

Gender and Videogames: the political valency of Lara Croft

Maja Mikula, University of Technology Sydney

The Face: Is Lara a feminist icon or a sexist fantasy?

Toby Gard: Neither and a bit of both. Lara was designed to be a tough, self-reliant, intelligent woman. She confounds all the sexist cliches apart from the fact that she's got an unbelievable figure. Strong, independent women are the perfect fantasy girls – the untouchable is always the most desirable.

(Interview with Lara's creator Toby Gard in *The Face* magazine, June 1997)

Lara Croft is a fictional character: a widely popular videogame¹ superwoman and recently also the protagonist of the blockbuster film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001). Her body is excessively feminine - her breasts are massive and very pert, her waist is tiny, her hips are rounded and she wears extremely tight clothing.

She is also physically strong, can fight and shoot, has incredible gymnastic abilities and is a best selling writer.

Germaine Greer does not like Lara Croft. In her latest book, *The Whole Woman* (1999), Greer has unequivocally condemned the enforcement of artificial and oppressive ideals of femininity through pop icons such as the Barbie Doll. Lara Croft, whose 'femaleness' is clearly shaped by a desire to embody male sexual fantasies, is the antithesis of Greer's 'whole woman'; Greer calls her a: 'sergeant-major with balloons stuffed up his shirt [...] She's a distorted, sexually ambiguous, male fantasy. Whatever these characters are, they're not real women' (Jones, 2001).

She may not be a 'real woman', but on the other hand Lara is clearly a 'positive image' for women, as Linda Artel and Susan Wengraf defined the term in 1976:

The primary aim of [annotated guide] *Positive Images* was to evaluate media materials from a feminist perspective. We looked for materials that had at least one of the following characteristics: presents girls and women, boys and men with non-stereotyped behaviour and attitudes: independent, intelligent women: adventurous, resourceful girls ... presents both sexes in non-traditional work or leisure activities ... women flying planes, etc (Artel and Wengraf, 1976 [1990]: 9)

As the sole survivor of a plane crash, who used her wilderness skills to stay alive for two weeks - as well as being a trained rock climber, expert shooter, motorcyclist and world famous archaeologist - there is little doubt that Lara qualifies for this category. It is for this reason that a (female) participant in the WomenGamers Discussion Forum can lionise Lara as a role model: 'I like the fact that she's a loner. She doesn't rely upon any male character to lead her around, or to rescue her if she were to break a nail.'

Lara is everything that is bad about representations of women in culture, and everything good - and thus analysing the circulation and discussion of Lara in Western culture allows us to explore the current predicament of feminist identity politics, epitomizing the range of contemporary feminist stances in relation to the body and the consumer culture of late capitalism. In particular, changes in the way that texts circulate - changes which have been enabled by changes in communication technologies - make it more difficult to generalise about the function of media texts. The fact that Lara Croft has no obviously attributable author, is so easily taken up by fan-producers, and is readily detached from the circumstances of her initial production makes it difficult to make any convincing claims about what such a text 'really' means.

Identification/objectification

As feminist debates have begun to explore the degree to which it is possible to understand a sexualised performance of traditional femininity as a form of empowerment (see Wolf, 1993; Roiphe, 1993; Denfeld, 1995; Lumby, 1997, p. 8), many commentators have pointed to a recent

tendency to allow female characters to be physically and emotionally powerful and independent - so long as they're young, pretty and have large breasts (see Inness, 1999). In a way, the debates which take place about Lara are familiar ones: accepting that her character is everything that an earlier generation of feminists wished for, does this become irrelevant when she still has to win her place in popular culture by being a sex object?

It is useful to begin thinking about such a question by addressing the ways in which players of Tomb Raider - the game in which Lara was introduced to the world - are invited to relate to this character. The concept of 'identification' with characters is often employed to discuss the function of films and television programs in offering gender roles to audiences. But this term isn't obviously useful for making sense of the ways in which the texts of video games work. Are players invited to 'identify' with Lara? Or, to complete the familiar binary, to 'objectify' her (see Mulvey, 1975 [1990])?

