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MASTER OF DRAMATIC ART (by Coursework)

RESEARCH REPORT

DRAA504

CONFLICTING CROFT: A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY BASED ON THE EVOLUTION OF LARA CROFT

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ABSTRACT

This report looks at the negative impact that the representation of female game characters such as Lara Croft has on female gamers. The visual development of Lara Croft is analysed in a systematic manner by comparing the evolution of her appearance from Tomb Raider 1 through to Tomb Raider 6. From this it is concluded that Lara Croft's depiction has not become more appealing to female gamers. Using semiotic theory, this report goes on to explore the possible meanings or messages that Lara Croft's image produces and presents to society. The effect of these messages on women and children is discussed, together with ways to prevent them from recurring in future games. This is followed by a case study of the female character, Chase Corrado, who features in the game Chase: Hollywood Stunt Driver. The character is analysed in terms of the framework and methodology used to analyse Tomb Raider. It is concluded that Chase Corrado is one of many female game characters who follow the example of Lara Croft in being designed for the male market.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of Master of Dramatic Art (DRAA504) by Coursework at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted previously for any other degree or examination.

MICHELLE DE KLERK _____

Signed on this_____day of

_____2008.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A. Introduction to the Study

Market research indicates that the game industry yields revenues of up to $10 billion per annum – clearly illustrating the extent and economic power of popular interest in the industry (Cassel & Jenkins 11). As Cassel & Jenkins state, this is big business (7).

Male consumers account for around 75 to 85 percent of the sales and revenues produced by the game industry (Cassel & Jenkins 11). The extensive success of video games amongst young boys has resulted in almost total market penetration of that sector. Thus if companies like Nintendo and Sony[1] hope to avoid stagnation and benefit from continued economic growth, ways of expanding the market and reaching new consumer groups will have to be found (Cassel & Jenkins 14). One such way is to enlarge the female gamer market (Cassel & Jenkins 14).

A "girls' games movement" has emerged from an alliance between feminist activists (who want to modify the "gendering" of digital technology) and industry leaders who wish to generate a girls' market for their games (Cassel & Jenkins 4). This alliance is the source of the limited number of academic studies available on women and games. The whole question of issues affecting the design of computer/video games for women remains a new and relatively unexplored field in academic

[1] Examples of consoles are the Nintendo 64 (1996), Super Nintendo Entertainment (SNES) Model 2 (1997), Sega Genesis 3 (1998), Sega Dreamcast (1999), Sony PlayStation PS1 (2000), Sony PlayStation 2 (SCPH-5000x) (2000), etc. (A Brief History 1)

studies.

The available studies suggest that different methods of attracting female gamers have been tried. One of these is the use of a female as the main character in the game, like the character Lara Croft from the game Tomb Raider. It is believed that the sexy female heroine Lara Croft is a feature of the Tomb Raider games that has contributed to its huge success and so far ten-year existence. So strong is this belief that other game companies are following the example of Tomb Raider by using similar sexy female protagonists in the hope of achieving the same success. The locally-produced female game character Chase Corrado, from the first South African-produced console game, Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver, is an example of character design influenced in this way. Chase is the first female game avatar to be produced in South Africa and thus represents to the rest of the world what can be expected from South African character design. One might hope that game developers in South Africa would differentiate their games from the rest of the international market with fresh ideas and new concepts. The character of Chase (if approached with informed design choices through research surrounding game characters and debates on the subject) possibly provided an opportunity for the designers to attract more female gamers. This thesis constitutes the first academic writing on the character Chase and how (through her sexualized design) she appears to follow in Lara Crofts footsteps.

Unfortunately, while a female character in a game attracts female game players, an over-sexualized depiction of the character does not (Ray

181). Furthermore, sexualized images of characters and their implications are not confined within the game world but spread through society via other media, extending negative impressions and unrealistic expectations of women and their appearance. It is for this reason that the representation of Lara Croft has stimulated lively debate within the gaming culture and more recently within academic studies.

Motivating this study is the desire to create further awareness of the effects of sexualized characters on the uptake of games by women players. The study will therefore be contributing to the small pool of current research on the topic of attracting female gamers to play games. Because Lara Croft is a universally recognized character she serves as a convenient example of how female characters like her are received by the sought-after female market. It is hoped that an investigation of this might help provide appropriate direction for designers concerning what character design aspects could attract more female gamers.

By identifying aspects of character design that are distasteful and sometimes offensive to female gamers, this study aims to show that featuring female characters like Lara Croft with sexualized attributes not only negatively affects growth in the games market but also the image of women in society. This study will look at whether attention to such issues has managed to bring about any changes in Lara Croft's design over her period of existence that could have made the game more attractive to female gamers. After all, it is a problem that Lara Croft's sexuality is linked to her success and is inspiring game designers to

sexualize future character designs.

A note on terminology:

In this study the terms 'computer game' and 'console/video game' will be used more or less interchangeably. In actual fact, the term 'computer game' refers to games played on a home computer, whilst the term 'video game' refers to games that are played in arcades or on console game systems such as Sega or Nintendo (Cassel & Jenkins 37).

A note on the biographical information provided:

This paper provides biographical data on quoted authorities, because the field of game criticism is not yet accepted as an academic discipline and there is a dearth of published material. In fact it is rare to find a theoretical book that contains the word "games" in the title (Juul 1).[2] As Kurt Squire[3] states, very few researchers have studied the field (2) and it is largely unexamined (Squire 3). It therefore makes sense to provide information of a biographical nature on sources quoted in order to support their attributed status as authorities in the field.

B. Introduction to Lara Croft

Lara Croft was the brainchild of designer Toby Gard, who brought her to life by sketching the 'perfect woman' for the computer game Tomb Raider, produced by the Core Design[4] game development studio. Varma's Lara Croft: Lethal and Loaded DVD states that Tomb Raider was released

[2] Jesper Juul is a PhD student in computer games at the IT University of Copenhagen.
[3] Kurt Squire is a PhD candidate in Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University and is currently working as a research manager at MIT.
[4] Eidos Interactive is Core's British parent-publishing corporation (Poole 2).

in 1996 and has become one of the most successful games of all time. According to Kurt Lancaster, over twenty-one million copies of the game have been sold (Lancaster 87).

Several factors are said to have contributed to the success of the game. These include technical innovations such as the character movement, which was considered revolutionary at the time that the game first appeared (Poole 25). Jeremy Heath Smith (managing director of Core Design) claims that by featuring a navigable three-dimensional game space, Tomb Raider was the first fully interactive 3D game that people had seen (Varma). In her essay "Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?," Hellen W. Kennedy points out that, with its simple but atmospheric soundtrack and degree of (previously unachievable) cinematic realism, the game deployed the latest in technical advances in game design (Kennedy 1).[5] Other innovations in the design and construction of the game, such as the gameplay, immersion, the engaging gamespace and narrative, as well as the controversial and opportunistic use of a curvaceous female lead (Kennedy 1, 2) also added to Tomb Raider's success.

Starting her career as the female protagonist within a computer game, Lara Croft has since achieved success beyond any expectations, appearing in many different contexts and in several different media. In the documentary film Lara Croft Lethal and Loaded it is argued that Lara is no longer just a character in a game, but is now a celebrity in her own

[5] The designers are constantly in pursuit of greater realism and the game's graphics keep improving.

right. Lara has starred in TV commercials, movies, books and magazines, to mention but a few of her achievements (Lancaster 87).[6] Models have been hired to represent her in real life, numerous items of merchandise have been based on her,[7] and a significant number of Internet websites have been dedicated to her (Lancaster 78, 87). It is no wonder then that Lara Croft has been referred to as a "cultural phenomenon" (Lancaster 88).

Clearly, Lara Croft has become an icon in the history of games and game development, through not only her achievements as a game character but also as a prospective role model for female gamers. To explore the notion of Lara Croft as a female gaming icon we must first digress briefly to examine the role of women in gaming (both as gamers and protagonists) from an historical perspective.

[6] Douglas Coupland's "Lara's Book" and the German Lara Croft Magazine (published by Eidos Interactive Germany) are dedicated to her, 2 motion pictures about her have been created (with the lead character played by the actress Angelina Jolie in the movies Tomb Raider and Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life). She also appeared on the cover of The Face magazine in June 1997 (Poole 3).

[7] The products range from the conventional T-Shirt to mousepads, calendars, watches, clocks, statues, a deck of cards, stickers, posters, wallets, bathing robes, etc.

Chapter 2: A brief look at how games and characters within games favour the male gender

As mentioned previously, there appears to be a paucity of female gamers within the gaming market. There are a number of reasons for this, which become evident when one looks at how frequently games have been gendered in favour of males.

It appears that all the customary associations with games are masculine, from the games console to frequency of play. Surveys done in 2003 indicate that the possession of a games console, game preferences and frequent play are all aspects associated with the male gender (Kerr 271). This set of associations might have caused females to avoid games. In their book In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences, Carl Bazalgette & David Buckingham state that when video games first started to emerge, research at the time suggested that they were a hobby practised primarily by males as opposed to females (188).[8]

Computers are usually rated as more masculine than feminine by both boys and girls (Canada & Brusca 1). The use of a computer is generally considered to be a masculine activity rather than a feminine one (Cassel & Jenkins 12). It would seem self-evident that the way in which computers are perceived by women would influence their interest in

[8] Cary Bazalgette is the Principal Education officer at the British Film Institute and has published widely on media education. David Buckingham is a lecturer in media education at the University of London Institute of Education and has led several research studies on children and the media.

games. But contradicting the notion that women might be avoiding computers and therefore computer games, the percentage of gamers who were female was estimated in 2006 to be 43 percent (Wells 1). This indicates that the perception regarding computers being related to the male gender could be changing. Nevertheless, it is significant that Tomb Raider comes in the PC format, which makes these historical arguments relevant: the game's format could have contributed to the lack of interest in it among females.

Other than the format of the game, further barriers to female participation in games are that the topics of the games are mainly male-oriented and may consequently not be as appealing to potential female users as they would be to male users (Canada & Brusca 8). It makes sense that more games have been targeted at boys, given that more boys play computer games than girls (Cassel & Jenkins 14). Video games have become common in children's playrooms but tend to be focussed on what boys find interesting such as sports, adventure and combat (Cassel & Jenkins 90). So-called 'pink software' has only recently established a playground for girls by promoting games such as "Barbie Fashion Designer," which was released in 1996 and which is said to have been the first in entertainment software to garner a mass market of girls (Cassel & Jenkins 90, 46).

Another aspect of games that has added to the market being perceived as predominantly male is the gender of the protagonists in early games,

which was mostly male. Schleiner[9] writes of a time when the avatars were almost always constructed as male (1). Children Now, a child rights campaign, found through a study conducted in December 2001 that only 16 percent of all game characters were female (Hill 2).[10] Before Tomb Raider there was a general absence of female roles in games, not to mention female leads, which indicates the change that Lara embodied by being a female lead within a game. Toby Gard states that having a female lead in a game was unheard of at the time that Tomb Raider was first released. In his article "Lara's Story," Steven Poole claims that the marketing gurus didn't like the idea of a female avatar[11] in the game because they believed that it would detract from sales (2). The success of Lara Croft and the research surrounding female characters in games indicates just how wrong this perception was. What is significant is that Lara became known as the first female protagonist and yet a large percentage of the game sales were to men. One would tend to assume that a game with an empowered female character would attract more female players (Cassel & Jenkins 30).

Recent research indicates that girls want to identify with characters or play as the main character ("Girls and Video Games" 1), and Tomb Raider provided an opportunity for them to do so. Identification occurs when players experience a feeling of inhabiting a character's personality or

[9] Anne-Marie Schleiner has curated online exhibits of game mods [i.e. modifications] and add-ons, including the exhibits "Cracking the Maze: Game Patches and Plug-ins as 'Hacker Art'," "Mutation.fem" and "Snow Blossom House" (Schleiner 1).
[10] Children Now is a national organisation that wants to ensure that children are the top public policy priority. They focus on the following issues: health, education, media and investing in children (Overview 1).
[11] An avatar is defined as the character (or characters) that the player controls in the game world (Glossary 1).

imagine themselves to be that character. This identification and the experience thereof is one of the features that make games so enjoyable. Cassel and Jenkins write of the game user being invited to imagine himself as the hero (Cassell & Jenkins 311). The fact that there is no narrator (Cassel & Jenkins 311) makes the player responsible for the actions of the character. Eventually the character (who can be referred to as the middleman) becomes insignificant and is replaced by the player himself as he is absorbed into the game world.

In her book Lara Croft Cyber Heroine, Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky quotes the philosopher Sybille Krämer, whose idea of the concept of virtual reality adumbrates an explanation of this experience of identification. Krämer proposes imagining a mirror that one can enter so as to start interacting with things in another world (Deuber-Mankowsky 32). One's imagination makes it possible for one to enter a different world and leave one's own behind. Deuber-Mankowsky writes that one does not require a data suit or a head-mounted display (as is needed for a virtual reality experience) to immerse oneself in the Tomb Raider game's interactive movie experience (37). However, this is not the case when it comes to female game players.

For it is not only a game's having a female protagonist that has implications for the potential female market, but also the way that the female character is represented. Lara Croft, the first female avatar in a

game, set an example and created expectations of how subsequent females would look.

Up until the 1980s, female characters in computer games (if included at all[12]) were, for the most part, "damsels in distress" (Ray 21), and generally represented in the following stereotypical ways:

A. The female as an object to be retrieved or rescued (Ray 29).

The occasional representations of female characters were limited to the princess offered up as a reward in games like Prince of Persia and Double Dragon. Women were seen as trophies rather than characters in their own right. Ray claims that this break from the princess cliché to a strong, independent woman has made a significant contribution to the success of Tomb Raider (32). Lara Croft was depicted as a tough, self-reliant, intelligent woman in a leading role within the game (Cassel & Jenkins 30). She therefore embodied an important change, and it is no wonder that she has become an icon for the role of women in gaming (Cassel & Jenkins 30).

Lara's violent behaviour is a sure indication that there is a tough side to her personality, and it is this strength that appeals to women. Lara is seen by some as a role model who encourages girls to stand up for themselves (Lancaster 95).[13]

[12] Research in 1992 showed that 92% of games featured no women (Girls and video games 2).

[13] Kurt Lancaster was formerly a member of the adjunct faculty in Comparative Media Studies at MIT and in the Department of Drama at New York University's Tisch School of Art.

Female players view Lara as an attractive role model (Cassel & Jenkins 30). In The Medium of the Video Game, Mark J.P. Wolf claims that Lara is regarded by female players as a powerful warrior icon who empowers them to express their sensuality and strength (Wolf 179). But Miranda Sawyer argues that because the player controls Lara, she is really not threatening at all (Sawyer 70). In any case, strong female characters are not necessarily a desirable alternative (to helpless female characters for instance), because they engage in violent, aggressive behaviour associated with male characters ("Gender Stereotyping" 2). Interestingly, the first Tomb Raider game was practically identical to its predecessor, Rick Dangerous, in its gameplay – so much so that Lara Croft Magazine wrote that the only differences were the graphics and the sex of the main character (Deuber-Mankowsky 14). Lara is referred to by Deuber-Mankowsky as "this three-dimensional female Indiana Jones" (14), suggesting that Lara is ultimately only a female shape with male characteristics, or a male disguised as a female. (Deuber-Mankowsky points out that changing the sex of the game figure served effectively to "camouflage" the similarities between Indiana Jones and Tomb Raider.)

Is it perhaps because of her seemingly male attitude that the feminine attributes of Lara's body (her sexual attributes) had to be severely exaggerated? There is no doubt that Lara Croft's femininity is reduced in a traditional manner to her oversized female attributes (Deuber-Mankowsky 47). And the implication is disturbing: that, in order to be

taken seriously as an action hero, she has to act like a male and have a body that is exaggerated to be more appealing to men.

The ambivalence of Lara Croft's identity is complex. According to Deuber-Mankowsky, many female players feel that Lara represents them as a woman who is liberated, living life to the full and superior to men (1-2).[14] Yet at the same time, as it is put in a review of Tomb Raider, "Gameplay consists of you leading the heroine…" (Jane 3), which implies that Lara still needs a man to lead her through the various adventures[15] and that she is neither independent nor liberated.

Lara's designer, Toby Gard, believes, that Lara is independent, but points out in an interview that strong independent women are the perfect fantasy girls because the untouchable is always the most desirable to men (Sawyer 67). Thus it is suggested in Varma's Lara Croft Lethal and Loaded that the main reason for Lara's hold on the game player (perhaps the male game player specifically) is that the real Lara Croft will always be just out of reach. In a literal sense, too, Lara is always out of reach during gameplay (Sawyer 69). This would mean that even the aspects of Lara that were introduced to reach more female gamers only make her more of a sexual fantasy to men, who already have the gift of Lara's generous chest size.

[14] Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky is Professor of Media Studies at Ruhr University Bochum in Germany.
[15] Later this thesis will show that game magazines have also been marketed to males, which means that the reviews they contain are aimed at male readers.

It could therefore be concluded that Lara's male-like attributes only serve to render her more desirable to male gameplayers: "Contrary to the hopes that some feminists placed in her, Lara Croft promotes the reduction of women to their female bodies" (Deuber-Mankowsky 58). Thus Steven Heller (amongst others) questions Lara's feminist credentials by saying that her fame may be due more to her large breasts than her kick-ass attitude (150), while Violet Berlin is adamant that Lara should not be promoted as a 'girl power' icon because she is in reality designed for men (Sawyer 70). [16]

Lara's strength makes her stand out as an improvement over previous female game characters, but women do not want to be depicted in games as what has been referred to as "the Lara Croft/big breasted Bond babe variety" (Croft 3).

Helen Kennedy speaks of the challenge of "trying to decide whether [Lara] is a positive role model for young girls or just that perfect combination of eye and thumb candy for the boys" (1). But in the light of the arguments given above, there is no decision to be made, given that even the few aspects of the game that may have been incorporated to appeal to women apparently end up appealing more to men. In this perspective, Lara Croft is just another instance of the depiction of female game characters as sexual objects.

[16] A new technology writer and broadcaster.

B. The female is depicted as a sexual object

The attempt to use Lara Croft to attract female gamers has been hamstrung by her abundant sexuality. It is not coincidental that 177,000 of the websites linked to Lara have to do with pornography of some sort (Deuber-Mankowsky vii), nor that Playboy recognised the money-making potential of featuring Lara in the magazine (Deuber-Mankowsky 4). Steven Heller specifically refers to Lara Croft as emphasizing the game industry's interest in creating space for empowered female representation whilst also catering for gamers "hungry for testosterone driven play" (148). Lara Croft is just one example of the way in which female characters in games are portrayed sexually to attract male players. A 1998 study performed at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida, discovered that in a sample of 33 popular game titles, all manufactured by game leaders Sega and Nintendo, 28 portrayed women as sex objects (Veen 2).

Ray mentions that when a female avatar is hyper-sexualised, it is most likely that a female player won't even consider the game (181). According to Amy Veen, who writes for Wired News, Lara Croft is a hyper-sexualised female caricature because of her breast size and small waist (1). Physical features believed to be sexually appealing, such as legs, eyes and breasts, are overstated and "brought together into a completely artificial yet extremely seductive image" (Hamilton 3). Large breasts on a game character, referred to by most theorists as 'eye candy,' may be pleasing to male players but appear to act as a barrier for female players (181). In addition, it is interesting that many male players

are indeed willing to play as Lara Croft, considering that she is a female protagonist. By playing Tomb Raider, men thereby transfer their male personality onto the female character. The man is in fact giving up his identity to become Lara in the game. It is debatable as to whether this transference of male characteristics onto a female character in some way empowers or diminishes the player. Cassel & Jenkins are of the opinion that Lara Croft does not exist to empower women but to give men, through play, the opportunity to experiment with the experience of disempowerment (31). Lara Croft's overstated feminine characteristics have also been considered as enabling male enthusiasts to overcome their resistance to transgender identification (Cassel & Jenkins 31), while Kennedy feels that male players are provided with the chance to explore alternative versions of themselves through playing as the active female fantasy figure, Lara Croft (7).

Arguments that have attempted to explain male gamers' close trans-gender identification with Lara Croft indicate that male identification with a female figure offers a heightened sense of vulnerability or risk that does not endanger conventional conceptions of masculine potency and courage (Cassel & Jenkins 30-31). But Kennedy argues that it is much more likely that the pleasures of playing as Lara have more to do with mastery and control of a female body within a safe and non-threatening environment (6).

Lara was selected by the gaming masses as the late 20th century's newest pin-up girl (Heller 150), indicating once more her presence as a

male fantasy. This does support Hill's statement that at her first appearance in 1996, Lara Croft was regarded as revolutionary, but that with her exaggerated proportions she was indisputably designed for the male market (2). An editor of a leading German feminist magazine declared that, as a heroine in a visual world populated with so few female action figures, Lara Croft is a gift of such importance that women have no choice but to accept her oversized feminine attributes as a necessary tribute to the male world (Deuber-Mankowsky 1).

According to Jason Hill, Lara was the inspiration for what soon became an army of replicas with even bigger breasts and smaller waists (2). This suggests that instead of setting an example for other designers with a view to expanding the female market, it is more likely that Lara panders to the already dominant male market. It seems that other game developers observed the success of Tomb Raider and presumed that this success was a function of the game's highly sexualised character.

Lara is not only strongly sexualised: she is simply unrealistically shaped. Game characters who are unrealistically shaped drive female players away because these characters convey negative messages to and about women as well as add to women's general insecurities. This is because when they are playing a game, players want to identify with the characters (Cassel & Jenkins 60). Characters who are designed with unrealistic, ultra-thin figures and are as sexualised as Lara Croft, are harder for women to identify with.

Lara has been described as having thin thighs, long legs, "a waist you could encircle with one hand, and knockers like medicine balls" (Cassel & Jenkins 338). Lara's thin yet busty figure is attractive to a male audience (Cassel & Jenkins 338). It is these features that make the character a male fantasy that is hard for women to live up to (Cassel & Jenkins 338). This once again undermines the idea that Lara can be a positive role model. She is perceived by some as the ultimate supermodel and thus the ultimate male fantasy, a woman who never becomes overweight and never ages (Lancaster 89). Some believe that Lara and similar female characters are designed solely as male fantasy figures: Christine Gailey, for instance, maintains that the female characters in today's games are entirely predictable boys' and men's fantasies (88). Cal Jones (Reviews Editor for PC Gaming World) feels that although men find Lara sexy, women complain that her anatomy simply isn't achievable (Cassel & Jenkins 338).

Just how unrealistic is Lara's figure? In her article "Lara Croft: The Ultimate Byte Girl," Miranda Sawyer says she believes that if a real woman was shaped the way Lara Croft is, she would fall over (70). Lara's proportions, just like Barbie's (if translated into human proportions, Barbie would have measurements of 38-18-34), set an unrealistic standard of beauty (Basic 1). This causes women to feel that the characters do not represent them and they therefore lose interest in the games (Cassel & Jenkins 61).

Lara and other game characters who are shaped like her affect women in two distinct ways that are disempowering:

1. They affect women's self-image

In her book Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body, Susan R. Bordo[17] simply states being beautiful in this day and age means having a slender figure (32). Portrayals of women in the media reinforce this, with the result that women come to feel insecure about their weight and body image. Felicity Edholm point out that the women who appear in these images throughout the media are presented as objects of desire, for men as well as for other women (Edholm 156). Edholm state that women feel the need to identify, imitate and meet the standards set by the women in the images (156). Thus there is an assumption on the part of teenaged American girls that they have to be like Lara Croft to be considered attractive, popular and desirable (Lancaster 88).

One reason for Lara's impossible appearance is that she was not designed around one real woman; rather she was compiled using features from numerous women (Deuber-Mankowsky 59). Female features considered by Lara's male designer, Toby Gard, to be "perfect" were put together to create an ideal woman.

[17] Susan Bordo is a Professor of Philosophy and Singletary Chair of Humanities at the University of Kentucky (amazon.com)

But this consideration is complicated by the fact that Lara has been represented by real-life models, who are regarded as extraordinarily beautiful by society (the meaning of the label 'model'). The fact that real women have represented Lara makes her standard of beauty seem more attainable and consequently puts more pressure on women who have a desire to look like her. Some feel that to supply the imaginary Lara Croft with a real-world referent (i.e. a human 'model') reinforces the idea of the ideal woman as an achievable, fulfillable reality (Deuber-Mankowsky 59).

Apparently Lara's managers at Eidos did what they could to avoid the models from claiming to be an actual or ideal embodiment of Lara, thus preventing them from acquiring dream-woman status (Deuber-Mankowsky 58). "Instead of being equated with any of them, Lara was to stand over all of them" (Deuber-Mankowsky 58). This is interesting when one is reminded of what models have to go through in order to achieve their (compared to Lara) 'somewhat perfect' bodies – including hours of gym work and endless weight watching. And yet now, because of Lara, there is an even higher standard of beauty to be met. Lara and those like her are obviously not realistic role models for women who work eight or more hours a day or have children to raise; yet women nevertheless feel pressurized to look like them (Cassel & Jenkins 338).

Van Zoonen points out that the pressures women feel to be slender and a pleasure to look at has shaped a generation of American girls and women

prone to eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia nervosa (87). What is the motivation behind this determination to starve oneself to look a certain way? In his book Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Anthony Giddens[18] writes that routine control of the body is unfortunately viewed as integral to being socially accepted (157). Thus these ideal representations of women negatively affect not only the way women see themselves but also how they are seen and judged by society at large.

2. They affect women's image in society

The majority of video games are designed by males for males ("Gender Stereotyping" 1). The result, according to Children Now, is that almost fifty percent of the most popular console video games contain negative messages about females ("Gender Stereotyping" 1). In a study conducted in 2000, Children Now examined 27 popular games and found that many of the games promoted unrealistic body images and stereotypical female characteristics such as provocative sexuality (Gender Stereotyping 1). This can be quite disconcerting when one realises that children, in the process of defining gender, not only build their expectations on what they discover through their interactions with others, but also associate gender identity with gender symbols like Barbie dolls (or Lara Croft) (Dietz 427). Thus, Barbie and gender symbols like her may become accepted by girls and boys as the feminine standard (Dietz 427). Deuber-Mankowsky points out that children live and grow up in the game world, which

[18] Anthony Giddens is Director of the London School of Economics and political Science (amazon.com)

represents an important part of society but actually remains closed and unknown to most adults and parents (427). Even if the child acknowledges the concept that video games are not real he or she may still not challenge the ideas and characterizations presented in them (Dietz 439).

Video games might not be real, but what about their effects? Deuber-Mankowsky links the Tomb Raider games with virtual realities involving the exploration of imaginable worlds via the senses (33). When these worlds are explored they are experienced as being real (Deuber-Mankowsky 34). Lara, as a virtual figure, contrives to emerge from the imaginary space of the game image and represent the body of a real woman (Deuber-Mankowsky 57). Deuber-Mankowsky states that Lara appears more beautiful, faster, more perfect and promises to satisfy both men's and women's fantasies of power because in her the ideal of the virtual woman has effectively been realized (75). And although this feature is not discussed further in this study, it is also apparent that Lara Croft is more realistically depicted with each new game, thereby becoming a more realistic representation of what women should look like (see Figures 7 - 18).

The child may be more likely to accept the traditional views of women found in these video games (Dietz 439). Eugene Provenzo, in his book Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo, says that these stereotypes do not only conduce to the formation of negative ideas about women on the part

of the children, but also over time affect the manner in which women are perceived more generally within society (100). Kathryn Wright (consulting psychologist for WomenGamers.com) puts it unambiguously: "the steady diet of media images portraying women as sexual objects … affects how we see women and their role in society" (Veen 1).

Funk states that numerous girls choose not to play video games that present negative gender stereotypes and other expectations that are inconsistent with recognized gender schemas (1). The manner in which Lara is depicted makes her a stereotypical character. Lara relates to the stereotype that a girl's worth is determined for the most part by her appearance, the ideal body being thin but busty (Funk 1). As soon as gender stereotypes are present in video games, stereotypical attitudes could be reinforced in any male or female individual who decides to play (Funk 1). Thus players may start to form certain ideas and expectations about women based on the way they are portrayed within the games. Dietz, for instance, found that girls, when exposed to portrayals of sexualized women, start to assume that their responsibilities involve upholding beauty and sexual appeal (426).

