Making Sense of Video Games:

A Textual Analysis of Tomb Raider II

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Abstract

This dissertation is a textual analysis of the hard-profile computer game Tomb Raider II. After reviewing and discussing the literature related to computer games and associated action movies, I shall outline Dowling's social activity theory and apply it exploratively to a range of computer game texts. I shall then apply the language of description more thoroughly to a sample of Tomb Raider II and a related walkthrough in order to analyse how they construct author and reader positions and to describe the nature and mechanisms of the distribution of practices between these positions. My work also includes an account of my personal engagement with the game. Finally, in my conclusion I shall give suggestions for further research.

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1 Introduction

The final decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a fundamental change in human communications. New forms of generating and retrieving digital information are now at our disposal and have become part of "a series of radical changes in how we communicate, in how knowledge is organised and structured, and in how we orientate ourselves in time and space" (BUCKINGHAM 1993b:20). Computer games[1] have become a major preoccupation for many children, and they probably have become children's main entry point into the world of information and communications technology[2]. Furthermore, the recent advertising campaign for the Sony PlayStation has been explicitly addressed to the mid-twenties consumer, and appears to suggest that the game console has also become an acceptable adult toy (SEFTON-GREEN 1998:3-4). Thus computer games have become a cultural phenomenon and are not going to go away. Many discussions of computer games have been dominated by assertions about their negative effects; they were, for example, accused of glorifying violence, encouraging anti-social behaviour (GUNTER 1998:15) and "reaffirming sexist ideologies and circulating misogynistic images" (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:3). Alternatively there are academics (e.g. KINDER 1991, GREENFIELD 1984) that suggest that video games can accelerate cognitive growth in areas such as spatial skills and visualisation. Either way computer games appear to be constructed as powerful pedagogic texts, transmitting content and/or practices to the

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[1] In this dissertation I shall use the terms 'computer game' and 'video game' more or less interchangeably. Generally, 'computer game' refers to games played on a home computer, whereas 'video game' refers to games played in arcades or on game consoles (e.g. PlayStation).

player. The consumption of computer games, on the other hand, is an economic phenomenon that enters the cycle of symbolic exchange that is contemporary consumer culture (see BAUDRILLARD 1988) and the marketing of multimedia 'fun and games' to young people and families is a serious business (NIXON 1998:38). Contemplations like these let us consider computer games rather as market texts. To examine these assumptions, it becomes important for sociologists and educational researchers to develop modes of analysis and descriptions that match the levels of detail and analytic power of the existent work on schooling.

Tomb Raider II is a hard-profile 3D-computer game with a salient female protagonist 'Lara Croft'. The game was released in 1997 by 'Core Design' and millions of copies were sold all over the world. Lara Croft featured in commercials for soft drinks in Great Britain, for cars in France and for a woman's magazine in Germany[3]. Furthermore, she graced already the covers of lifestyle, design and newsmagazines[4]. Comic books (e.g. FREON & ALICE 1999) and secondary literature (e.g. COUPLAND & WARD 1998) have already been published as well. She further went on tour with the Irish pop group U2 and victoriously fought against the singers of the German pop group 'Die Ärzte' in one of their video clips[5]. Last but not least, Hollywood giant Paramount purchased the film rights for Tomb Raider and Lara Croft in 1998, and the resulting film should appear on the big screen sometime in the near future. Thus other media sources borrow from the Tomb Raider games and vice

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[2] In the USA 30 to 40 percent of homes own a video game play console and another 10 to 20 percent rent or share them with neighbours (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:7)
[3] Lucozade, Seat, Brigitte
[4] The Face (June 1997), design (Spring 1999), Focus (24 August 1998).
[5] The title of the song was 'Männer sind Schweine' [Men are pigs].

versa, as I shall demonstrate later on. There is no doubt that this series is outstanding, and it is absolutely justifiable to give it some consideration from a sociological point of view. I chose Tomb Raider II from the series simply because it was the only sequel that was available for the Macintosh at the time when I started my investigations.

This dissertation is a sociology. The theoretical space I am interested in is concerned with "patterns of relationships between individuals and groups and the production and reproduction of these relationships in cultural practices and in action" (DOWLING 1998:1). As well as occupying a theoretical space, this work is concerned with an empirical space: computer games. Using DOWLING's social activity theory I wish to produce a description of the nature of the social relations established in and through computer games as texts, by referring to sampled utterances taken from 'Tomb Raider II'. My research question is, how does this computer game construct author and reader positions, and what are the nature and mechanisms of the distribution of practices between these positions?

Before engaging the computer game I shall review and discuss in chapter two some of the available literature relating to computer games and the analysis of narratives in movies. Much literature deals with 'effects', which are, however, not my primary concern here. GUNTER (1998) has provided a helpful and recent summary on the contradictory findings available on this issue. My methodological interest resides in textual analysis strategies and not in ethnography, for example. However, consulting some research dealing with empirical players and analyses of the content of video games may prove helpful. A range of questions occurs that will be addressed in my literature review. Who plays video games? Why do they attract people? How

do players engage and learn to play them? Issues that frequently give raise to concerns are related to violence and the rather sexist portrayal of women. Apparently a more or less exclusively masculine space is constructed. Another relevant question refers to the extent to which players identify with their alter ego on the screen. Finally, some attention will be given to Hollywood narrative patterns since computer games are sometimes referred to as interactive movies.

In chapter three methodological issues will be discussed, e.g. the opposition between text analysis and audience research. I shall argue that all analysis must constitute a recontextualisation of its objects, so that the kinds of distinctions that the proponents of audience research propose begin to lose their validity. Furthermore, I shall provide the rationale for the kind of approach I am adopting.

Chapter four will give a description of the approach I am adopting, namely DOWLING's (1998) social activity theory. I shall lay out the applicability of his language of description by referring to a range of other computer games I got hold of. Furthermore, I shall theorise on the referent activity of 'computer gaming' that gives Tomb Raider II its meaning.

Chapter five describes the public domain setting of my sample of Tomb Raider II, and chapter six will describe the positioning and distributing strategies that are deployed by the author. In chapters seven and eight I shall analyse a correspondent walkthrough as well as describe my personal engagement with the game, still in terms of the language of description. The final chapter will draw the conclusions and give suggestions for further research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Audience

Video games are played by people of all age groups, but the market is dominated by young males in their teens or early twenties (GUNTER 1998:37). Nine out of ten teenagers in the US play video games (ATARI 1982; GALLUP 1982), and playing time may range from two hours a week up to two hours a day (FUNK 1993).

In the early 1980s many studies suggested that playing video games was a predominantly male leisure occupation (DOMINICK 1984). At that time video game-playing was not a home-based activity but took place mainly in arcades populated by adolescent males (KAPLAN 1983). BUCHMAN & FUNK (1996) found that children reported steadily decreasing game-playing in the home from fourth to eighth grade, and boys reported more playing time than girls in each grade, in both home and arcade settings[6].

According to CUNNINGHAM (1997) the move of computer games from 'street culture' in the arcades to 'bedroom culture' in the home has opened up access to a lower age group, and female participation in games culture has increased. Thus, SKIRROW's (1990:322) claim that "the pleasure of computer games is gender-specific - women do not play them" appears to be no longer valid[7]. However, DOWNES' (1999) study of children between the ages of five and twelve showed that there were still

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[6] Girls were more likely to list educational games as favourites than boys. Violent games were generally very popular (50%). Girls appeared to prefer fantasy (cartoon) violence, whereas boys preferred human violence games.

gender differences in the frequency of game playing. These differences were, nevertheless, smaller than those suggested by previous research[8] (CUNNINGHAM 1994; WOBER & SHEHINA 1994). To sum up, research seems to indicate that although boys and girls can be equally skilled at using computer games, boys are more likely to play with them. Children of both sexes consider computer games to be boys' toys (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:149).

2.2 Player-Game Interaction

2.2.1 The Appeal of Video Games

MALONE (1981) found that the presence of a goal, automatic score-keeping, audio effects, randomness, and the importance of speed were important factors to make video games appealing. GREENFIELD (1984:88-91) wrote that the combination of the dynamic visual elements of television and interactivity - allowing an active participatory role[9] - were significant. Interactivity[10] is frequently seen as signalling what is specific about computer games (DARLEY 2000:148). LAUREL (1993:20-21) suggested that interactivity exists on a continuum characterised by the variables of

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[7] CUNNINGHAM is, however, aware that a lot more research needs to be carried out on the appeal of games to females of all ages. Her claims are based, among others, only on a small-scale research with a group of lower middle-class ten-year-old girls.

[8] From what the children said in the interviews, it can, however, be implied that greater differences could have been found if the children were to include games consoles in their reporting.

[9] Studies in other settings (science museums, zoos etc.) show that children are attracted to activities that let them become personally involved (GREENFIELD 1984:90).

[10] Note that this notion is not unproblematic in itself since, within the discourse of cultural theory (e.g. ALLEN 1992) it is assumed that textuality is always an interactive, creative process, since no text exists until it is engaged by a reader (FRIEDMAN 1995:73).

frequency, range, and significance[11], combined with other factors such as sensory immersion and the tight coupling of kinaesthetic input and visual response. Interactivity gives the player a way of directly taking a leading role in what occurs, and the means to control – at least in part – what will unfold within the scene on the screen (DARLEY op cit. 159). However, control and choice are ultimately strictly bounded. Sometimes, the player's progress does not depend on just finding all the relevant clues and visiting all the relevant locations, but it also depends on doing this in the right order (DARLEY op. cit. 157, FRIEDMAN 1996:78).

For SKIRROW (1990) video games represent the postmodern breakdown of boundaries between fantasy and science, high-tech and primitivism, play and real life, and, above all, between anxiety and pleasure. From their apparent appeal to boys, she deduces that computer games represent a journey into the hostile environment of the 'maternal cave'[12]. The pleasure in the repetition of this life and death performance[13] is caused by the anxiety about an unreal danger directed towards the insides of their own bodies. The boy[14] turns the danger from an internal to an external one and 'embodies' it as his father's penis inside his mother's body[15]. The strategy is to go into battle with a similar weapon to that of the enemy in a theatre of war far away from his

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[11] Frequency: how often you could interact; range: how many choices were available; significance: how much the choices really affected matters. A very interactive computer game, for example, would let the player do something that really matters at any time, and it could be anything s/he could think of.

[12] The player is using the keyboard to transport a character representing his own perceptions round a space – his mother's body – to discover its dangers and to take away the treasures it contains.

[13] In many games survival and final achievement seem unlikely.

[14] Each sex has its own essentially different mode of 'mastering' anxiety. Because of the anatomical identity of the mother's body with the one of girls, in their fantasy the emphasis is rather on the need to repair the damage the attacks have done (SKIRROW 1990:334).

[15] "These phantasies contain such ideas that 'the penis, incorporated into the mother, turns into a dangerous animal or into weapons loaded with explosive substances'; or that her vagina, too, is transformed into an instrument of death, as for instance, a poisoned mouse-trap." (KLEIN 1980:132)

own insides. If he does well, he will destroy everything and escape unharmed. After that he is frequently overwhelmed by a need to restore what he has destroyed, but doubts his ability to do so. Since "the mastering of anxiety has become [the child's] greatest pleasure" (KLEIN 1980:169) the anxiety cannot be finally mastered by this mechanism and is repeated over and over again. Alternatively, KINDER (1991:101-8) argued that computer games rely on oedipalised narratives[16] and so may provide an appealing surrogate for the missing or authoritarian patriarch against whom a son can test his powers.

TURKLE (1984:65-82) attributed to video games a "holding power" characterised as a force with aggressive, passionate, and eroticised roots. Furthermore, video games may create a narcissistic culture of rules and simulations that it is easy to fall in love with[17].

2.2.2 The 'Rules' of Video Games

POURNELLE (1990)[18] warns us that a "simulation is a simulation of the designers theories, not of reality". Acknowledging that Computer programs, like all texts, are ideological constructions, FRIEDMAN (1995:81), however, argues that playing makes the inner relationships of the software available. The player moulds his/her strategy through trial-and-error experimentation to see what works[19] (MYERS 1984:173).

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[16] One can find a heavy reliance on action genres (the epic, the romance quest, the western etc.) in which male heroes have traditionally grown into manhood and replaced father figures, and on myths (David and Goliath, Jack and the Beanstalk etc.) in which little guys beat giants and rescue princesses.
[17] "Like Narcissus and his reflection, people who work with computers can easily fall in love with the worlds created for them by others" (TURKLE 1984:65).
[18] Quoted in FRIEDMAN (1995:82)
[19] FRIEDMAN (1995:82) further argued that, the extensive discourses on strategy in manuals, magazines, bulletin boards, and guides also help exposing the 'inner relationships' of the simulation to

Similarly PROVENZO (1991:34) and TURKLE (1984) wrote that video games were teaching machines that instruct the player in the rules of a game as it is being played.

> Working out your game strategy involves a process of deciphering the logic of the game, of understanding the intent of the game's designer, of achieving a 'meeting of the minds' with the program. (TURKLE op. cit. 68)

The virtual world is not constrained to the known physical laws[20]. This may lead to contradictions between the patterns of the game software and the player's own interior patterns and preconceptions. MYERS (1984:173) reports a player excusing his poor play in a golf video game by referring to the game's poor simulation of this sport[21].

According to TURKLE (1995:67) and PROVENZO (1991:36) early video games[22] put players in computer microworlds with rather clear and unambiguous rules. Current video games – although more sophisticated and complex – still appear to sustain the sense of a reassuring, rule-based world, as well as the pleasure of participation in a form of esoteric knowledge – a closed world of references, cross-references, and code (TURKLE 1995: 67, PROVENZO 1991:36). Later in this dissertation, I shall, however, take a different stance at this issue.

2.2.3 Learning the Game

GREENFIELD (1984:96-110) listed the skills that are needed to master a computer game. Obviously sensorimotor skills such as eye-hand coordination are important.

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help players succeed more fully. See my discussion of a walkthrough in a subsequent chapter of this work.

[20] Computational representations of a ball, unlike a real ball, need not obey the laws of gravity unless their programmers want them to (TURKLE 1984:68).

[21] "This is not how a wedge acts! How can you hit down on a ball and hook?" (MYERS 1984:173)

[22] For example, Asteroids, Space Invaders, and PacMan.

Furthermore, cognitive requirements, such as the faculty of inducing from observation and the ability of parallel processing, are necessary to deal with complex systems of multiple interacting factors. For these reasons, computer games are sometimes constructed as a reservoir of use-values by arguing, for example, that they can promote eye-hand coordination or teach specific skills in spatial visualisation or mathematics (DONCHIN 1983; LEVIN & KAREEV 1981 cited in GUNTER 1998:22).

MYERS (1984) reported that players only rarely read the rules in the accompanying booklet, and that the game is usually quickly loaded into the machine for playing[23]. It is only after a practice period that they refer back to the rulebook, to their knowledge from other games, and above all to other players. Players often reify the game elements[24]. This imposes a pattern of behaviour on the game pieces, gives them knowledge and control, and it also increases game enjoyment.

Once the initial learning process is finished, the player allows the game a "free rein in developing its underlying patterns" (MYERS op. cit. 171), s/he becomes only a function of the game's flow (SKIRROW 1990:330), and "forms a symbiotic circuit with the computer, a version of the cyborgian consciousness described by Donna Haraway (1985)" (FRIEDMAN 1995:83). This is amplified by he fact that sophisticated input devices[25] promise a fully sensory embodied experience – blurring the boundaries of body/machine/game/device (ALLOWAY & GILBERT 1998:107).

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[23] DOWNES (1999:69) reported gender differences in the way the children used the various strategies. Girls "were more likely to seek help or to learn through reading manuals, booklets or help files" whereas "boys were more likely to play and explore or to use a combination of strategies".
[24] They might refer to 'all those stupid pilots flying low' or 'that cowardly tank'. (MYERS 1984:171)
[25] Input devices shaped, for example, as a pistol, require the player to shoot at the screen.

2.3 The Content of Computer Games

2.3.1 Violence

Violent content is not a necessary feature for the popularity of video games and it is rather action that attracts young children (GREENFIELD 1984:87). However, violence remains a prominent aspect of most commercially available games software. PROVENZO (1991), for example, found that the great majority of video games are based on themes of aggression and violence, based on the following scenario:

> an anonymous character performs an act of aggression – typically mediated through some type of technology – against an anonymous enemy. […] One must shoot or be shot, consume or be consumed, fight or lose. (PROVENZO 118-9)

This was not always the case, 'Pong', for instance, was non-aggressive. Aggression started only in the second generation with 'Breakout' involving destruction but no human aggression yet. 'Pac-man' started animate, but still non-human aggression. Only the following generation of games, e.g. 'The Empire Strikes Back', involved human aggression which took on a more fantastic form with 'Super Mario Brothers'. Hand-to-hand combat games, such as 'Mortal Kombat' made violence more personal. Finally, violence continues to reign in the actual generation of action games, such as 'Doom', 'Mortal Kombat 2', and so forth.

> These games often have the goal of blasting an enemy to smithereens; generally, mouse clicks fire off laser weapons, and the player has to zoom through tunnels or mazes to escape getting destroyed. The central theme in most games involves someone getting killed, finding out why someone was killed, or taking over the world […]. (SUBRAHMANYAM & GREENFIELD 1998:50-51)

Since action games seem to become the dominant genre, there is a continuing rapid acceleration in violence to make them more exciting. If a game is not violent, it is considered very often as boring (KINDER 1996:34). According to PROVENZO (1991:121) the emphasis on violence and aggression appears to be crucial in order to maintain the model of the individual as an autonomous and self-directed being. KINDER (1996:33) argued that violence works as a source of empowerment especially for those who feel powerless (e.g. children).

Because of the mostly violent content and interactive nature of video games, concerns have been raised that children are becoming more violent and aggressive after prolonged exposure to these games. So far, however, the research evidence on the effects of violent video games has been ambiguous and varies with the type of research methodology[26] (GUNTER 1998:108).

2.3.2 The Portrayal of Women

PROVENZO (1991) undertook a content analysis of 47 of the most popular Nintendo video games available at that time[27]:

> […] a total of 115 male and 9 female characters were identified. […] a ratio of nearly 13 to 1. Twenty males were identified as having dominant poses, while no females were identified in this classification. Three

[26] Surveys of relationships between behavioural dispositions and video game play have revealed little consistent evidence of a link. Yet, experimental paradigms have indicated that children may behave more aggressively in play situations after spending some time playing video games with violent themes. The results may also vary with the types of operational measures of 'aggression' (GUNTER 1998:109).

[27] He used GOFFMAN's (1976) work to establish a system for a visual content analysis of the gender themes for the game covers. There are some inherent problems in his methodology, since video games advertisements and covers are more likely to exaggerate the gender address of the product in order to reach their dominant market (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:8).

> females were clearly in submissive poses […] while no males were in corresponding representations. (PROVENZO 1991:108)

Approximately 30 percent of the games contained scenarios in which women were kidnapped or had to be rescued[28]. SKIRROW (1990:330) even claimed that women "are not there as rewards, they are the landscape, the scene in which the performance takes place."

Nowadays, it may seem that video game companies are making progress toward including more powerful and competent women in their action games. Yet, serial combat games may well include formidable female opponents, but they are rarely as strong as their male counterparts[29] (KINDER 1991:106-7). And even if they are powerful fighters[30], their bodies and moves are highly eroticised[31], so that one could argue that this greater diversity rather increases the sexist potential of the individual fights (KINDER 1996:31-4). Similarly GAILEY (1993) found that characters continue to be constructed according to a very traditional set of gender stereotypes.

> […] women in the streets are dangerous, lower-class and like the males in the games, sexually mature. […] The implied message is that, if women are going to be in the public (in the streets), they have o be like tough men and expect the hard knocks (literally) that men deliver. (GALEY 1993)

The NEXT GENERATION (1998) magazine concluded that, regardless of some increase in the number of female game characters, "they all seem to be constructed around very simple aesthetic stereotypes. […] in the West the recipe appears to be

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[28] Very often, this action was not even illustrated on the cover of the game. In Super Mario Bros., for example, Princess Toadstool is kidnapped and has to be rescued, but she is not depicted on the cover.
[29] For example, in 'Double Dragon' or 'Renegade'.
[30] For example 'Mileena' and 'Kitana' in 'Mortal Kombat 2'.
[31] 'Kitana', for example, decapitates her opponents with her deceptively feminine razor-sharp fan ('castration'), and she uses a mortal kiss to inflate and blow her opponent.

bee-sting lips, a micro-thin waist, and voluminous, pneumatic breasts." Since most of them are further aggressive and have the physical attributes of a male-defined sex symbol (SUBRAHMANYAM & GREENFIELD 1998:59), they become bodies encased in a male meaning machine (FLEMING 1996:55)[32].

2.3.3 Identification

TURKLE (1984:82-83) argued that video games, such as 'Asteroids', would encourage identification with characters from science fiction, sports or war stories, without leaving much room for actually playing their roles[33]. Role-playing games allow this to a greater extent. The players identify with an alter ego as they play their role in the dungeon, but the process of play is mathematical and procedural. However, in this process there is more than simply identification with the character on the screen. People are put into a highly focused and charged state of mind: a 'second self'. According to SKIRROW (1990:330) the performer appears to be a double or a split subject since the game is simultaneously in the first person – the player at the keyboard – and the third person – the avatar on the screen. The two are almost identified[34].

In simulation games, such as 'SimCity', the player is personally responsible for far more than any leader could ever manage, so playing this game is a constant shifting of identificatory positions, depending on what the player is actually doing. The player

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[32] FLEMING makes allusion to a plastic model kit that is based on a scene from the movie 'Aliens', showing the female protagonist (Ripley) 'wearing' a huge mechanical-industrial version of a lowly fork-lift truck.

[33] For example, the screen that players face when they play 'Asteroids' looks similar to the one Han Solo faced in 'The Empire Strikes Back'. Yet, they are not allowed to play the part.

identifies less with a role (mayor, industrialist, etc.) than with a process (FRIEDMAN 1995:84).

KINDER (1991:107) mentioned her son's transgender identification when he chose Princess Toadstool in 'Super Mario Brothers 2'. Arguments explaining this phenomenon parallel CLOVER's (1992:51) concept of the 'Final Girl'. A male identification with a female figure allows a heightened sense of vulnerability or risk without endangering conventional conceptions of masculine potency and courage[35]. However, one should not foreclose too quickly the possibility that women may also find such figure sources of identification within scenarios of empowerment[36] (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998:30-31). CUNNINGHAM (1997:198), even, doubts that 'identification' adequately describes players' relationships with the characters in the game. A character is chosen to operate on the basis of the moves it can make or the special skills and functions it has. FLEMING (1996:190) suggests that the player is not identifying with a character like Mario (he's to minimal a figure), but rather feels like a "powerful intervening force" on his behalf[37]. This parallels an advertisement saying that participation in the game is "just like being God, except the graphics are better" (ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY 1993:73).

