AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF FALUDI’S 
*BACKLASH* (1992) FOR THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER IDENTITY, IN THE 
WAKE OF THE ‘LARA CROFT’ PHENOMENON

By

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In accordance with Rule G4.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise/dissertation/thesis is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another University or for another qualification.

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Abstract

In the 1990s, Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992) was arguably of signal importance in the thematization of the limits imposed by the media on the negotiation of gender identity. However, the utilization of Faludi’s various analyses, in the interest of rendering social critique, has become progressively more problematic during the first decade of the 21st century. This is because her analyses engage neither with the development of media technologies subsequent to the early 1990s, nor with the way in which such technological developments now engage audiences on a greater multiplicity of levels than before, in a manner that consequently stands to inform their subjectivity to a degree hitherto unimagined. (A good example of the latter would, of course, be the proliferation of interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web). As such, in the light of such technological developments, this treatise is orientated around an investigation of the continued relevance of Faludi’s *Backlash* (1992) for the negotiation of gender identity in the contemporary era. In particular, its focus falls on West’s film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), which is considered against the backdrop of the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* phenomenon, which encompasses sequels to the film, online interactive sites, graphic novels, figurines, and video games, among other products. This investigation draws on the reception theory of, on the one hand, Adorno and Horkheimer, and, on the other hand, Stuart Hall.

Key words: backlash; gender negotiation; reception theory; mass media; globalisation
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Introduction

This study examines whether or not the phenomenon of ‘backlash,’ identified by Faludi in her critical work *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992), has been subject to augmentation or dissolution in the years succeeding the publication of her text. In short,

Figuratively, [backlash]…is a term that has come to mean a strong reaction against a system or state of affairs that had been changed…In feminist parlance it has become used to describe a fierce reflection of an ideology by forcefully reiterated counter-arguments. (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004:3)

In practical terms, this has involved a resurgence of patriarchal sentiments, and a concomitant representation of women in the media as passive and infantile beings – all of which has sought to eradicate from popular memory the successes of second wave feminism, which saw women emerge as active and mature subjects; critical of the past and in control of their destiny.

Arguably, this is of immense political import ance because a contemporary augmentation of ‘backlash’ at an international level, via the new technologies of the mass media, would not only stand to inform current subjectivity around highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles to a far greater degree than ever before. In addition, through doing so, it would also entail a profound contradiction of the principles of democracy, in a manner that would render the much vaunted political successes of globalisation—namely the growth and expansion of democracy—a mere façade.

In this treatise, the above issue will be explored in the following manner. In Chapter One, I will establish the discursive parameters of the theoretical standpoint articulated by the women’s liberation movement during the first, second and third waves of feminism. After this, in Chapter Two, I will establish the discursive parameters of the theoretical standpoint articulated by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992), against the backdrop of the above mentioned historical overview of the rise of feminism. In turn, in Chapter Three, I will investigate Lyne’s film *Fatal Attraction* (1987) – which Faludi discusses – and the possible resonances and dissonances between this film and West’s film *Lara Croft:*
Tomb Raider (2001), against the backdrop of the Lara Croft: Tomb Raider phenomenon. As will be discussed, this phenomenon encompasses sequels to the film, online interactive sites, graphic novels, figurines, and video games, among other products. After this, in Chapter Four, I will utilize the findings of the above to investigate whether or not the somewhat pessimistic reception theory communicated in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) has once again become valid, and, conversely, whether or not the more optimistic reception theory of Stuart Hall needs to be tempered in light of recent technological developments. Finally, I will conclude by commenting on whether or not Faludi’s theoretical standpoint, concerning the negotiation of gender identity, remains relevant for media representations nearly twenty years after the publication of her text *Backlash*, and to reflect on what follows from this from a democratic perspective.

Methodologically, I draw my research from textual and discourse analysis. I put the texts into what Hall (1975) has described as a ‘deep soak’. Fairclough (1995:46) maintains that this method entails the ferreting out of the ‘common-sense assumptions and presuppositions’ embedded in media discourse, describing and organizing these assumptions in a systematic way, and relating them to the larger sociological context in which they are located. Additionally, like Fairclough, I advance the importance of emphasizing “what is included and what is excluded, what is made explicit or left implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, what is thematized and what is unthematized, what process types and categories are drawn upon to present events, and so on’ (Fairclough 1995:104). Demont-Heinrich (2008:380) expands on this, explaining that, as human beings, we tend to “take for granted that media texts often reflect and help reproduce certain preferred, privileged, agenda-setting representations of the human social world,” in a manner that consequently stands to inform the audience’s subjectivity to a degree hitherto unimagined. (A good example of the latter would, of course, be the proliferation of interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web). Arguably, this understanding has received wide acceptance, as evinced by the fact that it is advocated by, among others, the likes of Blommaert (1999), Fairclough (1995), Fowler (1991), Hall (1975, 1980), Hall et al. (1981), and Wodak et al. (1999).

In short, I conceive mass media coverage of issues relating to gender identity not only as reflecting, but also as influencing, the nature of gender roles within the age of globalisation. However, while the ever-increasing development of technology
enables the mass media to increasingly inform subjectivity along certain dominant discursive lines, the question remains as to whether or not these dominant discursive lines resonate with the principles of democracy – such as the principles of liberty and equality – and democratic rights, such as the right to freedom of expression. In what follows an attempt will be made to answer this question.
Chapter One: Waves of Feminism

Although the history of feminism is complex, it is possible to articulate its major developments in terms of certain divisions and categorizations, however tentative these may be. Indeed, so long as their tentative nature is remembered, such artificial conceptual partitioning is often a very useful means through which to situate current trends in relation to what occurred before, and with a view to navigating a path into the future. The following exploration will thus be primarily concerned with the early feminist movements that emerged in the 19th century, and those which followed in the 20th and 21st centuries, in the interest of highlighting possible thematic resonances and dissonances between these ‘three’ waves of feminism.

According to Humm (1990) and Walker (1992), the history of feminism can be divided into three waves, and Krolokke and Sorensen concur when they point out, in Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls, that while first wave feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and while second wave feminism gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, third wave feminism broke onto the social scene in the 1990s (Krolokke & Sorensen 2005:24). Feminism is most commonly defined as involving “various movements, theories, and philosophies, all concerned with issues of gender difference, that advocate equality for women, and that campaign for women’s rights and interests” (Humm 1990:278).

1.1 First Wave Feminism

In short, first-wave feminism began in the United Kingdom and the United States, and focused primarily on the injustice experienced by women due to gender discrimination, especially with regard to the right to vote. First wave feminism includes within its ambit figures such as Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who is renowned for her successful initiative in organizing three-dozen nurses to care for those wounded in the Crimean War (1845) – a first in the history of the battlefield. Another historical figure that readily springs to mind with regard to first wave feminism is Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), who is renowned for the pivotal role she played in successfully initiating awareness about the issue of women’s suffrage in the United States during the 19th century. Yet, although many women were classed as
feminist agitators during this movement, certain historical figures continue to remain particularly salient, such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797).

Wollstonecraft rose to fame through her publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which was one of the first feminist treatises. The foundation of her argument was based upon the notion that women only *seem* inferior to men due to their lack of exposure to educational opportunities. Because of this, many philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries did not hesitate to associate women with irrational and oppressive tendencies, even though society was responsible for such character traits on account of the constraints it imposed on women. Through this, concepts such as reason and objectivity have become linked to the characteristics of masculine normativity, whereas emotion and irrationality have become characteristics associated with women. Indeed, “since women were thought to have keener nerves than men, it was also believed that women were more emotional than men. . . [Thus] an innate refinement of nerves was also identifiable with greater suffering, with weakness, and a susceptibility to [emotional] disorder” (Barker-Benfield 1992:9). In response to the above, Wollstonecraft suggested that the best way to overcome such traditional norms is to consider both men and women as rational beings, and to construct a social order that is based on reason – that is, the reasonable inclusion of both men’s and women’s interests. “Rights, [she argues,] . . . should be conferred because they are reasonable and just, regardless of their basis in tradition” (Wollstonecraft 2004:43-44). (As we trace the development of each feminist movement, we will be able to see quite clearly how Wollstonecraft’s argument has become increasingly relevant from the assertions of second-wave feminism to the assertions of third-wave feminism.)

In many ways, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is considered to be one of the first pieces of feminist philosophy. Within its pages is Wollstonecraft’s response to the rampant patriarchy of her time, insofar as she opposes the educational and political belief that women should be denied access to education. The very first example of this can be seen in the preface, where Wollstonecraft states that her “main argument is built on this simple principle, that if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all” (1997:101). Her argument sheds light on the idea of a woman as *more* than just a mother and a wife, that is, not only as someone capable of accompanying man through the daily affairs of business, politics
and socio-cultural concerns, but also as someone capable of making a meaningful contribution to such affairs and concerns. To expand on this, Virginia Sapiro explains in *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft*, “Wollstonecraft contends that society will degenerate without educated women, particularly because mothers are the primary educators of young children” (1992:182). Accordingly, the need for women to be educated increases as the world becomes more complex. In essence, Wollstonecraft identifies the cause of the problem as “a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who consider females as women rather than as human creatures” (1997:109). Her recommendation is that, instead of putting women on a shelf as if they were glass ornaments, or currency in marriage proposals, ultimately – because they are human beings – they should have equal rights to men.

Wollstonecraft was moved to write her philosophical treatise by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord’s 1791 report, in which he states that a domestic level of education is the highest level of education necessary for women, and that the extension of any other educational opportunities to women would be pointless. In particular, his recommendations were as follows:

Let us bring up women, not to aspire to advantages which the Constitution denies them, but to know and appreciate those which it guarantees them . . . Men are destined to live on the stage of the world. A public education suits them: it early places before their eyes all the scenes of life: only the proportions are different. The paternal home is better for the education of women; they have less need to learn to deal with the interests of others, than to accustom themselves to a calm and secluded life. (Sunstein 1975:22-33)

In Wollstonecraft’s opinion, this report had sexual double standards, and so she dedicated the *Rights of Woman* to Talleyrand. In this regard she states, “Having read with great pleasure a pamphlet which you have lately published, I dedicate this volume to you; to induce you to reconsider the subject, and maturely weigh what I have advanced respecting the rights of woman and national education” (1997:101).

The very first issue she chooses to address in the *Rights of Woman* is that of one’s natural rights, questioning who are entitled to such rights and the basis of such entitlement. She suggests that, “Since natural rights are given by God, for one segment of society to deny them to another segment is a sin” (Taylor 2003:105-106). Therefore, as Sapiro indicates, “*The Rights of Woman* . . . engages not only specific
events in France and in Britain but also larger questions being raised by contemporary political philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau” (1992:182). In an echo of Ephesians 5:22-24, Locke, in *Two Treatises of Government*, argued that it is humanities duty to fulfil the will of God, who accordingly commands wives to submit to their husbands as they submit to God. Similarly, Rousseau’s argument, as seen in *Emile*, is “that women should be educated for the pleasure of men” (1762:6).

An infuriated Wollstonecraft responded by attacking the imposition of such limitations upon women, through her assertion that, “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (1997:157). Indeed, in Wollstonecraft’s opinion, “The most perfect education [is] an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attach such habits of virtue as will render it independent” (1997:129). In short, the implication of this is that, if women were given the chance, they could achieve so much more than being ‘just a pretty face’.

Interestingly, Wollstonecraft deploys *The Rights of Woman* in the structured essay format, as opposed to formal argumentation format – common to eighteenth-century philosophical works – both in order to accentuate her major topics in the opening chapters of the treaties, and in the interest of allowing her to revisit each topic from a different perspective, all of which suggests a dynamic ‘work in progress’ approach. Furthermore, as Kelly notes, “It also adopts a hybrid tone that combines rational argument with the fervent rhetoric of sensibility” (1992:110), with a view to hammering out a practical political position, all of which would later be echoed in both second and third wave feminism.

Admittedly, there is no explicit proof that Wollstonecraft argues for gender equality between men and women. For example, instead of explicitly arguing for equality between men and women, Wollstonecraft simply puts forward the view that “men and women are equal in the eyes of God” (1997:126), equally subjecting both genders to the same moral law. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft contends:

> Let it not be concluded that I wish to invert the order of things; I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue. I speak collectively of the whole sex; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue
has only one eternal standard? I must therefore, if I reason consequentially, as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction, as that there is a God. (1997:135)

In doing so, she seeks to co-opt men into the struggle for the liberation of women, all of which is clearly evinced by her statement that she hopes to:

convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks; and prevail on them to weigh dispassionately the whole tenor of my observations. – I appeal to their understandings; and, as a fellow-creature, claim, in the name of my sex, some interest in their hearts. I entreat them to assist to emancipate their companion, to make her a help meet for them! Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens. (1997:288)

Thus, her ambiguity on the subject of gender equality has prevented Wollstonecraft from being classified as a ‘modern’ feminist. To elaborate on Wollstonecraft’s feminist status, Barbara Taylor writes in Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination:

Describing [Wollstonecraft's philosophy] as feminist is problematic, and I do it only after much consideration. The label is of course anachronistic . . . Treating Wollstonecraft’s thought as an anticipation of nineteenth and twentieth-century feminist argument has meant sacrificing or distorting some of its key elements. Leading examples of this . . . have been the widespread neglect of her religious beliefs, and the misrepresentation of her as a bourgeois liberal, which together have resulted in the displacement of a religiously inspired utopian radicalism by a secular, class-partisan reformism as alien to Wollstonecraft’s political project as her dream of a divinely promised age of universal happiness is to our own. Even more important however has been the imposition on Wollstonecraft of a heroic-individualist brand of politics utterly at odds with her own ethically driven case for women’s emancipation. Wollstonecraft’s leading ambition for women was that they should attain virtue, and it was to this end that she sought their liberation. (2003:12)

Nevertheless, such ambiguity notwithstanding, Wollstonecraft’s work not only subsequently shaped the thinking of the suffragettes, but also led to her being dubbed, albeit generally, as the ‘grandmother’ of British feminism.
Throughout history, it has been assumed by some that first wave feminism subsided when women were granted the right to vote; however, its endeavours did not end there. On the contrary, this movement continued to lobby, with considerable success, for reform in educational, professional and medical attitudes and policies toward women, and for women’s rights to equal education, work opportunities and specialized medical care. Ironically, the term ‘first wave’ feminism was only defined once a more militant ‘second wave’ of feminism came into play during the early 1960s. In the opinion of scholar Imelda Wheleman, “The second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism, involving the suffragettes in both the United Kingdom as well as the United States of America” (1995:216). Emboldened by the primary focus of overturning legal obstacles to equality during the first wave of feminism, second-wave feminism dealt with a wide spectrum of issues, “including unofficial inequalities, official legal inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and, perhaps most controversially, reproductive rights” (www.britannica.com).

1.2 Second Wave Feminism

Second wave feminism includes within its ambit figures such as Bella Abzug (1920-1998) and Gloria Steinem (1934-), among others, who are renowned for founding the National Women's Political Caucus (1971) – “a national bipartisan grassroots organization in the United States dedicated to increasing women's participation in the political process by recruiting, training, and supporting women who seek elected and appointed offices” (www.nwpc.org). Although many women were classified as feminist agitators during this movement, certain historical figures continue to remain particularly salient, such as Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986).

De Beauvoir rose to fame through her publication of The Second Sex in 1949, which is one of the most popular feminist pieces. The foundation of her argument is based upon a belief in “the advance in male oppression through historical, literary, and mythical sources, [and it attributes] its contemporary effects on women to a systematic objectification of the male as a positive norm” (www.philosophypages.com). Because of this, female identity, according to de Beauvoir, became represented as the ‘Other’, which ultimately led to the subjugation of both the social and political ‘selves’ of women, and their increasing experience of a unique form of alienation.
De Beauvoir was moved to write her philosophical text by Jean-Paul Sartre, “who questioned her assumption that being a woman was a peripheral fact of her life” (Bergoffen 1997:141). As such, she “identifies The Second Sex as ‘an almost chance conception’ induced by Sartre” (Bergoffen 1997:141). In response, de Beauvoir’s discovery was as follows:

This world was a masculine world, my childhood had been nourished by myths forged by men, and I hadn’t reacted to them in at all the same way I should have done if I had been a boy. I was so interested in this discovery that I abandoned my project for a personal confession in order to give all my attention to finding out about the condition of woman in its broadest terms. (Bergoffen 1997:141)

In short, The Second Sex serves as an analytical examination of the various ways in which women experience subjugation through peripheral forces that serve the sole purpose of situating, defining, and maintaining them in an inessential, objective space in society. In response to such subjugation, de Beauvoir used the master-slave dialectic proposed by Hegel to unpack the perplexing intricacies of historical oppression that women have been subjected to. In this regard, “Beauvoir characterises woman as a kind of Hegelian slave consciousness in two important ways: (1) woman serves as an instrument of mediation for man; and (2) even though she evades the life-and-death struggle, she nevertheless learns the same lesson of absolute negativity and can thus be emancipated through labour” (Simons 2006:276).

