

The London Consortium
Static. Issue 01 - Play and violence

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The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game
A Personal Cinema Project.

http://static.londonconsortium.com/issue01/bal_balkans.html

STATIC is the web resource of the London Consortium, a unique collaboration between the Architectural Association, Birkbeck College (University of London), the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and Tate. Aiming to initiate interdisciplinary intellectual debate about paradoxes of contemporary culture, Static presents contributions from an international team of academics, artists and cultural practitioners.

The materials, assembled for each issue around a theme, include analytical essays and articles, interviews, art projects, photographic images, etc. Static will welcome feedback, argument and commentary from scholars, artists and other readers, and will be regularly updated in order to communicate the most recent and relevant ideas and interpretations on the chosen topic.
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The making of Balkan wars: The game

A Personal Cinema project



The name "Balkans" has come to be understood as a synonym of war and it easily lends itself to an analysis from that perspective. From this point of view, the local history of nations and cultures is a war game that defines identities, real and imagined. The rationalization of European societies during the 18th century and the appearance of the nation state were reflected in the Balkans by several national revolutions and the emergence of nationalism. The co-existence of three major religions contributes greatly to the conflict. In many cases, the politics of culture and religion that bring pressure to bear upon the area, lead to an isolationism that results in phenomena similar to the situations in Bosnia and Kosovo. Despite the politics of division practiced by the separate religions, inhabitants of the Balkans embrace some common basic values. A healthier situation on the borders of South East Europe can only emerge gradually from the development of these common elements. It should be noted that, apart from the rules of neutrality and mediation, a third condition necessary for peace to exist in a multicultural, multireligious environment is the rule of the common elements: sensitivity, understanding and acceptance of the ethics and practices of people of other cultures.



Advertisements of "real war games"

Project's Basic Elements

<http://www.balkanwars.org/main/info.html>

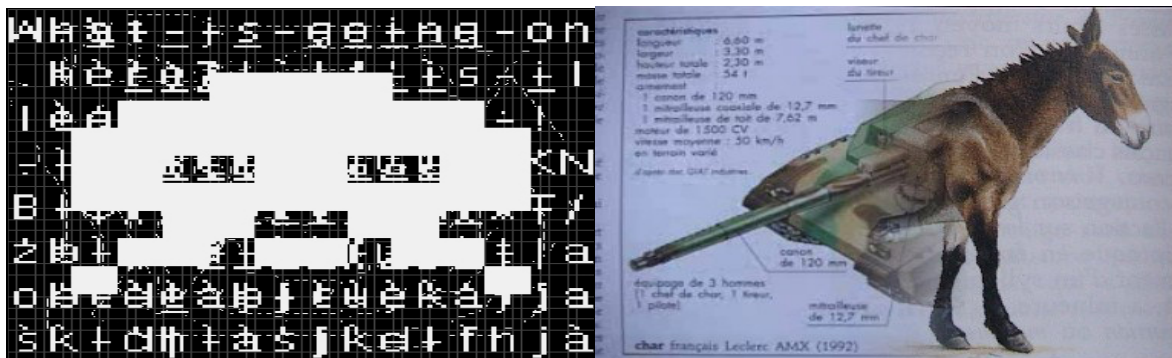
Geopolitical war games and epic strategy video games are interrelated in this multimedia project. While virtual battle scenes are celebrated for their extreme realism, contemporary warfare has begun to resemble science fiction. The reality (or virtual reality) presented by official narratives and industrial entertainment does not adequately describe the experiences of the people who are caught in the actual war games. In the real-time transmissions of CNN, as 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.



Robert Alias Dragot: Culture du conflit

Nikolas Kozakis: We art problems



Atta Deck: Death head

Babis Kandilaptis: Effacer_etroit_droite

The presentation and the distribution of the project have been possible so far via the videogame Balkan Mall, the DVD documentary that contains the basic concepts and realization of the project, the web site and the online version of the game, as well as the catalogues of the presentations. In addition, the Personal Cinema group is shooting a movie/documentary in the Balkans which is scheduled to be released at the end of 2005.



