Playing With Lara

I enjoy playing with Lara Croft; I appreciate her agility, her solitary determination and lethal accuracy. Ruthlessly acquisitive, Lara raids tombs, but her pillage has no independent value; its value resides in its function and whether it is a floppy disk or a golden idol, it exists to fill a keyhole. Progress goes awry when conditions are not met, and to miss pulling a lever or retrieving a key can mean being stuck, crossing and re-crossing a space that grows more emphatically empty or frustratingly banal. Between skirmishes Lara’s footsteps measure the games’ spaces with a metronomic regularity. She penetrates zones valued primarily for their newness, but this sought quality evaporates. However initially diverting, impressive or vast these places are, they exist to be travelled through, and once explored they become simply another barrier between Lara and wherever she is heading. In addition to speculating on the attractions of the game in the face of such orchestrated aggravation, it seems important to address the ways that Lara’s objectification jars against her role as homicidal archaeologist. The interrogating of a feminine action heroine with an arguably reactionary undertow involves themes and precedents that have been argued over at length by film theorists. Thus it seems productive to approach Lara (carefully) armed with the body of debate that has accumulated around a cinematic action heroine such as Ripley from the *Alien* cycle of films (1979-1997).1

As with cinematic heroines, Lara is available to the viewer via a screen. But Lara is an avatar; she is not just viewed, she is played, occupied and propelled by an off-screen agent. Her sex-doll proportions appear to confirm her compliance with existing cinematic models of objectification (such as those proposed by Laura Mulvey in the pivotal “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”) yet the passivity and castigation integral to such models has to be reconciled, in some way, with Lara’s explicitly sadistic and penetrative appetites. In certain respects Lara resembles Ripley from the *Alien* films, in that she has battled monsters in strange places and survived unaided. While Ripley has been exhaustively analysed, her meaning as gendered being has never been fully resolved. Her identity, authority and her function within the narrative have disrupted reductive or essentialist readings of her gender. Binarist models problematised by Ripley’s identity are completely scuttled by Lara’s. Lara is a peculiar mutant; her motion relies on her occupation: she requires a driver.

In recalling Ripley, my point is not to reopen the debate of who Ripley is or what she may mean, but rather to site the accumulation of theoretical attention she has received as a point of reference from which to proceed to an examination of *Tomb Raider* (Core/Eidos, 1996), a point from which to begin a consideration of the ways in which cinematic accounts of
pleasure, identification and gender may translate, or fail to translate, to an interactive medium. It is not their sameness that is being considered, but rather their difference. Ripley must elude death (at least until the end of *Alien 3*) and the whole point of our fear, and our fears for her, is loaded by our investment in her survival. She runs on fear, and our emotive succumbing to her endangerment propels the narrative to its climax. Lara, on the other hand, can die repeatedly and temporarily. Her infinite and mechanical resurrections change the dynamics of our investment in her safety. Each of the women is available to us, as viewers, via a screen, but the bodies they risk originate differently, as do the spaces they must cross. Differences inherent to the media, and their particularities of access and pleasure, have to be considered. Given the unique, specific role of an avatar, as image and as vehicle, watched and played, it is possible that Lara manages to function as objectified on-screen woman, even as she simultaneously functions as sadistic agent relative to those she so effectively and relentlessly annihilates.