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[34] The spectator of a movie is split in a different way, since s/he may identify with a variety of characters and positions.
[35] Interestingly, she argued that the, often, androgynous characters of the 1980s slasher movies were a key factor in enabling male fans to overcome their resistance to transgender identification. On the other hand, the success of games such as 'Tomb Raider' is linked to the exaggeration of Lara Croft's feminine features.
[36] They would, however, still remain compromised by male interests and fantasies.
[37] In the cinema this would be rather like identifying with the director – an extraordinary situation.

2.3.4 The Gender Issue

Considering the issues raised above, it can be argued that "there are abundant reasons to judge the video games of today as reaffirming sexist ideologies and circulating misogynistic images" (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:3). Video games appear to be a good example of the social construction of gender[38]. According to ALLOWAY & GILBERT (1998:97) many video game texts "align masculinity with power, with aggression, with victory and winning, with superiority and strength – and, of course with violent action. They offer positions for young male game players that promise success as masculine subjects."

So it comes as no surprise that there are more boys than girls who play video games, and visit video game arcades (DURKIN 1995). The problem in this differential attraction arises from the fact that the cultural constructions of gender are often not separate from those of power. These differential preferences are associated with differential access to technological fields and this may worsen since technological literacy[39] becomes a general precondition for employment (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:11).

Two ways out are usually suggested. First, one could encourage girls to beat boys at their own game. Sega's Lee MCENANY, for example, argued that stronger female characters – attractive to both male and female players – were needed to bridge the gender gap (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998b). Furthermore, a close look at trends in

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[38] The binary opposition between masculine and feminine is a purely cultural construct, conceived of differently in different cultures, historical periods, and contexts (see e.g. HARRIS 1989:343ff). Further, FAUSTO-STERLING (1993) and KESSLER (1994) showed that even the terms 'man' and 'woman' do not describe as clear-cut a dichotomy between biological sexes as was once thought.

popular culture[40] suggests that violent imagery appears to become compatible with feminine taste and feminist politics. However, when girls take over games that have been traditionally male, the norm is not questioned. Boys' games remain the norm, and they still remain games for boys. Second, one could construct a girls-only space. The software 'Barbie Fashion Designer', for example, was targeted explicitly towards a feminine audience and turned out to be a big commercial success. However, in this case one risks of falling into the trap of targeting only the most stereotypical aspects of current girlhood. Boys will probably not play with girl-targeted games[41], and the outcome might be ghettoised girls' interests. This impasse can probably only be avoided by pushing at both ends of the spectrum, opening up a gender-neutral space in the middle. This space could allow multiple definitions of both girlhood and boyhood, and multiple types of interaction with computer games of all sorts (CASSELL & JENKINS 1998a:34-36).

2.4 Narrative Structures

Narrative theory investigates the devices and conventions that govern the organisation of a fictional or factual story into sequence. PROPP (1968) undertook an extensive study of the Russian folk tale. He argued that it was possible to group characters and actions into eight character roles (spheres of action), such as 'hero' or 'villain', and thirty-one functions, such as 'absentation' or 'interdiction' (see appendix

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[39] Computer games are said to provide an easy lead-in to computer literacy (GREENFIELD et al. 1996) and those children who do not play them could be put at a disadvantage in later years.
[40] Female-centred action films ('Thelma and Louise', 'Aliens') and television serials ('Xena'), comic book heroines ('Tank Girl') etc.
[41] Note that girls can play boy games and have always enjoyed greater freedom than boys to engage in transgender play.

A), which move the story along, often in a highly predictable order. His theory may help us to understand what happens in a story – how plots are structured and the roles of the various characters (syntagmatic analysis)[42]. All stories begin with an 'equilibrium' that is disrupted by some event, setting off a series of other events, to close with a second but different 'equilibrium' or status quo (TODOROV 1981). BARTHES (1966) suggested that narrative works with five different codes[43] that activate the reader to make sense of it. The enigma code, for example, works to keep setting up little puzzles to be solved, and to delay the story's ending pleasurably. LÉVI-STRAUSS (1967) argued that an abiding structure of narratives, but also of all meaning-making, was a reliance on binary oppositions, or a conflict between two qualities or terms (paradigmatic analysis).

Since many computer games make intertextual references to Hollywood action movies, it is worth drawing our attention briefly to its narrative patterns.

2.4.1 Hollywood Narrative

There may well be an unlimited number of possible narratives in movies. Yet, historically, fictional cinema has tended to be dominated by one mode of narrative form: the *'classical Hollywood'* cinema. This conception assumes that the action will spring primarily from psychologically well-defined individuals as causal agents[44]. Of course, natural or societal causes may serve as catalysts or preconditions. Desire, for

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[42] BERGER (1998:19-23) applied PROPP's theory to an episode of the television program 'The Prisoner' and ECO (1966) to a James Bond movie ('Dr No') to show how his work can be used to help uncover the structure of a narrative text.

[43] The five codes are: the action or proairetic; the enigma or hermeneutic; the semic, the symbolic and the cultural or referential code.

[44] The narrative centres on personal psychological causes (decisions, choices, and traits of character).

example, sets up a goal, and the course of the narrative's development will probably involve the process of achieving that goal. Yet, there is a counterforce, an opposition, that creates conflict, usually in the form of a character with opposed traits and goals. Time is subordinated to the cause-effect chain. The plot[45] will omit significant duration to show only events of causal importance[46]. The story[47] chronology is ordered in a way as to present the cause-effect chain most efficiently. Eventually, most classical fictional films leave no loose ends unresolved and so display a strong degree of closure (BORDWELL & THOMPSON 1997:108-10).

BUCKLAND (1998) addresses some narrative aspects of the *'New Hollywood'* blockbuster. The latter addresses its audience through a mix of genres. Action-adventure is combined with comedy, drama, romance, science fiction, and the like. The characters and the plot are frequently remodelled. He pursues with a textual analysis of 'Raiders of the Lost Arc'[48]. The compositional norms of New Hollywood films include, among others, selective quotations of Old Hollywood films, the visual rhetoric of comic books and the norms of television aesthetics. CALABRESE (1992) found 350 of such references in 'Raiders'. Spielberg's movie is structured according to the serial format of the B-movie adventure stories[49] and influences of comic books are also recognisable. Finally, elements of television aesthetics are present: frequent

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[45] "The term *plo*t is used to describe everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us" (BORDWELL & THOMPSON 1997:92).
[46] If time is skipped over or a cause is missing the viewer is informed about it by a montage sequence or scrap of dialogue (STAM et al 1992:189).
[47] "The set of *all* the events in a narrative, both the ones explicitly presented and those the viewer infers, comprises the *story*" (BORDWELL & THOMPSON 1997:92).
[48] This is particularly interesting in the context of this dissertation, since the 'Tomb Raider' games, as the name already suggests, make many intertextual references to this particular movie and its sequels.
[49] It can thus be divided into six distinct, relatively self-contained, episodes, each of which ends in a series of rapid dramatic actions and/or in an unresolved cliff-hanging sequence (see Appendix B).

close-ups[50], rapid cutting[51], a highly mobile camera, and a shallow, lateral space. For some critics (e.g. MILLER 1990, MALTBY 1983) the outcome is rather self-sufficient and autonomous than being subordinated to a film's themes and narrative. One-dimensional stereotypes and plot-lines solely link one action sequence to the next. Popular blockbusters, nevertheless, have their own complex structure:

> The fluctuations in audience knowledge that occur […] combined with the generic figures and devices of serial adventure and the patterns of off-screen (and on-screen) presence, point to the need to consider narrative and narration, as well as spectacle, as source of pleasure and appeal in a film like ***Raiders***. (BUCKLAND 1998:174)

2.4.2 Narrative in Computer Games

Movies, television shows, computer games and toys are all part of an "ever-expanding supersystem of entertainment, one marked by transmedia intertextuality"(KINDER 1991:1). Sega and Nintendo have licensing deals with film companies in order to use animated characters, and many computer games are based on successful films (e.g. 'Jurassic Park') and vice versa (e.g. 'Super Mario Brothers') (CUNNINGHAM 1997:190).

Most computer games have so-called 'back stories' presented in the instruction booklet and/or pre- and interlude film sequences that recall blockbuster movies. Even though they are kept to the absolute minimum, they are the scene-setting rationale and the motivation for the visual representations and events encountered in the

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[50] Single objects are shown in isolation.
[51] The close-up requires less time for its content to be exhausted.

game[52]. Unlike the 'voyeuristic' movie-spectator, the player initiates the events that ensue by involving him/herself in a vicarious performance in a fictional simulated world – within a framework of certain conditions and possibilities – and s/he responds to their presence and action (DARLEY 2000:151). For this reason, computer games are sometimes referred to as 'interactive cinema', where the player takes on the role of the protagonist (FRIEDMAN 1995:77). Does this mean that the player is creating his/her own narrative? A kind of story is indeed possible, since, at the end of a period of play, it is possible to recount what happened to that point[53]. If a player, eventually, finishes all the levels, s/he would seem to be in a position to tell a story of near-epic proportions[54]. The psychological depth of the characters[55] is questionable, since "the motives both of players and their enemies are basic in the extreme" (DARLEY 2000:151-2). The most important traits of enemies, for example, appear to be the different ways of attempting to 'slay' the player and to 'die' in a multitude of spectacular ways. Characterisation and psychological motivation recede and are replaced by player-centred problems[56], which – in action games – concern "survival and one's successful passage through a difficult-to-negotiate and obstacle littered setting" (DARLEY op. cit. 153).

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[52] To put it in HERZ' (1997:139) words: "[…] once you had people on a screen […] they needed a reason to be there."
[53] In this sense, a game is capable of generating many such stories, retrospective accounts of what happened each time one played afresh.
[54] There are, of course, games that potentially never finish, such as Sim City or Asteroids.
[55] DARLEY (op cit. 204) further argued that the character definition in games tends to be of the lowest order. When characters do begin to take on individuating traits, then stereotyping of an extremely basic type becomes palpable; more conspicuous because more directly and simplistically framed: for example, Lara Croft, 'star' of the popular 3-D platform game 'Tomb Raider'.
[56] See SKIRROW (1990) for a psychoanalytical interpretation of the computer game performer.

According to some commentators, other dimensions of traditional narrative are largely absent in computer games as well (CAMERON 1995:37-8). The classical key conventions of enigma, narrative closure, time and space have to some extent a different signification. *Problems* and *puzzles* – dispersed throughout the playing experience – are rather technical in character, and often receptively similar. *Closure*, too, rests with the player and, ideally, means completing the game. Yet, this rarely happens, and far more likely are countless – aborted or saved – attempts towards a win. In this sense 'closure' is frequent and variable, sometimes satisfying and sometimes frustrating. The knowledge that the player gains is not about complex character relations in a fictional world, but more of a practical kind (DARLEY 2000:153). The narrative elaborations postpone and intensify the final gratification (mastering the game). After experiencing the closure of the game, the player usually abandons the game and turns to another one for new postponements (KINDER 1991:111).

In most games fictional *time* is more or less coextensive with the time of playing[57]. The player, however, is far away from having total control over the pace and timing of events: once a particular sequence has been triggered s/he has to act or to 'die'. The first-person perspective in action computer games differs only marginally from the sophisticated system of *spatial* representation of classical narrative cinema (ubiquity). The semblance of realistic spatial orientation is heightened by the three-dimensional modelled space and by the control the player is given to explore it. The representational spaces of the diorama and the cinema fuse – it is *as if* one has been

assigned the role of camera-person in this virtual world. At this point the cinematic is surpassed (DARLEY 2000:153-59).

In brief, narrative meaning in action games appears to be more shallow than the blockbuster movie and is replaced by "the experience of vicarious movement and fighting itself" (DARLEY op. cit. 154). Similarly, SKIRROW (1990:328) argued that the traditional narrative is disturbed since it coincides absolutely with the action. Besides the different position of the reader/performer, the narratives parallel those of the exotic thriller, the travel story, science fiction, or even a combination of all three, with an additional touch of the uncanny.

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[57] However, this is not the case in games such as 'SimCity' or 'StarCraft'. Here fictional time can be

3 Methodological Issues

My literature review in the previous chapter dealt with numerous findings from many different areas, however, all related to computer games or film narrative. Consequently, they are far from being based on a single research method or theoretical framework.

More survey-oriented research (e.g. BUCHMAN & FUNK 1996, DOWNES 1999) attempted to find out, who was playing for how long and what kind of games. In order to answer, among others, the question why particularly boys appear to be attracted to video games and play them, some of the cited research deployed Freudian (KINDER 1991) or post-Freudian (SKIRROW 1990) theory. Drawing on KLEIN (1980), SKIRROW, for example, recontextualised[58] boys' gameplay as a journey into the "maternal cave" and a way of dealing with their anxiety. This kind of criticism uses psychoanalytic concepts to understand particular subject matter and usually yields controversial results. However, as long as the recontextualisation principles are made available, they can be very interesting and helpful. Content analysis is another possible technique, whose basic assumption is that it will allow some insight into the people who receive the messages (BERGER 1998:116). PROVENZO (1991), for example, took this approach to give an account of how women are portrayed in video games. He had to provide, and did so, his coding principles to clarify what he considered, for example, as "dominant male" and "submissive female".

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slowed down or speed up, and is clearly different to real time.

[58] Every researcher must impose principles of selection and organisation on the collected data and s/he must render these principles of recontextualisation explicit (BROWN & DOWLING 1998:44).

Drawing on DOWLING's (1998) generation of a language for the sociological description of pedagogic school texts or non-school pedagogic texts (DOWLING & BROWN 1998, 1999) I intend to produce a description of the nature of the social relations established in and through the computer game 'Tomb Raider II' as a text. The computer game text will be interpreted as an instance of a referent social activity (to be developed later) that gives the text its meaning. A poem, for example, participates quite differently in the activities of courting, on the one hand, and school literature on the other. My analysis is sociological in that the activity is defined in terms of relations between social positions and practices.

Since I am not investigating "the ways in which young people use and make sense of the media in the context of their lived social experiences" (BUCKINGHAM 1993b:6), I am not attempting to do audience research. Of course, I could have engaged in this kind of investigations, and I could have looked, for example, at readings produced by children playing 'Tomb Raider II', but this was not my interest at this stage.

Text analysis approaches have sometimes been criticised that they tend to assume that the text defines its own use by putting their exclusive emphasis on texts and conflating empirical and textual reader (BUCKINGHAM op. cit. 10-11). These assertions, however, are not made here. To the extent that readers occupy voices constructed by the text, they are participating in the same referent activity. Concrete human subjectivities are to be interpreted as articulations of multiple positions (DOWLING 1998:131), and that a reader may well be participating in different activities is, for example, attested by this dissertation.

Since every data collection and description inevitably involves a process of recontextualisation (BROWN & DOWLING 1998:44), audience research, too, has to recontextualise, and so it mythologises its object. This can be illustrated by the following example where children have been interviewed on their television habits.

Marnie:	When I was two, um, I washed my hair and got away with watching 'Cop Shop', and that night I stabbed my Teddy [Laughs. Two other children laugh]
	[…]
Interviewer:	Yes, and you think that you can increase your understanding by seeing similar things on television?
Marnie:	Yes.
Angela:	Plus experimenting with it yourselves. [Marnie laughs.] You try it out with you're your Teddy or something. [Everyone laughs.] Like Marnie stabbed her Teddy. (HODGE & TRIPP 1986:112-14)

From these utterances HODGE & TRIPP (op. cit.) concluded that "[l]ooking at some modality indicators in their utterance, we note that both girls laugh in reporting these incidents", and that consequently "these statements are not to be taken at face value". What the researchers actually did, was recontextualising the children's laughter as modality cues according to the theoretical framework they had outlined previously[59]. Consequently, it can be argued that the kinds of distinction that the proponents of audience research propose begin to lose their validity.

Furthermore, the aim of my analysis is certainly not to provide a definitive reading of the selected utterances that could not be challenged. I shall attempt rather to describe the computer game 'Tomb Raider II' in terms of its referent activity insofar as it is instantiated in its utterances that I shall look at. As I have already pointed out, the research question can be formulated in the following way: How does this text

[59] Unfortunately, other audience research often even omits to render explicit its recontextualisation principles, which weakens its status as scientific work while parading as such.

construct different positions, and what are the nature and mechanisms of the distribution of practices between these positions?

In the introductory chapter I provided already a rationale for choosing 'Tomb Raider II' as an instance of the activity of 'computer gaming'. Yet, even one computer game is still an immense text, and so I shall limit my reading mainly to the box, the introduction movie, the training level, and the first two levels ('The Great Wall', 'Venice'). These utterances are probably the most known, since they are simply situated at the very beginning. The first level was even largely distributed as demo version, for example, on CD-ROMs that accompanied computer magazines. Occasionally, I shall, however, refer to other levels, the other Tomb Raider games or secondary literature, in order to make some points clearer (e.g. intertextual references). Furthermore, I shall devote two chapters to the discourse of a related walkthrough and my personal experience as an empirical player.

4 A Language of Description for Computer Games

BERNSTEIN (1996:135) coined the expression *language of description* and described it as "a translation device whereby one language is transformed into another". DOWLING (1998:130) refers to his language of description as *social activity theory* and construes it as a technology to analyse texts as "expressions of social relations and the cultural practices which (re)produce[60] them." His general strategy may, in broad terms, be described as conforming to a constructivist epistemology and is referred to as *constructive description*. This chapter will lay out his theory in order to analyse texts of the activity of 'computer gaming'. In subsequent chapters, I shall then, after an intensive engagement with the empirical texts from my sample, provide an analysis of utterances related to the computer game 'Tomb Raider II'.

4.1 Signs and Texts

According to DE SAUSSURE (1983), the sign is the union of the *signifier*, the form, and the *signified*, the concept. The link between the two is arbitrary: there is no natural or inevitable reason why the two are associated to each other[61] (CULLER 1976:19). But, this position has been criticised, for example, by KRESS (1993:173) who claims that the relation between signifier and signified is always motivated "by the producer's 'interest', and by the characteristics of the object". However, the motivation is not always immediately visible, and there is a continuum in signs, from

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[60] The use of the expression (re)production signifies the dialectical nature of production/reproduction (DOWLING 1998:20).

[61] He, however, recognised that, for example, syntactic patterns are not completely arbitrary (KRESS & HODGE 1988:21).

'opaque' to 'transparent', indicating respectively a low or high degree of visibility (HODGE & KRESS 1988:22)[62].

SAUSSURE argued that the marking of difference within language is fundamental to the production of meaning. The simplest way of doing so is by defining the meaning of a concept or word in relation to its direct opposite. Even though, this may be criticised as rather too simplistic[63], his attention to binary oppositions brought him to the revolutionary proposition that a language consists of signifiers that, in order to produce meaning, have to be organised into 'a system of differences'. It is the differences between signifiers which signify (HALL 1997:31-32). Hence, looking for polarisations is an important tactic in a semiotic analysis[64]. In many computer games such binary oppositions can be found: good/evil, war/peace, human/alien, masculine/feminine, etc.

BARTHES (1957) argued that visual representation takes place at two different but linked levels. Firstly, the signifiers of the image and the signifieds unite to form a sign with a simple *denoted* message. At a second *connotative* level, the sign is linked to a second set of signifieds, yielding a second more elaborate and ideologically framed message called *myth*. For example, in Mankiewicz's 'Julius Caesar', all the characters are wearing fringes, and the label of 'Roman-ness' is then associated with these insistent fringes. Similarly, in 'STARCRAFT BROOD WAR' (Fig. 4.1), the myth of 'Russian-ness' is created through the use of a certain number of signifiers. The

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[62] Similarly Charles Sanders PEIRCE classified signs in three major types: icon, index and symbol. In the first case the relationship between the signifier and the signified is based on resemblance, in the second case both are directly connected in some way and in the last case the link is purely conventional (HAWKES, 1977:128-9).

uniforms, the sinister faces, the haircuts, the black glove with the cigar, and the dark ambience recall stereotypical representations of KGB-like conspiracy scenes in Hollywood movies. This is further emphasised by one of the names ('Alexei Stukov'), the accents, and the music. In an essay about wrestling BARTHES further writes:

> Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles. […] not only is ugliness used here in order to signify baseness, but in addition ugliness is wholly gathered into a particularly quality of matter […] (Barthes 1993:16-17)

Again, this is very similar to my example. The viewer immediately understands that these admirals are rather shady characters that did not choose to intervene in this intergalactic war for merely philanthropic reasons.

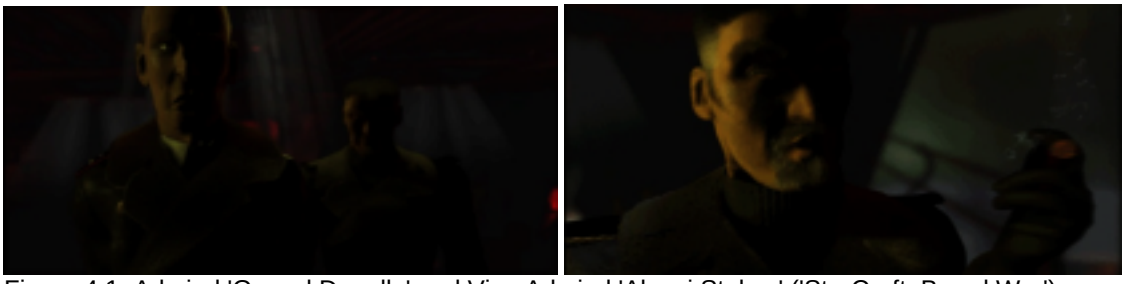

Figure 4.1: Admiral 'Gerard Dugalle' and Vice Admiral 'Alexei Stukov' ('StarCraft: Brood War')

Post-structuralist thinkers, such as DERRIDA (e.g. 1972), criticise the concepts of the stable sign. Signs move ceaselessly outward into unpredictable novel contexts of meaning, resisting closure by a process of constant rewriting. They become mere signifying terms within a spiralling proliferation of intertextual references from instance to instance. So language and all forms of communication becomes a place of semiotic 'play', an indeterminate field of infinite slippages and substitutions. A final

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[63] DERRIDA (1972), for example, argued that difference could never completely be captured within any binary system.

meaning cannot be achieved and is always endlessly put off, deferred. In order to put closure on my reading of the selected utterances, I shall present them as contextualised by a referent game or activity ('computer gaming') that gives the game its meaning.

DOWLING's (1998:1-23.) use of the expression 'myth' describes the relationship between a particular activity and other cultural practices[65]. Occasionally the activity of 'computer gaming' engages in mythologising practices. For example, Nintendo published leaflets for parents informing them of the educational benefits of their software (CUNNINGHAM 1997:191) and funded a research centre at the MIT to study how video games can teach children (PROVENZO 1991:139). Hence, computer games are constructed as a reservoir of use-values legitimising their existence in children's culture by virtue of their utility in optimising pedagogical activities of their players. DOWLING (1998:7) refers to this as the 'myth of participation'. However, generally 'computer gaming' texts do not claim to be about something different from learning the game and having fun with it.