Balkan mall videogame characters

Balkan Mall videogame

<http://www.balkanwars.org/main/project.htm>

When we recognise the video game as a significant form of cultural representation, the predominance of American perspectives in the conceptual space of these games becomes problematic. [Personal Cinema](#) proposed that artists respond to this problem by designing a video game that involves the complexity of real geopolitical, ethnic, and economic relations.

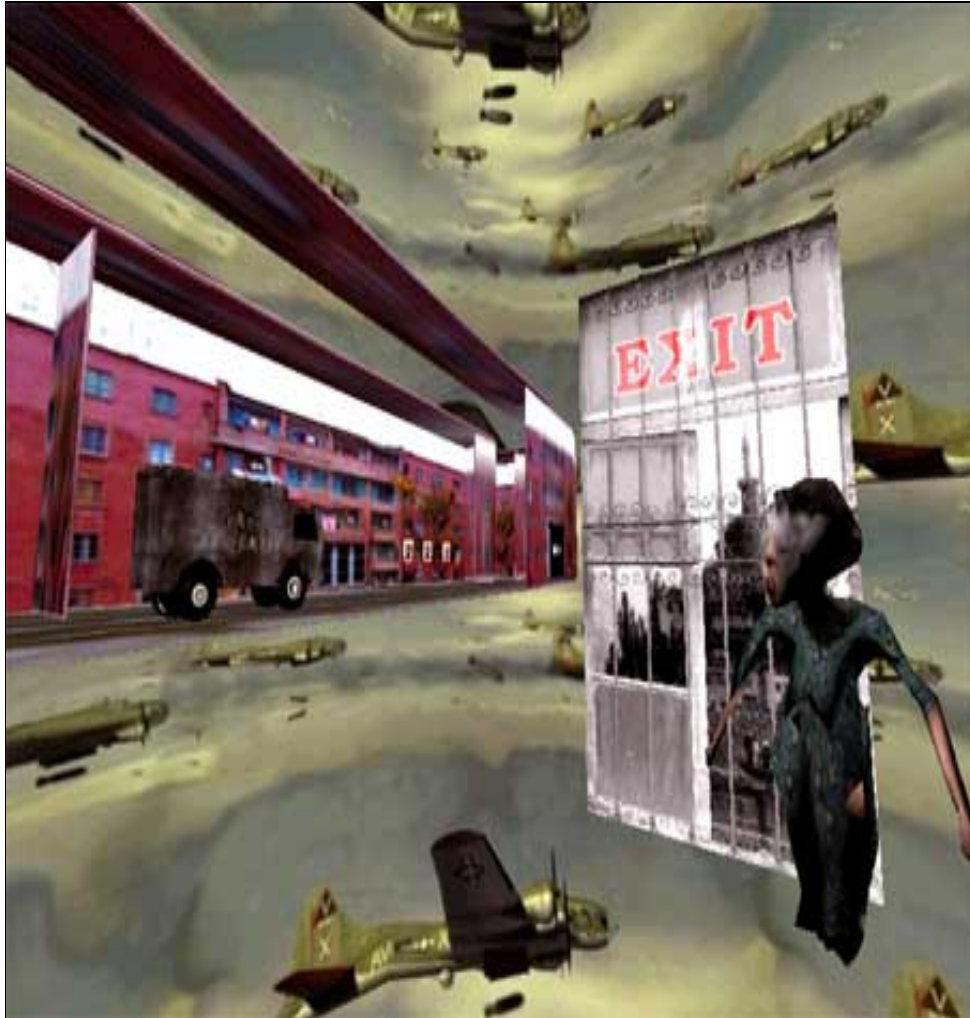
The project addresses the specific knowledge, abilities, resources, and creative practices of the participating artists in order to re-imagine a future in which the people of the Balkans are something more than victims of history. It offers space for dialogue based on history and on personal experiences. It is an opportunity to articulate new narratives that resonate with the memories and experiences of the artists, many of whom have experienced at first-hand the contradictions of the dominant media representations.

This project uses the formal characteristics of the epic adventure video game to critique the real historical game that transpires on the plane of geopolitics and everyday life. Participating artists were called upon to provide alternative representations of Balkan history and identity, to depict the reality of the Balkan Wars from a Eurasian perspective.

