

Paragraph Text:

"...It was a fresh summer night, sky deprived of stars, and hardly any signs of life. After hours of waiting, well passed midnight, they finally allowed us to enter. I couldn't see or hear much, except movements of those in front of me, but judging by intense scent of mildew and worm-like smell of earth, I realized my mile long underground adventure had begun. There was no looking back, only the brave steps ahead into my new, and hopefully, safe and fruitful future..."
[excerpt from war diary, July 1995]

We have all experienced the moments when we could not remember certain stories, details of special events, simple facts of everyday life... and at some point, we have all heard it at least once: "You have bad memory!" Personally, I do not believe there is such thing as "bad memory." As human beings, we have the special power and capability to selectively go through the storage of our memories and experiences and channel them any way we want - whether to put aside and bury certain memories and never [re]live them again, or to celebrate and highlight other events, [re]experiencing them over and over again. I believe **memory** is a tool we use to [re]create and remember our past and proceed into the future.

This project began...about, 29 years ago. It is fair to say, I was not fully aware of the intensity of this process for the first 15+ years, and in an odd way, the most painful and devastating years brought focus and passion for the rest of my life. The journey you are about to engage in is a collection of my personal diaries during the war in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, [re]presented in an experimental way that would tell one individual story and simultaneously educate, influence, move, and have an affect on much wider audience to reflect on their lives and the world around them.

Just like many teens around the world, I too kept a journal. It began with innocent and playful thoughts of a twelve year-old girl, living in Sarajevo, being concerned about the latest fashion, not the politics, listening to the sounds of The Doors and Janis Joplin, not the explosions and gunfire...enjoying life and not living in fear of being killed. On my fifteenth birthday, March 1st 1992, those carefree and happy moments were soon replaced with brutal facts and horrifying circumstances of life under siege - Sarajevo and its citizens had been surrounded by Serbs who took over all the roads leading in and out of the city. The United Nations declared the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and

Digital Storytelling: "M e m o r y..... SARAJEVO, my personal story"

Selma Ćatović-Hughes
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville AR
USA
Email: selma977@yahoo.com

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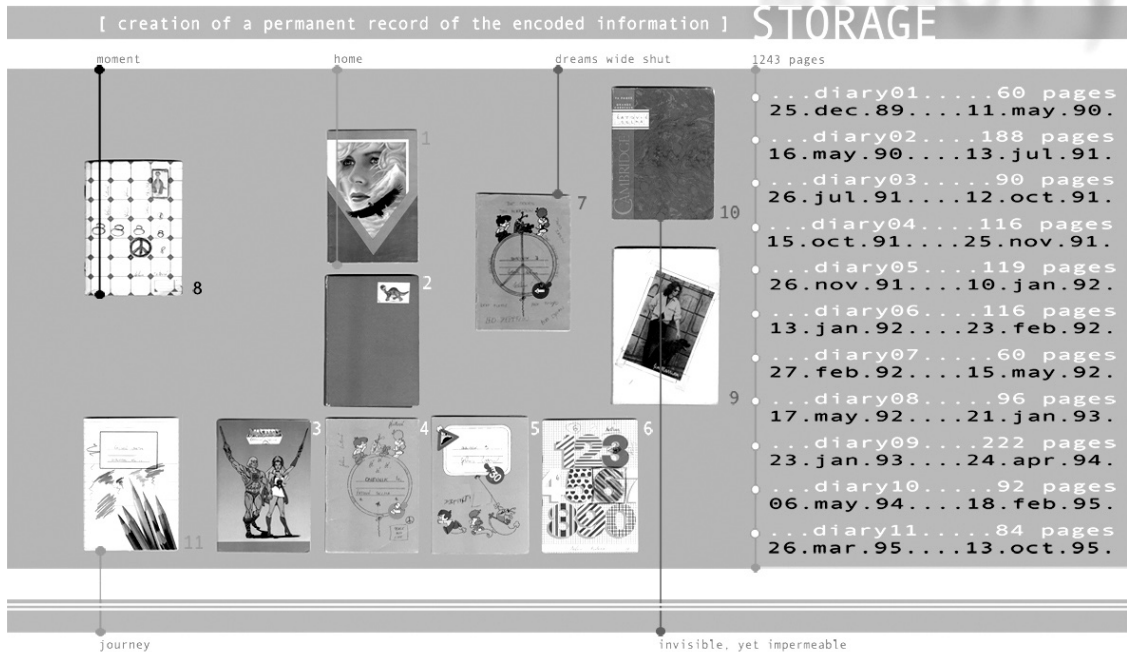


Figura-01

instantaneously, the Serbs disagreed with the United Nations [and the world] and declared the war on the Bosnian people.