The very first issue de Beauvoir chooses to address in The Second Sex is that of human nature, identifying the instinctive tension between male and female. She explains that:

Man encounters Nature; he has some hold upon her, he attempts to appropriate her. But she cannot fulfil him. Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger; or she submits passively to man’s desire and permits assimilation by him; so that he takes possession of her only through consuming her— that is, through destroying her. In both cases he remains alone. (1989:139)

Therefore, as Simons indicates in The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: critical essays, “Mirroring Hegel, the master’s (man’s) desire is thwarted in his attempts to consume nature through his inability to assimilate, negate, or destroy it,
thus leaving him in a constant state of renewed need” (2006:280). However, while some radical feminists place the blame for patriarchy squarely on the shoulders of men—such as Mary Daly, who writes in *Gyn/Ecology The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* that “Males and males only are the originators, planners, controllers, and legitimators of patriarchy” (1978:29)—other feminists, more informed by de Beauvoir, understand women as being complicit in their continued subordination. For example, Fredrika Scarth, in *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir*, interprets *The Second Sex* as saying, “Neither men nor women live their bodies authentically under patriarchy” (2004:100), insofar as *both* play into and perpetuate manufactured ‘inauthentic’ gender roles in a mutually-reinforcing dialectical fashion.

Through this, de Beauvoir, in effect makes use of *The Second Sex* in such a way that she presents a distinct perspective on the problematic situation that plagues women. In this regard, the concept of ‘Otherness’ can be understood as a degrading oppression of women’s freedom. To expand on this, Linda Singer describes de Beauvoir’s philosophical perspective as “the voice of the ethics of otherness” (Singer 1985:232), in which independence emerges in a related or similar situation. Accordingly, a parallel is drawn between the private self and the public self. In essence, de Beauvoir “reconceives ethical questions arising for individuals in private relationships as political questions for society as a whole, requiring an historical analysis as well as a phenomenological description” (Simons 1992:102). She proposes that, in order to overcome what is known as the ‘woman problem’, society needs to permit women the space needed to collectively obtain the necessary economic and political power with which they seek to identify themselves. Through this, she succeeded “in defining a social/political philosophy because of the originality of her method, which locates her critique on the margins of culture, in women’s experience and the originality of her subject” (Simons 1992:103).

In de Beauvoir’s opinion, feminist discourse could be redefined by means of analytically examining the epistemology of various female voices, whilst critiquing the way in which men view women as the Other. In this regard, *The Second Sex* supplied the theoretical basis upon which the radical second wave of feminism emerged.

Interestingly, de Beauvoir deploys *The Second Sex* in an autobiographical format, as opposed to the structured essay format—common to Wollstonecraft’s
philosophical treatise, *The Vindication of Women’s Rights* – both in order to personalise her major topics, and in the interest of allowing her to cater for the need to creatively *define* what a woman is. In short, according to de Beauvoir, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1973:301), with the consequence that women can become whatever they choose to be. Butler confirms de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* as a text that offers a radical appreciation of gender. For example, she states that, “Given our reading of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and ‘Must We Burn Sade?’ we know that Beauvoir was, from the very beginning, sensitive to the ways in which women were assigned inferior roles and relegated to passive positions” (Bergoffen 1997:142). Furthermore, de Beauvoir herself contends that,

To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist to him also; mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other. (1949, 2:576)

In doing so, she sought to highlight the increasing struggle for the liberation of women, all of which is clearly evinced in her perspective that “man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male” (de Beauvoir 1949:155). Thus, her emphasis on the need for women to creatively define ‘woman’ has led to de Beauvoir being classed as an existential feminist. To elaborate on de Beauvoir’s feminist status – on account of *The Second Sex* – Simons writes in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, that while:

some critics . . . have assumed a Sartrean foundation for Beauvoir’s philosophy [and] have charged that her reliance on Sartrean individualism undermines feminist activism . . . ; others have credited Sartre’s concept of radical freedom with empowering women’s individual freedom. (1995:10)

Arguably, for this reason, de Beauvoir’s work was instrumental in shaping the radical thinking of second wave feminists. Indeed, in many ways, *The Second Sex* (1949) is considered to be a model for many radical feminist theorists of the women’s liberation movement in the 1960s, “not only for its contribution to feminist philosophy, but
[also] for its more general contribution to existential moral and social philosophy and to our understanding of the social construction of knowledge” (Simons 1992:101).

To a large extent, it was to the changes in the conditions of women within the socio-cultural milieu of the 1950s that second wave feminism constituted a response. J. D. Morgan defines the staid appearance of the 1950s as deceptive, because the era was actually plagued by a number of intense politico-economic and socio-cultured conflicts, such that it comprised of “a volatile concoction of arch conservatism, political anxiety and various radical breaks with tradition” (2002:109). However, in order to understand the effects of the 1950s shift in ‘moral’ value on women, it is imperative to analyse the events of the 1940s. With the outbreak of World War Two on December 7, 1941, married women made haste to fill the absence in the workplace of their husbands who had been called to war. Practically overnight the ‘princess’ housewives transformed into functioning members in the workplace environment, with as much as 80% capable of filling the positions with little or no training whatsoever (Chafe 1972). In as little as three years, one in three women, who had previously been full-time homemwives, were working in defence of their nation (Gluck 1987). Furthermore, with a 35% growth in participation within the workplace, women were provided with childcare facilities to facilitate their participation within the industry. With symbolic models of womanhood, ranging from the heavy machinery dexterity of Rosie the Riveter, to the fearlessness of Commando Mary in the women’s auxiliary of the Armed Services, as many as eight million women could be found serving their country within governmental and industrial sectors (Klein 1984). Despite the need to adapt to the strenuous tasks within the workplace, women discovered the joy and satisfaction of acknowledgement for their efforts in the form of paid wages. Statistics showed that out of ten various employment sectors, 75% of employed women did not want to return to their role of maintaining the home once the war was over (Klein 1984), half of which had been previously dedicated to their housewife duties (Gluck 1987).

However, once the war was over, women were frowned upon in the workplace and males were, once again, considered to be the primary breadwinners and heads of the family. “Where earlier the working woman with child-care problems had been the object of commiseration, she became now the object of blame for the rising rate of juvenile delinquency” (Gluck 1987:15). With the war over, popular culture also made a sudden turnaround in the representation of women, with the likes of Rosie the
Riveter and Commando Mary becomingly completely obsolete. Where women were previously encouraged in war propaganda to enter the workplace, they were now being ushered back to their homes to aid in their husband’s social readjustment to domesticity after demobilisation (Hartmann 1978:227). Furthermore, the media reinforced the importance of women’s realisation that their husband’s were ‘head men’ again, and emphasised the need for women to help remake their men by forgetting their own preferences. In short, within a year, women were expected to turn their attentions from their satisfaction in having a job to appreciating the importance of a fully functional kitchen.

Subsequently, the baby boom era even began to view childless women as “deviant, selfish, and pitiable” (May 1988:137). With the above strategy in play, women were successfully bearing, on average, a minimum of three children per household, resulting in a 50% population growth in America from 1940 to 1957 (Mintz & Kellog 1988). Yet, despite the messages of the media, insisting that American women had “never had it so good” (Douglas 1995:123), women were noticing a growing increase in gender inequality and discrimination. Jobs that were advertised for women were now mostly unskilled with lower paying salaries, such as “clerical workers, typists, personal secretaries, nurses and teachers” (Morgan 2002:120). Women were also banned from the Harvard Lamont Library, as their presence became regarded as a distraction to the male students.

Moreover, the conservative 1950s ideologies increased in stature, as “exemplified by the American sociologist Talcott Parson’s theories on the family and social stratification” (Morgan 2002:110); these began to extend from the public sphere into the private sphere. For example, in *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (1955), Parsons showed support for the patriarchal structures of society, proclaiming men as the natural head of the household. Expounding on his sex role theory of the nuclear family, Parsons also argued that women were primarily responsible for the well being of children, and that men needed to turn their attention to more instrumental tasks. To strengthen the impact of these conservative sex role theories, audiences were fed messages of gender subjugation in the form of “new, popular TV sitcoms featuring white, middle class families including *Father Knows Best* (1954-1958), *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) and *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966)” (Morgan 2002:110). The utilisation of the media in this regard was primarily to address the issue of
women choosing to build a career instead of remaining dutifully at their family’s beck and call. To choose one example, among many, the character of June Cleaver in the TV series *Leave it to Beaver* “regularly delivered up two hot meals a day to her family in her immaculately clean house” (Morgan 2002:110), which she vacuumed wearing her high heel shoes. Furthermore, while the 1960s fashion market encouraged teenage girls to buy into the ‘sweet sixteen’ image found on the covers of their glossy magazines, another image that arrived on the fashion front was the awareness of teen sexuality. In this regard, *Seventeen* magazine soon became ‘the way, the truth and the light’ for high school girls across America (White 1971:248). As such, girls were either encouraged to remain virgins, or encouraged to identify solely with their sexuality, in a way that excluded their development of higher aspirations. Furthermore, such intricacies of sexuality and sexual behaviour became a project of exploration in popular culture, with events such as the 1953 launch of *Playboy* magazine, and its effect on the 600,000 readers it reached.

However, later in the 1960s, Parsons’ prescription of a woman as nothing more than “her husband’s wife [and] the mother of his children” (1945:95) became increasingly resented by housewives across America. This was in large part because women who had conformed to the role of the perfect housewife were losing all sense of purpose as they experienced empty nest syndrome. To substantiate this argument, Morgan points out:

> Due to the early age of marriage and childbirth that had characterised the postwar years, many of these women were still in their early forties with decades of role uncertainty and an uncomfortable sense of a lack of real purpose pervading their lives. (2002:122)

Similarly, Dr. Osbourne satirically advances, “Its shocking what happens to mothers in this country. . . They die at 40, and they’re not buried until they’re 80” (Osbourne in Lanahan 1966:27). It was within the above context, and in relation to its dynamics and tensions, that second wave feminism emerged.

For the most part, it is thought that the second wave of feminism began when President John F. Kennedy released the Presidential Commission’s report on the Status of Women with regard to gender inequality. The purpose of the Presidential Commission’s report on the Status of Women was to assist President John F. Kennedy in the task of exploring “issues relating to women and to make proposals in
such areas as employment policy, education, and federal Social Security and tax laws relating to women” (www.womenhistory.about.com). This report allowed the Presidency of the United States to navigate a path between those who supported the Equal Rights Amendment and those who opposed it,

trying to find compromises that advanced the equality of women’s workplace opportunity without losing the support of organised labour and those feminists who supported protecting women workers from exploitation and protecting women’s ability to serve in traditional roles in the home and family. (www.womenhistory.about.com)

That is, one could argue that second wave feminism encouraged women to become increasingly politically involved, not only through developing their awareness of the sexist power structure embedded in Western society, but also through endeavouring to undermine it via both the publication of influential texts like *The Feminine Mystique*, and via the establishment of critical organisations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Indeed, “the political movements that came into being in the 1960s meant that a radical questioning of gender roles was being carried out not only by isolated scholars or marginalized groups, but in front of and with the attention of many national publics” (Nicholson 1997:1), in the interest of bringing about the reconstruction of institutions across the globe.

Two political movements in particular, namely the Women’s Rights movement in the beginning of the 1960s, and the independent Women’s Liberation Movement towards the end of the 1960s, prompted the initial stages of these changes. That is “while Women’s Rights has been the more politically widespread movement in the United States, expressing an ideology more in accord with that of the population as a whole, it is from the Women’s Liberation Movement that most of the more theoretical works of the second wave have emerged” (Nicholson 1997:2). The goal of the latter, namely the Women Liberationists, was to create awareness among both women and men about the different forms of injustice experienced by women in various societies. Therefore, a need developed to formulate a theory that could clarify the depth of women’s oppression and the elements it was made up of.

To a certain extent, the theoretical framework of Marxism influenced the Women’s Liberation movement. This was primarily because Marxist theory offered a
metanarrative of society as a whole, which concurrently examined all preceding societies, and pondered the prospect of creating a future society, even one where its own instructive influence would become irrelevant. However, early feminists of the second wave also disagreed with many aspects of Marxist theory, arguing that women’s oppression was far more nuanced than the various other forms of oppression, and demanding a theoretical framework that delved deeper into their issues of concern than Marxism could. In short, “Th[e] limitation of Marxism was expressed in the narrowness of many Marxists’ interpretation of the concept of ‘production’; feminists argued that ‘production’ needed to be understood as including not only work geared to the creation of food and objects, but also to the creation and care of human beings” (Nicholson 1997:2). The radical works written by second wave feminists during the 60s and 70s reflect the tenuous relationship between their concerns and the Marxist metanarrative.

In particular, in Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy, Charlotte Witt suggests that philosophical concepts, such as reason and objectivity, “exclude everything that is feminine or associated with women” (2004:1). It would, of course, be nonsensical to suggest that women were completely omitted from the traditionally male dominated sectors of society; however, even though women were considered to occupy space as inessential objects, society did not hesitate to associate women with irrational and oppressive characteristics, arguing that these traits have successfully been embedded within the psyche of what defines a woman. In response, second wave feminists critiqued the omittance of women from traditionally male dominated sectors of society, and opposed the association of oppressive characteristics with what it means to be a woman.

When it comes to responding to the traditional norm of omitting women from traditionally male sectors of society, Mary Ellen Waithe, in A History of Women Philosophers, explains, “These women are not women on the fringes of philosophy, but philosophers on the fringes of history” (plato.stanford.edu). As such, the task of revising the historical position of women was second wave feminism’s way of responding to the omittance of women from traditionally male dominated sectors of society. Their aim was to include the lost voices of women from the classical period to the present, ultimately disputing their marginalisation. For this reason, traditional, male-gendered concepts are often rejected by feminists, so as to reconstruct an understanding of their own.
According to Witt, second wave feminists used the tradition of historical self-justification, as a tool for advancing *their* theoretical issues and *their* philosophical perspective. However, this raised a challenge for feminists engaged in the task of re-evaluating the limitations imposed upon women by society, namely the exact definition of the philosophical “us”. Therefore, one needs to question whether the “us” in feminist interpretation refers to feminists or women in general?

That is, the definition of the philosophical “us” is intertwined with the various interpretations of women and the feminine. An example of this can be seen in the opposing views of Carol Gilligan, and Catherine MacKinnon. *In a Different Voice* (1982), Gilligan defines women as the essential caregiver, whereas in *Feminism Unmodified* (1987), MacKinnon defines women as beings that succumb to sexual subordination. Furthermore, it can also be argued that by advancing a definition of the term ‘woman’, one invariably, no matter how broad such a definition, excludes various other women who cannot be accommodated within its conceptual parameters.

Thus, despite the radical stance of second-wave feminism in the 1970s, it was subsequently construed as having failed in its pursuit of gender equality because it assumed a universal female identity, and, in effect, overstated the experiences of upper middle class white women. That is, on the one hand, second wave feminism transformed the prime perspectives within Western society, in a wide range of socio-cultural and legal areas. Echols describes the role of feminist activists as those campaigning:

for women’s legal rights (rights of contract, property rights, voting rights); for women’s right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights (including access to contraception and quality prenatal care); for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against other form of discrimination. (1989:416)

Yet, on the other hand, as Walker explains, “during much of its history, most feminist movements and theories had leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America” (1983:397). In contrast, as Hill Collins (2000) illustrates, “at least since Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech to American feminists, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms.” Admittedly, appreciation of the latter only really gained momentum in the 1960s, after the Civil
Rights movement lobbied for transformation in the United States, in the wake of the collapse of European colonialism in the Caribbean, Africa, Southeast Asia and parts of Latin America. Nevertheless, as Narayan (1997) argues, this has resulted in, “women in former European colonies and the Third World . . . propos[ing] ‘Post-colonial’ and ‘Third World’ feminisms”, all of which, in certain ways, situated itself against, rather than in relation to, the overarching theories of second wave feminism.

1.3 Third Wave Feminism

As such, notwithstanding the radical stance of second-wave feminism in the 1970s, it was subsequently construed as having failed in its pursuit of gender equality, primarily on account of its assumption of a universal female identity and its hyperbolic emphasis on the experiences of upper middle class white women. Subsequently, third-wave feminism arose in the early 1980s as a response to the shortcomings of second-wave feminism. Admittedly, some scholars have questioned whether ‘the second wave’ has been a useful concept or not, specifically because while “something important occurred in the 1960s . . . [it] is still spinning itself out” in issues concerned with gender relations (Nicholson 1997:1). Yet, for the sake of convenience, and because of the common use of the term, in what follows the somewhat artificial distinction between second and third wave feminism will be maintained.