Interestingly, the observations made in this chapter can be summarized by looking at the link that Deuber-Mankowsky makes between Lara Croft and the following story. She is discussing Teresa de Lauretis's reading of a short passage from Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities. Lauretis quotes a passage from the founding tale of Zobeide that Calvino recounts in his novel's third chapter, "Cities and Desire." According to the tale, "Zobeide

owes its founding to a wonderful dream, one that bears a striking resemblance to the experience of playing Tomb Raider" (24). The story tells of men of different nationalities having had the exact same dream. In the dream it was night and a woman ran through an undiscovered city. She is described as having long hair and her naked body could only be viewed from behind. All the men dreamed of pursuing her, but despite their efforts each of them lost her.

After the dream the men searched for the city, but never found it, instead finding one another – at which point they decided to build a city like the one in the dream (Deuber-Mankowsky 24). It is significant that Deuber-Mankowsky links this story of a naked woman, a story so obviously about sexuality, to Lara Croft. The woman also has long hair, which, as stated previously, adds to her unrealistic beauty and sensuality. The dreamworld that the woman finds herself in is overrun by men, and she is outnumbered – similar to the way in which female gameplayers are largely absent from a male-dominated market. The story is completely about the desire of males. That the woman in the story is never obtained relates to what was said about Lara being untouchable, always out of reach, and thereby more of a fantasy for the projection of male desire. Interestingly, the men could not find their dream woman in reality – just as Lara Croft is a dream woman who only exists in a game world. Similarly, her unrealistic figure is only a dream to the many women who want to look like her for the sake of attracting men.

It appears as though the main reason for female gamers being less attracted to Lara Croft than male gamers is her abundant sexuality. The character's design appears to have more aspects that appeal to men rather than women. This study will identify these aspects or attributes and demonstrate how they contribute to Lara's overall sex appeal. The attributes will be comparatively analysed over Lara's ten-year existence in order to detect any major changes that would suggest whether she has become more of a sex object or a female role model.

Figure 1, below, is a screenshot from the Tomb Raider 6 – Angel of Darkness game. The outfit that Lara Croft is best known for comprises khaki shorts, a tight top and boots, as shown in the screenshot. Since Lara always appears in this outfit at some stage in all the games, it will serve as a suitable image for identifying the attributes of the character that remain constant throughout the games; for semiotic analysis to identify messages that are being sent out by these attributes and the implications for society; and for observing such changes to these attributes as occur in the course of the Tomb Raider series.



Figure 1 Screenshot from Tomb Raider 6 – Angel of Darkness

Source: www.planetlara.com

A female character could be visualized in any number of ways and Lara as a character represents some carefully selected design choices (Salen & Zimmerman 524). In Figure 1, the features that make Lara Croft a highly sexualized caricature can be identified as oversized breasts, skimpy clothes, bee-stung lips, long dark hair and make-up. These features, according to semiotic theory, can be identified as signifiers. The following section in this thesis deals with what these signifiers signify.

Oversized breasts:

According to Chevalier & Gheerbrant, breasts signify fertility and carry the connotation of motherhood (118). But although Lara has large breasts, it has been observed that her unrealistic shape (Lara is very thin with narrow hips) render her "unfit to give birth" (Gray 2). Other connotations of Lara's breasts are more sexual. Deuber-Mankowsky writes of Lara Croft's breasts as being "the visible markers of sexual seduction" (Foreword ix).

To expose the breast is viewed as a sexual invitation, a symbol of sensuality or of a woman's overall physical endowments (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 119). Although Lara does not originally appear bare-breasted in her games, an exhibition curated by Anne-Marie Schleiner included the popular Nuderaider patch, a game add-on that removes Lara Croft's clothing (Schleiner 3).

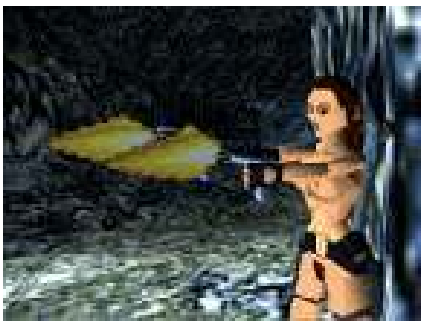


Figure 2 A Nuderaider screenshot.

Source: http://switch.sjsu.edu/web/v4n1/annmarie.html

In an interview, Toby Gard, who designed Lara, was asked why he provided her with such noticeably large physical attributes. His answer was that he felt exaggeration or caricature was the solution to producing clearer, more identifiable characters (Gibbon 2). Gard called Lara "a caricature of a feisty attractive woman" (Gibbon 2). Thus it can be concluded that Toby Gard did exaggerate the breasts intentionally, producing a more sexualized (and unrealistically figured) character. However, there seems to be some controversy as to why Lara's breasts ended up being so big. In another interview, Gard described the size of Lara's breasts as "a slip of the mouse" (Sawyer 67). He explained that he initially wanted to expand them 50 percent but then by mistake expanded them 150 percent (Sawyer 67).

Nexus, a male member in the womengamers.com forum, questions why sex appeal is used so widely in games when sex is not the key focus of the scheme in the majority of the games (Nexus 1). Most consumers purchase a game because it matches an area of interest or certain criteria for personal enjoyment, not to satisfy sexual desire (Nexus 1). Nexus is of the opinion that game developers who want to concentrate on story and character development should only utilize sex appeal where it would be logical to do so, instead of generously splashing it all over to add appeal and "eye candy" (1).

This strategy on the part of game developers might have been excused in the early history of videogames, when designers had to work around the restrictions of technology (King 79). With the few pixels available,

features such as character design had to be kept simple (King 79).[19] Today the restrictions on graphic design are far lighter and artists have immense scope and freedom in developing beautiful graphics and animations (Ray 33). Nevertheless, it was decided to give Lara unrealistically large breasts, a waist smaller than her head and very well rounded buttocks (Ray 33).

In an article entitled "Breast and Chest Size: Ideals and Stereotypes through the 1990s," S. Tantleff-Dunn[20] claims that research has shown that a larger bust-line is associated with a variety of positive attributes, such as popularity and confidence (2). These are supposedly attributes that women want to possess, especially in regard to the opposite sex. This ideal shape (large breasts with a very thin physique) places many women in a dilemma since tall, thin figures with large breasts are not likely to occur naturally (Tantleff-Dunn 1). Dissatisfaction with the body may lead women to search for dangerous methods of changing it, for instance extreme dieting, over-exercising, or obtaining surgery that entails an assortment of risks and is a costly alternative with relatively permanent consequences (Tantleff-Dunn 2). Amidst the growing popularity of breast augmentation, there have been complaints of medical complications and resulting arguments regarding the safety of breast implants (Tantleff-Dunn 2).

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[19] Before this, characters had to be kept simplistic and anime like, with huge heads and eyes and tiny bodies (King 79). Super Mario Bros is an example of this.

[20] Tantleff-Dunn did a study in investigating stereotypes associated with breast size through the 1990s. (Tantleff-Dunn 1)

Tantleff-Dunn found that women are correct in their belief that men prefer women who have large breasts together with a small waist and narrow hips (2). It is therefore understandable that women would want to achieve this look. And it is understandable for game designers to use it to their advantage to grab men's attention in order to sell the game character and thus the game.

Skimpy clothes:

Jane Gaines[21] discusses women's clothing in her essay "Fabricating the Female Body" (in Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body). She suggests that there is often no distinction between a woman and her clothing in popular discourse. Therefore, a woman is often perceived to be what she wears (Gaines 1). Designer Toby Gard dressed Lara in hiking boots, shorts, vest and backpack (Poole 6). But not just any shorts, for the size of her shorts seems to have attracted much criticism.

What does Lara's outfit make her? Funk describes Lara Croft as an under-dressed, buxom female with a weapon, a gender stereotype that implies that power for women is reliant on sexual appeal (Funk 1). Lara's wasp-like waist and enormous breasts are emphasised through her cut-off shorts and skin tight tank top (Salen and Zimmerman 524). Sawyer[22] points out that since Lara is centred on the screen during gameplay, the player is continuously faced with her perfectly rounded behind and tiny hot pants (69). But Toby Gard has said that he was moving away from

[21] Jane Gaines is a Professor of Literature and English at Duke University, where she directs the Film and Video Program, which she founded in 1985. (Oscar 1)
[22] Miranda Sawyer is a feature writer for The Observer, Esquire's motoring correspondent and a contributing editor for The Face.

the standard scantily dressed female representations during the time of Lara's design, and that Lara's outfit was an intentional response to the digital representations of women around him at the time (Poole 6). Gard is referring to representations of women dressed in thongs and S&M corsets, for example; he says that he specifically wanted to move away from the thigh-length boot-style stuff (Poole 6). Lucien King, editor of Game On: The History and Culture of Videogames, regards Lara's busty design as simple when compared to the dominatrix character of Ivy in the fighting game Soul Calibur (1999), who appears dressed in a tight basque (81) – see Figure 3 below.



Figure 3 Ivy from Soul Calibur

Source: http://www.soulcaliburuniverse.com

Lara Croft might be considered an improvement on this absurdity, but Poole says of Lara that she is an abstraction, an animated mixture of sexual and attitudinal signs; breasts, hot pants, sunglasses and thigh holsters (164). Lara's holsters suggestively hint at an impression of a garter and girdle, which are associated with sexual provocation

(Rubinstein 83). Gard once said in his defence that he didn't over-sexualize Lara because a person (a player, specifically) cannot get emotionally involved with a character that has been sexually objectified (Poole 6). It is interesting, then, that there are those who see Lara as a sexually objectified character. Gard's sense of Lara, however, was of a woman with considerable self-respect (Poole 6). To the extent that Lara is not depicted as a stereotypical blonde, she does retain some integrity and dignity, but this is in conflict with her large breasts and the skimpy clothes that have become her trademark. Even so, is Lara's outfit appropriate?

According to Salen and Zimmerman, Lara's shorts and tank top are not practical (524). Cal Jones[23] says that at one stage Lara "wanders around in the freezing cold in only a pair of shorts and a vest without so much as a pointy nipple in evidence" (Cassel & Jenkins 339). To Nexus it is not a matter of forbidding all forms of sexuality in games, but rather about coming to a decision as to when such content is suitable in the context of the game world (1).

Importantly, Lara's outfit can only look that good on her particular small, hard-to-achieve figure. It is not an outfit that every woman would feel confident enough to wear in public. There is also the likelihood that should a woman wear such an outfit, she would receive unwanted attention from the opposite sex.

[23] Cal Jones works as a Reviews editor for PC Gaming World and has been writing reviews for more than 6 years – Cassel & Jenkins xvii).

All of Lara's clothing items cling (Anderson-Davila 3). The female characters in games are more likely than the male characters to be dressed in revealing clothing (Pakingnan 2). Janelle Brown has indicated that GameGirlz hopes to encourage the industry to design more of their female characters like those in Quake 2 who are dressed in camouflage from head to toe and don't even have a belly-button piercing (Brown 2). This approach appears to have been effective, as many gaming companies have already approached GameGirlz for recommendations on how to reach girl gamers (Brown 2).

Make-up:



Figures 4, 5 and 6 Close-up of Lara's face

Sources: www.tombraiderchronicles.com, www.skribblerz.com, www.bebo.com

One seldom sees Lara's face during gameplay but now and then the camera angle allows a glimpse of slanted brown eyes and luscious lips (Sawyer 69). Figures 4, 5 and 6 above show close-ups of Lara Croft's face in different Tomb Raider games, and it is evident that she is wearing eye make-up. Make-up enhances facial features, hides flaws and enables one to appear more attractive to the opposite sex. It is almost as if Lara as a character is aware of her prominent features and uses make-up to enhance them to attract the player. The question arises: Does make-up

not suggest that the wearer wants to be looked at or desired by the opposite sex – wants to be seen as better than plain, wants to be sexy? Of course since Lara has no cognitive thought processes of her own, being merely a product of someone else's imagination, we must attribute these 'thoughts' to her designers and their biases regarding the portrayal of their character. However, it could also be said that the character Lara Croft has developed an identity of her own and has solidified in our minds as a persona to such an extent that we could believe that she makes these cognitive decisions for herself.

It can be said that the make-up she wears enhances her sexuality. The dark shade of her lips makes them appear more noticeable. Scientists have found that the size of a person's lips plays a significant role in determining whether they are sexually appealing to other people, "Basically, the bigger the better…" ("Lip Size" 1). Research has shown that a small nose, big eyes and voluptuous lips are generally attractive in both men and women ("Lip Size" 1). Therefore Lara's lips can definitely be seen as contributing to her being perceived by some as a sex symbol. Even Lara's sunglasses add to her sexuality because of the way she provocatively peers over them (Deuber-Mankowsky 65).

By identifying with (or subjecting themselves to) the most up-to-date fashion, clothing and cosmetics, girls generate specific and recognizable images for themselves (Van Zoonen 26). Thus they attract attention not to who they actually are but to the image they have created for themselves. The age at which teenage girls are wearing make-up is

getting younger and younger, as is the age at which teenagers are becoming sexually active (Baker 1).[24]

Long dark hair:

Lara Croft's hair colour is a dark, unnatural shade of reddish brown. Though not as sexualized as blonde women in society, according to the codes of Anglo-American cinema and television, dark-haired women signify sexuality (Van Zoonen 74).

Hair the length of Lara's is extremely expensive to colour professionally. Long hair also requires a lot of patience and effort to be maintained in good condition, making it a very time-consuming as well as expensive feature. The promotion of dyed hair can be said to have connotations of motivating women to be someone other than themselves and to spend money and time on becoming this 'other'. Samantha Holland writes that a woman's perceived overall focus and commitment to her appearance is demonstrated through the amount of time and money that she invests in her femininity (64).

According to Robin Bryer, long hair has embodied Western beauty and femininity for centuries: for example, "the length and abundance of the woman's hair is the prime feature of Botticelli's evocation of beauty" (8). Samantha Holland[25] agrees, claiming that long hair on a woman typically signifies beauty, femininity and sexuality (60). The fact that long hair has

[24] Debbie Farr Baker is a staff writer for The San Diego Union Tribune.
[25] Samantha Holland graduated from the University of Sheffield and has a PhD from Sheffield Hallam University: www.lmu.ac.uk/carnegie/lsm/contacts_24EFFFB859EE48E6BA06CA29AA6D687D.htm

often served as a fetish object (Van Zoonen 74) indicates that having long hair increases a person's sex appeal. This obviously makes long hair more desirable to women, and to many, the loss of hair signifies loss of sexual attractiveness (Holland 62). Could this then suggest that having an abundance of hair (as Lara does) makes her especially attractive in a sexual manner?

Long hair the length of Lara's hair is hard to attain and manage naturally, which compounds the fact that Lara's beauty is hard to match. Shorter hair is easy to manage and control, giving the wearer more time for socializing and other important activities. However, short hair can be seen as unfeminine or 'butch' (Holland 62). Many feminists and lesbians have used short hair to signify their politics and their sexuality (Holland 59). Thus women tend to be judged by society according to the length of their hair, and this is an aspect of the high expectations created for women by the images circulating in society.

This commentary makes it clear why Lara Croft has been identified as an overtly sexualized female character. Since this is one of the reasons why females avoid certain games, one would hope that in its ten years of existence the Tomb Raider series would have shown some indication of its developers taking these issues into consideration.

Chapter 3: Evolution of the Lara Croft Figure

This chapter will track the changes made to the sexual attributes discussed above and to Lara as a female representative from the first until the most recent game, spanning Lara's ten-year existence thus far. The images that this analysis draws on are screenshots from the Tomb Raider collection of games between the years 1996 and 2003[26] - see Figures 7 to 18 below.





[26] The brightness and contrast of some of the images have been adjusted for observational purposes.

Figures 7 and 8 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 1: The Scion of Atlantis

Source: Personal screenshots by author.



Figures 9 and 10 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 2 – The Golden Mask

Source: Personal screenshots by author.



Figures 11 and 12 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 3: The Lost Artefact

Source: Personal screenshots by author.



Figures 13 and 14 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 4: Last Revelation

Source: Personal screenshots by author.



Figures 15 and 16 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 5: Chronicles

Source: Personal screenshots by author.



Figures 17 and 18 Screenshots from Tomb Raider 6: Angel of Darkness

Source: Personal screenshots by author.

When comparisons of the above images were made, and relevant material on the subject matter was examined, the following was found:

A. Breasts, hair and skimpy clothes

1. Breasts

Lara's breasts appear fuller in Tomb Raider 2 than in Tomb Raider 1, where they have more of a cone shape. In Tomb Raider 3, they look somehow heavier. But according to Tricia Gray, Lara's model in Tomb Raider 3 is essentially the same as in Tomb Raider 2, except that in the latter, more polygons were used and smoothed out to provide a more

realistic match to an actual woman's body (2). Although it appears that the extra polygons were used to increase Lara's chest size, Gray states that Lara's breast size appears to have decreased by Tomb Raider 3, because when Tomb Raider 1 was released Lara's breasts were pointy and almost horizontally triangular, with fewer polygons being used for the model at the time (2). Thus, Gray is of the opinion that breast size was not purposefully increased or decreased, but was rather an effect of improving technology.

Lara's breasts seem just as big, if not bigger, in Tomb Raider 4 and Tomb Raider 5. As the character in Tomb Raider 6 cannot be controlled to pose in a perfect side profile, it is harder to determine whether any adjustments have been made to her breasts. Nonetheless, any significant changes in breast size would have been easily noticeable. It appears that Lara's breast size generally increased in size throughout the series of games and, after the first game, became slightly more realistic in shape.

Anderson-Davila[27] expressed the same opinion when she wrote that any player could see that Lara's cup size increased with each sequel, as did the frequency of occasional suggestive gestures (4). The fact that Lara Croft's breast size was augmented for the most part signifies an increase in her sexuality through the series of games.

[27] Katharine Anderson-Davila is a journalist who joined up with WomenGamers. – http://www.womengamers.com/about/contributors.php

2. Hair

In Tomb Raider 1 Lara's ponytail is tied up in a bun during the gameplay, but in the cinematics her hair is the long ponytail that we are familiar with. Lara's hair seems to grow in length from Tomb Raider 2 through to Tomb Raider 5. It might be reasoned that the designers intended to indicate the passing of time between the games and Lara's adventures, rather than lengthening her hair to intensify its sex appeal. Still, there is no evidence of any desire on the part of Lara's designers to make her less sexualized in terms of her hair. In Tomb Raider 4 the ponytail is quite a bit longer, and incidentally appears to be hanging between Lara's legs. The phallic nature of this depiction enhances the sexuality that the length of her hair bestows upon her. The ponytail is shorter in Tomb Raider 6, but given that the majority of games from Tomb Raider 1 to 6 have portrayed an increase in the length of her hair, the general consensus is that her sexuality has increased in this way.

3. Skimpy Clothes

Lara's shorts are unmistakeably shorter in Tomb Raider 2 than in Tomb Raider 1. This can be judged by the distance between the straps around her thighs and the bottom edge of the shorts that is slanting upwards. In Tomb Raider 3 the shorts appear as though they could be a tiny bit longer on the outer sides. This change has taken place very discreetly and there is still no indication of a definite decrease in the sexuality of skimpy shorts. In both Tomb Raider 4 and 5 the shorts show the same amount of tightness and appear yet shorter than in the previous games. The tightness of the shorts around the buttocks also forms what could be

interpreted for the first time as panty-lines, or in this case, perhaps g-string lines. These suggestive lines disappear in Tomb Raider 6. Thus the shorts decrease in size from Tomb Raider 1 through Tomb Raider 5, but then appear a bit longer and without lines, indicating increased tightness, in Tomb Raider 6.

In Tomb Raider 1 to 3 Lara wears straps around her thighs, which are a part of her gun holster. These straps are left out in Tomb Raider 4 and 5, in which case Lara could be regarded as wearing even less clothing. The straps reappear in Tomb Raider 6.

The top that Lara is wearing also shows signs of becoming shorter throughout the series. In Tomb Raider 1 to 3 Lara's midriff is covered. However from, Tomb Raider 4 to 6 her midriff becomes progressively more exposed, until she is finally showing the most flesh in Tomb Raider 6.

Conclusions:

Various minor changes in the representation of Lara Croft suggest that the character has generally been given more increases in sexuality than decreases. Whilst Tomb Raider 6 does show potential in reducing the character's sexuality as the shorts are no shorter than in any of the previous versions and the hair is somewhat shorter, such changes are minute and it cannot be said that the character has in fact become less sexualized. If it were the case that Lara's signature outfit had become long pants, for example, this might have indicated that Lara's designers

had made an attempt to tone down the character's abundant sexuality. Clothes aside, there has also been an increase in facial make-up through the series of games.

B. Make-up and lips

Facial comparison of Lara Croft in the games Tomb Raider 1 to 6 is provided in Figures 19 to 24 below.



Figures 19 to 24 A series of screenshots showing Lara's face as it develops through the game sequels. Source: http://larashots.com/TR1various.html[28]

When figures 19 to 24, above, are compared, it can be seen that the amount of make-up worn by the character has increased over time. More specifically, in Tomb Raider 1 she is wearing only lipstick, but from 2 she is also wearing eyeliner and eye shadow. This is most clearly visible in Tomb Raider 6. Thus, in terms of her make-up, Lara's sexuality has

[28] Figure 19 <http://larashots.com/TR1various.html>, Figure 20 Personal Screenshot, Figure 21<http://www.skribblerz.com/screenshots.htm>, Figure 22 <http://www.skribblerz.com/tr/trc/tr4fhorustemple.htm> , Figure 23 <http://www.planetlara.com/picview.asp?file=ScreenShots/tr5scrn_10.jpg> and Figure 24 <http://www.firingsquad.com/media/gallery_image.asp/90/13>

increased from Tomb Raider 1 through 6. Her lips generally remain oversized, signifying sexuality and desirability.

Lara Croft's sexuality, however, is not shown only through her exaggerated physical/sexual attributes. What follows is a brief look at other aspects of Lara's character that add to her sexuality.

It appears that Lara's behaviour within the game is one of these aspects. In one of the scenes in Tomb Raider 3 Lara is about to undress and take a shower when she asks coyly, "Haven't you seen enough?" ("Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series," Womengamers). In Tomb Raider 6, when left alone Lara sways her hips from side to side in a suggestive manner. Katherine Anderson-Davila has described Lara's gestures – such as her hip wiggle when she does a reverse crawl, her bottom approaching the camera – "occasionally suggestive" (4). It appears that camera angles are sometimes chosen to enhance Lara's sexual appearance. Another example is when Lara is swimming: "Some of the camera angles are objectionable, for example when Lara is swimming the camera zooms in-between her legs, adding a sense of voyeuristic detail" ("Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series," Womengamers). These camera close-ups together with the unrelenting focus on the character in the game have been carried through to the Tomb Raider movies in order to recreate the game experience (Deuber-Mankowsky 69). Clearly these voyeuristic details were not designed to attract female gamers ("Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series," Womengamers).

Such images not only put forward one gender as object and the other as subject, but also reinforce meaning and power ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 1); that is, they are perpetuating the patriarchal bias of the society in which we live. When a woman is presented as sexy, for whom is she being sexy, posing in those sexy clothes? She is presenting an image of herself as a desirable woman; that is, desirable to men. Deuber-Mankowsky describes the player's gaze as a continuous exchange between the desiring look and the powerful beautiful exhibition (39). Therefore Lara's sexiness caters to the desire of the men she encounters (both inside and outside of the game), thus reinforcing their power over her and the hegemony of patriarchy. Strengthening this argument is the recurring gaze (which mimics that of Hollywood cinema) and suggests that "seeing" is masculine (the viewer as male) whereas "being seen" is feminine, the characteristic position occupied by the image of the woman (Deuber-Mankowsky 40). (This argument is beyond the scope of this paper, and it is readily admitted that the above explanation is a necessary over-simplification.)

From the images and argument presented above we can see that the image of Lara has remained sexualized during the period under discussion. The changes that have been (and presumably will continue to be) made to her character between game versions are so small that her essence essentially remains static. The designers never push her too far in one or the other direction because it is possible that they would lose their market. If they were to make her too 'butch,' they would lose the male market that sees her as a 'fantasy' woman; if they made her still

more sexualized, they might risk losing their female market, such as it is. The facts suggest that the designers did not in fact take into account women's objections to the character's design, nor the impact of the design on the percentage of female gamers playing each new game.

Lara would probably not have become as popular among male gamers as she has if it were not for the attributes that make her so sexy. But now that she has achieved fame, one wonders what impact it would have on her fans if Lara suddenly became a more respectable character, one more realistically figured and thus transmitting a more responsible message to society about women?

According to Clarence Page's article "A Doll for All," Mattel Toys has tried a similar approach and set an example by responding to public demand, bringing out a new line of Barbies more naturally proportioned (2). It is said that the changes to Barbie reflect a broadening standard for good looks (Page 1).

Lara Croft is an ambivalent character because she is both a strong independent woman and a highly sexualized one: "a figure of empowerment, oscillating between subject and object, she excites identificatory and masturbatory fantasies" (Deuber-Mankowsky viii). The fine line between a successful gender representation and a problematic one is therefore highlighted. Is it possible to create a character that appeals to both men and women, as well as one that indicates a strong, empowered female presence in society?

But before this question is addressed, it will be shown in the following chapter that the issues affecting the interests of female gamers in a negative way do not stop at the design of gaming characters.

Chapter 4: Lara Croft and Gender Bias: Some Further Considerations

A. Further aspects internal and external to the games that make it difficult for females to identify with Lara Croft

Lara always appears to be single within the Tomb Raider games, and usually without a love interest in her life. This premise enhances the notion of her as a kind of men's plaything. It indicates that she is designed specifically for men and not as a character with whom women can identify. It seems as if Lara must always appear available to men and yet just out of reach in order to maintain their interest (Poole 25). Hamilton writes that the images hold no device to deliver fulfilment but what maintains men's interest is the way in which both sexual possibility and impossibility are simultaneously and continuously offered (8). Interestingly, Lara's sunglasses can be viewed as a sign that adds to her inaccessible image. Deuber-Mankowsky writes that dark glasses on a female make her seem more out of reach (65).

As opposed to male action heroes such as Indiana Jones or James Bond, who always have numerous women devoted to them, Lara as an icon is required to stay single (Poole 25). It was presumably intended that male audiences would identify with heroes like Jones and Bond and their success with women, and not that women might desire them the more (Poole 25). Lara Croft is an opposite instance, as her character is predominantly aimed at men who might desire her and not women who might identify with her (Poole 25).

Core Design also introduced a cinematic point of view whereby the viewpoint of the player is that of the camera that follows Lara closely during gameplay; in this way the player is positioned in such a way as to look at her from behind for the majority of the time (Poole 6). In many cinematic point of view games, the player sees the game world through the eyes of the protagonist, with only two weapons in view at the bottom of the screen. In such cases the player has little option but to identify with the protagonist, whereas in Tomb Raider what unfolds is more of a shared adventure between the player and Lara: the player is encouraged to identify with her situation as one would with an action hero on the big screen (Poole 6). It has been said that this point of view, as is often the case in Hollywood movies, is exploited primarily for its voyeuristic potential (Deuber-Mankowsky 71). It appears that the experience of cinema typically enfolds two opposing structures of pleasurable viewing: the first is a voyeuristic pleasure that occurs as a result of stimulation by what is seen, and the second is a vanity that grows out of identifying with the image (Deuber-Mankowsky 41). But while feelings of responsibility for Lara are aroused, in the event of her death in the game the player does not experience it as his own death but rather only as Lara's (Poole 6). This suggests once again that Lara may be an empowered woman, but she nevertheless still depends on the guidance of the (male) player, her fate entrusted to his safekeeping. Tricia Gray argues that it is as if men were so infatuated with Indiana Jones that they created a female version of him to meet their needs, a beautiful woman they could control (2). Gray seems to feel that it possibly comes down to a perverse fantasy

of power in that the idea of controlling women seems to appeal to men (3).