4.2 Metaphor and Metonymy

Metonymy is the process of associating one sign with "another of which it signifies either a part, the whole, one of its functions or attributes, or a related concept" (THWAITES et al. 1994:47). It works by "associating meanings within the same plane" (FISKE 1990:95). A *synecdoche* is a special case of metonymy; a part is substituted

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[64] See for example DOWLING (1999), BERGER (1998), or HODGE & TRIPP (1986).
[65] Since BARTHES was interested rather in the mechanisms of semiosis than in sociology, he does not provide any motivation, nor has he to, for the specificity of myth.

for a whole or a whole for a part. In 'Tomb Raider', for example, the player can sometimes hear a bear growling without actually seeing the animal on the screen. The process of metonymy also allows to establish intertextual references. For instance, the outfit and posture of 'Gex' (Fig.4.2), and the background (the iris) invoke the character of 'James Bond'[66].

Fig. 4.2: Gex (Return of the Gecko)

A *metaphor* is "an implicit or explicit *comparison* between signs" (THWAITES et al. 1994:44) and expresses the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Both signs must have enough similarity, but also enough difference for the comparison to have this necessary element of contrast. Thus, a metaphor transfers only certain qualities from one sign to another (FISKE 1990:92). It can be argued that a metaphor only works if the associations between the two signs stand in metonymic relationship with each other (DOWLING 1998:109). On the backside of the box of 'StarCraft Brood War' one can find the following text:

> Storm frozen wastes, scour arid deserts and navigate the twilight worlds of the Dark templar as you journey to the outer reaches of the StarCraft universe.

This description is a metaphor for what the reader will be doing while playing this game. He is not 'really' storming or 'navigating' but manipulating patterns of light and sound, which, of course, give rise to certain meanings that support this comparison.

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[66] This is further emphasised by his British accent and commentaries (e.g. "stirred but not shaken").

4.3 Text

The term text - a combination of signs - will be used here in an extended semiotic sense; it should not be understood purely in linguistic terms, but as exceeding the discursive. Texts are "the material realization of systems of signs" and "the site where change continually takes place" (HODGE & KRESS 1988:6). Ideology is "a systematic body of ideas, organised from a particular point of view" (HODGE & KRESS 1993:6), and is realised in texts, which "are themselves the sites of both the reproduction and the transformation of ideology: texts produce and reproduce ideology" (DOWLING 1998:110). The existence of ideology is material (ALTHUSSER 1971:156) and as such ultimately rooted in physical matter: the body and its physical environment. For that reason ideology, too, can be said to exceed the discursive (DOWLING 1998:105).

Every text, or rather its reading, constructs its reader (‘model reader’) and similarly its author. They are both textual strategies and have to be distinguished from the empirical author and reader, which should not be the focus of attention (ECO 1979:7, 10). The object 'text' cannot stand on its own, it has to be read as an instance of something else: "the text is always contextualised by a referent game or activity that construct authors and readers in specific ways" (DOWLING 1999). Texts produce and reproduce ideology and construct textual subjects associated with that ideology. These textual subjects are one of the main concerns of the empirical work of this dissertation. For the purpose of my analysis I have chosen to consider computer games as monologic texts, i.e. texts that construct a unitary authorial position (DOWLING 1998:112). Since the term 'ideology' has its own ideological baggage, DOWLING suggests using the term 'activity'.

4.4 The Activity of Computer Gaming

DOWLING (1998:122 & 130ff.) differentiates between *activity-in-general* and *activity-in-particular*. Activity-in-general is produced by, and it produces the division of labour within a given society and so constitutes the contextualising basis of all social and cultural practices. Activity-in-particular comprise *positions* and associated *practices*[67]. The term 'position' is a theoretical category that does not correspond to the empirical author and reader. However, human subjects participate in multiple activities, and since these activities (re)produce human subjectivity, the latter is, of necessity, constituted as multiple (DOWLING 1998:122). Practices are distributed within a range of potentially hierarchical positions. In other words, an activity regulates who can say or do or mean what.

I am asserting that the activity 'computer gaming' specialises its practices and subjectivities sufficiently to be referred to as an activity. The activity of 'computer gaming' can be construed as operating in complex ways and constructing a hierarchy of positions (e.g. author, customer, player), and distributing practices (e.g. authoring, buying, playing) within this hierarchy. MIYAMATO's[68] affirmation that computer games are industrial products and not art[69] (MASUYAMA 1995:36) indicates that computer gaming is a commercial activity; it is basically about making money. A commercial activity is contextualised by exchange relations. An exchange activity is concerned with the marketing of a product and so locates the principles of evaluation

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[67] They are achieved as a particular articulation of a notional Global Semantic Universe (see ECO 1976, 1979)

[68] Shigeru MIYAMATO is the 'father' of 'Donkey Kong', the 'Mario'-series and 'Legend of Zelda'.

[69] He, however, admitted, that he would welcome if the Museum of Modern Art in New York added one or two Nintendo game stations to its industrial design section (ibid.).

on the acquirer side. A commercial organisation may, of course, become pedagogically active and seek to construct rather than respond to a market. Even though an important market for computer games does exist, every single game has to provide a rationale why it should be acquired. The strategy game 'Myth, The Fallen Lords', for instance, claims to offer the best available 3D graphics for this kind of games (Fig. 4.2b) available at the time. Another instance of a pedagogic practice is the legal warning (copyright) that is usually displayed at the beginning of most games in order to regulate the behaviour of the acquirer (see DOWLING & BROWN 1999).

Figure 4.5b: Advertisement (MacAddict)

The practices and positions of an activity are realised in texts. A text is any empirical object of analysis that has to be interpreted as participating in a particular activity giving the text its 'meaning' (DOWLING & BROWN 1999:2). A computer game consists of a set of utterances of the activity 'computer gaming'. Other related texts would be advertisements, strategy guides, walkthroughs or even clothing and merchandise. The analysis that follows is concerned with some of these utterances and not with the interactions between them and what may actually happen when empirical players[70] interact with the game or talk about it. Hence, the empirical text is being constituted

as monologic: it constructs a single author[71] and thus can be read in relation to a single activity. Just as pedagogic texts[72], market texts construct reader voices. They, however, impose less regulation in terms of their reading. The author is in the possession of the highly specialised machine code to generate the game; the reader is not, and as my analysis will show, there is no attempt to apprentice him/her to this code. The link between the regulative principles of the activity and the actual realisation is metaphorical without visible metonymic links to the former.

Activity has two levels. Firstly, at the structural level, it constructs positions via the distribution of practices to a range of positions. Secondly, at the textual or evental level, it is (re)produced by texts that distribute *message* over a range of *voices*[73] and so (re)produce the practices and positions of activity. The relationship between the two levels should be conceived as dialectical. The structural level is only accessible by means of the textual level (DOWLING 1998:132).

4.5 The Structural Level

4.5.1 Practices: Domain and Gaze

DOWLING (1998:132-137, 2000) distinguishes four different domains of practice organised along two dimensions measuring the strength of classification of expression (signifiers) and content (signifieds): *esoteric*, *public*, *expressive* and *descriptive*.

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[70] I shall, however, devote one section to a particular case study involving myself as an empirical player.
[71] Empirically, however there are multiple authors.

The *esoteric domain* of practice is described as referring to those regions or aspects of an activity that are most strongly classified in relation to other practices in terms of both content and mode of expression. Only within this domain can the principles of the practice be fully realised. This highly specialised domain may itself comprise subregions, referred to as *topics*[74]. With regard to computer gaming, I would suggest two different topics. Firstly the highly sophisticated *machine code* that allows to generate a virtual semiotic space on the screen. Secondly a *production code* that regulates the game genre[75], the design of the game[76] and the marketing strategy[77]. The esoteric domain of an activity casts a *gaze* beyond itself and effects a recontextualisation of practices and discourses relating to other activities (e.g. action movies, science fiction, science, etc.) by subordinating them to the principles of the esoteric domain. The result of the recontextualising gaze is the constitution of a *public domain*.

The reader is positioned as someone who is susceptible to the *public domain* that constitutes the entry point to the game and exhibits comparatively weak classification in relation to other practices in terms of forms of expression and content. Even though it appears to be non-specialised practice, it still remains, to a greater or lesser extent, subject to the regulative principles of the esoteric domain. The public domain of a computer game is interactive and manual, and has a strong visual orientation. In other words it is a real semiotic space in which the reader can get lost. Referring to

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[72] In a pedagogic text authorial and reader voices are constructed as, respectively, transmitter and acquirer in the context of a pedagogic relation (DOWLING & BROWN 1998:2).
[73] *Message* and *voices* are the instantiations of, respetively, practices and positions in texts.
[74] Although topics exhibit a certain degree of positivity, they are multiply interconnected.
[75] Adventure, Shoot-'em-ups, Puzzle games etc. See SANGER et al. (1997:ix-x) for a more detailed list.

BAUDRILLARD (1976) a computer game is a simulation of a physical environment that, however, lacks a 'real-world' referent. It has no original -neither does it claim to have one - and there are only copies by the millions that are all virtually identical and sold for approximately the same amount of money. Now, BAUDRILLARD would probably further argue that video games - just as Disneyland - are hyperreal and camouflage that the 'real' is not real either to ensure that the reality principle is not threatened.

The *expressive domain* refers to those regions or aspects that are most strongly classified in terms of content, but weakly classified in terms of mode of expression. Within this domain an outsider - a player attempting to learn to play a particular computer game - might attempt to re-code its esoteric domain principles that are encoded in machine code instructions - inaccessible to him/her - in terms of physical movements that can be made by the avatar that s/he controls. This would be to construct an expressive domain description of the game.

The *descriptive domain* of practice refers to those regions or aspects that are most strongly classified in relation to other practices in terms of mode of expression, but only weakly classified in terms of content. The author of a computer game uses the machine and production code in order to model the recruited practices and discourses from other activities.

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[76] Appearance of the characters, locations, quality etc.
[77] Budget, targeted group etc.

4.5.2 Practices: Discursive Saturation

Even if we take for granted that all practices are material, some minimise their dependency upon the material by producing highly developed articulated discursive structures. *Discursive saturation* is a measure of the extent to which a strategic practice tends to make the principles of an activity available within discourse. If the latter are explicitly available within discourse - constituting relatively context independence - the practice exhibits high discursive saturation (DS^+). Alternatively, if the practice delimits such availability - constituting relative context dependence - it exhibits low discursive saturation (DS^-) (DOWLING 2000).

A computer game text renders the highly discursively saturated and context independent esoteric domain invisible and renders it as DS^-. In exchange for currency, the reader is offered an experience - fun and immersion in a virtual world - and not an apprenticeship. The player is expected to develop competence-oriented skills, which allow him/her to dispense with algorithms such as manual dexterity and/or the capability to solve puzzles. The principles of evaluation of this experience reside with the reader because no other principles are available.

4.5.3 Positions

Activities construct a hierarchy of positions. The most dominant position – the subject – exhausts the practices of the activity and has access to the regulative principles of the esoteric domain and the realisation principles of the gaze at the level of discourse. The more subaltern positions are, to a greater or lesser extent, objectified by the activity. Dominant and subaltern positions are constructed via the distribution of practices.

Pedagogic activities, for example, construct transmitting and acquiring positions[78]. In order to generate new subjects, apprenticing pedagogic action proceeds by constructing metonymic chains that must, eventually, enter the esoteric domain. Computer games only construct virtual apprenticed positions. The game 'Descent' (Fig. 4.4), for example, constructs a hierarchy of combat pilots - more or less skilled players - via the recruitment of a discourse that mimics military jargon.

Fig. 4.4. Difficulty Level (Descent)

Dependent positions are the more subordinated positions that are not attributed potential subjectivity of the activity itself. The initial 'hailing' or 'interpellation' takes place within the public domain. The dependent position is denied access to the regulative principles of the esoteric domain, and so achieves perpetual dependence on the subject. This is true for the player of the computer game who will not be able, merely by playing, to generate a new computer game on his/her own. *Objectified positions* are fully objectified by the activity; they are positions in the public domain that relate to recontextualised activities, such as the hero or the villain in a computer game.

[78] Within the two categories of positions, further hierarchies may be constructed.

4.6 The Textual Level

A text is a weaving of textual strategies that position voices and distribute message. These strategies and the patterns of voices and message have to be identified in and by the analysis (DOWLING 1998:142-9).

4.6.1 Voices and Positioning Strategies

Any monologic text constitutes a range of *voices* that correspond to some of the positions constructed by the activity. The *authorial voice* of the text may but need not necessarily correspond to the subject position of the activity. The text may also constitute a *spurious or displaced authorial voice* which acts as a mask with respect to the authorial voice. Figure 4.5 shows on the left side how the authorial voice directly addresses the reader by providing some tactical advice. On the right side the reader is addressed via the displaced authorial voice of 'Admiral DuGalle'.

Figure 4.5: Authorial and displaced voice ('StarCraft Brood War')

The text must also constitute one or more *reader voices*. Authorial voices are dominant whereas reader voices are subaltern voices and may be organised hierarchically. Pedagogic texts, for example, may construct both *apprenticed* and *dependent* voices. If a given text incorporates public domain message, the text must construct *objectified* voices, too. Computer gaming only constructs dependent reader

voices and objectified reader voices (e.g. captain of a spacecraft) of the recruited public domain settings.

Positioning strategies establish relationships directly among voices in various ways. The positioning strategies that interpellate the subaltern voice as subject to the authority of the authorial voice are referred to as *interpellation*. This happens, for example, when the player is evaluated by summary tables at the end of each mission of 'StarCraft' (see Fig. 4.9).

Positioning strategies may also establish *identification* between voices. In constituting a public domain setting a text may construct a character with whom the reader is identified either in terms of a projected career or within a relational nexus. An example of the former might be the pilot voice of a 'realistic' flight simulator as a potential career of the reader voice. Alternatively, the text may construct, for example, a domestic or peer group narrative including characters who might stand as textual surrogates for the reader's family. The introduction movie of 'Crime Killer', for instance, shows a young boy playing with a toy police car in a domestic setting. This boy, as a grown-up, is going to be the hero of the game with whom the player is to identify.

The construction of objectified voices, for example, characters in public domain settings, is referred to as *objectification*. The identification of the reader voice with an objectified voice, as this is the case in many computer games, has to be considered as an objectification of the reader voice.

The identification of the authorial voice with another voice is referred to as *affiliation*. The authorial voice of computer games frequently affiliates with the

authorial voice of game reviews to promote the video game in question. *Displacement* is the strategy by which the authorial voice identifies[79] itself with the reader so as to constitute a displaced author. Let us consider, for example, the following excerpt from the 'PlayStation' video game 'Crime Killer'. At the beginning of the first stage the 'Chief' addresses 'Rookie 88' by the following words:

> 88, this is the chief. Welcome to the CPD. Now let's see what you are made of. Patrol the district and scan for reports. Act only on direct orders from Dispatch, I've got no time for heroes! The world may have gone to hell since the petrol Bug escaped, but we are still the law!

The displaced authorial voice 'police chief' moves figuratively towards the reader to give him/her an instruction on what s/he is supposed to do in the first stage. Generally, positioning strategies do not operate in isolation from the message. This is certainly the case in public domain identification of computer games. The latter would be less appealing without attractive game characters or narratives.

4.6.2 Message and Distributing Strategies

Distributing strategies may expand or limit the *range* of the message. *Expanding strategies* broaden the message to a given voice in terms of the range of esoteric domain topics and/or recontextualised public domain settings. *Limiting strategies*, on the other hand, narrow down the message in terms of topics and settings. Limiting may be effected via the *exclusion* of message relating to the esoteric domain, or alternatively to the public domain. The first case certainly applies to video games in

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[79] "This is to be distinguished from an identification of the reader voice with the authorial voice. In a displacement, the authorial voice moves figuratively, towards the reader voice; in being identified with the author, the reader voice moves." (DOWLING 1998:144)

general, since they never make their esoteric domain available to the reader[80]. This strategy is associated with a dependent reader voice.

The association between these distributing strategies and the voice structure of a text is conditional upon their combination with other distributing strategies that are concerned with the *discourse* of the activity. *Particularising* distribute to the dependant voice "the products of the practices of the activity without the principles whereby these products are generated" (DOWLING 1998:149). In the case of a DS^+-practice, the discourse is presented as if it were DS^-. This may work, firstly, by *proceduralising* where principles are substituted by algorithms or procedures. Walkthroughs or strategy guides do this: "Jump and grab the bottom of the small sloped pillar. Pull up and jump immediately. Lara will backflip to the top of the pillar nearby" (WARD 1998:71). Secondly, this may be realised by *metaphor*: exemplars are used to stand for, or synecdochise, a whole class. Since the relationship between exemplars is metaphoric, the message is rendered more context dependent. The 'expertise' to be gained in a particular game, might be of some use in the context of similar games. Yet, this 'expertise' remains context dependent and constrained rather to the public or, at best, to the expressive domain (see MYERS 1984). Particularising strategies are likely to be associated with positioning strategies which set up public domain identification (the objectification of the reader voice as in video games) or with a displaced authorial voice, but not exclusively.

Abstracting strategies (DS^+) are instantiated in *principling* and *metonymy*. Principling is the inverse of proceduralising. Definitions and taxonomic

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[80] In the second case, the text remains in the esoteric domain and so excludes a lay audience: an

classifications etc. are used to facilitate the expression of the regulating principles[81] of a DS^+ activity. Metonymy is used to make the metaphorical relationships between exemplars visible, so that the context dependency of the message is reduced. Abstracting strategies cannot be associated with computer game texts.

Fig. 4.6: Distributing Strategies (DOWLING 2000)

Expanded or limited range and abstract or particularised discourse generate a two-dimensional strategic space with four possible combinations (Fig. 4.6). *Generalising* refers to the combination of expanding and abstracting strategies[82] (DS^+). *Specialising* is "the construction of abstract message with respect to a specific topic or setting" (DOWLING 1998:147.). *Articulating* is constituted by a particularised discourse (DS^-) and an expanding range. The esoteric domain is realised as segmental and the public domain is "constituted as an incoherent collection of settings or, alternatively, as constituted by public domain rather than esoteric domain principles" (DOWLING op. cit. 149, DOWLING 2000). Video Games including time warps, multiple worlds of adventure, secret levels (e.g. 'Gex, The Return of the Gecko') can be affiliated with this strategy. *Localising* does not generate segments or collections,

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alienated voice is constructed.

[81] Since regulating principles cannot be fully realised outside of the esoteric domain, principling must involve esoteric message.

[82] As far as esoteric domain message is concerned, this might establish an articulation between topics within the more general discourse. The articulation of public domain settings must involve specialised

but rather elaborates the instance (esoteric or public domain) by proceduralising or using a metaphor. Localising strategies recruit extended and closed narrative and combine with positioning strategies which identify the reader voice with a public domain setting in order to project the dependent voice into that domain. This is the case for computer games such as 'Crime Killer' where in subsequent levels, similar missions[83] have to be completed in a similar environment[84].

4.7 Resources

Textual strategies are realised in texts via the implication of *resources* (DOWLING 1998:150). There is no a priori limitation on what can count as a resource and there is no predetermination on how they are implicated into the various textual strategies. The *signifying* mode is one main category of resource. This term describes a form of the relationship between expression (signifier) and content (signified) implicated in sign production. The relationship between both is not understood as being arbitrary (see SAUSSURE 1983), but as being motivated (see HODGE & KRESS 1988, KRESS 1993). There are three signifying modes referring to conventions of signifying practice - the *iconic*, the *indexical* and the *symbolic*[85] - at the level of both visual and sonic representation.

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significations, so that there must be some movement of the text outside of the public domain (ibid. 147).

[83] Blowing up illegal parked cars, chasing a squadron of drug and arms dealers, placing a suspect under surveillance etc.

[84] Urban wasteland, industrial zone etc.

[85] These terms do refer back to PEIRCE's distinction between 'icon', 'index' and 'symbol' but DOWLING's (1998) use does not coincide with them.

4.7.1 Icon

The picture at the top of the screenshot from the computer game 'StarCraft' (Fig. 4.7) portrays what looks like the sinister and devastated landscape on an earth-like planet that has been transformed into an interstellar battleground for human high-tech soldiers against creepy aliens. Our view of the scene might be from a spacecraft surveying or even participating in the battle. We can read the text by substituting for it a potential visual image and a physical viewpoint that fixes our own virtual presence as spectator of the scene: the image is an articulation of a visual code and a physical viewpoint.

> […] an icon signifies the virtual, physical presence of the viewing reader and at least one of its readings is predicated solely upon this ***visual code of presence*** - this is what it would look like if you were there. […] The reader must recognize her/his own spatial position as encoded within the icon (in terms of azimuthal and elevation angles, perspective, etc) thus producing the icon as signifying her/his presence. (DOWLING 1998:153)

Of course, an icon does not present an actual and uncoded resemblance or replication of a scene or of an object. Iconic codes still must be acquired and a text must assume that its reader has acquired certain (iconic) codes. In textbooks the iconic mode frequently exhibits strong modality. However, in computer games modality does not operate in quite the same way as in the textbooks: the representations are all fantasy scenes, even if signified by a photographic text. There is, in a sense, a second layer of signification - similar to BARTHES's (1957) 'myth' - that relates to a fictional world: a virtual reality.

Figure 4.7: Iconic text (StarCraft)

The category 'visual icon' can be scaled into three categories according to the strength of the code of presence. *Photographic* codes signify a real presence in the form of a camera, which is a surrogate for the authorial/reader voice. Photographs or videos minimise the interruption of the code of presence. Some computer games, for example 'X-Files', include real video sequences with real actors and objects. The icons in Figure 4.7 or Figure 4.8 may be very close to a photograph, they are, however, still recognisable as generated by the computer. There is no exaggeration of features and no humour, and therefore best referred to as *drawing*[86]. Yet, in many computer games, the characters do have exaggerated features, such as muscles (e.g. 'Mortal Kombat'), or obviously display some humouristic features (e.g. 'Rayman',

[86] With the advent of new and more powerful game consoles (e.g. PlayStation 2), it will probably get more and more difficult to draw the line between the two so far enumerated signifying modes. For

Figure 4.8: Drawing (StarCraft)

'Crash Team Racing'). Texts of this category are then best referred to as *cartoons*. The caricature and/or humour have a tendency to interrupt the code of presence.

Computer games are multi-semiotic and so the scene in Figure 4.7 was, of course, accompanied with the adequate sounds such as the screams of dying soldiers or the sound of the flame throwers. These sound recordings reinforce the signifying of the presence of the reader and may be understood as the sonic analogue of an icon. As in films, sound in computer games is of three types: speech, music, and noise (also called sound effects). A sonic icon corresponds largely to what in film theory is referred to as diegetic sound: "sound which has a source in the story world" (BORDWELL & THOMPSON 1997:330). A good example for a speech icon can be found in 'Myth II'. An invisible dwarf approaches a gate, and one can hear the guards speak without actually understanding what they are precisely saying. Whereas sound effects are omnipresent, diegetic music[87] is more rarely employed. The category

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example,"Electronic Arts' WCW wrestling game for the PlayStation 2 will use 3-D imaging of the athletes' faces for added realism." (CROAL 2000:56)

[87] An instance can be found in the introduction movie of 'StarCraft'. A technician is listening to music while checking a wrecked spacecraft.

'sonic icon' can also be scaled in two categories according to a sonic code of presence: realistic and humouristic sound. The sound of the screams ('StarCraft') would be an example of the former, and sounds like 'pling' - when 'Gex' catches a carrot ('Return of the Gecko') - are an example of the latter. Most of the time photographic or drawing codes combine with realistic sounds, and cartoonic codes combine with humouristic sounds.