"...There's a lot going on here in Sarajevo. Yesterday was a really wonderful day - my birthday. I went out with [friend] Jasna. She gave me a book about The Doors - very cool! ...Sometime in the middle of the night, the phone rang. Actually, the phone rang several times, but none of us got up to answer it...an hour or so later, the phone rang again around 5:30 am and [sister] Sabrina rushed to answer it. It was [uncle] Ibro. He wanted to talk to Mom...I thought somebody was in the hospital or even dead. Mom was talking to him, actually, she was only saying: "...Really?... ...Seriously? ...And what else?...Where?...You're kidding?..." We all got up and were waiting for her to finish, so she could tell us what's going on. She put the phone down and said: "Sarajevo has been surrounded during the night. The Serbs put the barricades in few places; they killed three people and wounded several." We turned the TV on to see the live broadcasting from few places around the city...I started joking and the whole thing was really funny to me. It would be too much for me to tell you all this in details, so I'll speed up. The traffic stopped, there was no school, and I called Jasna but she already knew about it..."
[excerpt from war diary, March 1992]

The barricades were removed in the next few

days, and the following month seemed as normal and peaceful to me as before - I was back in school, finishing up my freshman year in high school. However, my parents and other adults appeared to be preoccupied with the political shows, the evening news and the announcements for possible food, water and electricity shortages. It didn't make any sense to me, so I didn't worry or write about those issues in my journal...until the defining moment. On April 5th, I was a part of the Peace Walk, a walk that changed so many lives forever.

"...I haven't written to you in three days. Yesterday and today has been almost like a real war in Sarajevo. There was a peace walk yesterday. Well, it was supposed to be like that—peaceful—but unfortunately it wasn't. The people started walking across the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge, and as we got closer, they started shooting. They were shooting from Vraca, the Police Academy, and the ones shooting were Serbs with snipers...Those idiots were shooting down at the unarmed people...some got shot, some wounded. I don't understand how someone could do this...those are not human beings..." [excerpt from war diary, April 1992]

Starting April 6th 1992, the war was officially "on" in Sarajevo and was spreading fast in other regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The school year ended early, the traffic was rerouted through safer and smaller streets, the shops and

grocery stores were closed or operating on the abbreviated schedule. The main boulevards and avenues were empty, and major intersections became like giant fields of darts, where the Serb sniper bullets were precisely aiming at the target - anything that moved. The host for the 1984 Winter Olympic Games was slowly but consistently suffocating its own citizens within the carefully constructed boundary around the city.

"...I was reading my old journals yesterday and I got depressed. It used to be so good - we were free. Now we live in one giant prison. Yep, Sarajevo is one huge prison. Everything is limited and predetermined: food, movement, electricity, water, phone, gatherings. Everything. After all, our life is predetermined and limited. Either you're gonna live or you're gonna get killed. There is no third. This is some inconceivable madness. Is it ever going to end? When? And when it does, what is going to happen with all of us and our destinies? I think nobody knows, not even God, if he even exists. My God exists, but even he is quiet and not saying a word..."
[excerpt from war diary, March 1993]

Three years later, I was weeks away from graduating high school, and instead of getting excited, I wondered and worried about my future. "Yesterday was awesome -- we had both electricity and water for eight straight hours... hooray!! You could see the lights miles away. I swear, the entire city was awake, making pies and bread, washing clothes, watching movies..." Was I going to spend the next two, five, or ten years of my life anticipating whether or not the electricity and water would kick in? Would I wake up the next day to see all my family and friends alive? Would I ever have a chance to fulfill my dreams? College? Career?

Well, the good thing about "living in the dark" [without TV distractions and very limited amount of candles per night] is the infinite time you have to think, daydream, and always hope for better days. During my final year in high school, I found out about the World University Service, a student organization helping young people to further their education in the United States. I applied for a scholarship, and in three rapid weeks got a fax of acceptance and the note to leave Sarajevo as soon as possible. But how?!?! At that time, the only way out of the city was through the tunnel, a mile long, barely four feet wide and five feet tall passageway underneath the airport, strictly for military use. My mom called everyone she knew, asking if there was anybody who could get me out. Fortunately, a friend-of-a-friend was in charge of organizing rare civilian "trips" through

the tunnel and the next one was planned in less than two days. Wow!!