Until recently there were few female characters in video games. Women were largely represented by 'damsels in distress' – vulnerable victims of violence, to be rescued by muscular male heroes. It was the first Tomb Raider game (1996) that broke away from the familiar pattern. Instead of being the 'object' of rescue, Lara Croft is the protagonist and the driving force of the game plot. Since Lara's groundbreaking entry into this traditionally male world, the number of female characters in action videogames has been on a steady increase, but it is still considerably lower than the number of males (Mayfield, 2000).

Following the established videogame-industry marketing trends, developers of Tomb Raider, Derby-based company Core Design, identified the target audience for the first Tomb Raider game as 'males between 15 and 26 years of age' (Pretzsch, 2000). In the early stages of development, two alternative protagonists were considered – one male and one female. The female character, initially called Laura Cruise, finally prevailed, despite fears in the marketing department that such an unheard-of choice would undermine the sales of the product. But is this target audience - the young men who take on the character of Lara in order to play - primarily being invited to take sexual pleasure from *looking* at her? Or to enjoy the pleasures of *being* her? We know that there are certainly masculine pleasures to 'being' Lara, even with her unprecedentedly feminine body. The violence in Tomb Raider is understood to be desirable for men. A study undertaken two years ago by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (AAUW) indicates that girls 'often dislike violent video games and prefer

personalized, interactive, role-playing games' (Mayfield, 2000); and the 'girl games' which multiplied on the market since the mid-1990s almost exclusively focused on shopping, fashion, dating and appearance. So Lara's behaviour is understood to be 'masculine', and to appeal to men. The idea that violence could appeal to women is unthinkable in the logic of computer game marketing.

But can men 'identify' with Lara as they perform her violence? The binary logic of 'identification/objectification', so well developed in film theory, doesn't seem very useful for thinking about the ways in which Lara Croft functions. To complicate things even further, research suggests that the very idea of 'identifying' with a character is a gendered one. According to one study, the process of identification is more important for female gamers, who tend to become 'irritated' when they cannot identify with their female character (Wright, 2000). Men are not so keen to 'identify' with video game characters at all; and it is not obvious that the game encourages them to do so. Despite the first-person format of the gameplay, Tomb Raider enables the gamer to 'impersonate' Lara while having her body in full view. For the player, Lara can be both 'self' and 'other' - at the same time. An enthusiastic male reviewer of the first Tomb Raider game has declared that 'having a *person* in the game' [emphasis is mine] made him 'more cautious and protective'. Ironically, he found himself not 'just controlling Lara', but 'looking after her as well' (Olafson, 1997, p. 100). His experience of the game thus encapsulates the patriarchal rhetoric of 'control' and 'care', by a male subject of a female object. Ironically, even when offered empowerment through a possibility of conflating the subject-object distinction, male players seem to view themselves in the position of the subject and see Lara as the object of their 'control' and 'care', with her exaggerated sexuality subjected to their disciplining gaze. When the latest Tomb Raider game title, *The Angel of Darkness*, introduced a new male character, Kurtis Trent, who is controlled by players just like Lara, Lara's aficionados expressed hostility to (jealousy of?) the new male character: 'he better not take over too much of the game, cause I need to spend some quality time with Lara, as I haven't talked with her in ages'; or 'I hate to control a male in Tomb Raider. Tomb Raider is the world of Lara!'² For these male players, it is obvious that at least part of the pleasure of playing this game involved 'controlling' a female character as feisty and attractive as Lara; while 'controlling' a male character is perceived to be somehow wrong.

All of this seems straightforward enough: for these male players, even as they 'are' Lara, they are distanced from, controlling - perhaps 'objectifying' the character. But the ambivalence of Lara's function is emphasised when we notice that contributions by female participants to an Internet forum on Tomb Raider³ indicate that women's experiences of the game are quite different from men's; and that the empowerment activated by game-play is strongly influenced by different gamers' experience and enactment of gender codes. It involves experimentation with and testing of these codes reminiscent of the widespread gender swapping practices in the virtual worlds of Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs).⁴ By and large, women enjoy 'being' Lara, rather than controlling her. According to one female gamer, Lara is 'everything a bloke wants and everything a girl wants to be'; for others, she is a role model, symbolizing 'adventure, independence, possibility and strength'. One enthusiastic woman gamer admits: 'Heck, I imagine I AM [sic] Lara when I'm playing, I know some might say "come on, it's only pixels" but what Lara and her environment is made of is irrelevant in my eyes.' The game makes it possible to be excited about identifying with this strong and capable archaeologist; or to enjoy looking after an excessively feminine character.