In general, iconic public domain text is interpretable as an assertion of a virtual reality and significance of a specific public domain setting. The latter is thereby foregrounded, while the esoteric domain is correspondingly backgrounded.

4.7.2 Index

"An index incorporates visual or spatial codes, but does not assert the virtual, physical presence of the reader" (DOWLING 1998:154). Basically, there are two categories of index: tables and graphs. The screenshot in Figure 4.9, for example, displays a *table* that is shown at the end of a mission of 'StarCraft'. Symbols are arranged into tabular form to give the player some kind of statistical feedback on his way of playing. *Graphs* are the residual category and include 'mathematical' diagrams (line graphs, histograms, pie charts, etc.) and geometrical diagrams or maps and the various forms of projection. An example of a graph would be the line graphs in Figure 4.9 or the map in lower left corner in Figure 4.7. It is perfectly possible to produce an iconic signification of an index. Thus, an image as in Figure 4.9, only altered by few, might suggest that 'this is me, sitting in my command centre, receiving the damage report from my last mission'.

Figure 4.9: Graphs at the end of a mission (StarCraft)

A sonic index would by and large correspond to a nondiegetic sound, which "is presented as coming from a source outside the story world" (BORDWELL & THOMPSON 1997:330). Music added to enhance the action is the most common type of nondiegetic sound. Here again one might distinguish between movie-like music and humouristic music. Diegetic music would correspond to an iconic signification of an index.

4.7.3 Symbol

The text in Figure 4.10 is symbolic; it is alphanumeric and it is visual only in linear terms. There is no visual code of presence. Nevertheless a symbolic text may

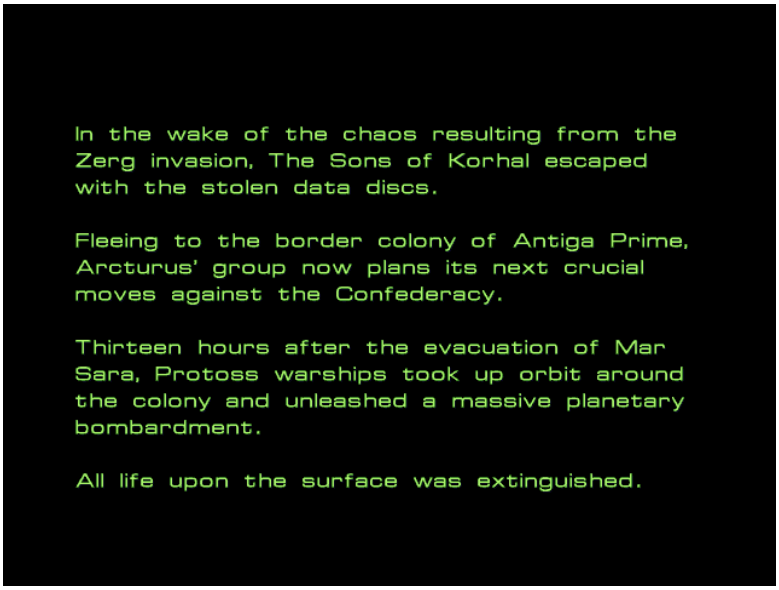

Figure 4.10: Symbol (StarCraft)

verbally signify a virtual presence, as it is the case with my example. The player is positioned as the commander of intergalactic troops, and the content of the alphanumeric text corresponds to an update on the war situation. The 'viewpoint' is signified by the content and not by the mode of signification. The visual representation in figure 4.11 establishes both a visual and a verbal presence of the reader and the displaced author. Hence, it corresponds to an iconic signification of a symbol. This is also true at the sonic level, since we can hear the symbol as speech while one head is moving - claiming authorship. The whole representation suggests a strong presence of he reader who is identified with a commander that actually takes part in this war. A genuine sonic symbol would, for example, be off-screen speech that cannot be attributed to a participating character in the narrative.

Figure 4.11: Iconic signification of a symbol

5 Description of the Empirical Domain Setting

I shall now attempt to provide a thick description of the public domain setting of my sample of 'Tomb raider II' along the lines of the narrative, the characters, the action and the puzzles. My focus will be on intertextual references, modality issues and distortions.

5.1 The Narrative

The introduction movie gives us some more information about the backstory. Startled birds rush into the air, which is usually a signifier for an existent disequilibrium or upcoming evil in movies. The appearance of 'The Great Wall of China' leaves no doubt about the location. The first human character we see is an armoured warrior - the commander-in-chief - from the back standing close to impaled bodies. A subsequent extreme close-up shot shows his spotted facial skin and reptile eyes. An unfair battle is going on at dawn in a far-distant past. Heavily armed soldiers (swords, shields, bows etc.) vastly outnumber barely armed monks who defend the Great Wall. The monks' physical appearance is much more pleasant: big eyes, kind facial expression, muscular - but not over-muscular - body[88]. As a climax, a terrible dragon - the transformed emperor - is burning everything in its range. Thanks to the sacrificing courage of two monks a magical dagger can be removed from the dragon's heart. The evil army is defeated. The dragon falls on the ground

[88] Apart from the items (health packs etc.), the monks are the only visible helpers - unless they are shot at by Lara Croft - that appear in the game (Level 12: Barkhang Monastery).

and is literally melting away[89], the commander-in-chief falls to his knees and the soldiers stop attacking as if they had been under a spell earlier on (cf. The Temple of Doom[90]). In the second part two monks return the dagger to its resting-place within the temple of Xian at night. The monk who puts the dagger back to its receptacle is blinded by a purple light appearing suddenly and he is locked up with it. The available sounds can be reduced to noise such as screams, whizzing arrows, and flames. Music is only used once when the monks approach the door to the temple of Xian to signify that they found the right place and that something significant is about to happen.

This narrative heavily draws on Chinese mythology and history. Chinese emperors frequently referred to themselves as the real dragons (SHAN 1998). The emperor, to whom allusion is made here, could be the first emperor of China 'Qin Shi Huang' (CHOU 1997-9). He became known for some extraordinary achievements[91], but he also was a tyrant[92]. Apparently, he was very superstitious and searched for an elixir of immortality (HULSEWÉ 1962:521-3, UCCS 1996). There are two possible interpretations for the name 'Xian'. It could either refer to a "being who has attained physical immortality in religious Taoism" (ENCYCLOPEDIA MYTHICA 1999), or to Xi'an, one of the oldest cities in China (CHOU op. cit.). I could not find any reference to an actual Chinese myth involving a dagger of Xian. This loose recontextualisation

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[89] A classic way of passing away for aliens or occult creatures.
[90] Indiana Jones and his companions are fighting members of the 'Thuggi' cult who worship the Indian God 'Kali'. After drinking from a red liquid, the latter fall under a spell.
[91] In 221 B.C. he became the first unifier of China by conquering and bringing under one rule the seven major states which had been fighting for hegemony. He also built the Great wall by joining a number of smaller walls. He further unified the currency and the system of writing, weights and measures.

is simply indicative for the commodification of the borrowed practices and discourses.

Many binary oppositions can be found in this setting: evil/good, superior/inferior weaponry and numbers, wild/gentle appearance, war/peace etc. The respective attributions and associations recall BARTHES' (1993) description of wrestling, since we understand on the spot who the bad and who the good guys are. In TODOROV's terms, one could say that the equilibrium is restored at the end, and in PROPP's terms we have an initial situation for future action. At present times, this equilibrium appears to be at risk. For this reason Lara Croft, the heroine, may now be dispatched in a James Bond like manner in a red helicopter to the Great Wall. From the text on the box we know that she is sent on a "quest for the dagger of Xian, reputed to possess the power of the dragon", and that she "is not the only one".

As the action unfolds we learn from more interlude movies, that the key to the temple - the seraph[93] - was stolen by 'imbecile vagabonds'. It found a new resting place in Bartoli's father's ship that was once bombed by one of the monks. Lara Croft can lay claim to the seraph and enter the holy place in Tibet. After killing the dragon and after a final showdown in her mansion, the player gets virtually shot. Thus, he is prevented from seeing her nude in the shower. The narrative has some gaps. Contrary

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[92] Many had to suffer and died working in labor gangs on the Great Wall and other projects. Furthermore, he ordered to burn books and kill scholars, among others, to silence opposition.

[93] In Christian and Judaic belief, a seraph is an angel of the highest order - mentioned in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament (ANSON et al. 1997:961). So that is a long way from Chinese mythology!

example, contrary to the story in Tomb Raider I[94], we are not told here who sent her on this adventure[95].

My description of the setting so far shows that this computer game - like many action movies - heavily draws on discourses and resources from many other activities (e.g. archaeology). Mainly 'James Bond' and 'Indiana Jones' movies appear to be the object of intertextual references here. Central to the latter movies is the quest for religious or mystical artefacts just as in the Tomb Raider games. The exotic locations, for example, China and Venice can be found in both kinds of movies. Especially, 'Moonraker' and 'The Last Crusade' contain spectacular action scenes and boat hunts in Venice. 'The temple of Doom' starts in China and the Great Wall is shown from a high angle while Indiana and his companions flee from Shanghai in an aircraft.

Figure 5.1: Motorboats in Venice (Tomb Raider II: Level 2)

Both Venice and the Great Wall of China claim to have geographical and historical status. Thus, it is not surprising that their representations (Fig. 5.1 & appendix F) give rather a realistic view of a 'real' location. Since they include a physical viewpoint and no exaggerated features, they are best described as drawings

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[94] In Tomb Raider, she is dispatched by the mysterious Ms. Natla, who, in fact, deceives her and turns out to be her worst enemy.

[95] The Tomb Raider Traveller's guide CHOU (1997-9) attempts to close these gaps.

and exhibit a moderate modality to 'readers at large'. This is somewhat different for the characters, and I shall now focus on the protagonist of the game first.

5.2 Lara Croft

The front of the box (Fig. 5.2) shows us the well-known main character 'Lara Croft' in her traditional outfit[96]. Her hyperfeminised body corresponds to the stereotype as depicted earlier by the NEXT GENERATION (1998) magazine. JONES[97] complains about this and sees in this 'silicon chick' a 'dangerous foe' for women.

> Lara has thin thighs, long legs, a waist you could encircle with one hand, and knockers like medicine balls. Show that to a guy and although he may not admit it […] deep down he finds Lara sexy. Show that to a woman and she will complain that Lara is anatomically impossible. Which is true, because if you genetically engineered a Lara-shaped woman, she could die within around fifteen seconds, since there's no way her tiny abdomen could house all her vital organs. (JONES quoted in, Jenkins 1998:338)

The anatomical distortions of Lara Croft's body point us to the modality issue. 'Readers at large' are likely to judge the whole set of modality markers involved in this cartoonic representation as signifying 'lack of realism'. However, for the specific addressees of this computer game, the modality markers serve to signal their affinity with the mimetic values, realised by this text, and they seem to

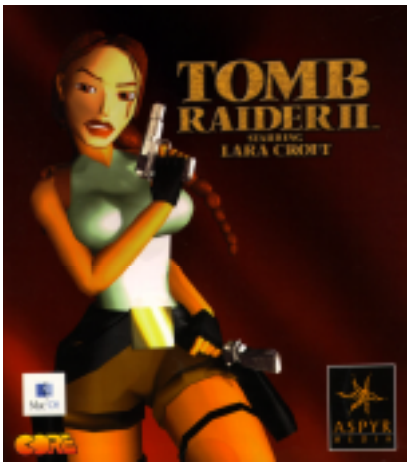

Figure 5.2: Front cover

[96] Aqua sleeveless shirt, fingerless leather gloves, leather belt, tight canvas shorts, two holsters with two pistols, tall white socks, and brown lace-up boots (CURTIS et al 2000:24).
[97] She is a reviews editor for 'PC Gaming World'.

indicate a 'play' text. Hence, the cartoon establishes both the mimetic values of its world, and a system of modality markers (see HODGE & KRESS 1988: 130-31). Apart from the gunshots and the footsteps, Lara Croft's sounds (grunts, groans etc.) can be said to be open to suggestive interpretations, which underline the previous point. Within this entertainment genre, Lara Croft can be considered as a realistic character for those who share many dimensions of this setting, who are young, male and would like to become voyeuristically and seductively active.

However, even apart from the clipping problems - Lara can put a leg inside a solid surface or run through a dead T-Rex - there are also other modality problems. It may still be acceptable that the keys are cartoons (Fig. 5.2b) - they would be hard to find otherwise - but as for inserting them is a mimed action weakening the claim of a virtual reality.

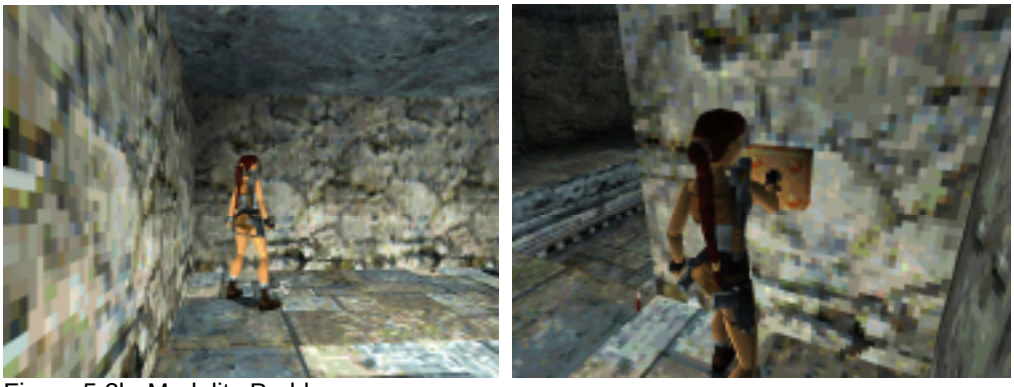

Figure 5.2b: Modality Problem

The verb 'starring[98]' immediately invokes movies and the word 'raider' makes a direct reference to Spielberg's 'Raiders of the Lost Arc' and its sequels. Like some cartoon characters (e.g. The Phantom, Two-gun Lil) she is wearing two pistols. Her different outfits make her look like a Bond girl. For example, dressed in her black

'Gucci' bikini[99], she recalls Melina Havelock (Carole Bouquet) in 'For Your Eyes Only' (Figure 5.3) when Bond (Roger Moore) first meets her. Interestingly, the references also appear in the opposite direction:

> James Bond is dating Lara Croft. The fans of the latest Bond movie, The World is Not Enough, are readily convinced. The unfeasibly pneumatic nuclear physicist, Dr Christmas Jones [!], is a celluloid copy of the star of the Tomb Raider series […] She wears the same thigh-hugging shorts, aqua tank top and action boots topped by chunky socks. Her long brunette hair and physical assets are all strikingly reminiscent of the 3D game heroine. (ARLIDGE 1999)

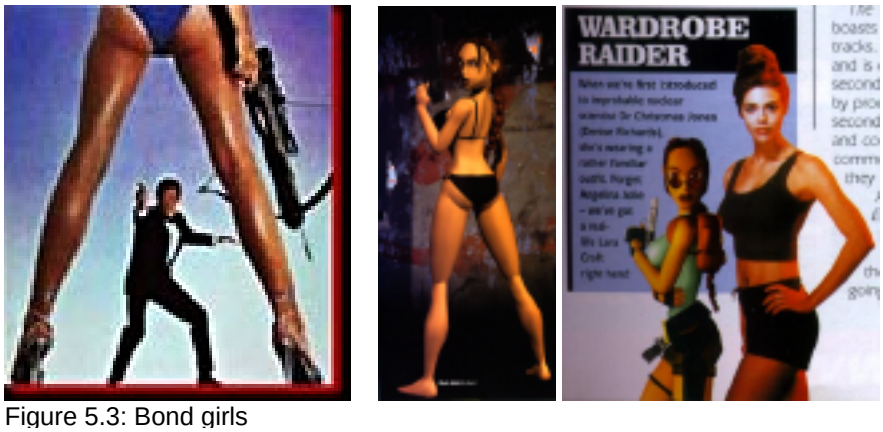

Figure 5.3: Bond girls

Thus, not surprisingly the director[100] of the forthcoming Lara Croft movie calls her the 'James Bond of archaeology'. However, there are attempts to give her some psychological depth by providing a curriculum in secondary literature which is, however, crowded with suggestive intertextual references (appendix D), and a real life appearance through the use of models. Lara Croft is constructed as an attractive

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[98] Or should it be "staring (at)"?
[99] She never wears it in the game.
[100] Simon WEST, Quoted in the Guardian, March 3, 2000.

white[101] British[102] woman, member of the aristocratic class. She becomes a desirable objet whose possession connotes high status and power. One could even argue that she creates a myth in BARTHE's sense on her own.

Lara Croft is the avatar that the player has to move through the virtual semiotic space, using either the keyboard or a gamepad. She is the representation of a woman and can largely rely on a whole range of movements and actions (see appendix C) that would also be available to an extremely well trained individual with a body in peak condition. However, there would be certain limitations, especially in terms of range and endurance. Similarly, in action movies, heroes often have superhuman strengths[103]. Apart from an incredible health she has no magical or supernatural powers and she can be shot, crushed, or fall to her death.

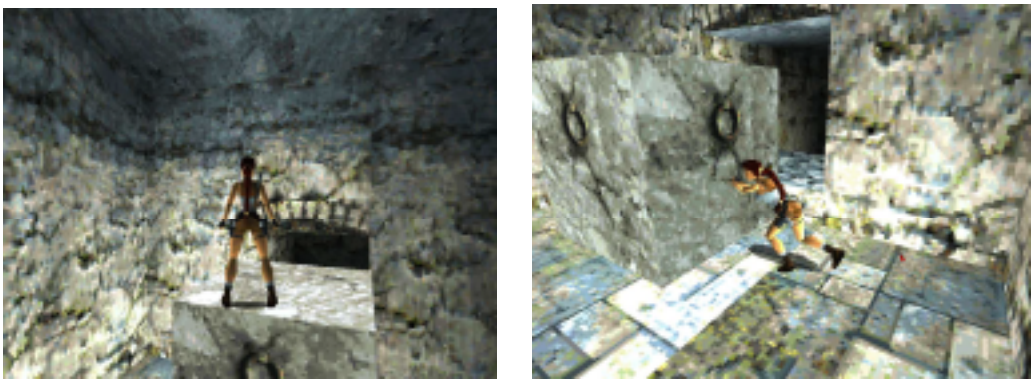

Figure 5.3b: Distortions of the public domain setting

[101] White still appears to be the dominant discourse. GOLDMANN-SEGALL (1998:184) reported the case an African-American girl that chose a young white female as her favourite television character, probably because she would not want to identify with an African-American woman whom she might not see as powerful.

[102] However, during a seminar on visual communication at the Institute of Education where I presented Tomb Raider 2, a Chinese student attributed Lara Croft certain Chinese features.

[103] Just remember Indiana Jones in 'Raiders' fighting with several soldiers in a truck, getting shot and even after being thrown through the windscreen returning and succeeding in steeling the 'Arch of the Covenant'.

As far as Lara Croft's moves and actions are concerned, there are a number of distortions that one can come across. A number of movements are impossible, although they are suggested by the public domain setting. In Tomb Raider II she can neither duck nor crawl[104]. Although there would be enough space for an individual to move in between the block and the arch (Fig. 5.3b), Lara Croft has to pull the block to get through. Similarly, there are chairs or low rocks around in that virtual space, but there is no way to make her sit down - except in boats or snowmobiles. Only items, such as keys or health packs, that are supposed to be picked up, can actually be picked up. Contrary to the suggestion of the setting - she has only a small backpack - she can carry many weapons and ammunition. Similarly, only for the action relevant windows can be blown. And why does she need keys if she owns a grenade launcher? Alternatively actions are possible that are not suggested by the public domain, for example, Lara Croft can safely stand on awnings in Venice, at least in level two. With regard to these distortions, one could assert that the player is literally trapped in the public domain setting.

5.3 Opponents

5.3.1 Animals

Down in a valley close to the Great Wall, Lara meets her first foe. A *tiger* suddenly appears only after Lara has waded into shallow water (Fig 5.4). From movies and even some documentaries we 'know' that tigers are dangerous man-eaters, so the best way to dispose of them, is to kill them. This can be safely done from the

[104] These movements will only be possible in the sequels.

water (or a rock) since this wildcat - unlike the 'real' tiger - is scared[105] of water. The other animals in the two first levels are crows, spiders, T-Rex dinosaurs and Dobermans. Traditionally the *crow* is a mystical bird - but usually does not attack humans. This could be an intertextual reference to 'The Birds' or to 'The Crow'. *Spiders* are more frequent opponents (Dr. No[106], Raiders of the Lost Arc[107]). It is, however, most unlikely that they would go after humans the way they go after the heroine. Down in a cavern even an extinct species - the *Tyrannosaurus-Rex* - has to serve as a target. This is a reference to movies such as 'Jurassic Park'. In the Venice level Lara Croft is attacked several times by *Dobermans*. This breed of dogs makes its appearance in movies, usually as ferocious watchdogs. However, to make it even more acceptable to kill them, the text on the box tells us that they are 'rabid Dobermans'.

Figure 5. 4: First Foe

All these animals have some features in common. In action movies they are largely presented as dangerous, or somehow uncanny. As a result of this might they might even be perceived as such by some people. For this reason they may not have to be

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[105] For Lara to survive, it is not necessary to kill this and the next one, since they are not following her neither through the water nor on the rocks.

[106] James Bond (Sean Connery) is lying in his bed in a hotel room and suddenly feels how a spider is travelling over his skin. In Fleming's book it is not a spider but a poisonous millipede.

alienated by a cartoonic way of representation and can be shot without hesitation. At this stage, animals do not pose any serious threat[108] since there is usually enough time to shoot them until they reach Lara, or they can be shot rather cowardly from a safe rock or hallway.

5.3.2 Humans

There is a counterforce in the person of the villain Marco Bartoli who appears to be the head of a cult-like organisation that is after the dagger as well. We learn this from a henchman that attacks Lara Croft in an interlude movie. His vocabulary ('the right one', 'those who believe' etc.), his black outfit with a mystical symbol[109], and finally his suicide create the myth of cult-ness[110] (cf. BARTHES 1993). He, just like Bartoli himself, has a strong Italian accent vs. Lara's British aristocratic accent. It seems that many villains in action movies have accents. In 'Raiders of the Lost Arc', for instance, Jones' opponent, the French archaeologist Belloq (Paul Freeman) rather unsuccessfully imitates a French accent. But that does not really matter, since it simply has to signify otherness or even baseness.