In many ways, the successes of the second wave of feminism, such as the growth of women’s awareness of their reproductive rights, child care services, women’s studies programs and the creation of domestic abuse shelters for women and children—were construed as foundational tools by third wave feminists. Yet, third wave feminism moved beyond the conceptual framework of second wave feminism insofar as, against the backdrop of post-structural theory, it increasingly couched its criticisms in genealogically-orientated discourse analysis, which, to a certain extent, tempered the provocative and militant nature of second-wave feminist declarations. In effect, it did so by describing social problems not in terms of actual gender struggles, but rather in terms of broad historico-discursive shifts, which co-opted genders and forced them into conflict with one another. “Born with the privileges that first- and second-wave feminists fought for, third-wave feminists generally see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents” (Krolokke and Sørensen: 2006:15).
Indeed, as Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards advance in *Manifesta: Young women, feminism, and the future*, third-wave feminism was “buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism” (2000:83), all of which led to an increase in diversity and a decrease in the militant approach. In this regard, in order to overcome the shortcomings of second wave feminism, third wave feminists have designed a plan of action that includes, firstly, obtaining reproductive rights, secondly, focusing on sexual harassment and sexual violence, and thirdly solving issues of race, social class and sexuality.

That is, firstly, third wave feminists continued to alert women to their reproductive rights, such as their right to access to contraception and their right to a legal abortion. In the opinion of Baumgardner and Richards, “It is not feminism’s goal to control any woman’s fertility, only to free each woman to control her own” (2000:83). For this reason, many feminists view “South Dakota’s 2006 attempt to ban abortion in all cases, except when necessary to protect the mother’s life” (www.nytimes.com), and “the US Supreme Court’s recent vote to uphold the partial birth abortion ban” (Ludlow 2008:26), as a means of restricting the reproductive and civil rights of women. With abortion being illegal in America, women find themselves forced to use high mortality measures, such as knitting needles and coat hangers, to perform the operation.

Secondly, third wave feminism also delved deeper into the exploration of issues such as sexual harassment and sexual violence. In response to the growth in the exploration of sexuality, Richard Hoggart points out that the prime suspect in violent sex crimes against women was the publication of “the new market of cheap detective genre paperbacks” (Morgan 2002:113). In Hoggart’s opinion, the root of the problem could be found in the “new style of sex-novels spreading from America” (1981:258), which promoted sexual violence against women. In this regard, while Mickey Spillane grew to frame through the creation of the character of misogynist tough guy detective Mike Hammer (2002:113), Ian Fleming similarly reaped the rewards of his creation, James Bond, who was equally renowned for his objectification and casual ‘use’ of women in the course of his duties as a British secret service agent (Denning 1987:223).

However, issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women are not limited to literature but are rather part of a wider discursive phenomenon. Linked to this, not only have women’s rights been restricted, they are also associated with
vulgar and degrading words, such as ‘cunt’, ‘bitch’ and ‘whore’. However, most of these derogatory terms did not originate with the purpose of these powerfully negative connotations in mind. For instance, “the English word cunt, which is commonly used as a pejorative, is thought to ultimately come from the Proto-Germanic word kunton meaning ‘female genitalia’ (http://dictionary.oed.com). Nevertheless, with the passing of time, the word has come to serve as a pejorative term and a negative association of femininity. Furthermore, the modern meanings of the term bitch and whore derived in a similar fashion. Yet, third wave feminists consider it more viable to alter the sexist meaning of a derogatory word than to strike it from the record, as second wave feminists were keen to do. For example, in Cunt: A Declaration of Independence, Inga Muscio posits “that we’re free to seize a word that was kidnapped and co-opted in a pain-filled, distant, past, with a ransom that cost our grandmothers’ freedom, children, traditions, pride, and land” (2002:16).

Similarly, Elizabeth Wurtzel in Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women, initiated the reclamation of the term bitch. Her philosophy of the term bitch is as follows: “I intend to scream, shout, race the engine, call when I feel like it, throw tantrums in Bloomingdale’s if I feel like it and confess intimate details about my life to complete strangers. I intend to do what I want to do and be whom I want to be and answer only to myself: that is, quite simply, the bitch philosophy” (1999:30).

In short, by highlighting the use of ‘appropriately’ accepted sexist language for both girls and women, third-wave feminism has created words and forms of communication, which help to celebrate what it means to be a woman. Kroløkke et al believe that “By deploying a kind of linguistic jujitsu against their enemies” (2006:16), third wave feminists have been able to embrace and over exaggerate the stereotypes associated with women.

Moreover, as with the first- and second-waves of feminism, third wave feminists chose a medium through which they could ensure that their messages reached the public. Owing to the time that had elapsed since the emergence of first and second wave feminism, these media were very different and, in many ways, capable of communicating the third wave feminist message to a far greater audience. Where first- and second-wave feminism ensured they were heard through the publication of texts such as Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) and Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963), third-wave feminism originated, among other things, the empowerment of the new grrl rhetoric, through the formation
of “girls-only punk bands such as Bikini Kill and Brat Mobile in the United States in the early 1990s” (Kroløkke et al 2006:15-16). For example, in Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance, Kroløkke et. al point out, “In their manifesto-like recording ‘Revolution Girl-Style Now’ (1990), Bikini Kill celebrated the self-reliance and acting out of prepubescent girls and mixed the feminist strategy of empowerment with the avant-garde or punk strategy of D.I.Y.: ‘Do It Yourself.’” (2006:16)

Lastly, third wave feminists focused their attentions on the oppression and limitations imposed upon women as marginalized figures at the levels of race, social class and sexuality. Making women aware of their need for action at these levels, as well as obtaining access to education to facilitate such action, are imperative steps in evoking the necessary socio-cultural change. In response to this, Baumgardner and Richards believe:

Consciousness among women is what caused this [change], and consciousness, one’s ability to open their mind to the fact [that] male domination does affect the women of our generation, is what we need. . . The presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice we have it—it’s simply in the water. (2000:83)

Therefore, third-wave feminism is primarily concerned with the development of feminist theory and politics, especially those “that honour contradictory experiences and deconstruct categorical thinking” (Kroløkke et al 2006:16). For this reason, third wave feminists encourage feminism to be defined by the individual identities and perspectives of women from all walks of life, as opposed to a universal female identity. An example of this ever changing, proactive third wave feminism is prevalent in Jennifer Baumgardners and Amy Richards Manifesta: Young women, feminism, and the future:

The fact that feminism is no longer limited to arenas where we expect to see it – NOW, Ms., women’s studies, and redsuted Congresswomen – perhaps means that young women today have really reaped what feminism has sown. Raised after Title IX and William Wants a Doll, young women emerged from college or high school or two years of marriage or their first job and began challenging some of the received wisdom of the past ten or twenty years of feminism. We’re not doing feminism the same way that the seventies feminists did it; being liberated
doesn’t mean copying what came before but finding one’s own way – a way that is genuine to one’s own generation. (2000:83)

However, the above stance has created a problem; it is sometimes difficult to identify figures of third wave feminism because many of them refrained from defining themselves as feminists, as it had a negative impact on their fluid notion of gender. For example, in Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Mohanty classifies herself as a Postcolonial Feminist, “critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric” (1991:49). She is supported in this view by black feminist, Alice Walker who maintains, in her text titled In search of our mothers’ gardens: womanist prose, that “colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us” (1983:291) Analogously, in To Be Real, Rebecca Walker states:

Whether the young women who refuse the feminist label realise it or not, on some level they recognise that an ideal woman born of prevalent notions of how empowered women look, act, or think is simply another impossible contrivance of perfect womanhood, another scripted role to perform in the name of biology and virtue. (1995:iv)

To bring further clarity to this debate, in Feminism/postmodernism Sandra Harding stipulates, “Since the 1980s standpoint, feminists have argued that feminism should examine how women’s experience of inequality relates to that of racism, homophobia, classism and colonization” (2004:283). Similarly, in Gender and Society, West & Zimmerman argue, “In the late 1980s and 1990s postmodern feminists supported the view that gender roles are socially constructed, and that it is impossible to generalize women’s experiences across cultures and histories” (1987:26).

In sum, third wave feminists want women to be acknowledged for their intellectual acumen and dynamism, and not for their advancement of staid dogmatism and static images of the ‘new’ women. Yet, after some initial successes, the power of third wave feminism to effect social change through the creation of such critical awareness dissipated. On the one hand, some critics argue that this could be due to the lack of a single cause for third wave feminists to focus on and fight for. That is, while first wave feminists successfully combated opposition to women’s suffrage, and while second wave feminists fought for gender equality within the workforce, third wave feminists are said to lack direction, being little more than an intellectual over-
extension of second wave feminism that has lost touch with the real politics of social relations. In this regard, “the women’s movement, as we are told time and again, has proved women’s own worst enemy” (Faludi 1992:2), insofar as it is inherently self-defeating. To elaborate on this Diane Elam explains:

This problem manifests itself when senior feminists insist that junior feminists be good daughters, defending the same kind of feminism their mothers advocated. Questions and criticisms are allowed, but only if they proceed from the approved brand of feminism. Daughters are not allowed to invent new ways of thinking and doing feminism for themselves; feminists’ politics should take the same shape that is has always assumed (Baumgardner & Richards 2000:83).

However, on the other hand, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the demise of the power of third wave feminism can also be attributed to the phenomenon of ‘backlash’, or a negative discursive reaction to the successes of second wave feminism that smashed into the ranks of third wave feminism.
Chapter Two: Faludi’s Backlash Theory

Arguably, the failure of third wave feminism was not due to any major theoretical limitations or any internal inconsistencies on its part; rather, on the contrary, as Susan Faludi advances in Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (1992), the diminution of third wave feminist influence can be directly attributed to the ‘backlash’ that undermined it, and which was ultimately a negative patriarchal reaction to the successes of second-wave feminism. Although critics differ on the reasons for this, a particularly cogent account of the rise and fall of third wave feminism is proffered in Faludi’s text.

In short, in Backlash (1992), Faludi defines this discursive phenomenon as a dynamic that co-opts both males and females to subscribe to highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles, in terms of which all the gender modifications of second wave feminism are construed as anathema. Essentially, ‘backlash’ is an achievement reversal tool that has been used as a broad category into which a number of demographics can fall. As Faludi explains, “the successes of the women’s movement are inscribed on the charge sheet along with its failures, imagined or otherwise, and both are magnified to suit the purposes of its detractors” (Faludi 1992:xiii). Arguably, “the brilliance of Backlash is that Susan Faludi sees these strategies for what they are: an attempt to divide and isolate women at a crucial moment in their struggle for equality, independence and autonomy” (Smith 1992: xiv). As Joan Smith goes on to explain, “Backlash, with its sharp historical sense, its clear-sighted perception of the opposition, and its faith in the willpower of women...is the balance-sheet which tells us, in a period of concerned anti-feminist propaganda, exactly where we stand” (Smith 1992: xv).

For the most part, Faludi’s Backlash can be used as a lens through which to examine the images fed to us by the media. Furthermore, it assists us in exposing that which is factual and that which is merely propaganda. That is, ‘backlash’, communicated largely through the mass media, involves:

an incredible compendium of incorrect facts, bogus statistics, false logic and unfounded theories, all of which are presented by society and the media in particular as ‘true’ and ‘factual’ in order to keep women subordinate. (www.synaptic.bc.ca)
In this regard, according to Faludi,

> From ‘the man shortage’ to ‘the infertility epidemic’ to ‘female burn-out’ to ‘toxic day care’, these so-called female crises have had their origins not in the actual conditions of women’s lives but in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture and advertising – an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood (Faludi 1992:8-9).

Using the above as a point of departure, in what follows, the validity of Susan Faludi’s text will be considered, and close attention will be paid to an analysis of her theory of ‘backlash’ in terms of its origins, its influence on popular culture, and its effects on women’s minds and bodies. Faludi’s claims will also be evaluated in the light of critical literature from, among other sources, the *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, the *Journal of Women and Language*, and the *Women’s Studies International Forum*.

To begin with, “the truth is that the last decade has seen a powerful counter-assault on women’s rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminists movement did manage to win for women” (Faludi 1992:12). As indicated by its name, the focus point of antifeminism is feminism, “the role of woman at work, at home, in society, and in the culture”, and it aims to promote “a complex political, social, and cultural agenda” (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 20). In short, antifeminism can be seen as a response to feminism, voicing opposition toward feminist standpoints and those responsible for the articulation of such standpoints, which includes arguing that feminism has debilitated women. “Identifying feminism as women’s enemy only furthers the ends of a backlash against women’s equality, simultaneously deflecting attention from the backlash’s central role and recruiting women to attack their own cause” (Faludi 1992:12-13). In the 1980s and 1990s, antifeminists debated the formation of content in the academic field and claimed that feminists were sabotaging the university system. These

backlashes [arose] in reaction to women’s ‘progress’, caused not simply by a bedrock of misogyny but by the specific efforts of contemporary women to improve their status, efforts that have been interpreted time and again by men – especially men grappling with real threats to
their economic and social well-being on other fronts – as spelling their own masculine doom. (Faludi 1992: 13)

In light of the above, Faludi supports the view that “a backlash may be an indication that women have had an effect...[as] backlashes occur when advances have been small, before changes are sufficient to help many people. It is almost as if the leaders of backlashes use the fear of change as a threat before major change has occurred” (1992:14). *Amazons, Blue-stockings, and Crones: A Feminist Dictionary* elaborates further on the irony of this, defining an antifeminist as a “woman who claims the only place for a woman is in the home and who has come out of the home to prove it” (Kramarae, C and Treichler, P.A. 1997: 20). That is, antifeminist causes are not solely supported by men. Cynthia D. Kinnard provides evidence of this in her bibliography, whereby she indicates that “almost half of the antifeminist books and pamphlets and nearly one-third of the articles were written by women” (cited in Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 20). Faludi provides further examples of this in her critique of Beverly LaHaye’s antifeminist campaign to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, “highlight[ing] the paradox inherent in the female antifeminist activist’s position: such women often make a public career of campaigning against women’s right to a public life” (cited in Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 20). An example of this can be seen in the way in which “antifeminists in early twentieth-century England and the United States opposed female suffrage” (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 20).

Taken as a whole...these codes and cajolings, these whispers and threats and myths, move overwhelmingly in one direction: they try to push women back into their ‘acceptable’ roles – whether as Daddy’s girl or fluttery romantic, active nester or passive love object. (Faludi 1992:16)

However, once the right for women to vote was successfully achieved by the women’s movement, antifeminists turned their attention to issues involving abortion and the importance of proper childcare, and accused “the women’s movement of creating a generation of unhappy single and childless women” (Faludi 1992:17).

Specifically, Faludi focuses her analysis on the feminism of the second wave, which took place in the 1970s, and the subsequent antagonistic response of antifeminism, which took place in the 1980s and 1990s.
The war between antifeminists and feminists became exceedingly problematic when the bar moved from verbal abuse to physical violence; when women around the world found themselves being “imprisoned, tortured, and killed for violating patriarchal codes” (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 20). This occurred not only in forgotten corners of society but also in some of its most elite institutions. A brutal example of such antifeminist violence occurred at the University of Montreal in December 1989. After separating the male engineering students from the female engineering students, Marc Lepine shouted, “You’re all fucking feminists” before opening fire. “He killed fourteen women and wounded nine more because he felt that feminists had invaded traditional male territory” (Kowaleski-Wallace 1997: 21). For a more recent example, one simply needs to refer to the prosecution of Martha Stewart, who “was indicted . . . on charges of conspiracy, obstruction of justice and securities fraud, all linked to a personal stock trade she made in 2001” (www.nytimes.com). However, when it came to investigating the elaborate scam behind the Enron scandal, it was discovered that the men responsible “did not receive jail time or the public scrutiny that Martha Stewart did” (www.shvoong.com).

The backlash against feminism aims to remould women into their ‘acceptable’ patriarchal roles, succeeding in this regard by not appearing to be a political struggle but rather simply the advancement of the natural way of life. In contrast, “feminism…asks that women not be forced to ‘choose’ between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves – instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men” (Faludi 1992:18).

### 2.1 Origins of a Reaction: Backlash Movers, Shakers and Thinkers

When it comes to the politics of gender, despair and backlash go hand-in-hand. If one were to try to define the origin of the contemporary backlash, the ranks of the New Right would be the perfect place to start. Once again, we are delivered the hypothesis that women are their own worst enemies. To shed some light on the matter, Faludi explains how “the leaders of the New Right in the USA were not so much defending a prevailing order as resurrecting an outmoded or imagined one” (1992:261). As with previous backlash movements, when the enemy has no face, the face becomes that of a feminist woman. The fact that the New Right locked onto the
feminist movement with such fervour “was in itself a testament to the strength and standing of the women’s movement in the last decade” (Faludi 1992:263). The main aim of the New Right was to draw up a bill that dismantled most of the successes achieved by the women’s movement, and to publicly punish those who chose to rebel.

In short, as Faludi explains, because “much as the New Right warriors billed themselves as aggressive and free agents of change, their manoeuvres were all reactions against what they saw as the dominant enemy – the proponents of women’s rights” (1992:269). Yet, through the New Right’s use of rhetoric, they couched their opposition towards abortion, sexual freedom and career opportunities, not in ‘oppressive’ terms, but rather in a benign tone, labelling their resistance as ‘pro-life’, ‘pro-chastity’ and ‘pro-motherhood’. In turn, this clever and subtle manipulation of language was rapidly and uncritically soaked up by the media, and broadcast to the public in the form of sitcoms, such as, among others, the *Brady Bunch*, where the characters for the most part constituted the virtual embodiment of these right wings views.