A game avatar can be conceived of as both subject and object at the same time: as on the one hand, a mask to be worn, and on the other hand, a tool to view and manipulate (Salen & Zimmerman 526). Thus it appears that the camera angle from which Lara is viewed throughout the gameplay was chosen to emphasize the avatar's status as object or tool, to provide voyeuristic pleasure for male players. If a first person shooter camera angle had been chosen, the player would have experienced the game from the perspective of the character. And a first person shooter camera angle would have made it easier for female gamers to identify with the character because they would not have been constantly reminded of her sexual attributes while playing.

Some dialogue within the game also indicates that players are not expected to identify with Lara. At the beginning of the game, training takes place within Lara's house. Lara says, as if talking to the player: "Welcome to my home. Feel free to look around" (Hamilton 2). The fact that she is referring to the structure as *her* house and not the player's house suggests that the player is not intended to become the character (Poole 85). If this is the case, if the player is not supposed to identify with Lara, then women players are in a sense excluded. For men, on the other hand, this could be advantageous because they don't have to feel that they are giving up their masculinity to become a female: rather they remain in a position of power, controlling a female.

B. Further aspects of the game that favour male game players rather than female game players

The Tomb Raider games also favour males when they are looked at in terms of 'feminine' game structure attributes versus 'masculine' game structure attributes.

A great deal has been written about the differences between games that appeal to male as opposed to female gamers. This section will focus only on the attributes of games that appeal to both women and men, with specific reference to the Tomb Raider games.

Identification of Character

Beal argues that females have a preference for games that present them with a character with whom they can identify (Beal 3).[29] They are also more likely to identify with non-stereotypical characters (Beal 3).
Thus, as was argued earlier, Lara Croft's enhanced and stereotyped sexuality reduces her appeal as a character with whom female gamers can identify ("Girls & Videogames" 1).

[29] Vangie Beal aka "Aurora", director of GameGirlz.com, contributes to several computer games websites and helps run several other women and games resources. Beal has a deep involvement in gaming, having headed up the first all-girl Quake clan, PMS. She also works on the Da Valkyries website, tracking female "warrior" games and as a correspondent for the Planet Quake gaming site (Brown 2).

The Main Character

It is important to females to be able to play the role of the main character. Lara presents female game players with the opportunity to play and experience Tomb Raider as the main character. Usually action adventure games that present the player with plenty of combat and opportunities to explore (as is the case with Tomb Raider) feature male characters in the leading role (Salen & Zimmerman 324). Introducing Lara Croft as a female lead is said to have been in a way an intervention in the cultural rhetoric of gender (Salen & Zimmerman 524).

Genre

As previously mentioned, Jenkins classifies the Tomb Raider series of games as belonging to the action adventure genre. This genre originated from what were considered to be 'boy's game' side scrollers (Salen & Zimmerman 524).[30] However, it appears that girls also enjoy adventure games ("Girls & Videogames" 1). As a female character in a game which contains a lot of action and adventure, Lara Croft is re-working the male-dominated action genre (Kennedy 2).

Action and Character Tasks

Studies have shown that girls favour game formats that do not feature shooting, violent action or aggression (Cooper, Hull & Huff 421). Thus in terms of aggressive themes, Tomb Raider favours the preferences of

[30] Side scrollers are games typically associated with arcade games, the like of Super Mario Bros. The word refers to a genre of game where the gameplay itself is viewed from a side view and the characters move from left to right on the screen. The character can normally only perform basic moves such as attack in a straight line, move from left to right and climb up and down. Games like this normally advance in the form of levels.

boys rather than girls. Action and shooting are ubiquitous traits in Tomb Raider (Perry 1). Lara Croft has to defeat evil gangsters and kill dangerous animals, which are hardly stereotypically feminine pastimes and presumably make it harder for female gamers to identify with her. Lara carries two guns, which are obvious symbols of masculine orientation (Cooper, Hull, Huff 420). And apparently boys enjoy games that offer them the ability to shoot or propel objects through space (Cooper, Hull, Huff 421). Lara's exploits, comparable to those of James Bond or Indiana Jones, are without a doubt the sort of adventures traditionally associated with men (Deuber-Mankowsky 46).

According to Michael Lewis,[31] males prefer games in which the character's aim is to outsmart the opponent, whereas women feel a need to decipher and understand their opponent (2). Boys also prefer overt competition in which enemies are defeated immediately, as is the case in Tomb Raider where Croft shoots to kill. Girls prefer covert competition in which the conflict is subtle and sneaky (Lewis 2). Both "outsmarting" one's opponent and "figuring out" one's opponent imply intelligent forethought; but if we take "outsmart" to mean overt, aggressive strategizing, then Tomb Raider is a typical example of the kind of game that boys prefer. On the other hand, girls are interested in games that require problem solving ("Girls & Videogames" 1) and puzzle solving ("Lara's Manifesto" 1), and Tomb Raider features a number of puzzles to be solved (Perry 1).

[31] Michael Lewis is author of Liar's Poker and most recently of Trail Fever, a book about the 1996 presidential campaign.

It has been shown that girls consider video game violence to be boring, irrelevant and unrealistic ("Girls & Videogames" 1). But if there has to be violent incident, girls prefer fantasy or cartoon violence to the more realistic "human violence" that boys enjoy (Funk & Buchman 222).

Environments

Tomb Raider is set on Earth or in a realistic environment which corresponds with the masculine preference for realism mentioned above. But girls also respond positively to realistic themes because they offer characters and situations with which they can easily identify ("Girls & Videogames" 1). In the games, Lara is presented to us in a number of different environments – for example, the desert, dark urban landscapes, caves and tombs – which are for the most part wild or "unsafe" and therefore masculinized (Kennedy 3). Because of this, her femininity appears completely distinctive and her image thereby becomes more powerful (Kennedy 3).

Because of the fact that the action genre is usually masculine, having a female character in such a world is often seen to be providing at least some reparation for a number of inescapably upsetting depictions of women (Kennedy 3). Lara Croft's presence in a traditionally masculine world of adventure (and her implicit rejection of certain patriarchally sponsored values and norms) clearly opposes the patriarchal norm that locates femininity within the private or domestic space (Kennedy 3).

Graphics and Sound

Girl players are attracted to games with quality graphic images and sounds or music ("Girls & Videogames" 1). Enhanced visual and sonic features have been increasingly incorporated into the Tomb Raider series of games.

Repetition

It has been argued that one of the main reasons why girls are not that interested in gaming is that they find games too repetitive ("Girls & Videogames" 1). Tomb Raider is, unfortunately, one of those games that involves a fair amount of repetition, such as the design of certain of Lara Croft's enemies, who seem to be almost clones of each other.

Co-operation

Tomb Raider does not offer the social element of co-operation that attracts females to multi-player online gaming (Funk & Buchman 221).

Sifting through all this information gives one the impression that the games in the Tomb Raider series contain some aspects that may have been intended to appeal to women, but that these are very few compared with the number of aspects that appeal to men. Regardless of what Lara looks like, she is still essentially playing a man's role in a man's world.

C.Marketing and Promotion

It has been argued that a number of factors within the game add to the sexualized manner in which the character Lara Croft is depicted, making it hard for female gamers to identify with her and causing them to lose interest in playing the game. This depiction of Lara occurs not only in the Tomb Raider games but also in the media used to market them. Deuber-Mankowsky claims that Lara Croft was one of the first virtual figures to make the shift from the game world into the reality of the mass media (2). She was therefore setting an example for future game advertising, which rendered the public's perceptions of her especially important.

Marketing campaigns presented a buxom Lara Croft in progressively more risqué poses to accompany each of the Tomb Raider sequels (Hill 5). Lara appears to have changed significantly in the transition from the game to the media. Deuber-Mankowsky writes that while players (some of them young) were watching the female successor to Indiana Jones on their screens, a different Lara Croft was coming into view on billboards and in magazine advertising (20). Lara is said to have taken on a life of her own in the media via her "new" sexy image (Deuber-Mankowsky 20). Apparently fans of the heroine angrily protested that Lara's increasingly sexy media image had nothing to do with the game (Deuber-Mankowsky 20). It seems that there was a discrepancy between what the game-developers of Tomb Raider expected for Lara Croft in terms of advertising and what actually emerged. According to Deuber-Mankowsky this discrepancy was due to the acquisition of Core Design by Eidos, which

put the marketing of the software company's games into the hands of a multi-national corporation (19). Core Design's idea of Lara Croft was that of a game hero in the tradition of Rick Dangerous, while Eidos viewed her primarily as a promotional icon (Deuber-Mankowsky 19). Core Design even acquired a court injunction to prevent Playboy from linking Lara with the magazine, which would have further distorted her image (Deuber-Mankowsky 4).

Adrian Smith from Core has said that Lara's seductive portrayal in the Tomb Raider advertisements was hardly an original sell when it was taken into account that 90 percent of game buyers are male (Sawyer 69). Smith explains that Tomb Raider was not in fact meant to be sold on Lara's charms. For Core, the two innovative selling points were the cinematic imagery[32] and the fact that you could see the character (whatever she happened to look like) (Sawyer 69). But while Smith was apparently not impressed with the advertising, Gard, Lara's developer, praised the marketers (calling them "clever lads") for recognizing the easy route of promoting Lara's breasts in their marketing strategy (Sawyer 67). Thus there were conflicting opinions within the company as to whether the advertising was suitable or not, and questions remain regarding the intentions of the company in respect to Lara Croft.

Can one really point fingers at the media for interpreting Lara in a sexual way when her image was sexualized from the outset? The media do not seem to have interpreted the character unfairly. It does not help that

[32] Core wanted the scenes to look as though the player were within a film (Sawyer 69).

sexuality is a commodity which marketers and image-makers have taken advantage of for decades in many entertainment industries (Hamilton 1). It is commonly found in the history of advertising that women are represented in a sexualized manner. Sawyer links the Tomb Raider advertisements of the nineties with advertising techniques of the seventies: "Lara's appeal is that of a Seventies car advertisement: a half-naked woman being used to sell the machinery beneath her" (Sawyer 70).

This shows that Lara has been constructed as a sex symbol and that the female market has essentially been ignored (Anderson-Davila 2). An example of such marketing featuring Lara Croft would be an advertisement for cars manufactured by Seat ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 20). One of the commercials in the Seat cars campaign shows Lara in a bikini, walking towards the beach while seductively swaying her hips. A middle-aged man with glasses, sunhat and a beer belly gawks at her. The man becomes very hot and very red and his ice-cream melts away. We follow his gaze, which focuses entirely on her body, the camera view only showing Lara from her neck to the middle of her thighs. At one point in the advert we see Lara's bottom in full view, which at times fills half the screen. Lara pushes the man into the Seat car behind him, switches on the air-conditioning and locks the door ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 20).

It seems that the marketers went the extra mile to convince adolescent boys that they shouldn't identify with Lara, but should just gape at her

(Jane 3), which helps one to understand why a male would even consider playing a game that has a female lead. The question arises as to how many boys would play Tomb Raider if they felt that they were in some way undertaking a feminine position (Jane 1). Thus Lara had to be sexualized overtly to keep the interest of the male market.

In an article for Womengamers, a gameplayer has said that she was offended by what she called Eidos' "transparent efforts to market to horny young men" ("Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series," Womengamers). She resented the fact that Eidos so clearly valued the male market more than the female one ("Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series"). Other advertising involving Lara Croft that could be regarded as offensive to women because it is so evidently constructed specifically to appeal to males, were the three American advertisements in the Tomb Raider 2 advertising campaign (Ward 4):

- The first begins by showing an empty basketball court, upon which the text "Tomb Raider II" and "Lara Croft" is superimposed. It goes on to show several action scenes with fast-paced music added. The text "Where the boys are" is superimposed and the empty basketball court is shown again.
- The second advert is structured identically and includes the same text, but in this instance a patronless strip club and a bored stripper are shown ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 18). The concept of the advertisements is illustrated through this example: Among the people that the boys have left patronless by going home to play Tomb Raider is

an exotic dancer on the stage of an empty strip club; the boys appear to have lost interest in the sex industry's gaze exchange (Ward 4).

The third advertisement in the campaign shows an empty gents' toilet with urinals ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 18). These advertisements featured spaces used largely or exclusively by men, revealing a clear intention to market to males only.

Advertising is not the only form of media featuring Lara that is aimed at males. The reviews and previews were much more concerned with the male gaze exploring Lara's body than the gameplay (Jane 3). A few quotations from different reviews serve to illustrate this: "Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation … Lara fans may rejoice as Last Revelation also offers … the chance to play a Lolita version of Lara, budding breasts and all;" "A marketing person's dream, Lara combines the no-nonsense spelunking fun of Indiana Jones with the brazen sensuality of a pin-up queen" (Jane 3). Rather than bringing girls' attention to the fact that Lara is an empowered female character who can be used to play games, the message was more, "Hey boys, check out this chick's boobs" (Jane 3). Toby Gard stated in 1997[33] that Lara's bosom was focused on more often when it came to marketing (Sawyer 67). Salen and Zimmerman refer to Lara as being a type of action slut, a teenage boy's impression of a woman and a digital pin-up girl – a role that literally played out in the many provocative full-page images of Lara (524). It is no wonder that

[33] One year after Tomb Raider 1.

Lara is to some no more than a toy to be played with instead of an avatar to identify with or a personality to inhabit (Jane 3).

It can be concluded from the above discussion that Lara Croft's design appeals much more to males than to females, despite Tomb Raider having stood out as a game supposedly designed for both male and female gamers. According to Cassel & Jenkins, when they were creating Tomb Raider Core Design made a conscious attempt to appeal to both male and female gamers (30). Deuber-Mankowsky maintains that the game achieved the goal of attracting men and women, and has thus helped to increase the number of female players (9).[34] But according to Susie Hamilton (PR Manager for Core Design), males aged 15 to 26 were from the outset the target audience of the Tomb Raider games ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 5). This again indicates the dissension within the company surrounding the idea of Lara Croft's target market. Had the company shared a single vision of Lara Croft she might indeed have turned out to be equally marketable to female and male players.

[34] Earlier we said that developers felt that they had reached as many males as they could and that they now had to find ways to reach female players in order to increase the number of users.

The Influence of the Industry:5

As mentioned above, the designers of Tomb Raider claimed to have targeted the game at both sexes. However, as we have seen, much more could have been done to attract female gamers. Like Tomb Raider, very few best-selling games contain 'girl-friendly' features (Pakingan 1), even with research on the topic readily available. When discussing the topic with male game designers, Beal discovered that the overwhelming reaction was "We are guys. We don't know what females want to see in games. We design the games we want to play" (1). This lack of interest in female gamers is disappointingly arrogant. More game developers need to become aware of the information available on making games girl-friendly, while at the same time retaining their male market. It appears as though the collaboration between designers and researchers that could ultimately ensure a better future in game design is lacking.

Pakingan points to a huge problem: researchers are accusing game developers of producing bad products, and game developers are ignoring researchers (2). It has also been argued that the research has tended to generalize women's preferences too much and ignore exceptions to the rule: e.g. the fact that there are women who do not only like role-playing games, puzzles or adventure games (Pakingan 2). If this is indeed the case, then attitudes such as these will prevent designers and developers from compromising, and ultimately slow down progress in producing better games capable of appealing to a wider audience.

There are indeed certain games that demonstrate that when the research supporting female interest in games is taken into consideration, it is possible for a wider market to be reached. It has been stated that the first Tomb Raider was successfully marketed to girls, but in fact only 30 percent of its sales were to women ("Girls & Videogames" 2).

In his essay, "Do Breasts, Blitz & Blood Make a Brand?," Martin Croft argues that game developers would benefit from decreasing the sexist imagery in their games. According to Croft, the buyers of games are now mainly women in their 30s and 40s, i.e. the mothers of the younger generation male game players (2). It is very likely that these mothers will not buy games that they think might convey negative messages about women to their children. With the added use of credit cards, parental control over the buying of games over the Internet is tighter (Croft 2).

Maria Deevoy[35] believes that the industry is maturing and that sexist imagery is being used less in marketing campaigns (Hill 1). Kerr reveals that there are cases where producers of games (and consoles) are making use of advertising to lure females into the gaming community as consumers (274). Microsoft, for example, specifically aimed its 2002 XBox campaign in Japan at women aged 20-40 (Kerr 274). The campaign promoted the console as being good value for money and a multiple entertainment device (Kerr 274). In addition to this, Microsoft organized a range of 'hands-on' events within a shopping section in Tokyo (Kerr 274). Whilst the success rate of this campaign is unknown, the fact that women were targeted instead of men ensured an original approach to

[35] Maria Deevoy is the marketing manager at Eidos Australia.

console marketing (Kerr 274). Another example is Sony, who attempted to market the Playstation 2 (PS2) to females as well as males, promoting it as an integrated entertainment system rather than a gaming system (Kerr 274).

Mark Finn[36] has argued that if we take into account how few designers are female, it is to be expected that some women will feel alienated from commercial games (Hill 2). Hill claims that most analysts believe that the paucity of female game players and women employees in the game development industry are intrinsically linked (1). According to Mike Wilson,[37] the fact that the gaming population overwhelmingly slants towards males is leading to fewer women becoming part of the culture and therefore the industry (Beal 3). Hill says it is understandable that one would think, when walking into the average game store, that women do not play games, especially considering that the typical store would be filled with male staff and posters of sexy pin-up babes (Hill 1). Beal feels that there would be some hope of resolving the problem of sexism within games if women could be motivated to consider careers within the gaming industry, which in turn would attract more female players (Brown 2).

There are a number of advantages to having more women employees in the gaming industry that would be beneficial to both genders. Jason Della Rocca[38], for instance, trusts that an increase in female developers will lead to the production of better games (Hill 5). Christopher Sherman,

[36] Mark Finn is a media and communications lecturer at Swinburne University.
[37] CEO of Ion Storm computer game development company.
[38] Jason Della Rocca is of the International Game Developers Association.

executive director of the Women's Game Conference, agrees that the industry will change for the better with the participation of more females (Hill 5). Sherman says getting more women into the process of creating games will promote a diversity of ideas, which should consequently lead to new types of games and eventually new players (Hill 6).

There are indications that the industry is actively striving to employ more women. Evelyn Richardson, executive director of the Game Developers Association of Australia, says local studios are making an effort to attend to the gender imbalance and recruit more women (Hill 5). Della Rocca estimated in 2005 that women account for 10 to 15 percent of the worldwide game development community, compared to just 1 or 2 percent a decade ago (Hill 4).

Kim McCarten argues that from the perspective of the design industry, the imagery has in fact not changed, even in projects where the majority of designers have been women (Heller 168). McCarten claims that the reason for this is that female designers are still working from a male perspective. Because there are so few of them, they have adapted to and become skilled in primarily male environments and therefore produce images that reflect this (Heller 168).

There are, however, companies like Purple Moon that have achieved some success in applying what they have learnt about gender differences to their games. This company boasts two successful games in which they have incorporated these ideas into the game designs (Lewis 3). Another example of a successful game where female designers contributed to the

design is The Sims,[39] which has proven that the market potential for females is huge. The Sims has even been named one of the most popular commercial games with women and more than 60 percent of The Sims players are female (Hill 3). The designers intentionally sought to make the game appealing to women (Hill 3). Hill believes that the main reason that they were able to succeed in this was that approximately 40 percent of their development team and two principal designers were women (3).

Executive producer of The Sims, Lucy Bradshaw, believes that the game attracted a broad player base because players have a lot of freedom to play however they wish (Hill 3). Also, the player can feel successful when mastering any aspect of the game (Hill 3), in which case winning is not the main goal – an aspect that would appeal to women.

Perhaps someday Core will have more females influencing the creation of Tomb Raider games, which may lead to female-friendlier versions of the game and perhaps even greater popularity and sales.

[39] The Sims is a strategy/simulation computer game created by game designer Will Wright, developed by Maxis, published by Electronic Arts, and first released in February 2000 (Twist 1).

Chapter 5: Comparative Case Study and Conclusion

It ought to be instructive to make a comparison, using a similar approach, between the trend-setting Lara Croft and a game character more recently produced by the local South African company I-Imagine Interactive. I-Imagine Interactive, situated in Johannesburg, South Africa, was the first licensed games developer on the African continent.[40] The first XBox game that they released, entitled Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver, featured the female lead character Chase Corrado. It is said to have sold in excess of 170 000 units in Europe and North America (Annexure A).

An interview was conducted with Dan Wagner, founder and Managing Director of I-Imagine Interactive, to obtain insight into the character and her design (Annexure A).

It was pointed out earlier that because of her success, Lara Croft has set an example for the development of female characters in the future. When asked whether the success of Lara Croft from Tomb Raider ever crossed their minds or became part of their discussions in the design of Chase Corrado, Wagner replied: "I don't think you can create any female heroine in a game without thinking about Lara Croft. We examined the way Lara Croft developed using new and more powerful hardware."

[40] Being the first licensed games developer on the African continent, I-Imagine were part of a programme with Microsoft to become the first proprietary software developer for Xbox in Africa.

This chapter will investigate whether Chase Corrado was simply modelled on Lara Croft or whether the designers of this female character took into account any of the issues raised in this study concerning female game characters and game players.

Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver was only released in the Microsoft XBox format and not in PC format, thus the point made earlier about the masculine gender bias of everything to do with computers is in this instance irrelevant to the question of sales to female gamers. Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver is a game based on stunt driving, which is generally considered to be a male pastime. However, given the fact that the racing genre is a top selling genre in games (Annexure A) and that I-Imagine used a female as the lead and only playable character, Wagner's statement that the company was looking for a way to differentiate their game from the basic track racing game is logical (Annexure A). In addition to this, Wagner states that the brief to develop the game indicated having a woman from the start, and the reason for this was indeed that it was not the norm.

It is interesting to note how the perception regarding female characters in games has changed since the first Tomb Raider, when marketing personnel did not like the idea of a female avatar in the game because of a belief that it would hinder sales. In this case, I-Imagine deliberately cast a female character in order to set their game apart and ensure good sales.

Wagner stated in the interview that the racing genre is predominantly male but that the company's core focus is to make the game fun for the average gamer – whether male or female. This seems to evidence an awareness that female gamers would identify with a female character and therefore be attracted to the game. This chapter will discuss what other aspects of the game indicate that I-Imagine might have had aspirations to reach a wider audience inclusive of female gamers.

As established previously, it is not merely the presence of a female character in a game that affects the potential female market, but also the way that the female character is represented.

Like Lara, Chase is depicted as a tough, self-reliant, intelligent woman. Thus Chase also does not fall into the 'damsel in distress' category of female characters, and female gamers would not be put off the game for this reason.

Chase is also re-working the male-dominated action genre by being a female character in a game that contains a great deal of action and adventure. Wagner considers Chase Corrado to be a good role model because of the fact that she is a young, independent woman who chases her dreams and aims high.

But, like Lara, Chase fails to offer a wholesome alternative to the helpless female stereotype because, for example, her actions in the game involve the kind of aggression and destruction associated with male characters (Annexure B). This places Chase in the same position as Lara, as a female (body) with male characteristics, perhaps even a male disguised

as a female. In either case, even though she is a strong female figure, she cannot be celebrated for her femininity.

The background story provided by I-Imagine mentions that "[Chase] grew up somewhat of a tomboy, duelling neighbourhood boys in tricycle races instead of going to ballet classes … Chase already showed great interest in her father's career, which was stunt driving. Instead of preoccupying herself with the usual pastimes of girls her age, Chase spent most of her time with her father in the garage and on set." (Annexure A). The character's rejection of stereotypical female roles would seem to be in line with the empowerment of women to be autonomous agents. But, just like Lara Croft, Chase nevertheless contrives to be also (almost literally unbelievably) sexy in a purely conventional way. Once more, as Deuber-Mankowsky says, the character's femininity is reduced in a traditional manner to her oversized physical attributes (47). For Chase is unfortunately depicted as another example of what has been referred to as "the Lara Croft/big breasted Bond babe variety" (Croft 3).

As is the case with Lara, Chase also cannot be viewed as the liberated woman one might at first think she is because the gameplay consists of the (male) game player leading the heroine. And once again, she remains out of reach, an elusive fantasy figure: as Sawyer says, the untouchable is always the most desirable to men (67).

Thus, as is the case with Lara, aspects of Chase's character believed by Wagner to appeal to female gamers are cancelled out by the features that make her a sexual fantasy figure for men.

One might therefore conclude that the industry is still interested in creating space for empowering representations of women, but is unable to abandon its primary market of gamers "hungry for testosterone driven play…" (Heller 148).

Chase's profile identifies her as yet another hyper-sexualized character because of her unnaturally large breasts, tiny waist and sexy clothes, which together make it unlikely that female players would be drawn to the game. Wagner also stated in the interview that Chase was expected to be viewed by men as a sex symbol and by women as a sex symbol that appeals to men.

The developers justify their use of a sexualized female character by rationalizing her marketability and possible franchise opportunities. If Chase was less sexualized, however, she might have been more marketable to a wider audience that included women. We must therefore question the rationale behind Chase's sexualisation. If the selling point of the game is that it is "fun," as I-Imagine claim, then we must question why Chase had to be sexualized in order for the game to be considered marketable.

Chase's overstated feminine characteristics possibly make it easier for male enthusiasts to overcome their resistance to play as a female

character. Kennedy's argument about male players being more attracted to the pleasures of playing Lara because they have an opportunity to master and control a female body within a safe and non-threatening environment (6) could apply to Chase as well.

It was previously mentioned that the editor of a leading German feminist magazine declared that women have no choice but to accept Lara's oversized feminine attributes as a necessary tribute to the male world because she is a heroine in a visual world with so few heroines (Deuber-Mankowsky 1). But what about Chase? She is clearly one of what Hill refers to as the army of replicas that followed the example of Lara (2). Now that female lead characters have become more common in games (and more positively depicted because of Lara), but with feminine physical attributes still generally overstated, one has to wonder how long women will still be expected to accept such representations. Thus Chase is another example of a situation where the designers had the opportunity to expand the female market but instead settled for satisfying the already dominant male market.

Presumably the game developers had observed the success of Tomb Raider and assumed that this success was achieved through creating a highly sexualized character. Wagner stated that the idea for the game was the company's own and that they had complete creative freedom, but did accept input from the publisher towards the end of the project

when they were assigned their own producer. It was the publisher who decided that Chase should have excessively large breasts.

Chase, like Lara, is unrealistically figured, which makes her hard for women to emulate or identify with. And because she sets an unrealistic standard of beauty, she is a negative role model. The disempowering effects in terms of women's self image and their image in society discussed previously in relation to Lara Croft are equally attributable to the character of Chase. And as was the case with Lara, it appears that Chase's abundant sexuality would be the main reason for female gamers to avoid the game.

The significance of Chase's hyper-sexuality will become clearer when we focus more closely on the various attributes that work together to create her image, especially with regard to how they changed in the course of her development.[41]

[41] There are no sequels to Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver but the character went through a number of changes during her development. This study will show whether she evolved into a more or less sexualized representation.



Figure 25 Chase featured in NAG Magazine

Source: http://www.i-imagine.com

Figure 25 above is an image of Chase that was used when the game featured in New Age Gaming Magazine (NAG). Chase is well known for the leather outfit portrayed in this picture because she wears it for most of the game. This is therefore an appropriate image to use in order to identify and discuss the character's sexualized attributes (oversized breasts, skimpy clothes, makeup, bee-stung lips and hair).

Breasts:

As previously mentioned, breasts signify sexual seduction (Deuber-Mankowsky Foreword ix) and because Chase's breasts are simply enormous (perhaps even larger than Lara's), she is clearly being sexualized in this manner. Chase's breasts are more exposed than Lara's because of the low-cut top she is wearing, and the exposed breast of course signifies sexual invitation (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 119). The fact that the outline of her left nipple is clearly visible, barely and tantalizingly covered by her top, will not be lost on any male gamers. Chase's figure combines large (and importantly, firm) breasts with a small waist, like Lara Croft, and thus sets an unrealistic example for women that implicitly urges them to take dangerous steps to match her beauty, such as plastic surgery.