The death of the author?

Lara was originally conceived by Englishman Toby Gard: another female 'creation' by a male 'creator' in a long series of patriarchal representations of women, epitomized in the western tradition by the story of Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (X 243-298). Gard's original description of his creation included elements of an intentionally ironic masculinist imaginary, such as 'Lara likes to work with underprivileged children and the mentally disabled. She has a degree in needlework [...]' (Pretzsch, 2000) A twenty-something year old familiar with products of a globalized popular culture, Gard went on to imbue his vision with elements of such iconic creations as Indiana Jones and James Bond. According to media reports, Gard had consciously resisted fitting his heroine out with 'spangly thongs and metal bras so popular with digital women', because he felt that she 'had more dignity' (Jones, 2001).

Soon after the release of Tomb Raider I, Toby Gard left Core to found his own company, Confounding Factor, purportedly because he wanted to 'have greater control over the new characters and games [he] wanted to design' (Gibbon, 2001). He described his distancing from his mind-child as 'similar to losing a love', since 'you're not really allowed to go near her' (Snider, 2001). Since then, Core and Eidos have avoided naming a single person as Lara's creator and have consistently emphasized a collective authorship of the game, reinforced by Eidos/Core franchise ownership.

After Gard's departure from Core, in the sequels to the original game, both Lara's aggression and sex appeal steadily increased, effectively blending a death wish with the pleasure principle and thus digging deeply into the essence of the Freudian Id. In an editorial review at WomenGamers.Com, we read that

[in] TombRaider II and III, Lara became an obnoxious sex object, more intent on stealing the hearts of men than relating to her female following. Her physique became more and more unrealistic as the series progressed. Her attitude became more deliberately sexual as well.

(Lara Croft Tomb Raider Series 2001)

Lara's transformation is emblematic of the impossibility of 'ownership' of products of popular culture in our media-saturated world. Her estrangement from her original creator(s)/owner(s) can be observed at two levels: at one level, the embryonic Lara 'betrays' Toby Gard by developing into a consumer product 'owned' by Core and Eidos; at the other, Lara is reconceptualized through media manipulations which by nature cannot be controlled by either of her creator(s)/owner(s). The first 'betrayal' involves moulding of the character by the Core design team, to simultaneously anticipate and reproduce the demands of the market.

This type of 'betrayal' has been common in cultural production for centuries, but with the advent of new technologies it has assumed a new dimension. In the past, products of the so-called 'high culture' were likely to be consciously shaped by their authors with

reference to the tastes and desires of influential patrons instrumental in supporting the production stage and/or facilitating the circulation of the final product. By contrast, works pertaining to popular culture often cannot be attributed to a single author and their ever-changing individual re-enactments reflect the artist/performer's expectations of her/his temporary audience (Lord, 1960). The new technologies of computer-mediated communication have refashioned the circulation of popular culture mainly by undermining the possibility of 'fixing' the audience and thus anticipating their likes and dislikes, as well as their cultural knowledge, experience or skills which would equip them to fully appreciate a given product.

To appeal to an essentially unpredictable global market, Lara had to be conceived as an 'empty sign', which would allow diverse, often contradictory inscriptions and interpretations. To quote Lara's cinematic avatar Angelina Jolie, Lara is 'a bit of everything. She's like every kind of sexy Italian actress I've ever watched, and yet she's also that guy in Crocodile Hunter in Australia – completely in love with danger' (Kolmos, 2001, p. 105). In fact, the only 'inscription' undertaken and proliferated by Core Design and Eidos Interactive is the one understood unmistakably to signify power. The heroine's constructed identity is no more than an amalgam of values representing all the different faces of empowerment in advanced capitalist societies: class, wealth, appearance, physical fitness, strong will, intelligence and independence.

Lara is comfortable with ambiguities and contradictions – they are in fact the very 'material' she is made of.⁵ The values of an idealized world of security and tradition are brought in by means of Lara's constructed biography, well known to the faithful, which was conspicuously created in response to public demand only after the first game was finished. Lara Croft is a member of British aristocracy, a graduate of Gordonstoun, Prince Charles' alma mater, with a mission to '[prepare] students for a full and active role as international citizens in a changing world'⁶. Following a plane crash in the Himalayas, where she is the only survivor and struggles for two weeks to stay alive in the wilderness, Lara renounces the safety of her former *modus vivendi* in favour of a life

of uncertainty and adventure. Despite this rupture, she remains branded by the world she originates from, through her polished British accent, tea-drinking habit and – when considered appropriate – through her complete mastery of what may be considered a ‘refined’ social behaviour.