Bartoli now, as most villains, has many henchmen that hinder Lara Croft in her quest and make her undergo many ordeals. Many of these henchmen look blocky and have over-masculine bodies and uncanny outfits, and their restless footsteps and/or groans can be heard even before they appear (Fig. 5.5 & appendix C). Although the

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[107] In the first episode Indiana Jones is crossing cobwebs to find his and his guide's back covered with them.
[108] Later in the game sharks or yetis (!) will however be a major challenge. Again, what can be said about the animals so far is true for these as well.
[109] Similar to the one that was visible on the door to the dagger's resting place.

sounds may seem somehow realistic as such, their endless repetition is very unlikely and so it will generate a nearly humouristic effect - however, signifying baseness. Hence the representations of the henchmen can be considered as cartoonic, and what was said earlier about modality and the representation of Lara Croft can be applied here as well. For the addressees the enumerated modality markers signal their affinity with the mimetic values realised by this text and appear to indicate that these characters signify an imminent threat that has to be 'disposed of'. This moral code is similar to the one that dominates action movies. Both Jones and Bond have the 'licence to kill' their 'base' opponents[111] - nazi soldiers, cultists, criminals, and so forth - when it comes to reach their goal.

Figure 5.5: Human ennemies in Level 2: the club-wielding thug and the masked sniper

[110] In a later movie we may assist a mystical ritual giving Bartoli the strength of the dragon (cf. Rituals in 'Raiders of the Lost Arc' and 'The Temple of Doom').
[111] The movie 'Austin Powers' parodies this. A housewife - sitting with her son in the kitchen - a phone call announcing the death of her new husband killed shortly before by Austin Powers. She then says: "Nobody ever thinks of the family of a henchman!"

5.4 Traps and Puzzles

A major danger emerges from boobytraps (Fig. 5.6). For example, within the Great Wall Lara has to move through a gauntlet of traps: broken floor tiles with deadly spikes below, rolling boulders, encroaching spiked walls, and slicing and rolling blades. Nearly all of them can be found in the Indiana Jones movies. The rolling boulder is one of he most spectacular scenes in 'Raiders of the Lost Arc'. Both Indiana and Lara escape in a similar way by landing in a hollow and a lower room respectively. In 'The Temple of Doom' Indiana and his companions get trapped in a room with spiked walls, and they finally escape by moving out quickly. The slicing blades and the collapsing floor appear in 'The Last Crusade', when Indiana has to pass the three challenges to reach the room with the Holy Grail. The first challenge is the 'Breath of God[112]'. Indiana has to kneel down and to roll forward to avoid two slicing blades. Lara cannot kneel down and has to time her way through them. The second trap 'The Word of God[113]' can only be passed by stepping on the inscribed bricks in the right order. The last challenge 'The Path of God[114]' - an invisible pathway - makes its appearance, too, in Tomb Raider II, but only later in level fourteen.

[112] Only the penitent man [sic] will pass.
[113] Only in the footsteps of God will he [sic] proceed.
[114] Only in the leap from the lion's head will he [sic] proof his worth.

Figure 5.6: Gauntlet of traps

This gauntlet makes clear that pace makes the difference between puzzle and action and so divides the public domain setting (see STALLABRAS 1996:4). The element of threat is much more imminent in the latter than in the former case. Solving the puzzles basically means finding keys, switches, levers, etc. and operating them in the right sequence, discovering hidden passages and secrets, and finally finding the way to exit each level. This is generally rather constraining and only leaves room for limited freedom. Of course, action does contain puzzle elements, too. This is best illustrated by an example in level seven (40 Fathoms), where different switches have to be pulled in the right order to extinguish two rows of burners and it takes excellent timing to pass them.

6 The Textual Level

In this chapter I shall focus on the textual strategies that are deployed in Tomb raider II in order to establish a relation among the voices, and to distribute message to the reader voice. Voice and message are the direct products of the analysis of the selected utterances.

6.1 Voices and Positioning Strategies

Before I present some utterances of my sample and my analysis in relation to the constructed voices and positioning strategies, I would like to point out that the authorial voice appears either as such or as a displaced authorial voice. A video game is a market text and must act selectively on the reservoir of potential acquirers and so it has to construct reader voices. There is, however, less regulation imposed in terms of their reading than in a pedagogic text. The reader voice is thus constructed as somehow susceptible to the public domain setting and, particularly, to Lara Croft. It appears that the female protagonist is the main offered rationale for buying this game, since she is the dominant participant[115] on every box and in advertisements. Tomb Raider II and III are presented respectively as "starring" the "Adventures of" Lara Croft. In an advertisement for the latter game, a scantily dressed Lara Croft suggestively tells us: "It's hard to believe but I just get better and better."

Once the game is acquired, there are no noticeable constraints put on the reader. S/he can try to accomplish the game with or without a walkthrough, with or without gathering all the secrets. Alternatively, the reader can explore the locations without

caring too much about the way through, and use cheat codes - built into the software - to get all the weapons, move to the next level, or even let Lara Croft explode[116]. Rumours about a nude code turned out to be untrue, but they illustrate the importance of the protagonist. However, in the booklet there is a weak attempt to construct a hierarchy among the player voices: "On each level there are 3 secret items to find […] *World-class* 'Tomb Raiders' will try and find all three" (p. 14, my emphasis).

It can be argued that all these low discursive practices are allowed and some even encouraged: "Explore Exotic Locations […] Exciting Moves", says the text on the back of the box. Yet, engaging in high discursive esoteric domain practices and acquiring subjectivity is explicitly prohibited. After having installed and started the software, the first symbolic utterance the player is confronted with, is a legal warning (Fig. 6.1). The authorial voice interpellates the reader voice via the recruitment of legal arrangements. The 'alteration of the software code' - entering the esoteric domain to generate esoteric domain message - is forbidden; subjectivity is thus denied and the reader voices must remain dependent voices. This is a reinforcement of the pedagogic aspect of the text, since it corresponds to an attempt to regulate the behaviour of the reader.

Figure 6.1: Legal Warning

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[115] This term is borrowed from KRESS & VAN LEEUWEN (1996:45-55)
[116] To push this train of thought further, one could even argue that the author has no objection if the CD-ROM is used as a Frisbee on the beach.

After successful completion of each level or by using the cheat code, the authorial voice addresses the reader voice by presenting a table with some statistics (Fig. 6.2). The latter are neither the account of a linear game, nor a summary of the best[117] parts in the game-play. In fact, this index refers to a patchwork of the actually saved parts of this level, a simulation of a game that as such actually never took place. Thus, one may wonder to what extent this simulated narrative has any meaning at all, and what its relation to the 'real' game history is that has to exist. In an arcade game such a table would indeed be a summary of the elapsed linear game and makes some sense. With regard to the textual strategies, this table, nevertheless, represents a kind of evaluation of the reader voice and can therefore be considered as an interpellation. This also applies to the accompanying tune at the end of each level that is the same every time. Please also note that the cheater is not directly interpellated by the authorial voice, since it is not immediately visible in the table whether the player cheated or not[118].

Figure 6.2: End Level Table

Apart from the end level tune, other tunes are audible but only at rare occasions. When Lara Croft approaches an important area we can hear a certain tune that clearly signifies this. In level two (Venice) a typical Venetian music is dubbed in, while Lara is driving a motorboat, in order to create a certain atmosphere. Here, the use of music

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[117] In terms of elapsed time, used ammunition or lost energy.
[118] There are games that use such strategies. In 'Descent 2', for example, the cheater is verbally addressed as "cheater" and receives no score at the end of the level.

is very similar to the use of music in movies. I have already underlined the numerous intertextual references to action movies. Hence, it can be argued that the authorial voice identifies with the authorial voice of a movie director. Consequently, the music within the levels can be considered as a displacement, too.

As the game continues the player is confronted with some unattributed point-of-view shots (Fig. 6.3). The screenshot on the left shows Lara Croft standing on an arch behind a window. So this point of view cannot be attributed to her. The same applies to the screenshot on the right, since she is inside a building throwing the switch that opens this gate. These shots are simply shown to the player and are an instance of the authorial voice. The latter identifies with an unseen agent or helper giving an important clue, and so moves towards the reader voice via displacement. Later in the game these clues are no longer given.

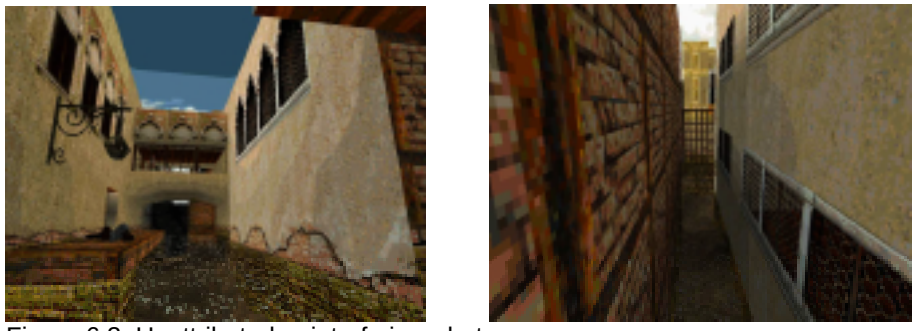

Figure 6.3: Unattributed point-of-view shots

When Lara Croft lifts up one of the three dragons, we can hear a nondiegetic sound (ting-a-ling) and hear her saying 'aha'. The latter can be considered as a displacement and the fomer as an authorial interpellation. The 'aha' alone can be heard when she collects other items[119]. Through these two sounds the reader voice is

[119] health packs, flares, weapons etc.

evaluated and receives some kind of appraisal from respectively the authorial and displaced authorial voice. Interestingly enough, when Lara Croft picks up items in the water, we cannot hear her exclamation. This is probably to strengthen the claim to a virtual reality.

Lara's house - the training level - and the interlude movies are rare occasions where we can hear her speak. By identifying with the protagonist, the author moves figuratively towards the player and so constitutes a displaced authorial voice. The same applies to the noises (grunts, steps, weapons etc.) Lara Croft, her enemies and the traps emit.

Figure 6.4: Backside of the box

Instances of affiliation strategies can also be found, namely on the box (Fig. 5.2 & 6.4). The authorial voice affiliates with the holders of the trademarks listed at the bottom and with authors of computer and other magazines by quoting excerpts from their articles.

"Tomb Raider II is the most anticipated game for the Mac this year!" - MacAddict
"Lara Croft has created a sensation everywhere!" -Time Magazine

At first glance, the issue of identification appears to be an ambiguous and intriguing issue in the context of this particular game. Besides rare occasions the player sees Lara Croft as if s/he were standing behind her. If one switches to the look mode one is only very rarely placed within her head, and usually the shot just becomes a little bit closer or the reader is positioned above her. Lara Croft's

appearance can largely be described as conforming - however in an exaggerated way - to the actual standards of attractiveness set up by western entertainment media. So she is designed to become almost permanently the object of the reader's gaze. In the training level, the displaced authorial voice of Lara Croft directly addresses the reader voice, for example: "You need to press jump and forward for me to clear the gap." Hence, there appear to be no indicators to support the claim of an identification of the reader voice with the objectified voice of the adventurous female archaeologist. Seeing Lara Croft in action corresponds to the view of a camera person following her combined with occasional point-of-views taken by another camera person. Thus one can argue that the reader voice is construed as voyeuristic, like the movie spectator. Yet this is only part of the picture, since the avatar has to be manipulated. Consequently, the reader voice is also identified with a powerful intervening force on her behalf (cf. FLEMING 1996:190). Furthermore, the enumerated intertextual references indicate a tacit identification of the player with Indiana Jones - teaching now Lara Croft - and/or James Bond - supervising his new Bond girl. To sum up, it can be argued that the reader voice is identified with an objectified helper voice, and that the relationship between the two voices has some erotic connotations.

However, since Tomb Raider II is contextualised by exchange relations that put fewer constraints on its reading, an empirical player is, of course, free to identify - from a more psychological point of view - with Lara Croft. A female player may well identify with her and consider this as an empowerment, whereas a male player may

engage in a safe transgender identification to provide him with a more thrilling experience[120].

6.2 Message and Distributing Strategies

None of the instances of 'Tomb Raider II', enumerated so far, contain any utterance that could be considered as an instance of the DS^+ esoteric domain of the activity of computer gaming. Thus they can be considered as DS^- message that is distributed to the reader voice. From this angle, one can certainly see a limiting strategy at work that is associated with a dependent reader voice. Furthermore, it can be claimed that abstracting strategies (specialising and generalising) are definitely not operative here.

In the training level the displaced authorial voice (Lara Croft) distributes message through proceduralising. She explains to the player the moves s/he has to perform in order to pass successfully the assault course: "To climb up press forward and hold down the action button." This message corresponds to esoteric domain content that is encoded in public domain terms. This rather technical knowledge that is transmitted to the reader voice is however localised knowledge since it is only applicable to this game and - only to some extent - to the other games in the series without giving access to the esoteric domain at all.

The whole public domain setting that favours a reading of Tomb Raider II as 'interactive movie' is a metaphor for patterns of light and sound that are generated through the machine and production code. Metonymic links towards the latter are nowhere available. Furthermore, I would argue that Tomb Raider II recruits rather an

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[120] See chapter two.

extended and closed narrative that is at least as coherent as the narrative of most blockbuster movies. Lara - unlike Gex - does not have to jump around trying to catch carrots or skulls, and fall through rabbit holes in order to acquire a remote control granting access to another even more bizarre world of a media dimension that is a loosely related patchwork of intertextual references[121]. Furthermore, the distributing strategies combine with positioning strategies that identify the reader voice with the described public domain setting in order to project the dependent voice into that domain. For these reasons the distributing strategies at work here are best described as localising.

Finally I would like to come back to the question, 'Who says what?' It seems that the authorial voice makes its appearance in order to provide a rationale for buying Tomb Raider II (Lara Croft) and affiliates, for example, with the authorial voice of the Time Magazine as an advertising ploy to underline this. It further regulates the behaviour of the reader voice (legal warning). However, subsequently the authorial voice disappears only to surface sporadically in order to evaluate the reader voice through tables and occasional nondiegetic sounds. It appears that the authorial voice mainly acts pedagogically. In other words, this computer game draws on pedagogic discourses and practices and can also be considered as a *virtual* pedagogic text[122]. The player has to acquire a specific content (knowledge, skills) in order to move on. This content is transmitted in the tutorial and by allowing the player to save his/her game at any time. As mentioned before, the principles of evaluation reside with the

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[121] To movies such as Star Wars, Indiana Jones, James Bond, Tron, different science fiction, horror and kung fu movies and so forth.

authorial voice, who decides whether or not the player may move on to the next, usually more difficult level[123]. During the tutorial[124] and the actual game-play a displaced authorial voice, mainly Lara Croft, takes over in order to allow an experience, the immersion in this virtual space. To end this chapter, I want to underline that Tomb Raider II remains a market text that is contextualised by exchange relations.

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[122] In a pedagogic text authorial and reader voices are constructed as, respectively, transmitter and acquirer in the context of a pedagogic relation (DOWLING & BROWN 1998:2).
[123] There is still the possibility to use a cheat code.
[124] The tutorial is nearly designed as a level on its own right and allows - apart from the assault course - a lot of explorative freedom.

7 The Discourse of the Walkthrough

In the fourth chapter I have described the activity of computer gaming as complex and operating in multiple ways. For this reason, I also construe walkthroughs as texts that are instances of the referent activity of computer gaming. As a sample I have chosen Stella's walkthrough (see appendix E) of the first two levels that is available free of charge on the Internet. Stella's site is part of a larger network[125] on the topic of the Tomb Raider games. The authorial voice of the latter claims that it is an unofficial web Site, and that it is not associated with either 'Eidos Interactive' or 'Core Design'.

At first glance this walkthrough looks a lot like a pedagogic text with similar characteristics to those that can be found in textbooks (see KRESS 1998:62-66). The text of the walkthrough makes use of both written (symbols) and visual modes of communication (drawings, indexes). The written text is dominant and is divided into small paragraphs with bold headings. Coloured words or expressions make further sub-divisions. The utterance underneath the headline "Kills: 23 Items: 4 […] plus 2 keys and 3 secrets" nearly looks like the setting up of an 'educational' aim. The written language has the function of narrating ('jump', 'grab', 'hold' etc.); of pointing ('this series of screenshots may help'); of describing ("First comes a series of broken floor tiles"); explaining ("You'll have other chances to acquire this weapon"; and classifying ("The next few areas include a series of hazards"). The drawings (screenshots) and the indexes (maps) carry information that displays what this virtual world is like (Fig. 7.1). Especially the novice player is directed towards these resources.

It appears that an authorial voice, corresponding to the subject position in the art of

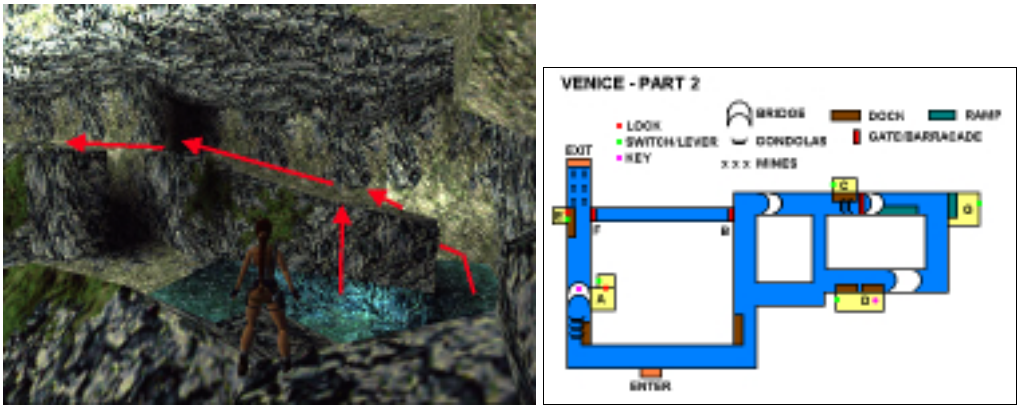

Figure 7.1: Drawing and index

game playing, is apprenticing a novice player into the art of playing this game properly, and guiding him/her through all the upcoming difficulties until the end of the game. By following the step by step instructions, the apprentice is supposed to become more and more proficient until equaling his/her 'master' and achieving subjectivity.

However, there are numerous advertisements and links to the official Tomb Raider web page (www.tombraider.com). Furthermore, it is possible to buy the games and related merchandising products in an on-line shop:

> Need a game fix but hate shopping? How about a gift for your favorite raider? Or maybe you just want to thank me for all the help I've given you? (That's right, I don't get paid for writing these walkthroughs; it's a labor of love.) (STELLA 2000:1)

This points to the fact that also this kind of walkthrough is contextualised by exchange relations. Knowledge about an already acquired commodity is exchanged against the exposure to information about other available commodities. Again, fewer

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[125] www.tombraider.net

constraints are put on the reading of the walkthrough. For example, it could be considered as an advertisement for the game by offering a kind of sneak preview for potential acquirers. Alternatively, it can be regarded as a strict step by step instruction to get actually through. Another possibility would be to view the walkthrough as an attempt to "recount a story of near-epic proportions"(Darley 2000:152)[126]. Furthermore, there is only a weak attempt to regulate the behaviour of the reader voice. At the end of each level walkthrough one can find copyright indications similar to those in the following excerpt:

> Feel free to copy, distribute and quote this walkthrough, but please include this credit line so people can send me their corrections, comments and suggestions. Also, if you'd like to offer this on your own web site, kindly ask permission first.
> (STELLA 1998-2000a:3)

Note the difference to the legal warning at the beginning of Tomb Raider II. This is however not surprising since the esoteric domain remains untouched, and the exchange of information about the Tomb Raider games is one of the main practices of this network. For all these reasons, the walkthrough remains a market text and can again only be considered as a virtual pedagogic text that draws on practices and discourses from pedagogic activities. It constructs a virtual subject and virtual apprenticed positions, and even a virtual esoteric domain. The latter corresponds to what PROVENZO (1991:36) described as "[e]xpert and often highly esoteric knowledge [sic]" that "is essential in advancing to the highest level of a video game."

In terms of DOWLING's language of description the authorial voice can be construed as identifying with a female reader voice of the Tomb Raider II computer

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[126] This is more obvious in CHOU's (1997-9) Tomb Raider Traveller's Guide.

game so as to constitute a displaced authorial voice. Furthermore, it affiliates openly with other reader voices, claiming membership in a larger group of game players and empirical multiple authorship:

> Special thanks are given to the participants in the alt.games.tombraider newsgroup, without whom some parts of this walkthrough couldn't have been written. Thanks also to Jeff and Geoff for their tips on this level. (STELLA 1998-2000a:3)

Displacement is also achieved through claiming empathy with the difficulties of the reader voice through utterances like the following ones:

> The next few areas include a series of hazards, which you will have to do in sequence in order to get through. Save your game here, since you'll probably need several attempts. […] Then run onto the collapsing floor to fall safely below. Whew! (STELLA 1998-2000a:2)

> The next area is somewhat labyrinthine, so I've included a map (below). (STELLA 1998-2000b:1)

I suggest that this walkthrough constructs two pairs of reader voices. First, there is the hierarchic pair novice/experienced that is instantiated in the subsequent utterances:

> If you're new to Tomb Raider and are having trouble negotiating this climb, the diagram below, along with this series of screenshots may help. […] Unless you're really fast, skip the automatic pistol clips (STELLA 1998-2000a:1, 2)

Secondly, the pair daring/cautious player becomes recognisable in the following excerpts:

> DOWN INTO THE CAVERN: Don't take the zip line yet, or you'll miss quite a bit of action. (STELLA 1998-2000a:3)

> There are two ways to do this: the James Bond way and the cheater way.
> Bond: Take your time getting in your boat. Position it facing the left side of the ramp. Now gun the engine (forward + Action) and take off over the exit ramp and up the long wooden ramp. […] Whew!
> Cheater: Park the boat outside the exit room. Go in, press the button and swim out under the door. This way the timer never starts and you can drive your boat or swim to the exit at your leisure. Less stressful but also less fun. (STELLA 1998-2000b:3)

The vocabulary that is used here, for example, "the James Bond way" vs. "the cheater way", indicates that the authorial voice rather favours the daring voice, so the second pair constructs a hierarchy as well.

The message that is distributed here can be described as an attempt to re-code the machine code in terms that are suggested by the public domain. For example: "Jump down into the water, swim under the boathouse door and use the key to unlock the door." Again, as I have pointed out previously on several occasions, there is no way to get access to the esoteric domain via this expressive domain message. This corresponds to a proceduralising distributing strategy. Since the message is limited to this one game the whole discourse of the walkthrough can be considered as deploying a localising strategy.

The discourse of the walkthrough appears to favour an identification of the reader voice with the objectified voice of Lara Croft. The way the imperative form and 'you' are used here indicates an identification of the reader voice with the objectified voice of Lara Croft. The text says "Another dog and a bat-wielding thug will try and stop *you*, so *kill* them too" (my emphasis) and not, for example, "[…] will try and stop *Lara*, so *she* must kill them too". Thus contrary to the actual game, this walkthrough seems to identify the reader voice with the objectified voice of Lara Croft. Please note also that the accompanying booklet does not do that either: "Pressing Up moves Lara

forward at a running pace" (p. 7). Another distinction can be made: whereas in the game it is the reader voice that may give instructions, it is now the reader voice that is given instructions.

I have discussed the modality issue in relation to the animal foes earlier on. The authorial voice of this walkthrough appears to contest the modality markers here as far as the tigers are concerned: "You don't have to kill it since you are going up, not down. And tigers are endangered, you know. ;-)" (STELLA 1998-2000a:1). However, the smiley weakens this assumption considerably, and so does the lack of compassion for the tigers later on[127]. So even in relation to the tigers, it can be argued that the authorial voice signals its affinity with Tomb Raider II and its modality markers.