Ripley, and the theoretical attention she has received, is a resource, a base from which to proceed into the less charted territory of *Tomb Raider*. Throughout the *Alien* cycle dialectically informed attributes and values emerge as mythic operatives. The complex, livid universe Ripley occupies lends itself to emotive and sensual existence in the eyes of the recipient. Her embodiment as endangered and gendered being in a compellingly imagined universe has generated multiple readings.² Her role places her at the epicentre of meaning, within complex worlds, and against sets of hierarchical relationships. As Barbara Creed³ has argued in her work on the *Alien* cycle, its geography and its abject monsters are gendered in pre-Oedipal fantasies of maternal draw and abhorrence. The films lock Ripley and the alien queen in a relationship that traces the terms of their difference as it negotiates their semblance. Processes theorised as integral to our sense of self remain susceptible to anxiety concerning our origins: our remaining receptive or sensitive to notions of reunification with the maternal body informs both the terrors and the pleasures of *Aliens* (1986) in particular. The *Alien* films are, at least in part, horror movies; they intend us to take pleasure in our fear of the carnivorous womb at their centre. As Carol Clover has pointed out, horror films and their squirming audiences problematise viewing models that insist on positioning the female on screen as inevitably the object of a sadistic or controlling gaze. The pleasures of horror involve surrender, passivity and discomfort, rather than, or alongside, pleasures of sadistic control. The environment of *Aliens* and the characters that fill it are loaded with information, from the implicit gendering of a craft or a creature, to the hyperbole of close up wide-eyed terror. Ripley is positioned in a mobile frame of enacted values, her meaning extricated from a web of jostling elements. While Ripley can be read as ideological or psychoanalytic figment, as “Final Girl” (Clover 35) in a loaded space, Lara is the only girl in an empty space. The proliferating detail of filmed space presents the reader/viewer with a range of sensual information and emotive investment notably absent from the echoing sterility of Lara's world.
The places Lara infiltrates are redolent of painstaking assemblage and technological accomplishment. In consequence, and despite all the game’s shadowy vast chambers, game-space cannot attain the kind of creepy enigmatic or suggestive depths that Ripley encounters. While the areas that Lara explores can be complex, visually pleasing or intriguing, they remain sterile and profoundly organised. They are not vicariously tactile. There is a feeling that the places could not smell, that even the water is not damp. Traps and predators arrive on schedule to be dodged or despatched. Monsters attack suddenly and fatally, but the fright they evoke is contained, utilitarian rather than uncanny.  

Cinematic space is haunted by what remains just off-screen, especially in a scary movie, but digital game space seems less able to evoke such resonance. The creepiest monsters in *Tomb Raider* are those that manage, in their murmurings and groans, to attain a kind of uncanny, auditory ambiguity despite their digital construction.

The terms of our visually consuming on-screen film space are pre-arranged, then naturalised, via continuity editing, shot and reaction shot, while the camera orchestrates our motion through the screen space. Notions of film immersion as a subtle and encompassing process do not translate comfortably to a necessarily interactive medium. Lara is a vehicle, and she will only move if, as and when the player compels her to. While gazing at a film screen, our looking is choreographed and the limits of the frame become naturalised, denied or surpassed. Our motion though the onscreen space is pleasurably fuelled by a dreamlike disembodiment or surrender, while distance is cut, soared through. By contrast in *Tomb Raider* players cross a space that is rarely abbreviated, running behind Lara, who is mostly on foot. Participants trail her in a third-person perspective. Players are able to partially manipulate the screen frame using Lara’s location as a fulcrum: to look up or down for example. Whereas cinematic immersion involves denying our containment by a frame, the options offered by *Tomb Raider* centralise the issue of choice, and as a reductive side effect make explicit the limits of those choices. Interactivity makes a point of access, and thus the terms of access are never neutralised. We aim Lara, but her mechanised progression has the effect of emphasising the insistent limits of our options.

Much of *Tomb Raider* involves steering Lara from behind through various trials and onwards through a sequence of zones or levels. The barriers between subsequent zones are overcome once the relevant levers or keys have been activated. To cross a barrier is to enter the next sector. Penetration, novelty and accumulation are the rewards of performance. Death can be sudden (by yeti or archaeological death trap) or gradual (venom, drowning), accidental or strategic. If a poorly handled conflict has resulted in the squandering of various resources, such as health or ammunition, Lara is sacrificed, the confrontation played over and the text perfected. This kind of replay does not represent real options in terms of interactive intervention in narrative outcome: as a player, I can do, undo and redo until Lara has effectively performed the challenge presented to her by the game, but I can only proceed
through the game, through the space itself, if I perform the task as the game demands. Scaling a series of monoliths or chasms, for example, calls for a precise and predetermined series of jumps, holds and steps. For each puzzle or obstacle, there is generally a single solution. To discern that solution and then perform as necessary is your aim. The solutions clearly pre-exist your participation. Players have options about the speed with which space is crossed, the ferocity with which enemies are despatched and the meticulousness which each nook, cranny, or cave is explored, but we do not author our trajectory. Solutions are not freestyle. A player will systematically experiment, and after trial, error and accidental death, correctly perform the intended and necessary response. The conditional terms of our motion through space are thus rendered explicit. We do not write our own narrative, we uncover a pre-existing text and conform to its injunctions.5