Skimpy clothes:

Like Lara's, Chase's clothes appear skin-tight. She exposes a lot more of her breasts as well as her midriff. Her pants sit lower around her hips than is the case with Lara Croft and although the pants are long her entire outfit is leather. Leather has sexual connotations relating both to

youthful rebellion or non-conformity (bikers, etc.) and to sado-masochism. Fortunately Chase's outfit is not in view as much as Lara's is during gameplay. This is because the game focuses on driving: Chase is mainly shown in vehicles and how much is seen of her is dependent on the vehicle. For example, on a motorbike her full figure is shown, but in a car, only her upper body is visible. Should the player choose to view the replay cameras however, he/she will see many different camera angles. The sense of voyeurism created by the perspectives in Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver and Tomb Raider is therefore higher in Tomb Raider because we are always aware of Lara's sexuality. In this regard, Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver might be less likely to deter female gamers – especially during gameplay. However, there are parts of the game cinematics in which several camera angles focus on her breasts and buttocks (which are enhanced by her clothing). These shots are at times full screen, focussing only on one specific sexual part of her body.

Is Chase's outfit appropriate to her line of work? It would seem so, because Chase is dressed according to the requirements of the film she is doing the stunts for (Annexure A). I-Imagine stated that the outfit was chosen to be sleek, easy to manoeuvre in and certainly for its sex appeal; but one has to ask whether such a tight leather number is really that comfortable or "easy to manoeuvre in"?! The outfit may also be inappropriate for certain weather conditions – it doesn't offer enough covering to protect from the cold and cannot possibly offer comfort when driving around in the hot sun as leather is a thick fabric and the black colour absorbs heat. As is the case with Lara's outfit, Chase's outfit can

also only look good on a small, hard-to-achieve figure – like hers. Should a real woman wear such an outfit in public she would no doubt receive a great deal of attention from the opposite sex.

As mentioned previously, GameGirlz is hoping to encourage the industry to design female characters that are not so scantily dressed. Chase is unfortunately not yet an example of this. Wagner has however pointed out that although Chase changes outfits during the game she does not at any point wear less clothing.

Make-up:

At first glance Chase appears to be wearing very little make-up and seems more natural and less stereotypically sexualized than Lara Croft. But it may be that her make-up is just more subtle and "classy": she is clearly wearing brown eye-shadow and her flawless skin could well be produced by the application of "base". But there is no doubt that her lipstick is a more natural colour than Lara's, less overtly enhancing the sexuality of her lips, which are also of a more believable size.

Hair:

Chase's hair is shorter than Lara's and a natural shade of brown. This is a significant improvement on Lara's strongly sexualized long hair. The fact that Chase's hair is a natural colour and not a colour that would necessarily require chemical treatments to achieve perhaps makes it less sexualised and more attainable. The length of the hair is also not as

sexually appealing as Lara's, but is long enough to avoid looking masculine.

Thus, although Chase appears to be a sexualized character, she is less sexualized than Lara Croft because of her shorter hair, smaller lips and more natural appearance. Since there has been no sequel to Chase: Hollywood Stunt Driver, we cannot comment on the development of the character as such. However, comparisons between earlier concept drawings of Chase Corrado and later ones can be made. These images have all been provided by I-Imagine. An analysis of the evolution of the original concept sketch as well as perusal of the final model revealed the following:





Figures 26 to 29 Earlier character concepts through to final rendering[42]

Source: www.i-imagine.com

The changes between the original concept of the character and the final rendering are vast. It is clear that Chase has become a great deal more

[42] I-Imagine Interactive supplied the writer of this paper with all the images in this paper of Chase.

sexualized since her original conception. From beginning to end her top has shortened and her breasts have become more exposed and larger. The fact that the breasts are smaller in the concept drawings could suggest that it was indeed not initially the company's idea that Chase should have such a large bosom. Her dress code has changed from casual jeans and a top that fitted more loosely to the skin-tight leather outfit. Changes in make-up are not as obvious. Chase's hair and makeup are also more practical for the type of work she does. It was stated in the interview with I-Imagine that her hair colour was originally red, but that this was changed for aesthetic reasons to make her look more 'normal'. But we have to ask what constitutes a look of normality. Chase does not look 'normal': in reality, 'normal' women do not look like her. The fact is that Chase initially looked quite down-to-earth but subsequently evolved into a sex symbol. This sexual evolution is more obvious than was the case with Lara Croft, for in the original designs Chase was conceived as less sexualized than Lara in Tomb Raider 1. Overall, female gamers would probably find identification with Chase easier in terms of design.

But, like Lara, there are other aspects about Chase that make it hard for women to identify with her. She too has no love interest in her life and the fact that she always appears to be single enhances the notion of her being a plaything for male players. It indicates that she too is designed for men and not for women to identify with. Like Lara, Chase always has to appear available to men and yet remain just out of reach in order to maintain the interest of men ("A Postmodern Analysis of Lara Croft" 25). This appearance is enhanced by the camera angle from which she is

viewed during the game – the same camera angle used for Lara. The biggest difference between how Chase is viewed and the way Lara is viewed is that Chase is always inside a vehicle and her buttocks are therefore not permanently on display, as is the case with Lara. This allows for a less male-oriented and voyeuristically pleasing camera angle and perhaps one more acceptable to females: another aspect that makes Chase Hollywood Stunt Driver less sexualized than Tomb Raider.

As stated before, the idea of controlling women appeals to men (Gray 3), which then means that the camera angles chosen favour the male rather than female gaze. Additionally, a first person shooter camera angle would have made it easier for female gamers to identify with the character, and would have made the game experience more real for the player, regardless of gender. Chase may be an empowered woman, but, like Lara, she is still dependent on the guidance of men, which essentially reduces her to just another beautiful woman men can control (Gray 2).

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Images:

Figure 1

"AODScreenshots/aodscreen_20030904_227.jpg." Online image. Planetlara.com. 6 Sept. 2003. 15 June 2007. <http://www.planetlara.com/picview.asp?file=AODScreenshots/aodscreen_20030904_227.jpg>

Figure 2

"Screenshot from Nuderaider." Online image. Switch. 10 May 2004.

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Figure 3

"New subgallery created!" Online image. Soul Calibur Universe. 13 Dec. 2007.
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Figure 4

"Tomb Raider 2." Online image. Tombraiderchronicles. 18 Jan. 2008.
<http://www.tombraiderchronicles.com/tr2/screenshots_08.html>

Figure 5

"Tomb Raider 4 – The Temple of Horus" Skribblerz. 18 Jan. 2008.
<http://www.skribblerz.com/tr/trc/tr4fhorustemple.htm>

Figure 6

"tr6." Online image. Bebo. 18 Jan. 2008.
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Figures 7 & 8

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 1. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figures 9 & 10

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 2. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figures 11 & 12

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 3. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figures 13 & 14

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 4. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb 2007.

Figures 15 & 16

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 5. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figures 17 & 18

Screenshots from Tomb Raider 6. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figure 19

"Inside the Natla Tech building, Lara reads a book she found in a

cabinet." Online Image. Larashots. 3 Feb. 2007.
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Figure 20

Screenshot from Tomb Raider 2. Personal screenshots by author. 7 Feb. 2007.

Figure 21

"Tomb Raider 3 – Jungle". Online image. Skribblerz. 18 Jan. 2008.
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Figure 22

"Tomb Raider 4 – The Temple of Horus" Skribblerz. 18 Jan. 2008.
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Figure 23

"ScreenShots/tr5scrn_10.jpg". Online image. 12 May 2003. PlanetLara. 3 Feb. 2007.
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Figure 24

"Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness Screenshots Image #13". Online

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Figure 25

Chase featured in NAG Magazine. Supplied to author via email by Dan Wagner. 19 Oct. 2005. <www.i-imagine.com>

Figures 26 – 29

Earlier character concepts to final rendering. Supplied to author via email by Dan Wagner. 19 Oct. 2005. <www.i-imagine.com>

Figure 30

Poster promoting Chase. Supplied to author via email by Dan Wagner. 19 Oct. 2005. <www.i-imagine.com>

Annexure A:

E-mail interview with Dan Wagner from I-Imagine Interactive. 19 October 2005.

QUESTIONS:

1. Please introduce yourself in terms of your position in the company and your background.

Dan Wagner, founder and Managing Director of I-Imagine Interactive.

Background:

Dan Wagner is one of the original 8-bit video game 'addicts'. Early in his career he joined Sega's distributors in South Africa (a division of Ozisoft) in the capacity of General Product Manager. His expertise in programming 3D hardware using Creative Graphics Library, at Creative Lab's distribution, Super Diamond Computers, led to his decision to enroll as a student at Digipen Applied Computer Graphics School, in Vancouver Canada. He earned the distinction of graduating with excellence. In spite of receiving attractive job offers from some of the world's leading game development studios, Dan decided to return to South Africa and actualise his dream of establishing a locally based, world class game development studio.

About the game:

2. Which target market were you aiming at when you developed the game?

Our game was targeted at a wide audience of console gamers aged 15 – 40.

3. What type of research did you do to assist with the development of this game, for instance to reach your target market?

The racing genre is a top selling genre. What we did is look for a way to differentiate our game from your basic track racing game, to appeal to a wide audience and stand out amongst a very competitive market.

4. How much creative freedom did you have with the game design or were you following a strict client brief?

The idea for the game was our own, so we had complete creative freedom, but did take input from our publisher towards the end of the project when they assigned their own producer.

5. What degree of realism was aimed at with the game design? And was this an aesthetic decision?

The style of the game was designed to look and feel arcade-like. Gamers like to do things they can't in real life, and hence our game allowed players to easily perform stunts, though the vehicle handling had realistic physics.

6. What did you aim for as the strongest selling point in the game?

The uniqueness of a game based on doing Hollywood-like stunts.

7. Can you give me an idea of how many copies have been sold?

In excess of 170 000 units in Europe and North America.

8. Did the number of copies sold meet your expectations?

Considering it was our first title and launched only a few months after the Xbox had been released in Europe, and that the publisher had done little marketing for the game, it did very well.

9. In designing any game – do you aim to attract women gamers as much as male gamers?

It's really more dependent on the game we make. In this case the racing genre is predominantly male. Our core focus is to make the game fun to the average gamers, be they male or female.

10. Do you know what the ratio of female versus male consumers of this game is?

The latest research from the US is done by the ESA www.theesa.com. They supply the following stats, but do not break it down by game genre:

Forty-three percent of game players are women.

Women over the age of 18 represent a greater portion of the game-playing population than boys from 6 to 17 (28% and 21% respectively).

11. Aside from the racing, does the game feature a developing story and if so what is it?

The design of the game had an underlying story though this was not carried through into the game. This was an arcade game and hence the key component was fun and fast progressive levels.

12. Are you planning any sequels?

No final decision on this has been made yet.

13. Is the game restricted to one driver, being Chase only, or are there options?

The single player or career mode allows you to play the character of Chase only. The multiplayer games allow up to four players to play together.

14. Does the game feature any elements that could distinguish it as being South African?

We have one scene in the game where Chase makes use of a parachute, which has a large South African flag on it.

The character Chase:

15. Who were the people involved in creating the character Chase Corrado?

There were many people involved in the creation of the character. The character changed a few times during development until both the publisher and we were satisfied.

16. What was the inspiration behind creating the character?

We like the juxtaposition of having a woman stunt driver versus the opinion that “women are bad drivers”. We researched real stuntwomen, such as Gerogia Durante, and many films, such as Speed.

1. Was there any reason behind having a female character in a car racing game? Or was the brief from the start to have a girl?

The brief was to have a woman from the start. The simplest reason behind this was that it wasn’t the norm.

18. Has Chase changed much physically from your original idea of her?

Chase has certainly evolved over time: Below are some earlier versions of Chase

Is she based on anyone you know?

No

19. Is there a story behind naming the character Chase Corrada?

CHASE CORRADA

Chase’s mother passed away during her birth and her father chose not to remarry. She grew up somewhat of a tomboy, dueling neighbourhood boys to tricycle races instead of going to ballet classes. During childhood, Chase already showed great interest in her father’s career, which was stunt driving.

Instead of preoccupying herself with the usual pastimes of girls her age, Chase spent most of her time with her father in the garage and on set. Chase had her first go-cart accident when she was six; she came out of it laughing and never looked back.

After her father's refusal to train her in racing and stunt driving, a teenage Chase custom built a '71 Trans Am drag racer she called El Toro, and secretly began competing in drag races. She won every race. Despite the fact that a girl was beating them, all the drag racers accepted their defeat and a few even became close friends with the enigmatic young woman. After witnessing one of his daughter's triumphant races, Griffin decided to train her – he could not deny her talent.

As fate would have it, Mr. Chin, legendary action movie director and close friend of Chase's father, noticed the young stunt actor on a training track. He invited her to do a stunt-audition for his next blockbuster movie – and as with any other of her endeavours – Chase succeeded.

Although young, Chase is proving to be highly gifted, extremely professional and very precise in executing stunts. And even though safety is one of her highest priorities, she will not back down from any stunt – no matter how big, or how huge the explosion or jump. Chase easily does stunts that few stuntmen can emulate – including her biggest rival, Rick Baen.

Chase has the potential to not only become the best stunt actor in the industry – but possibly the greatest ever.

CHARACTERISTICS

- She has a shy yet sexy look in her eyes, with a mouth that's always set in a shy smile (except when concentrating on what Mr. Chin is directing or when Baen is nearby).
- Her eyes are always friendly, but a tilt in her head with a piece of hair always hanging over her eyes suggests a bit of adventure and danger lurking underneath the feminine veneer.

- Although she is a stuntwoman, she still walks like a lady with an air of mystery around her.
- Her motions and movements are fluent and self-assured.
- When she smiles, the smile starts from the right corner, giving her a bit of a sexy, teasing undertone.

20. In designing the character, did the success of Lara Croft from Tomb Raider ever cross your mind or become part of your discussions?

I don't think you can create any female heroine in a game without thinking about Lara Croft. We examined the way Lara Croft developed with new and more powerful hardware.

1. Was Chase ever featured in other media such as television, print advertising, magazine covers, etc?

Yes, several.

22. How often is her full figure shown in the game and can you describe from a player point of view how she is seen.

Chase is mainly shown in vehicles, as the game is focused on driving. How much is seen of her is dependant on the vehicle. For example on a motorbike her full figure will be shown, but in a car, only her upper body will be visible. Normally the player will see the character from behind (as he/she is driving), however if the player chooses to see the replay cameras he will see all types of camera angles.

There are also a few cutscenes where the player will see Chase's full figure.

23. How much character development did you invest into this character, in terms of: personality, background story, history, family, etc?

The character background developed and improved over the course of the game production. However this was used more in marketing such as interviews than in the game.

24. Is she being promoted as a single woman or does she form relationships within the game?

Single, independent woman.

25. How would you say males relate to the character Chase Corrada?

Since we never got around to building the story in the game and you mainly see her behind the wheel of a car, I would say that guys just see her as a sex symbol.

26. In creating the character, did you hope that Chase would become a fantasy model for men?

In designing games we try to look at franchise opportunities, so certainly making a marketable character was one of them.

27. How do you think women relate to Chase?

As the story behind the character is not really revealed in the game, most women would probably just see her as a sex symbol to appeal to men.

Though ironically although I played a key role in creating Chase, I had two women working with me intricately in both how she looked and her background story.

1. Do you think she could be seen as a good role model for women/girls?

The character itself I think would be a good role model. She starts off a bit of a rebel, but ultimately she is a young independent woman that chases her dreams and aims for the top.

29. What inspired her outfit, perhaps looking at elements such as style, colour, comfort and sex appeal? Is this type of outfit based on the attire usually worn by stunt drivers?

In the game Chase wears outfits to fit the movie that she is in. Her main outfit was chosen to be sleek, easy to maneuver in and certainly sex appeal.

30. Does she ever wear less clothing?

No

31. Is there any particular reason why Chase has dark hair and not blonde?

Originally Chase had red hair, but ultimately we chose brown. The choice was more aesthetic then anything else. Our goal was to make her as normal looking as possible.

32. Is there a story behind the size of her breasts?

The publisher really made the call on this one. We just tweaked the pixels (many times) until they were happy.

33. Did you feel any pressure from feminine debates surrounding female characters in games?

No.

34. What positive and negative feedback have you received surrounding the character?

We have never received any external feedback regarding the character.

35. Will the character have her own fan website?

No.

Company information:

37. There seems to be a shortage of females in the gaming industry - in designing this game, what was the ratio of female employees versus male employees in the company? Did this change after the game?

There certainly is a shortage in the industry. About a year into production we hired one female artist, who landed up doing the main redesign of Chase. She eventually moved on (over a year after Chase was released). Currently we are once again an all male company.

Annexure B:

X-Gamer Chase Preview provided by I-Imagine Interactive.

hands on

chase

Ever wanted to know what it's like to be Lee Majors? Or a woman? Now you can do both.

release july complete

The most crazy-assed stunt anyone's pulled in the XGamer office lately was when Mark got out of his chair to make a cup of tea. Mental. Truth is, the stunt world is a total mystery to us. We imagine it involves falling off buildings, being set on fire, wrestling crocodiles and having to snog actors that super-stars deem too minging to kiss.

Happily games like *Chase* fill in the blanks. As stunt lady Chase Carrada, the game whisks you around the movie sets of the world to perform daredevil driving feats. Only by proving you'll do anything for a dare can you establish your reputation as the most fearless stunt loony in the industry.

hollywood stunts

There're four locations in total, each with its own theme. The first thing you notice when you pick up and play is how the level collapses around you, virtually everything is destructible and as you're flooring it through the city you'll cause more damage than the Luftwaffe did during WWII. You start off in 1920's gangster America, where you must write off every car in sight, while Mafia goons breathe down your tailpipe.

Each mission (or scene, rather) kicks starts with a clipboard giving you your objectives and once off you'll have the movie director screaming down your lug-hole as you pelt through the sets at ridiculous speeds. Jackie Chan, James Bond and Mad Max have all been used as inspiration for the later levels.

There're several scenes in each location and you gain reputation points by wowing the camera. Top marks are earnt for destroying set fodder like fire hydrants (which erupt into giant geysers when hit), telephone boxes and ripping through newspaper stands. Later on you'll be racing to leap rising bridges and hurtling through hay-packed barns in recreations of classic Hollywood action moments.

Chase is a fast-fuelled action game that instantly has you chuckling through a deluge of all-out city mayhem. You're constantly on a knife edge, with time, bullets or the directors "CUT!" as constant adversaries. The missions are also hugely replayable as there's always a different way to go about them.

Fresh, fast and fun, *Chase* could be the game that puts the stun in stunt.

Dan Curley

GAMER PREDICTS

Looking like it could win our hearts as much as *The Fall Guy* did in our youthful years. Keep an eye out for our forthcoming review.

HIT!

game
- Genre Stunt Crazy
- Players 1-4
- Movies None
- Code stage Alpha

company
- Developer I-Imagine
- Publisher Eidos
- Contact 01225 320 29
- www.ilandfun.com

JUMP AN OPEN DRAWBRIDGE

One of the early levels has you being hunted by rival gangsters. You can only escape you fly over a rising drawbridge...



1 You get your briefing on a clipboard from the director.
2 Then start to finish it's carnage all the way.
3 Smash the pedal to the metal or a watery doom awaits.

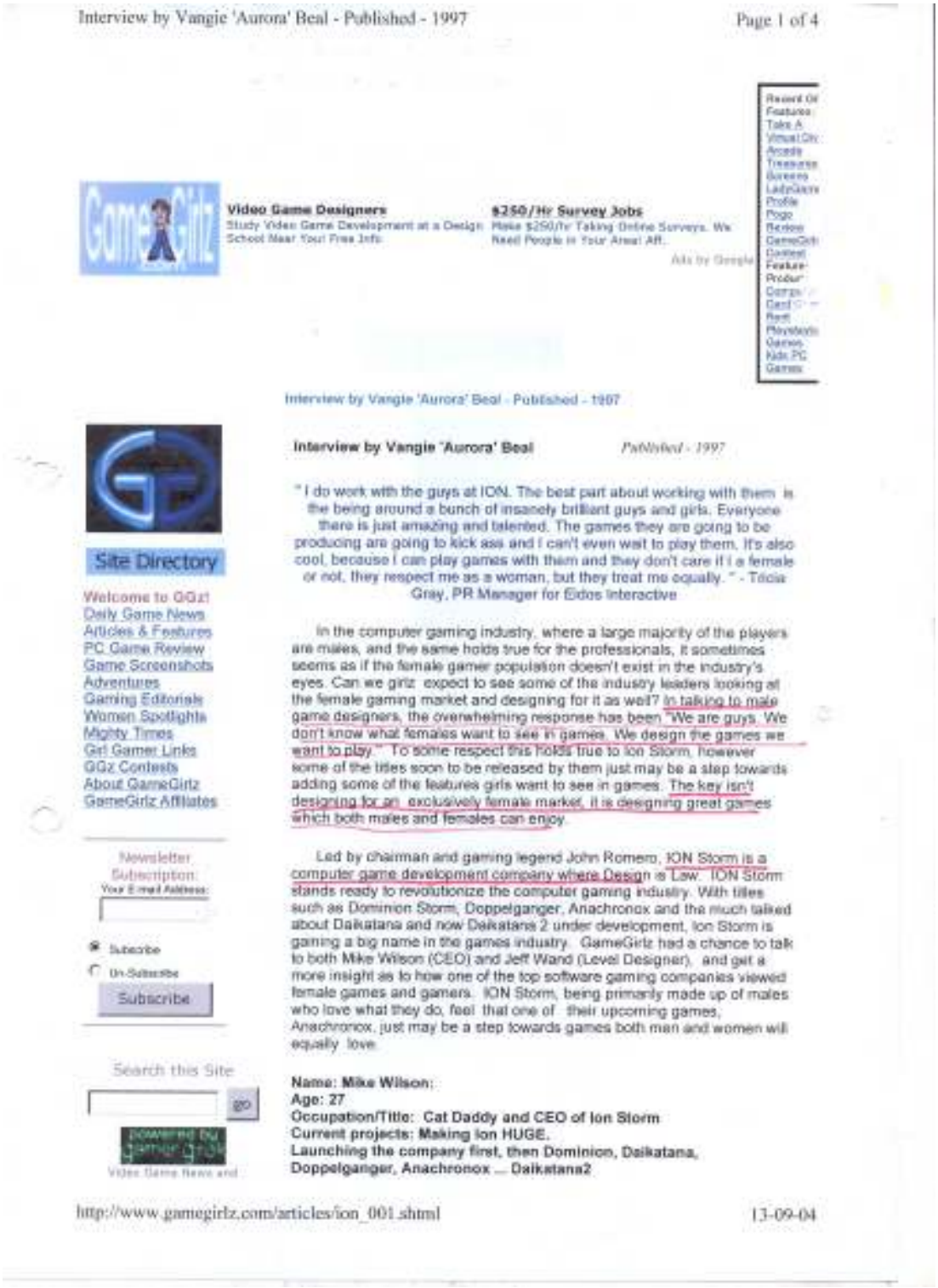


Grab the clipboards dotted along the level for reputation points.

The director keeps you informed of your performance, good or bad.

Annexure C:

Other:



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Video Game Designers
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Interview by Vangie 'Aurora' Beal *Published - 1997*

" I do work with the guys at ION. The best part about working with them is the being around a bunch of insanely brilliant guys and girls. Everyone there is just amazing and talented. The games they are going to be producing are going to kick ass and I can't even wait to play them. It's also cool, because I can play games with them and they don't care if I a female or not, they respect me as a woman, but they treat me equally. " - Tricia Gray, PR Manager for Eidos Interactive

In the computer gaming industry, where a large majority of the players are males, and the same holds true for the professionals, it sometimes seems as if the female gamer population doesn't exist in the industry's eyes. Can we girlz expect to see some of the industry leaders looking at the female gaming market and designing for it as well? In talking to male game designers, the overwhelming response has been "We are guys. We don't know what females want to see in games. We design the games we want to play." To some respect this holds true to Ion Storm, however some of the titles soon to be released by them just may be a step towards adding some of the features girls want to see in games. The key isn't designing for an exclusively female market, it is designing great games which both males and females can enjoy.

Led by chairman and gaming legend John Romero, ION Storm is a computer game development company where Design is Law. ION Storm stands ready to revolutionize the computer gaming industry. With titles such as Dominion Storm, Doppelganger, Anachronox and the much talked about Daikatana and now Daikatana 2 under development, Ion Storm is gaining a big name in the games industry. GameGirlz had a chance to talk to both Mike Wilson (CEO) and Jeff Wand (Level Designer), and get a more insight as to how one of the top software gaming companies viewed female games and gamers. ION Storm, being primarily made up of males who love what they do, feel that one of their upcoming games, Anachronox, just may be a step towards games both men and women will equally love.

Name: Mike Wilson:
Age: 27
Occupation/Title: Cat Daddy and CEO of Ion Storm
Current projects: Making Ion HUGE.
Launching the company first, then Dominion, Daikatana, Doppelganger, Anachronox ... Daikatana2

http://www.gamegirlz.com/articles/ion_001.shtml 13-09-04



GG: What do you enjoy most about working at ION Storm?
Mike Wilson: "Starting with six guys and a few computers and growing to 4 full game teams in the coolest game shop in the world in less than a year... it's less than boring. Ion Storm is the chance to do everything we ever wanted to do... the right way, from the very beginning. The possibilities (and realities) are limitless."

GG: What other previous gaming related jobs have you had?
Mike Wilson: " VP of Development, DWANGO... helped start the very first multiplayer action gaming service back in 94 with Kee Kimbrell , John Romero, and Bob Huntley. Again, I got to get in when it was just a glimmer in our eyes and helped grow it into an international franchising operation in less than a year. Director of Marketing and Distribution at id from mid 95-Dec 95. Got to launch The Ultimate Doom, Hexen, Master Levels for Doom II, Heretic:Shadow of the Serpent Riders, Final DOOM, the id Anthology, and a little game called Quake. I got to start id's own publishing company and do lots of fun things with those titles. "

GG: Do you see there being a market in designing games for females?
Mike Wilson: "There is absolutely a HUGE market developing for women... I just wish we knew how to do it.... hopefully Tom Hall will get us close Anachronox."

GG: Do you think that the games your company designs, are games girls would want to buy and play?
Mike Wilson: "We're getting there... I think action games like Quake are about as masculine as gaming gets, but there are still quite a few females that play. All of our games, including Daikatana (which is the most Quake-like of our 5 titles in progress) incorporate more storytelling/role playing/problem solving elements that are our best guess at getting more women involved. The problem is that there is not a solid definition for what women want in games... it's a new frontier that has only been dabbled in so far. Maybe forums like this site will help us figure it out."

GG: What elements of a game to you think game developers need to include making your games more appealing to females?
Mike Wilson: "See above... again, more involved plots and better character development seem to be the way to go, but hey, what do we know? We're about 95% male here."

GG: If your company does market research before releasing a game, does that research include feed back from females? If not, have you ever given any consideration to assessing the female gamer market and seeing if it would be valuable to you?
Mike Wilson: "We don't do market research... we make the games that we want to play, because we are all avid gamers. This is what leads to content more aimed at males (or at least it has thus far), but if we try to design 'games for women' based on market research... well, we'd be faking it. Our hearts wouldn't be in it if we did it for that reason. The good news is that our lead designers, especially Tom Hall and Warren Spector, have a desire to create truly compelling content that just happens to be what I'd say is the most likely key to bridging the gender gap."

GG: Why do you think there are so few females working in the computer games industry as programmers, designers, and writers?
Mike Wilson: "Well, our industry is just now reaching a 'coming of age' cycle, where we're seeing more focus on design and content and FINALLY a move away from techno-gadgetry. This is what Ion Storm is all about. However, up to now, the focus on technology has brought in a lot more early-adopter males into gaming than females, who are traditionally more cautious, practical adopters of technology. The overwhelming gamer

population slant towards males leads to less women getting into the culture and therefore the industry. Hopefully, if we're right, and we're reaching a stage that focuses on content over features-lists, then we'll see a big trend toward female involvement on both the consumer and developer side. We're always looking for female talent... but there aren't a lot to choose from. I mean, we hold women to the same standards as any other applicant... they have to be badass at what they do. We won't hire anybody just because they're female."

GG: What are your personal thoughts on the gaming industry and how females fit into it ?
Mike Wilson: "I hope that they fit into it in a big way... this little industry could really use an infusion of some new ideas and energy... not that we're tapped out, by any means, but well... I like women. A lot."