They were encouraged to use humour, parody, *détournement*, and irreverence to bring to light themes related to *The Making of Balkan Wars: the Game*. Submissions could take various forms: photos and photo-montage, illustrations, character sketches, scenarios, sound-track music, story-boards, dioramas, sound effects, videos, and essays.



Balkan Mall videogame: Identity factory



Balkan Mall videogame: Villages



Balkan Mall videogame: Disco

As a result of the numerous contributions, the [Balkan Mall](#) video game counteracts 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. In its actual form, it is a multi-user, 3D video game which hosts about 40 videos and documentaries, sounds, images and texts contributed by more than 50 participating artists from 16 countries, who were inspired by the Balkan territory and way of life. Twenty different spaces shape an imaginary shopping mall, which is actually an interpretation of the social, historical and cultural elements of the [Balkans](#). The players are asked to design their own avatars that refer to Balkan characters, and to have them interact and talk with each other. Moving within the space, the players discover that their behaviour defines their degree of participation in this simulated Balkan reality. They realise that the *gameplay* is based on the variable of Balkanization (and de-balkanization) and that keeping the balance is what they are asked to do in order to progress in the game.

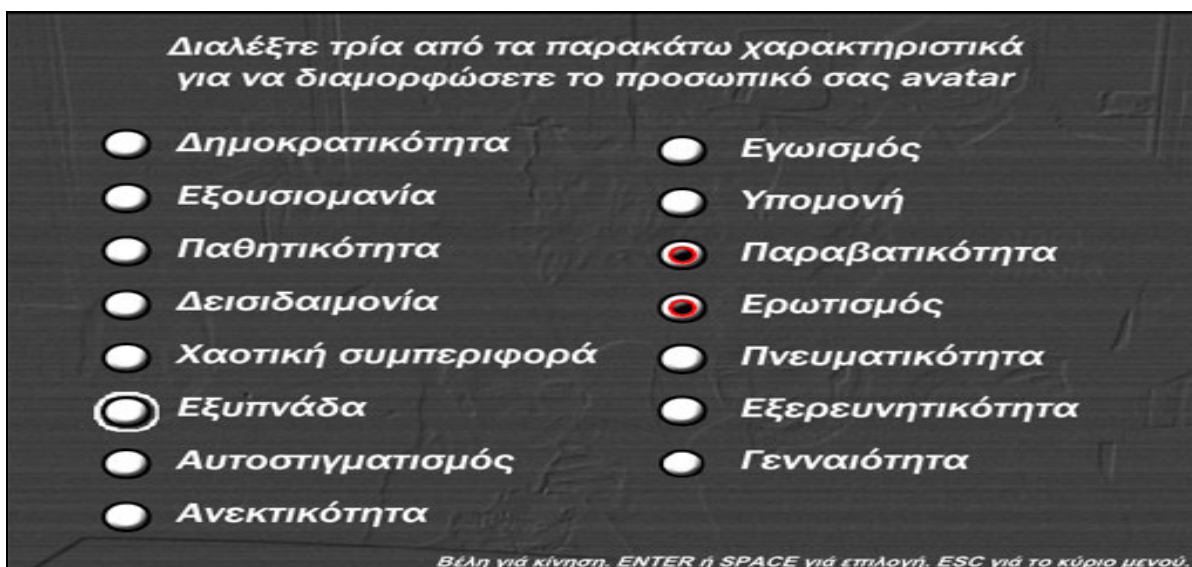


Balkan Mall videogame: Personal borders dealer



Balkan Mall videogame: Hills

The full videogame version in a single user form as well as in a multiuser online form, the DVD documentation and supplementary footage can be distributed in a simple DVD of 4.7GB



Balkan Mall: Avatar selection

The factor of Balkanization

<http://www.personalcinema.org/warport/index.php?pagename=Main.ZoranPetrovski>

While the player explores the spaces, the factor of Balkanization changes according to what the player is doing within the game. The **Balkanization** factor varies depending on which video, animation or text the player is watching and how much time he or she is spending in front of them. The balance of Balkanization is also influenced by the interaction between the avatars. The ideal is to maintain a balance between **Balkanization** and **De - Balkanization** and the player will be informed about her/his level of success at achieving this by an indication in the game's interface.