*Tomb Raider* is nostalgic in a boys’ own adventure, Indiana Jones, style. The game supposes that there are still empty spaces to be revealed, entered and pillaged, invaded places that have lost their names and occupants, where a lone, wilful adventurer can defy death and gravity.6 In his analysis of film noir Slavoj Zizek describes nostalgia as involving an intensification of gazing pleasure: contemporary viewer gratification is buoyed and buffered by the gazing of some past, imagined audience. Zizek explains the relishing of film noir as being informed by this ghostly doubling:

> what fascinates us is precisely a certain gaze, the gaze of the “other”, of the hypothetical, mythic spectator from the 1940s who was supposedly still able to identify immediately with the universe of film noir. What we really see when we watch a film noir is this gaze of the other (527).

When I play Lara, I play in the company of her creators, and in the shadow of the desiring gaze that her breasts and short shorts were formed to address. Extragamically Lara Croft is repeatedly posited as technological innovation, as dreamed up, cutting-edge cheesecake, while each new *Tomb Raider* episode, and each subsequent Lara, is heralded as the offspring of creative and technological innovation. Game magazines mix glowing reviews of *Tomb Raider* with detailed accounts of Lara’s construction, as if leering over Dr. Frankenstein’s shoulder. Driving Lara means occupying a place shaped and then vacated by her designers. Each impressive interior or frustrating puzzle is resonant of their will. Lara’s is an imagined world, and the fact of its invention is never denied or superseded. Her body and its capabilities have shaped the spaces through which she is steered, obstacles have been designed and placed with specific and achievable solutions in mind. Lara runs in the company of these ghosts, the eyes she seems built to please, and the creative intention, the will, of her makers. Somewhere near the crux of her desirability resides a digitally immaculate primal scene. As players we occupy a zone strung between this loaded moment and some imagined reception, a mirage target of desire. Lara herself is intertextually narrativised as rising directly
from technological innovation and implicitly paternal “authors”. She has come into being parthogenically, shaped by a fictional beckoning appetite that is gendered male, as relentlessly as she herself is gendered female.  

Gendered bodies, big guns

Cycles of representation initiated by the image of woman on screen, of “lack” and subsequent castration anxiety (as elaborated in psychoanalytically informed film theory), cannot be held to translate directly from an image of flesh to an image of digital conception. Given Lara’s digital history, can it be assumed that the viewer, of whatever gender, accepts on some necessary and unconscious level that the figure on screen is persuasively sexed? Is she “woman enough” to instigate the castration anxiety on which Mulvey’s benchmark analysis of narrative pleasure hinges? By Mulvey’s account, the screened image of woman inevitably gives rise to castration anxiety in the male viewer, and such anxiety (associated with her “lack”) is manifest in either scopophilic or sadistic scenarios. Superficially there are alignments between Mulvey’s explication of sadistic looking and the trauma undergone by Lara on screen. It is completely possible that the urge to punish and control her are crucial to the relationship between Lara and her player. Nevertheless it would be deceptive and reductive to dismiss Lara as a figment of hypersexualised objectification. Perhaps the cycles suggested by Mulvey as being an inevitable aspect of gendered looking are being evoked, mobilised and exploited, only to be rendered ironic or subsequently compromised by Lara’s construction and expendability. Her emphatic proportions would seem to confirm that she operates as object for the screen viewer, and as such calls into play the models of looking described by Mulvey, but levels and degrees of flux and exchange made manifest by the console complicate attempts to cement a static subject/object allocation. Lara is watched, while she is being driven. Her physicality and gender invite objectification, yet she operates as perpetrating and penetrative subject within the narrative. This duality involves a certain delegation of agency between on and off screen positions. Watching a film may of course involve shifts in processes of looking and identification, but driving an avatar involves utilising a console, identification is occupation: literal and mechanised. This flux in agency is the price we pay to play. When Lara dies her temporary mortality returns the role of subject to her operator. She exerts violence with us, and then she dies for us, over and over.