Name: Jeff Wand
Age: 23
Occupation/Title: 3d computer graphics artist at disputedly the most awesome and ambitious company in the world, ION Storm.
Current projects: I am working on Daikatana!

GG: What do you enjoy most about working at ION Storm?
Jeff Wand: "I enjoy working with people that not only have a lot of the same interests that I do, but have the same goals."

GG: What other previous gaming related jobs have you had?
Jeff Wand: "I used to work at Origin Systems for four years in Austin, Texas working on Wing Commander and Ultima-related projects."

GG: Do you see there being a market in designing games for females?
Jeff Wand: "Eventually yes. If I may be so bold, I tend to think of the market for female gamers as being similar to the market for african-american movie goers. Right now we might be in the early stages with games being kind of like the early blaxploitation films ("Shaft", "Cleopatra Jones") but eventually they'll involve into more content driven games. ("Waiting To Exhale, "Soul Food") I know, I know brilliant analogy, huh?"

GG: Do you think that the games your company designs, are games girls would want to buy and play?
Jeff Wand: " Depends on the girl, but out of all our games in progress, I think Anachronox is the game that's being designed with the female gamer in mind the most."

GG: What elements of a game to you think game developers need to include making your games more appealing to females?
Jeff Wand: "A good storyline, puzzles, non-stereotyped female characters, and an absence of shock value."

GG: If your company does market research before releasing a game, does that research include feed back from females? If not, have you ever given any consideration to assessing the female gamer market and seeing if it would be valuable to you?
Jeff Wand: "I think we're very open-minded and consider feedback from female gamers rare and very valuable. In addition we dialogue quite a bit on female gamer issues with the most hardcore female gamer I know, Tricia Grey, our Eidos representative. By the way, female gamers should hook up with her. She can be a very persuasive ally!"

GG: Why do you think there are so few females working in the computer games industry as programmers, designers, and

writers... ?
Jeff Ward: "I don't think there have been many games out there that girls have seen and said to themselves "I want to make a game like that". Also the lifestyle lacks a certain amount of glamour that other industries have. I mean even if your company wins "Action Game of the Year", it hardly compares to a Nobel, Pulitzer, Grammy, Emmy, Lifetime Achivement, etc.... "

GG: What are your personal thoughts on the gaming industry and how females fit into it ?
Jeff Ward: " I think it's inevitable that females will play a bigger part in the game industry both as consumers and creators. There're already females at the top of their companies that are doing very well, Sierra On-Line, Titanic, and Illusion Machines are good examples and I'm starting to see a steady stream of female artists (thank god) coming into the industry. Sonya Roberts got her foot in the door at Pseudointeractive as a level designer/artist! It's happening, it's just going to take time."

Related Links:
http://www.ionstorm.com

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MEDIA

Girls & Video Games

Nineteen million girls between the ages of eight and eighteen spend $57 billion of their own money each year in the United States. [1] Despite this figure, the $6.3 billion U.S. video game industry [2] has been slow to develop a wide range of products that reflect girls' interests. This may be due to misconceptions that girls are not interested in video and computer games. [3] However, Mattel's success with Barbie computer software proves that there is a market for products aimed at girls. In fact, the girls' game market generated $64 million in 1997. [4]

Video and computer games have long been designed and marketed primarily to male consumers, who make up about 89% of the console market and 94% of the gaming magazine market. [5] This is evidenced in widespread aggressive and violent themes, which reflect boys' traditionally aggressive play. [6] One study found that 40 of the 47 top video games from Nintendo were violent. [7] Another study revealed that 92% of arcade games had no female roles, and of the 8% that did, 6% were "damsels in distress" and only 2% had active (rather than passive) roles. [8] Video game advertising has also lacked female representation; game packaging usually pictures boys, not girls. Even parents purchase video games twice as much for their sons as they do for their daughters. [9]

However, research shows that girls are also interested in playing video games. According to a recent study, women make up 43% of PC players and 35% of console gamers. [10] Another study revealed that 74% of girls using computers spend time playing games online. [22] Though software developers are finally recognizing the multibillion-dollar industry for girls, [12] they are slow in developing a variety of girl-specific games. [13]

Although, games such as *Barbie Fashion Designer*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Little Mermaid* have opened doors to a girls' market, these games have not yet broadened the overall scope of video games designed for girls. Some girls regard many of these video games as too "girly-girl;" [14] the computer game industry calls them "pink" games. [15]

In order to even out the gender gap, and to ensure that girls will not be at a disadvantage in their future, studies have been conducted to examine what girls' interests are and how to encourage them toward technology. Studies show that some girls view video game violence as boring, irrelevant, and unrealistic. [16] One study revealed that girls do not necessarily dislike the violence, but the repetition of the games. [17] Another study found that girls were not interested in video games because they felt the games lacked complexity in plot and character, and thus they did not feel motivated to master the skills of the game. [18] Also, studies have found that girls dislike fast-paced activity, [19] rigidity and the lack of options in survival games. [20] Finally, one study revealed that girls were not interested in being "winners" or "losers," [21] and they did not care about high scores. [22]

Research has revealed that girls want to identify with characters or play the role of the main character. [23] They are interested in "open-ended" explorations with flexible environments [24] and varied outcomes. [25] Realistic themes (as opposed to fantasy, which boys tend to prefer) also interest girls because they provide characters and situations with which girls can readily identify. [26] Girls demonstrate interest in the relational, social, and familiar, as well as non-aggressive activities. [27] Secrets, [28] appearances, siblings and pets are also topics of interest. [29] Girls are reported to be interested in attaining a goal and reaching a destination, [30] and they prefer cooperation over competition. [31] Girls enjoy games involving role-playing, adventure, drawing, creative writing, and problem-solving. [32] Finally, girls like games with quality graphic images and sounds or music. [33]

With the popularity of *Barbie Fashion Designer* and its clones, some experts are warned that video games will reinforce gender stereotypes. In attempts to even out the playing field some companies are marketing traditional computer games genres (i.e. violent games) to females, instead of creating female specific games. Games such as *Quake* , a shoot-'em up game, and *Tomb Raider* , an adventure game, are now being marketed to girls. *Tomb Raider* , which features Laura Croft, a strong female, has been particularly successful, attributing 30% of its sales to women. Games like *Tomb Raider* have indeed increased the representation of female video game characters, whereas in 1992 only eight of 100 games contained women. [34] However, critics charge that these video games still do not reflect the interests of girls.

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May 21, 2005

Storm in a C-cup as Lara slims down and covers up

BY NIC HOPKINS AND TOSIN SULAIMAN

SHE is famous for her pneumatic features, with a bust that has entranced legions of teenage boys over the past decade, but Lara Croft has undergone an extreme makeover.

Eidos, who produce the *Tomb Raider* games, which were turned into films starring Angelina Jolie, has toned down Ms Croft's curves for the upcoming release of *Tomb Raider: Legend*.

Gone are the gravity-defying features that remained unmoved no matter how vigorous the somersaults Ms Croft executed, and in their place is a more realistic figure.

Her bust size has reduced from a DD-size cup to a more modest C. Her skimpy outfits are less revealing and in some scenes she is wearing a round-neck sweater with full-length arms together with long trousers. "Lara's been on a diet and she's definitely gone down a cup size, but she's still quite well proportioned," said Toby Gard, the original creator of the character.

The news of Lara's new body was greeted with scepticism by some women.

"It doesn't make it easier to be a girl in today's culture," Deanne Jade, principal of The National Centre of Eating Disorders, said. "Why don't they make her podgy? Why don't they give her bigger hips and thighs?" However, Lou Ford, the deputy editor of Cosmopolitan, questioned how realistic Lara's smaller bra size was. "Just like in real life, it's irrelevant how big a woman's boobs are. It' s irrelevant to how good a job she does."

Eidos spent two years researching its core audience and decided to change Lara's looks after the last title, *Angel of Darkness*, sold only two million units worldwide, far fewer than expected. "The days of selling Lara as boobs and guns are over," Matt Gorman, worldwide brand manager for *Tomb Raider*, said.

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LABOUR SAVING DEVICES OF THE MODERN AGE...

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Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice

Computer games girls play.

By Michael Lewis

Posted Wednesday, Feb. 1, 1995, at 12:00 AM PT

Interval Research Corp. is one of the many curious, putatively futuristic institutions that could never exist were it not for the largess of Paul Allen, the retired co-founder of Microsoft.

Its stated purpose is to explore the intersection of culture and high technology and, incidentally, to make money. It is one part think tank, one part venture-capital fund, and one part mystery.

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Five years ago Interval Research hired Brenda Laurel, who had spent the previous 20 years developing

washingtonpost.com:
• Bob Woodward on How Mark Felt Became Deep Throat

Newsweek.com:
• Understanding Deep Throat

Slate:
• So Who Leaked to Mark Felt?

computer games, to head a 10-person team investigating the nature of little girls. The $6-billion computer-games industry had been built to the specifications of the 11-year-old boy, mainly because it had been invented by male computer geeks with the mental age of 11-year-old boys. Girls had been largely ignored. Girls, it was felt, weren't interested in playing computer games. "A $6-billion business with a vacant lot next door," as Laurel puts it. "It made sense to build on it."

Originally, Laurel set out not to create a business but merely a body of knowledge. Her team spent four years interviewing psychiatrists, teachers, parents, children, toy-company executives, and so on. At the end of the research they decided they understood girls between the ages of 7 and 12 as they had never been understood. They took this understanding and Interval's money and created a computer-games company in Palo Alto called Purple Moon. Purple Moon refuses to divulge its research, but it does provide journalists with a summary of the results. The most salient of these are the differences in how little boys and little girls compete. Here they are:

GIRLS (Horizontal Competitors)	BOYS (Hierarchical Competitors)
Covert competition	Overt competition
Desire to establish relationships/friendships	Desire to establish physical superiority/power
Social status tends to be determined by affiliation and exclusion	Social status tends to be determined by achievement and physical domination
Aim to figure out opponent	Aim to outwit opponent
Regard oral sex as adultery	Do not regard oral sex as adultery

Actually, I made that last one up. But the others are original to Purple Moon--and about, oh, a billion male-chauvinist pigs. Forty man-years of research have confirmed for the computer-games industry what anyone with eyes not blinded by ideology can see. It would seem a good example of business people chewing more than they had bitten off.

But before you sneer--or, at any rate, while you sneer--

But the whole enterprise you must know that the two games released by Purple Moon have been fantastically successful. One is called Secret Paths in the Forest, the other is called Rockett's New School. In the three months since their release, both have ranked among the top 50 best-selling computer games. Purple Moon may have reinvented the wheel, but the wheel rolls.

The first thing you notice about the games themselves is their packaging, which seems designed to alienate little boys. A self-respecting little boy might be able to get beyond the illustrations of flowers and jewels and little girls prancing across empty fields. But he would surely give up when he saw the message emblazoned on the side of the box:

Deep Friendships. Love of Nature. The confidence to be cool. The courage to dream. It's what girls are all about. And it's what girls share when they discover Purple Moon adventures. Which is why Purple Moon is just for girls.

It turns out that the purpose of this warning label is to avoid what Purple Moon calls "the cootie effect." The cootie effect is the death of interest suffered by little girls when little boys play a computer game and pronounce it to be "lame." And that is almost certainly what the snips-and-snails crowd would do if it got its hands on, say, Rockett's New School. The game captures the many reasons 11-year-old boys have historically made a practice of avoiding 11-year-old girls.



Rockett's New School is what Purple Moon calls "a friendship adventure." A friendship adventure, unlike the usual phallocentric computer adventure, is not about the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. No wizards are slain, no goals are scored, no puzzles are solved. Rockett's adventure is a simulated real-life experience, a soap opera starring 14-year-olds that attempts to capture the emotional complexity of

awkward social situations. The principal social situation is a teen-age girl named Rockett's first day at a new school. Rockett is a spunky, miniskirted, 14-year-old redhead faced with a series of psychologically fraught encounters: meeting the coolest girl, meeting the uncoolest girl, meeting the cute boy, deciding where to sit in the cafeteria, confronting a bully who is upset that she is dressed in exactly the same white blouse and green miniskirt, and so on. Maybe the most striking thing about these encounters is their rawness. The game does not feel like an old person's idea of a young person's point of view; it feels like a young person's point of view. In one situation, for instance, Rockett is openly grossed out by a male teacher whose hand is deformed. The game requires her to shake the gnarled and withered stump.

In none of this does Rockett--or the player--have any control over ultimate outcomes. In each real-life situation, three separate thought-bubbles appear over Rockett's head. They correspond to three social attitudes: bitchy, chirpy, and shy. The player, plugged into Rockett's central nervous system, chooses her state of mind. But Rockett's state of mind has no effect on Rockett's destiny. The cool girl snubs Rockett whether she is a bitch or a suck-up--the only difference is the severity of the snubbing. No matter where the player points her mouse and clicks, Rockett marches inexorably to her fate.

The big difference between the computer games that little boys play and the computer games that little girls play lies in what the player controls. The little boy wants to control his destiny. The little girl wants to control her state of mind. At any time, for example, the player can freeze the narrative and send Rockett sneaking into the backpacks and lockers of the other students. She can read diaries and private letters, or write her own. ("OK, whatever I write down here is going to be, like, my most private thoughts.") According to Purple Moon, the little girls who play the game spend fully half of their time snooping through other people's private effects.

Thus the fantasy of little girls, it would seem, is not to win but to acquire slowly a sense of social superiority. If the games favored by 11-year-old boys resemble life in a high-tech startup, the games favored by 11-year-old girls are like life in a bureaucracy. Whether the cause is nature or nurture, who would care to say?

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0. Introduction

'Cyber-Goddess', 'Icon of the Nineties', 'Virtual World Star', Lara Croft has captured the public imagination and the global market in ways that no other virtual character has. She is everywhere - in the original CD ROM computer game, in the merchandise industry, in TV advertisements, in music videos and - soon - in a motion picture, and she is talked about everywhere - from serious newspapers to popular magazines to the internet.

In her genre she is revolutionary - heroines, who really solve problems without the aid of a hero - are practically non-existent in the world of computer games (Louis 1998). And no other computer game protagonists have managed to leap out of the subcultural world of gamers and aquire a degree of popular recognition - and market value - that is usually reserved for celebrities of film or music.

With her impressive body, squeezed into tight fitting outfits Lara can hardly be overlooked. Or ignored. Opinions diverge whether she is a liberating feminist icon or a reactionary object of male desire. As a feminist, my feelings towards her were ambivalent and I felt the desire to look more closely at what she is. How is she constructed, how is she represented, how is she talked and written about? What discourses are drawn upon in her construction, what are the meanings she carries, what are the resulting consequences for a feminist analysis? Is the decision whether she is pro- or anti-feminism really that easy, and is that actually a valid question?

To explore these questions I will draw on a theoretical background that is informed by postmodernism and feminism. On the one hand because I believe feminism can greatly profit from many postmodern ideas, on the other because I find a postmodern analysis of Lara particularly potent. A feminist standpoint is the underlying basis of all my analyses, its thoughts, theories and insights flow into the whole concept of this work. By feminism I understand, to use Claudia Springer's words "a philosophy that seeks to end patriarchy and institute in its place an egalitarian system. Feminism seeks to release all people, men and women, from narrowly defined ideas about gender" (Springer 1996, 15)1. In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary to take a close, theoretically informed look at how these ideas of gender come into existence, are perpetuated, are protected from deconstruction and what ends they serve. One particular area in which ideas about gender are transported, reinforced and/or subverted is that of representation.

Representation is a particularly interesting area for feminist research and analysis because it frequently reinforces the notion of the male subject and the female object. "The prohibition [what may or may not be represented] bears primarily on woman as the subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images of women" (Owens 1985, 59, emphasis in original). But images do more than just posit one gender as object and one as subject, they perpetuate meaning and power. Discourses and images are vital in the construction and perpetuation of social and symbolic order (Bertens 1995) an area that Michel Foucault has theorised in great detail.

> He interrogates the power that is inherent in the discourses that surround us - and that is continually reproduced by them - and interrogates the institutions that support those discourses and are, in turn, supported by them.
>
> Bertens 1995, 8

Discourses are all around us they mediate all areas of life and they control the production of knowledge: "they put a limit on what is sayable at any one time: they define what counts as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' statements" (Ward 1997, 129). Representations are part of these discourses and therefore part of the power structure to be analysed.

With Foucault I have already introduced postmodern thought into my dissertation. But there are further reasons why I believe it is particularly fruitful to brong postmodern ideas into the process of analysing representations and images - especially from the realm of popular culture. First, postmodern theories repeatedly and explicitly deal with representations and their meanings. At the basis of a postmodern analysis of images lies the assertion that a symbol can actually represent reality in an unmediated and direct way. Following this thought is the insight, that representation is closely linked to ideology:

> If representations do not and cannot represent the world, then inevitably all representations are political, in that they cannot help reflecting the ideological frameworks within which they arise. The end of representation thus leads us back to the question of authorship, to such political questions as 'Whose history gets told? In whose name? To what purpose?'
>
> Bertens 1995, 7

Second, postmodernism offers insightful new ways to look at popular culture, which had been either mocked or looked down upon by modern theorists. Mass and popular culture are no longer seen as 'low art' opposed to the academic 'high art' of painting, sculpture etc. The distinction between high and low has eroded and left the tradtional boundaries meaningless (Jameson 1985). As Umberto Eco puts it:

> Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not the prisoners of the mass media. Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on.
>
> Eco in Ward 1997, 30

This embracing of mass culture offers the possibilities to look at phenomena of popular culture from a whole new angle. Not judgement is the central aim but an understanding of the workings of these phenomena and their meanings in our society.

Third, the new media are of particular interest from a postmodern perspective - due to the fascination with mass culture. Especially questions of reality and the construction of identity in relation to the influences of the second media age are of central concern:

> In the 20th century, electronic media are supporting an equally profound transformation of identity [as the emergence of a urban merchant culture in the midst of feudal society did in the Middle Ages]. Telephone, radio, film, television, the computer and now their integration as 'multimedia' reconfigure words, sounds and images so as to cultivate new configurations of individuality.
>
> Poster 1995, 80

In the first part of my disseration I introduce the reader the phenomenon 'Lara Croft'. The first chapter gives a general overview over the game Tomb Raider and its protagonist Lara Croft. I place her within the context of other heroic women and of other virtual persons, since she seems to me to be related to both groups while at the same time being something special in each group.

The second chapter is dedicated to a detailed presentation of many of Lara's different manifestations. Since Lara is to the very largest part a visual phenomenon I found it particularly important to include many visuals so that the reader will get a reasonably good idea of the type of representation used in relation to Lara. My aim is to show what discourses are used to construct her, what traditions are drawn upon, which elements are repeated and what aspects are completely left out. I will look at one aspect in her representation, namely the hyper-sexualisation, in more detail since it is the most striking feature of Lara.

The second part of my dissertation will be more theoretically informed, analysing the presented material from the standpoint outlined above. Having identified the issues of identity, the body and reality as central postmodern concerns which pertain strongly to Lara I analyse her representations in relation to these points.

The question of identity features strongly in postmodern thought since it has broken with the modern notion of a unified, stable and essentially timeless self. Instead we encounter fragmentation, fluidity and constant performance of identity. I take a close look at how Lara's identity is constructed and what meanings both this identity and the manner of construction carry.

The next question is that of the body. Here I rely strongly on Foucault who

> has argued that the rise of parliamentary institutions and of new conceptions of political liberty was accompanied by a darker countermovement, by the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body.
>
> Bartky 1997, 129

Several feminist theorists have taken Foucault's thoughts and applied them to a feminist standpoint. Particularly the control of the female body via a normative gaze has been the focus of many analyses. In our visual culture women are bombarded with normative images of femininity. In aiming to fulfill these norms, women's bodies turn into docile, controlled bodies. Since image are particularly common means of perpetuating feminine norms I analyse the representations of Lara in relation to this accusation. But I also pay attention to her subversive potential.

In the third part of this chapter I explore the meanings of reality and virtual reality in relation to Lara. What changes are occuring and how are they mirrored in the representations? What fears and attempts to deal with these fears can be discerned in the way the images are constructed? The new technologies bring about many changes and in their wake many boundaries are being blurred - something feminists (among others) have always aimed for and hoped for. For that reasons, some feminists see great potential in these changes, particularly in virutal reality and cyberculture. To explore all the implications of this would be a dissertation of its own but I touch upon a few points that I find particularly striking and promising.

Note: This dissertation is accompanied by a CD ROM that contains all the videos discussed (the advertisements and the music video). To run the CD you need Windows 95 or higher and Internet Explorer or Netscape. Put the CD in your CD ROM drive and double-click on the index file. In case some videos do not work in your Explorer or Netscape, go back to your CD ROM drive window, double-click on the folder 'Videos' and select the video there.

1. Tomb Raider and Lara Croft

The computer game Tomb Raider first appeared in November 1996 and was subsequently followed by Tomb Raider II and Tomb Raider III in one year intervals; Tomb Raider IV is due to be released in November 1999 (PSZ 9/99, 17). All Tomb Raider games are produced by Core Design and published by Eidos Interactive, both of which are British companies.

From the start the Tomb Raider games were a big success, the original Tomb Raider having sold over 3 million copies before Tomb Raider II was released (Bradley, 1997b, 24). Three factors are seen to have been influential in the success: the gameplay as such, the clever marketing and the curvaceous protagonist Lara Croft (DS, 18.10.1998, http://www.stern.de). In the development of Tomb Raider Core Design introduced several innovations, on the technical side, in design and in the construction of the game. And of course by creating a very sexy female heroine, thereby being the first to focus a game completely on a heroine instead of having - at most - the occasional female character (LCM 1/99, 24).

The target audience of the Tomb Raider games, according to Susie Hamilton, PR Mananger for Core, would usually be males between 15 and 26 years of age (BRADLEY, 1997a, 14). This group is considered to be the general target audience for computer games, the average player being about 23 years old. As the games became more complex and challenging over the last few years, adults became more involved (or rather stayed involved, since this is now the generation that grew up with video games). Game playing has moved beyond its image of being a retreat from reality for asocial teenagers and introvert youngsters. Instead it "now ranks with movies, sport and music as the key leisure pursuit of the under-30 population" (SHAKESPEARE 1997).

The Game

Tomb Raider is a 3D adventure/action game where the player moves the protagonist Lara Croft through several different levels and locations (eg the Chinese Wall, Venice, Tibet, Peru etc.) usually trying to find one (or more) particular mythological artefact(s) at the end of each quest. On the way the player - as Laru - has to fight attacking animals and evil contestants, solve puzzles, search for items needed along the way and generally manage to get through the trap-ridden levels alive. Tomb Raider II and III focus more on offering many different exotic locations and extensive combat scenes, whereas the new Tomb Raider IV is said to go back to the original Tomb Raider's virtues of atmosphere, smaller locations and a stronger emphasis on tricky puzzles. As opposed to earlier 2D computer games, where the action was viewed either from above or from the side - but always as if on a flat surface - the whole design is now three-dimensional, giving the environment real depth and atmosphere. The possibilities that new hard- and software opened up in the field of graphics and design, also made the protagonist of the play a much more interesting and central issue. To further enhance these possibilities, Core introduced a cinematic point of view: the viewpoint of the player is

that of a camera which follows Lara in a short distance, therefore looking at her from behind at all times.1

In most other 3D games, the player looks out of the eyes of the protagonist, only seeing his2 weapon on the bottom of the screen or the hand holding it at the most. In these games the player is more apt to identify with the protagonist whereas in Tomb Raider it is more of a joint adventure between the player and Lara, the player being "encouraged to identify with her situation as you would with an action hero on the big screen" (BRADLEY1997a 15; emphasis mine). Feelings of responsibility for Lara are evoked and in case of her death the player does not feel that he has died but rather that he let Lara die (LCM 1/99, 112-113).

Lara Croft

Lara Croft started out as the central character of Tomb Raider but, as Susie Hamilton states

> When the press reviewed the finished game and saw how Lara interacted with the environment, they became more and more interested in her and began to treat her like a real person! We found ourselves swamped with interview questions ... we also began to get rather a lot of fan-mail and requests. ... Once we realised that so many people out there were interested in Lara, we quickly had to put together a 'personality' for her.
>
> http://www.gamespot.co.uk/pc/gamespot/action/tombraid2/interview/02.html

Toby Gard originally 'invented' Lara and his initial character description included: "Lara likes to work with underprivileged children and the mentally disabled. She has a degree in needlework and likes to travel" (http://www.gamespot.co.uk/pc/gamespot/action/tombraid2 /interview2/04.html). This concept has been slighlty altered along the way and her biography is much more detailed now as well. It contains information on her vital statistics, her education, hobbies, favourites and background. The following information has been taken from the LCM (1/99, 84) and Lara's Book (Coupland1998, 29-31).

Vital Statistics

Name Lara Croft

Nationality British

Date of Birth 14.02.1968

Birthplace Wimbledon, Surrey, England

Marital Status Single

Blood Group AB negative

Height 180 cm (5 ft 9 in)

Weight 59,7 kg (9st 4)

Measurements 86D-61-89 (34D-24-35)

Hair Colour Brunette

Eyes Brown

Education

Private tutoring (ages 3-11), Wimbledon High School for Girls (11-16) Gordounstoun Boarding School (16-18), Swiss Finishing School (18-21).3

Hobbies

Lara prefers non-team sports, such as rock climbing, extreme skiing and marksmanship.

Favourites

Film Deliverance, Aguirre, Wrath of God

Music U2, Nine Inch Nails

Food Beans on Toast

Transportation Norton Streetfighter Motorbike

Cities Atlantis, Venice, London

Weapons Uzis (one for each hand), M-16 Fully Automatic Assault Rifle

Background

As daughter of Lord Henshingly Croft, she was born into the secure world of aristocracy. During her time in Gordounstoun she discovered the Scottish mountains and freeclimbing. She learned extreme-

skiing during her time in Switzerland. On the way home from a school trip to the Himalaya the plane crashed, leaving her as the sole survivor. Forced to survive by her wits for more than two weeks, she returned to civilisation a changed woman. No longer willing to live a life of luxury - and unwilling to comply with her parents' desire that she marry the Earl of Farringdon - Lara instead opted for a life of adventure and intrigue which she is still leading today. Since her parents have disowned her she lives by writing books about her adventures.4

This curriculum vitae that was developed for Lara constructs her in a very specific way. She is upper class, highly educated, extremely fit physically and she has chosen her own way of life. All of these characteristics rate very highly in our society and most people find these features worth striving for. Lara is modern, she is not tied to old-fashioned traditions and she is the typical example of individuality brought to its peak: she does what she wants, she is completely her own person with no obligations to anyone else. But as a consequence she is also a loner with no social network.

The key attributes that are generally associated with Lara are 'powerful', 'sexy', 'agile', 'charming', 'virtual', 'no-nonsense', 'independent', 'athletic', 'adventurous' and 'feminine' (fig. 3). She is physically fit and able to perform quite impressive athletic tasks. She is strong, intelligent and courageous. She has a no-nonsense attitude and does the job that needs to be done, using her skills, determination and quite an impressive array of weapons. But while displaying these traditionally more male characteristics - reminiscent of Indiana Jones and James Bond in particular - she still retains a very 'feminine' side: she is charming, cultivated, sexy and beautiful. "Lara represents independence and strength of conviction in a really female way - although she's tough, there's nothing at all butch about her. She still retains her feminine qualities" (BRADLEY 1997b, 25).

But Lara is not the first action figure to combine a sexy body and 'feminine' qualities with fighting power. Her earliest predecessor is probably Emma Peel (fig. 4), partner of John Steed in the popular English TV series 'Avengers' of the mid 1960's, who wore tight black leather clothing and was an expert in Martial Arts. Though she was quite a novelty in her own time she does seem a bit tame and meek from today's perspective. Lara's other female 'relatives' seem to emerge mainly out of the area of comics: Wonder Woman (fig. 5) and Superwoman, two all-American, very sexy women that save mankind; Barb Wire (fig. 6), a post-apocalyptic no-nonsense power woman who combines the sexiness of a vamp with the deadliness and scrupulousness of a professional killer - the comic was later made into a film, staring Pamela Anderson. A more distant relative is the Australian comic figure 'Tank Girl' (fig. 7), whose representation differs slightly from the others. The focus is comparatively less on her body and more on the fact of her being a punk and outlaw. She is a renegade who has stolen a military tank and who lives in a post-nuclear war world. Her boyfriend is a mutant kangaroo and she enjoys violence to the point of cruelty. The graphic designers at Core were reportedly inspired by her when they first started to design Lara (LCM, 1/99, 8).

