


s Place
e
James
an Diego
rd's original bar from
twood home!
us for the
HOOR and
oeuvres
y through Friday.
OR
han's Place in the Hotel St. James
James
town San Diego
ervations: 234-0155



Another Take on the Oscars

by IAN BARNARD
Queer Nation/San Diego

Most lesbians (like everyone else) would rather feel than read; they thus achieve their most longed-for goal: to be like everyone else. And that is too bad. Lesbians, instead, might have been great, as some literature is: unassimilable, awesome, dangerous, outrageous, different: *distinguished*. Lesbians, as some literature is, might have been monstrous — and thus have everything. (Bertha Harris)

Recent debates about protests at the Academy Awards ceremony have focused on the appropriateness of choosing "negative" portrayals of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transvestites as topics for anti-homophobic political activism. However, these debates have created a closed binary between "radicals" and "moderates" that have erased other perspectives from the picture. I, for one, enthusiastically joined Queer Nation's trek to the Oscars to celebrate our visibility, and to demonstrate my anger at Hollywood homophobia in general, and, at the relentless heterosexism of the awards ceremony in particular. However, I feel that neither *The Silence of the Lambs* nor *Basic Instinct* are proper objects of attack, and I found many other queer activists at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion who were less than enthusiastic about the targeting of these specific films. In fact, my sign read "Queers in Support of Lesbians Who Kill Heterosexual Men — We (heart symbol) *Basic Instinct*," and many queers of all genders were delighted by it.

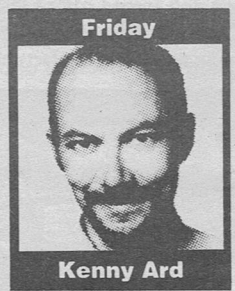
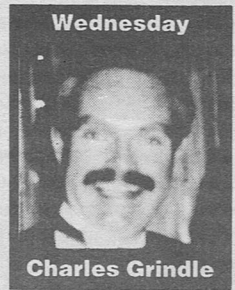
The decision by some Queer Nationalists to make these two films exemplary of Hollywood homophobia is symptomatic of our fear of being different. The most publicized of the Oscar protestors have denounced the queer stereotypes depicted in films like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Basic Instinct*, and called for "positive" depictions of us by Hollywood. But these protestors are unable to account for the fact that many of us enjoyed both of these films, and could imagine nothing more boring than reels of Hollywood celluloid brimming with nicey-nicey images of lesbians and gays. Are these protestors the same people who are less than happy with the work of great gay filmmakers like Gus van Sant because he doesn't depict gays "positively" in his films? More importantly, isn't their demand for "positive" representation just a thinly veiled quest to be liked and accepted by heterosexuals, at the expense of giving up our potential to be truly different? What has happened to Queer Nation's commitment to a politics of outrage and non-assimilation?

Many lesbians and gay men have been moved, disturbed and impressed with *Silence of the Lambs*. Far from seeing the film as simple sexism and gay-bashing, many of us believe it to be a profound interrogation and critique of our culture's rigid sexgender system. Lesbian and gay theorists are writing articles and books praising the film's complexity and perceptiveness. Are we merely to dismiss all these people as dupes of Hollywood homophobia? *Basic Instinct* has been treated equally simplistically by the protestors. While *Basic Instinct* is certainly no great movie, one would

imagine that Sharon Stone's character would be the perfect Queer Nation role model. Far from being a character to be ashamed of, she is a very empowering figure: she is strong, she is hot, she is smart, she kills heterosexual men with abandon and she has all the men in the movie completely under her thumb. She only cries once in the film: when her female lover is killed (by Michael Douglas' character). She doesn't die at the end of the story, as queer characters were commonly killed off at the end of most earlier Hollywood movies, but instead stays on to deceive Michael Douglas yet again. Those who complain about the film's finale, where Stone and Douglas end up together, seem to forget that it is far from comforting. Unlike Douglas, we know that she is the killer, and that she could murder him at any moment. The movie leaves us with a heterosexual relationship that is founded on delusion and that is destined to erupt into violence. This can hardly be seen as a cozy endorsement of heterosexuality.

"... isn't their demand for 'positive' representation just a thinly veiled quest to be liked and accepted by heterosexuals, at the expense of giving up our potential to be truly different?"

The picture of the Oscar protest that appeared on the cover of the *Gay + Lesbian Times* (4/2/92) depicted a woman wearing a T-shirt that reads "CAUTION: Ice-pick wielding bisexual fag-dyke Do not agitate!," yet the powerful image evoked by these words seems to have been lost on those columnists who commented on the protests. As much as those words convey negative stereotypes of queers, they also forcefully articulate the "Bash Back" ethos of Queer Nation and other activist groups. Those who are protesting *Basic Instinct* base their opposition to the film on a shallow and simplistic reading of it, or, worse still, on hearsay. I have been particularly struck by one thing when I speak to people protesting *Basic Instinct*: very few of them have actually seen the movie. (Those who are loathe to pay money for what they believe to be the promotion of homophobia can always ask for their money back after seeing the film — in fact, the cinemas at Fashion Valley, where I saw the film, advertise a money-back guarantee.) The kind of orthodoxy that is being promoted by the *Basic Instinct* and *Silence of the Lambs* protestors has to stop. It is based on ignorance. We do need to continue to protest Hollywood homophobia, but we also have to learn to embrace potentially powerful representations of us, and where these don't exist, to do perverse readings of the monstrous depictions of us that do exist. If we don't, we are going to be stuck with mundanity and mediocrity, and we'll be no better off than we are now.



9PM NIGHTLY

Complimentary
Hors d' oeuvres
Fridays from 5pm

San Diego's Finest
Piano Bar & Lounge

Home of the Famous
Double Bucket Cocktail™

Open Daily
at 11:30 am

Ave. • 619/ 298-9495



CA
Check
 AN
 EM
 FO
 REN
 RO
 MA
 MO

PAV
9 pt.
8 pt.
7 pt. B
7 pt. TE
 No
 Pr
EXTRA V
___ No
___ Pr
___ Ph
___ Di

1/2 PRI