

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a man and a woman in a dimly lit room. The man, on the left, has grey hair and wears glasses, resting his chin on his hand. The woman, on the right, has blonde hair and wears a red turtleneck under a grey patterned sweater. The lighting is warm and focused on their faces.

Theresa L. Geller and
Julia Leyda, EDITORS

Reframing
Todd Haynes
Feminism's
Indelible Mark



Reframing Todd Haynes



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Reframing Todd Haynes Feminism's Indelible Mark

Theresa L. Geller and Julia Leyda,
EDITORS

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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For Chantal Akerman (1950–2015)

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism's Indelible Mark

Theresa L. Geller

Feminist theory has left an indelible mark on my own critical—and creative—thinking.... For me, everything I questioned about what it meant to be a man—and how much my sexuality would perpetually challenge those meanings—could be found in arguments posed by feminists. What can I say? I identified.

—TODD HAYNES, *Far from Heaven, Safe, and Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story: Three Screenplays* (2003)

“Something Quite Different”

For three decades, Todd Haynes has been making film and media attuned to the almost imperceptible shifts in our culture as they happen. From the AIDS epidemic and an increasingly toxic celebrity culture to the financial crisis and the devastating effects of environmental deregulation, his projects are uniquely calibrated to these subtle changes, registering in their formal experimentation and rarified thematics an ever-evolving affective history of the present. Yet Haynes's films do this by returning us to a different historical moment, inviting us to rethink our own from another place and time. Although his body of work has been concatenated in terms of a loosely defined “queer” style or generic categories such as melodrama,¹ the incontrovertible distinction of each of his projects is that their narratives are situated in a different era, or in multiple eras, as in the case of

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Wonderstruck (2017), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), and *I'm Not There* (2007). He is the only living filmmaker whose entire body of work consists of period dramas, and yet this very work is lauded as postmodern, experimental, and, in many ways, cutting-edge filmmaking. As he explains, "I see things about the present more clearly when I'm looking through the frame of the past: I think it's very hard to assess the present moment that we are in" (quoted in Aftab 2017). Haynes's exceptional acumen for assessing the present as it unfolds has earned his work well-deserved critical accolades. Among a pool of films representing eighty-four years of cinema from twelve countries, the British Film Institute named *Carol* (2015) the best LGBTQ film of all time, and the *Village Voice* declared *Safe* (1995) the best film of the 1990s. Because of its philosophical themes concerning illness, *Safe* has remained "ahead of its moment," as Haynes puts it, as fitting an allegory of the AIDS crisis at the time of its release as it is of a global pandemic decades later, evident in the renewed attention it received when COVID-19 struck (Haynes, quoted in Tobias 2014).²

The iconoclastic independent filmmaker has recently garnered significant attention for quietly building a body of meaningful media work aimed at "thinking about identity and representation ... [in which] ideas and issues and progressive politics ... coexist," in the filmmaker's words (quoted in Lim 2010). *Todd Haynes: The Other Side of Dreams* at the Lincoln Center in New York (2015) and *Sparks on Celluloid: Haynes + Vachon* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017), both retrospectives the director helped curate, and a lengthy in-depth profile in the *New Yorker* (Lahr 2019), brought Haynes's oeuvre and its contexts to new viewers and dedicated fans alike.³ Haynes has steadily garnered wider critical recognition for his "outsider's perspective," because, as Cate Blanchett attests, "the authenticity of that perspective" has produced quietly revolutionary media- and genre-spanning work for the past three decades (quoted in Jagernauth 2016). While other independent filmmakers moved into the mainstream, Haynes has held fast to the outsider status cultivated by artists and activists who characterized the movement known as New Queer Cinema (NQC), with which he is most often identified by film critics and scholars to this day. And yet, most of his work has now been released since the turn of the millennium, the point at which NQC had been declared to have run its course (Pick 2004, 103).⁴

Politically and aesthetically nonconformist, Haynes has built a career essentially outside the industry, averaging about four years between features until the mid-2010s. Not only did the frequency of Haynes's releases

increase—with *Carol* (2015), *Wonderstruck* (2017), and *Dark Waters* (2019) coming at two-year intervals—but these literary adaptations also represented a departure from his consistent practice of writing the material he directs. Whereas *Carol* recalls Haynes’s earlier melodramas, the others move in new directions: *Wonderstruck* is a young-adult film bearing the imprint of his art-house sensibility nonetheless, and *Dark Waters* is a docu-drama thriller in the vein of *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000). And yet all of these are also period dramas, proving once again Haynes’s claim that “even though I mostly make period movies, they are all contemporary at the same time” (quoted in Jenkins 2015). Significantly, despite nearly one hundred award nominations, with at least half resulting in wins, only with his first official studio movie, *Dark Waters*, and ads for Revlon (2017) and Givenchy (2018) did critics begin to wonder whether Haynes might be flirting with the mainstream. Yet Haynes’s new (and first) documentary film, *The Velvet Underground* (2021), is a clear retort to such suspicions, demonstrating a return to form (and content) in a film that epitomizes the experimentalism and avant-garde aesthetics for which the “outsider” band was known, and that greatly impacted Haynes as a filmmaker.

Trained as a painter but making films since he was in high school, Haynes established himself with the controversial *Poison* (1991), an experimental tripartite feature that exemplified the traits of the group of independent, low-budget films that B. Ruby Rich (1992) dubbed “New Queer Cinema.” These films shunned positive gay images and subverted both narrative structure and film style, inspired by the AIDS crisis and the assimilation of poststructuralist thought into the academy. Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, *Poison* quickly became the subject of political scrutiny for its National Endowment for the Arts funding, and led to invitations for Haynes to appear on television talk shows to debate Republicans about arts financing, making him the movement’s default (and exceptionally articulate) spokesperson. Despite, or possibly because of, his notoriety in the media, Haynes balked at the prospect of being pigeonholed as a filmmaker of NQC, claiming that he “was eager to move on from it and do something quite different in my second film” (quoted in Winslet 2011). Yet that film—*Safe* (1995)—secured his position in NQC by providing film critics and scholars formal terms with which to further define the movement. The film’s idiosyncratic style and opaque narrative resonated with the anti-assimilationist, anti-identity politics that defined the emergent subfield of queer theory. Although some critics chose to ignore the fact that *Safe* “doesn’t have gay themes in it at all,” Haynes hoped

the film's thoroughgoing critique of identity and representation would allow his work to be seen in a different light: "As opposed to feeling part of a current cinematic movement among gay filmmakers ... [my work] shares a criticism of mainstream culture that goes beyond content and that does affect forms" (quoted in Saunders 2014, 41).