While her curvaceous figure is Lara's most obvious characteristic, Eidos claims that it is more her

personality that makes her so popular and that it is Tomb Raider's gameplay that merits the success of the trilogy. As Troy Horton, the producer of Tomb Raider puts it: "You can't deny she's sexy, but the gameplay's there too and that's important. Ultimately that's why people play. ... Lara's character is really just a bonus. She's been given a tangible personality and the way in which the player can actually control her really enables him or her to become more involved." (BRADLEY 1997b, 25).

But Lara's popularity cannot be explained with her bodily features alone. One of the reasons why she fascinates so many people is that she is not real but only exists in virtual reality - an unexplored realm with seemingly infinite possibilites. She is one of the first computer animated characters outside of films (such as Toy Story) and she has been given a complete 'real life' personality. By letting her give interviews, printing autograph cards for the fans and hiring a real life body-double to represent Lara at different occasions (such as computer fairs), Eidos has been quick and thorough to comply with the fans' desire to make Lara as real as possible.

But Lara is not the first virtual star. Almost exactly at the same time as the first Tomb Raider was released, the virtual idol Kyoko Date (pronounced DAH-tey, fig. 9 & 10) released a single and a video in Japan. The Japanese company for graphic and media design and animation Visual Science Laboratory (VSL) and the talent agency HoriPro, one of the biggest star agencies in Japan, jointly created Kyoko and developed her into a teen idol exactly as they would have done with a real person. Her single immediately hit the top ten but her career as popsinger stagnated when the record "Love Communications" only sold 50.000 copies; which according to Dr. Kenji Yoshida, one of the founders of VSL, was mainly due to wrong marketing (eg most record stores did not stock the CD). Kyoko still dominated the global media landscape for a couple of months and she is definitely worldwide the first digital popstar of the music scene. But even though her single was not as successful as the producers had hoped she still achieved huge popularity, especially among the young male population of Japan, and by now 95% of the Japanese population recognise her.

Kyoko's biography is at least as detailed as Lara's (going so far as to tell us her favourite flower and her footsize) and she herself is rendered in far more detail, attempting to look as much as possible like a real human.5 But, as far as personality is concerned Kyoko differs greatly from Lara. Being almost ten years younger she is constructed precisely to be a teenager. She still lives with her parents, goes to school and does nothing more extraordinary than collect sneakers. She could generally be described as very 'tame' and average. Her favourite singer is Mariah Carey and her aspiration is "to be a private detective (like in old American TV shows)". She does not seem to be represented mainly in overtly sexual tones but more as the sweet girl next door. She has recently been bought by Microsoft who plan to export her to the rest of the world.6 But as one author in the German Lara Croft Magazin (1/99, 114) states: "Success has not yet been granted to her in the Western hemisphere which may be due to the fact that her songs are too thin and her bust is much too small. The warbling cyber-teenie does not seem to radiate tangible eroticism, as far as Western standards are concerned" (my translation).

But VSL has reacted and created a successor for Kyoko: Busena7 (fig. 11). She is aimed at an international audience and therefore has a face that is supposed to be neither Asian nor American or European. She is beautiful, cheeky and sexy and a special new feature is that she is more interactive.8 VSL President Kato: "Whoever does not find Busena sexy enough shall be able to construct her to their own taste." She has a band of her name, which also features Peter, a forty year old guitarist and an alien. VSL considers this to be the right mixture to attract teenagers. They were due to release a single and a video towards the end of last year but either that never happened or it was not a big international success. (http://sueddeutsche.de/wissenschaft/virtu/virtu3.htm)

But virtual personalities are not a Japanese phenomenon alone. One German TV channel has introduced the so-called WebFace (fig. 12) to guide internet users through their website (http://www.zdf.de). This woman - who has yet to be named - is supposed to make a personal contact with the user possible; not only does she talk and sing but she is also able to react emotionally and answer questions concerning the website correctly. Once downloaded she stays on the user's computer, providing herself with the newest information whenever the user is online and reminding him of the start of his favourite TV programme.
(http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/arc/theme/webface.html)

Other examples include AIMEE (fig. 13) developed by the German software company Vierte Art (http://www.vierte-art.com) who has been a VIP guest at a Chanel party in Hamburg - talking to the guests from a big screen - and who hosted an evening show on arte, a German-French TV channel on May 12. She is 20, beautiful, mysterious, unreachable and has 'a will of her own'. And TYRA (fig. 14), a black singer, designed by the same company, who is due to make her appearance soon. (http://electrolounge.berliner-morgenpost.de/bm/electrolounge/archiv/themen/199808/themen/1998081600.html)

There is one male character, E-CYAS (Endo-Cybernetic Artificial Star, fig. 15 & 16), designed by the I-D Group in Stuttgart, Germany, one of the most successful multi-media agencies in Europe (http://www.taz.de/tpl/1998/12/11/ a0190.taz/oldText.html). He has given interviews and released a CD with the telling title 'Are You Real?'. E-CYAS differs from the other virtual persons in that his makers pretend that is he is a real virtual person, living in the internet. His biography explains that 23 students had been invited to a computer laboratory, all of them with different talents and lifestyles. These people represented the knowledge, culture and lifestyle of the whole generation. The brains of these students were then read with neural scanners, fed into a supercomputer and combined to a 'meta-personality'. To everybody's surprise this meta-personality developed a consciousness and began to communicate with its makers. E-CYAS was 'born'. (http://www.e-cyas.de)

But E-CYAS' main reason for existence is not a possible career as singer. Rather he is one of the newly developing 'software agents'. It is their assignment to bridge the gap between the consumer and the objects of his desire. By gaining more and more information about the user the intelligent 'human interface' allows the agents to introduce the user to information or consumer goods he is

likely to appreciate. These digital 'ghosts' would aid the everyday user to find his way through the overwhelming opportunities offered by the new technologies. They are also meant to introduce newcomers to the internet and to the virtual world. The I-D Group created a virtual 'world' where visitors can create and construct their own virtual personalities, which are called Avatars.9 Using their virtual bodies they can then meet other users that are online. E-CYAS is the central element in this world and by gathering information on the user's interests he is able to introduce him to potentially interesting other users. (http://www.taz.de/tpl/1998/12/11/a0190.taz/oldText.html)

These worlds are gaining more and more popularity and Avatars, the virtual representation of humans in the internet, are developing into a common feature of the internet and other media. The three-dimensional worlds where the Avatars meet are the next step after the common chat-rooms. People meet to socialise and talk, make friends and sometimes even hold Avatar weddings. The are using their 'home-made' virtual bodies, that are still fairly crude at this stage (well-known comic characters or simple, childlike drawings for example). But artists and software designers alike are seeing a big future in the Avatars and virtual societies. They hope that a new cultural space will develop where new forms of interactivity will become possible.
(http://sueddeutsche.de/wissenschaft/virtu/virtu5.htm)

So both professional Avatars such as Lara, Kyoko, AIMEE and E-CYAS and personal Avatars created by internet users to represent themselves in the virtual world, seem to open up a whole new world of opportunities - both commercial and cultural. Among this group of virtual personalities, Lara is definitely the one who is best known and who is the most visible of them. Something about her seems to fascinate the public, and the commercial industry. It would seem to me, that she offers fascinating - but also potentially threatening - new territory (new technology, virtual reality) on the one hand while on the other hand also offering reassurance and stability. She seems to oscillate between reinforcing social codes and challenging them, or - on another level - between modernism and postmodernism. I believe that therein lies her particular attraction. In order to further demonstrate what I mean by this duality she offers, I will now go on to take a closer look at the many different representations of Lara Croft, and how she does not only live in the world of cyber games but has crossed over to popular culture and commercialism, before I will then analyse the implications of these representations in more theoretical detail.

2. Representations of Lara Croft

Lara Croft started out as the main character in a computer game but by now she appears in many different contexts and in several different media. She stars in music videos and TV commercials (as computer animation), there is a magazine and a book dedicated to her, she appears in a comic, there will be a motion picture about her shortly (with a real human actress), she has a 'body double' to

represent her in 'real life', there is a vast palette of merchandise related to her, pictures and articles on her have appeared in almost every major magazine and newspaper and the internet is swamped with websites dedicated to her, both official and unofficial.

In this chapter I will take a look at these different manifestations of Lara Croft and try to trace and make visible recurring themes in her representation, as well as contradictions and elements that have been omitted. Since the hypersexualisation of her representation is a particularly dominant feature - and one that is constantly discussed - I will take a closer look at the way the subject is treated: by fans, by critics, in computer game magazines and in other magazines and newspapers.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate how certain conventional elements (hyper-sexualisation being the most obvious) are repeatedly used in representations of Lara across different cultural discourses for the same purposes.

2.1 Pictures of Lara Croft

Lara Croft is definitely largely a visual phenomenon. Pictures of her abound, both official productions by Eidos and many artworks produced by fans and artists. There is no article, no website or any other mention of her without it being accompanied by visuals. The majority of the pictures are computer renditions, produced by Eidos. While collecting these visuals from the internet, magazines and merchandise products, I found that they could be grouped together in several subsections. I divided the official Eidos pictures into four groups, the first containing images that show 'Lara in action' (fig. 17-24), which means that they are mostly scenes from the game rendered in better quality. The second category I created is 'Lara with weapons' (fig. 25-32), which contains similar images to those of the first category but the focus is on Lara using all different sorts of firearms. The third category is called 'Lara posing' (fig. 33-42) and here I put all the pictures that give the impression of being shot in a studio, in contrast to those of the first two categories which are more reminiscent of snapshots. The last category contains all those pictures of Lara that are purposefully and directly erotic (fig. 43-54). These images draw heavily on traditional erotic representations of women. To give the reader an impression of the diversity of the images the following pages will show a selection of each of the categories.

I find that these images generally show Lara in either of three different 'moods': aggressive/active, cheeky/flirtatious or sensual/vulnerable. There are very few pictures showing her happy and none where she is sad, pensive or hurt. These representations seem to reduce her to either the tough heroine acting on her own, content with herself, or the self-conscious woman showing herself to an audience presumed to be male, sometimes inviting the gaze, sometimes seemingly oblivious of it. I presume it is for these reasons that I as a female reader and viewer felt as if I was intruding into a world not meant for me. None of the images or texts I encountered seemed to be directed towards heterosexual women1 but always towards a male audience.

2.2 The Book and the Magazine

That products centered around Lara are biased towards a male audience becomes particularly clear in both Douglas Coupland's Lara's Book (1998, fig. 55) and the German Lara Croft Magazin (1/99, fig. 56), which also appeared in Great Britain, France and Japan and is published by Eidos Interactive Germany.

The back cover of Lara's Book for example invites the potential reader to "get to know the real Lara Croft - a fearless, tough, and completely loveable femme fatale"(emphasis mine) and the author "turns his keen eye to the world's love affair with pop culture icon Lara Croft"(emphasis mine). The book - which has magazine format - consists mainly of high gloss images with short texts in-between. One gets the overall impression that the author is sharing his love for Lara Croft, assuming that the reader feels the same way about her (and thereby assuming the reader to be a heterosexual male): "Lara has left her mark on so many people. It is as soft as laughter. As insistent as a bullet hole. As recognizable as her perfect smile. When I think of her, it's more than just a single image filling my mind. It's her poetry in motion." (COUPLAND 1998, 38).

Similarly, the Lara Croft Magazin is aimed at a male audience that shares an erotic fascination for Lara. The cover topics are 'Eroticism - Unknown Facets of the Super Star', 'Uncovering the Myth' and 'The New Pleasures2 of Digital Toys'. The cover image was created especially for the magazine and is reminiscent of high gloss erotic photography. The magazine features several full page pictures of Lara which clearly draw on traditional erotic imagery. Emphasis seems to have been placed on the image of the vulnerable, startled female. One image (fig. 57) copies the famous black and white photograph which Lewis Morley took of Christine Keeler3 (fig. 58) in 1963. Besides these pictures the magazine also offers its readers a double page fold-out (fig. 47) which shows Lara lying on her side, wearing a tight black dress, and even a classic centrefold (fig. 48) showing Lara lying on a beach, wearing only bikini pants but covering her breasts with her arm.

Considering the way the images and the magazine are constructed I did not find it particularly surprising to find that one of the relatively few ads in the magazine4 is for the men's magazine Playboy (fig. 59) imitating the wire frame which is used to construct Lara and stating that 'The real thing is not too bad either' (LCM, 1/99, 37).

Besides these erotic images and the above mentioned articles, the magazine contains a lot of information on Eidos, Core and the development of Lara; an article on artificial intelligence; reports on the different contexts Lara has appeared in; information on websites etc. One other interesting set of pictures show Lara dressed in clothes that famous couturiers designed especially for her (fig. 60-62):

2.3 The Internet

The internet is probably the best place to look for anything related to Lara Croft and Tomb Raider. Search engines list about 5000 sites relating to the key words 'Lara Croft'. Both official and unofficial sites usually have information on the game, such as gameplay strategies, hidden features, detailed maps etc.; and on Lara herself. The sites are full of graphics, artwork and screenshots of Lara and often all the newest information and gossip. Furthermore some sites have chatrooms where fans meet to discuss anything related to Lara or Tomb Raider. Most of the fans' websites also contain artwork and stories produced by the fans themselves.

The following sites are some of the most popular of the many Lara Croft based websites:

'The Croft Times' (http://www.ctimes.net): This virtual newspaper is updated every week and contains everything from news to gossip, from pictures to artworks, from gamestrategies to chatrooms, from background information to links to other sites.

'Lara's Portal Page' (http://www.eidos.co.uk/lara.html): This start page leads to the different official websites and includes all the official information on merchandise, demo versions, fan clubs and background information.

'Visions of Lara Croft' (http://network.ctimes.net/volc/): This site contains over 700 visuals - artworks, screenshots, graphics created by fans and photographs of Lara models. It also includes a listing of all the places Lara has appeared in so far (comics, TV ads, videos, books, etc).

The artworks created by fans cover a broad range of images. There are drawings (from childlike to quite sophisticated), paintings and computer generated pictures. The subject matter is similar to that shown in the official pictures: Lara in action with her weapons and/or Lara in some sort of sexualised situation. The amount of fan artwork is huge and I have selected just a few to give a general impression (fig. 66-74).

There are some artworks that depict Lara in the nude but it would seem that most fans distance themselves from these kinds of representations and most sites carry the logo 'Nude Raider Free'. I had some trouble finding any pictures showing Lara naked (which were not on some pay-to-look sex sites) and could only find two (fig. 75 & 76), which are so amateurish that I almost find them amusing. It seems that most fans would agree with one author in the LCM that Lara is only in full splendour when she is scantily dressed instead of naked since true eroticism needs the element of the concealed. (LCM, 1/99, 60).

One site (http://network.ctimes.net/LiC/) which has led to controversies among the fans (art or blasphemy?) is a gallery of pictures showing Lara in leather, bound and gagged and in other positions reminiscent of sadomasochism. After having read the description of the site and the introductory page –on which the designer of the page repeatedly warns viewers that they might possibly find some images offensive - I was quite surprised to find fairly tame pictures in this gallery, most of them official Eidos images, some reminiscent of soft pornography (fig. 77 & fig. 78) and only three pictures which show her in sado-masochistic poses. Two of these images - the ones with Lara chained to the wall (fig. 79 & 80) - are actually taken from other computer games where the player finds Lara thus captured during his own adventure. The third picture (fig. 81) shows Lara in leather, wearing high-heeled over-knee boots and holding a whip. The suggestive title of the image is 'Wanna Play?'.

2.4 Drawings of Lara Croft

In the computer magazine PCFG (Winter 1997) I also found some drawings of Lara beside the standard computer generated images (fig. 82 & 83). I find that even though she still has that impossible figure, she looks much more like an actual fighter or adventurer. She is muscular, has big strong hands and does not give the impression that she just left the beauty salon to have her pictures taken. Personally, I find that these images best correspond to Lara as she is represented in the game. These images really do seem to carry the message of a strong, independent woman who does not pander to anyone and who is depicted for her own sake, not in order to have some viewer look at her.

Lara has also appeared in a comic book. Michael Turner created the hugely successful 'Witchblade' comics in 1995. They feature a New York cop, Sara Pezzini who is - like Lara - sexy and dangerous. She fights for justice and carries the supernatural weapon witchblade. Turner created two comics in which Sara and Lara jointly solve a criminal mystery (TURNER 1999a, b, fig. 84). The two women are again represented in the already well-known tradition of combining sexiness with fighting power, beautiful bodies with deadly weapons. Artificial situations are created where they can be shown in evening dresses or bathing suits (situations that are not vital to the plot) (fig. 85-87).

Apart from the conventional representation of Lara I found two new sides to her character in the comic. The first is to see her working with a partner and to see her have a friend. In all other instances so far she is depicted as the lonely wolf that does not have any attachments to other people. The second striking feature is that this comic is the first ever to even mention men in relation to Lara: she tells the story of how she had been on a mission with a male colleague who died during the trip. Not only is this the first time that she has had any contact with males but in the end of the comic she also reflects on the loss, on the fact of her loneliness and on the idea of having someone special in your life.

2.5 Merchandise

Due to Lara's enormous popularity and her huge number of fans there is quite an impressive array of merchandise available. The products range from the conventional T-Shirt, to mousemats, calenders, watches and clocks, statues, a deck of cards, stickers, posters, wallets, bathing robes, etc. One of the most popular items seem to be the Lara statues (fig. 88 & 89). Most are between 6 and 20 inches tall and show Lara in action - fighting sharks, tigers, yetis, riding a motorcycle or just shooting at some unseen enemy.

On one webpage I also found a nude Lara statue kit which shows Lara with her clothes half torn away (fig. 90). As not to offend people, the statue was depicted with black bars covering her genitals and her breasts. Contrary to the statues shown before, this one is not an officially approved figurine. But as with other forms of representation, products showing Lara naked are rare again. Here as elsewhere, scanty dress and sexy poses are preferred over simple nudity.

The merchandise in general takes up familiar images and uses them on T-shirts, mousemats and all the other products. What I find interesting is the choice of products and the choice of images used. Most of the images used are from the 'sexy Lara' category rather than from the one 'Lara in action'. The highly sexualised pictures seem to be considered the better bet when trying to sell something. Two of the mousemats on offer not only show Lara in a sensual position but further enhance the erotic component by adding suggestive remarks, such as 'Can you handle it?' (fig. 91) and 'Only in your dreams, boy' (fig. 92).

The calendar on offer is a typical example of the genre 'calenders of beautiful women': the same semi-naked, erotic imagery that we already know so well - from Lara and from other women that are considered to be sexy. It is the same with the T-shirts, the deck of cards (the backside showing Lara lying on red satin wearing a black evening dress) and the posters. Erotic representations definitely outweigh the more action-oriented ones.

But besides the images used I found it interesting to look at what kind of products were chosen. Most of these merchandise products seem to aimed at a male consumer. The mousemats with the suggestive remarks speak for themselves, card games - particularly poker - are a traditionally very male pastime, the T-shirts and the bathrobe are only available in sizes XL and XXL, the calender recalls the typical pin-up girl calenders often found in all-male environments.

It would seem to me that the merchandise industry is trying to cater to the taste of the 'action-heroine-fan' - who likes Lara for her adventurous nature and who either ignores her body (like most hetero female fans) or sees it as a nice bonus - and to the fan that is mainly attracted by Lara's bodily merits at the same time. But in my opinion the fan interested in the erotic side of Lara is considered to be in the majority and most merchandise is aimed at him. And whereas there is merchandise

aimed solely at men and merchandise aimed at both male and female fans, there is no product that is specifically geared towards women, giving them in some way the opportunity to identify with a strong, courageous and independent woman. As in other forms of representation, images of Lara are either aimed directly towards men, inviting their gaze and flirting with them, or she is seen as the person in action, unaware that she is looked at. There is no imagery inviting a woman's gaze or trying to establish a bond between Lara and a female viewer. Most representations seem to completely ignore women as potential viewers.

All this again contradicts Eidos' claim that this is a game for women and that they believe that it attracts a large number of female fans. Their merchandise and - as I will demonstrate shortly - their marketing strategies belie their words and make clear which audience the game is mainly aimed at.

2.6 Advertisments

In the first part I will look at advertisments for the Tomb Raider games and at marketing strategies of Eidos. In the second part of this section I will then go on to analyse some advertising campaigns for non-Tomb Raider products in which Lara plays the central role.

The Game

In the UK Eidos started the so-called 'washroom campaign' when the second Tomb Raider was released in winter 1997. Pictures of Lara were placed in the Gents toilets in bars and pubs all over Great Britain (BRADLEY 1997a, 14). Another clear indication that the male market is definitely the one Tomb Raider and Lara Croft are aimed at. A male consumer is certainly the target of the German campaign that accompanied the release of Tomb Raider II as well: huge posters showed Lara, batting her lashes and telling the viewer: 'You can move me into 2000 different positions. Try that with your girlfriend!' (LCM 1/99, 110, my translation). Not only does this motif completely ignore any potential female buyers but it is also blatantly sexualised and offensive.

One animated ad on the internet for Tomb Raider III demonstrates again the strategy to sell sex and adventure together. The animation shows six different panels. The first shows Lara with two guns, next to her the question 'What more do you want?'. The following pictures offer answers to that question: 'More locations', 'More special effects', 'More action', 'More weapons'. These four panels all show Lara somehow in action and they emphasise the quality of the game play. The last panel then adds the neccessary amount of sex, showing Lara's breasts squeezed into a tiny shirt, suggestively asking 'More...?' (fig. 93).

Similarly, the magazine ad for Tomb Raider III (fig. 94) again mixes sexiness, beauty and weapons, showing Lara wearing a black evening dress with a slit almost to the hip, holding a gun in each hand.

She seems to be walking on a carpet of red roses. This image reminds me of TV heroines of the 1970s - like Charlie's Angels - who were long-haired, sexy, carried weapons but did not seem 'really' threatening (in the end they usually had to be rescued by a man after all).

One of the marketing ideas developed by Eidos in order to continue to sell Tomb Raider II after Tomb Raider III had been released, is the special edition offer. Besides the game it includes three small posters, a T-shirt, a sticker - all of these feature the pictures with Lara wearing the designer clothes, adding the adjectives 'lethal', 'loaded' and 'irresistable' - a deck of cards and a mousemat (see fig. 51).

I found several TV advertisments for Tomb Raider games, one German, the others from the US. It is interesting to note how they differ. In the German ad for Tomb Raider II, the focus is solely on Lara, she appears for a press conference (fig. 95) and is bombarded with questions such as, 'Is it true that you found the dagger?', 'Are there Yetis in China?', 'Are you ever mortally afraid?. She answers all questions with yes, no or maybe and seems to be rather bemused by the publicity she is getting. Only to the last question, 'Is archaeology just a pastime for you?', does she give a more eloquent answer, stating that 'Really, this is all just a game to me...'. The ad seems to cater to the fans desire to see more of Lara, to pretend that she is real and to find out more about her.

In one interesting scene she is asked 'Does the adventure keep you in form?', and instead of her face we see her lower torso (fig. 96) and then her legs. I am not entirely sure what to make of this but it does seem to make clear that she is completely at the mercy of the cameras and that they can 'look' - and therefore the viewer can look - wherever they please without Lara having any influence on it. She is the object we look upon and she has - at least precisely in this situation - no influence on how we look at her or where we look. She is under the control of the viewer (via the cameraman).

In the three American advertisments for Tomb Raider II the emphasis is more on the game itself. The first one starts by showing an empty basketball court, then the text 'Tomb Raider II' and 'Lara Croft' is superimposed. It then goes on to show several action scenes of the game (fig. 97), adding fast-paced music. Then the text 'Where the boys are' is superimposed (fig. 98) and the empty basketball court is shown again.

The second one is structured identically except that we see a bored stripper (fig. 99) instead of the basketball court, then the same texts but different action scenes. The third ad starts directly with the action scenes and ends by showing an empty gents toilet with urinals.

All three TV spots imply that men have stopped doing what they normally do and are instead playing Tomb Raider. They are not where they used to be (sports fields, stripper bars and the toilet), instead they have now joined Lara in her adventures. By linking the game to such stereotypically male pastimes and by the directly mentioning 'boys', playing the game is constructed as a very male occupation. The ad is obviously aimed at men, not at women.

The other American advertisment - for Tomb Raider III - focuses more on the game instead on its protagonist as well. It makes use of the idea that the players identify with Lara. Here the viewer sees the world through Lara's eyes. She enters a big laboratory, being greeted as 'Croft'. She is then introduced to her new adventure, being told where she will go and that she will receive some new 'toys', such as a rocket launcher, 'a girl's best friend' (fig. 100). She is told that she has been watched and that her work is very impressive, during which time we see scenes from the game on a computer screen. Lastly she is shown the new outfits she will be getting for her new adventures, shown by three models on a catwalk and adding the necessary touch of eroticism (fig. 101). Overall the whole ad is reminiscent of James Bond: the way she is addressed as 'Croft', the new gadgets she is being shown, the professor in a white coat with an English accent showing her around. She is linked to adventure, action, exotic places and impressive weapons. And whereas Bond always needed women to add sexiness to this cocktail designating success, Lara can take care of that herself, particularly with the new outfits designed for her.

In general I think it can be said that no single advertising or marketing strategy focuses solely on the game and its characteristics, or as one reviewer puts it:

> The poster and media publicity reveal exactly what the EIDOS ad men see in Lara. They know that their target audience will latch onto a girl in short shorts and a crop-top more rapidly than any images of atmospheric 3D or logical problem solving.
>
> BRADLEY 1997a, 15

Other companies quickly realised the potential of Lara's appeal as well. Lara is widely recognised, even among people who have no contact with computer games, and her popularity - particularly among males - is very high. She is beautiful and sexy, so men like to watch her; she is independent and strong-minded so people are likely to trust her judgement concerning the products; she is a sympathetic figure and her virtuality emphasises the companie's up-to-date technology and its forward-looking philosophy. I find that these elements become particularly clear in the French series of TV advertisments for the car company Seat.

Seat

In the first commercial, Lara is continually chased, first by a tyrannosaurus rex, then by two men on motorcycles (fig. 102) and finally by a helicopter. In each situation she chooses a car from the Seat range and thereby manages to escape. In the last scene she sees a group of good-looking surfers trying to hitch a ride (fig. 103). Quickly exchanging the small car she has been driving for a large familiy car, she gives them a lift (fig. 104). The main emphasis of this commercial is on adventure,

action and risk. Lara is the tough woman, able to handle adverse situations, in this case with the particular help of the cars by Seat. Only the last scene makes a reference to Lara's attractiveness and gives the - male - viewer the chance to envy the group of surfers.

The second commercial is similar in that Lara is on the run again, driving a car through the snowy alps, followed by the bad guys on snowmobiles, shooting at her (fig. 105). While the car manages the adverse conditions perfectly, the pursuers have more problems In the end Lara arrives at a little mountain cottage, and we see three men sitting in the back of the car, wearing nothing but their boxershorts, freezing (fig. 106). Leaning against the wall of the cottage are three surfboards (fig. 107), so I presume they are supposed to be three of the surfers she had picked up in the previous commercial. The scene ends with Lara offering them the obligatory cup of tea.

The third commercial makes a stronger reference to the game itself: we see Lara hurrying home to her mansion, because a player has put in the Tomb Raider CD and the game is loading. In order to get home fast enough, Lara again uses a Seat. In the last moment, she jumps into the game, ready for action. But the erotic element is not completely left out: in the first scene she walks onto the beach, carrying snorkeling gear and wearing a bikini - then she realises the time and rushes of.

