Whose Film Is It Anyway: *Interpretation, Reception and the Queering of* ***Basic Instinct***

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Lys Woods examines the critical and popular reception of *Basic Instinct* with particular attention to the protests organized during the film's production and around its theatrical release. An alliance of protesters was formed by member of GLAAD, Act UP, Queer Nation and the National Women's movement. Woods surveys various scholastic and journalistic reviews of the film, focusing particularly on the largely negative reaction to demonstrations against the film's—and Hollywood's—offensive representations of homosexuality.

Since the 1980s, reception has played a crucial role in film studies. Today, the interest and investment in reception is such that the category is beyond serious challenge, regardless of the fact that many practitioners choose to elide questions of reception altogether. But despite the signs of reinvigoration, a lingering unease underpins the imbrication of the study of film with the study of reception, an unease which may present itself in various guises and to various degrees but remains predicated upon the discrete, and, at times, oppositional imperatives of the interpretation of film texts (the foundational methodology of film studies), and the interpretation of interpretation—reception. That said, this unease has not necessarily been a detriment, but in itself offers a rejuvenating if unresolved investigation into the roles of the institution, film studies and the academic in postmodernity. Clearly, reception studies can have multiple roles and positions within the discipline; and the manner in which the institution and individual academics structure their turn to reception is both relatively open— audience research, fan studies, historiography, star discourse—and open to contradiction and incompatibility: between the discourses of institutional academics, journalistic film reviewers, filmgoers and audiences, and Hollywood marketing.

The underlying animosity, or diverse agendas, between the various fields that constitute reception has much to do with film's peculiar position within both modernity and the institution. With respect to the former, film has always straddled oppositions: mass audience and elite critic; careless habit and contemplative reverie; industrial technology and rarified art; and in regard to the latter, the institutionalization of film studies occurred during (and via) the moment in which film studies was inextricably enmeshed with apparatus theory, a construction of legitimacy which overtly privileged those who had a working knowledge of high French theory. Within the institution the film reader was critical, distanced, and legitimate, able to scour the depths of the film text to uncover and reveal its meaning; but outside of the institution the film viewer was constructed as, at worst, illegitimate and, at best, naïve, the ideological primitive to the institution's sophisticate. Needless to say, this history is not conducive to suddenly and easily embracing the mass in mass art and popular culture. [1]

RECEPTION IN ACTION: THE CASE OF BASIC INSTINCT

As one of the more high profile protests organized against a Hollywood release, the outcry over *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) acts as a telling case

study that foregrounds the fault lines and discursive competitions within the multifarious components of reception. Not only the protests themselves, but more crucially the largely negative reaction to the protests by both the mainstream press and scholarly journals inadvertently map the stakes of diffuse and disseminated postmodern authority, and highlight the broad incompatibilities of the various sectors and vying constituents of film studies, film criticism, film culture and film reception.

After a troubled production, during which, according to the *Toronto Star*, the producers of *Basic Instinct* had to obtain a court injunction to ward off protesters from the film's San Francisco location shoot, the protestors readjusted their tactics for the film's theatrical release. Composed of a loose-knit alliance between GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), Act UP, Queer Nation, and the National Women's movement, and at times sporting T-shirts that read, "Catherine Did It," thus spoiling the film's surprise ending, the protesters vocalized and made visible their own boycott of the film, while encouraging other filmgoers to do likewise. The coalition's putative agenda was to inform the public about Hollywood's long history of demeaning and offensive representations of homosexuality (informative pamphlets were made up and distributed), and to hamper the boxoffice payback of *Basic Instinct*, the latest incarnation of Hollywood's homophobia and misogyny.

The protests were a nationwide offensive, taking place in such densely-populated cities as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, [2] with press conferences and spin-off performances also occurring. For instance, six Queer Nation members were arrested in New York after disrupting Sharon Stone's opening monologue during her *Saturday Night Live* guest-host appearance. [3] Generally, the protests were taken up by the media with little attention to specificity; indicative of the media's hysterical reaction, the protests and protesters took on a life of their own, treated as an amorphous, ubiquitous entity, an attitude which is lucidly, if incidentally, evinced by media pundit Ms. Clift on the CNN segment *Crier & Company*. Speaking of the protests and filmic representation, Clift declares that the answer to Hollywood's woes vis-à-vis the *Basic Instinct* protests is none other than Kevin Costner: "He needs to do for *the gays* what he did for Indians [!?] in *Dances With Wolves*." Within the mainstream media, "the protests" and "protesters" come to stand in for "the gays"—all of them. This phraseology is troubling, as well as inaccurate, but I want to use it for the remainder of the paper for two interconnected reasons: firstly, to draw attention to the fact that the media parlayed the protests as a phenomenon, a metonymy for homosexuality as a whole; and secondly to utilize the vague and ill-formed, yet potent image of the protests and protesters as they live on in the public imagination, encouraged by television coverage which unerringly focused on chanting, rowdy crowds: "Two, four, six, eight/ Hollywood must stop the hate." (In all probability, some of the protests may have been relatively calm, comprised mainly of leaflet activity.)