Despite his ambivalence about his NQC branding, Haynes, more than others of his cohort (such as Gus Van Sant and Gregg Araki), has been designated the keeper of the flame for the movement for obvious reasons. Certainly the fact that Haynes returned to "gay themes" in his next films, *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) and *Far from Heaven* (2002), cemented this association; both joined *Poison* and *Dottie Gets Spanked* (1993) as crucial pillars in the canon of NQC.⁵ More significantly, these very different films established the two main strands of Haynes's work, which, as he describes, "fall into categories: the melodramas, which are typically women's stories, and the more exuberant, eccentrically structured films about musical artists" (quoted in N. Davis 2015a). Both categories rationalize setting his stories in other historical periods; yet these strands are not as distinct as they might first seem for other reasons too, as this volume demonstrates by foregrounding the "women's stories" that traverse both. It is this attention to women's stories that distinguished Haynes's work from the start, making him "an exception among male queer directors ... not least because he enables queer to function inclusive of women" (Pick 2004, 106). His exceptional focus on women may be why Haynes was eager to shed his label as a director of NQC, especially because, from his perspective, NQC was never about what motivated or shaped his work but rather, "the movement, as it was branded, basically identified a market" (quoted in Lim 2010).⁶ Although the movement "was extinguished almost as soon as it was named" because queer themes became mainstream almost overnight, film critics and scholars have continued to frame Haynes's career in terms of NQC (Lim 2010). Yet, when asked directly which association best governs how the industry and audiences perceive him now—that is, "with New Queer Cinema, with the 'woman's film,' with activist work, [or] with academic approaches to semiotics"—Haynes avers: "For the most part, people notice my career's obvious attentiveness to female subjects and the very great actresses I've worked with" (N. Davis 2015b).

Haynes is notably not resistant to this sort of market identification. He has no qualms about being branded a director of women's films: "These days ... anybody who is making women's stories a priority is distinct from the ongoing, tiresome turn to the male spectator as our sole value. It's

a distinction I completely appreciate and feel I've earned and am proud to hold" (quoted in N. Davis 2015b). Haynes has shown exceptional consistency in his choice of creative collaborators (Christine Vachon, Julianne Moore, Cate Blanchett, Maryse Alberti, Sandy Powell, et al.), and in "subjects" that confront cinema's and society's continuing "problem with women" (Haynes, quoted in MacKenzie 2016). For all these reasons, Haynes is widely recognized as a woman's film director, with *Carol* and *Far from Heaven* his largest box office draws to date. This collection of essays, therefore, undertakes a unique project in Haynes criticism: to integrate the multiple perceptions of the director, creating a more complete understanding of Haynes as an artist-activist mobilized by academic theorizations of gender and cinema. Synthesizing these perspectives, the volume privileges those things for which Haynes is most noted today, specifically his persistent interest in the political and formal possibilities afforded by the genre of the woman's film and his collaboration with women in front of and behind the camera.

As fans recognize, and as reviewers and interviewers consistently note, "Haynes has always focused on stories about women," and he is eager to explain why: "[Stories about women] always—maybe more than films about men—contain the limits of social burden ... and the choices they make in carrying on the institutions of the family, satisfying men, raising children—there's less freedom of movement in women's lives" (quoted in Thompson 2016). It is this political perspective that makes his film and media work pointedly *feminist* rather than simply "about" women. Indeed, Haynes's persistent feminist commitments as a queer filmmaker provided the grounds for producers Vachon and Elizabeth Karlson to defend their choice of a man to tell Patricia Highsmith's story, affirming "he couldn't have been a better choice for the undeniably feminist film"; screenwriter Phyllis Nagy agrees, noting that "this material was *absolutely* for Todd ... whether or not he's a female" (Simon 2015, emphasis in original). Haynes's cross-gender identifications—a theme throughout this volume—is allegorized in the film itself. During a key scene, the eponymous Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett) places a new camera firmly in the hands of Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), an expensive and thoughtful gift from a wealthier, older woman meant to encourage the young ingénue's interest in photography. Taking photos of the enigmatic, alluring Carol, Therese bears a metonymic relationship to Haynes, who, as a child, had to be bribed to stop drawing only women in his sketch pads (figure I.1) (R. White 2013, 133). Of course he never really stopped, as he explains to Kate Winslet, remaining "drawn



- 1.1 Therese behind the camera stands in for Haynes himself—one of many cross-gender identifications to be found in his work.

to female characters . . . because they don't have as easy or as obvious a relationship to power in society, and so they suffer under social constraints" (2011). In this way, Therese also figures Haynes as a student of art and semiotics at Brown University, guided by mentors who introduced him to the "arguments posed by feminists" that shape his films.

Reframing Todd Haynes: Feminism's Indelible Mark contends that no thorough consideration of Haynes's work can afford to ignore the crucial place of feminism within it, evident not only in his recurring focus on female characters and his continuing commitment to collaborations with women behind the camera, but also, and most significantly, in the influence of feminist theory on his aesthetic vision, discernible in the visual and narrative design of his oeuvre. Therefore, this volume reframes Haynes's long and continuing career in the emergent critical rubric of "new feminist cinema" to shed new light on the expanding arc of the director's work. "Any narrative of twenty-first-century cinema could be, and perhaps should be, written through feminist films," So Mayer (2016a) suggests, and "one such narrative would reflect the emergence of openly feminist cismale filmmakers," identifying "*Camera Obscura's* special issue on Todd Haynes" for its study of Haynes's "intersectional filmmaking and its importance for feminism" (6). Whereas Mayer speculates that the narrative of feminist male filmmakers is crucial to the development of "new feminist cinema," this

particular lineage within feminist cinema remains essentially unexplored. Nearly two decades after the publication of “Todd Haynes: A Magnificent Obsession” (2004), *Reframing Todd Haynes* contributes to the narrative of new feminist cinema by exploring Haynes’s “women’s stories,” including films rarely identified as such, even as it questions the essentialist notion of “woman” throughout.

In the films that make up new feminist cinema, as loosely characterized as NQC before it, “a politicized point of view can be sensed in an ethical approach to narrative choices, but also through film form” (Mayer 2016a, 9–10). Haynes’s films exemplify this commitment to form, insisting that his “experiments in form” are inseparable from “the invigorating notion of gender as a product of ideology,” inspired by “the complexity—and diversity—of feminist thought, from its incorporation of Marx and Freud to its reexamination of film and society” (Haynes 2003, viii). It is this focus on the ideology of gender that de-essentializes his film practice. Although his films stand out for their attention to women characters and women’s concerns, the performance of femininity across bodies and genders is crucial to all of his media work. Haynes may well be recognized for his films’ social and cinematic construction of femininity, memorably conveyed by the “great actresses” with whom he collaborates, but he is equally indebted to feminist theory for challenging “what it mean[s] to be a man”—and how nonnormative sexualities undercut those meanings. A focus on nonnormative sexualities—reading Haynes’s films as primarily queer—has dominated academic and popular criticism of his work, often eclipsing the feminist arguments he repeatedly references as the early inspiration for his filmmaking: “It was 1981 when I started [at Brown University],” Haynes recalls, “only just a few years after some of the seminal writing, particularly cutting-edge feminist film theory, had first come on the scene. . . . I found myself identifying and relating quite closely” (quoted in R. White 2013, 134). And as recently as 2015, he reaffirmed that “New French theory and feminist film criticism . . . paved the way for my asking theoretical questions about representation and narrative form and feminism” (quoted in Cooke 2015). Without disputing his place in the queer film canon, which has been thoroughly documented in extant scholarship,⁷ this volume turns its attention to the questions that Haynes has long posed in his film work—questions that reflect the indelible mark of five decades of feminist theory on the filmmaker’s “creative thinking.”