In the newest commercial the focus is solely on Lara's erotic side. Again we see her coming out of the sea, walking towards the beach, wearing a bikini and seductively swaying her hips (fig. 108). Then we see a middle-aged man with glasses, sunhat and a beer belly who gapes at her. Following his gaze we look at Lara again, coming towards us. We see the man again who is now getting very hot and very red - even his ice-cream melts away (fig. 109). Again we follow his gaze, this time focusing completely on Lara's body, cutting her off at the neck and the middle of the thighs (fig. 110). Seeing the man's face again, he has become bright red and smoke is coming out of his ears (fig 111). The camera position then shifts, so that it is behind Lara, slightly to the right and slightly below. We watch Lara walk towards the man, raising her harpoon - due to the position of the camera, we have Lara's bottom in full view, at times filling out half the screen (fig. 112). She makes him get into the Seat right behind him, pushes the aircondition button and locks the door, triumphantly leaning against the car, the man timidly knocking against the window (fig. 113). We are then informed that all Seats are now available with airconditioning and that they 'cool men down'. In the last scene the man is writing 'I Ô Lara' on the steamed up rear window. The whole commercial has a seductive musical score added to it,similar to a stripper song..

I find this commercial particularly interesting because Lara is again overly sexualised but the viewer is forced to identify with the gaping man - since he is doing precisely the same thing. And this man is not attractive or in any way a desirable person to identify with. He is a wimp and he is helplessly locked into a car. Lara is in complete control of the situation. She does not hesitate once, she does not get angry, she just does what needs to be done in a matter-of-fact style with a touch of humour. She seems to be more amused than angry at his reaction and seems to be saying, 'well, that's just the

way men are...'. It is this representation of male sexuality that I find most critical in this commercial. The popular myth of the ever-willing male is again perpetuated along with the belief that all men invariably and uncontrollably react to a woman like Lara. The man's reaction is 'natural' it is not his fault and he would not be able to do any thing about it, even if he wanted to. Women have to be witty in order to handle men and it is their job to find ways of dealing with these natural male instincts; no responsibility is put on the men's shoulders. This popular construction of male sexuality is limited and reductive and reinforces tendencies to explain male (and female) behaviour in terms of biological essentialism.

Play Station

Another company using Lara is Play Station. It does seem rather obvious that they use the protagonist of one of the best selling Play Station games to advocate their products. The ad is for several games which are top hits and which are on sale (including Tomb Raider). A father wakes up his son, and excitedly tells him about this. The son is rather irritated because, as he states, he does not even have a Play Station. The father rushes off, fights his way through the crowd of people and then spots Lara, sitting at a desk with Tomb Raider CDs on it, looking rather bored. The father jumps the crowd barrier which keeps the fans at bay, rushes to her side and takes a photograph of himself holding Lara, who is looking rather irritated and annoyed (fig. 114). In the last scene we see the son holding this pictue asking his dreamily distant father, if his mother knows about this, getting the short and irritated answer 'Who?'.

Lara is portrayed here as the good-looking, extremely sexy woman who drives men mad, leads them to disregard rules and previous behaviour (I suppose the son did not have a playstation because his father would not buy him one) and makes them act on instinct. Interestingly enough, she is not pleased to have all these men lying at her feet, but seems to be accepting it - more or less - as part of her fame.

Brigitte

Lara shows a very different side of herself in a TV spot for the German women's magazine Brigitte5. The ad starts conventionally with Lara shooting at someone and pursuing them. But then she spots a wedding dress in a shop window, stops and admires it, forgetting her pursuit (fig. 115). As the LCM states, this shows that 'before all else, Lara is a woman' (1/99, 117). She demonstrates that even though she is a tough woman, she can be feminine - here romantic - as well. We are again reassured that women are essentially feminine, no matter what our impression might be. Even an independent fighter like Lara has the same dreams and desires deep inside (eg getting married) as every other woman.

Lucozade

Recently Lara has become even more than 'just' the star of TV spots. The soft drink company Lucozade made her their official business spokesperson. She stars in a global TV spot which turns a possible scene of the game into a small film: Lara is fleeing from a pack of bloodhounds through an ancient ruin. She has run out of ammunition and has to stop her flight because she has reached a ledge with a seemingly bottomless drop. Facing the scowling dogs she bends down and reaches for her backpack. As in the game we are then shown the range of items she can select from: a chocolate bar, a soft drink and of course Lucozade, which she subsequently chooses. After she has finished the bottle, she blows the dogs - and the viewers - a kiss (fig. 116) and jumps off the ledge. The dogs follow and fall into the bottomless pit. Lara has tricked the dogs as she has managed to somersault and hang on to a gargoyle. She then vaults up again (fig. 117) and holds the life-saving bottle of Lucozade into the camera.

In this ad Lara is constructed as the determined fighter who is physically fit and does not give up even in seemingly desperate situations. She is clever, in control and able to make the right decisions (all traditionally more male attributes) but at the same time she is charming (the blow kiss) and very attractive.

On Lucozade's website (http://www.lucozade.com) the user can also load down pictures of Lara or send these images as internet postcards. The choice of images is interesting in that most representations are more on the erotic side and truly action and adventure oriented images, that carry an aggressive message are left out.

Looking at all the TV advertisements with Lara, I find it interesting to note that she is usually not carrying a weapon, except when actual sequences of the game are shown and when she is holding the harpoon in one of the Seat commercials. Considering that all other representations we have seen so far place great emphasis on her carrying weapons and using them, I find her lack of arms striking. She is still portrayed as the tough fighter and the independent, self-confident woman, but it would seem that she is considered to be less attractive for potential consumers of the advertised good if she is heavily armed. I supposed she might be perceived too much of a threat, making it more difficult for the viewer to make her - and thereby the product - the object of his desire.

2.7 Video

Lara Croft not only appears in TV advertisements, she also stars in a music video. The song Ein Schwein namens Männer [A Pig Called Men] by the German punk rock band 'Die Ärzte' (fig. 118) was released on 6 April 1998 and became a number one hit within three weeks, staying there for two months. The song satirises the popular notion that the only thing men want is sex - and that all the time (see Lyrics, App. A & B)6.

In the video, we see the band playing in an old warehouse until all of a sudden, Lara holds a pistol next to the leadsinger's head. The three members of the band flee, manage to get their own weapons and a serious battle between them and Lara ensues.

What I found particularly interesting about the video was the fact that neither of the three male members of the band are dumbstruck by Lara's figure. Rather, they quickly realise that she poses a real threat (fig. 119) and take her – as a fighter - seriously. She does receive quite a lot of serious kicks and punches (fig. 120) - but most of the time she outwits her male opponents. If she is knocked to the ground she is quick to be up again and she is always unharmed.

In the end Lara wins by using her wits. Surrounded by all three men (fig. 121), she shoots down a huge grille, and while she quickly jumps to the side, it covers her three adversaries.

In the whole video the emphasis is put on Lara's fighting abilities, her courage, her wit and her determination. Her representation is not overly sexualised, the producers of the video could have chosen other camera angles or shots, showing off more of Lara's body. She is the winner in all aspects (fig. 122), whereas the men are constructed more as loosers, trying to be cool and macholike, but failing utterly, as they are clearly over-confident.7 They like to show off but instead of impressing anyone they rather make fools of themselves. In one scene the leadsinger and the bassplayer shoot at Lara from a very short distance. They try to look like cold killers (fig. 123) but this image is shattered when the viewer realises that they do not manage to hit Lara and that she has ample time to turn around and walk away. In a later scene the leadsinger wants to attack Lara with a chacko8 but shows off his ability to twirl it around until Lara becomes impatient and shoots it out of his hand.

Lara could be seen here as the 'new kind of woman' who does not accept macho-like behaviour and silly swaggering in men and who acts on her dislike, letting the men know what she thinks of them - and not in a particularly nice and feminine way. But maybe her body is feminine enough so that she can be allowed to behave in such an unladylike fashion? I will come back to this question in the next chapter.

Lara had one other appearance in the music scene. She accompanied the Irish pop band U2 on their 'PopMart' tour (fig. 124) which started 25 April 1997 and lasted for eleven months. During the song Hold Me, Kill Me, Kiss Me, Thrill Me from the Batman Forever Soundtrack, she appears on a huge screen, posing in front of a lightblue background smiling coyly, then getting onto her motorbike and driving away. Shortly afterwards she reappears, this time aiming a rifle at lead singer Bono. The images take up the themes of the song: love, desire and threat. Lara is sexy and desirable but also very dangerous and quite capable of killing. But part of her attractiveness seems to lie precisely in the possibility of danger and in the threat she can pose if she so choses.

2.8 The Movie

There are few hard facts concerning the planned movie about Lara Croft: Eidos has sold the rights to make a film of Lara Croft and Tomb Raider to Paramount and the movie is due to be released during the summer of 2000 (LCM 1/99, 116). In August 1998 Paramount started an advertising campaign in American cinemas with the slogan 'Who is Lara Croft?' (fig. 125). As far as the actress portraying Lara, the director and the script are concerned speculations are running wild. Rumours have it that Brent Friedman is writing the script and that Luc Besson will be the director (Ahlers 1999, 96). The question of the actress is even less clear, names like Jennifer Lopez, Demi Moore, Sandra Bullock, Liz Hurley and Anna Nicole Smith are repeatedly mentioned (Ahlers 1999, 96, DZ 51/97, no page, and PCFG Autumn 1998, 48). The producer Lloyd Levin refuses to give any comments concerning the lead role and says that he could imagine chosing a newcomer since the most important aspect is that the fans will recognise Lara (Ahlers 1999, 98). Some rumours also have it that - after the success of films such as 'Antz' and 'A Bug's Life' - Paramount is considering a computer-animated feature instead (http://members.xoom.com/DutchTobe/). The plot will probably retell the story of Lara's life - including the life-changing plane-crash - and will then go on to some adventure including the typical ancient ruins, artefacts, evil opponents, many puzzles and lots of heavy firearms that Tomb Raider fans will expect (http://members.xoom.com/Dutch Tobe/).

2.9 The Body Double

Since the virtual Lara Croft cannot appear at fairs, autograph sessions or photocalls, she has a real-life model representing her on these occasions. There have been several official Lara models, since May 1998 it is the English model Nell McAndrew (fig. 126), before her it was Lara Weller (fig. 127). In the beginning Nell McAndrew was not allowed to talk since, as she herself says, "Lara is very intelligent and, in contrast to myself,she does not have a Yorkshire accent" (Ahlers 1999, 98). In order to get the job as Lara's double, Nell had to have her breasts enlarged. She recently got undressed for Playboy Magazine, posing not as Lara but as herself. But since the Playboy cover showed her in Lara's dress and had the words 'Lara Croft' on it, Eidos immediately intervened and forced the publishers of Playboy to recall the issue (at least in the UK) so that any evidence linking Nell to Lara would be removed (DZ 32/99, 33).

2.10 The Game

Surprisingly enough, in the game Tomb Raider itself, the representation of Lara Croft is less hypersexualised than in most other representations. She certainly has that impressive figure but due to the facts that the angles and planes of the wireframe used to construct her (fig. 128) are clearly recognisable, that she is rather 'pixely' or 'blocky' (fig. 129) - compared to those images produced for

publication - and that her size on the computer screen is usually only a couple of centimetres (fig. 130), her body is not as striking here as it is in other forms of repeesentation. Furthermore, about 90% of the time the player only sees her from behind. She is certainly very sexy from that perspective as well - particularly when she is climbing onto something or when swimming - but the whole context of the repeesentation reduces the effect. When playing the game one quickly starts to focus on the action and the problems at hand, taking less notice of Lara's body.

It would certainly seem that the programmers at Core place great emphasis on Lara's looks. When Tomb Raider II was released one of the main criticisims was that only cosmetic changes had been made - mainly concerning Lara - whereas many faults of the original game had been left untouched (McCAULEY 1997, 29). Besides her looks, the way Lara moves was revolutionary when the game first appeared and her movements have been made smoother ever since, while new moves were added with each sequel as well. Lara can run, jump (backwards, forwards or sideways or just up), swim, climb, duck, crawl, summersault etc. "She is the first artificial figure whose movements are so fluid that they come close to that of a real person and who is at the same time under such direct control" (DZ 51/1997, no page, my translation). This element of control is probably one of the attractions of the Tomb Raider games: not only can you move your character around on the screen, but you can also make her do things, whenever you feel like it and how often it pleases you. Particularly hard moves are furthermore accompanied by a soft moan by Lara, which has its own appeal for many players. Another factor is certainly that Lara is always at the fans' disposal, all they have to do is play the game. Every fan can have their own copy of this 'dream woman' in their own home, sitting there completely passive until the owner decides what to do with her (or rather, what to make her do). The idea that a famous person belongs to the public and therefore in a sense to everybody is shifting into whole new dimensions here.

Looking at all these different forms of representation I find that there are several recurring elements. One thing I find particularly striking is the way in which the images repeatedly combine danger and threat with eroticism. Lara is constructed and perceived as a woman that has to be treated with respect and who can certainly become dangerous. Beautiful but deadly women have always fascinated men.

For all we know she might very well still be a virgin. Unlike a femme fatale, who has sexual relationships with several men, she never has any lovers or relationships. To keep the interest up, she has to appear to be always available (and just out of reach). As opposed to male heroes like Indiana Jones or James Bond, who always have several women devoted to them, Lara has to remain single. But the two men are aimed at a male audience which is to identify with the male heroes and their success with women and not at women who might desire them. I believe this is another indication that Lara is also mainly aimed at men who are to desire her and not at women who should identify with her.

2.11 The Hyper-Sexualisation of Lara Croft

Lara's hypersexualisation is probably the most obvious theme in all representations of her. She never wears any clothing that might hide her figure (even her winter jacket is tight fitting and in Tomb Raider II she is walking through the snow in her shorts) and every opportunity is used to portray her in a way that shows off her bodily features. The representations seem to rely on the unspoken assumption that all men would invariably find Lara extremely attractive and completely irresistible. They convey the conviction that all men ultimately react to women like Lara, that this reaction is involuntary, beyond their control and totally natural.

That this assumption is shared by many fans becomes clear in some reactions to an article attacking Lara, which was published in the games magazine GameSpot UK: "Guys like women, and for good reason, and they also like the way they look, their image. I'm sorry, but that's just the way it is and try as we might we can't change it." (http://www.gamespot.co.uk/news/1997/11/98.html)

In an internet survey conducted by Dr Simon Sherville of the University of Brighton Usability Group, in collaboration with the GameSpot UK in June 1998, gameplayers were asked about their attitudes to on-screen characters such as Lara. The question was how people of different sexes and sexual orientations responded to and identified with Lara. More than 200 people replied:

There was a slight bias towards being attracted to Lara amongst the straight men, there was a major bias toward being attracted to Lara by the gay women, few straight women were attracted to Lara but there was enough of a grid effect in evidence, and the bisexuals were gloriously split down the middle. ....Many women were offended by Lara or mens' reaction to her.

Sherville, personal email, 20.06.1999

Answers to both the article and the survey also show that the players of the game are very aware that Lara is not real that she is idealised and that no normal woman could be expected to look that way:

> -I don't expect women to look like that, but I do admit that yes, when I first ran the Tomb Raider demo I thought, 'Whoa, check her out!' but I really didn't think much about it after that. ... I don't want to check out some girl that isn't even real.
>
> -let's face it, it's just a game, of course it's impossible to have thin arms like that and do a handstand while climbing a wall, but it's all a game isn't it?
>
> -I'm sure every one of our Olympic competitors could pull that move off [being able to go handstand to pull-up]. Sure that's not the 'average' woman but here's my point: if a game is to be made requiring such

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feats of strength, who should the heroine be - a chubby couch-sitter with a remote control, ...or Dominique Dunn(sp)?

http://www.gamespot.co.uk/news/1997/11/98.html

Another argument repeatedly used to justify Lara's unrealistic measurements is that the men in the computer games have exaggerated bodies as well:

-First, how accurate is Duke Nuke'em [fig. 135] with regard to men? How accurate are the Quake guy's biceps? Does anyone exist that's built like that?

-My girlfriend is a hell of a lot closer anatomically to Lara than I am to Duke Nuke'em, the Quake guy, or just about any of the men depicted in games today. You don't hear a bunch of men complaining that this animated character has larger arms or chest then them.

http://www.gamespot.co.uk/news/1997/11/98.html

The producer of Tomb Raider, Troy Horton, argues along the same lines when asked to comment on criticism concerning Lara's shape: "It's no different from a man walking around fighting with his shirt off. Is that sexist?" (BRADLEY 1997b, 25).

I would argue that simply describing Lara as sexist, is reducing a very complex phenomenon to a popular catchword. But I would also argue that it is not the same thing whether a man or a woman is depicted in an overtly sexualised manner. The starting point for both is very different and the traditions that these kinds of representations merge out of are not identical. Men have rarely been made the object of desire and representations of men that are explicitly and solely erotic - and not in a context that is meant to be erotic like pornography - are small in number compared to those of women.

It would seem that many men enjoy the way Lara looks and they feel that their reaction is entirely natural and not to be influenced by them. The possibility that Lara might perpetuate a potentially limiting view of sexuality and women is declared as irrelevant because the viewer/consumer knows that Lara is not real. But the concept of reality is undergoing some drastic changes in challenges, as I argue in last part of chapter three. Images and mediated experiences (such as consuming a virtual character) have a very definite influence on we perceive ourselves, other people and the world around us.

In this chapter I have introduced the reader to the visual world of Lara Croft. I hope to have shown that though she appears in many different forms of representation, there are several recurring themes.

She is repeatedly constructed as highly attractive, very sensual and quite independent woman. In most representations her body is overemphasised, never letting us forget that Lara is a woman and that there are biological differences between men and women.

Having looked at Lara in great detail, I now go on to analyse her –or rather the representations of her - from a more theoretical point of view. I will ask what meanings she generates and what fears and desires become apparent in the representations.

3. Lara Croft and Postmodernism

I think I can be particularly valuable and informative to look at the phenomenon of Lara Croft from a postmodern perspective. In his book Postmodernism Glenn Ward (1997) identifies several themes that are characteristic of postmodern approaches. He says that

> these themes are to do with what it means to live in our present times, and how best to go about describing them.
>
> They propose that society, culture and lifestyle are today significantly different from what they were a hundred, fifty or even thirty years ago.
>
> They are concerned with concrete subjects like the developments in mass media, the consumer society and information technology.
>
> They suggest that these kinds of development have an impact on our understanding of more abstract matters, like meaning, identity and even reality.
>
> They claim that old styles of analysis are no longer useful, and that new approaches and new vocabularies need to be created in order to understand the present.
>
> WARD 1997, 1

All if these themes are closely related to Lara: she is definetely a 'child of her time', typical for today's society and culture. Many of her characteristics, like her accessability are only made possible through recent developments in technology and through the widespread use of computers, television and the internet. By making her independent, determined and succesful her creators were also relying on characteristics that are idiosyncratic of our times.

She is closely related to mass media, consumer culture and information technology. She appears in several of the mass media - she actually only exists in the media - , she is used to advertise diverse

products and she is herself a product of information technology and relies on it for her existence.

Furthermore her creation and existence raise questions of meaning, reality and identity. Particularly these last three points will be interesting for analysis. What sort of meanings does Lara generate? Are these meanings flexible? What are the particular implications for the meaning of the body? What questions are raised in relation to reality? Where are the boundaries between real and not real (are there any?)? What issues around identity are brought up? How does she - as both a phenomenon of 'virtual reality' and of mass consumption - influence our subjectivity and our construction of identity?

3.1 The Question of Identity

In contrast to modernist philosophy, where it is assumed that a person has a stable identity underneath the roles one is forced to play in everyday life, and that the struggle is to find it and be true to it, postmodernism assumes no such stable identity (Ward 1997, 107). Opinions diverge as to whether "the selves achieved under modernity have vanished in the wake of consumerism, mass culture, and growing bureaucratisation of life" or if "the stable, unified self has always been an illusion" (Ward 1997, 108). The self is not perceived as something that is "substantial, essential or timeless" (Ward 1997, 108). Where modernists searched for the true self, postmodernism recognises and sometimes celebrates "disintegration, fragmented desires, superficiality, and identity as something you shop for" (Ward 1997, 108).

These changes, the subsequent culture of 'lifestyle shopping' and the 'aestheticisation of life' (Featherstones's term) are closely linked to social and cultural developments, such as the immense increase of images and signs in everyday life. In many cases image has become more important than content, both as far as practical goods to be sold are concerned and in the construction of our identities. "People can change their identities more frequently, experiment with them, select more options from a cultural supermarket with far less commitment than ever before" (HARRIS in Ward 1997, 109).

The idea of a fluid, everchanging and transitory identity can be liberating and frightening at the same time. This conflict is very apparent in our times and it is often reflected in a search for stability and structure in a world that is full of multiple meanings, fragmented experiences and a wide range of possible identities. But not only the dissolving of the modern identity is a sympton of the postmodern condition. Craig Owens, in his article *The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism* (1983), identifies another loss which explains the yearning for stability and structure:

> a tremendous loss of mastery. ... What has been lost is not primarly a cultural mastery, but an economic, technical and political one. For what if not the emergence of Third-World nations, the 'revolt of nature' and

> the women's movement - that is the voices of the conquered - has challenged the West's desire for ever-greater domination and control?
>
> Owens 1985, 67

Owens argues that the attempt to recuperate that loss becomes particularly apparent in the visual arts, where we find "a desperate, often hysterical attempt to recover some sense of mastery via the resurrection of heroic large-scale easel painting and monumental cast-bronze sculpture" (Owens 1985, 67).

Even though Lara is in no way depicted in classically modern mediums, I find that she shows signs of this conflict as well. On the one hand she is definetely postmodern, in her artificiality, in her multi-mediality and in the way that her identity is quite literally constructed, 'shopped together', including all the things that have a high value in our society. And also in that way she represents creativity, fluidity and a certain depthlessness - postmodernism being more interested in the surface of things than in their depth, assuming that there is no deep meaning hidden under the surface.

On the other hand, the identity that is constructed for her is very stable. She hardly challenges any social codes and her identity largely remains the same. Her behaviour is predictable and her characteristics are reduced to 'sexy', 'dangerous' and 'tough'. The only interesting break that can be discerned is the difference between the type of character that is portrayed in the game - independent, purposeful - and the way Lara is promoted in advertising - hyper-sexualisation, feminisation. Her identity is created in accordance with the product to be sold, or rather, the feature considered to be more important in relation to the product is over-emphasised.

The possibilities offered by the fact that everybody can have access to Lara, that she has no 'real' identity and that she can truly 'be anything' are vast, but they go unused to the largest part. Eidos cannot hold claim over Lara's identity, each player or fan is free to redefine her, shift her identity to meet his (or her) needs. Particularly the internet offers the possibility to actively reinvent her, by writing stories, creating art or discussing her. Jean-François Lyotard describes this postmodern phenomenon as 'little narrative'. For him the postmodern is defined by an incredulity towards metanarratives and "advocates a turn to the 'little story' which validates difference, extols the 'unpresentable' and escapes the overbearing logic of instrumentality" (Poster 1995, 91). In contrast to Lyotard, for whom technology is always complicit with modern narratives, Poster sees the narrative structure of the second media age - particularly the internet - as encouraging "the proliferation of stories, local narratives without any totalizing gestures" (Poster 1995, 92).

The meanings associated with Lara could therefore become multiple, contradictory and they could have the force to challenge boundaries. But this is hardly taking place. All the information I could find on Lara faithfully stuck to the rigid and restrictive identity given by Eidos, stuck to the big metanarrative about Lara. I do believe that there are certainly many fans who privately reassess and

reconstruct Lara but these activities do not seem to find their way into the public.1

The discourses surrounding Lara and Tomb Raider also seem to show an avoidance of the subject of her potential fluidity, her openess for creation and her possible transgressiveness. It would seem that the fact that she is computer generated, that she is a virtual persona and as such hugely succesful is new and unstable enough. To keep the balance she needs to be grounded, reduced to her essentials. Her stable characteristics are overemphasised, the focus placed on her more reliable attributes. This is on the one hand her body (paradoxically perceived as stable, even though - as a construct of pixels - it is just as easily changeable as is her identity) and on the other hand her adventurous and action-oriented lifestyle. A third element repeatedly mentioned in connection with her is her virtuality. In all the many different articles on her, numerous paraphrases and circumscriptions are used to talk about her such as digital lady, beautiful heroine, virtual or cyberspace sex-symbol, deathdefying and scantily-clad adventurer, divinely curvaceous, adventurous young lady, well-proportioned archaeologist, goddess and dream-girl. Wherever Lara is talked or written about, her bodily features are always of central interest and never go unnoticed. No article, not even the more 'philosophical' ones of intellectual magazines and newspapers explore the possibilities implied in her virtuality and her accessability. In the next chapter I will therefore take a closer look at the meanings Lara's body generates and what issues can be raised in a postmodern context.

3.2 The Question of the Body

Over the last decade the body has been the focus of many theoretical discussions, analyses and debates, particularly within feminism. In her article Embodying Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body (1997), Kathy Davis argues that the surge in popularity can be mainly traced to three influences:

> For some, the concern is regarded as a reflection of the culture at large. Others view the current interest in the body primarily as a theoretical development. And, for still others, feminism is held responsible for putting the body on the intellectual map.
>
> Davis 1997, 1

Changes in our culture, particularly the rise of consumer culture, drastically change our lives. The protestant work ethic has been replaced by hedonism and consumption. Individuality is the key word and 'everything' is within reach: "An ideology of personal consumption presents individuals as free to do their own thing, to construct their own little world in the private sphere" (FEATHERSTONE in Davis 1997, 2). In these conditions, where the construction of identity is a central endevour, the body has become inscribed with a whole new meaning: it is the vehicle for self-expression and self-creation (Davis 1997, 2).

But the body is also a "powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (Bordo 1989, 13). It is therefore inevitable to look at the body when dealing with social theory, but this insight is rather new. Traditionally, the sciences were reluctant to deal with the body, regarding it as negligable in comparison to the mind: "sociologists seem to prefer to imagine that if society rules us, it does so through our minds, while we rule our bodies rather than being ruled by them" (Davis 1997, 3).

Bringing the body back into the theoretical discussion and analysis is to a large part the merit of Michel Foucault (Davis 1997, 3). He has unmasked the body as "the primary site for the operation of modern forms of power - power that was not top-down and repressive, but rather, subtle, elusive and productive" (Davis 1997, 3). The body is seen as the "direct locus of social control" (Bordo 1989, 13). Whereas in traditional societies discipline was maintained by direct control and punishment or imprisonment of the body, the advent of modernism brought changes to the power-structures; power now attempts to transform the minds of individuals via more indirect control (FOUCAULT 1979).

> What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. ... [I]t defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies.
>
> Foucault 1979, 138

For feminists the link between these 'docile' bodies, the processes of discipline and normalisation and social control - especially of the female body - has been particularly interesting and has been repeatedly analysed (Bordo 1989, BUTLER 1993, Davis 1997, Bartky 1997).

In her article The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault (1989) Susan R. Bordo that women are always in pursuit of an unattainable "ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity" (Bordo 1989, 14). This pursuit turns women's bodies into docile bodies, forcing women to spend their energies 'improving', transforming and subjugating their bodies to external regulation. Bordo argues that this "discipline and normalization of the female body ... has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control" (Bordo 1989, 14).

She goes on to argue that in our times - vision being the most privileged of the senses - the ideals of femininity are mainly perpetuated by visual imagery. Femininity has become "a matter of constructing ... the appropriate surface presentation for the self" (Bordo 1989, 17). One of the major difficulties, she argues, is that today's feminine ideal demands two very contradictory characteristics

in a woman: she has to be warm and nurturing, charming and caring and at the same time tough, cool, succesful and in control, offering the best of 'masculine' and 'feminine' virtues (Bordo 1989).

I find that Lara is one of these women, seemingly offering everything a man may wish for today: she has the necessary 'macho' characteristics, but she is in no way masculine. She may be self-determined, independent, in control and strong (even carrying weapons) but she retains her femininity in the way she walks and moves, in the way her body is overemphasised and hyper-sexualised and in the way she is often represented in traditionally feminine poses with a 'feminine look' on her face (vulnerable, pouting or flirtatious).