Furthermore, “in time-honoured fashion, anti-feminist male leaders…enlisted women to handle the heavy lifting in the campaign against their own rights” (Faludi 1992:270-271). That is, in order for the New Right to succeed, they needed intellectual spokespersons and enthusiastic organisers, all of which the New Right women were able to provide. A good case in point is Connaught C. Marshner, who, in *The New Traditional Woman*, maintains that, “A woman’s nature is, other-oriented . . . Women are ordained by their nature to spend themselves in meeting the needs of others” (Faludi 1992:272). In Marshner’s own opinion, aspects of her youthful conservatism...began as ‘child rebellion’...absorbing [her elders] advice for future use” (1992:273), in the struggle to win back for women their ostensibly ‘natural’ way of life.

Another well-known tool of the New Right was Beverly LaHaye, “the director of Concerned Women of America, the largest female New Right group” (Faludi 1992:272). As Faludi explains, LaHaye’s secret was that “she found she could [assert herself and exert ‘strength’] . . . without challenging the church or threatening her husband . . . if she made it clear that she was seeking only ‘spiritual power’” (1992:282). Understandably, among women, this encouraged a combination of subordination to patriarchy and apolitical spiritual devotion, which
effectively extinguished any sparks of insubordination and any glowing embers of political aspiration.

When it came time for the Ronald Reagan election, women were slowly but surely worked out of the federal system. To expand on this, Faludi explains how “the New Right women who received political appointments typically landed with posts that came with inflated titles but no authority or required them to carry out the administration’s most punitive anti-feminist policies” (1992:292). If the Reagan environment was limiting for New Right women, one can only imagine how lethal it must have been for feminist women. For example,

The Department of Education, which had starred in the campaign to oust the feminists, now directed the effort towards crowning the fathers. If the ‘pro-family’ movement was ‘pro’ anything, it was paternal power. (Faludi 1992:297)

Similarly, instead of the Reagan administration acknowledging the increasing gender gap and taking the requests of women into consideration, the Republican Party encouraged men to take on macho stances in the hope of making an impact on other men. In Faludi’s opinion, “The Republican Party only ‘won’ the battle over the gender gap by default” (1992:310). As the New Right’s ‘pro-family’ philosophy increased its influence on American politics, women once again tended to become increasingly marginalized.

It would, however, be incorrect to suggest that the New Right were primarily responsible for marketing backlash. “Entrée to centre stage awaited cooler talking heads, intermediaries with the proper media polish and academic credentials to translate fiery tirades against women’s independence into tempered sound bites and acclaimed hard covers” (Faludi 1992:314). Their investigation was primarily concerned with a “philosophical, not a personal, discourse over female independence . . . but they all carried personal baggage when they stepped up to the mike” (Faludi 1992:315). In essence, as Faludi maintains:

The point is not to reduce the backlash theorists to psychological case studies but to widen the consideration of their ideas to include some less recognized factor – from professional grievances to domestic role strains – that played important contributory roles in shaping these thinkers’ attitudes towards feminism. (1992:316)
Male backlash voices were also prevalent; for example, George Gilder became categorised as America’s top male chauvinist, while simultaneously establishing for himself a literary career. In Faludi’s opinion, “Unlike some other backlash writers, he is at least honest about the advantages marriage offers his sex and about the real ratio of single men to single women” (1992:320). To concur with Faludi’s opinion, Gilder believes that in general, single men should be characterised as an extremely unpleasant species. He goes further to describe them as “a baboon troop of ‘naked nomads’ who are far more likely than married men to become drug addicts, alcoholics, compulsive gamblers, criminals and murders” (Faludi 1992:321). Through statements such as these, in the blink of an eye, Gilder went from being a freelance writer to the brains behind the Reagan administration.

Another salient and powerful critique of feminism derived from Allan Bloom. His argument was that with the successes of the feminist movement, society began to consist of constantly unsatisfied women and spineless men. Furthermore, according to Bloom, “feminists have invaded every academic sanctuary – a view shared by many male scholars [who] denounc[ed] ‘political correctness’ in the early 1990s” (Faludi 1992:325), in favour of expounding the virtues of traditional conservative gender roles. In Bloom’s case, he reminisces back to the days when males were traditionally ‘known’ to hold all the power and authority, both in public life and home life, and believes not only that this male dominance is under huge attack, but that it should also be defended. What is important to remember when considering Bloom’s critique of the feminist movement is that his “work is a scholarly wasteland: no research, no evidence, not even a single quotation from a single living human being to support [his] analysis of the contemporary situation between the sexes” (Faludi 1992:329). Yet, nevertheless, his \textit{Closing of the American Mind}, in which he reiterates his stance in relation to feminism, became a best seller across the United States.

In contrast, Warren Farrell supported the view that the feminist movement would assist in freeing men from their economic burden of being solely responsible for putting food on the table and having to constantly cover up their feelings and emotions. However, as the media attention on feminist matters began to wane so did Farrell’s enthusiasm for the movement, as well as his popularity. Similarly, during the 1970s, Robert Bly attempted to elaborate upon the peace-loving spirit of feminism, insofar as he argued that both men and women “should embrace their feminine principle; the life preserving nature, [which] he maintained...resided in both sexes but
was unhealthily repressed in men” (Faludi 1992:340). But by the beginning of the 1980s, he too was starting to feel emasculated and sought refuge in isolation. In her analysis of these figures, Faludi notes, “While Warren Farrell and even neoconservative men like George Gilder at least sought to be heard by women, Bly believed strict separatism was the soft male’s only salvation” (1992:341). It appears that the men of the New Age did not seem to have any opposition towards the successes of women’s movement. However, Faludi adds, “Bly may be an advocate of world peace, but as the general of the men’s movement, he is overseeing a battle on the domestic front – and he holds his dovish sentiments from the family–circle conflict” (1992:345).

In many cases, the voices of feminists fared no better, insofar as their words were all too often co-opted by backlash dynamics and used against women and their struggle for freedom. A prominent figure that comes to mind in this regard is Sylvia Ann Hewlett. Drawing attention to the lack of campaigning done around the issue of working mothers and their children, Hewlett sparked instant interest from the backlash press. For years to come, many newscasters, columnists and journalists would appeal to select and accontextualised aspects of Hewlett’s work on the unfortunate ramifications of feminism.

Similarly, many feminist scholars initially focused their investigations on the various differentiations between the sexes, in the hope of overcoming the traditional notions that characteristics such as objectivity and reason are primarily associated with men, whereas characteristics such as emotionality and irrational behaviour are associated with women. In light of this, Faludi thematizes the way in which, “sometimes academics seemed to forget the force of socialisation altogether and presented women’s and men’s roles as biologically predetermined and intractable” (1992:360). For example, Carol Gilligan set out “to show how women’s moral development has been devalued and misrepresented by male psychological researchers, how ethics has been defined only in male terms” (Faludi 1992:362). In essence, the results were as follows:

The differences in moral reasoning that social science researchers have been able to find are most often linked not with sex but with class and education – that is, those very social and economic forces that relational feminists, Gilligan included, have given such a wide berth” (Faludi 1992:364).
Because of this, during ‘backlash’, Gilligan’s theories were easily appropriated to support prejudicial viewpoints that engendered bias against women.

Betty Friedan, too, feminist author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was subject to such manipulation. The irony of Friedan’s work is that she inevitably “yank[ed] out the stitches in her own handiwork” (Faludi 1992:352), because, in the ensuing confusion of backlash, she (along with other feminists) turned on their own. Faludi defines Friedan’s departure from feminism as “an embattled one – Friedan versus the ‘radical feminists’ was how she cast it at the time – and ever since, her accounts of political infighting have featured the same subtext: she was unfairly locked out of the feminist power structure” (1992:356). In essence, her partial acceptance of the New Right language can ultimately be regarded as a manifestation of her (perhaps inadvertent) complicity with backlash; a complicity that fuelled it significantly.

### 2.2 The Backlash in Popular Culture

The dynamics of backlash are particularly evident in popular culture, particularly in print culture publications, films, television and the fashion industry. To begin with, when it came to covering the events of second wave feminism, many of the major publications considered it irrelevant, “declaring this latest ‘fad’ a ‘bore’ or ‘dead’ (Faludi 1992:100). Their agenda aimed not only to neutralise the effects of feminism, but also to portray it as a commercialised movement. More significantly, the media advanced that they had found the solution to the inconsistency many women experienced in their lives, and which would later become the central hypothesis of the backlash thesis: “women have achieved so much yet feel so dissatisfied; it must be feminism’s achievements, that is causing women all this pain” (Faludi 1992:102).

Publications opposing women’s rights increased dramatically toward the end of the 20th century, merely updating their arguments with newly enlisted specialists. As Faludi explains, “The absence of real women in a news account that is allegedly about real women is a hallmark of 1980s backlash journalism” (1992:103). Once again, the three recurring myths of a ‘man shortage’, an ‘economic decline’ and an ‘infertility epidemic’ resurfaced to form the backlash media’s triptych: superwoman
‘burnt-out’ versus New Traditionalist ‘cocooning’; ‘the spinster boom’ versus ‘the return of marriage’; and ‘the infertility epidemic’ versus ‘the baby boomlet’ (Faludi 1992:105). Ultimately, the only acknowledgement women received in the press were when they were turning on one another. ‘Cocooning’ was a term the media specifically associated with the likes of women, not people, who were choosing their homes over the office, and defining themselves as ‘New Feminists’. In Faludi’s opinion, the media portrayed “the New Traditionalist . . . [as] an independent thinker who ‘made her own choices’ and ‘started a revolution’ . . . [Accordingly,] ‘she’s not following a trend . . . she is the trend’” (1992:117).

Thus, a decade later, giddy single women were transformed, “with a touch of the media’s wand” (Faludi 1992:120), from being the press’s ultimate version of the Cinderella fairytale to society’s ugly stepsister, with all fingers pointing to the campaign for women’s rights as the guilty party. Furthermore, “When the backlash press wasn’t labelling single women mental misfits, it was busy counting the . . . exact number of ‘excess’ or ‘redundant’ single women . . . to elevate anxiety levels” (Faludi 1992:123). Yet, when it came to citing facts or statistics to support such statements, documentation was conspicuously scarce.

A couple of years down the line and Hollywood was also seen jumping on the backlash bandwagon, absorbing “the ‘trends’ the 1980s media flashed at independent women – and reflect[ing] them back at moviegoers at twice their size” (Faludi 1992:141). In effect, the backlash was responsible for shaping “much of Hollywood’s portrayal of women in the eighties” (Faludi 1992:141). To elaborate on this, Faludi explains:

In typical themes, women were set against women; women’s anger at their social circumstances was depoliticised and displayed as personal depression instead; and women’s lives were framed as morality tales in which the ‘good mother’ wins and the independent woman gets punished. (1992:141)

In essence, women were once again depicted as their own worst enemy, and the primary reason for why they remained single and childless was advanced as relating to their single-minded pursuit of independence.

Attempts to silence the female voice in Hollywood films have been a recurrent theme during times of backlash. Although the character of Marilyn Monroe has been
construed as a critical figure – for her capacity to tap into the repressed fifties male sexual psyche – arguably, for the most part, women of the time perceived her as the epitome of female docility and submission to male domination through the male gaze. This pattern of submission was once again repeated in Hollywood during the late-1980s, with filmmakers solely preoccupied with the task of “toning down independent women and drowning out their voices” (Faludi 1992:144).

In order for filmmakers to successfully achieve such a reverse metamorphosis, directors very cleverly designed plots that coercively transformed independent women into submissive little girls and passed the transformation off as being “the female character’s own ‘choice’” (Faludi 1992:144). When this was not the case – that is, when women remained strong – it was usually in the service of their children or their marriage, such that they never emerged as independent in the strict sense of the term. British director and screenwriter James Dearden’s infamous Fatal Attraction (1987) – a film in which the voice of the independent woman was ‘drowned out’ – is a good case in point. That is, the protagonist, Alex Forrest, (played by Glen Close) emerges not only as a strong woman in terms of her career and general demeanour, but also as a sexual predator and, indeed, one prone to violence when she cannot have her own way in the latter regard. As the film became increasingly popular, the press realised its potential and cleverly made use of it to increase support for monogamy, and present guidelines for those who were single. People magazine went a step further in their promotion of the film, providing proof of real life ‘fatal attractions’, with the accompanying warning that not only do such incidents take place in real life, but they are often characterised by similar vengeful frenzy. However, what People magazine forgot to mention was that when it comes to real life cases, “such assailants are overwhelmingly male – a fact surely available to the six reporters assigned this apparently important story – all but one of the five aggressors People chose as examples were women” (Faludi 1992:145-146).

Dearden’s initial intention for the film was based on the exploration of “an individual’s responsibility for a stranger’s suffering [, in order] to examine how this man who inflicted pain, no matter how unintentionally, must eventually hold himself accountable” (Faludi 1992:146). Nevertheless, the script was slowly reworked so that the husband came across as ever more lovable, whereas the single woman was slowly but surely transformed into the likes of a malicious and deadly vixen. In essence, “the attraction is fatal only for the single woman, [which] underlines the point driven home
in the final take of *Fatal Attraction*: the best single woman is a dead one” (Faludi 1992:152).

In Faludi’s opinion, “It is as if Hollywood has taken the feminist films [of the seventies] and run the reels backwards . . . propos[ing] that women [of the eighties] had a better deal when they stayed at home” (1992:156). Ultimately, there is no win-win situation for women; those who do not submit to the calling of their nest will no doubt be punished for their insubordination. According to Faludi, “In these backlash films only the woman who buries her intelligence under a baby-doll exterior is granted a measure of professional success without having to forsake companionship” (1992:158).

In conjunction with the press, the movie industry of the 1980s marketed the manipulative representations of the backlash against women’s liberation. Just as with the previously discussed backlash myths, Faludi explains that when it comes to the Baby Boom trend – in other words, trends amongst women born during the post World War Two Baby Boom era – “Women get sorted into two camps: the humble women who procreate, and their monied or careerist sisters who don’t” (1992:163). Monied or careerist women who choose to chase an occupation instead of embracing motherhood and the role of a housewife, are chastised and punished by society, insofar as they are labelled rebellious outcasts. Similarly, Faludi highlights how, “in this sanctimonious climate, abortion bec[a]me...a moral litmus test to separate the good women from the bad” (1992:163).

When attempting to define the style of the 1980s backlash movies, it is clear that they contain elements of the Pygmalion tradition. The Pygmalion tradition is based solely on the notion that women are nothing more than the property of their fathers or husbands. This being the case, men are then seen as the primary guardians of feminine virtue. Once again, one is faced with the battle between fact versus fiction. To shed further light on the situation, Faludi draws attention to the following comparison: “In the real world, blue-collar men might be losing economic and domestic authority, but in these movies the cops and cabbies were demanding respect from cowering affluent women” (1992:167). While men were being portrayed as the hunky heroes, women were being subjected to discrimination, torture and sometimes even death.

This was all the more so on television during the 1980s, as women seemed to become increasingly marginalized within television narratives. With the genre of
action-adventure growing in popularity, women were more often than not portrayed as the ultimate ‘damsel in distress’; while the villains were beating women to a pulp, the heroes were focussing their energies on embodying the macho male façade. Complaints to the Independent Television Commission about such subtle gender discrimination only surfaced during the early 1990s, when women had simply had enough of being portrayed as the desperate housewife, the sensuous vixen or the virginal nun, solely to meet the desires of men. To shed light on the modus operandi of the backlash perpetrators, Faludi explains:

The lurking quality of television’s backlash against independent women is the product of the industry’s own deeply ambivalent affair with its female audience [, which] succeeded in depopulating TV of [them] and replacing them with nostalgia-glazed portraits of ‘apolitical’ family women by banishing feminist issues and reconstructing a ‘traditional’ female hierarchy i.e. housewives, career women, singles. (1992:179-182)

As one delves deeper into the analysis of the backlash in television of the 1980s, it becomes clear that while babies became the metaphorical representation of marriage and motherhood, their absence also constituted a source of condemnation. In short, Faludi explains, “At the same time that 1980s TV was busy saluting the domestic angels of 1950s TV, it was maligning mothers who dared to step outside the family circle” (1992:190).