Lara thus brings together the aspirations of modernism – the imperialist pursuit of power and global prestige – and their postmodern problematization and fragmentation. Paradoxically, she critiques neo-imperialism by enacting her own complicity with it. The element of ‘critique’, however, may be promoted or indeed entirely overlooked in individual readings. Lara’s appeal, as well as that of other virtual characters created for a global market, rests on this multivocality, parodic potential and a capacity for endless contextualization. In fact, each contextualization by definition reduces the multivocality and jeopardizes the characters’ universal, i.e. globally marketable appeal. This is particularly evident when the characters are contextualized in environments and the media other than the virtual environment of the videogame medium they originated from. Lara’s appearance in advertising⁷ and film⁸ has by necessity ‘betrayed’ some of the heroine’s virtual possibilities by fixing her according to the imperatives of the medium and the genre. The same is true for her trans-contextualizations in comic strip,⁹ music¹⁰ and narrative fiction.¹¹

In the mythology surrounding Lara Croft, there is hardly a hint of the notion of moral responsibility, but while the earlier game titles focused on violence in the service of adventure and self-defense, the latest release, *The Angel of Darkness*, aims at bringing forth Lara’s true ‘dark side’. The rejection of moral responsibility goes hand in hand with the overall abandonment of faith in a ‘universal truth’ motivating moral choices, characteristic of postmodernism.

The principle of multivocality also underlies the visual/graphic representation of Lara Croft. Her facial features and skin colour are fairly non-descript and invite diverse readings; her exaggerated body ironically ‘compensates’ for her non-corporeality.

Overstated muscles for males and Barbie-like proportions for females are a commonplace in the videogame genre. With Lara's extravagant curves in full view, gamers can indulge in sexual fantasies, manipulating camera angles to focus on the most prominent bodily parts.

Making sense of Lara

There is no single author to whom we can appeal to guarantee Lara's political intent. Unlike those forms of high culture which maintain a strong connection with an authorial figure - Salman Rushdie can still be interviewed to ask what he 'really' meant - if we want to talk about Lara's political function, we have to find out from her consumers.

Again, the technical specificity of Lara's existence is relevant here: because in the world of computer generated characters it is not unusual for consumers also to be consumers. And when we examine the ways in which Lara functions for gamers we find not any simple consensus on her political nature: but an ever increasing variety of Laras, whose characters, natures - and even bodies - are in a state of flux. To reduce Lara to a single image - a 'sergeant-major with balloons stuffed up his shirt' - and then condemn that image, as Greer does shows little understanding of how such computer images function.

Patch distribution is a widespread activity in the gaming community, which offers alternative versions of game plots and characters, engendering transformations at the borders of official game genres. Hackers alter the original source code from a game engine to modify game structure, characters' appearance and game play itself. By far the most popular unofficial interventions in the Tomb Raider source code are related to the heroine's sexuality and enactment of gender. The fact that this aspect of Lara's virtual identity is also left ambiguous - i.e., there have been no clear 'hints' in the games pointing to the heroine's hetero- or homosexuality - has intrigued the participants in Tomb Raider fan forums, who speculate on her 'gayness', 'straightness', relationships,

attitudes to marriage, maternal instincts: 'She's a good het girl who wants a husband and babies'; or, 'there is much about her that is consistent with a sapphic orientation, and nothing that rules it out'; or, 'when Lara retires, I think she'll be an incredible wife, sitting near a fireplace telling her children about her adventures – while her husband is washing the dishes'.¹² Similar speculations often inform Tomb Raider fan fiction and artworks, where fans reproduce their own ideas on sexuality and gender.