Although, as Haynes claims, “the world has just continued to move far away from the kinds of radical questions that I felt free to ask during

the *feminist* schooling that I enjoyed and grew from” (quoted in R. White 2013, 162, emphasis added), his work has persistently pursued such questions for several decades now. Indeed, this book contends that Haynes is the most significant male director in the canon of new feminist cinema, which is defined as expressly activist and often noted for politicized revisions of “women’s genres.” In *Film Feminisms: A Global Introduction*, Kristin Lené Hole and Dijana Jelača assert that “feminist films can, and have frequently been made by male directors” (2019, 27), pointing to Haynes’s *Far from Heaven* (2002) as a key example, and elaborating on how *Carol* appropriates “the male gaze and desire . . . [as] the audience is invited to identify with Therese’s gaze and align with her lesbian desire towards Carol—an act of looking that actively undermines the patriarchal and heteronormative sexualizing of women onscreen” (54). Notably, this analysis of *Carol* is remarkably consistent with Haynes’s own claims about the origins of his filmmaking, explaining to Gus Van Sant (2015) that it emerged “out of feminist film theory in the ’70s. Laura Mulvey. That whole movement. And the notion of the male spectator, the male gaze. All of these terms now feel extremely integrated if not outmoded or defunct, yet they still have residence and are formative.” If college-era Haynes is aligned with the budding artist Therese, feminist theory—notably, as far from singular today as it was from the start—is more akin to Carol, the experienced older woman, privileged in many ways, yet also embattled and world-weary. Any engagement with feminist thought at the current moment must reflect on its institutional privileges and its long-fought struggles—and the stories told about them. Such reflection informs the organization of this volume, which maps the shifting terms of feminist film inquiry as it has developed over the past half century.

Although the terms of ’70s feminist film theory, as Haynes acknowledges, have been declared “defunct” if not dismissed outright,⁸ recent feminist film criticism has proven they nonetheless “still have residence” in the critical formulations of new feminist cinema. Directed toward woman-made cinema, this scholarship develops a nonlinear approach to film feminisms to reveal new feminist cinema’s often obscure(d) connections to film history and theory—the project driving *Reframing Todd Haynes* as well, but one turned to the cinema of a gay male independent filmmaker (see Bolton 2015; Margulies and Szaniawski 2019; Mulvey and Rogers 2015; and P. White 2015c). “What’s ‘new’ about the twenty-first century ‘new feminist cinema,’” as Mayer explains, “is its negotiation of a transgenerational feminist film history of four decades within a reflexive awareness

of the interruption and re-vision of feminisms, and interconnectedly of film cultures, in the new millennium” (2016a, 6). The story of twenty-first-century cinema that this volume narrates through Haynes’s work takes as its starting point the director’s training in feminist film theory and his proclivity for telling “women’s stories,” making his work a model for the interconnectedness of feminist and queer film cultures.

In the example of Haynes’s films, NQC’s celebrated experimental aesthetics can be traced back to feminist film theory and women’s film culture. As Mary Ann Doane explains, “much of the film practice of the 1970s and 1980s allied itself with the avant-garde through a project of negation, a systematic interrogation and undermining of classical [Hollywood] codes of sexual looking and imaging” (2004a, 1231). A student of Doane, Leslie Thornton, and Michael Silverman at Brown in the early 1980s, Haynes interrogated the classical codes of sexual looking in painting and filmmaking, beginning with *Superstar*—a film he asserts “collects all the themes and instincts of every film I have made since in one little movie. It’s about pop culture, women, domestic life; it experiments with formal traditions; it sets up boundaries that the viewer has to overcome” (quoted in Cooke 2015). Although it was a collaborative project with Cynthia Schneider, *Superstar*’s themes reappear throughout his work, but they are most often recognized as (and reduced to) “a content idea,” as Haynes puts it, overlooking the “structural idea[s]” behind his experimentation with preexisting forms (Laskawy 2014, 21). Thus, his work “about” women and domestic life have earned him popular recognition as a “woman’s director,” a label he is happy to embrace: “If these kinds of stories [that raise questions about choices we do or do not have] find greater expression in domestic tales that are driven by female characters, then I’m thoroughly proud to be part of that tradition. And it is a tradition!” (N. Davis 2015b).⁹ In this assignation, however, the feminist idea(l)s motivating his experimental filmmaking remain obscured.

By reframing Haynes as director of new feminist cinema, this collection affords a clearer understanding of the formal innovations of his film work. The “tradition” of the woman’s film activates most of Haynes’s key feminist thematics and experiments with “form,” which to him “is everything. It’s the first question about how to approach a story and why you are telling it and what kind of traditions you are evoking” (quoted in Hopewell 2017). Directly influenced by Doane’s (1987) critical contribution to the “invention” of the genre and its subgenres, Haynes studied such films (with her) not to replicate them but rather to identify in

them “stress points and perturbations [that] can ... be activated as a kind of lever to facilitate ... another cinematic practice”—one not possible within “the traditional forms and conventions of Hollywood narrative,” because these, by (feminist) definition, cannot sustain the exploration “of female subjectivity and desire” (13). Haynes’s postmodern women’s films pull this lever, posing crucial questions about femininity, “narrative form and feminism”—and thus are constitutive of “another cinematic practice” grounded in formal experimentation. “The cultural work feminist critics performed in ‘inventing’ the genre of the woman’s film,” as E. Ann Kaplan argues, has directly impacted “feminist cinema practices in the current postmodern moment ... inspiring feminist directors to imagine aspects of their social and political worlds through a genre lens” (2012, 71, 72). Although Kaplan is likely thinking only of women directors here (“their”), Haynes is arguably the most well known and prolific of the “independent directors outside Hollywood” doing just such work in “the postmodern, feminist era” (73). The woman’s film functions as a key generic framework through which Haynes’s cinematic experimentation is mapped throughout this collection precisely because it undercuts auteurist claims to the uniqueness of the (male) director’s vision.

Haynes’s women’s films fly in the face of auteur theory’s claims for the originality of the auteur, as they evoke not only the original tradition but also the feminist counter-cinema that first recited and reworked the subgenre in their formal experiments. Indeed, not just Haynes’s women’s films bear the “indelible mark” of second-wave feminist filmmaking; its formal experimentalism is evident even in his student thesis, *Assassins: A Film concerning Rimbaud* (1985), in which, he admits, “people will see the influence of Fassbinder, for sure ... [but I was also] translating different influences” in shots that were “very Laura Mulvey,” referring to her film with Peter Wollen, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) (N. Davis 2015a). Women’s cinema of the ’70s and ’80s drew heavily on the classical woman’s film despite its avant-garde aesthetics, and Haynes’s work reflects this feminist “interruption and re-vision” of the tradition, revising it for the same reasons. Noted for its “pleasurable reworking” and “ironic undercutting” of that genre “both attractive to and manipulative of women—the melodrama,” women’s cinema established a nonpatriarchal film language by “draw[ing] on, criticiz[ing] and transform[ing] the conventions of cultural expressions traditionally associated with women: the melodramatic story of doomed love, ... the ‘family romance,’ and ... the family melodrama” (Kuhn [1982] 1994, 171). Haynes has noted that films like Sally

Potter's *Thriller* (1979) and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), which "were beginning to work with commercial genres ... using the experimental vernacular," impacted him and Vachon "tremendously" (quoted in MacDonald 2014, 154). Such critical transformations of the melodrama clearly shaped *Superstar*, *Safe, Far from Heaven*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Carol*, but they also inflected his other works, as several contributors demonstrate. Feminist counter-cinema's reworking of the tropes of the woman's film provided Haynes the experimental film language for "another cinematic practice"—one that negotiates trans-generational feminist history and film culture to interrogate the affective conditions of the present.