Certainly Lara suffers (to the extent that a non-biologically generated and infinitely resurrectable character can be held to suffer) in a manner that recalls Mulvey’s account of on-screen woman as the object of punitive ordeal. But are Lara’s travails experienced by the viewer’s unconscious as credible; does digital pain count? She is not impaired by her wounds. She runs on, relentless and unmarked, and only a small indicator in the top right of the screen gives any clues to the extent of damage sustained to her wellbeing. The novelty and variety of her deaths are diverting, and occasionally spectacular, but her resurrection is constant and guaranteed. Lara is punished in ways that are suggestive of objectified
castigation, but the rapidity and repetition of her revivals indicate the presence of a different, perhaps simultaneous dynamic. It is not just about her pain or suffering, but about her renewability. Her primary adaptation is this facility to shed lives. This discarding and resuming sites her as subject, not object, within a sadistic formula. She is the agent of repetition, the perpetrator, while her victims are the numerous, the interchangeable and the expendable. At the same time as she carries out her penetrative exercise in slaughter and acquisition, she fulfils the role of object for the spectator. She takes lives and we take hers. Her hyperbolic breasts are decoys: her sex toy physicality is a mantle of objectification, as her deaths are a pretence of fallibility.

Lara models an objectified female casing, but she is the sadistic force in Tomb Raider. She is the subject (the transgressor, the survivor, the perpetrator) at least relative to the other occupants of her world. The sadist requires objects as fodder, and the sadistic scenario demands repetition. This is where the parade of victims, in their numbers and by their interchangability, come into play. Sadistically informed narrative is associated by Deleuze in Coldness and Cruelty (1991) with post Oedipality, with will, law, demarcation and penetration. Lara’s violence and mobility are fuelled by just such appetites. Perhaps this is precisely the value of her cipherdom, and the fulcrum of the subject/object flux between player and avatar. Empty, she enables occupation. Her driver is the “male” agent whose will to penetrate is teased and appeased by the game’s terms of pleasure and reward. The function of her elaborately gendered chassis is to act as psychic mattress. Progress is a fortda oscillation, onward motion is gendered male, and penetrative success and acquisition are transmitted directly past the avatar to the player (of whatever gender). Failure, on the other hand, is snared by Lara’s body. Her unexpected deaths or sudden fallibilities recall and reinstate her limitations. The limitations reside in her body and her body is gendered female.

Gaylyn Studlar (1985) has adapted Deleuzian accounts of masochism in order to explore aspects of identification and film fantasy, and to propose that cinema evokes the seductive possibility of symbiosis in a dynamic that draws on fantasies of regression. As per Coldness and Cruelty, masochism is pre-Oedipal, involving a subject’s vulnerability to the lures of maternal plenitude and reunification. Accordingly, the un-nameable maternal body operates as a structuring vortex around which an elaboration of dialectics, suspense and elaboration orbit, the “eternal timeless supremacy of the mother can only be expressed in the language of myths, which is therefore essential to masochism” (Deleuze 63). Studlar traces structural similarities between the thematics of masochism and elements of film spectatorship. Further to associating masochism with the elaboration and suspense of film narrative, she links masochism’s drive towards maternal reunification with the film screen itself. Studlar wonders if aspects of viewer submission enable a restoration via the screen to the “sense of wholeness of the first symbiotic relationship” (614). The pleasure of symbiosis (viewer with viewed) is enabled by a selective collaboration on the part of the spectator. It is a process
reliant on surrender (and of course it is a tendency, not a proscribed or inevitable aspect of viewer immersion). We also watch Lara via a screen, but in a game, the conditions in which a fantasy of regressive symbiosis between viewer and screen could operate are undermined or ruptured. The masochistic seductions of infantile regression and obliterating maternal reunification cannot thrive in a site where participation is performative. The pleasures of cinematic identification involve an emotive immersion or investment in the body, and the environs of the body on screen, in processes engaging the unconscious and fuelled by elements of spectatorial passivity. The games console, by mechanising elements of identification, arguably undercuts the pleasure potential of such processes. Lara remains under the viewer’s control, identification is explicit: we drive, direct and occupy her. The console umbilically links the off screen participant, to the on screen world and enables their agency within that world. The console embodies the difference between the two media, from surrender to interaction. The console involves skill and proficiency, any accumulation of which is demonstrable, on screen. As the film screen offers the dream of symbiosis, the console offers the dream of control.