The most widespread patches exploiting Lara's ambiguous sexuality are the so-called 'Nude Raider' patches, which replace Lara's already scanty clothes with nude skin textures.¹³ The more straitlaced among Lara's aficionados oppose this disrobing trend and display 'Nude Raider Free' banners on their Internet sites. Other interventions, such as Robert Nideffer's Duchampian¹⁴ manipulations of the original Nude Raider patches, represent Lara as transsexual or butch lesbian. As an empty sign, Lara is the ideal gender-bender for the hacking community and cyberspace critics interpret this as her primary subversive potential:

From Lara as female automaton, Lara as drag queen, Lara as dominatrix, Lara as girl power role model, to Lara as queer babe with a shotgun, and from the gaps in between, a new range of subject positions will emerge in online game hacking culture that challenge given gender categories and adapt them to the diverse gender sensibilities of men, women and others (Schleiner, 2001)

Feminist Lara

Lara's appeal for her fans is the open nature of the character: attempts to employ the traditional language of feminist cultural theory to pin down her political effects simply don't work in this terrain. She is drag queen and female automaton, dominatrix and queer babe, at the same time, in different ways, for different audiences. We cannot simply answer the questions: 'is she a feminist icon or a sexist fantasy?'; a 'male fantasy'

or a 'positive image'? But we can state, with some certainty, that she has certainly been taken up by feminists, and used for feminist ends.

A subversive manipulation of Lara Croft with a specifically feminist bent was staged by a group of participants in the International Women's University (ifu) in Hannover in August 2000, within the project entitled 'Reconstructing Gender'. They chose Lara for their performance, because they were attracted by her virtuality and multivocality:

Since she is virtual she could be anything - but she is limited to heroine and sex-symbol; she could be fluid and challenge existing borders - instead she reinforces them; she could subvert traditional meanings and meaning-making - instead she is represented to us in the most traditional contexts; she could be used to explore the implications of postmodernism, of new technologies, of changes in society - both the chances and the threats - instead she is used to try and convince us that in spite of all the changes things will essentially remain the same.¹⁵

For these feminists, Lara herself has potential and possibilities: but they don't think they have been well enough exploited. Like the creators of patches, they remake Lara for themselves. The group involved in this project kidnapped a cardboard Lara Croft figure out of a MacShop in Hamburg. The women then dressed the cardboard Lara in traditional costumes from different cultures and staged her in contexts she is not normally associated with – for example, as pregnant, or, in the toilet. Finally, they decorated the effigy with 250 URLs related to feminism and returned her to her original 'abode', the MacShop. In one way nothing more than a traditional performance art project that seeks to claim a superior feminist sensibility to the bad mass culture it plays with, this feminist work is more interesting in its very ordinariness. This group were not, in fact, doing anything special. They were wrong to state that 'she is limited to heroine and sex-symbol'. Their act of provocation is important precisely for the fact that it is neither radical, nor shocking. It is not unusual to imagine Lara in a range of different

circumstances: the consumer-producers do so all the time. New Laras are always being produced. Lara shocks feminist writers; Lara excites feminist writers. There are many Laras, and many positions that can be taken on her politics. She is indeed a sex object; she is indeed a positive image and a role model; and many things in between.

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¹Since Tomb Raider is both a 'computer game' and a 'videogame' (PlayStation, Sega Saturn and Game Boy), the two terms will be used interchangeably in this paper.

²<http://www.eidosgames.com/ubb/Forum22/HTML/034613.html> (May 2002).

³Eidos' official web site, <http://www.eidosgames.com/ubb/Forum22/HTML/034058.html>.

⁴According to Turkle, people use gender swapping as a 'first-hand experience through which to form ideas about the role of gender in human interactions' (Turkle, 1996, p. 362). Players become conscious of social practices related to gender that they tend not to notice in real life: as female characters, male MUDers are sometimes surprised to find themselves 'besieged with attention, sexual advances, and unrequested offers of assistance which imply that women can't do things by themselves' (Turkle, 1996, pp. 362-3).

⁵Even her date of birth – 14th February 1968 – brings together the numbers commonly associated with such mutually 'irreconcilable' concepts as 'love' (14th February – Valentine's Day) and 'dissent' (1968, the year of revolts).

⁶ Gordonstoun Mission Statement from <http://www.gordonstoun.org.uk>.