Balkan Mall Videogame: the Factor of Balkanization

Over the course of history, the original idea of naming the peninsula as "The Balkan peninsula" has led to the creation of a new term: Balkanization. Today, the meaning of this term does not refer just to the Balkans, but it actually has a global use and significance.

To refer to the "Balkanization" of a given community has become predominantly pejorative, suggesting the narcissistic fragmentation of large collectives into ever smaller splintered groups that assert themselves in bloodshed and cruel hatred, in cunning moralist purism and in ritual evocation of ancient herds.

Fredric Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* writes that: "if Balkanization means a particular kind of fragmentation where the fragments are mutually hostile and in competition with each other, then it is by no means clear that fragmentation and globalization are really opposites. Globalization may in fact enable and promote Balkanization".

One Internet search engine offered nearly eight thousand results for the use of the term. Results ranged from references to the Balkanization of the World Wide Web, to that of the Chinese legal system. The term also cropped-up in reference to the territories of Nigeria and Columbia, to the U.S. electricity grid, and to the transit system in San Francisco. Everything and everywhere seems to be in danger of becoming "Balkanized," with only a tiny proportion of these cases taking place in the Balkans themselves.

But, getting back to the origins of the term Balkanisation, one would wonder what could its dialectic opposite be? In which way and under which term could de-balkanization it be defined?

If the Balkan people are frequently accused of being trapped in their own history, many people who know little about the region have also shown an unwillingness to think beyond a symbolic, formulaic representation, to the point where as Vesna Goldsworthy said: "the Balkans have become nothing but a metaphor for conflict, incivility, and violence".

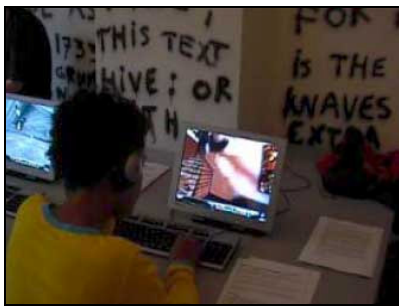
Also, she mentions in one of her articles entitled *Escape from the Balkans* that in a speech (at a Balkan conference), the Bulgarian president Petar Stoyanov reminded his audience that the Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic is "not dividing Europe from the Balkans but Europe from Europe".

Of course, the definition of De-Balkanization is a complex problem of a political, social and moral order. But since art, and even entertainment, have some degree of influence on the collective imagination, the work of activists and artists can help to portray a future in which the inhabitants of Balkanized regions all over the globe are something more than the victims of power, of history interpreted by power, and of propaganda. A healthy culture that claims to provide a future to look forward to must take into consideration the memories and experiences of people who have faced first-hand the pain and brutality of war.

The Making of Balkan Wars: The Game/ shows-round tables

Previews-round tables

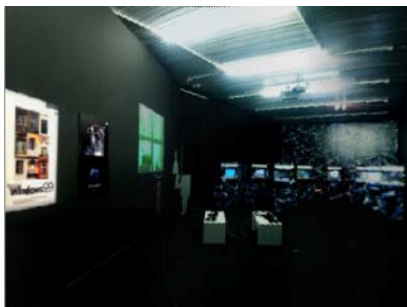
- Forum 2002, November 2002, Thessalonica
- Conversations, art and society in Europe, December 2002, Athens
- Forum 2003, June 2003, Thessalonica
- "In the Gorges of the Balkans. A report", July – October 2003, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kasel
- Academy of Fine Arts, February 2004, Madrid
- Art Athina, May 2004, Athens
- City Museum of Skopje, May 2004, Skopje
- Casa Transit, November 2004, Cluj
- Video Zone 2, November 2004, Tel-Aviv
- Beyond Stereotypes, October 2005, Tbilisi