The act of 'killing' an opponent is frequently referred to by metaphors such as "to take care of" and occasionally as "to dispatch", "to plug away at" or even "to put out of misery". For these examples there is nothing natural that links the tenor with the vehicle. Some critics argue that the "ubiquitous action of metaphor is one force in the discursive and ideological process of 'naturalising' the social, of turning that which is problematic into the obvious" (KRESS 1990:72-73). In this context the use of these euphemisms is again rather an approval of the mimetic values realised by the computer game.

[127] Please note that it is possible to be successful in the first level without killing any tiger.

8 My Personal Experience: A Case Study

In this chapter I shall describe my more personal experiences resulting from my engagement with the computer game Tomb Raider II in terms of the deployed theory. This is a very particular case study, not only because of the very limited sample, but also due to my particular double status as player/researcher. Since human individuals participate in a range of activities, multiple positions related to the latter are instantiated in any given human individual (DOWLING 1998:167). Thus, apart from taking up a reader position of the computer game in question, I also took up the position of a social research apprentice. Since different positions are not hermetically sealed with respect to each other, I could establish the activity relating to the former as public domain, to which a recontextualising gaze was cast from the latter. In the process of this dissertation I made the recontextualising rules of the social activity theory available before applying them subsequently to my sample of texts from the activity of computer gaming[128]. In other words I imposed a specialised expression upon non-specialised content from the position of the esoteric domain of the deployed theory, so engaging in a descriptive practice. Hence the language of description is mythologised as being, at least potentially, about something other than itself. This is the myth[129] of reference that constructs sociology as a system of exchange-values:

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[128] Since this dissertation is part of an academic course, it is recontextualised by pedagogic relations with respect to my supervisor - the subject - and myself - the apprentice. My text constructs two kinds of reader voices. First, there is the subject reader voice that claims the evaluation rules. Second, there is the voice of another potential reader - a student or interested person - that might engage with this dissertation at a later stage.

[129] Note that myth does not necessarily have to be understood as pejorative.

sociological commentaries can be exchanged for the practices which they describe (DOWLING op. cit. 4-7).

When I played Tomb Raider II the two positions interfered frequently. For example, playing without taking notes was more enjoyable, but implied a bad feeling, since I had neglected the researcher position. On the other hand, playing while taking notes disturbed the game-flow considerably. Consequently, I divided my playtime into two periods: one that was rather devoted to research and one that was rather devoted to having fun. Yet after some time an absolute separation was hardly maintainable.

The first time I 'met' Lara Croft was actually in my classroom. With a mischievous grin, an eleven-year old gave me a poster displaying Lara Croft dressed in a diving suite and lying in a pool. Somehow this pupil had intuitively positioned me as someone who was susceptible to this kind of representation. In ALTHUSSER's terms, I was hailed as an already-subject of a patriarchal ideology that constructs representations of women as objects for the male gaze. Possibly her appearance also brought up childhood memories and reminded me of my favourite anime heroes such as 'Actarus'[130] or 'Captain Harlock'[131] (Fig. 8.1) whose faces were drawn in a very similar way. Consequently, I was probably interpellated as an already-subject of more than one ideology.

Figure 8.1: Space Captain Harlock

[130] See, for example, http://www.vex.net/~guru/goldorak/goldorak.htm for more information.

It was only a year later that I got hold of a demo-version of Tomb Raider II and actually started playing. Since this game was one of the few elaborated ones that were available for the Macintosh at that time, I purchased the full version. Just like many other players (cf. MYERS 1984), I do not like reading too many instructions before playing. Similarly, the tutorial only attracted my attention much later. Consequently, the cavern beneath the Great Wall became my training ground for experimenting with the avatar and figuring out the basic available moves. This process, however, continued almost over the whole game-play. In order to leave an area, here the cavern, I had to encode the machine code using the terms suggested by the public domain term, for example, "Lara has to jump forward and to grab." However, since games do not operate yet with voice control, I also had to encode those public domain terms in terms of the input device to make Lara Croft perform the appropriate moves. Especially, with the small keyboard of my iMac this was not always easy, and it took me some time to get used to the commands, especially as there appear to be some mismatches between the machine code and the keyboard response. As I became more skilful though, the two ways of encoding appeared to merge more and more. Further problems, however, emerged when I had to learn to make Lara swim, dive and fight in the water. Partially, because she was virtually free-floating in a three-dimensional space, which was a major challenge for my spatial skills. Yet, these difficulties were also due to the encodings I had performed previously, and that had to be adapted to some extent in the water. For example, pushing the 'Command' key makes Lara jump - move *upwards*- on dry land, but makes her dive - move *downwards* - while

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[131] See, for example, http://cygnus.simplenet.com/anime/harlock/ for more information.

swimming in the water. This contradictory coding was sometimes Lara's undoing, for instance, when she was chased by underwater animals and, instead of getting out of the water in time, went down for another fatal dive.

On the one hand the suggestions of the public domain setting are virtually exceeded by the game, since probably nobody could perform the moves to the extent that Lara Croft can. On the other hand, serious constraints are not only put on her freedom of movement but also on her moves. The latter do not always operate in the way the public domain setting appears to indicate. For example, every time I made Lara jump on a slope and pressed 'jump' again, she backflipped instead of jumping forward again. It took me some time before I definitely stopped my attempts to get Lara out of caverns in this way. In MYER's (1984:173) words, there was a contradiction between the patterns of the software and my own interior preconceptions.


Figure 8.2. Way Out

The first cavern became the object of my explorations for quite some time, before I finally found the only way out, namely climbing the rocks close to the water (Fig. 8.2). It struck me that there was no tiger in the cavern, no matter how long I let Lara stay there. The tiger was only triggered when Lara waded into the water. The sudden and unexpected attack from behind on Lara provided me with a somehow thrilling experience. The next major challenge was that I had enormous difficulty in making

her jump from one rock to another (Fig. 8.3). Looking back, I feel nearly ashamed of this since it is a simple jump that has to be performed; neither grabbing nor running was actually required. My difficulties probably arose from the fact that the public domain setting suggested a run and jump, and so my numerous attempts were doomed to fail. Somehow I then made it to the top of the cavern. The final long-distance jump made it clear to me that one of the major challenges of this game was to line up Lara correctly, and to push the run, jump and grab control buttons in exactly the right sequence with the right timing.


Figure 8.3: My first difficulty

I would describe myself rather as taking up the 'cautious player' position, which implied that I soon searched the Internet for walkthroughs and downloaded the one I analysed in the previous chapter. The walkthrough provided me with information about the upcoming attacks and hazards, and gave me the certainty to collect all the secrets without getting stuck in a dead end. However, the engagement with the game changed then, and I would suggest that it moved from a more immersive encoding in terms of emotions (thrill, excitement, etc.) towards a more technical engagement in terms of manual skills. The challenge then consisted mainly in the re-coding of the walkthrough's suggestions in terms of hitting the right keys at the right time. However, I sometimes challenged these suggestions and tried to find my own possibly easier, strategies. For example, in the second guardhouse of the Great Wall, instead of climbing up the wooden ladder

immediately - leading to a ledge with a key and a spider - I made Lara take the opposite stairway and shoot the spider from a ledge on the opposite site at a safe distance (Fig. 8.4). Please note that this also is one of the rare occasions when Lara Croft can be seen from the front. In that position she actually 'saw' more than I did, since her guns were locked on the spider.

Figure 8.4: Killing a spider

Unlike some other games that only allow to save the game-play after completing a level (e.g. 'Gex, The Return of the Gecko') Tomb Raider II allows to save the game at any given moment. This favours a trial and error strategy and opens up many possibilities[132]. For instance, even after a victorious fight, I sometimes decided to go back to a previous, saved position. I did this either to use another weapon or strategy, or in order to get her through with little or even no loss of energy at all. The latter strategy is not really necessary, since there are enough health packs available. And after each level the energy is completely restored.

Besides health packs other items such as weapons or ammunition can be acquired. As a reward for finding the three secrets in a level, one receives supplementary accessories. In STALLABRAS' (1996:3-4) words, one could argue that 'labour' is traded for equipment, and, from this angle, exchange relations even continue within the

[132] The movie 'Groundhog Day' plays with the same idea.

game. Furthermore, use value and exchange value no longer appear to be opposed, but to collapse into an ideal unity.

In the previous chapter I have already raised the issue of identification from the point of view of the language of description. So the question I want to deal with now, is whether I felt rather like identifying with or more like manipulating Lara Croft. The answer is certainly not easy, since there appear to be indicators that point in either direction. The first draft of this chapter included sentences like 'I have to jump and grab', and I remember well that I was deeply moved when Lara died at the beginning. Luckily, I could resurrect her every time, and as I kept playing, I presume that I felt more like manipulating her or, at least, like being co-existent with her. In this context, it is also interesting to note my friends' reactions. When I told them about the object of my study, they commonly said something like "It is great to have a girlfriend like Lara Croft" or "How is Lara?" Thus they constructed an emotional and erotic bond between Lara Croft and myself. Utterances like these illustrate the effectiveness of the authorial marketing strategy. This relationship, however, was abruptly ended with my virtual death in her bathroom.

TURKLE (1984) argued that a player could actually decipher the logic of a game and discover its rules. But what do these rules correspond to in Tomb Raider II, if they are not the realisation rules of the activity of computer gaming? Before attempting to answer this question I would like to refer briefly to the movie 'Final destination' that tells the story of a group of high school students that are saved from a plane explosion thanks to the preternatural power of one of them. The survivors appear to die one by one under mysterious circumstances. The main character then

figures out death's pattern and starts disrupting this plan, which, however, turns out to be a never ending endeavour. This is in a sense what I was virtually doing while playing Tomb Raider II. Deciphering the logic of Tomb Raider II means, at least to some extent, trying to uncover the 'perverted' plans of the author to kill or trap the protagonist. This implies reasoning in a very specific and context-dependent way. The latter aspect is further emphasised by my assumption that an important part of deciphering these rules consists in learning to recognise and to handle the arbitrary and specific distortions of the public domain setting in question.

9 Conclusion

In discussing texts related to the activity of computer gaming I have introduced DOWLING's language of description. This language defines the categories, esoteric, public, descriptive and expressive domain, textual strategies, authorial and reader voices, pedagogic and exchange relations, resources and so forth. My deployment of the language of description has enabled me to describe my sample of utterances of Tomb Raider II, an associated walkthrough, and my personal engagement with the game in the same terms. This, of course, is the essential purpose of theory. Furthermore, the specific nature of the language has generated textual analyses that are sociological in nature, i.e. texts have been described in terms of the ways in which they construct relations and distribute practices between social positions, such as author and readers in exchange activity.

My description of the public domain setting of Tomb Raider II has shown that this game draws heavily on many of the discourses and practices of activities that current action movies, particularly Indiana Jones or James Bond do. The locations also correspond largely to those that commonly appear in these movies, and some even lay claim to a historical and/or geographical status (e.g. The Great Wall, Venice). Probably for these reasons they are designed in great detail (see appendix F). There is also a similar narrative: a solitary heroine is dispatched to re-establish a disturbed equilibrium and protect mankind from a greater evil. A megalomaniacal villain has sent out many grotesque looking and sounding henchmen to go after her. And, of course, there are numerous other hazards such as fierce animals or boobytraps, and magical or mundane objects - acting as helpers (e.g. health packs) - that have to be

found. The moral code - 'live and let die' - is very similar to the one that can be found in most Hollywood blockbusters. The narrative is, of course, not all the time coherent or accurate. Indeed, it remains a mystery, who actually sent Lara Croft on her dangerous and challenging quest. At the end of level six she leaves the offshore rig attached to a submarine to reach the wreck of the 'Maria Doria', which is impossible to achieve in real life. However, we are used to similar things happening in action movies. For example, in 'Raiders of the Lost Arc', Indiana Jones manages somehow to follow a diving German submarine in the Mediterranean Sea, and it remains unclear how he then manages to escape from it again (BUCKLAND 1998:172). Furthermore, the musical scores accompanying the action, introductory screens, credits, and so forth only underline that Tomb Raider II is dominated by cinematic features and can be described as emulating film. However there are also cartoonic features, such as exaggerated body characteristics, that remind us that this video game is in fact a play text. Consequently, there is no claim to represent any reality, but for the susceptible reader the modality markers of this video game - apart from some modality problems raised earlier (e.g. the keys) - serve to signal their affinity with the mimetic values raised by this text.

Since a video game is an interactive text, there are two more peculiarities that need to be emphasised with regard to the public domain setting. First the setting is distorted, and many actions that are actually suggested by the setting cannot be taken. For instance, Lara is unable to dive in shallow water and consequently she cannot rely on this option to avoid the darts after leaving the second guardhouse within the Great Wall. Secondly, action and puzzle sequences are divided by pace. Unless the player

hits the pause button, close combats with henchmen and animals or rolling boulders do not leave much time for long reflections. Puzzles are usually less imminently threatening, and there is generally enough time to figure out what levers to pull to lead to the desired effect. Sometimes, however, both aspects are effectively combined when the player has to guide Lara Croft through timed traps with fatal accessories such as burners or swinging blades. Learning to play the game implies adapting to the distortions and the pace of the public domain setting, in which the player is trapped.

The content of video games is often criticised as in the following quotation:

> Enemies must advance and die in hordes, but for the player nothing can be irrevocable. Here ideology and marketing have arrived at a particular felicitous marriage. Its single-minded impetus has surprised even those who manufactured it. Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari is disappointed with his progeny: 'The repetitive, mindless violence that you see on video games is not anything I want to be assocated with.' (STALLABRAS 1996:5-6)

Furthermore, it is a common argument that this violent or sexist cultural content determines a violent consciousness in individuals who unproblematically accept that violence as a reality (see PROVENZO 1991). Finding out whether this applies to the actual player of Tomb Raider II was not the focus of my research. If the empirical reader occupies a voice[133] that is constructed by the texts in question, s/he is participating in the referent activity. From the results of my textual analysis no assertions can be made either about how far an empirical player actually takes up these positions or about the extent of the latter's influence on his/her engagement with discourses or practices of other activities. If a clarification of these issues is requested, then further research would be needed. This research could possibly draw

on an extension of the language of description to dialogic texts (see DOWLING 1998:164-69). With regard to the above stated critique, it cannot be denied that Tomb Raider II contains indeed both violent and sexist statements that are certainly not unproblematic. The manipulable avatar Lara Croft can be regarded as a virtual sex object for the male gaze. Furthermore, she has to be made to engage in violent and morally dubious actions[134] to lay claim on the dagger and finally end the game.

Besides, since the interface of every video game is arbitrary (STALLABRAS 1996:6), it can be argued that already the imposition of a cultural arbitrary implies symbolic violence (BOURDIEU & PASSERON 1977:8). Hence, the decision of the author to privilege one particular type of content and actions is not one of rational choice, but rather a political decision; the occupation of what Max WEBER referred to as 'value sphere'. It is up to every individual to decide whether s/he considers authoring and reading this type of games as a laudable cultural activity of our society, and to position him/herself accordingly.

At first sight Tomb Raider II appears to be a pedagogic text constructing, transmitting and acquiring positions with a coincidence of pedagogic action and pedagogic content. This is somehow similar to a traditional apprenticeship. Three demos[135] show the reader what playing this game is like. A tutorial (Lara's house) explains the available moves and relays the player back to the start if an obstacle is

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[133] Note that voices are the realisations of positions and positions are understood here to be constitutive of human subjectivity rather than syndromes of expected behaviours.
[134] In Tomb Raider III she even has to shoot, among others, military police officers and museum guards.
[135] They appear after some time of inactivity in the menu mode.

not taken the way it should be[136]. Similarly, in the game one obstacle after the other has to be taken and if the player fails s/he may start in a previously saved position. The degree of difficulty increases from level to level in terms of opponents and puzzles.

However, Tomb Raider II is not contextualised by pedagogic relations but by exchange relations. The referent activity 'computer gaming' is a commercial activity that is marketing this game in order to exchange it for the currency of the acquirer. Thus Tomb Raider II is a market text that only draws on practices and discourses borrowed from a pedagogic relationship. However, texts related to Tomb Raider II also become pedagogically operative, for example, when they introduce the reader to a rationale for acquiring the game. This rationale is undoubtedly the salient protagonist Lara Croft herself. Another instance of a pedagogic action is the regulatory text at the very beginning prohibiting an incursion of the reader into the esoteric domain.

All this has, of course, implications at the textual level. The authorial voice as such generally becomes active, either to advertise the game or in order to regulate or evaluate the reader voice with either symbolic or indexical utterances. The displaced authorial voice attempts to provide the reader voice with an immersive experience in a virtual world. The message that is distributed to the reader voice corresponds to instantiations of the public domain or, at best, of the expressive domain. Neither of them will give access to the esoteric domain and allow the generation of a new subject; the reader voice thus remains dependent. Tomb Raider II sets up a closed and

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[136] The elapsed time that is displayed in the upper right corner stops, and Lara's voice says "Back to the

extended narrative and projects the reader voice into this setting via an identification of the latter with a participant that is teaming up with Lara Croft. For these reasons, it can be argued that this particular game deploys, by and large, a localising distributing strategy.

The discourse of the walkthrough is contextualised by exchange relations as well. The authorial voice moves via displacement towards the reader voice that is hierarchised in terms of ability (novice/experienced) and attitude (cautious/daring). The message that is distributed corresponds to expressive domain message - a re-codification of the machine code in terms of the public domain setting.

After applying the language of description to one selected game, the next step would now be to cast our gaze at other games in order to generate different categories. It is, for example, conceivable to classify computer games according to their tendency to deploy either localising or articulating strategies. A game such as 'Gex, The Return of the Gecko' recruits a fragmented narrative: Gex has to acquire remote controls in completely different worlds, full of apparently unrelated intertextual references to all kind of movies or other popular culture texts[137]. Furthermore, this game draws nearly exclusively on cartoonic resources, emulating rather a fun fair or a theme park than a movie. For these reasons, this video game can be described as deploying an articulating distributing strategy.

Since many developments of educational and entertainment software reproduce game-like formats, a major challenge would also consist in recontextualising these products within the social activity theory. To conclude this dissertation I want to

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start!"

explore this trail by briefly applying the theory to a popular and praised piece of 'educational' software such as the 'The Logical Journey of the Zoombinis'. At first sight, it seems to be even more difficult to distinguish whether this particular piece of software is a pedagogic or a market text. The claim that it enhances learning skills and supports the math standards of the 'National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' does not make it a pedagogic text. Rather it identifies schoolteachers and pupils as an important fraction of its market. Mathematical topics, such as logic or algebra, are recruited and rendered as expressive domain message. This is done to introduce a rationale for purchasing the game. Thus, this kind of educational software is still a market text. Furthermore, since the esoteric domain of mathematics is never visible, this text does not construct an apprenticed but a relayed dependent reader voice with regard to mathematics. A major difference between the Tomb Raider and the Zoombini text is that the former, contrary to the latter, does not engage in mythologising practices. The computer game does not claim to be about something other than itself. It is marketable in its own rights and is not presented as the sugaring of a pedagogic pill. The educational piece of software, however, justifies its existence on the market, by virtue of its utility in optimising the mathematical competencies of its users via an experience in a virtual world that is simulating mathematics.

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[137] One of Gex' favourite random comments is "I feel like I am in Boy Gorge's pants."

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- Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery (1997) M. Jay Roach
- Dr. No (1962) Terence Young
- Final Destination (2000) James Wong
- For Your Eyes Only (1981) John Glenn
- From Russia With Love (1963) Terence Young
- Groundhog Day (1993) Harold Ramis
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989) Steven Spielberg
- Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Arc (1981) Steven Spielberg
- Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984) Steven Spielberg
- Julius Caesar (1953) Joseph L. Mankiewicz
- Jurassic Park (1993) Steven Spielberg
- Moonraker (1979) Lewis Gilbert
- Star Wars (1977) George Lucas
- The Birds (1963) Alfred Hitchcock
- The Crow (1994) Alex Proyas
- Thelma and Louise (1991) Ridley Scott

10.3 Software

- Asteroids (1981) Atari
- Breakout (1974) Atari
- Crash Team Racing (1999) Sony Computer Entertainment
- Crime Killer (1998) Interplay Productions
- Descent (1995) Parallax Software
- Descent 2 (1996) Parallax Software
- Doom (1997) GT Interactive
- Gex, The Return of the Gecko (1998) Crystal Dynamics
- G-Police (1997) Psygnosis
- Mortal Kombat (1993) Acclaim Entertainment
- Mortal Kombat II (1994) Acclaim Entertainment
- Myth II: Soulblighter Playable Demo v1.2.1 (1999) Bungie Software
- Myth, The Fallen Lords (1997) Bungie Software
- Pac-man (1981) Midway
- Pong (1972) Atari
- Rayman (1995) Ubi Soft Entertainment
- SimCity (1989) Maxis
- SimCity 2000 (1995) Maxis
- Space Invaders (1978) Taito
- StarCraft (1994) Blizzard Entertainment
- StarCraft, Extension Set, Brood War (1994) Blizzard Entertainment
- Super Mario Brothers (1985) Nintendo
- Super Mario Brothers 2 (1988) Nintendo
- The Empire Strikes Back (1985) Atari
- The Logical Journey of the Zoombinis (1996) Broderbund.
- Tomb Raider Gold (1999) Core/Eidos Interactive/Aspyr Media
- Tomb Raider II (1998) Core/Eidos Interactive/Aspyr Media
- Tomb Raider III (1999) Core/Eidos Interactive/Aspyr Media
- X-Files (1998) Fox Interactive

Appendix A: Morphology of the Folktale

PROPP (1968) pointed out that a given action may be done by any number of different characters in a story. A story can thus be studied in terms of the functions of its various characters. Functions are to be understood as both the actions of characters and the consequences of these actions for the story. Every story begins with an 'initial situation', in which the main characters are introduced. PROPP asserts that there are exactly 31 functions and eight characters (see tables 1 & 2), although a given tale might not contain all of them. Functions often arrange themselves in pairs (struggle/victory) or in groups (villainy, dispatch, decision for counteraction, departure from home). PROPP's work is of interest because these functions – with minor adaptations – can be applied to modern narratives as well. There are two kinds of heroes. The 'victim hero' suffers from the actions of a villain and the 'seeker hero' helps others who have suffered from villainy. The important thing is what characters actually do, and not what they feel, think or intend to do. To sum up, PROPP offers what can be described as a syntagmatic analysis of narratives. His analysis focuses on the way a narrative evolves over time, as one function follows another. He helps us understand what happens in a story – how plots are structured and the roles of various characters.