Furthermore, the constant sound of wedding bells was not only reserved for prime time viewer, more often then not, daytime American soap operas were also chiming along to the matrimonial tune, causing an increase in marriages and a decrease in divorces. For example, the issues thematized in the prime-time programme ThirtySomething “included cocooning, the mummy track, the man shortage and the biological clock” (Faludi 1992:194). The show portrays a whole array of cliché backlash women – from the heavenly serene mother figure, Hope Murdoch (played by Mel Harris), to the single woman climbing the corporate ladder, Ellyn Warren (played by Polly Draper). Ultimately the series drove home the message that choosing the home over a career is the right choice to make. At the same time, corporate organisations saw the opportunity to reap the benefits of ThirtySomething’s topics, and jumped on board for the ride, insofar as they utilized it as a model for social organisations and as an index for social concerns.
In past ‘backlashes’, the fashion industry has been responsible for designing increasingly restrictive fashions and commanding women to conform. In short, backlash mentality is orientated around the idea that the women’s liberation movement was responsible for depriving women of looking feminine. To elaborate, Faludi explains, “The fashion industry’s publicists . . . blamed . . . feminism . . . [for generating] women’s sartorial ‘identity crisis’ – by inventing a ‘dress-for-success’ ideology and foisting it onto women” (1992:209). For example, the unveiling of the woman’s executive work suit during the late 1970s became a metaphorical representation of the increase in women’s political and economic ambitions. However, because of its relative simplicity, such clothing soon became the fashion industry’s nemesis. It is for this reason that clothing stores progressively did away with their executive-dressing sections and replaced them with more colourful and flamboyant styles, which appealed to (and engendered) a less ‘focused’ disposition. Lacroix, ‘The King of Couture’ – and a crystal clear representation of the 1980’s obsession with class – soon replaced the racks where the woman’s executive work suit had once been displayed. Lacroix’s High Femininity grew in popularity, purely because it portrayed women in a heavenly and virginal light, simply lying in wait so as to be devoured by their masculine lovers. Admittedly, this ‘deliverance’ provided by Lacroix’s misogynistic portrayal of women did not last long, and soon his collection decreased in popularity.

Yet, this notwithstanding, clothing stores persevered in their attempts to coerce female shoppers into purchasing High Femininity garments. In order for High Femininity to achieve success in drawing independent career women back to their ‘traditional’ subordinate roles, they had to market the clothes in such a manner that they appealed to workingwomen. For example, Faludi highlights that “if the clothes manufacturers could not get women to wear puffball skirts, they would try dictating another humbling mode of fashion persuading women to think of themselves as daddy’s little girls” (1992:223). Fashionable lingerie was also no longer marketed as intimate undergarments associated with women’s newfound sexual liberation. In Faludi’s opinion, it was as if “the American intimate apparel explosion of 1987 never happened” (1992:229).
2.3 Backlashings: The Effects on Women’s Minds and Bodies

Taking all the above aspects of backlash into account, it is possible to argue that backlash did have very negative effects on the bodies and minds of women. On the one hand, with regard to their bodies, women were spoon-fed unrealistic images of what a woman’s body should in actual fact look like. In essence, the 1980s backlash defined “the first woman of the ‘New Generation’ [as having] no imperfections, [shrinking] in height, gain[ing] almost three inches on her breasts, shed[ding] an inch from her waist, and develop[ing] three sets of eyelashes” (Faludi 1992:237). This resulted in the new fundamental statistics of 34-23-36. Therefore, the ultimate top models during the 1980s were the mannequins, endorsing a ‘return to femininity’, as if it involved the revitalisation of the feminine features that were previously smothered by feminists during the 1970s. As could have been predicted, the cosmetic industry jumped on board the backlash train, labelling women’s liberation as the primary cause of the negative impact on women’s physical appearance. Faludi claims, “The beauty industry may seem to be the most superficial of the cultural institutions participating in the backlash, but its impact on women was, in many respects, the most intimately destructive – to both female bodies and minds” (1992:240). During periods of backlash, the cosmetic industry supported the view that a woman’s traditional feminine qualities could be measured by the extent of her porcelain exterior.

Similarly, “the perfume industry decided to sell weaker fragrances to weaker women, and both the scent and the scented were toned down” (Faludi 1992:243). As the image of women with loving husbands and doting children were proving to be unsuccessful incentives, perfume advertisements soon became littered with fragile and submissive representations of women. Analogously, cosmetic trends of the late 1980s focused their efforts on portraying women as silent and childlike. In this regard, the cosmetic industry invented an increasingly rewarding approach to incorporating backlash perspectives as a marketing tool, presenting the prospect of eternal youth. Faludi explains that the successes of “the beauty companies fared better hawking anti-wrinkle potions than [that of] traditional scents and cosmetics because backlash appeals to this area were able to couple female awareness of ancient cultural fears of the older woman with modern realities of the baby-boom woman’s aging demographic” (1992:248).
Another cosmetic organisation that surfaced in the early 1980s was “the American Society of Plastic and Reconstruction Surgeons, [which] billed ‘body sculpturing’ as safe, effective, affordable – and even essential to women’s mental health” (Faludi 1992:249-250). Medical practitioners presented ‘body sculpturing’ as an opportunity for women to enhance their self-image and increase their prospects. In next to no time, surgeons were quoting propaganda advertisements as if these were degrees that could be used to measure their specialized skills. In addition, women’s ability to give birth, or in some cases their decision not to become mothers, became a backlash issue too. To elaborate on the issue of abortion, Faludi explains:

The media generally defined the struggle over abortion as a moral and biological debate . . . but the peculiarly fierce animosity that the Rescuers brought to the battle over women’s reproduction freedom was fuelled by passions . . . from severe economic and social dislocations [that] . . . they blamed . . . on the rise of independent and professional women. (1992:438-439)

The actual issue at hand was the recent acknowledgement of women’s right to contraception, which played a major part in influencing their sexual attitude and behaviour, and which ultimately negated the control men had previously had over women’s ability to procreate. To counteract the contraceptive revolution, the anti-abortion movement labelled the women’s liberation movement as women’s own worst enemy and argued that women’s right to an abortion, in essence, victimised them of their own choices.

Supporters of the anti-abortion movement can be classed as among backlash’s most violent representatives, because of their extreme reaction to even the slightest advancement of women’s right to control their own fertility. While the position of the anti-abortion movement does not prevent women from aborting unwanted foetuses, Faludi explains, “there is now an upper time limit of 24 weeks, except in cases of risk of grave permanent injury to, or risk to the like of, the mother, or risk of severe foetal handicap” (1992:452-453).

Part of the argument concerning women’s right to abortion is the way in which the anti-abortion movement defines mother and child. For example, “The foetus is a conscious, even rumbustious tyke, the mother a passive, formless and inanimate ‘environment’” (Faludi 1992:459). In essence, as the argument concerning women’s rights to abortion heightened, it soon became evident that the foetus was entitled to
more rights than its mother. Doctors, who initially considered the foetus to be a unit on its own – independent from that of its mother – soon began to perceive the mother as a supplementary unit with no choice in the matter.

On the other hand, with regard to their minds, women were psychologically patronised into assuming a vulnerable, childlike mentality. The attack on the female mind was conceivably the most intimate, “impressing its discouraging and moralist[ic] message most effectively, and destructively, on the millions of women seeking help from . . . therapy books and counselling – women who were already feeling insecure and vulnerable, already bunkered in isolated private trenches” (Faludi 1992:370-371). Furthermore, psychologists did not seem to understand the devastating ramifications that such a cultural attack would have on women’s psyche, and thereby, albeit inadvertently, became part of the problem.

In essence, women were encouraged to imbibe feelings of serenity and acceptance towards situations that they had no say over, instead of the courage needed to effect change in situations where their influence did hold ground. In order to fully grasp this notion, it is important to refer to Faludi’s definition of ‘addiction’. “The meaning of ‘addiction’ itself – ‘the giving of oneself to a desire’ – nicely matches the traditional Victorian vision on feminine passivity” (1992:380). In terms of the 1980s backlash, it was advanced that women should return to childlike attitudes. Furthermore, towards the end of the 1980s there occurred an increase in the thematization of ‘co-dependency’ – “a dysfunctional pattern of living and problem solving that developed during childhood. Co-dependent behaviour is learned by watching and imitating other family members who display this type of behaviour and learned from family rules and family routines” (www.psychologistanywhereanytime.com). Obviously, this lent itself to the propagation of traditional submissive attitudes among women. Understandably, the continuous emphasis on the notion that women consisted of defective characteristics exposed the true patriarchal colours of these popular psychologists.

An example of this, as Faludi explains, was the popular diagnosis of a form of “so-called ‘natural’ female masochism [.which] was more likely...the unnatural product of a sexist social system of rewards and punishments that induced many women to adopt submissive behaviour” (1992:388).

Despite the fact that backlash has incorporated feminist language into it’s attack on women’s minds through the medium of self-help therapy books, it rejected
the most fundamental principle of feminist theory, namely the significant role of personal and social growth. Furthermore, as Faludi notes, “Backlash therapists of the 1980s firmly rejected another fundamental feminist principle – that men can, and should, change too” (1992:374).

2.4 Critiques

By framing an investigation around the nature of negotiating gender identity, Faludi’s *Backlash* is arguably of signal importance in the thematization of the limits imposed by the media on the negotiation of gender identity. Furthermore, the utilization of Faludi’s various analyses of the ‘backlash’ against feminism works not only to expose “the affiliations ascribed to feminism [as]...myths”, but also exposes that the “so-called female crises [have] their origins in the media, popular culture and advertising” (Faludi 1992:8-9).

In this regard, Reggie Nadelson from the *Independent* (1992) supports Faludi’s theoretical standpoint of “the politics of backlash [as] the politics of resentment”; that is, resentment on the part of traditionally orientated (patriarchal) males to the recent successes of second wave feminism. In particular, Nadelson endorses her argument “that advertising, television, pop culture – in fact anyone with an eye for change and the business it could bring – delivered mainstream credibility to the moral posturing of the New Right” (www.independent.co.uk). In addition, Zoe Heller from the *Independent* (1992), in recognition of its significance, valorises Faludi’s “demolition of the anti-feminist ‘trend stories’ seen in the US and British media” as impressive (www.independent.co.uk).

Similarly, other authors have implicitly lent their support to Faludi’s claims. In volume 8:1 of the *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, the article entitled ‘Emergent Feminist(?) Identities: Young Women and the Practice of Micropolitics’ by Shelley Budgeon, examines the identities of young women produced within the late modern social conditions, “with the aim of exploring these identities in relation to the increasingly fragmented project of second wave feminism” (2001:7). The indication is “that the identities under construction allow the young women to engage in a resistant fashion with the choices they have available at the micro-level of everyday life” (2001:9). In doing so, Budgeon reiterates Faludi’s claim that the backlash against feminism aims to remould women into their ‘acceptable’ patriarchal
roles, succeeding in this regard by not appearing to be a political struggle but rather simply the advancement of the natural way of life.

Analogously, in her article entitled ‘Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavour’, in volume 26:1 of the Journal of Women and Language, author Amanda D. Lotz pointed out “that feminists must not be mislead by simplistic popular media constructions of third-wave feminism, but should consider uses emerging in other national contexts for more productive theory building” (2003:26). In this way she not only echoed Faludi’s stance on the role of the media in the subordination of women, but also her call for the configuration of strategic approaches towards addressing such subordination.

In Feminism in Popular Culture, the chapter entitled ‘Popularity Contests: The Meanings of Popular Feminism’ by authors Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley, questions the importance of feminism in popular culture. The indication is that “the idea of feminism in popular culture gestures towards a generational politics of feminism and is shaped by our own experiences of growing up with feminism in the popular” (2006:1). In response to this, Hollows and Moseley “chart some of the changing ways in which feminisms have expressed their relationship to the popular from the 1980s onwards, a period that is historically post-second-wave feminism” (2006:7). In doing so, they build upon the aftermath of the dynamics of backlash, which are particularly evident in popular culture, as analysed previously by Faludi.

In volume 28:2-3 of the Women’s Studies International Forum (May-June 2005), an article entitled ‘Ivory tower? Feminist women’s experiences of graduate school’ by authors Paula Barata, Sandeep Hunjan and Jillian Leggatt, points out both the positive and negative aspects of creating feminist identity, negotiating new gender roles, valuing and devaluing all things feminine, and interfacing with the masculine world. In this way they emulate, to a significant degree, the contours of the more salient aspects of Faludi’s argument.

However, the utilization of Faludi’s various analyses, in the interest of rendering social critique, has become progressively more problematic during the first decade of the 21st century. This is because her analyses engage neither with the development of media technologies subsequent to the early 1990s, nor with the way in which such technological developments now engage audiences on a greater multiplicity of levels than before, in a manner that consequently stands to inform their
subjectivity to a degree hitherto unimagined. (A good example of the latter would, of course, be the proliferation of interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web). As such, in the light of such technological developments, it is necessary to investigate the continued relevance of Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992) for the negotiation of gender identity in the contemporary era.
Chapter Three: Thematic Resonances and Dissonances Between Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* and the Lara Croft Phenomenon

In the context of an increasingly aware and competitive gendered environment, there is a need to identify whether the power relations in the media industry reflect the dissolution or augmentation of Faludi’s ‘backlash’ phenomenon. In this regard, limited attention has been given to the possible thematic resonances and dissonances between, on the one hand, the power dynamics within the narrative of Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987), examined by Faludi in *Backlash* (1992), and, on the other hand, the power dynamics within the narrative of West’s *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), and, for that matter, the Lara Croft phenomenon. Arguably, such attention is valuable because just as *Fatal Attraction* constitutes a landmark ‘propaganda’ film for backlash – and hence the key cinematic text around which Faludi appears to have constructed her entire argument – so too *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* constitutes a contemporary cinematic cornerstone for the negotiation of gender identity.

That is, in a comprehensive review of research on the power dynamics within the narrative of *Fatal Attraction* (1987), Faludi observed that “Hollywood restated and reinforced the backlash thesis: women were unhappy because they were too free; their liberation had denied them marriage and motherhood” (1992:141). This highlights the perennial feature of cinema in backlash periods with “efforts to hush the female voice in American films” (Faludi 1992:141). Although this body of work forms an important base for negotiating gender identity in contemporary film theory, much more work needs to be done in order to investigate whether transformation subsequent to Faludi’s analysis of the effects of backlash theory on the negotiation of gender identity has involved a dissolution or augmentation of the backlash phenomenon she identified.

In particular, the utilization of Faludi’s various analyses, in the interest of rendering social critique, has become progressively more problematic during the first decade of the 21st century. This is because her analyses engage neither with the development of media technologies subsequent to the early 1990s, nor with the way in which such technological developments now engage audiences on a greater multiplicity of levels than before, and in a manner that consequently stands to inform
their subjectivity to a degree hitherto unimagined. As will be discussed, a good example of the latter would, of course, be the proliferation of interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web.

Thus, in the light of such technological developments, this chapter seeks to investigate the possible resonances and dissonances between Lyne’s film *Fatal Attraction* (1987) – as focused on by Faludi – and West’s film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), against the backdrop of the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* phenomenon; as will be discussed, this phenomenon encompasses sequels to the film, online interactive sites, graphic novels, figurines, and video games, among other products. Ultimately, this is done with a view to evaluating whether the power relations in the media industry reflect a dissolution or augmentation of the backlash phenomenon identified by Faludi.


The narrative of Adrian Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987) revolves around the story of a married man, Daniel Gallager, (played by Michael Douglas) and a single career woman, Alex Forrest, (played by Glenn Close) who decide to indulge in a weekend affair. However, trouble in paradise begins to brew when their weekend of sexual frenzy turns into a bitter obsession.

Daniel Gallagher, the prize family man, has it all; a successful career as a New York attorney, a loving wife, and a doting daughter. That is, until he catches the eye of one Alex Forrest, an editor he encounters while at a business function and later again at a meeting. Their mutual attraction seems instantaneous and, with his wife and daughter away for the weekend, Dan sees the perfect opportunity for him and Alex to take advantage of the situation. However, what to Dan initially seemed like nothing more than a weekend of pleasure, takes a dangerous turn when Alex realises that she was nothing more than a simple fling in Dan’s eyes.

Believing the affair to be over, Dan returns to his family life as if his weekend affair with Alex had never happened. Harbouring feelings of hurt and resentment, Alex slowly but surely becomes obsessed with Dan, looking for any excuse to meet with him. In a desperate attempt to obsessively cling to him, Alex soon finds herself transforming from a successful career woman into a deranged and suicidal lunatic.
This becomes clear to the viewers when Alex tries to slit her wrists after Dan tries to make her see the weekend for what it was, a mere flash in the pan.

In a desperate attempt to cut all his ties with Alex, Dan relocates his family from Manhattan to Bedford. Nonetheless, this does not stop Alex in her feverish pursuit of him and she manages once again to track him down. Adamant that she will not be ignored, Alex does not realise that her obsession with Dan has driven her insane. Dan, fearing for the safety of his family, eventually turns to a police lieutenant in order to obtain a restraining order against Alex, all the while pretending it is “for a client” of his. To his frustration, Dan is told that by no means may he obstruct Alex’s rights without evidence of due cause. Furthermore, to his horror, he is told that one way to overcome this problem would be to expose and own up to his adulterous behaviour.

Alex drives this point home when she decides to punish Dan for ignoring her by putting his daughter Ellen’s pet bunny in a pot to boil on the stove. Finally pushed over the edge, Dan confesses his infidelity to Beth and tells her all about Alex’s pregnancy. Left with feelings of betrayal, Beth kicks Dan out of their house but not before Dan lets Alex know that their secret is out in the open, expunging her of her power to manipulatively blackmail him. Beth takes this as her cue to take control of the situation, warning Alex that if she does not leave her family alone, she will kill her. Enraged by the turn of events, Alex decides to teach Dan and Beth a lesson by kidnapping Ellen and taking her to an amusement park for the day. Panic-stricken at the disappearance of her child, Beth ends up injuring herself in a car accident while desperately searching for Ellen. Once again, fearing for his family’s safety, Dan turns to the police in the hope that they will arrest Alex. However, to his dismay, Dan is told that the only assistance that the police can provide is in driving by his home and keeping an eye out for any intruders. Realising their family is in grave danger, the Gallaghers decide to stick together as a family unit.