But Bordo argues that what may look like a route to liberation and pleasure ('I can be anything I want'), may not be so fulfilling when women attempt to pursue this ideal:

> Popular representations ... may speak forcefully through the rhetoric and symbolism of empowerment, personal freedom, 'having it all'. Yet female bodies, pursuing these ideals, may find themselves distracted, depressed, and physically ill as female bodies in the nineteenth century, pursuing a feminine ideal of dependency, domesticity, and delicacy.
>
> Bordo 1989, 28

Considering this, Lara may seem empowering to some women, but it remains questionable if that is really true, if she does not rather set the stakes so high that no 'normal' woman can attain them - leaving only depression and frustration. Bordo is particularly interested in women's bodies' shape and with women's obsession with slenderness and dieting.2 For her, the correct body shape is one of the major rules of femininity. Paradoxically, the attempt to shape one's body according to the ideals actually offers many women a sense of control and mastery that they often lack in a male dominated world. But, Bordo argues, this sense of control - at least over one's own body - is illusory and turns one's body into one of Foucault's 'docile' bodies. (Bordo 1989)

Similarly, Sandra Lee Bartky, in her article Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power (1997) argues that modern disciplinary practices, which render a body 'feminine' and which seek to "regulate its very forces and operations, the economy and efficiency of its movements" (Bartky 1997, 129) can be divided into three categories: the practices of the first aim to regulate a body's shape and size; those of the second bring forth a way of moving and gesturing that is specifically feminine; and the practices of the third category deal with the decoration and the display of the female body (Bartky 1997). These practices are not violently enforced on women, there are no formal authorities or institutions who discipline transgressive bodies, so why, asks Bartky, do women conform to these practices - if we discard both the notion that they are performed voluntarily or that they are natural? (Bartky 1997)

Using Foucault's ideas on the operation of power, she argues that the very subjectivity of the subject is constituted by the structure of power. As the prisoner in Foucault's Panopticum - a model prison, consisting of a central tower and a circular structure, divided into individual cells, surrounding it (Foucault 1979) - woman is under constant surveillance. But the surveillance does not only originate from the central tower, instead the "conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault 1979, 201) induces in the inmate the need to perpetually surveille his (or her) own self. "The gaze which is inscribed in the very structure of the disciplinary institution is internalized by the inmate" (Bartky 1997, 147). In the same way women have internalised the standards of femininity and keep themselves under constant surveillance:

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous, patriarchal Other.
>
> Bartky 1997, 140

Bartky argues that even though the effects of the self-discipline may actually harm and inhibit women, it is practiced nonetheless because it also offers a sense of mastery (control over one's own body, mastery of all the 'beauty care skills' required of women) and a secure sense of identity. Therefore she reminds particularly feminists that

> any political project which aims to dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualization, if not outright annihilation.
>
> Bartky 1997, 146

Discipline, by means of normalisation, is focused sharply on women's bodies. Not so much her ability to bear children, but her sexuality and her appearance have become the central concern. Bartky relates this to the "growing power of the image in a society increasingly oriented toward the visual media" (Bartky 197, 149).

A similar argument is made by Bordo when she says that "the rules of femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through the deployment of standardized visual images" (Bordo 1989, 17).

I believe that Lara can definetely be seen as a prime example of these standardised visual images that normalise women. She manages the dual demands placed on women today, to be 'macho' and feminine at the same time. She thereby helps to peretuate a common image of women that is in

reality unattainable. Particularly her body represents an ideal that is hardly realisable: she is incredibly thin, has a improbably large breasts and is physically fit. To aim for these bodily characteristics would force women to spend even more time dieting, consulting plastic surgeons and working out in fitness studios. One thing that can be interpreted as positive is that she helps break with "our cultural association of curvaceousness and incompetence" (Bordo 1989, 23). Here, finally, we have a large-breasted woman that is definitely not a 'bimbo'. She also breaks with the recent fascination with female bodies that are almost asexual, bodies that are reminiscent of early adolescence, bodies into "whose very contours the image of immaturity has been inscribed" (Bartky 1997, 141). But even with these small challenges to cultural codes I find that she perpetuates a potentially limiting and inhibiting image of a woman's body.

In our postmodern consumer culture everything has been commodified, turned into a 'product', consumption and hedonism are our daily aims, and capitalism increasingly penetrates our day-to-day existence:

> The onslaught of commodification that is characteristic of late capitalism has ... even managed to obliterate the classically Marxist distinction between the economic and the cultural. ... [It is] an indeterminate situation in the which the economic and the cultural - representations, signs - create and feed each other.
>
> Bertens 1995, 10

Lara clearly displays signs of this link: originally the product of the subculture of computer games, she has been appropriated by capitalism and turned into a potent economic symbol. The entire culture surrounding Lara is constructed through capitalist discourse as has been shown in chapter 2. Seen from this point of view, Lara is definitely a postmodern phenomenon since postmodernism and late capitalism are often seen as closely linked and interdependent. Postmodernism advocates an aestheticisation of life, assumes no human nature and true self and therefore supports the "endless pursuit of new experiences, values and vocabularies" (Featherstone in Bertens 1995, 212). Capitalism also supports this pursuit and profits from it by offering experience and identity construction via consumption (Bertens 1995, 214).

While many critics condemn postmodernism due to its links to capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari have argued most interestingly, that the combination of postmodernism and capitalism may actually contain the potential to cause the latter's downfall:

> Capitalist systems effectively control desire by attaching it to the production and consumption of goods, and by trapping social subjects in an organised network of normalising impersonal social structures and processes. ...[C]apitalism has the effect of undoing identity by channelling desires in many different directions at once. It continually destabilises itself by inventing new territories for consumer desire. As

> commodities multiply, there are more things to desire, more images to identify with, and more lines of escape. Learning to live this proliferation of contradictory desires and identifications offers us paths for liberation and defiance. By becoming intense, 'decentred' consumers, we can pose a threat to the territorialisation of private and social life. ... [C]apitalism could generate more and more multiplicity, and therefore...actually contains the seed of revolution.
>
> Ward 1997, 138

I do see some of this potential in Lara - she could be 'counter-consumed', ie consumed in a way that was not intended by the producers and marketers. By reading her against the grain and by refusing to blindly consume her the way she is offered, the consumer holds the power to challenge the system. The possibilities range from the appropriation of Lara by lesbian communities to the positive role model Lara could be for teenage girls who actively pick the positive and empowering sides of her, ignoring the more limiting and inhibiting ones.

In our society that is intent on visual imagery and on consumerism and commodification, we are furthermore bombarded with idealised images of bodies. Springer argues, that the "endless depiciton of human bodies have in effect replaced actual human bodies in the public imagination" (Springer 1996, 40). Lara takes the commodification and idealisation to an extreme. She is readily available, she is linked to consumer goods and she is often reduced to a commodity. Overdrawing it, one may say that a woman's life, her body and mind can be bought and sold at will and used whenever the owner feels like it. This may not be quite the case, particularly because she is not real, but it is definetely an underlying current in the different forms of representation.

The hyper-sexualisation of Lara's representation - both visual and textual and particularly in the context of advertising - furthermore makes apparent what Foucault, in the first volume of The History of Sexuality (1976) describes as the ever growing discourse on sex. Far from being a society that suppresses sexualitiy, "modern western society actually produces sexuality in the form of endless sex-talk, sex-study and sex-theory" (Ward 1997, 131). All the discourse on sexuality only further emphasises the modern notion that there is 'natural' sex and is thereby another form of social control, because it makes sex into a problem.

> The discourse on sexuality creates the notion that sex is an absolute, abstract category. Sex and sexuality have become the titles used to cover all bodies and their pleasures. ... All bodily pleasures are now understood in the terms of the degree to which they deviate from, conform to, improve or avoid sex. Sex is the dominant term, the standard against which 'the body and pleasure' are measured.
>
> Ward 1997, 131

In this sense, the discourse on sexuality objectifies and categorises our experiences which fundamentally effects both our experience of personal and social identity. (Ward 1997, 133). The representations of Lara with their overt connotations to sexuality further enforce this idea. A game - and the other products she is used to promote - can only give pleasure when it is related to sexuality and the body.

In her article *Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture* (1995), Anne Balsamo offers another interesting explanation why certain bodies are represented in an overly sexualised way. She uses the representations of female bodybuilders to make her point, but her arguments equally apply to Lara:

> female bodybuilders who develop big muscles, and consequently greater strength, are considered transgressive of the natural 'order' of things - an order that defines women as weak and frail. Their transgressive body displays (of female bodies that are also strong bodies) are neutralized in the mass media through the representations that sexualise their athletic bodies - their sexual attractiveness is asserted over their physical capabilities.
>
> Balsamo 1995, 217

By sexualising Lara in the manner that most representations do, the fear that a strong - and even armed - woman might induce in a male consumer is radically diminished. Even though she may challenge the common notion of femininity as weak, compliant and dependent, the inherent threat is reduced by over-emphasising the biological difference between men and women, constantly reassuring the viewer of these differences which are necessary to justify male superiority.

Claudia Springer offers an interesting thought on the popularity of virtual sex in her book Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age (1996). She argues that many people's fascination with bodiless sexuality can be linked to the very real dangers to the body that exist in our times. Springer lists AIDS, environmental disasters and nuclear war. Not only do these threaten to kill individuals but the existence of the whole human race is at stake. Taking this threat into account, she argues that it is understandable that in fantasy we reconstitute ourselves as pure intellect, "without the burden of imperfect, fragile, and mortal bodies" (Springer 1996, 84). But she discovers a paradox in these fantasies, while people imagine a bodiless future they overemphasise bodily pleasures "so that the bodiless future promises to provide extraordinarily intense sexual gratification" (Springer 1996, 84).

Even though people do not actually have virtual sex with Lara, many fans seem to fantasize about it and Lara is certainly portrayed in a way that invites sexual fantasies. Imagining sex with her is completely harmless, holds no risks, no commitments and no real threat. Similar to virtual sex this produces "new forms of hyperreal pornography ... in which you can engage in any kind of fantasy,

presumably without fear of bodily harm or arrest" (Ward 1997, 115).

The idea that female sexuality is dangerous is age-old and deeply embedded in western, patriarchal society: "sexuality is dangerous, and sexual women pose a threat either because they are killers themselves or because they incite violence in men" (Springer 1996, 157). I find that this perceived threat is certainly expressed in the different ways that Lara is represented. Being both extremely sexual and quite a killer at the same time, she is the epitome of 'woman'. But her particular form of existence allows men to act out their desire to control and contain women and their sexuality. Women's bodies have always been perceived as "far more permeable, fluid and subject to 'leakage'" (Lupton 1995, 101) than men's bodies.3 This instability inspires both repulsion and desire - the female body offers emotional security but also threatens engulfment (Lupton 1995). By playing the game or by consuming images of Lara, men have the chance to explore their fascination with female sexuality without a real threat, while at the same time controlling the process - either very directly in the game or indirectly through their choice to look or not to look. Female sexuality and women's bodies are thereby objectified and turned into a commodity, loosing their perceived danger.

Dealing specifically with representation, Craig Owens argues that the "patriarchal order privileges vision over the other senses" (Owens 1985, 71) and that representation is a means to deal with the 'threat' posed by the female. Images of women, he argues, often reflect the "masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity" (Owens 1985, 75). This idea seems to relates perfectly to the stable identity Lara is given in all representations, as I have argued in the previous chapter.

But while Lara's body, her representation and the way she is talked about is saturated with sexuality, her identity is suprisingly asexual. She does not have any sexual relationships, we are not even informed of her sexual orientation - but due to western societies heterosexual bias, she is automatically assumed to be heterosexual unless we are informed otherwise. Her body is there for our pleasure but her bodily pleasures are nowhere even considered. This reinforces the notion that women are sexual creatures, attractive, sexy and desirable but that they seemingly have no sexuality themselves which others would have to worry about. There is no need to consider her desires or her preferences. Here it becomes apparent again that she is created by men and for men, or as Owens puts it: "the representational systems of the West admit only one vision - that of the constitutive male subject - or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine" (Owens 1985, 58). Our patriarchal system of power legitimises certain images while prohibiting others. Woman as the subject of an image is invalid, whereas images of women as objects are multiple.

I find this particularly interesting when contrasting Lara to the pop-star Madonna, who is probably the best-known postmodern icon. Incessantly reinventing herself4, she is always particularly keen to play with sex and gender stereotypes. Whether she reinforces or subverts these stereotypes in the end

is widely debated but of no meaning for my point that she actively deals with sexuality and makes it very clear that she definetely has her own sexuality - even when leaving us in the dark as to just how that sexuality is constituted. Lara as such holds all these possibilities but they are not explored and Eidos would probably do everything in their power to prevent that. A Lara that is subversive and potentially rebellious would not attract such a large audience anymore and would drastically reduce her value - particularly for advertising.

The over-emphasisation of biological difference in the representations of Lara raises another issue that postmodernism and feminism frequently deal with: the fact that Western thought is based on the concept of binaries and that these not only designate difference but also assign a value to the opposing elements. "Like all representations of sexual difference that our culture produces, ...[it] is an image not simply of anatomical difference, but of the values assigned to it (Owens 1985, 61). Both postmodernism and feminism have therefore raised a strong criticism of binary thinking, demanding instead to be able to conceive difference without hierarchy (Owens 1985, 62).

Thinking in binaries has divided the world into mind/body, male/female, natural/cultural, real/artificial (and many other oppositional pairs). Within this construct, woman is identified as the inferior natural body which needs to be controlled by the superior, cultural male mind:

> The female body becomes a metaphor for the corporeal pole of this dualism, representing nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality. Images of the dangerous, appetitive female body, ruled precariously by her emotions, stand in contrast to the masterful, masculine will, the locus of social power, rationality and self-control. The female body is always the 'other': mysterious, unruly, threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order.
>
> Davis 1997, 5

Masculinity is therefore dependent on dualities to justify its claim to superiority (Springer 1996, 49), or as Anne Balsamo puts it: "the construction of a boundary between nature and culture ... guarantees a proper order of things" (Balsamo 1995, 215). She goes on to argue that the body is particularly significant in the process of boundary settings because here the anxieties about loss of the 'proper order' erupt and are played out:

> Techno-bodies are healthy, enhanced and fully functional - more real than real ...As is often the case when seemingly stable boundaries are displaced by technological innovation, ... other boundaries are more vigilantly guarded. Indeed, the gendered boundary between male and female is one border that remains heavily guarded despite new technologized ways to rewrite the physical body in the flesh.
>
> Balsamo 1995, 216

Again Lara seems to be a prime example of this, considering that she is definitely more real than real, not only in her physical abilities but also in her femininity. Blurring the proper boundaries through her 'masculine' behaviour, her overtly feminine body is used to even things out. Since she is completely fictional, her body could have had any shape, but, as Balsamo says correctly, the border remains heavily guarded.

The creation of characters such as Lara could help bring us closer to what Donna Haraway, in her essay A Cyborg Manifesto, describes as a post gender world (Haraway 1991). Using new technologies - Haraway uses the cyborg as an example - we could rid ourselves of the self-imposed limitations inherent in our constructs of gender and our binary thinking. 'Real' and 'artificial' are challenged along with 'natural' and 'cultural'. Haraway envisions a world that "might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanent partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 1991, 154). Instead of realising these possibilites, Lara challenges some social codes of femininity but immediately reinforces others to keep the balance. Though she may be a symbol of new technologies and of progress, her potential is realised in a blatantly conservative and traditional way. But, as Springer says in relation to a British TV series, even though it

> is evidence that patriarchal ideology tenaciously persists in the late twentieth century despite all the cultural changes that reveal its artificiality ...[it] may indicate that patriarchal ideology is unraveling. No longer coherent in its textual presentation, patriarchal ideology persists amid glaring contradictions and tensions.
>
> Springer 1996, 160

The issue of dichotomies also brings to the forefront the question of real and artificial. Particularly in relation to Lara this raises interesting questions, considering that she is not 'real' but treated as if she were. Our society is increasingly confronted with the question of what is real - if such a thing as reality exists - and what is not and how to deal with the resulting difficulties. The way Lara is represented can be analysed as part of an attempt to deal with the threats of a dissolving sense of reality and the pluralisation of virtual realities.

3.3 The Question of Reality

Postmodern theories often deal with the issues of reality and representation. Hans Bertens even goes so far to state that "[i]f there is a common denominator to all these postmodernisms, it is that of a crisis in representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real in the widest sense" (Bertens 1995, 11). The belief that there is a direct and linear relationship between an image

and that which it represents is no longer considered to be valid, "representations are ... no longer determined by an essential connection to the things which they are supposd to represent" (Ward 1997).

Due to the saturation of our society with media and therefore mediation, our culture is increasingly simulational, "the media often changes the things that it treats, transforming the identities of originals and referentialities. In the second media age 'reality' becomes multiple" (Poster 1995, 85).

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard is particularly associated with theories of reality and simulation. He argues that there is no direct relationship between an image and reality and that therefore simulation cannot be the opposite of truth. Rather the two concepts operate on different planes. He defines simulation as "the generation of models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard in Ward 1997, 61).

This dissolution of the dichotomy real/simulation or authentic/inauthentic is closely related to the proliferation of different media and mediations that have permeated our society. Our daily experiences have become mediated by images, so that 'authentic' experience becomes impossible. (Landsberg 1995)

But Baudrillard goes even further: not only is there no connection between simulation and reality, to him there is no more reality against which we could even measure the difference, the image has imploded into reality, to use his phrase. There is no real, essential, unmediated stance outside of simulation. (Ward 1997)

Nevertheless are simulation and what we term reality closely related. Baudrillard argues that, contrary to popular belief, images precede the real and produce it instead of reality producing the images. Our concept and experience of reality is shaped and mediated by the images we have absorbed of this reality: "We can experience the world only through a kind of filter of preconceptions and expectations fabricated in advance by a culture swamped by images" (Ward 1997, 60). Even our construction of identity is deeply influenced by this. Even if we presume a 'true' identity somewhere within a person, how could you, Ward asks, "seperate it from the various identities you are sold daily in advertising, fashion/lifestyle/interior decoration magazines, sex technique videos, shop window displays, fitness programmes, pop records?" (Ward 1997, 68). Furthermore, identity is constructed by experience - so how does the impossibility of authentic experience effect our sense of self? Baudrillard argues that society's reaction to the simulation we experience is panic. Desperation and a longing for reality let us make fetishes of the supposedly authentic. In an attempt to assure ourselves of our reality and that of experiences, products, images etc, we manufacture what Baudrillard calls the hyperreal5, meaning more real-than-real. For hyperreality "it is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard in Springer 1996, 34). This leads to a kind of nostalgia, a faible for myths of origin and signs of reality.

This underscores my earlier point that Lara needs to be particularly feminine (more real-than-real) precisely because she challenges at the same time - through her artificiality - our concept of reality. Computer games are becoming more and more realistic, virtual reality for the masses is just around the corner, digital characters are becoming indistinguishable from real persons. All of these changes further enhance our increasing doubts about reality and authenticity. We are at the same time frightened and fascinated by their possibilities and these alternating currents are also visible in representations dealing with new technologies.

In his article Rear-View Mirrorshades: The Recursive Generation of the Cyberbody (1995), Nigel Clark, drawing on Marshall McLuhan, Walter Benjamin and Baudrillard, argues that, whenever confronted with new experiences and drastic changes, people tend to 'look backwards', towards the past in an attempt to master the new challenges. McLuhan said that we tend "to look at the pesent through the spectacles of the preceeding age" (McLuhan in Clark 1995, 114) and Benjamin "offered the striking image of the 'angel of history' perpetually backing his way into the future" (Clark 1995, 114). Major changes and transformations lead to an insecurity - in order to deal with this insecurity and the discomfort that, what we perceived up to now as reality, has changed, we take refuge in the imagined certainties of previous times. (Clark 1995)

In our present times which are bringing unprecedented changes and challenges, we can see this recursive view in many cases, Lara being one of them as I have argued above. Particularly the digital media oscillate between onward roll and backward glance, since they contribute strongly to the destabilisation of our traditional sense of reality. This - frightening and new - destabilisation is often countered by the deployment of these new media "as instruments for the containment, subjugation and recording of a universe of refractory messages" (Clark 1995, 115).

But whereas Baudrillard only sees panic and the construction of a hyperreality as the outcome of these alternating currents and the underlying anxiety, other theorists see a great potential in the 'death of the real'. Alison Landsberg, in her article Prosthetic Memory (1995), agrees with Baudrillard that the death of the experience has led to "a veritable explosion of, or popular obsession with, experience of the real" (Landsberg 1995, 178). But whereas Baudrillard only sees this in negative terms, this development seems to offer many positive possibilities for Landsberg. She argues that mediated experiences are no less important or meaningful than supposedly authentic ones. People's desire to experience, for example history (via virtual reality, experience museums, realistic computer games etc) and not just read about it, offers the opportunity to make history into personal memories. Landsberg would like to see the changes as a "new relationship to experience which relies less on categories like the authentic and sympathy than on categories like responsibility and empathy" (Landsberg 1995, 178).

New technologies offer us new way to experience things we would otherwise have never had the chance to experience. And if supposedly 'authentic' experience is mediated as well, and always has been- is virtual experience really so very different? Dealing particularly with movies and the cinema,

Landsberg suggests that

> the experience within the movie theater and the memories that the cinema affords - despite the fact that the spectator did not live through them - might be as significant in constructing, or deconstructing, the spectator's identity as any experience that s/he actually lived through.
>
> Landsberg 1995, 180

Mark Poster (1995) furthermore argues that technology increasingly duplicates real reality (he does not make quite clear what he means by real reality, though). But this virtual reality does not simply mirror reality it offers alternations and possibilites that do not exist in reality. He sees the virtual experiences as encouraging play, discovery and experimentation much more so than do actual live through experiences. In these imaginative surroundings people can play and experiment with identity in unprecedented ways:

> Virtual reality takes the imaginary of the word and the imaginay of the film or video image one step farther by placing the individual 'inside' alternative worlds. By directly tinkering with reality, a simulational practice is set in place which alters forever the conditions under which the identity of the self is formed.
>
> Poster 1995, 86

This idea of playing and experimenting with identities has held an understandable fascination for feminists. Cyber-technology offers the possibility of getting outside of gender. Particularly Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant and Claudia Springer are considered to be cyberfeminists. In her famous essay A Cyborg Manifesto (1991), Haraway envisions a world full of virtual space where identity is fluid and fleeting and social concepts and prescriptions of gender are a thing of the past - along with other limiting social codes.

Sadie Plant argues along the same lines when she encourages women to embrace technology because she believes the alliance of software and women can bring about patriarchy's downfall:

> Like women, software systems are used as man's tools, his media and his weapons; all are developed in the interests of man, but all are poised to betray him. ... Women's liberations is sustained and vitalized by the proliferation and globalization of software technologies, all of which feed into self-organizing, self-arousing systems that enter the scene on her side.
>
> Plant 1995, 58

In her book *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (1996), Claudia Springer deals mainly with representations of cyborgs human hybrids. She comes to the conclusion, that

> (i)n the arena of fictional representation the imagery of human fusion with artificial components is replete with metaphors pertaining to sex and gender. Representations of technology have long been gendered and eroticized, so this is not a new phenomenon, but an analysis of recent imagery reveals the particular desires and fears of the late twentieth century, a time when the future of human beings in any form, male or female, can no longer be taken for granted.
>
> Springer 1996, 48

The representations of Lara can be seen as a prime example of this. New technologies - virtual reality but also genetic engineering and plastic surgery - threaten to make the sexual difference obsolete and thereby undermining a pillar of patriarchy. In a desperate attempt to hold on to old conventions and securities, signs of masculinity and femininity have to be over-emphasised.

So it would seem that the possibilities for a feminist subversion and challenge to patriarchy are there but go as yet mainly unused. The world of cyber is still male dominated and clings desperately to old gender concepts, as can be seen in the construction of Lara. But, as I have argued before, cracks in the patriarchal ideology are becoming visible, changes are taking place - if slowly. Lara sends out contradictory messages and she can have multiple meanings. I believe there is a chance here if we explore the cracks further and find ways of subverting traditional readings of Lara.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have looked at the many different manifestations of the virtual character Lara Croft. The amount of images and representations of Lara is huge and I have introduced the reader to several of them. She has been seen in many different situations, poses and media. After having - hopefully - achieved a detailed impression of what Lara looks like and how she is represented, I went on to analyse these images from a feminist postmodern standpoint. The combination of these two theoretical positions seems to me to be very potent when dealing with representations from the realm of popular culture. Both have a deep interest in issues of representation and as far as theoretical ideas on popular culture are concerned, I believe that feminism can gain valuable insights when collaborating with postmodernism.

The issues and questions I raised in my theoretical analysis are related to the concepts of identity, the body and reality. All three seem to have a particularly close relation to the phenomenon Lara Croft.

Lara's identity is constructed as stable, she seems to have found her true self (through the life-changing tragedy she lived through) and manages to live accordingly. In this respect she has achieved what modernism strives for. But she is also very postmodern in that her identity is artificially put together from fragments and bits and pieces that the inventors thought fitting. Therefore her identity holds the possibility of shifting and changing of exploring the chances of fluidity and change. Both the mode of her construction and the medium she first appeared in further support this postmodern fragmentation. Computer games are prime examples of fragmentation since, as opposed to movies, there is no linear story line. Instead you can stop, come back later, replay a scenario, or do something in a different way. But it would seem that Lara's potential is not realised. I argued that this is due to the fact that the major changes that the new technologies and the second media age bring with them do not only bring about enthusiasm and fascination, but also fear and disorder. This instability is perceived as threatening and needs to be dealt with, one way is to fix other things more firmly in their designated place, such as Lara's identity for example.

Or that of the body. Lara's body is overtly feminine, I argue, because the dissolvance of boundaries in other areas such as nature/culture, real/artificial and human/non-human, needs to be countered by a reaffirmation of perceived stabilities, such as biological difference. But the representation of Lara's body does more than just fasten gender stereotypes. It also helps to perpetuate to perpetuate a feminine ideal that women are desperately and unsuccesfully trying to achieve. Here power and Foucault's analysis of its workings come into play. Since power is no longer working top to bottom but along an interconnected web, its workings are much more subtle and hard to find.

Images are one way of controlling subjects because they help form our concepts of self and the ideals we strive towards. Images of femininity in our culture lead women to be perpetually busy with their bodies: keeping them in the right shape, moving in the proper way and to decorating them nicely, perpetually trying to transform and 'improve' them.

Foucault calls these bodies docile bodies because all energies are diverted to activities that are unthreatening for the social order and the status quo. Conforming to these images of femininity gives many women a sense of achievement and power, which is illusory and trying to reach these ideals can be outright harmful (eg plastic surgery).

Images therefore need to be critically assessed and explored for their potentially limiting messages and for their possible subversive potential.

Since images shape and influence the way we perceive reality the last part of my final chapter deals with the concepts of real and artificial. Postmodernism has often proclaimed the end of the real, arguing that everything is simulation with no linear connection to some unmediated 'real' reality. Opinions diverge whether this is to be seen in negative or positive tones. Where Baudrillard only sees panic and the construction of a hyperreality, other theorists argue that this offers new chances and possibilities. They emphasise the potential that arises when we experience things without

actually living through them. They argue that these mediated experienced first do not differ that much from supposedly 'authentic' experience (since there is no real outside of simulation) and second are just as influential in the construction of our identity and self as are experiences we actually live through. Virtual space furthermore invites a playfulness, and imaginative responses and offers room for experimentation. Feminists have been particularly interested in these ideas since they also offer the chance to experiment with concepts of gender, sex and sexualities which could in the long run lead to the disappearance of gender constructs alltogether.

Due to the limited space available, and since no analysis is ever exhaustive, I was unable to touch upon many points that could have further enriched my analysis. I could deal neither with the whole issue of pleasure nor with the contrasting concepts of capitalism - both of which could offer interesting insights. Other ideas I had to leave out are a closer analysis of feminism's relationship to subcultures and the question what new technologies and virtual experiences implicate for the material body. The materiality of the body is often neglected in postmodernism and cyberculture, here feminism with its many insightful thoughts on the materiality of the body could offer new angles and perspectives.

I would have particularly liked to further explore the impications cyberculture could have for feminism. Cyber and new technologies often challenge boundaries by their mere existence, especially those between natural/artificial and human/non-human. Once boundaries start to dissolve, others - such as gender - might at first be guarded even more strongly but in the long run might topple as well.

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