"Cultural Tremblings"

That Haynes frequently turns to the woman's film, like the feminist filmmakers before him, is of little surprise as the gestalt of his filmmaking is one of affective belatedness. Feminist film theory has long argued that the fantasy of the woman-centered melodrama is time-based, premised on the affective register of "the pathos of the 'too late,'" as Linda Williams (1991, 10–11) formulates it. Yet this narrative dilatoriness is equally present in his musical biographies; as Haynes asserts, "pop music ... provides those true Proustian moments, unlocking sensations, unlocking our imagination" (quoted in Murray 2014, 143). This Proustian sensibility permeates Haynes's work because all of his films are set in previous eras.¹⁰ About Haynes's arguably most exuberant musical, *Velvet Goldmine*, Nick Davis observes: "On the one hand, it is a gender-bending, pleasure-baiting, hormone-firing, freely adapting, time-warping, glitter-bombing, assumption-testing spectacle and soundscape.... On the other hand, *Velvet Goldmine* emits a palpable melancholy ... pin[ing] ... for relatively recent pasts" (2013, 246). This melancholy is a result of how and *why* Haynes persistently engages "relatively recent pasts." Acknowledging his consistent tendency to draw on earlier forms of popular culture to frame the past while also differentiating his work from the larger trend of "retro" cinema, Haynes explains: "We're learning how to refer to and play with other genres; I just think sometimes the style precedes the purpose and the content. We need to know why we're looking at the past and what we're trying to learn from it and ultimately how it's informing the present" (quoted in Farber 1989, 22). Haynes's films thus strive for historical dialectics, limning the conditions of the present by returning to older genres



I.2 Another stand-in for Haynes, Jarvis Cocker recites women's stories and experiences through the temporal drag of Sondheim's lyrics.

and themes to re-enliven their particular affective register at a different historical juncture.

The short film *I'm Still Here*, which appears in the documentary *Six by Sondheim* (2013), exemplifies these dialectics, encapsulating his cinematic projects writ small by emphasizing the pathos behind the camp surface of the famous ballad. In it, Haynes provides a unique interpretation of one of Sondheim's more famous—and potentially more campy—songs, one usually performed by elder stateswomen of musical theater such as Elaine Stritch or Debbie Reynolds, but here performed by the lanky singer Jarvis Cocker of the band Pulp, who interprets the song lyrics for and through the many women sitting in the diegetic audience of a smoky bar (figure I.2).¹¹ Less crooning to his female listeners than identifying with them, Cocker seems a perfect stand-in for the director who is best known for telling women's stories. Offering a striking synecdoche for his body of work, *I'm Still Here*, like *Superstar*, weds the musical form to the woman's "weepies" by intercutting the song's performance with stoic close-ups of the women in the audience, implying their personal experiences of suffering in the lyrics. This metonymic relation to Haynes's oeuvre only deepens when the framing documentary informs the viewer that Sondheim, a gay artist, wrote the song thinking about Joan Crawford's long career—a career revived by her role in Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945). As he does

with his return to that text and the woman's film generally, Haynes creates a layered portrait of women's struggles and survival, allowing Sondheim's lyrics to imply the melodramas behind the unknown women's faces in the diegetic audience.

In many ways, this short underscores Haynes's response to the question of his identifying as a "woman's director": "I'm pleased if I'm doing anything to reinvigorate a discussion in movies about women's stories, women's status, and women's experiences—and also, stories that aren't by definition affirmative or heroic" (N. Davis 2015a). His choice of verbs—to reinvigorate—acknowledges the existence of previous vigorous discussions about women's stories and social status in feminist theory that Haynes has long sought to rekindle. Sondheim's lyrics, of course, are anything but heroic or affirmative: "Reefers and vino, rest cures, religion and pills, and I'm here; Been called a 'Pinko,' commie tool, got through it stinko by my pool..." (Sondheim 1971). Such lines recall Carol White's "rest cure" and Mildred's final line, "Let's get stinko," and like all his films, the lyrics return to specific moments in history ("In the Depression, was I depressed?... I got through Herbert and J. Edgar Hoover") through the frame of women's less-than-affirmative experiences of them. More to the point, the personal experiences of history denoted in Sondheim's lyrics are presented in the juxtaposition of events set in the past with the present tense declarative, "and I'm here." At each "I'm here," Haynes employs lighting and close-ups to carve out the space and consideration that these complex and compelling women are due. In an analogous way, *Reframing Todd Haynes* carves out space for the long overdue critical consideration of Haynes's feminist film practice, which draws on the relatively recent pasts of feminist theory and film culture to provide a much-needed window on the present.

Haynes's avant-garde aesthetics and politicized narratives find their origins in feminist critiques of representation (or "semiotics") and in the activism of the AIDS crisis. And yet, despite his repeated proclamations, in every book-length study of the director (excluding *Camera Obscura's* special issue), and in most published articles, the words *feminism* and *feminist* barely make an appearance outside of quotations from Haynes himself.¹² The fact that most Haynes criticism tends to omit or ignore the feminist arguments with which he expressly identifies to stress the newness of queer theory (and NQC) is consistent with how Clare Hemmings (2011) describes the stories told about each. A teleological story has taken hold, as Hemmings explains, in which "feminist and queer theory are counterposed usually with

the emphasis on the former's untrendy focus on oppression and the latter's seductive emphasis on 'individual' performance" (119). Fortunately, scholars of "queer feminist criticism" challenge these stories by unpacking the political implications of such specious claims. Queer feminist criticism, a "strange" neologism invented by Robyn Wiegman, describes not so much "a collaboration between queer *and* feminist criticism but ... a distinct body of work in its own right ... [defined by] a set of shared political and theoretical genealogies [that have] in some cases revis[ed] the very inheritances of queer theory along the way, such that the famous distinction between sexuality and gender ... is repealed as a theoretical universalism" (2014, 19–20n1). Indeed, it is precisely this distinction that has made it too easy to disavow Haynes's feminism and efface the specific theoretical origins of his filmmaking.

Envisioned as a contribution to this "distinct body of work," this volume approaches Haynes's period work, which to date includes every feature and his television projects, as a creative archive of queer feminist historiography. Haynes's filmmaking, like queer feminist scholarship, "attends to the condition of the present through the analytics of affect and time" (Wiegman 2014, 5). Haynes's projects are catalyzed by the same epistemological aims as queer feminist scholarship, drawing on past eras and their forms to provide an affective aesthetics—if not an analytics—fitting our own historical moment(s). He admits: "I try to be motivated by what's around me, the cultural tremblings that surround us. ... [But] I always seem to go to another time to draw some sort of frame around the time we are in" (quoted in Hopewell 2017). Included here is new research on Haynes's film and media that expressly draws on queer feminism's political and theoretical genealogies, including its revisions of established narratives. Like the queer feminist criticism with which Haynes's work has long been synergistically aligned, his film work is centrally concerned with queer negativity, engaging the affects of shame, melancholia, pathos, and failure. Haynes's more recent projects, however, have begun to reflect the "different set of terms" needed to analyze the conditions of the present: "debt, crisis, precarity, bare life, biopolitics, neoliberalism, and empire" (Wiegman 2014, 5). Several chapters directly engage queer feminism's critical concepts, situating the volume's project within its purview as opposed to traditional auteur criticism, which is interrogated from the outset.