Montevideo, Amsterdam



Cluj, Romania



Medialab, Madrid

Real space installations/shows

- MediaLab Madrid , February – March 2004, Madrid,Spain
- City Museum of Skopje,May 2004,Skopje, Macedonia
- Channel Zero, Netherlands Media Art Institute Montevideo, August 2004 , Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- Casa Tranzit , November 2004, Cluj, Romania
- REX Cultural Center, December 2004, Belgrade, Serbia
- Best project award for 2005, European Media Art Festival, Απρίλιος 2005, Osnabrueck, Germany
- Going Public 05 - Communities and Territories, May 2005, Larissa, Greece
- Synch Festival, july 2005, Layrio, Athens



Skopje: City Museum



Synch 05: Layrio



Rex Cultural Centre: Belgrade

PERSONAL CINEMA

<http://www.personalcinema.org/>

About Personal Cinema

Personal Cinema calls for the emergence of both representation and distribution systems that are responsive to the local, the individual, and even the unprofitable. It is concerned with the presentation of multimedia works such as films, videos, documentaries, video games, CD-ROMs, software, etc., within the framework of independent production and practices that are different from those that are applied by the film industry and the commercial media in general.

Personal Cinema organizes projects and events that engage the critical mind of the public, suggesting alternatives to the new global homogeneity. It focuses attention on problems that concern the local territories and tries to explore the different cultural characteristics that constitute the social identity of the individual. Moreover, it works to develop public contexts for minority groups to express and represent themselves.

Personal Cinema expands in both physical and virtual space using new methods for distribution of personal media works and strategies of public address, because technological innovations have established new rules for engagement with a public that has become accustomed to increasingly frenetic and effortless media. Personal Cinema anticipates cooperation with other social and artistic groups which share the same concerns, and which are likewise dedicated to opening a visible space for debate on social, cultural and political issues.

Basic group members

Gulsen Bal

Panos Vittorakis

Andy Deck

Daphne Dragona

Nikolas Kozakis

Ilias Marmaras

Maya Bontzou

Dimitris Dokatzis

Panos Papadopoulos

Yannis Skoulidas

Alexandros Spyropoulos

Stewart Ziff

The Making of Balkan Wars: The game

Curating: Personal Cinema

Coordinating: Ilias Marmaras, Nina Vagic

Web site: Maya Bontzou

Communication: Daphne Dragona

DVD production: Panos Vittorakis

Participating Artists

Robert Alias Dragot - Albania

Genti Shkurti – Albania

Beatrijs Albers – Belgium

AnicetoExposito-Lopez -Spain/ Belgium

Angel Vergara – Spain / Belgium

Francis Schmetz – Belgium

Jacques Lizene – Belgium

Marie Andre /Belgium

Eugene Savitzkaya – Belgium

Reggy Timmermans – Belgium

Koen Wastijn – Belgium

Ria Pacquee – Belgium

Albena Mihaylova – Bulgaria

Krassimir Terziev – Bulgaria

Mathias Wagner K – Germany

Kostas Beveratos – Greece

Dimitris Tsardakas – Greece

Babis Kandilaptis – Greece / Belgium

Nicolas Kozakis – Greece / Belgium

Maya Bontzou – Greece

Dimitris Dokatzis – Greece

Ilias Marmaras – Greece
DimitrisTzamouranis - Greece/Germany
Maurice Ganis – Greece
Angelo Skourtis – Greece
Panos Vittorakis-Greece
Vassilis Kokkas – Greece / Germany
Alexandros Spyropoulos – Greece
Antonio Riello – Italy / Holland
Chiara Passa – Italy
OPA & HA-Macedonia
Irene Paskali – Macedonia
Yane Calovski-Macedonia
Natasha Dimitrievska – Macedonia
Hristina Ivanoska – Macedonia
Floer Tudor – Romania
D-Media-Romania

Mona Vatamanu – Romania
Per Pegelow – Russia
Vuk Cosic – Serbia / Slovenia
Andrej Tisma – Serbia
Hammer creative – Serbia
Milena Zevu – Serbia / Hungary
Selda Asal – Turkey
Gulsen Bal – Turkey
Cem Gencer – Turkey
Genco Gulan – Turkey
Ruth Catlow – UK
Andy Deck – USA
Doron Golan – USA
Morgan Showalter – USA
Stewart Ziff – UK / USA

The Balkan mall video game was created by

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

Texts

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

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