In Coldness and Cruelty, Deleuze counters Freudian allocations of masochism and sadism as complementary Oedipal perversions, by describing sadism and masochism as contrasting complexes, with different structuring fascinations. Sadistic fantasy is Oedipal, it “negates the mother and inflates the father” (134), while the pre-Oedipal urges of masochistic fantasy involve self-abasement, symbiosis and the lure of the maternal body. Sadistic fantasy involves taking the role of the controlling parent in the punishment, objectification or debasement of a parade of nameless victims. Tomb Raider is driven by just such concerns, especially in its element of formulaic repetition. Additionally, at an extra-gamic level, the attention paid to the terms and details of Lara’s construction are suggestive of a concern with origins and paternity that recall sadistic preoccupations. As masochism involves the draw of maternal symbiosis, sadism involves the idealisation of the father. Lara’s digital origins are resonant of parthenogenesis, of an expulsion of biology that recalls sadism’s drive to exalt the paternal.

Deleuze describes the dialectical, elaborative proliferation of sensual description in masochistic fantasy as a kind of circling, an approach to a gravitational namelessness: the lure of reunification with the maternal body (hence masochism’s association with self-obliteration, absorption). On the other hand, the “sadistic hero appears to have set himself the task of thinking out the Death Instinct (pure negation) in a demonstrative form” (31). Repetition is the sadist’s tool in approaching this negation. In Tomb Raider pleasures and frustrations grate against each other in repetitious rituals of obedience and conformity that lead, via homicidal incident, onward (or inward) to new territories. Deleuze writes that “in sadism, it becomes possible for the boy to play the role of a girl in relation to a projection of the father” (68), and that “the sadistic fantasy ultimately rests on the theme of the father
destroying his own family, by inciting the daughter to torture and murder the mother” (59). To bear his account in mind, is to open a space in which to imagine our weakness for Lara across gender and against more obvious tidal patterns of desire, sexual demarcation or appetite. If it is feasible to gender the hermeneutic “secret” as the deepest female aspect in the game, the implication is that the androgynous daughter (Lara, and the player in Lara’s guise) is expiating or exposing the maternal on behalf of the exalted and absent father. This notion of play as an attempt to placate a paternal authority is suggestive of the obedience inherent to our conditional progression through the game, and recalls again the pathogenic construction of Lara and her world.

**Conclusion**

Lara is an agile cipher, a vehicular android, a smooth seamed femme-bot. She is hyperbolically gendered, but having digital origins and an avatar function significantly effect the ways that she is visually consumed. *Tomb Raider* is fuelled by sadistic preoccupations at the primary (apparatus) level, and at a subsequent or thematic level. Lara is the perpetrator, her victims are numerous, unnamed and disposable. On screen, in her world, she takes on the role of subject. Yet, simultaneously, Lara’s exaggerated dream girl proportions are inflated by a reactionary imagination; she does function as object for the viewing/playing subject. I propose that this “doubling” is enabled by Lara’s peculiar origins, her construction and her vacuity. She is a vehicle, and she freezes should players lift their fingers from the console. This is a constant reassurance that she acts for the player, and thus that there is no will pre-existent to the player’s. The player is effectively confirmed as sadistic operative, and as subject. This reassurance is then confirmed and cushioned by Lara’s physicality. Her sex doll attributes are the clear signals of a familiar, cossetting objectification that eases a delegation of agency from player to avatar. Extra-gamic sniggering about Lara’s desirability further deflects potential anxiety regarding subject fluctuation. The outcome is that Lara relays her penetrative, wilful and lethal agency on to the player. This, perhaps, is why despite all her lone adventuring and valiant perseverance, she reaffirms more borders than she crosses. The fact remains that I have enjoyed Lara’s company, and will continue to do so, but as the *Tomb Raider* games have moved closer to cinema in terms of characterisation (via increased use of animated inserts and dialogue for example) there is less flexibility in Lara’s identity, and more a sense that a woman on the console is, at some level, a problem. While this girl-on-girl dynamic remains largely unacknowledged, it seems implicitly present in attempts to standardise the pleasures Lara offers her operators. Lara’s expanding biography is, via her latest incarnations (*The Chronicles*, the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* film [2001]) problematising my relationship with her in new ways. The more elaborated, fixed or otherwise legitimised her “story” is, the more it seems that a desiring and specifically male consumer is being imagined, addressed and constructed, and the more untenable any neutral participation by players outside this particular demographic seemingly becomes.
Works Cited


NOTES

1 Remembering Ripley involves grappling with psychoanalytically informed models of representation and subjectivity. My intentions are speculative rather than prescriptive, and I am not presuming that a particular, specific or static player is constructed by the text, or that the pleasures offered by the text are necessarily constant from player to player.

