Stewart Ziff , Alex Spyropoulos, Yiannis Scoulidas
2D Graphics : Ilias Marmaras , Maya Bontzou , Alex Spyropoulos,
3D Animation & Level design: Alex Spyropoulos
Video editing :Ilias Marmaras , Maya Bontzou
Programming: Yiannis Scoulidas ,
Music Composition: Vassilis Kokkas
Sound Design: Stelios Giannoulakis

Personal Cinema Core Members

- Maya Bontzou
- Gulsen Bal
- Andy Deck
- Dimitris Dokatzis
- Daphne Dragona
- Nikolas Kozakis

- Ilias Marmaras
- Panos Papadopoulos
- Yannis Skoulidas
- Alexandros Spyropoulos
- Panos Vittorakis
- Stewart Ziff

Participating Artists

1. Robert Alias Dragot - Albania
2. Genti Shkurti – Albania
3. Beatrijs Albers – Belgium
4. Francis Schmetz – Belgium
5. Jacques Lizene – Belgium
6. Marie Andre /Belgium
7. Eugene Savitzkaya – Belgium
8. Reggy Timmermans – Belgium
9. Koen Wastijn Deschuymer – Belgium
10. Ria Pacquee – Belgium
11. Albena Mihaylova – Bulgaria
12. Krassimir Terziev – Bulgaria
13. Irene Paskali – Macedonia
14. Natasha Dimitrievska – Macedonia
15. Christina Ivanoska - Yane Calovski – Macedonia
16. Yordancho Sekulovski – Macedonia
17. Mathias Wagner K – Germany
18. Kostas Beveratos – Greece
19. Dimitris Tsardakas – Greece
20. Babis Kandilaptis – Greece / Belgium
21. Nicolas Kozakis – Greece / Belgium
22. Maya Bontzou – Greece
23. Dimitris Dokatzis – Greece
24. Ilias Marmaras – Greece
25. Angelo Skourtis – Greece
26. Maurice Ganis – Greece
27. Alexandros Spyropoulos – Greece
28. Vassilis Kokkas – Greece / Germany
29. Dimitris Tzamouranis – Greece / Germany
30. Stelios Giannoulakis-- Greece
31. Panos Vittorakis – Greece
32. Chiara Passa – Italy
33. Antonio Riello – Italy / Holland
34. Floe Tudor – Romania
35. Mona Vatamanu – Romania
36. Per Pegelow – Russia
37. Vuk Cosic – Serbia / Slovenia
38. Andrej Tisma – Serbia
39. Windows 99-HAMMER CREATIVE – Serbia
40. Milena Zevu – Serbia / Hungary
41. Aniceto Exposito – Lopez – Spain / Belgium
42. Angel Vergara – Spain / Belgium
43. Selda Asal – Turkey
44. Gulsen Bal – UK / Turkey
45. Cem Gencer – Turkey
46. Genco Gulan – Turkey
47. Ruth Catlow – UK
48. Stewart Ziff – UK / USA
49. Andy Deck – USA
50. Goron Dolan – USA
51. Opa HA - Macedonia
51. Morgan Showalter – USA

International Collaborators and Supporters

Media Lab -Madrid	Popi Diamantakou	Karin Ohlenschlänger
Gulsen Bal	Vassilis Kazis	Katerina Zivanovic
Biljana Tanurovska	Katerina Gregou	Montevideo
LOKOMOTIVA	Dennys Zacharopoulos	Idea Foundation
PROSENGHiSI	Sania Papa	Caza Transit
Nikos Xydakis	Vasile Ernu	B92 – Rex Cultural Center

Multimedia performing arts
center

Forum for South Eastern
Europe art exchanges

Supported By

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Greek Ministry of Culture
Stability Pact for SouthEastern Europe
Kunsthalle Fredericianum
Rene Block
Swiss Cultural programme for Macedonia and Serbia

Texts

Andy Deck	Karin Ohlenschläger	Matthias Wagner K
Popi Diamantakou	Zoran Petrovski	Nina Vagic
Ilias Marmaras	Alex Spyropoulos	Stewart Ziff
Svebor Midzic	Biljana Tanurovska	Gulsen Bal