Haynes is uniquely skilled in translating contemporary affect in film and media set in other eras, as several contributors specifically detail. The contributors who engage queer feminism's conceptual archive come

at it from differing terms and perspectives, reflective of the distinctive, and sometimes contradictory, approaches within the field itself. For example, the “bi-polar” interpretations of affect in queer feminist criticism, evident in the distinctions between J. Halberstam’s “converting loss into heroic loserdom” and Lauren Berlant’s (2011) much more skeptical anatomization of “optimism’s cruelty,” are “important not as competing interpretive strategies or opposite world views, but as evidence and evocation of the collective *affect* of “The times we’re in” (Wiegman 2014, 6). *Carol* may be seen to integrate these perspectives, which Patricia White’s analysis sketches out, accessing melancholic queer histories before Stonewall through Highsmith’s writing while heralding asynchronous lesbian erotics to buffer against progressive assimilationist narratives. Other conceptual frameworks such as “empire” or “bare life,” however, delimit the political traction of queer feminism’s negative affect, redemptive (Halberstam) or not (Berlant), as Danielle Bouchard and Jigna Desai assert in their critical reassessment of *Safe*, *Wonderstruck*, and *Carol*.

Whereas part I, “Influences and Interlocutors,” stresses the compensatory work of negative affect and its heroic losers—twilight lovers, glam rockers, and various social outcasts—part II moves toward the pole of optimism’s cruelty. Patrick Flanery zeroes in on this in his examination of the HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce* (2011), in which he details how Haynes, like Berlant, confers “meticulous attention on the psychic and social environments in which [his] objects of study struggle to live . . . offering them (and us) an interpretive sensorium of the intimate detail” (Wiegman 2014, 6). Indeed, the chapters collected in part II, “Intersections and Interventions,” take as their object of study “the psychic and social environments” of Haynes’s women’s stories, paying special attention to the ways these environments come into conflict. Haynes’s women-centered melodramas reject redemption in favor of simply detailing the suffering of his protagonists, even at the risk of “disappointing” the work’s political aims, as Sharon Willis anatomizes in her canonical essay on *Far from Heaven*. Such detailing describes the visual and narrative work of Haynes’s “women’s films,” but not only his women’s films, as Jess Issacharoff demonstrates by turning our attention to *Poison*’s women.

Although Haynes’s cinematic contemplation of suffering is foreshadowed in his high school short *The Suicide* (1978), it becomes explicitly political during his college years, as he avows in his introduction to the screenplays for *Superstar*, *Safe*, and *Far from Heaven*: “If there exists between them a sisterhood of sorts, aligning them as stories about women

or even experiments in form, the imprint of feminism would clearly be at its core" (Haynes 2003, viii). It is this relationship between feminism and Haynes's experiments with form that tethers part III's focus on Haynes's stories about women. In "Intermediality and Intertextuality," it is evident that even though films like *Dottie Gets Spanked* and *I'm Not There* may feel more assuring in their queer premise that "being undone is a way of over-coming, even when life still feels bad" (Wiegman 2014, 6), their feminist imprint is no less clear. Because Haynes's women's stories, major or minor, circumscribe their objects of study to white women's struggles, however, this imprint is potentially attenuated, as both Willis and Bouchard and Desai detail in their interventions.

Although only some contributors directly engage queer feminism's critical terms, all share its impulse "to reconfigure feminism and queer theory as co-operative rather than discrete theoretical traditions" (Hemmings 2011, 189). Using a wide range of critical frameworks, from star and fan studies to media archeology, each chapter attends to the affective asynchronies discernible in Haynes's film work. Haynes admits, "I feel that going back to the past deepens and makes more exciting the journey or the transport that a film offers us. . . . I also feel that in some ways, when period films have issues that reflect back—or forward—to contemporary issues, they're almost stronger" (quoted in Jenkins 2015). While much Haynes criticism acknowledges such transports, most often as pastiche, citation, or homage, this volume theorizes three decades of media practice in terms of the "outmoded or defunct" that names a particularly queer feminist relation to time and affect. Purposefully out of sync, Haynes opts "for a kind of overt aesthetic and temporal disjunction," Elena Gorfinkel argues, as his "films are *about* anachronism as much as they *use* anachronism as an aesthetic resource . . . employ[ing] 'outmoded' or obsolete elements within their *mise-en-scène* and narrative" (2005, 155). More than simply using obsolete "elements," Haynes's works rely in toto on the affective structures of anachronistic forms and thematics to reorient our perspective on the present.

To this extent the volume is shaped by the notion of "temporal drag," following Elizabeth Freeman's redefinition of "drag . . . as the act of plastering the body [and texts] with outdated rather than just cross-gendered accessories, [and] whose resurrection seems to exceed the axis of gender and begins to talk about, indeed talk back to, history" (2010, xxi). Translating the pull of the past on the present in affective and affecting scenarios, temporal drag in Haynes's work takes the form of deep intertextuality, or

what many identify as his richly allusive cinephilia and fascination with popular media and celebrity culture—the central organizing through-line of part III, “Intermediality and Intertextuality.” *Reframing Todd Haynes* illuminates the feminist origins (and ends) of Haynes’s cinematic temporal drag to explore the ways his film and media model “a kind of *temporal* transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind” (Freeman 2010, 63). Yet critics who have situated Haynes’s films in the archive of temporal drag (e.g., Dana Luciano, Cüneyt Çakırlar) frequently elide the specific context of feminist historiography in which the term arises for Freeman. Experiencing the “pull backward” of feminism’s waves, “its forward movement [that] is also a drag back,” Haynes’s work resonates with Freeman’s theoretical project, which seeks to replace feminism’s generational logic with “a notion of ‘temporal drag’ [as] the movement time of collective political fantasy” (65). And yet the director is only footnoted in Freeman’s *Time Binds* as an exceptional filmmaker of NQC, acknowledging his importance in the spurious “lacuna” of research on cinema’s reworking of history as social construction that “is currently being filled in cinema studies, particularly in essays on the work of Todd Haynes” (2010, 182n11).¹³

Haynes is surprisingly absent from Freeman’s archive, which is mostly experimental film and media, because her project is to explore affective registers other than suffering. He shares the same history as all of her other visual artists, nonetheless: “Born between 1960–70 ... coming of age in the afterlife of sixties, [a] successor to mass movements whose most radical elements were often tamed, crushed or detoured.... [His] political experience unfolded in and moved outward from the 1980s, when the feminist, lesbian/gay, and AIDS movements met continental theory” (Freeman 2010, xiv). Haynes is one of the most self-aware artists of his historical positioning and inheritance in just these terms in interview after interview.¹⁴ With his training in semiotics and feminist theory, Haynes wasn’t just a “witness” but actually led the charge in “the semiotic warfare eventually known as ‘queering’”; he cofounded the art activist group Gran Fury, which “brought deconstructive reading practices and grassroots activism together, laying the groundwork for ... queer theory” (Freeman xiv–xv). One important contribution of recent queer feminist criticism is the genealogical work of excavating these foundations, tracing them back to the “arguments posed by feminists,” as Hemmings, Sara Ahmed (2017), Jennifer Nash (2019), and Freeman, among others, have all undertaken in their respective contributions to the field. Haynes, of course, has long

asserted that these arguments form the bedrock of his “creative thinking,” claiming “that it wasn’t until gay theory was ushered in . . . that I realized how significant and important feminism is” (quoted in Wyatt 1993, 7). It is this recursive allegiance to feminism that is reflected in the temporal drag of much of his work. Haynes’s period work, “in its chronotopic disjunctiveness,” to borrow Freeman’s phrasing, epitomizes “a temporal economy crucial to queer performance [but] harnesse[d] to . . . movements that go beyond the shimmyings of individual bodies and into the problematic relationship between feminist history and queer theory” (2010, 68). This relationship is expressly addressed in the chapters by White, Julia Leyda, Issacharoff, Davis, Noah Tsika, and Willis, and it is implicit in the feminist reframings throughout the volume in their meticulous attention to various transgenerational feminist histories.