⁷In an aggressive marketing campaign, Lara's debut on the computer screen was soon followed by mass production of a wide variety of merchandise for the ever-growing hordes of her aficionados: from action figures to paint-it-yourself resin statues, from screen savers to clothing. It has been noted that the images of Lara featuring on a majority of these products depict the heroine as a sex object and that the products themselves – for example T shirts, which are only available in sizes XL and XXL – are obviously aimed at a male consumer: 'There is no imagery inviting a woman's gaze or trying to establish a bond between Lara and a female viewer. Most

representations seem to completely ignore women as potential viewers.’ (Pretzsch, 2000). The same study also identifies this bias towards male viewers in advertisements for Tomb Raider games, as well as some other unrelated products – such as Seat cars and Lucozade soft drinks – where Lara is used in the advertising campaign. Moreover, the tensions between seemingly contradictory aspects of Lara’s personality – aggression, sex appeal, speed, loneliness, intelligence etc. – tend to be resolved in favour of the features considered compatible with the advertised product. Advertisements for Seat cars thus capitalize on the concept of speed. We are also reminded that car industry has in the past extensively used images of sexy women to promote the concept of success ‘promised’ to potential buyers.

⁸Tomb Raider is not the first videogame to cross the boundary from the computer to the cinematic screen – suffice it to mention Super Mario Bros. with Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper, and it becomes clear that the crossing is not an easy one. Reviews of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) have been largely negative, mainly focusing on the unconvincing and contrived plot, as well as a rather superficial portrayal of main characters. The film’s shortcomings can also be interpreted in terms of the argument outlined above: for the film version, the unresolved tensions and contradictions cohabiting in the virtual medium had to be resolved in favour of ‘privileged’ interpretations. As a consequence, Lara’s exploratory spirit, her intelligence, panache and a certain humour are hardly noticeable in the film.

⁹Lara’s entry into the comic medium dates back to 1997, when Michael Turner included her for the first time in an episode of his widely popular *Witchblade* series. Rather than as a mere subordinate to the heroine, New York policewoman and Sandra Bullock lookalike Sara Pezzini, Lara featured as her equal partner in stopping a bloody vendetta. Other episodes followed, with the two sexy women joining forces to exhibit their formidable bodies and fighting power. Since late 1999, Eidos has published a series of comics, written by Dan Jurgens, in which Lara appears as the main character. The comic genre abounds in strong self-reliant females – from Modesty Blaise, Superwoman, Wonderwoman and Darkchylde, to Catwoman, Elektra, Glory and Tank Girl.

¹⁰Lara’s ironic and ultimately subversive aspects have up to date only been discerned and put to good use in the music scene, by the German punk rock band Die Ärzte and the Irish pop band

U2. The former use Lara in a video-clip for a song satirizing the macho stereotype, entitled *Ein Schwein namens Männer*. Lara is shown in a gunfight with the three members of the band – a fight she herself initiated and which she leaves victorious. The three men seem unimpressed by Lara’s body and engage in a serious fight with her, but they cannot match her wits and dexterity. The latter, U2, featured Lara on a large video screen during their PopMart tour in 1997-98, to accompany the song ‘Hold Me, Kill Me, Kiss Me, Thrill Me’ from the soundtrack of the film *Batman Forever*. Lara’s screen appearance reinforces the theme of the song: shown in the beginning as loving and shy, she then quickly disappears on her motorbike, only to return with a gun and aim it at Bono, the lead singer.

¹¹David Stern’s novel *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), based on the screenplay for the film, suffers from very much the same maladies as the film itself: the ambiguities of the heroine are resolved in an unconvincing, dull way; the potential for ironic critique is left unexplored and even the action itself is paralyzed through uninspired narration.

¹²<http://www.eidosgames.com/ubb/Forum22/HTML/032935.html>. (May 2001)

¹³There have been rumours that these patches were originally launched by Eidos itself, in an attempt to boost the publicity of Tomb Raider Games. Whatever the origin of the patches, it is true that – despite a clear increase in sexual overtones with each new title in the Tomb Raider series and a decidedly suggestive marketing campaign – Core and Eidos have characteristically avoided nudity and pornographic innuendoes, and thus managed to keep the game’s rating at PG-13.

¹⁴Nideffer’s patches are reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp’s well known parodic addition of a moustache and a goatee on a reproduction of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, entitled *L.H.O.O.Q.* (‘Elle a chaud au cul’, or ‘She has a hot ass’).

¹⁵<http://www.vifu.de/students/> (May 2002).