Basic Instinct, of course, had a huge opening weekend, which lead to the first round of media head shaking as commentators, almost in unison, bemoaned the protestors' ineffectual tactics. CNN's "media analyst" Martin Grove is typical of this attitude: "The protestors were trying to give you a different impression of *Basic Instinct*, a negative impression. But the film's strong debut, the second biggest opening of the year, indicates those protests probably backfired." As Matthew Gilbert, in a special report in the *Boston Globe* entitled, "Cashing in on Controversy," asks: "Do forces such as Queer Nation […] recognize the power of negative hype? If their goal is to keep the public from seeing the offensive lesbian portrayals in *Basic Instinct*, then they are surely misguided and naïve." Silly protestors, don't they know the 60s are over? Don't they know all publicity, good or bad, is still publicity?

But publicity also counts for concerns other than the film. The protests raised GLAAD and Queer Nation's own profiles, an attendant benefit that is recognized by Gilbert's concluding remarks: "More people will see *Basic Instinct* after the protests, but more people will know about Queer Nation as well as the offensive stereotyping of gays and lesbians in Hollywood movies." GLAAD spokesperson Geoff Mangin tows a similar line when he remarks that "*Basic Instinct* was destined to be a box office success, with its huge, sexy, marketing campaign and the release of the film during a non-competitive time of year," but goes on to offer that in his mind the protests were worthwhile and productive in that they were "able to get people to talk about how gays are portrayed in film. It was a trade off […] we received an enormous amount of attention about the issue."

This occasional, and grudging praise of the protests, though, is overshadowed by the general, barely concealed contempt for the protests as a "pointless" endeavor and an "over-reaction." *Chicago Sun Times* writer Llyod Sachs rather impassionedly cries "gay and

Lesbian activists are contributing to the bloodletting of color and risk from movies and other forms of popular culture." (Sachs must know that he can't blame the protesters for *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993)—doesn't he?) And Sachs has lesbian critic Ruby Rich to commiserate with him over the "negative impact" of the protests. Rich, rather sanctimoniously, offers that: "Responding to Hollywood product and judging its positive and negative values is a doomed venture […] Those who put all their emotion and energy into protesting *Basic Instinct* instead of promoting *Edward Ii* deserve what they get."

While *Basic Instinct*'s homophobia is undeniable, although possibly ambivalent, it pales beside the overt and tasteless homophobic remarks one encounters in perusing the press' responses. Gilbert, attempting clever humour, twists the AIDS awareness slogan "Silence=Death" to "Silence=Box Office Death," and *The Independent* ran a peculiar "HIV Positive Role Models" headline for Adam Mars-Jones' coverage. Mars-Jones' connection between the AIDS epidemic and the *Basic Instinct* protests belies a conflation of the two and an anxiety over both. [4] AIDS activism is, of course, the other popular image that combines political action with visible and self-identified homosexuality, and in the early 90s an arena in which protests and political activism received a vast amount of media coverage. In some sense, the media backlash against the political activism engendered by the film can be read as the forum in which public hysteria surrounding "gayness" took its most uninhibited form, especially as *Basic Instinct*, despite its lip-service to homosexuality is primarily invested in heterosexual sex. One of the strange sub-texts of the protests, and one which applies equally to the efforts of gay activists to increase awareness of both the scope and the indiscriminate nature of AIDS, pivots on the blurring of boundaries between gay and straight communities, between gay and straight issues, between gay and straight sex. And in this light, the media's furious response to the film's protests would seem to imply a return of repressed hostility that could be openly voiced in relation to the frivolousness and vagrancies of the entertainment industry and its discontents.