Driven mad by jealousy, Alex is convinced that if she were to eliminate Beth, there would be nothing else preventing her from being with Dan. Breaking into the Gallagher’s house, Alex lunges at Beth with a kitchen knife while she is soaking in the bath after returning from the hospital. Hearing chaos coming from the bathroom, Dan burst in and manages to shove Alex into the bathtub, drowning her. Almost as if she returns from the dead, Alex springs up from the water, waving the knife madly in the air. As if giving into her motherly instincts, Beth fetches Dan’s gun and fires a
shot, hitting Alex in the chest and ultimately killing her. The scene ends with the arrival of the police and a close up of the Gallagher family unit, with the camera cleverly zooming in on a photograph of Dan, Beth and Ellen.

In order to analyse the power dynamics prevalent within Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987), it is imperative to take into consideration Laura Mulvey’s subsequent question of whether or not it is *just* to portray women solely “as objects of a male gaze?” (Jacobsson 1999:5). The reason for this is that, generally, movies categorise men and women into separate gender roles, all the while “establishing the existence of the male gaze” (Jacobsson 1999:5). Her focus, however, is on the question of whether or nor it would be possible to reverse the effects of this male gaze in modern film, presenting the possibility of a female gaze.

Apparently resonating with such concerns, *Fatal Attraction* was initially construed as challenging the dominant construction of the traditional male gaze; it was said to have attempted altering the traditional male gaze and substituting it for a more female one. Examples of this can be seen in the way in which Alex seductively initiates the sexual encounter with Daniel; luring him into her web of desire. The second clue of the potential presence of the female gaze takes place during the passionate sexual intercourse they indulge in on their way up to Alex’s apartment. The importance of this scene is not only that it takes place in the elevator, but also that they do not resort to the ‘missionary position’ during their copulation, showing Alex in an equal light to Daniel; because instead of towering above her, she meets him eye to eye. Furthermore, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Alex’s advances toward Dan are being rejected. However, refusing to be nothing more than a one-night-stand, Alex rejects the patriarchal voice of Dan, and becomes violently persistent on getting her own way. In this case, it is to have Dan as her husband; the husband her career-orientated life has always denied her.

Yet, according to Faludi’s analysis of the film, the above three points notwithstanding, no emergence of a female gaze occurred in Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction*. To elaborate on this, J. Williams explains, “*Fatal Attraction* is fundamentally a horror film set in yuppie-melodrama-land: its whole structure becomes blindingly clear once you realise that the part usually played by the Thing/ the Blob/ the Bug (the virus) is played by the Single Woman, Alex” (1993:234). Similarly, Laura Mulvey advances the view that Hollywood takes the form of a monolithic structure so as to reaffirm the perception of the male psyche, making it concrete. In essence, audiences are presented
with a narrative that specifically depicts the unconscious fears and desires of the patriarchal system. To shed light on the matter, Jacobsson explains, “Women are objectified in the Hollywood movies through unconscious desires, founded in the patriarchal ideology, giving a ‘male gaze’” (1999:7). Mulvey concurs with Jacobsson’s argument in her book entitled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, supporting the notion that women are objectified through the male gaze, rendering them as passive beings within the narrative. In short, when it comes to the world of film, the male gaze is, in essence, the representation of the camera lens, encouraging the viewer “to identify with this male gaze” (Jacobsson 1999:7) in a way that invariably objectifies the woman on the screen. Accordingly, Mulvey points out that there are three various aspects prevalent to cinema. The first is the eye of the cameraman or director, responsible for selecting the angles with which to shoot the object. The second is that of the characters, all of which are representatives of the illusion at hand, which, discursively speaking, is infused with the ideology of patriarchy. The third is that of the viewers, who fall prey to the manipulation of the first two aspects and who then, albeit inadvertently, propagate this ideology. As such, in each of these various aspects endemic to cinema, the male gaze objectifies women.

Hence the importance of questioning the possibility of reversing the traditional male gaze and substituting it with a female gaze, “where the woman would be objectifying the man to a subject of their desires and pleasures of looking” (Jacobsson 1999:8). Thanks to the women’s movements, women have been encouraged over the years to fight for their right to equality in all spheres of existence, from the realm of party politics to the domain of aesthetics. As previously discussed, “this notion has also been acknowledged in cultural production, such as film production, and an issue taken up by feminist film criticism is whether we can…talk…about a female gaze or not” (Jacobsson 1999:8).

As discussed above, at first glance, Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987) seems to protest against Mulvey’s notion of the traditional male gaze. However, a more circumspect approach to the text reveals that this movie can be used instead as a case in point to examine the validity of Mulvey’s notion about the traditional male gaze. As previously discussed in chapter two of this study, in order to extinguish any threat to patriarchy, the backlash thesis is solely based upon the suppression of woman’s freedom and liberation. This involves making women understand that by rejecting the secure elements of marriage and motherhood, they inevitably become their own worst
enemy. The importance of such a backlash thesis is to see it for what it is, patriarchy’s way of establishing male dominance within society, and not as a verification of women’s nature. Furthermore, “men’s unconscious desire to keep the system as it is and to do this at all levels and by all possible means, is maintained for example in the use of Hollywood movies” (Jacobsson 1999:9). This is simply because both narrative agency and possession of the gaze have to be summed up in relation to psychoanalytic structure. Therefore, what some may consider the reaffirmation of the traditional male gaze, has inevitably been supported by a backlash perception of the single career woman, who, because she is both ambitious and powerful, is ultimately seen as a potential threat to the dominance of patriarchy. For this reason, one could argue that, although on the one hand, Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* seems to have the potential to provide its viewers with the possibility of a female gaze, on the other hand, for the most part, the film serves primarily as an example of how the desire and preferences of the viewers have the ability to direct the film towards a more traditional male gaze. Still further, it represents a picture of working women as psychologically damaged beings who simply need to accept the traditional norms of patriarchal society, or die. As Jacobsson asserts, “The use of psychoanalytic theories is still relevant in order to explain and understand the status quo, the patriarchal order in which we are caught” (1999:25).

In this regard, shortly after hitting the big screen, *Fatal Attraction* was advanced as responsible for engendering awareness around the possible dangers of infidelity. Understandably, feminists opposed the portrayal of Alex as an ambitious career woman who transforms into a mad woman. In an echo of this, Faludi presents a theoretical perspective not only of the inception and developmental changes of the screenplay of Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987), but also of the way in which its thematic orientation around the reversal of gender power was negatively received by audiences around the globe – audiences whose subjectivity was thoroughly informed by the discourses of ‘backlash.’ In doing so, Faludi alerts her readers to the fact that the initial script had been doctored in such a way as to situate the character of Alex in a completely negative light, all the while turning a blind eye to Dan’s involvement in the affair.

In essence, Faludi’s analysis of *Fatal Attraction* provides powerful evidence for her argument that the film served the backlash thesis in providing a de facto anti-feminist message and, in actual fact, was primarily created for that purpose. More
specifically, Dearden was forced into altering the script to an immense extent, so that viewers lost sight of the moral message of the original, which criticised the way in which men treat women like mere objects, rather than showing them the respect due to every human being.

The irony of this situation was that, initially, *Fatal Attraction* was intended to be a feminist film. The film then changed hands with Paramount and someone with less feminist ideas replaced the original producer. Placed in the hands of director Adrian Lyne, the first step in changing the feminist motif of the original script, was to transform the script in such a way that, instead of supporting a feminist viewpoint, the film now supported the backlash thesis, namely that career women were ‘evil’ and ‘dangerous’. Therefore, the character of Daniel Gallagher was cast in a more sympathetic light, so that he could win the hearts of the audience. Ultimately, the plot was transformed from depicting Alex Forrest as the victim of a thoughtless man, to depicting Daniel Gallagher as the victim of a career woman on a mad, suicidal rampage. Indeed, Lyne even instructed Dearden to rewrite the script so as to have Alex initiate the sexual encounter with Daniel, seducing him as an equal, and then rejecting the patriarchal voice by violently persisting in getting her own way. To push the boundaries even further, Alex was then thrown into a downward spiral of psychotic vengeance, whereby she stalks Daniel, while plotting to capture him as the husband her career had always prevented her from having.

Another significant change that should be noted is that in Dearden’s original script, Daniel’s wife Beth (played by Anne Archer), also had a career. However, in order to serve the backlash thesis, she was rewritten into the role of the loving housewife and doting mother, who abandoned her career in favour of her family duties. Needless to say, this was the version Lyne chose to shoot when it came to filming the movie. Moreover, not satisfied with ending the film with Alex’s suicide during a serenade of Madame Butterfly, Lyne shot the finale of *Fatal Attraction* with both Daniel and Beth working as a married unit to destroy the evil career woman. For this reason, Lyne’s perspective of career women is arguably that they are bound to suffering from psychotic behaviour, purely due to the stresses women experience within the workplace, and because of their rejection of the patriarchal voice calling them to their destiny of the home.

The problem with the above is that Faludi’s general analyses of ‘backlash,’ along with her specific analysis of Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987), is orientated
around a contrast of the successes of second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, with the successes of ‘backlash’ of the 1980s and early 1990s, all of which takes place against the backdrop of the similar reversal of gender power that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. That is, while the 1940s saw women significantly empowered within industry and various other professions, on account of men’s absence during World War Two, the 1950s saw not only the return of men to positions of dominance in the workplace, but also significant efforts to return women to their previously disempowered housewife moulds. Thus, what Faludi’s analyses do not engage with, is the subsequent development of media technologies, during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, and the way in which, through such developments, the media now not only reaches far more people than ever before, but also engages them on a far greater multiplicity of levels – such as interactive exchanges on the world wide web – all of which have the potential to inform subjectivity to a degree hitherto unimagined.

As such, under these circumstances, it is arguably of immense importance to investigate whether the phenomenon of ‘backlash,’ identified by Faludi, has been subject to augmentation or dissolution in the years succeeding the publication of her text. This is not least because, while such proliferation of technology is part of globalisation, and while the expansion of globalisation has been concomitant with a world wide extension of democracy, the simultaneous augmentation of ‘backlash’ at an international level would necessarily entail a profound contradiction of the principles of democracy, in a manner that would render the much vaunted political successes of globalisation a mere façade.

### 3.2 The Power Dynamics within *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001)

The Lara Croft phenomenon is a good case in point to investigate the above concerns. Simon West’s *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003), originated from the series of the *Tomb Raider* video games. The opening scene shows Lara Croft (played by Angelina Jolie) exploring the relics of an ancient Egyptian tomb in search of a very rare diamond. On approaching a chamber toward the end of the tomb, Croft is suddenly attacked by a giant robot. Fighting with the robot in an intense struggle, Croft escapes death by dislodging the robot’s motivational circuit, resulting in its malfunction. Snatching up
a memory card, Croft inserts it into the robot, using it as a laptop. At this point the scene changes and Croft’s combat zone is revealed as nothing more than a training program, set up by her assistant, Bryce, in the comfort in her own home.

In terms of the narrative, the earth is moving into the initial stages of a rare planetary alignment, which, when concomitant with the reconnecting of the disjointed halves of the legendary ‘Triangle of Light’, will result in disaster for humanity. In an attempt to protect humanity, Croft finds herself jetting off in the interest of preventing the reconnecting of the ‘Triangle of Light’.

Initially in an effort to distract Croft’s attention from her helplessness in the face of the ever-approaching date, 15 May – the day Croft’s father mysteriously disappeared – Hillary, Croft’s butler, presents Croft with the possibility of exploring several projects. She, however, does not avail herself of his efforts, unable to overcome the loss of her father.

During a dream, Croft is reminded of a significant piece of information that her father had left her with before his mysterious disappearance. This jogs her memory back to the intricate details of the planetary alignment, and an object that could possibly be connected with the ‘Triangle of Light’. Roused out of her slumber by the periodic ticking of a clock, and after following its incessant ticking, she happens upon a hidden chamber with a clock that had mysteriously begun ticking away. Getting to the bottom of Croft’s discovery, Bryce tinkers with the clock, uncovering an unusual object disclosed within the clock.

Believing the clock-like device to be linked to the ‘Triangle of Light,’ Croft approaches an old friend of her father’s whose speciality is investigating clocks. However, Mr Wilson renounces any connection between the clock-like device and the ‘Triangle of Light’. As the narrative progresses, Croft comes into contact with the likes of Alex West, a fellow architect interested in raiding tombs by destructive means. Sparks begin to fly between the two star-crossed tomb raiders, yet Croft will not allow herself to stoop to Alex’s level by exchanging such architectural relics for monetary gain. Later that night, Croft receives a call from Wilson, notifying her that he divulged information regarding Croft’s identity and the intricate details of the clock-like device to a man named Manfred Powell, a member of the Illuminati, which Wilson himself is part of.

In order to get to the bottom of Wilson’s association with the Illuminati and Mr Powell, Croft visits Powell at his residence in search of the truth, providing Powell
with photographic evidence of the clock. It is only when she is discussing the situation with Bryce that she comes to the realisation that Powell is in fact lying about what he knows regarding the intricate details of the clock. Later that night, Croft’s house is invaded by armed commandos and, regardless of Croft’s efforts to keep the clock-like device out of harms way, it is taken from her.

Surprisingly, early the following morning, Croft is delivered a letter from her father, indicating his arrival after the initial phases of the planetary alignment. In a dream, Croft’s father reveals that the clock is in fact a key with which the two halves of the ‘Triangle of Light’ may be retrieved in order to grant its owner the most destructive power of all time. With the ‘Triangle of Light’ initially imprisoned within the city walls of those who worshipped it, eventually the temptation of power became too much and the city was destroyed. In order to prevent such devastation from reoccurring, the ‘Triangle of Light’ is split into two separate parts. One half is buried within the depths of a tomb located in Cambodia, whereas the other half was hidden within the ruined city itself, located in modern day Siberia. Spurred on by her father, Croft goes in search of the two halves so as to destroy them before they are able to land in the hands of the Illuminati.

After locating the first half in Cambodia, Croft arranges to meet Powell in Venice so as to unite in locating the second half of the triangle. While working in partnership with Croft, Powell reveals that Croft’s father was once a member of the Illuminati. Despite both the resentment she feels with regard to her father’s association with the Illuminati, and her hesitance to work alongside Powell, Croft and Bryce agree to meet Powell in Siberia. Once inside the tomb, they are presented with a giant vision of the solar system, which becomes clearer as the planetary alignment draws near to its completion. Successfully, Croft gets her hands on the final piece of the ‘Triangle of Light’. Thus, when Powell attempts to reconnect the two halves, they discover that they do not fuse. Coming to the realisation that Croft is concealing the solution to the problem, Powell threatens to murder West unless she hands it over. Faced without much of a choice, Croft agrees and the ‘Triangle of Light’ becomes too much for them to handle.

Croft is then thrown into an alternative existence, coming face to face with her father. He explains that their meeting is the ramification of reactivating the ‘Triangle of Light’ and desperately encourages her to get rid of it, so as to prevent any future harm that it may cause. Leaving her father’s side, Croft is brought back to the tomb in
Siberia, where time is elapsing from the moment of West’s death. After reversing the sequence of events that took place in West’s murder, Croft obeys her father’s instructions and destroys the ‘Triangle of Light’. With the tomb on the verge of self-destruction, the adventurers vacate but not before Powell has time to tell Croft that he murdered her father. Enraged by this new discovery, Croft kills Powell and escapes just before the tomb comes crashing down.

Back at Croft’s mansion, Hillary and Bryce are shocked at the sight of Croft in a very feminine dress. Turning to pay her final respects to her father, Croft ventures into the garden where her father’s memorial is situated. Upon her return, Hillary presents her with a silver tray holding her much-loved guns, which she seizes with an alluring smile. As such, although on a surface level, she comes across as a liberated action figure, a more circumspect approach reveals that throughout the film she has remained a disempowered pawn in the hands of male characters. From the outset, her actions are co-ordinated by Bryce, who plays with her as one would a video game character. Similarly, while in the absence of her father, her butler takes care of her as one would a child, it is only through the direction of her father – albeit in a dream – that she embarks on her journey. Analogously, other male characters alternately advise her and hinder her on this journey, until she returns home, where she becomes once again beholden to the memory of her father and once again subordinate to the paternalism of her butler.

The above power dynamics prevalent within Lara Croft: Tomb Raider come as no surprise because they pervade the video game in which she features; indeed, the video game character preceded the film character and hence functioned as a hermeneutic key for the latter. In essence, when it comes to popular computer games, Croft broke the traditional mould of the stereotypical supporting role of the female character to the male hero. This in itself was a welcome change for female gamers, in that “there was something refreshing about looking at the screen and seeing myself as a woman. Even if I was performing tasks that were a bit unrealistic…I still felt like, Hey, this is a representation of me, as myself, as a woman. In a game. How long have we waited for that?” (Nikki Douglas cited in Cassell and Jenkins 1999).