The impetus for this volume is the desire to rethink Haynes’s cultural production in terms of the antiteleological engagement with social history paradigmatic of queer feminist criticism. In Haynes’s cinema, the varied frames of history, figured against the conceptual ground of feminist politics, are his attempt to “intercede in the current direction of the world . . . to interrupt the contemporary moment with a [filmic] practice of the untimely,” and as Jane Elliott insists, “such interruptions need not appear historically new” (2006, 1701). And yet they cannot just be a repetition of the past either. In the organization of the volume, the aim is to tease out this contradiction: diverse contributions are placed in dialogue through a specific set of feminist frameworks. Temporal drag, albeit implicit, specifies the queer feminist logic behind the book, because, as Freeman posits, it names “a counter-genealogical practice of archiving culture’s throwaway objects, including the outmoded masculinities and femininities from which useable pasts may be extracted” (2010, xvii). *Reframing Todd Haynes* is organized around these very counter-genealogical practices, from restoring outmoded lesbian or young girls’ fantasies and the creative work to which these fantasies give rise, as explored in part I, to the regressive femininities of defunct film genres that tethers part II, and the archiving of culture’s throwaway objects that mobilizes part III. Haynes’s recollection of supposedly “outmoded” feminist film theories is redoubled in his citation of older genres and intertexts. As such, his work embodies the aims of temporal drag, which creates “a *productive* obstacle to progress, a usefully distorting pull backward, and a necessary pressure on the present tense” (Freeman 2010, 64, emphasis in original). Haynes’s film and media, the book argues, exert just such a necessary feminist pressure on the present.

“Experiments in Shape and Feeling”

As the quotations in the preceding paragraphs have shown, Haynes persistently draws attention to the legacies of feminist film criticism and women’s art practice in his work, making his own authorship visible as a constituent part of a larger body of artistic and theoretical work—work developed in large part to counter auteur theory’s and genre criticism’s gendered foreclosures. Haynes’s career thus paradoxically affords a unique opportunity to disrupt the auteurist edifice, smuggling in the very terms of that edifice’s undoing in its most privileged figure—the white male director. The established response to auteur theory’s endemic sexism, which has been much noted of late (Marghitu 2018; Mayer 2016b; and Shambu 2018), is the proliferation of scholarly research on women filmmakers, rekindled in exciting new directions with Mayer’s *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (2016a) and Patricia White’s *Women’s Cinema, World Cinema* (2015c), which “models ... an expanded, critical, interrogatory post-auteurism” (Shambu 2018). Several contributors extend this model to Haynes’s film and media, beginning with White’s chapter on *Carol*. Accordingly, this book departs from the chronological structure typical of auteurist companion studies, opting instead for a post-auteurist framework developed in conjunction with the concept of new feminist cinema. With the aim of democratizing authorship, many contributors here trouble Haynes’s status as auteur by foregrounding women’s contributions to works that are expressly polyvocal and heteroglossic.

Part I of *Reframing Todd Haynes*, “Influences and Interlocutors,” deconstructs the founding conceit of auteur theory by approaching his work through the feminist concept of authorship. “The concept of auteurship,” as Hole and Jelača explain, “is imbued with a sense of creative authority historically denied to women ... [and] inherently invites hagiographic celebrations of a filmmaker’s artistic achievement, while the concept of authorship is more democratic and less burdened by such demands for high artistic recognition” (2019, 9). Focusing on Haynes’s collaborations with smart, creative women—artists in their own right—the contributors challenge reductive notions of the (male) auteur in analyses that tease out the dialogical implications of film production and reception. By recuperating the contributions of women to his work, these chapters develop a feminist dialogics that challenges “the myth of the solo auteur” by “reinforcing the concept that it takes many people to create art ... [which] doesn’t devalue the work, it just acknowledges what actually goes into making it”

(Derschowitz 2019, 60).¹⁵ In this way, part I amplifies the multiple voices that speak through, with, and back to works organized under the name “Todd Haynes.” White, for one, examines the ways in which Haynes’s *Carol* can be read as a complex palimpsest that bears the imprint of its lesbian authors, Highsmith and Nagy. White’s chapter highlights the democratic potentials of film authorship (as opposed to auteurism) by drawing out the multiple authors of its images (postwar women photographers such as Helen Levitt and Vivian Maier, costume designer Sandy Powell, producers Vachon and Karlson) and narrative (Highsmith, Nagy). She goes on to show that Haynes’s commitment to such polyvocality opens the text to new interlocutors throughout its afterlife.

Julia Leyda, too, examines the ways Haynes’s films invite viewers to collaborate in a film’s meanings well after production. In her close reading of the doll scene in *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), Leyda suggests the film authorizes fan appropriation, evinced in the slash fiction produced, mostly by women, in the years since its release. The schoolgirls in the doll scene allegorize the repurposing of gay male desire echoed in the fan fiction that arose as part of the film’s reception. Akin to the lesbian subculture surrounding *Carol*, women appropriate the narrative and characters for their own purposes and fantasies—an appropriation Haynes models in his own fandom, repurposing popular culture for his own use. To this extent, Leyda and White both foreground intermediality to amplify the heteroglossia of Haynes’s film work, intimating how the self-authorizing technologies of social media may well provide the grounds for auteurism’s eventual undoing.

Whereas White’s chapter introduces the breadth of interlocutors shaping Haynes’s works, Rebecca Gordon and David Maynard and I examine the implications of taking such influences seriously, focusing on Julianne Moore and Christine Vachon, respectively. By rack-focusing on Haynes’s collaborators, these chapters undermine some of the most cherished precepts of auteur theory. Because these interlocutors are women, granting them an authorial presence throws the male canon into question, as Maynard and I make clear in our discussion of Vachon. For Gordon, on the other hand, the meanings generated by Moore’s body and the suffering it registers may well be a form of embodied resistance beyond the director’s ken. Abjection is central to Gordon’s quite literal anatomization of Julianne Moore’s body in Haynes’s women’s films, from her only partially hidden pregnant body in *Far from Heaven* to her actually anorexic body in *Safe*. Indeed, Moore’s characters are typical of Vachon’s films, inclusive of

Haynes's work but extending far beyond it. Maynard and I argue Vachon's work is inhabited by characters who seem to revel in "self-destruction, passivity, sacrifice, and masochism"; we identify in these themes, however, an antisocial feminism that, following the work of Halberstam (2011), "renarrat[es] abjection as resistance" (Wiegman 2014, 6).