If the protestors failed to win mainstream media support—and I only encountered one critic who lauded them outright—, they fared no better in scholarly publications. [5] Strangely, in fact, while one could find many instances of the broad incompatibility between academic and journalistic responses to the protests (the latter tends to focus on their economic failure, while the former demonstrates no concern for the protests' "success" or lack thereof), these two camps momentarily reconcile their differences around one similar point of critique: the protester's inability to properly read a film. Sky Gilbert in the *Toronto Star* intones that: "The work of art may, in fact, be working on a complex, metaphoric level. And I certainly think *Basic Instinct* is a film of beauty and a work of art." The implication here is clearly that the protesters may have missed the "complex" and "metaphoric" meanings, a sentiment also articulated by Julianne Pidduck in *CineAction*:

> By highlighting *Basic Instinct*'s tongue-in-cheek, hyperbolic qualities, I would like to qualify and diverge from the literal type of reading offered by Queer Nation […] I am not arguing that my reading must be the only correct one, but it suggests that a multivalent cultural text like *Basic Instinct* merits closer attention that is meted out by a rote literal critique. (70)

Pidduck goes on to enlist critic Catherine Carr's take on the film to suggest an alternative reading:

> This is a movie about male anxiety and paranoia. Women who are sexually powerful cause their anxiety, as do women emotionally attached to other women. Catherine is both. True—she and the other three might all be killers. But look who they've killed. Family, for one thing. Brothers. Men who might become husbands. It's part of the whole male anxiety scenario. In fact, it's almost a parody of a guy's worst nightmare. And I thought it was a scream. (70)

The undercurrent of Pidduck's charge is not only that the protestors missed the possible complexities of the film's multivalent address but also that the protesters are somewhat anachronistic in their conceptualization and enactment of resistance. But resistance itself is by no means a simple or uncontested position in the 90s. As Judith Mayne argues, the legacy of 70s apparatus theory cannot be quelled by simply inverting the terms:

> If the model of the cinematic subject assumes homogeneity, then projecting heterogeneous 'activity' can be just as vapid and indistinct as the term 'passivity.' While it may be preferable to speak of black spectators as always resisting the fictions of mainstream cinema (preferable, that is, to ignoring race altogether), I fear that the continuing dualism of 'dominant' spectators versus 'marginal' (and therefore resisting ones) perpetuates a false

> dichotomy of us and them. Defining the other as the vanguard of spectatorship only reverses the dichotomy. (159)

That is—and Mayne goes on to investigate this facet in her study of star reception—resistance no longer implies a blanket criticism of the Hollywood classical narrative concomitant with the turn to alternative, avant-garde film forms as the mode that would produce a critical spectator. Now the "resisting" or "critical" spectator does not eschew visual pleasure in the image (*pace* Mulvey), but is constructed as the critical work entailed by the marginalized viewer to eek out sites of pleasure in mainstream productions that have been designed under the aegis of dominant paradigms. Mayne's point, though, is that this positioning of the "critical" is not resisting Hollywood as much as it is continuing the classical formation of identification along multifarious lines to optimize the widespread and even contradictory pleasures that a film could elicit in contradistinction to the lone happy viewer of the 70s model: the white heterosexual male.

Implicit in Pidduck's position is her performance of a feminist critical intervention, one that entails reading against the grain of the film's dominant economy in order to find her pleasure elsewhere. As she concludes:

> Catherine Trammell [*Basic Instinct*'s protagonist, played by Sharon Stone], with all of her impossible verve and absolute sexual confidence, her ability to turn a room full of seasoned cops into so much quivering jelly, even her tight grip on the proverbial castrating ice pick, provides moments of supreme pleasure for the feminist spectator—a fleeting but potentially empowering fantasy of transcendence to bolster up our imaginary reserve. (72)

The ire the protests inspire within academic circles in the 90s seems to be connected to their rejection of any pleasure principle whatsoever, their refusal to get with the polymorphous and heterogeneous textuality that is the talisman of the 90s intelligentsia. At this juncture, then, applying such heteroglossia to the protests and protesters themselves may prove useful, as well as reconsidering the role of resistance outside of the pleasure dome.