Kind of character	***Functions***
villain	A, H, Pr
donor	D, F
helper	G, K, Rs, N, T
princess (and father)	M, J, Ex, U, W
dispatcher	B
hero	C, E, W
false hero	C, E, L
Table 1: Characters and Functions (from: BERGER 1997:27)	

Function			*Description*
	α	initial situation	Members of family are introduced; hero is introduced.
1.	β	absentation	One of the members of the family absents him- or herself.
2.	γ	interdiction	Interdiction addressed to hero (can be reversed).
3.	δ	violation	Interdiction is violated.
4.	ε	reconnaissance	Villain makes attempt to get information.
5.	ξ	delivery	Villain gets information about victim.
6.	η	trickery	Villain tries to deceive victim.
7.	θ	complicity	Villain is deceived.
8.	A	villainy	Villain causes harm to a member of the family; or
	a	lack	Member of the family lacks something, desires something.
9.	B	mediation	Misfortune made known; hero is dispatched.
10.	C	counteraction	Hero (seeker) agrees to counteraction.
11.	↑	departure	Hero leaves home.
12.	D	1st donor function	Hero tested, receives magical agent or helper.
13.	E	hero's reaction	Hero reacts to agent or donor.
14.	F	receipt of agent	Hero acquires use of magical agent.
15.	G	spatial change	Hero led to object of search.
16.	H	struggle	Hero and villain join in direct combat.
17.	J	branding	Hero is branded.
18.	I	victory	Villain is defeated.
19.	K	liquidation	Initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
20.	↓	return	Hero returns.
21.	Pr	pursuit, chase	Hero is pursued.
22.	Rs	rescue	Hero is rescued from pursuit.
23.	O	unrecognized arrival	Hero, unrecognized, arrives home or elsewhere.
24.	L	unfounded claims	False hero presents unfounded claims.
25.	M	difficult task	Difficult task is proposed to hero.
26.	N	solution	Task is resolved.
27.	R	recognition	Hero is recognized.
28.	Ex	exposure	False hero or villain is exposed.
29.	T	transfiguration	Hero is given a new appearance.
30.	U	punishment	Villain is punished.
31.	W	wedding	Hero is married, ascends the throne.

Table 2: PROPP's Functions (from: BERGER 1997:26)

Hero	*Villain*
seeks something	hinders hero
suffers from villain's acts	punishes hero
undergoes ordeals	makes hero undergo ordeals
is dispatched	engages in reconnaissance
gets helpers (magic powers)	has henchmen (evil skills)
heroines (rescued)	enchantresses (bewitch heroes)
seeming villainesses	false heroes shown to be evil
love	lust
young (sons)	old (fathers)
handsome	ugly (often grotesque)
individualists	collectivists
imagination, invention	technology, manpower
finds donor figure	hinders finding donor
defeats villain	loses to hero

Table 3: Polarities in Propp's Functions (from: BERGER 1997:29)

Appendix B: Raiders of the Lost Arc

This description of the adventure film 'Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Arc' is taken from BUCKLAND (1998:171-72). See LEWIS (1991) for an ideological analysis of this movie.

1. The first episode depicts Indiana Jones' (Harrison Ford) adventures in the South America jungle. He successfully retrieves a golden idol from a cave, only to have it taken away by Belloq (Paul Freeman). Belloq tries to kill Jones, but Jones escapes.

2. In the second episode we see the reverse side of Jones' character as he teaches a class of students. He is now presented as an eccentric professor. In a long expositional scene he explains the significance of the Ark of the Covenant to two government representatives. Jones is then asked to retrieve the ark before the Nazis get hold of it. This involves a detour to Nepal and a visit to Jones' former partner, Marion (Karen Allen), who possesses the headpiece to the staff of Ra that helps indicate where the ark is located. But the Nazis follow Jones to Nepal, burn down Marion's bar, and try to kill both Marion and Jones. Jones and Marion escape, and Marion decides to join Jones on his quest.

3. In Cairo, Jones and Marion again pursued by the Nazis. Marion is kidnapped and appears to die in an explosion. Jones has the headpiece interpreted, and only just escapes being poisoned.

4. Jones locates the ark and discovers that Marion is alive but being held by Belloq. In an act of symbolic exchange, Belloq and the Nazis steal the ark from Jones, but in return give him Marion. Both Marion and Jones are then sealed inside a tomb.

5. Jones and Marion escape from their incarceration, blow up a plane, and retrieve the ark after a long struggle. Marion and Jones sail away with the ark, only to be stopped by a Nazi submarine. The Nazis take Marion and the ark, but Jones succeeds in escaping.

6. On a remote island, Belloq opens the ark to devastating consequences: all who witness its contents are killed. Only Jones and Marion, who close their eyes, are spared. In an epilogue, the American government takes possession of the ark, and Jones and Marion mark their status as a couple.

Appendix C: The Moves of Lara Croft

Moving

Running: Pressing Up moves Lara forward at a running pace. Pressing Down makes Lara jump back a short distance. Pressing Left or Right turns Lara Left or Right.

Walking: By pressing the Walk button in conjunction with the Cursor Keys, Lara can carefully walk forwards or backwards. While the Walk button is held down, Lara will not fall off any edge- if you walk up to an edge Lara will automatically stop.

Side Step: Holding down the Side Step Key and then pressing the Left or Right directional keys allow Lara to side step in that direction.

Roll: Selection Roll will make Lara roll forward, and finish up facing the opposite direction. This also works when Lara is underwater. Roll may also be activated by pressing the Up and Down Cursor Keys simultaneously.

Jumping: Lara can jump in any direction, to evade her enemies. Press the Jump Key and Lara will jump straight up into the air. If you press a Cursor Key immediately after pressing Jump, Lara will jump in that direction. In addition, pressing Down or Roll straight after starting a forward jump makes Lara somersault in the air and land facing the opposite direction. This also works when jumping backwards by pressing Up or Roll immediately after takeoff. Note: by jumping straight up while holding the Action Key, Lara can "inch" her way forward and grab those tricky ledges.

Swimming

Underwater: If Lara finds a deep pool of water, she can jump in, and have a jolly good swim around. Lara can hold her breath for a short time. If she is still underwater after that she'll drown. Pressing Up, Down, Left or Right makes Lara rotate in that direction. Pressing Jump makes Lara swim. Lara can pull levers and pick up objects under water. Just position Lara as close as you can and press Action.

Swimming on the surface: Left and Right will rotate her, and Up and Down make her swim in those directions. You can also use the side step actions to swim Left or Right when on the surface of the water. Pressing Jump will make Lara dive under the surface again, while pressing Action when Lara is close to an edge will make her climb out.

Wading in shallow water: Lara won't swim in waist deep water; instead she wades. The controls are basically the same as when she is on dry land, except it is slower going and she can only jump on the spot, not in a direction.

Attacking

Lara starts the game carrying two pistols and a shotgun. Later in the game she may find some extra weapons. Note that the pistols have unlimited ammunition, but the shotgun requires shells. Hopefully you'll find some.

Shooting: Press Draw and Lara will draw her guns. If she sees something she doesn't like the look of she will point her guns at it. If there are multiple enemies, Lara will lock on to different targets, choosing the best one as she sees fit. Pressing Action while Lara is aiming at something will assign that enemy as the current target.

It will remain as the current target indefinitely while the Action button is held down, regardless of whether or not Lara loses her lock. While the Action button is held, Lara will only fire at the current target, ignoring any other enemy in the vicinity. If Lara loses sight of the enemy, it will break her lock, but that enemy will still be assigned as the current target.

The camera will track the current target, so even if Lara loses sight of it, you can still see where it is. To make Lara continue shooting the current target after she has lost her lock, simply point her in the right direction. While you have your guns out, Lara can no longer do anything that would involve the use of her hands. These actions are described below.

Other Actions

Vaulting: If Lara is faced with an obstacle that she can climb over, pressing Up and Action will make her vault onto it.

Climbing: Some walls are climbable. If Lara comes across such a surface, pressing Up and Action will make her jump up (if there is room) and catch handholds, on the wall. She will only hang on while Action is held down. She can then be made to climb up, down, left and right by pressing the cursor Keys. Pressing Jump make Lara jump backwards away from the wall.

Grabbing hold: If Lara is near to a ledge while she is jumping, pressing and holding the Action Key will allow her to grab the ledge in front of her and hang there. If a wall is climbable, Lara can catch onto it anywhere (not just ledges). Press Left or

Right, and Lara will shimmy sideways. Pressing Up will make Lara climb up to the level above. Let go of Action and Lara will drop.

Picking objects up: Lara can retrieve objects and store them in her inventory. Position Lara so that the object you want to retrieve is in front of her feet. Press the action Key and she will pick it up. Often, enemies will drop objects when they are killed so always check for goodies near their bodies before leaving the aera.

Using switches: Position Lara so that the switch is in front of her. Press the Action Key and she will use it.

Using puzzle items/ keys: Position Lara so that the object receptor is in front of her. Press the Action Key and the Inventory Ring will appear. Left and Right will allow you to select the object you want to try, and pressing Action again will use it.

Using Flares: If Lara finds herself in the dark and has any flares in her inventory, she can get one out and light it by pressing the Flare button. This will light up her surroundings for a minute or so, and while she is carrying it she can still vault or climb- they even work underwater. If she wishes to discard the flare, it can be thrown a short distance by pressing the Flare button again. She will also drop it automatically when it goes out or she draws her weapons.

Pushing/ pulling objects: Lara can push certain blocks around and use them to climb up to greater heights. Stand in front of the block and hold down Action, Lara will get into her ready stance. Once she is ready, press Down to pull the block, and Up to push it, or if you decide you no longer wish to carry on with this task, simply release the Action Key.

Looking around: Pressing the Look Key will make the camera go directly behind Lara, whatever the camera is currently doing. With the Look button held down, the Cursor Keys allow Lara to look around her. Once you let go of the key, the views returns to normal. (TIP: if you are trying to line Lara up for a jump, and the camera is in an awkward position, pressing just the Look Key on its own will show you exactly what direction she is facing)

Using Vehicles: On certain levels, Lara may encounter vehicles which she can use during the level. To get on board, move up to the side of the vehicle and press Action. Once on, the cursor Keys, control movement exactly as on foot, except a bit faster. The Walk button makes the vehicle move slowly (but it won't stop it going over edges, so be careful). Pressing Action will either make the vehicle travel much faster or fire the vehicle weapons if it has them. Note that when a vehicle is travelling faster because Action is being pressed, Lara will take damage if she crashes into anything. To get off the vehicle, press Jump and Left or Right to choose which side to exit.

Secrets

On each level there are 3 secrets items to find- The Stone Dragon, Jade Dragon and the Gold Dragon. World-class "Tomb Raiders" will try to find all three.

(From the accompanying booklet Tomb Raider II, pp. 7-13)

Appendix D: Lara Croft's Background

Curriculum Vitae:

Vital Statistics:
Name: Lara Croft [aristocratic surname]
Nationality: British [as James Bond]
Date of Birth: February 14, 1968 [St Valentine's Day]
Birthplace: Wimbledon, Surrey, England
Marital Status: Single [she must be available]
Blood Group: AB neg. [very rare]
Height: 5 ft. 9 in.
Weight: 132 lbs
Measurements: 34D-24-35
Hair color: Brunette
Eye Color: Brown

Education:
Swiss Finishing School (1986-1989)
Gordonstoun Boarding School (1984-1986)
Wimbledon High School for Girls (1979-1984)
Private tutor (1971-1979)

Sports: She's no fan of team sports, bur prefers instead free climbing and shooting. [idividualistic hero]

Background: Growing up as the daughter of Lord Henshingly Croft in the safe world of nobility, Lara discovered the Scottish Mountains and free climbing while she was at Gordonstoun. During her years in Switzerland, Lara took up extreme skiing. In search of new challenges, Lara traveled to the Himalayas. As the only survivor of the ensuing plane crash, her whole attitude changed. She vowed to be free of her existence as privileged daughter of a noble household, and become the independent adventuress she is today. Her parents, who wanted to marry her off to the Earl of Farrington, cut her off financially. Lara lives of the royalties from her travel diaries and spends her time amassing exciting experiences.

From: COUPLAND & WARD 1998:29; CURTIS et al. 2000:82

Appendix E: Stella's Walkthrough

Stella's walkthrough is available at the following URLs:

Level one (The Great Wall):

http://www.tombraiders.net/stella/TR2walk/2level1.html

http://www.tombraiders.net/stella/TR2walk/greatwall2.html

Level two (Venice):

http://www.tombraiders.net/stella/TR2walk/2level2.html

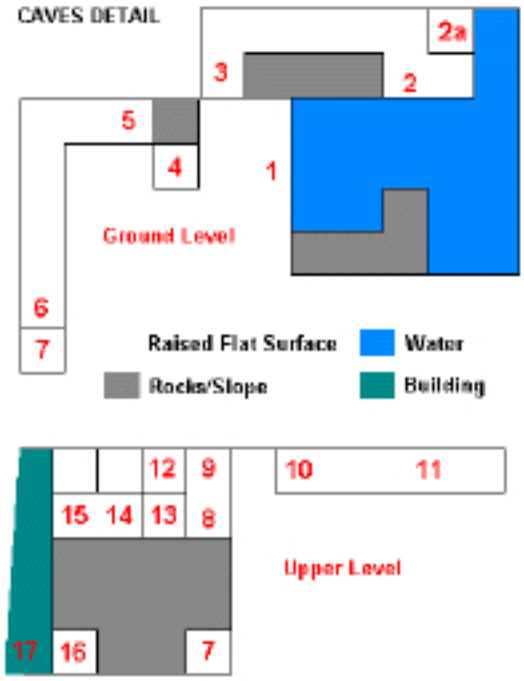
LEVEL 1: GREAT WALL

Kills: 23 **Items:** 4 (8 and grenade launcher)* plus 2 keys and 3 secrets

*STARTING INVENTORY: small med-pack, large med-pack, 2 flares, pistols (unlimited ammo), shotgun with 2 shells. (*Under found items, the number in parentheses shows total including extra items granted for finding all three secrets.)*

First a movie: Lara jumps out of a helicopter and descends a rope to the ground near the Great Wall of China.

CAVE WITH POOL: The level itself begins in a cave at the base of the wall. You'll need to climb up the rocks to the tower. If you're new to Tomb Raider and are having trouble negotiating this climb, the diagram caves.gif (also online at http://tombraiders.net/stella/images/caves.gif), along with the series of screenshots at http://tombraiders.net/stella/TR2walk/greatwall2.html may help. I refer to areas marked with letters the descriptions that follow.



Cross the cavern and wade into the water (1). Climb onto the rocks at left (2 or 2a). If you like, turn and shoot at the tiger that emerges below. You don't have to kill it since you're going up, not down. And tigers are endangered, you know. ;-)

Follow the ledge to the end (3) then do a standing jump to the block ahead (4). Turn right and jump to the next ledge (5). Follow this ledge to its end (6) and climb onto the rock in front of you (7). Reverse and do a running jump to the ledge across from you (8). This ledge is short. To the right, across a small gap, is a longer ledge that spans the wall you were facing when you first entered the cave. Jump across to this ledge (from 9 to 10) and follow it to the end (11),

where you'll find **SECRET #1**, the Silver Dragon. From up here you can kill a second tiger on the cave floor if you like.

Turn around and return across the small gap (back to 9) then climb up three blocks--two waist high (12 and 13), one taller (14). Look to the left to see the flat area you'll need to jump to next. Stand on the slightly sloped surface near the wall (15) and take a running jump to the flat area (16), then pull up into the building (17).

FIRST GUARDHOUSE: Stand on the trap door to drop down (safely) into the room below. Swim/wade out of the pool and go to the top of the stairs. Do a running jump and grab the ledge near the switch. Pull up. Pull the switch to open the exit door.

POOL BELOW THE WALL: Go out onto the wall and kill 3 crows who'll approach from the other building. Continue toward the second building, then take the slide to the right down into the water. You'll find the GUARDHOUSE KEY In a small underwater cave (to the right if you're facing away from the wall). Climb out of the water and kill the tiger. *(NOTE: If you like, you can tread water near the left side of the pool until he runs off in that direction, then climb out and hit him with two shotgun blasts.)*

SECOND GUARDHOUSE: Face the wall and climb up on the rocks to the right of the pool. Use the key to unlock the guardhouse door. Enter and kill 3 spiders. Climb the ladder, kill another spider and take the RUSTY KEY, which unlocks the exit door below. Go through the exit and continue to the next room. 3 spiders will come down from the ceiling and another spider will come in behind you, so kill all of them. Take the shotgun shells and large med-pack from the skeleton. There's a large stone block in front of the exit. Move it out of the way and go through this opening. Slide down the ramp to the right and step into the water.

GAUNTLET OF TRAPS: This area is a trap in which sharp blades are shot across the room from various holes. To clear it, go to the left wall and jump and grab the crevice above. Hang and traverse all the way to the right, and the blades will pass harmlessly below. Drop into the water, reverse underwater and swim to the corner near the door. Surface and pull up to the right side of the shooting blades.

The next few areas include a series of hazards, which you'll have to do in sequence in order to get through. Save your game here, since you'll probably need several attempts. First comes a series of broken floor tiles with deadly spikes below. Run over these, then keep running, cutting to the right as you enter the next room. You'll be pursued by rolling boulders, so keep running to the door on the left. Leap over the spikes to land on a slide, which will deposit you in a room with spiked walls encroaching. Unless you're really fast, skip the automatic pistol clips on the floor near the skeleton and immediately pull up into the opening. *(NOTE: If you want those clips, here's how to do it: Slide down into the room and immediately press Look to get Lara's perspective back. Jump left to land right on the clips, pick them up then jump forward to the opening and pull up.)* Here you can catch your breath and save your game.

(NOTE: For the double boulder trap at the beginning of this sequence, you can also run straight forward just to the middle of the slope, or all the way to the wall. Then the boulders wil roll past and you can head toward the spikes

afterwards.)

Now, run down the next hallway, over the collapsing floor with spikes below, leaping over the three slicing blades as you run. At the end of the hall, cut to the left. If you can manage to do it before the spiked walls close in, pick up **SECRET#2**, the Jade Dragon. Continue running down the next long hallway, keeping to the right to avoid more spiked walls moving in from the left. Slide down into the next room. Roll when you land to face the opposite direction from the spiked wall coming at you. Then run onto the collapsing floor to fall to safety below. Whew!

Ahead you'll see two huge rolling blades. In front of them is a skeleton with a small med-pack, which you can pick up safely if you don't get too close to the first blade. Now, run carefully past the blades and emerge in a cave above a huge cavern. There are 2 spiders in the area near the doorway to your right, and 3 more spiders will descend if you approach the zip line. Take care of them now so you don't have to worry about them later on.

DOWN INTO THE CAVERN: Don't take the zip line yet, or you'll miss quite a bit of action. Instead, stand at the edge of the huge cavern near the zip line and look down. You'll see a flat, square ledge with some moss growing on it to your right. Stand with your back to the cavern and hang and drop down to this ledge. Pull up to grab the crevace in front of you and traverse to the right till you can pull up into a small cave. Follow the path, picking up a box of flares on the way, until you reach a shaft with a ladder. Climb onto the small ladder, climb to the right then down the long, dark shaft to the cavern floor below. When you can't climb down any further, drop to the floor. You don't really need flares here since there's nothing to find, but go ahead and light one if you like.

Enter the cavern and advance just to the two skeletons. You'll start to hear a rumbling, so either prepare to fight the T-Rex, or run back to the tunnel opening for some cover and plug away at him from there. When Mr. Rex is dead, cross the cavern to an opening in the middle of the other short side. Here you'll need a flare to see and retrieve **SECRET #3**, the Gold Dragon. (If you've gotten all three secrets, you'll also receive a bonus of a small med-pack, 3 pairs of grenades and the GRENADE LAUNCHER. You'll have other chances to acquire this weapon if you miss it here.)

(A WORD OF CAUTION: I HIGHLY recommend saving all or most of your grenades for the last few levels of the game. There are a few enemies there who are quite easily dispatched using grenades and very, very hard to kill otherwise. Now, don't say I didn't warn you.)

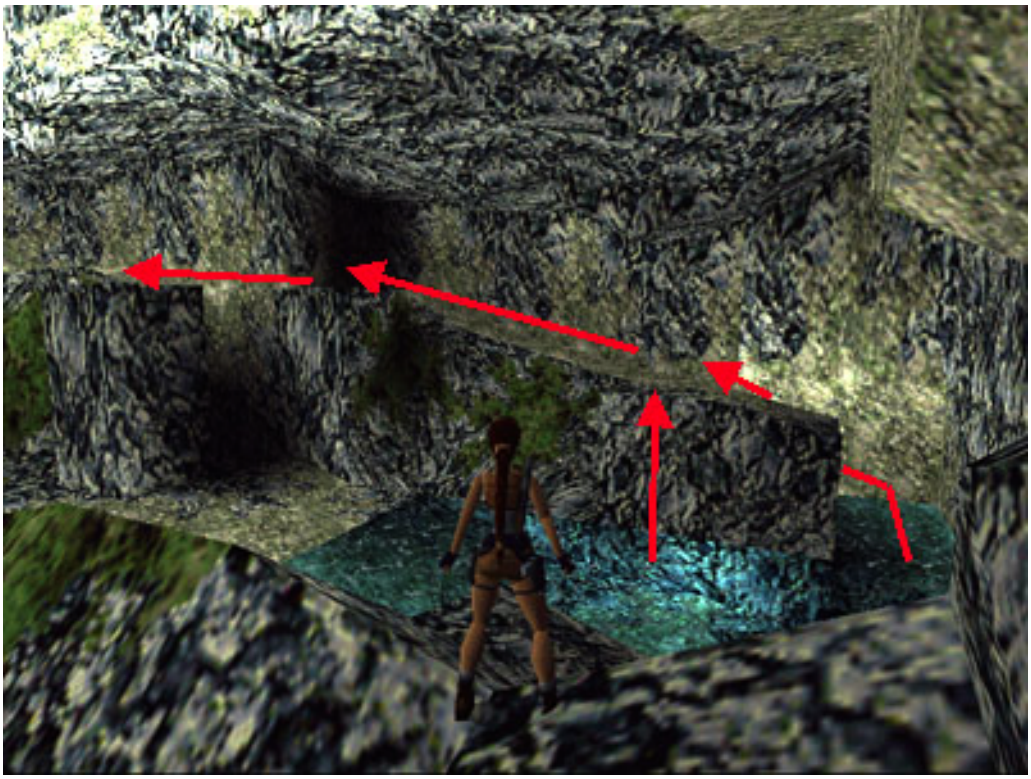
By now you'll be hearing more stomping and roaring. That's Mrs. Rex come to mourn her poor departed husband. Put her out of her misery, then return to the tunnel by which you entered. Follow the tunnel until you come to the step. Climb up onto it, turn around and jump up to grab the ladder. Climb all the way to the top of the ladder (don't get off on the left where you climbed on) and you'll come out near the zip line.

THE EXIT: Now, grab the zip line and hold on as you slide down to the opposite side of the cavern. Try to let go before the end of the ride to drop onto the green area. Two tigers charge from the doorway opposite. Kill both, then head through

the doorway. You'll emerge near a big wooden door, which should look familiar if you watched the opening movie. *(NOTE: Perhaps the opening in the rocks on the left was originally intended to lead somewhere, but in the final game it's unreachable.)* Approach the door to finish the level.