By widening the temporal frame to include the production histories of Haynes's films and their transmedia afterlife, part I solidifies a narrative about Haynes that firmly places his work in the tradition of new feminist cinema. Returning to the feminist theorists and filmmakers that influenced Haynes's *Safe*, my own essay takes to task the "manspreading machinery" of auteurism that Girish Shambu defines as "an ingenious mechanism for ceaselessly multiplying discourse on a limited number of directors ... usually, men" (2018). Situating the film in a transgenerational genealogy of feminist counter-cinema, the chapter provides an altogether different context from the male genius-auteur tradition in which his work is commonly placed. Rather than "admit that female filmmakers ... influence individual male filmmakers—or even culture more broadly," interviewers and critics have ignored the substantial influence of Chantal Akerman on *Safe*, emblemizing a deep misogyny endemic to auteur theory (Mayer 2016b). My discussion of *Safe*'s indebtedness to women's experimental cinema and the feminist culture that shaped it provides a pivot to part II, which approaches Haynes's work in terms of the interruption and re-vision of feminisms that further challenge the auteurist paradigm.

Whereas part I's contributors attend to the conceptual and contextual frames mobilized by Haynes's media work, part II, "Intersections and Interventions," reframes Haynes's film work from the standpoint of intersectional feminist politics, foregrounding issues of class, race, nation, sexuality, and whiteness that have intervened into feminism's foundational claims about gender as a (singular) category of analysis. The first chapter in part II reminds us that, as early as 1991, Haynes was forthright about the "reductive" tendency to label him as a gay filmmaker: "I don't consider myself a gay filmmaker, and I don't consider *Poison* an exclusively gay film" (Laskawy 2014, 20)—a claim Issacharoff illustrates by returning to the film's other sections, "Hero" and "Horror," which literally frame the critically privileged section, "Homo." Returning to *Poison*'s forgotten women enables Issacharoff to recuperate the feminist scholarship that made queer social theory (and NQC) imaginable. Her chapter demonstrates how cross-gender identification in Haynes's work figures the intersectional and, at times, familial relationship between queer and feminist theory evident

throughout this volume. Part II, in this way, explores Haynes's "intersectional filmmaking and its importance for feminism," assessing his work less in terms of collaborative authorship, as part I does, than the arguments posed by feminist theory that have developed over the last several decades (Mayer 2016a, 6).

Poison was made at the height of the AIDS crisis, responding to a critical moment in history; two decades later, Haynes would react to a different crisis, the financial crisis, with yet another intersectional work—one attuned to the particular affective experiences produced by late capitalism in the new millennium. As both *Dark Waters* and *Mildred Pierce* adumbrate, neoliberalism has captured Haynes's attention in recent years: "Where is the outside now? Who stands beyond capitalism? Who is questioning corporate culture? The market has won. It accepts gay and lesbian lives because those people can spend money like anyone else. It is issues of poverty and race that need attention now" (quoted in Cooke 2015). Haynes, true to form, locates this "outside" inside the family and its cinematic genres, as Flanery suggests in his reading of *Mildred Pierce*. He traces an emergent aesthetic form in the temporal drag of Haynes's adaptation of James M. Cain's novel—an aesthetic originating in the changed affective atmosphere following the financial crisis of 2008. Reading it as an exemplum of Berlant's "situation tragedy," Flanery tracks the recurrent disappointments of failed fantasies of the good life in *Mildred Pierce* to the logics of neoliberalism. Sounding the depths of these resonances, Flanery's chapter links the intersectional politics of gender and class experienced as perpetual crisis to the temporality of televisual serialization.

The dialectics of Haynes's *Mildred* relies on its anachronistic return to a set of thematics that found the maternal melodrama in its heyday when the problems of motherhood were intimately tied to issues of social class. Willis argues the discursive limits of the form for transcoding critical race and intersectional feminist politics. Overlooked in responses to Willis's critique—those who have sought to defend *Far from Heaven* against the "disappointments" and inconsistencies she maps out in its political ambit—is the trope of "maternal plenitude" and its topos of suffering that shapes her intervention.¹⁶ Addressed to women, the maternal melodrama figures centrally in woman's culture, as Berlant (2008) details, yet the form "has mobilized fantasies of what black and working-class suffering must feel like in order to find a language for [the white woman's] own more privileged suffering at the hands of other women, men, and callus institutions" (6). Such fantasies, as Willis shows through her extensive media

archeology, form the political undertow of *Far from Heaven*, and Haynes's own words bear this out: "It's the gay man, Frank Whitaker, who has the most freedom. . . . He's not as intensely visible as Raymond the gardener, who has to move. But Cathy is at the bottom of the hierarchy; she gives up the love object, loses the husband, and is left with the responsibility of the children" (quoted in MacDonald 2014, 163). Sybil—who, as the family's black maid, actually takes care of the children in the Whitaker home—doesn't even appear on this scale of ranked oppressions, intimating the perspectival blind spots that accompany Haynes's women's films, even when critically queer.

The last two chapters of part II, in this way, bring into view the more troubling residue of cinematic fantasies that are reactivated in Haynes's filmic allusions—fantasies that operate as the historical ground against which Haynes's white protagonists figure. Both Willis's and Bouchard and Desai's interventions trouble what sort of narratives and which kinds of bodies are read as feminist, queer, or both, intimating that Haynes's citation of classic films, from D. W. Griffith to Douglas Sirk, raises concerns feminist film critics cannot ignore. In posing such questions, these chapters reject the hagiographic tendencies of auteur theory in favor of an intersectional feminist perspective that demands film criticism be more attentive and amenable to other kinds of histories and other sorts of subjects. Drawing attention to his construction of white femininity and the racialized politics of looking in several of his films, Bouchard and Desai revisit their earlier claims (2005) about *Safe*—a film that came on the scene at a critical moment in the institutionalization of feminism, and one that thematizes a similar sense of entitlement in its representation of whiteness within the broader context of US imperialism. In identifying certain troubling motifs in *Carol* and *Wonderstruck* (2017), they trace out increasingly problematic relations of looking in his films that Haynes once challenged in *Safe*. As a filmmaker who has come to see class and race as priorities for cinematic representation, Haynes's image repertoire of white femininity (and marginalized women and children of color) certainly begs scrutiny, as Bouchard and Desai prove in the closing chapter of part II.

The final part of the volume, "Intermediality and Intertextuality," offers a critical model that moves precisely in this direction by reading Haynes's work through a series of feminist companion texts in media history. Temporal drag manifests in his films through a self-conscious creative practice of media archeology in which Haynes scaffolds his meditations on the present to the affective work of a range of media forms and material

objects. Bouchard and Desai, to this extent, afford a transition to part III in their discussion of *Wonderstruck*, a film that figures media archeology's privileged objects—particularly early cinema and the “captured exotica” of museums—along with the subfield's more troubling aims, as Elsaesser identifies: “to fetishize ‘memory’ and ‘materiality’ in the form of trauma and loss” (2016, 206). The film's obsessive attention to the materiality of cultural objects set in their specific sociohistorical contexts (or not, in the case of the Natural History Museum, as Bouchard and Desai address) reminds us that such fetishizing has long typified Haynes's work. His film and media curate an array of “defunct” objects and cultural forms, mostly involving outmoded genres of music (e.g., the easy listening, folk, and glam rock of the '60s and '70s) and film, especially the subgenres of the woman's film as Doane (1987) identifies them: the films of medical discourse, the maternal melodrama, the love story, and the paranoid gothic film. Yet, as the final chapters demonstrate, Haynes's intertextuality is coeval with his interest in intermedia, turning his “textual drag” of older cinematic, televisual, and musical genres into opportunities to lovingly contemplate past movements in architecture, photography, painting, design, fashion, and much more.