I wonder if Pidduck herself is overly literal-minded in regards to the protestors' actions, as are nearly all the commentaries; that is, is the point and the only end of the protests to call attention to the film's deleterious representation of lesbianism; or, possibly, are other issues at stake—issues that, appropriately enough, also structure the film beyond its almost myopic investment in all things heavy-breathing and wall-banging? One academic article which makes no mention of the *Basic Instinct* protests is also one that has little interest in the film's sexual escapades and sexuality shenanigans. Commonly, *Basic Instinct* is treated as an early 90s "erotic thriller" alongside others of its ilk, such as *Fatal Attraction, Disclosure, The Hand That Rocks The Cradle,* and *Single White Female*; but Marie Danziger's "*Basic Instinct*: Grappling for Post-Modern Mind Control" views the film under the aegis of another early 90s narrative trend: the pathological dynamics between "readers" and writers.

Grouping such films as *Misery, Barton Fink,* and *The Player*, the stakes of *Basic Instinct*, for Danziger, are not defined by gender and sexuality (although both play a part) as much as they are by the struggle for *narrative authority*: "It seems both sides will go to any length to tell their version of the story. The ultimate victory is to have the last word." Re-viewing the film from this perspective, Danziger argues that:

> In *Basic Instinct* the key conflict has all the earmarks of the classic writer/reader vendetta. The flawed cop with the checkered past is Michael Douglas, and he's pitted once again against his natural enemy, the fatally attractive, sexually devouring blonde who'll stop at nothing to get her man. The point is that the obsessive predator is a threatening writer figure: she's found out all there is to know about him in order to make him the central figure in her next murder mystery. Since she intends to kill him off in the last chapter, the cop has a real stake in pushing a rewrite. (8) [6]

Presumably, Danziger declines to mention the protests as she does not feel they pertain to her own singular take on the film. But narrative authority and "authorial" rights are as much the concern and the byproduct of the protests as are the issues of identity and representations of sexuality and women; but, unlike the film, the lines between reader and writer are not clearly demarcated. Indeed, apiece with the hubbub and recriminations surrounding the protests is the struggle between who has (or should have) the access and the authority to transform their (private) reading into (public) writing.

Writing about the protests, Mayne comes close to broaching this subject when she notes that: "I am not certain that spectatorship is the appropriate word to describe these political actions, which have far less

to do with how films are seen and consumed and far more to do with how they are produced" (164). Her assumption is that the protests are to some degree predicated upon a quest for representational control, which I think works, although along divergent lines than Mayne suggests. Rather than an investment in how films are produced, the protests seem to have everything to do with how the film will be seen and consumed; regardless of whether or not the protestors saw the film themselves, their actions construct one nodal point of the film's reception, not only in their own manifestation as an overt display of political action, but outside of that modality, too.

That is, precisely what is at stake in the protests is the *grain* of the film, an entity no longer conceptualized as occurring at the site of production or circumscribed and contained within the text itself, but located in extratextual discursive action. Numerous commentators remarked that the choice of *Basic Instinct* is an odd peg to hang years of frustration over Hollywood's profilmic treatment of gays and lesbians. While these critics could not exactly defend the film's representational choices and strategies, they did point out that homosexuality is simply a peripheral issue in the film, a narrative device more than anything else; as Gary Arnold observes in his review, "[t]he lesbian angle is nothing but an angle." Obviously, attempting to inoculate issues of representation by claiming angles is a problematic defense strategy, but Arnold's point is worth exploring insofar as it suggests that the ontological status of homosexuality in the film is barely more than a kinky sub-plot. One could speculate that if not for the uproar, few reviewers would have even mentioned homosexuality in conjunction with the film. The grain of the film would have been a neo-noir, over-the-top erotic thriller, and those who liked it would have most likely greeted it as *Rolling Stone's* Peter Travers does:

> What makes *Basic Instinct* a guilty pleasure is the shameless and stylish way Verhoeven lets rip with his own basic instinct for disreputably alluring entertainment. The film is for horny pups of all ages who relish the memory of reading stroke books under the covers with a flashlight. Verhoeven has spent $49 million to reproduce that dirty little thrill on the big screen. You can practically hear him giggling behind the camera. His audacity makes you giggle along with him.

And without the protests, the film's controversial slack would easily have been taken up by questions of filmrating and censorship over the expurgated 45 seconds that saw the film move from the unprofitable NC-17 bracket to the more lenient and consumer-friendly R rating.