With the overwhelming success of the game, came the release of the Tomb Raider films and, on some levels, such as its structure and narrative, is said to pillage the well-known Indiana Jones films. However, Croft’s popularity was not only about embarking on adventurous journeys across the globe, as this is a common
characteristic among action hero films. Instead, Croft had a unique element that drew her audience to her; like never before, audiences were presented with the epitome of a female fantasy figure right in the centre of all the action. Simply put, her curvaceous figure was just as much a part of the narrative as was her raiding of tombs. This serves as a source of evidence when it comes to Croft being classified as the object of one’s sexual desire, a tool that was very cleverly used in the marketing and advertising of *Tomb Raider*. For example, through the character of Croft, women were spoon-fed an unrealistic image of what a woman’s body should look like. In short, Croft can be defined as the embodiment of “the first woman of the ‘New Generation’, [having] no imperfections, [shrinking] in height, gain[ing] almost three inches on her breasts, shed[ding] an inch from her waist, and develop[ing] three sets of eyelashes” (Faludi 1992:237). In effect, this resulted in Croft being designed to meet the fundamental ‘backlash’ statistics of 34-23-36.

Clearly, it was the intention of Croft’s creators to make her appealing to both men and women alike, and for the latter this involved the veneer of empowerment. For example, Croft’s debut went hand in hand with the 1990’s girl power revolution and had the potential to positively influence the emerging ‘laddette’ culture, which encouraged women to take men on at their own games. It is for this reason that Croft can be classed among other highly sexualised female characters of the 1990’s, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2002). The mesmerising factor of each and every one of these female characters is that they were able to captivate both men and women.

To be sure, Croft is not the first gun-juggling action heroine to hit the scene and one is able to trace her representation back to the likes of *Anne Get Your Gun* and onwards to *Thelma and Louise* and the character of Trinity from the *Matrix*. On the other hand, these are women who are all able to perform extraordinary acts, ultimately undermining the conventional perception of the female body as passive. As such, these female heroines encroach on what was previously a predominantly masculine landscape, offering an extremely potent alternative representation of femininity. To date, the action genre has typically been associated with masculine traits so the representation of this otherness of femininity can be seen as a means of challenging the oppressive representations of women and the god-like representation of masculine ‘hard bodies’.

However, on the other hand, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, as discussed, concomitantly communicates female subordination at the level of both narrative
content and form. This becomes increasingly clear through the work of Laura Mulvey, Steve Spittle, and Mike Ward, among others. Basing her argument on the foundation established by the likes of early feminist scholars such as Molly Haskell and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Laura Mulvey thematized the significance of scrutinising the representations of patriarchal dynamics within the medium of film. In particular, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, the article entitled ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ by Laura Mulvey, draws attention to the way in which Hollywood films encourage audiences to partake in the establishment of the male gaze, this is primarily because “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (1989:19). This split between the active/male and passive/female sets females characters into two categories. They either assume the role of an erotic object for the purpose of the on-screen characters or the off-screen audience.

To elaborate on this issue, in his article entitled ‘Is Any Body Out There? Gender, Subjectivity and Identity in Cyberspace’, author Steve Spittle believes that when it comes to the options available to female spectators, they are few and far between. For example:

The ambivalence in *Tomb Raider* lies in the unusual tension between its basis in the male gaze and its simultaneous identification with an active female protagonist. That my female students felt empowered by, and attracted to, *Tomb Raider* suggests it does mark a shift in conceptions of subjectivity and identity. However, this shift is not total and still appears to be rooted in existing gender definitions. (1997:9)

They can either identify with the male protagonist at the risk of jeopardising their own gender, or they can masochistically relate to the suppression experienced by the female victim. It is for this reason that feminist theorists such as Claire Johnston and Luce Irigaray, among others, are in support of presenting audiences with alternative film aesthetics. In short, they believe that the option of such alternative film aesthetics will redirect female desire, eliminate the patriarchy and sexist pleasure of the spectator, and concentrate instead on feminine subjectivity and the unique aspects of the female body.

In this regard, Mulvey’s psychoanalytically informed approach to masculinized female heroines, such as Lara Croft, is based upon the development of
her argument concerning the purpose of female characters within mainstream film narrative. Firstly, Mulvey draws attention to the way in which the audience transforms the female character into an eroticised object by means of selecting to view her through the eye of the male gaze; solely servicing masculinized desires and fetishes. Secondly, should female characters embody an ‘active’ or ‘strong’ stance, it would inevitably mean threatening the traditional male order of the action genre, and so little room is left for it. Indeed, when investigating representations of the action heroine’s presence within a traditionally male dominant genre, it becomes clear that, at a latent level,

the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence, unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the visually ascertainable absence of the penis, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. (1989:21)

In the case of Lara Croft, as discussed, while she is the physical epitome of the backlash women, her threat as an action figure is defused through her constant implicit subordination to the male characters in the film.

Furthermore, in his article entitled ‘Being Lara Croft, or, We are All Sci Fi” in Pop Matters (2000) Mike Ward, who pays special attention to Croft’s voyeuristic quality critically analyses the relationship between Croft and her male spectators. For example, in relation to a photograph of Croft in which she looks directly at the viewer, Ward advances that she acknowledges herself as the object of the male gaze and, in a sense, invites it. Similarly, in terms of the video game:

If Lara never returns the ever-present look, she demonstrates her awareness of the player in other ways: her only spoken word is a terse, slightly impatient, “no” if you try to make her perform a move that isn’t possible. To the novice player at an impasse, there seems to be a frustrated potentiality in the way she stands and breathes, the user’s ineptitude holding her agility a lethality at bay. (Cited in Kennedy 2002:3)
This resonance between the spectator’s masculinized gaze and Croft’s inability to move the narrative is, for the most part, what categorises her as the ultimate ‘object of desire’.

As the issue of gender equality grows ever more complex, women need to find new solutions to addressing the problematic situation. Currently, in the struggle for gender equality, women face the constant threat of misrepresentation by the media industry, which continuously hampers their endeavours to effect social change, insofar as it adopts a “blame-the victim” ideology. This is not a random occurrence; it is part of the backlash cycle. In the interest of combating this through the creation of an alternative film aesthetic, Laura Mulvey, in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996), proffers a new way to differentiate whether the main character within an action narrative is a hero (moves the narrative) or a heroine (objectified by the masculine gaze). For example, Croft is nothing more than “a beautiful surface that is appealing and charming to man [, which] masks…an ‘interior’ that is mechanical…[by] an ‘outside’ that is deceitful” (Mulvey 1996:55). Mulvey classifies this as her Pandora theory, explaining that “Pandora prefigures mechanical, erotic female androids, all of whom personify the combination of female beauty with mechanical artifice” (1996:55). Mulvey’s definition of Pandora allows her readers to pick up on an increasingly promising interpretation of what it means to be an active female protagonist. For example, as Mulvey explains, “Pandora’s gesture of looking into the forbidden space, the literal figuration of curiosity as looking in, becomes a figure for the desire to know rather than the desire to see, an epistemophilia” (1996:59). Taking Mulvey’s argument into consideration enables her readers to move beyond the point where only activity performed by the main character in an action genre is considered masculine. This, in turn, allows the spectator to look past the “rather too neat binary opposition between the spectator’s gaze, constructed as active and voyeuristic, implicitly coded as masculine, and the female image on the screen passive and exhibitionist” (1996:62). That is, towards a new film aesthetic in which feminine wisdom, understanding, and for that matter compassion, move the narrative, instead of masculine violence.

In short, this chapter examined the ambiguity in Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and provided an explanation for why the narrative of West’s *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) is not actually driven by the character of Lara Croft herself, who, despite her activity, actually remains subordinate to both the male characters in the
narrative and the masculinized gaze of the spectators. As such, this investigation exposes how the ‘backlash’ phenomenon identified by Faludi enforces the subordination of women by covertly over-determining their subjectivity. Therefore, it is arguably of immense importance that the phenomenon of ‘backlash,’ identified by Faludi, has been subject to augmentation in the years succeeding the publication of her text. In the next chapter, these considerations will be taken further through the medium of Adorno and Horkheimer’s and Stuart Hall’s respective reception theories, and will be couched in explicitly political terms within the context of globalisation and the expansion of democracy that is supposed to be concomitant with it.
Chapter Four: The Negotiation of Gender Identity

In light of the previous chapter, which discussed the media creation of Lara Croft, it is necessary now to consider the effect of such media creations on subjectivity. This is because the augmentation of ‘backlash’ at an international level, via the new technologies of the mass media, not only stands to inform current subjectivity around highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles to a far greater degree than ever before. In addition, through doing so, it also entails a profound contradiction of the principles of democracy, in a manner that renders the much vaunted political successes of globalization – namely the growth and expansion of democracy – a mere façade. This is quite simply because one cannot celebrate the diversity of democracy when mass media technologies render current and future subjectivity increasingly uniform and politically passive, through informing it around the above mentioned highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles.

In this regard, in what follows, the reception theory of Stuart Hall, who advances that audiences have the ability to accept, negotiate or oppose the images and information they receive from the mass media, will be focused upon. However, it will be argued that the efficacy of such negotiation and opposition has progressively been undermined through the increasing reach of the mass media, and through the multiplicity of new levels, such as interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web, by means of which it engages audiences’ attention. As such, while the argument of this treatise continues to leave room for the possibility of such negotiation and opposition, it advances that they are becoming increasingly problematized through the way in which audience’s perceptions are being over-determined by, and hence confined to, dominant readings by the above-mentioned technological developments. That is, through the technological developments of the mass media the average individual is now virtually swamped by a daily deluge of images such that he/she is increasingly denied a respite from them, during which such individuals might otherwise have reflected on such images, and either negotiated with them or opposed them. The consequence of this, in turn, is a growing tendency on the part of such individuals to read such images in a dominant manner. Through doing so, this chapter not only seeks to temper Hall’s confidence in audiences’ autonomy. In addition, it also seeks thereby to re-evaluate the excessive pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer, who insisted that
the media wield hegemonic power over helpless and passive subjects. That is, although their perspectives have for many years been thought of as out-dated, it will be advanced that recent technological/media developments have lent re-newed relevance to their reception theory, particularly in relation to questions of democracy in the age of globalisation.

4.1. Adorno & Horkheimer

Critical theory, which developed between the 1930s and the 1960s was arguably one of the most important contributing factors to social theory, as it is understood today. This is primarily because the critical thinkers of this early period were among the first to examine the effects of state capitalism, and to engage with the significant ramifications of the mass media within so-called democratic societies. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer defined what was occurring as a new form of fascism, finding “the ruthless unity in the culture industry … evidence of what will happen in politics” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995:8). In short, they perceived technology to be a medium by which capitalist societies could impose their message of uniformity upon all individuals within society, removing the focus from the development of critical thinking in favour of an emphasis on the functioning of society as a whole complacent unit. For this reason, critical theory can be seen as a form of antagonism, opposing capitalist positivism for its potential to hinder the possibility of social change. This is because critical theory encourages social analysis, with the aim of identifying the existence of both social problems and their underlying causes, so as to bring about a form of socialist metamorphosis.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of what they considered to be the failure of the era of Enlightenment, impacts upon the way in which society interpreted politics, philosophy, culture and education. In particular, these and other critical theorists examined the way in which the working class was incorporated into societies that were increasingly based on capitalist principles, and they advanced the need for an innovative counter force to promote social transformation.

Accordingly, the problem with the monolithic culture created by capitalist societies is that “the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995:9), so that the culture industry literally mediates between individuals and the reality of their existence; justifying injustices
and mystifying oppression. Through this the working class, because they are critically
disempowered and rendered politically passive, become reduced to uncomprehending
cogs in the capitalist machine.

Among the first to examine the effects of state capitalism and to engage with
the political ramifications of the mass media within capitalist societies, in the
Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), Adorno and Horkheimer highlight the way in
which “films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and
in every part...[and maintain that] under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and
the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through” (Adorno and Horkheimer
1995:7). This raised Adorno and Horkheimer’s suspicions of the existence of a strong
and growing foundation for social domination, which increased their pessimistic view
of capitalist societies as incommensurate with the development of the individual’s
autonomy, sociality, and aesthetic appreciation.

To a large extent, Adorno and Horkheimer based their argument and theories
on the emerging political reality of National Socialism, whereby

state intervention in the economy had effectively abolished the tension in capitalism between the
relations of production and material productive forces of society, a tension which, according to
traditional Critical Theory, constituted the primary contradiction within capitalism. (Pollock
1941:453)

In essence, Adorno and Horkheimer discovered that monopoly ownership within
production and new forms of centralised planning had ultimately usurped private
property and interfered with the functioning of the market. In this regard, Adorno and
Horkheimer argue the following:

How formalised the procedure is can be seen when the mechanically differentiated products
prove to be all alike in the end. That the difference between the Chrysler range and General
Motors products is basically illusory strikes every child with a keen interest in varieties. What
connoisseurs discuss as good or bad points serve only to perpetuate the semblance of
competition and range of choice. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995:8)

Understandably, they saw the above leading towards the likes of totalitarianism and
fascism, insofar as it was indissociable from the emergence of a hegemonic,
monolithic culture (of consumption), in which diversity and critical thinking had no
place.

A monolithic culture involves the functioning of a system as a whole, and the thorough interdependency of its interrelated parts. The main concern of a monolithic culture is self-preservation, and therefore there is no tolerance of deviation from the given norm. Furthermore, a monolithic culture is unable to carry out drastic or sudden changes, however necessary or urgent these may be, due to the fact it does not tolerate the factor required for change, namely individual creative thought. In terms of the products of the culture industry,

No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection), but by signals… The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers’ needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995:11)

A monolithic culture can therefore be critiqued for its dehumanisation of humanity, or what Marx in the Manuscripts terms the ‘human essence’, which comprises of the human potential for autonomy, sociality and aesthetic appreciation. Instead of developing such potential, a monolithic culture creates a faceless entity that is easily manipulated into accepting and serving the system. The creation of such passive subjectivity problematised the political situation for Adorno and Horkheimer, because they understood democracy as something that required active, critical, subjects in order to function coherently and effectively.

To sum up, Adorno and Horkheimer’s Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944) focuses primarily on the problematic situation brought on by the rise of fascism and the threat of the emergence of similar forces of domination in ostensibly non-fascist spaces. In opposition they decried the fact that “What is individual is no more than the generality’s power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such… In this way mass culture discloses the fictitious character of the ‘individual’ in the bourgeois era” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1995:12). However, subsequently, the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer was attributed to the difficult historical context in which they were writing, and their perspectives were marginalized in favour of more optimistic appraisals of the capacity of the individual to engage with the products of the mass media.
4.2. Stuart Hall

In this regard, the reception theory of Stuart Hall is a case in point. As previously discussed, critical theory dominated social theory from the 1930s till about the end of the 1960s. At this point, around the beginning of the 1970s, many of the first generation of critical theorists were deceased, and much of their theory had become construed as obsolete. In their place, a younger generation of critical theorists began to emerge in Germany, the United States and England, among other places, appropriating traditional approaches to critical theory and adding their own content to such approaches.

Among these new additions and appropriations of the 1970s was Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication. Even though the model was designed in the 1970s, it’s theoretical origin dates back to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, which “examine[d] the apparent failure of revolutionary social change as predicted by Marx [and which]…looked to the capacity of the ‘superstructure’ (especially ideas and ideology represented in the mass media)” as the primarily reason for Marxism’s failure (McQuail 2000:95). However, it challenged the pessimistic Frankfurt School view that by incorporating a “rational-calculative, utilitarian model of social life,” commercial mass media was able to dominate the culture of so-called capitalist societies, “manipulat[ing] and ultimately oppress[ing]” the autonomy of the individual (McQuail 2000:49).

In Britain, “cultural studies [involved merging] Marxist theory with ideas and research methods derived from diverse sources including literary criticism, linguistics, anthropology, and history” (Baran & Davis 2008:321). The “most influential…British powerhouse of theorizing about culture” during this time was, no doubt, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (Hartley 1999:116), which was founded in the 1960s by Richard Hoggart, and which fell under Hall’s directorship during the 1970s. Hall’s approach, rooted in Marxist theory, was “intended not to describe culture but to change it” (Hartley 1999:116). As a result, the foundation of Hall’s theory was rooted in opposition to the elite’s historical domination of class, race and gender, and led to his focus on how audiences interpreted the various messages sent out to them by the media. Accordingly, the media was seen as a means of “set[ting] the agenda to decide which issues will be examined within what is taken to be a framework of consensus, i.e. the national
interest” (Dutton 1997:62).

In Hall’s opinion, modern capitalist culture revolves around the mass media and its patterning of the individual’s frame of reference, intimately relating them to “the techno-economic and social processes of modern capitalism” (Tomlinson 1991:60). In addition, his theory focuses primarily on “the hegemonic power of the media” and hence involves the inter-workings of cultural studies with Gramscian theory (Nightingale 1996:21).