"I got in the van, the door shut and we started driving away. They say, "never look back", but I had to - my mom looked frightened, tears rolling down her face, shaking...it was one the saddest moments of my life, and I couldn't even cry. This was just the beginning of my adventurous journey, and I had no idea what to expect next."
[excerpt from war diary, July 1995]

Conflicts escalate into wars, wars go on for years, sometimes decades, and when it is all over, the immediate post-war reconstruction takes over. Schools, hospitals and homes are repaired, usually to their original condition, masking any signs or traces of the unfortunate events, sadness and struggle. Is it possible to re-condition something [building, space, soul] to be the same, feel the same, when it had been wounded, destroyed, and deeply scarred on the inside? How can a newly reconstructed architecture embody the facts and memories of the past, using the scars as its primary structure and necessary economic rehabilitation as a sheer veil that can be wiped out or replaced tomorrow??? Just as the extraordinary presence of Roman ruins is precisely in the traces embedded in the tectonics of space - where fragments of walls, fallen columns and the minimal reminisce of structure, combined with written and graphic narratives allow us to imagine and feel the spaces as they had once existed - so too may be the remaking of Sarajevo: juxtaposed with the existing urban condition, one may experience two timelines simultaneously.

For four years, Sarajevo was divided into two parts - one occupied by the oppressor, and the other by the captive. Although there was never a permanent "Berlin-wall-like" divider, the natural contours of the river and invisible screens of the snipers served as impermeable walls. The implied boundary [of danger] seemed to be more powerful than the massiveness of the concrete barricades. However, now when the gunfire has ceased, the once uninhabitable threshold between the two sides is just another space along the river.

Instead of placing banal memorials and gold plaques engraved with the bare facts, how can we make a tribute and a remembrance to a series of events—a time period that changed the fabric of the city—in a more three-dimensional experience? What are the overlapping characteristics of the city's enclosure as the war



progressed? What are the tectonic and spatial qualities of the environment and surfaces? What is the sound of sadness, fear, life under siege? What is the resonance of the same?

"...The past 2-3 days have been rough. The grenades have been falling all around my house, within 100 meters. Last night, around 2am, I was woken up by the horrifying detonation; and then 4 more followed. It was really awful. I'm laying in bed, listening for sounds like an animal in the jungle: I hear the initial firing, then I hear it flying over my house, and after 2-3 seconds of silence, I see the bright light and finally the explosion..." [excerpt from war diary, January 1994]

How can we integrate digital phenomenon in the process of the post-war retrieval of information to [re]trace and [re]digest the past while creating necessary advanced improvements for the new contemporary society?

As an outcome of living, surviving and enduring the war circumstances for almost four years, the people in Sarajevo and Bosnia, including myself, have established a secondary timeline [in addition to more common historical references to B.C. and A.D.], a new datum as a reference to the War Era. Even today in an everyday casual conversation, almost 11 years after the peace agreement was signed and the war ended, you can hear stories being related to "Before, During and/or After the War". What I find the most compelling about this concept is that it is not just a simple two-dimensional system which measures time from a reference day. In fact, it has spatial quality that creates multiple readings not only from a single reference day [beginning of the war], but also from a reference space, sound, visibility, proximity and flow of movement. Contrary to the city of Rome, where the history

has been methodically surveyed and recorded, revealing the layers and artifacts of different time periods to exist both on their own and when overlapped with the new layer, the city of Sarajevo does not have an integrated and comprehensive analysis of the War Era and its remnants. The post-war reconstruction has picked up its speed in the recent years, which is a positive sign for change, economic growth and development. The big question is - how much time does it have to elapse to allow for the new generation to be engrossed by the inclusive documentation of their most recent past?

This project illustrates the process of [re]tracing steps and [re]constructing memories into the experiential episodes. Consisting of the artifacts and text from my war journals, images, archived movie and audio clips, and digital multimedia, the inactive written text becomes animated, telling the story in a specific and unique way. One of my goals for this project is to explore the impact that social conditions have on architecture, art, culture, and ultimately, people. **Digital Storytelling** is a tool that helps define and challenge that line between the old and the new, stillness and noise, light and dark, confined boundary and vast field of freedom. Merging the current conditions with the facts from the past, Digital Storytelling contains pieces of personal memories and characters, local and international references, reality and idealism, all of which are plotted along the defined timeline to create representations of space as a continuum where events occur in an irreversible order.

My focus and interest in the rehabilitation process and history of Bosnia is to develop a collection of research, installations, short films, and various other studies that will enhance one's perspective and understanding of my narrative.

And just when it seems that 10, 20 or 30 years after the war is enough to move on, start a new phase in your journal, pick up the latest Vogue and make that fashion statement, you suddenly realize it is not as easy as it may seem. The wounds can heal, but scars are forever...and the memory of how we got that scar is eternal.



Figura-02

Keywords:

Sarajevo War [Re]Trace Memory Storytelling