2 For an account of the problems Ripley has raised for feminist film theory, see Elizabeth Hills (38). Watching a film and playing a game, while both
screen based activities, are different experiences. As I write this the feature film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* is on general release, but the game Lara is, of course, not the same creature as this subsequent celluloid incarnation.

3 Barbara Creed’s ‘Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine’ is included in *Alien Zone; Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (Kuhn, 1990). This anthology contains a selection of work on the *Alien* cycle, and thus offers an overview of the various conclusions theorists have reached concerning the meaning of Ripley.

4 Julia Kristeva links the hybrid and the ambiguous with the abject. If the game spaces are digitally constructed and overtly assembled, its sheer intentionality would seem to make it difficult to employ ambiguity at a visual level. Using darkness works to an extent, but it is at the audio level that a spooky ambiguity seems best achieved.

5 I am unsure if the repetition of gameplay functions primarily to increase the value of new spaces. Perhaps repeat events function as opportunities to re-play towards a more perfect or correct event, or perhaps the lure of repetition is about re-play as deviation, as variation on a theme.

6 Lara raids African, Polynesian and South American sacred sites, London office blocks and Venetian living rooms. Her bizarre global web of blasphemous larceny, and the designation of sites from owned to abandoned, tribal, industrial, magic or occupied, is worthy of further investigation, especially in light of Lara’s own supposed racial and class identity (and the weird drooling over her “aristocratic” roots).

7 This is intended as an exploration of various elements of Lara’s construction, not as a prescription of the pleasures involved in gendered reception. There are, of course, additional pleasures and alternative dynamics that could be considered, for instance, the lure of the hermeneutic: the notion that there is a secret truth, a revelation, to be pursued or unveiled, the pleasure of gaining, via a rite of initiation or trial, access to a long sealed chamber or mysterious power. Additionally it would seem worth examining this fascination with revelation in context of emergent media technologies. Perhaps the dislocation of traditional notions of truth, evidence, veracity or history is behind a
culturally evident yearning to address a “loss”, via the exposure of
commensurate “authenticities”.

8 Mulvey proposed that the anxiety generated by the image of woman on
screen is diverted into either fetishistic or castigating scenarios. I am focusing
on the castigated or investigated alternative. A closer examination of fetishism
in relation to Lara Croft is justified, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

9 In analysing porn films, Zizek (524) describes a shift in agency (from viewer
to performer), and suggests that this shift is one of the reasons that porn is so
depressing. This notion of a delegation of agency is worth considering in
relation to Lara’s flagrant objectification (the big breasts and the small
clothes). Perhaps, in part, it is discomfort around the agency Lara enjoys on
screen that is being responded to or purged via the reactionary tone of much
of her extra-game manifestations. Despite all the biographies, web sites and
merchandising, and however much some fans may abhor a vacuum, Lara
remains empty, a cypher. If the proliferation of detail is a compulsive and
compensatory response to her fundamental blankness, she draws it forth, but
she is unaltered by it.

10 I have, at times, taken conscious pleasure in driving Lara off cliffs or
blowing her up. The question is whether her pain or suffering register in the
unconscious, whether her pain (or her “lack”) can figure in psychoanalytic
processes such as those described by Mulvey.

11 *Fort-da* refers to the “go away” game Freud describes in “Beyond the
Pleasure Principle” (599).

12 In my experience this is reflected in the pronouns friends tend to use when
describing their progress (or lack of) through the game. Success is often
appropriated by the player (“I am up to the City of the Dead) while failures and
frustrations are described as Lara’s responsibility (“she keeps getting eaten”,
“she keeps falling off that stupid cliff”, etc.).

13 Perhaps it is significant that the feature film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* inflates
the role of the Lara’s father. He is central to the plot, despite being dead.
Additionally Lara and her father are played by a real life father and daughter,
casting that was frequently mentioned in the film’s publicity. Of course reading
Lara as the “good female element” expelling or exposing the “bad female
element" recalls Ripley again, especially in *Aliens*. Seemingly, each of the characters reflects our susceptibility to such fantasies, even as the terms of our relationship to each of them remains specific to either medium. And, of course, any number of additional or alternative cycles of mutating fascination may be fuelling our desire to play with Lara Croft.