The success and efficacy of the protest is its hijacking of the film's meaning, its repackaging and re-prioritization of the film's content such that (and here the protest is curiously similar to an industrial marketing campaign) even before the film's release its grain had been already concretized to the degree that it almost necessitated a response from the film's commentators. And this aspect, this precociousness, may be why nobody likes the protesters: they are public amateurs. Unlike film critics and film academics, they have not been bestowed with the power of professionalism; they forged themselves a soapbox instead.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Mayne correctly claims that the protests are not an issue of spectatorship per se, but they do function as a site of reception outside of the official channels of discourse, and moreover, outside of the by now "natural" habitat of amateurs: the internet. My concern is that film studies, both as a discipline and as an arena supposedly open to oppositional voices, did little more than simply dismiss the protests. Why is the discipline only comfortable with bodies of reception if they are at a safe historical remove, and indeed, is it merely a coincidence that the institutional turn to reception and spectatorship is accompanied by an increasing attention to historical subjects and subjectivities? At the same time, the recent trend in turning to the public sphere—in situating cinema as it lives in the world, rather than as it is seen on the screen, as it is refracted through numerous viewing positions and the social apparatus itself—is a potentially lucrative pathway out of simply incorporating reception and spectatorship as evidentiary artifacts for any given academic position or interpretation. With this turn we can begin to recognize that cinema is, and always has been the domain of amateurs.

For instance, in Miriam Hansen's article "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere," an introductory piece on the potentialities of envisioning the cinema as it works with, informs, and constructs a public sphere, she can postulate that:

> In Chicago movie theaters catering to African-Americans during the 1919s and 1920s […] the nonfilmic program drew heavily on Southern

> black performance traditions, and live musical accompaniment was more likely inspired by jazz and blues than by Wagner and Waldteufel. Although the films shown in such theaters were largely white mainstream productions, their meaning was bound to be fractured and ironized in the context of black performance and audience response. I am not saying that such reappropriation actually happened in every single screening or every theater […] But the syncretistic makeup of the cinematic publicity furnished the structural conditions under which the margin could be actualized, under which alternative forms of reception and meaning could gain a momentum of their own. (147-48)

In a similar vein, one might begin to formulate alternative visions of the protesters, not based on whether their reading of the film is valid or invalid, but alongside the issues that their very presence outside of the theatre raised in terms of reception. The efficacy, or more properly, the effects of the protests are not simply a matter of a successful boycott calculated in box-office receipts (as Hansen notes, empirical measurements may not be the appropriate method), but would begin to encompass a broad array of social arrangements and attitudes. The material proximity of the protestors to the exhibition site of one raunchy, A-level hetero-sexploitation picture may have, like the musicians in Hansen's formation, not only "actualized" marginal voices, but also worked to "fracture" and even "ironize" the onscreen proceedings, as much as they also may have increased their taboo value. The comparison of self-identified gay and lesbian bodies on the street with the film's own envisioning of "lesbian" bodies and desires would seem to mark an ironic and unavoidable juxtaposition between the lived reality and the Hollywood fantasy, while the presence of gay men in the protestors' ranks may have called forth, and already proposed, the film's own central repression: the male-male love between Michael Douglas and his detective partner and only friend, Gus (George Dzundza). These examples are hardly definitive, but they do begin to formulate how the protest's fructifying effects could be both calibrated and discussed, especially in terms of the film's poetically ironic aftermath.

If the protests were so wrong, misguided and useless, so out of touch with the pulse of the public, why is it that they, more than anything else, constitute the film's legacy? They undeniably achieved a victory at the symbolic level in that they have irreversibly "queered" *Basic Instinct*. HBO's *The Larry Sanders Show* performed a reenactment of Sharon Stone's infamous leg-crossing, no-underwear scene, with a befuddled Larry Sanders and his ardent, devoted admirer David Duchovny, as the players. Michael Douglas made a guest appearance on the sitcom *Will and Grace* as a gay detective who falls for Will, a part which includes a turn on the dance floor of a gay bar—to Missy Elliot's "Get Yer Freak On," no less. And finally, succinctly summarizing the protesters' complaints, but from a position of comfortable appropriation, which may be the most vital of the protest-effects, comedian Margaret Cho, in her film *Notorious C.h.o.* happily mines her sexual experiences with women for comic fodder, including her encounter with an ultra-femme vamp at an S&M club: "Oh please," moans Cho, "if I'm going to go down on a woman, I want her to be a 300-pound bull dyke; I mean, I want her to look like John Goodman. I don't want to be Sharon Stone-d to death."

Lys Woods wrote about the Academic Conference and the "Death of the Graduate Student" in the layout of Synoptique 4.