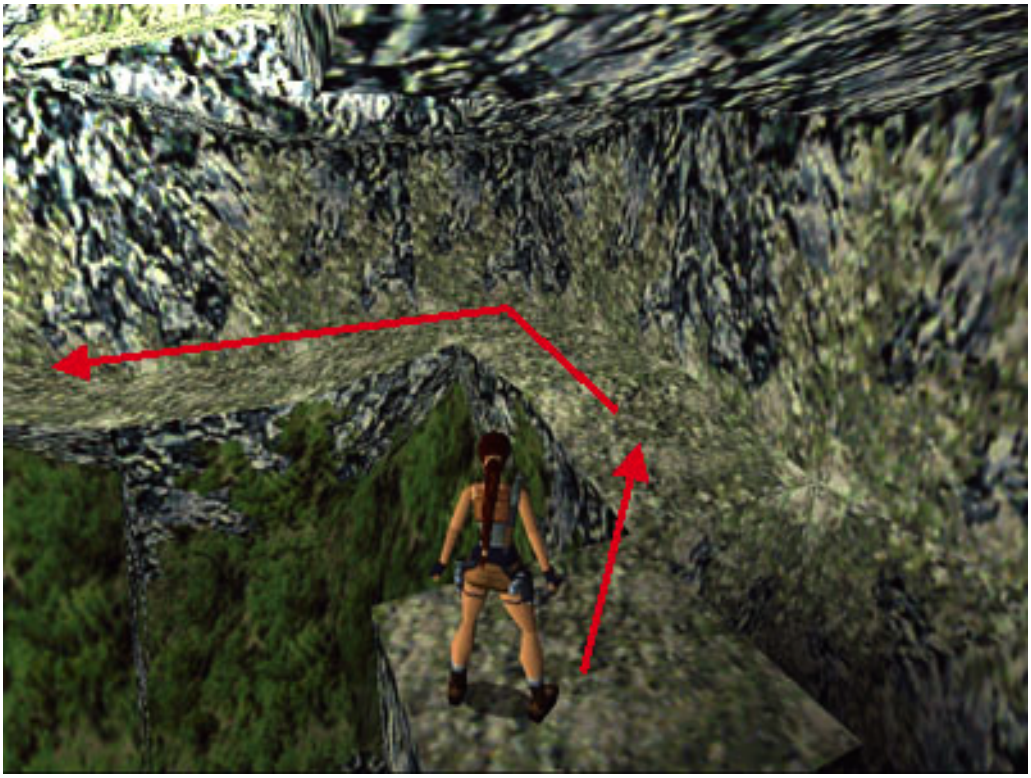
Next, a cut scene, in which Lara has words with a member of the Fiama Nera cult. Now you're off to scenic Venice. . . .

Great Wall Detail

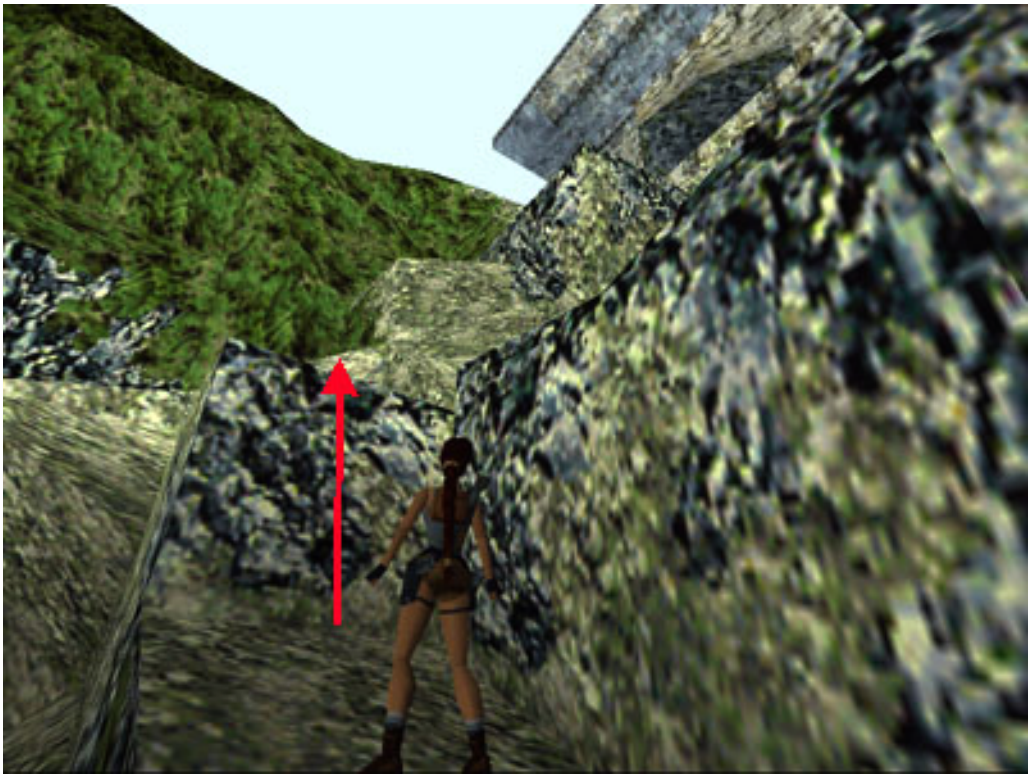


(1) Climb out of the pool onto the rock ledge (lower or rightmost arrow in screenshot above). Follow the ledge to the end, then do a standing jump to the block ahead. (This is shown in screenshots 1 and 2, above and below.)

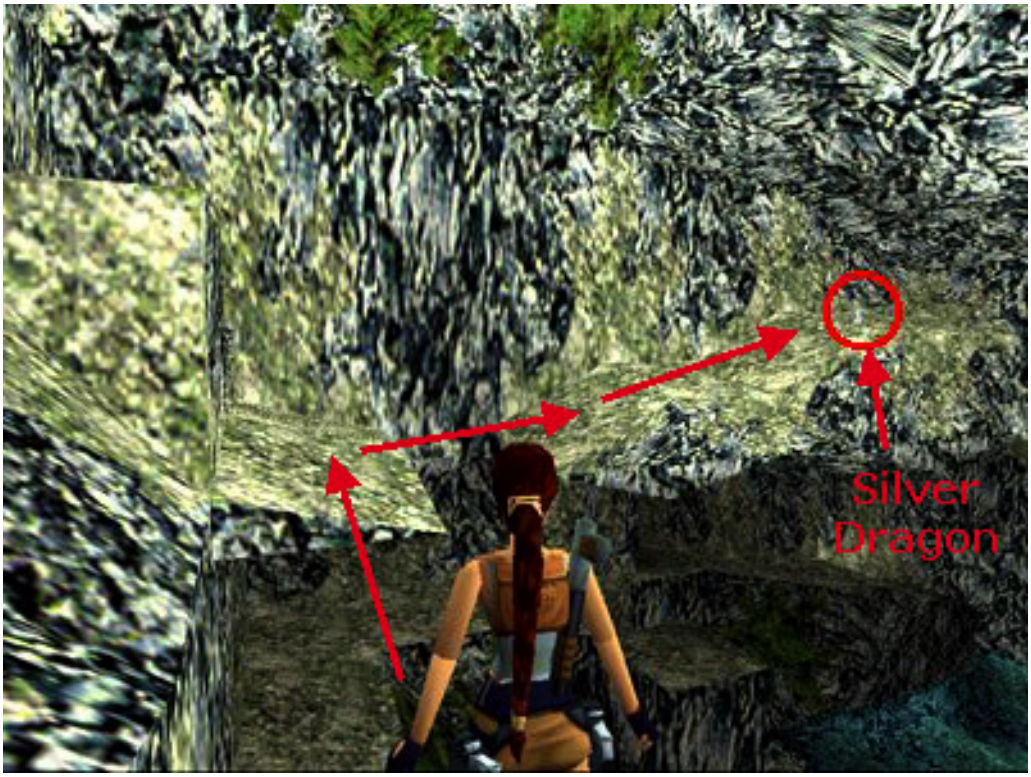
(2)



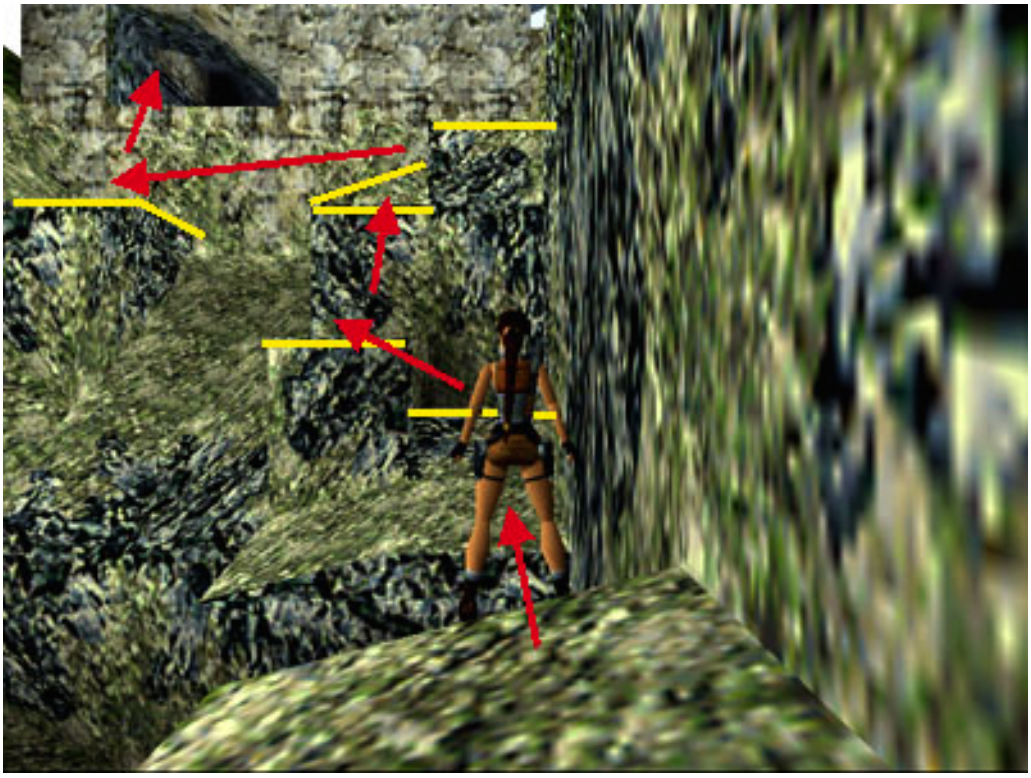
(3) Turn right and jump to the next ledge. Follow this ledge to its end. . .



(4) . . . and climb onto the rock in front of you.



(5) Reverse and do a running jump to the ledge across from you. This ledge is short. To the right, across a small gap, is a longer ledge that spans the wall you were facing when you first entered the cave. Jump across to this ledge and follow it to the end, where you'll find the Silver Dragon.



(6) Turn around and return across the small gap, then climb up three blocks—two waist high, one taller. Look to the left to see the flat area you'll need to jump to next. Stand on the slightly sloped surface near the wall and take a running jump to the flat area, then pull up into the building.

[Return to the Great Wall Walkthrough]

LEVEL 2: VENICE

Kills: 24 **Items:** 19 (23)* plus automatic pistols, 3 keys and 3 secrets

*(*Under found items, the number in parentheses shows total including extra items granted for finding all three secrets.)*

BOATHOUSE AND VILLA: This level begins in an alley. Advance forward, taking care of a doberman that charges from the courtyard ahead. A sniper will fire at you from a balcony on the right, so take care of him too. He's carrying a key, but you'll have to come back for it later, since the balcony is too high to reach from here. Proceed down the alley on the left of where you came in. Another dog and a bat-wielding thug will try and stop you, so kill them too, then take the thug's small med-pack.

Across the dock is the large wooden door of the boathouse. Swim underneath the door and push a button on the far wall, which opens a door in one of the buildings you passed earlier. Swim back out and climb onto the dock next to the small wooden building. Enter this building and take the flares off the table. Push the button to open the trap door and either climb the ladder or pull up to the second floor. Push another button here to open a second trap door, and climb onto the roof.

The building you're standing on abuts a larger building. Shoot out the window and go in. A doberman is on guard in the checkerboard-tiled room to the left. Kill it, then leave this room for now and exit through the window opposite the one you came in. Jump to the red awning, then to the balcony and take the BOATHOUSE KEY from the sniper you shot earlier.

Return to the checkerboard room, go over the glassed-in walkway and throw a switch which opens a door outside. Return to the checkerboard room, shoot out the window and jump from the windowsill to the red awning across the canal. Go left across three red awnings to the door you just opened with the switch. Go in and throw another switch to open the large door below.

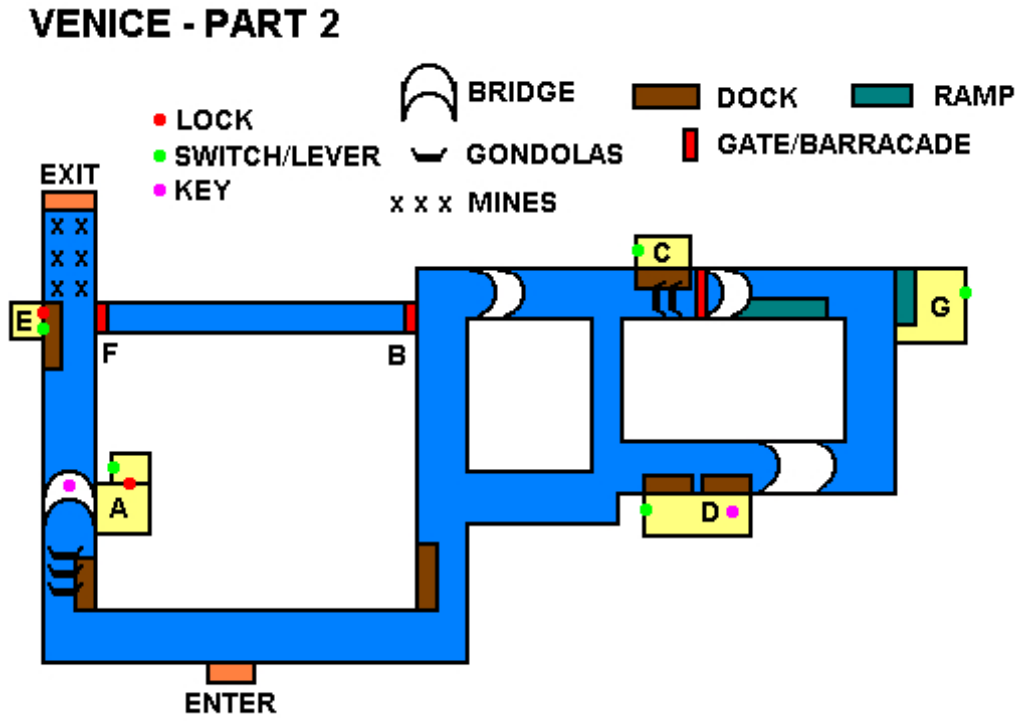
Jump down into the water, swim under the boathouse door and use the key to unlock the door. This cues a thug with a gun to appear on the dock by the wooden building. Swim out of the boathouse first and take care of him, relieving him of his AUTOMATIC PISTOLS. Then go back, get the boat and drive it through the door near the chain link fence, which you just opened with the switch above.

IN BETWEEN (BOAT LOCK): On the right, near this entrance is a small passage containing **SECRET #1**, the Silver Dragon, plus some flares. If you like, you can take the ladder down from here and kill 2 rats. Get back in the boat and continue straight. Turn right and take the boat over a waterfall. In the water below the falls is **SECRET #2**, the Gold Dragon. After retrieving it, take the only exit from this room into a room with many pillars. Under the water just to the left of where you enter are 2 sets of Uzi clips. On the right is the ledge with the 2 rats you may have killed earlier. On the far left is another ledge with a door, a window and a ladder going up.

There's a rat on this ledge as well; kill it before continuing. The door doesn't open, so draw your guns and approach the window. Lara will aim at the thug

behind the window, so shoot it out and dispatch the thug. Then take his auto pistol clips and the shotgun shells in the dark corner. Maneuver the boat into the alcove to the right of the ladder (note the lever high on the left wall). This is actually a BOAT LOCK, which will raise you up to the next area. Return to the room where you killed the bad guy and pull the switch to close the lock doors and raise the water level. Climb the ladder, jump in the water and pull the lever to open the exit doors.

CANALS: The next area is somewhat labyrinthine, so I've included a map, venice.gif (also online at http://tombraiders.net/stella/images/venice.gif). It's not to scale but more of a schematic. The orange block marked ENTER is the BOAT LOCK where you come into this area. I refer to areas marked with letters in the descriptions that follow. You can probably manage without the map, but it may help.



ROOF GARDEN: Go left at the entrance, turn the corner and ram through the three gondolas to clear a path. Before proceeding, get out at the dock at which the gondolas were parked. Climb onto the platform and jump across the canal, grabbing the red awning and pulling up onto it. Jump over to the stone bridge on your right. A doberman and a thug with a bat rush you from the left, another baddie with a gun from the left, so take care of all three. You can jump back down to the awning or dock if you need to. The bat thug has a large med-pack, which he'll no longer need, and the gun thug has a STEEL KEY. Go into the roof garden (A) and use the steel key to unlock the door. Enter, drop through the door in the floor and flip a switch to open the first of two metal gates (B). When you return to the roof garden, a guy with a gun is waiting. Kill him and take 2 sets of automatic pistol clips.

STONE DOCK: Another bad guy is patrolling the stone dock down the canal on the left. You may be able to snipe him from the bridge. When he's dead, go and

lift 2 sets of M-16 clips off him. There's a locked door here (E), so next you'll need to find a key. Or, you can get the key first and pick up the ammo when you return. There's also an extra motor boat.

Return to the area where you came in. Around the corner (after passing the BOAT LOCK on your right), is a dock with another armed thug. Either park next to the dock and jump out onto it, or leave the boat near the boat lock and swim around the corner, climb onto the dock, then take out the bad guy. Pick up a large med-pack and 2 boxes of shotgun shells from the body. From here, you can take the boat or swim.

Continue straight past the dock where you just were, take the second right under a white stone bridge. Ahead is a dock with 2 gondolas nearby. Ram the gondolas, since you'll need a clear path here later on. When you step out on the dock, a bad guy with a bat comes through the door. Kill him and take the small med-pack he's carrying. Enter the building (C), killing 2 rats, then flip the switch that opens a door elsewhere (D).

Head through the narrow waterway across from the dock. Make a left and get out at the covered doorway. This is the door that you just opened. When you step out here, a thug with a gun appears on the other dock just to the right. You can kill him now or wait and do it from above (the latter is probably easier). Enter the building (D) to find a room with shallow water and ladders on the walls. On the floor is an IRON KEY. The door you came in closes behind you, so climb up through the hole in the floor. You're met on the floor above by a thug with a bat and a dog. Kill them and take the small med-pack off the thug. Pull the switch that opens the exit door. If you didn't kill him earlier, you can shoot the thug below through the gap between the right side of the door and the wall.

The iron key opens the door at the stone dock (E). Head back there. Unlock the door and take out a goon with a gun who emerges, then relieve him of a small med-pack. (Don't forget to search the other corpse on the dock if you didn't earlier.) Go inside and flip a switch that opens the second metal gate (F).

THE EXIT: There are underwater mines (x x x on the diagram) in front of the exit, which is under the clock beyond the stone dock. At this point, it's a good idea to take one of your boats and set them off. Drive toward the mines and jump out at the last minute. You'll destroy the boat, but you can take the other one.
Now proceed to the room with the switch for the exit door (G): From the stone dock, go through the narrow waterway with the iron gates you opened, continue straight under the white stone bridge, turn right down the narrow waterway, then left past the two docks and under a bridge. Now turn left and you'll end up near two doorways--one small, one large. Inside this room is the button that opens the exit, guarded by a bad guy with a gun. Kill him from outside.

Across the way is a long wooden ramp leading up to a glassed-in walkway. Go up, shoot out the windows, enter the walkway and take **SECRET #3**, the Jade Dragon (plus 4 sets of automatic pistol clips if you've gotten all of the secrets).

Return to the room with the button (G). Search the corpse there for some auto pistol clips. Now comes the fun part: a run for the exit. When you push the button, the exit doors open. As soon as you go over the ramp, a timer starts and

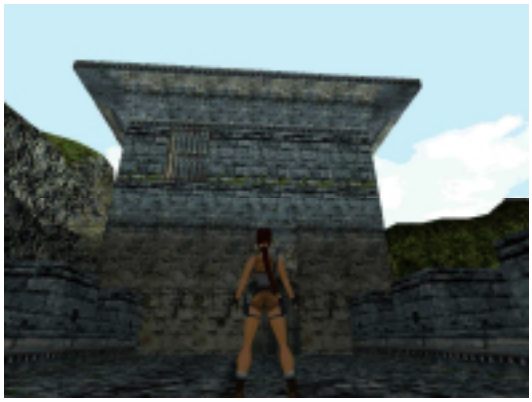
you'll need to get through the exit doors before the bell stops tolling and they close. There are two ways to do this: the James Bond way and the cheater way.

Bond: Take your time getting in your boat. Position it facing the left side of the ramp. Now gun the engine (forward + Action) and take off over the exit ramp and up the long wooden ramp. Still holding Action, sail through the glassed-in walkway and land in the canal below. Go straight under the white bridge, corner left then right, go under the metal gate, through the narrow waterway and under the other metal gate. Make a hard right then gun it through the exit. Whew!

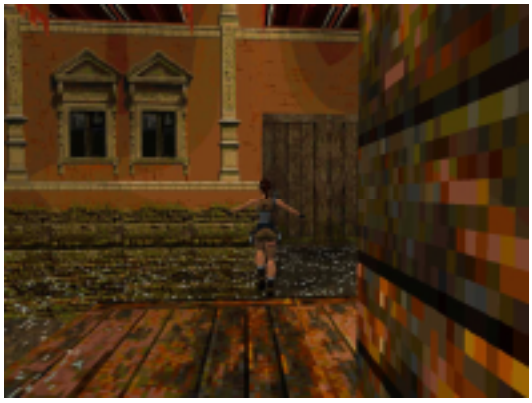
Cheater: Park the boat outside the exit room. Go in, press the button and swim out under the door. This way the timer never starts and you can drive your boat or swim to the exit at your leisure. Less stressful but also less fun.

Appendix F: More Screenshots from Tomb Raider II

Along The Great Wall

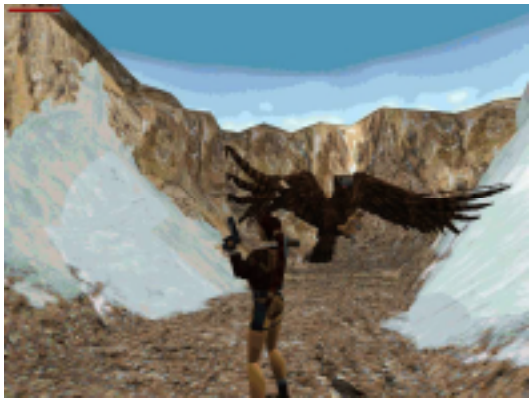
In Venice



Opponents






49'18

Lara's House