However, importantly, Hall rejected the excessive pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer, who insisted that the media wield hegemonic power over helpless and passive subjects, and he did so on the basis of their “linearity, [their] concentration on the level of message exchange, and…[their] absence of a structured conception of the different moments [of mass communication] as a complex structure of relations” (Nightingale 1996:27). In Hall’s opinion, reception theory, in addition, needs to include analyses of one’s ability to decode the encoded messages fed to one by the media industry, in a process that is informed by one’s “context and the culture” of one’s past experiences (McQuail 2000:56). In other words, although messages are produced by the encoder based on the experiences of everyday life, they need to be decoded by the audience, with the result that what the encoder intended is not always what is communicated. Ultimately, “each moment is ‘determinative’, operating in its own conditions of production” (Storey 1996:11). This is, of course, not to say that Hall rejects the possibility of hegemony. On the contrary, he advances that

the practice of signification through language [can] establish…maps of cultural meaning which promote the dominance of a ruling-class ideology, especially by establishing a hegemony. This involves containing subordinate classes within superstructures of meaning which frame all competing definitions of reality within the range of a single hegemonic view of things. (McQuail 2000:307).

However, in his analysis, Hall also thematizes the multiple phases involved in producing, receiving and interpreting messages. The first phase involves encoding a meaningful discourse that centers on conformation to dominant power structures. What the audience is initially presented with, then, is a preferred reading or interpretation of the encoded message. During the second phase, dominance also plays its part in controlling the use of language and they way in which the discourse
of the encoded message is situated, with the final third phase involving the audiences’ ability to accept, negotiate or oppose what they are presented with. As such, for Hall, despite the dominance of certain power structures and relations, audiences can become actively involved in the process of textual analysis, enabling them to interpret the text’s meaning based on their own personal experiences and cultural history. This is also known as audience reception. For this reason, it can be deduced that the textual meaning can be found in the space that occurs between the audience and the producer; in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (1980), Hall defines this process as the margin of understanding.

As such, Hall’s encoding/decoding model presents researchers with an alternative perspective on what constitutes an ‘active audience’, a perspective which can be rooted in the practicality of media-effect research. To elaborate, McQuail explains that, “While early effect research recognized the fact of selective perception, this was seen as a limitation on, or a condition of, the transmission model, rather than part of a quite different perspective” (McQuail 2000:57). What Hall’s, encoding/decoding model introduced was the idea that messages “situated structures of production, text, and audience (reception) within a framework where each could be read, registered and analysed in relation to each other” (Nightingale 1996:22). In addition, Hall’s encoding/decoding model also generated interest with regard to genre-based research, drawing renewed attention to “the relevance for media research of socio-linguistics and social semiotics” (Nightingale 1996:23).

To put Hall’s encoding/decoding model to the test, David Morley, one of Hall’s colleagues, embarked upon the task of analysing the responses of groups from various socio-cultural frames of references, so as to determine their potential for differential decoding of the messages with which they were presented. Morley’s analysis was based on the response of 5-10 people from 29 various groups, and was concerned with their interpretation of BBC’s *Nationwide*, a magazine detailing news of current affairs. In his text entitled *The Media*, B. Dutton explains the basis upon which the groups were chosen:

[They] might be expected to differ in their decodings from ‘dominant’ to ‘negotiated’ to ‘oppositional’. The group tending towards a dominant reading (i.e., those seen by Morley as closest to *Nationwide*’s own values) included bank managers and apprentices, while those rejecting *Nationwide* and producing an oppositional reading included black further education...
students and shop stewards. In between (having a ‘negotiated’ reading) were teacher training

All in all, Morley’s analyses verified Hall’s hypotheses, with only one
distinguishable difference, namely that both working-class apprentices and middle-
class bank managers shared dominant interpretations of BBC’s Nationwide, thus
problematizing the connection between class and the position of interpretation. With
this new outcome coming to the fore, Morley asserted the view that the act of
decoding messages cannot be primarily based on class, but should instead be couched
in terms of “social position plus particular discourse positions” (Storey 1996:16).

A number of years after Morley’s Nationwide study, he embarked upon the
task of an ethnographic analysis of family viewing. As before, this study was largely
based on Hall’s encoding/decoding theory of audience reception, with emphasis given
to “the many unwritten rules, understandings and patterns of behaviour that develop
in the micro-audience environment of even one family” (McQuail 2000:399). Again,
Morley’s ensuing views on Hall’s encoding/decoding theory of audience reception
opposed over-emphasis on the level of “differential and oppositional reading of media
texts” (McQuail 2000:99).

As such, on the one hand, McQuail believes Morley’s findings “proved very
effective in ‘re-empowering’ the audience and returning some optimism to the study
of media and culture. [However, on the other hand, they also] led to a wider view of
the social and cultural influences which mediate the experience of the media,
especially ethnicity, gender and ‘everyday life’” (McQuail 2000:99).

4.3. Media Saturation

With regard to the latter, a crucial part of contemporary ‘everyday life’ is the
phenomenon of media saturation, on a scale never before imagined. In his text entitled
Educating students in a media-saturated culture (1996), John P. Davies explains that
media saturation defines the way in which society has become dominated by the mass
media and can roughly be traced back to the early 1940s, with the communication
convergence of movie-house newsreels, newspapers and commercial radio stations,
presenting society with a means of accessing the same ‘story’ but in different formats.
Despite the fact that television was invented in the late 1920s, it only contributed to
this convergence of communication in the 1950s, reaching millions of household viewers across the globe and ultimately increasing the media’s ability to pervade society even further. Furthermore, the invention of new civilian satellite links in the 1980s presented 24-hour cable television news operators with the ability to broadcast live or near-live footage to audiences, who could view these events as they unfolded. Lastly, bringing the convergence of communication technology to its apogee was the invention of the World Wide Web in 1994, which served the purpose of connecting people from all over the world through blogs, poles and instant global reports. In essence, through the convergence of these technological developments, the mass media is literally able to hold the attention of their audience in the palm of their hand, indefinitely.

Against this backdrop, although this study takes as its point of departure the reception theory of Stuart Hall – who advances that audiences have the ability to negotiate, oppose or be dominated by the images and information they receive from the mass media – it contends that the efficacy of such negotiation and opposition has progressively been undermined through the increasing reach of the mass media, and through the multiplicity of new levels, such as interactive exchanges on the World Wide Web, by means of which it engages audiences’ attention. That is, although this study continues to leave room for the possibility of such negotiation and opposition, it advances that they are becoming increasingly problematized through the way in which audience’s perceptions are being confined to dominant readings by the above-mentioned technological developments. This is because, although such negotiation and opposition were commonplace before, this was related to periods of respite/reflection between exposure to mass media products. These periods of respite/reflection were filled with alternative discourses – stemming from non-mainstream socio-cultural configurations – which, in turn, functioned as axiological benchmarks for the evaluation of mainstream mass media products. With the concomitant disappearance of such alternative discourses and increase of media saturation, on account of globalization, the loss of negotiated and oppositional readings of mass media products has occurred, to disastrous effect.

Floyd J. McKay, a journalism professor emeritus at Western Washington University, not only concurs with the above argument in his article entitled ‘Can democracy survive our media-saturated society?’ (2005), but also expresses concern over its political ramifications, insofar as he questions whether democracy has the
ability to overcome the media-saturated society within which we currently live. On the one hand, our younger generations exhibit an increasing ability to multitask continuously developing new media technologies. For example, the younger generations are now able to watch television, while simultaneously surfing the Web, while the older generations battle to keep track of all the latest new media technologies on offer (such as MP3, TiVo, etc.), let alone the functions they are intended to serve.

However, on the other hand, McKay is of the opinion that, despite the youth’s ability to multitask in the above way, “most of them have the attention span of a fruit fly, and…are woefully ignorant of world affairs, or even local events beyond the realm of entertainment” (2005:1). In this regard, he goes on to explain that “graduates of some of our finest high schools have shown up in my classes unable to name the century of the Civil War or define rights protected by the First Amendment. But they know all the rap stars and top athletes” (2005:1). In short, although the youth are increasingly obsessed with the media industry, their obsession seldom includes the likes of serious news.

Indeed, as McKay indicates in his article entitled ‘Can democracy survive our media-saturated society?’ (2005), during the 1990s, there was a massive increase in students wanting to register for journalism or communication majors, to the extent where some schools of communication took up the largest parts of the university. However, very few students were actually serious about pursuing a career in journalism. Instead, their field of dreams lay in the glitz and glamour of television, with only a few investigating the prospects of newspapers and magazines. McKay believes that this sudden interest in the low-paying field of journalism was the result of a media saturated youth, who have allowed the media to dominate their lives.

More evidence for the above can be found in the Kaiser study, ‘Generation M’, which investigates the significant role the media plays in the lives of contemporary youth. With the sudden increase of cable television, cellphones, video games and iPods, it’s no wonder that the youth are currently faced with a reality that previously existed only in the realm of fiction.

Farsighted authors (Aldous Huxley’s ‘Brave New World’ in 1932, Neil Postman’s ‘Amusing Ourselves to Death,’ in 1985) predicted a society in which a love affair with technology and entertainment stripped us of our capacity to engage in the serious thinking that sustains a
The problem is that, in the contemporary era, society has become so dominated by the media that young people are unable to find time for reflection on the media, and on their relationship to its products.

To illustrate this issue further, one can simply refer to the Lara Croft phenomenon, which, as previously discussed, is not just a film, but rather an entire ‘lifestyle’. Arguably, it is responsible for reinforcing the passivity of the subject and making it amendable to dominant readings of mass media products.

In his article entitled, ‘Tail from the Crypt: Lara Croft Returns to Her Roots in the Fourth Installment of Tomb Raider’, cited in the December issue of PC Gaming, Gary Eng Walk defines Croft as “a bona fide legend, an indelible tattoo on the biceps of ’90s pop culture. There are Lara T-Shirts. Watches. Posters. A coffee table book. A movie deal” (1999:100). What Walk neglects to mention is the amount of negative attention surrounding Croft. When it comes to the world of academia, debates about Tomb Raider center primarily on Croft being designed to meet the fundamental ‘backlash’ statistics of 34-23-36, which, in their book entitled From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender in Video Games, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins classify as the media’s “overt pandering to adolescent male interests in ‘tits and ass’” (1998:32). Yet, the latter critical appraisal of Lara Croft, when compared to the amount of time and energy devoted to her valorization in the mass media, emerges as little more than a lone voice crying out in the media saturated wilderness of cyberspace.

In particular, it is the cinematic animation of ‘virtual reality’ that allows the spectator to identify with the spectre of Lara Croft. In The Vocabulary of Psychoanalysis, this form of identification is defined by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis as a “psychological process in which a subject assimilates an aspect, a property, a characteristic of another and transforms himself [or herself] totally or partially on the basis of this model” (1976:184). While this has always been possible in relation to cinema, it is the ease with which it is now possible through virtual reality, that is the problem.

Similarly, in terms of Laura Mulvey’s analysis of the ‘male gaze’ in her article entitled, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1989), the spectator can identify with the protagonist in two different ways:
The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. The first is a function of the sexual instincts, the second of ego libido. (1989:18)

As such, if the character of Lara Croft is covertly over-determined by, among other things, the discourse of backlash, which seeks to render women passive and infantile, and if contemporary subjects are impelled to identify with her, on account of media saturation that dissolves the possibility of negotiated or oppositional readings, then surely the subjectivity of such spectators stands to be similarly passive and infantile.

Under these circumstances, the excessive pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer, who insisted that the media wield hegemonic power over helpless and passive subjects, needs to be re-evaluated, and Hall’s confidence in audiences’ autonomy, needs to be tempered. Failure to be circumspect in this manner will arguably result in an under-estimation of the political problems currently facing the contemporary era; problems to which we will now turn.
Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary now to consider the rights and duties practiced within democratic societies. Due to these considerations, it is arguably of immense importance to investigate the vaunted political successes of globalisation – namely the growth and expansion of democracy, which, if contradicted, would be rendered a mere façade.

The foundation of a democratic society is built upon the principle that each and every individual within that society has certain rights, which are recognized and guaranteed, insofar as they cannot be overridden by the state. For example, everyone is entitled to their own system of beliefs, including those of a religious nature, as well as the practise of freedom of speech, which entitles individuals to write and speak openly about their interpretation of the multiple sources of information with which they are presented.

However, with the luxury of rights comes the responsibility to shoulder duties, and this falls on each and every individual within societies orientated around democratic principles. For this reason, in no way may an individual, in the exercise of his/her rights, disrespect the law of the state or negatively impact upon the rights of other individuals.

One way of ensuring that power is justly distributed in a democratic society is by means of free and fair elections, which are held periodically to elect the country’s leaders. This involves providing the country’s people with a variety of candidates and governmental parties who are (ostensibly) fit to wield such power. However, if the elected governmental candidates and party fall short of fulfilling their duties, then the people have the right to replace them. Therefore, the people are, in essence, considered to wield power, with government being based on the will of the people. In the end, it is the government’s duty to meet the needs of its people.

In his article entitled ‘The shape of things to come: global aging in the twenty-first century’ in Journal of International Affairs, vol. 56, Peter G. Peterson indicates that three decades ago, a mere twenty five percent of the world’s states were democratic. However, with the expansion of globalisation, democratic states have increased their numbers to over one hundred and twenty countries in the world. That means that three in every five countries throughout the world take part in free and fair
elections, periodically. This is excluding the many more countries that are in the process of trying to adopt the practice of democratic principles.

However, the effectiveness of democracy rests on the participation of its citizens. In order for citizens to effectively participate in democratic practice, they need to be aware of public affairs so as to cogently analyse the performance of their government in relation to such issues. Most importantly, the practice of democratic rights must be carried out with respect for the law and tolerance for the rights of other individuals, or else precedents are set for the incremental exploitation of some, which can easily lead to their long-term marginalization, and with this, the dissolution of the democratic status of the society in question. That is, in order for a democracy to function properly, it needs to establish a system based on rules and laws, and not solely on achieving the satisfaction of certain individuals at the expense of others.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is evident that the phenomenon of ‘backlash,’ identified by Faludi, has been subject to augmentation in the years succeeding the publication of her text. Moreover, the augmentation of ‘backlash’ at an international level, via the new technologies of the mass media, has not only stood to inform current subjectivity around highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles, as mentioned above, to a far greater degree than ever before. In addition, through doing so, it has also entailed a profound contradiction of the principles of democracy, in a manner that renders the much vaunted political successes of globalisation—namely the growth and expansion of democracy—a mere façade. Although democracy is spreading, at the same rate women throughout the world are being subjected to media saturation, which not only declares them to be unequal to men, but which also renders them increasingly passive and infantile. Therefore, one cannot celebrate the growth of democracy when mass media technologies render current and future generations of women incapable of fulfilling the role of active, critical, democratic subjects, through informing their subjectivity around the above mentioned highly specific and non-negotiable gender roles. Deutscher (1997:1) thematizes the deconstruction of these gendered norms, emphasising that “[g]ender has never been a stable matter” and therefore relies on the “incoherence of definition”. What needs to occur, however, is more than a challenging of such definitions; that is, what is required is a challenging of the ways in which gender is implicitly defined through the products of the mass media.
For centuries, society has advanced the importance of literacy – the ability to read and interpret texts. However, in modern society, visual representation has usurped the power of print, and these images have not only captured our imagination, but have also eclipsed other images – such as those of the community and of tradition – and inhibited our ability to imagine them.

In order for democratic societies to survive in this media-saturated world, citizens need to become literate, which nowadays entails a great deal more than simply reading and writing. As individuals, we need to make it our mission to learn how to read and critically interpret the messages sent to us on a daily basis by the media. With the ever-increasing growth of technological developments, it is imperative to learn how to operate and critically analyse the products of these technologies so as to stay one step ahead of the ‘dominant’ discursive game.

Those that can already interpret the messages presented to them by the media are aware that the media’s main function is to relay information from someone else’s perspective, such as the perspective of the elite within society. They are alert to the many techniques incorporated by the media so as to elicit a specific response from the audience; in other words, their potential to elicit a dominant reading from the masses. This is why media literate individuals do not solely rely on one primary source of information but rather on a wide spectrum of possible alternatives, thereby enabling them to use the media critically and effectively. In essence, media literate individuals are skilled with the ability to interact with the messages presented to them by the media, instead of simply reacting to them habitually. However, this is not enough; because of the veritable deluge of images with which we are swamped, it is crucial to arrange a time of respite from them, during which one can reflect on them.

Education can take many forms. Primarily when one thinks of education, the picture of a teacher and a classroom comes to mind. However, with the continuous growth of technological developments, it is important not to limit one’s educational options to such institutions. Other alternative educational options are those of the family, friends, the community, religion, etc. Importantly, a resurgence of interest in these social spaces would be more than an exercise in nostalgia; that is, it would be fundamentally political, insofar as it would provide, in an age of media saturation, the much needed alternative discursive benchmark against which the products of the mass media could once more be critically evaluated. Therefore, by incorporating and placing importance on these different forms of education, individuals will once more
be able to apply Hall’s encoded/decoded model of communication. In conclusion, because such negotiation and opposition are the bedrock of democratic citizenship, such alternative education is the key for ensuring the survival of democratic societies across the globe.
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