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1 I realize that my assertions here are open to challenge; that is, some may argue that the relationship between film studies and reception is an untroubled one. As evidence for my case I would call upon Henry Jenkin's "Reception Theory and Audience Research," which, especially in its concluding pages, outlines some of the difficulties in breaking down the boundaries between academic critics, with their penchant for textual interpretation, and fans, with their penchant for emotional outbursts. The reverse formation of these attributes is, of course, also true.

Also, of note as a truly bizarre application of reception studies is Stephen Crofts' work on *The Piano*; indeed, I think that the awkward co-joining of the two disciplinary tactics have been nowhere more reified. Crofts baldy states: "[my hypothesis] suspects that reviews may attend little to the film's female Oedipus-oriented modes of address […]" (145). Gee Stephen, do you really think so? Later in the same article, Crofts more generously (and reasonably) concedes that due to the "broad incompatibility between discourses of psychoanalysis and of journalism, it would be understandable if few reviewers mentioned the female Oedipus-oriented modes of address as such," before ingenuously continuing: "Indeed, the first two of these—Ada's oedipal trajectory and the film's attachment to the preoedipal/ 'semiotic'—are not mentioned by any review in the sample, even indirectly"

(147).

Crofts' analysis is unfailingly reception-oriented, replete with charts composed of columns to tabulate the reception of *The Piano* in four national contexts, with a fifth chart to exhibit the combined results. As well, Crofts is intent on maintaining the importance of textual analysis as a film studies tool, insofar as he wants to propose a connection or "continuum in terms of text, circulation, and reception" (146). Crofts reads the text as one that has an investment in the female oedipal trajectory, and he wants to utilize his reception analyses as "support" for his hypothesis that: "*The Piano*'s success was substantially based on its invocation of an oedipally oriented female subjectivity" (152). In some sense, Crofts wants to validate, to prove, his textual analysis through reception studies, and, as Crofts' contribution here veers dangerously close to the social sciences (hence the neatly organized chart), proof, which has perhaps been lacking in film studies, suddenly appears as a feasible option— so argues the rhetoric of his neatly arranged charts.

2 See Kevin Phinney's article, "Activists Mobilize for National 'Instinct' Protest; Gays Take 'Campaign of Education' to the Streets."

3 See Beth Kleid's *Los Angeles Times* report.

4 Indeed, the early 90s erotic thriller genre as a whole can be seen as a response to the AIDS crisis, saturated as it is with the overwhelming threat that sex is no longer safe.

5 Bizarrely, perhaps, one of the only people who took the protestors charges to heart is the man responsible for the whole affair, the film's screenwriter Joe Eszterhaz. His $3 million screenplay had landed at the GLAAD offices and immediately set off an alert and protest against the film. Initially, Eszterhaz wanted to comply with the protesters and adjust the script accordingly (a move for which he was publicly chastised by elements of the mainstream press); as he recalls in an interview with Jim Woods: "I suffered a great deal of prejudice when I was a kid […] that something I had written was offensive to gay people was horrifying to me." Eszterhaz's changes were blocked by both the film's director, Paul Verhoven, and the film's male star, Michael Douglas. Later Eszeterhaz said of the problems he faced with Verhoven: "When a film makes $420 million, it tends to patch up any differences you have." If nothing else, Esterhaz exhibits a seemingly forthright honesty.

6 Danziger rightly calls attention to the fact that Douglas has had more than one encounter with this female lover/nemesis, most notably with Glen Close in *Fatal Attraction*, but interestingly, Douglas has had an earlier onscreen relationship with another female writer as well. Indeed, in *Romancing The Stone*, Douglas' irascible but loveable Peter Pan, *Indiana Jones*-like adventurer personified the febrile yearnings and writings of Kathleen Turner's mass-romance author—not only did reader and writer meet cute, they complemented each other, solved the case and fell in love. As a litmus test for 90s cynical self-awareness, and arguably, post-feminist empowerment, one has to look no further than the difference between Turner and Douglas's heartfelt reunion at the end of *Romancing The Stone* and the almost parodic take on such coupling bliss at the never-ending end of *Basic Instinct*. Completing yet another athletic sex session, Douglas proclaims: "We'll fuck like minks, raise rugrats, and live happily ever after." The camera, of course, has other intentions; following a screen fadeout, the image returns as the camera moves down the bed to reveal an ice pick tucked away underneath.

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