Although media archeology remains loosely defined, the general consensus of its traits is remarkably descriptive of Haynes's media practice: “discontent with linear narratives . . . , the need to ‘read [media history] against the grain,’ . . . to ‘dig out’ forgotten, suppressed and neglected histories . . . reconfigur[ing] the temporalities of past and future” (Elsaesser 2016, 183). Haynes's films certainly undertake such work in their anachronistic pull backward, but it is their attention to “reading” popular media texts against the grain on which the latter chapters focus. Moreover, what makes his own “readings” of popular culture pointedly feminist is his choice of intertexts. Most are recognizable feminist “companion texts [that] spark a moment of revelation in the midst of an overwhelming proximity” (Ahmed 2017, 16), and, as the contributors elaborate, in Haynes's imaginative worlds, such companion texts provide a wealth of feelings and resources “to make sense of something . . . beyond [our] grasp” (16), like our own present moment in history. Lynne Joyrich's chapter, for example, maps *Far from Heaven*'s numerous cinematic intertexts, particularly Sirk's domestic melodramas, that are well-established feminist companion texts. Indeed, Haynes, as J. Hoberman (2002) observes, “first encountered Sirk in college in the 1980s at a moment when academic interest in his movies was stimulated by a feminist reappraisal and radical rereading of so-called

women's pictures." For Joyrich, *Far from Heaven's* intertextuality invites a deeper media archeology through these companion texts' "outmoded . . . accessories," including the television console and the wired telephone, along with other material objects that make up their particular affective sensorium. Attending to the semiotics of objects of mediation, she makes the case for Haynes as a dialectician of new technologies, as these objects intercede into and redirect characters' communications and desires.

Bridget Kies's essay builds on Joyrich's materialist reassessment of melodrama, but rather than do so through the objects within the diegetic frame, she looks to the technology of its transmission: the television. Reflecting the recent historical turn in feminist media studies, Kies situates *Mildred Pierce* in the context and history of HBO programming. Kies tunes in to the gendered divisions that shape televisual discourse and define cable branding through the framing of *Mildred Pierce* as an HBO miniseries, situating it within the larger context of the history of media industries. In this context, the miniseries signals a double feminization, both as maternal melodrama and as television itself, which has long been theorized as a feminized medium. This feminization of forms is also central to Mary R. Desjardins's chapter, which explores the meanings of the female body and female agency evoked by the anorexic body in *Superstar*—or its avatar in the form of a Barbie doll, adding yet another layer of intermediality to a film about the pop singer and television icon Karen Carpenter. Desjardins situates the experimental video in the broader context of feminist cultural criticism, reading Haynes's work with feminist classics such as Lynn Spigel's research on Barbie and Susan Bordo's work on eating disorders to vet the film's claims about the female body, stardom, and, especially, biography, as Desjardins notes in her added coda.¹⁷ Forerunners in feminist intermedia studies, Desjardins's and Joyrich's essays first appeared in *Camera Obscura*. They thus bridge the book to its own companion text, that journal's special issue.

Barbie dolls in *Superstar* evoke a recognizable object from childhood with its own "haptic historiography . . . negotiating with the past and producing historical knowledge through visceral sensations" (Freeman 2010, 123, emphasis in original). In *Dottie Gets Spanked* (1993), such haptics are bound to the act of spanking. The deep intertextuality generated by Haynes's fictionalized Lucille Ball, "Dottie," and the queer child who worships her affords Noah Tsika the opportunity to undertake an extensive media archeology of female stardom in the age of television, implicitly responding to the question Desjardins poses in her coda about how

to theorize biography from a feminist perspective and anticipating Nick Davis's chapter on *I'm Not There*. In his study of Cate Blanchett's Dylan and Charlotte Gainsbourg's Claire, Davis finds both performances to be equally mimetic and denaturalized, akin to Ball's complexly queer mimicry anatomized in Tsika's analysis. In her performance of Claire, Gainsbourg evokes the feminist companion texts of the era, Davis argues, particularly the writing of rock critic and radical feminist Ellen Willis. Together, the last two chapters develop an intermedial archeology that explicates Haynes's unique "*dialectics of feeling*," mapping out in his work how "we feel through and with representational, technological, and social forms whose histories are uneven and overlapping" (Freeman 2010, 127, emphasis in original).

Taking its cue from Haynes's cinematic dialectics, *Reframing Todd Haynes* offers a critical practice appropriate to new feminist cinema narrated through the frame of authorship in order to disrupt the tropes of auteur criticism. In his experiments in shape and form catalyzed by the insights of feminist film theory of the '70s and '80s, Haynes refuses to fetishize the "new" in work that is nonetheless uncannily contemporary. Haynes's film and media, in this way, afford a rich archive of companion texts that suggest "perhaps when we think about the question of feminist futures, we need to attend to the legacies of feminist pasts" (Ahmed 2003, 236). By returning to feminist film theory's privileged forms, especially the woman's film, Haynes has created an oeuvre of "social political critique," bringing the genre's "latent radicality and embedded critical perspectives of modern life" to the surface of the screen in creatively anachronistic experimental narratives (Haynes, in Kohn, 2011). Such work incarnates queer feminist criticism's temporal drag in its interrogations of time and affect. Evoking the "specters of feminism," his film and media may "look politically anachronistic," but as Freeman insists—and Haynes proves time and again—"there are those of us for whom queer politics and theory necessarily involve not disavowing ... feminism and its histories" (2010, 59, 62). From his collaborative work with (and inspiration from) women throughout his career to the "radical questions" his work has consistently posed across several decades, Haynes's unwavering feminist commitments have left their own indelible mark on culture and on our understanding of film and media.

NOTES

I thank Patricia White and Lynne Joyrich for their thoughtful contributions and feedback to this introduction.

- 1 Recent examples include Jonathan Goldberg's 2016 book *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility* and Wim Staat's "Todd Haynes' Melodramas of the Unknown Woman: *Far from Heaven*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Carol*, and Stanley Cavell's Film Ethics" (2019). Both Staat and Goldberg explicitly distance themselves from all feminist readings of Haynes's films and ignore—or, worse, denigrate—feminist writing on melodrama generally.
- 2 The *New Yorker*, for one, framed it as "A Tale of Two Plagues" (Roth 2020). Reconsiderations of *Safe* since COVID-19 have appeared in popular magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *W Magazine*, and *Jezebel*. See Cills (2020), Collins (2020), Hahn (2020), Munzenrieder (2020).
- 3 Haynes retrospectives in the US followed the one held during the 2012 Munich Film Festival. The director was later awarded the Pardo d'onore Manor lifetime achievement award at the Locarno Film Festival and feted with a tribute to his career at the Mill Valley Film Festival.
- 4 Rich, who coined NQC, now sees it as less of a "movement" than a "moment" (2001, 114–18).
- 5 Both *Safe* and *Superstar* are not so easily integrated into the NQC canon; the latter obviously predates the movement by four years. Those who make the case for *Safe* do so by reading the film as an AIDS allegory. Others, like Michael DeAngelis, gloss over *Safe* when using Haynes's work to define "the characteristics of new queer filmmaking" (2004, 41).
- 6 Haynes remains adamant in defining NQC in specifically formal terms: "The thing I dug about New Queer Cinema was being associated with films that were challenging narrative form and style as much as content.... Queerness was, by definition, a critique of mainstream culture. It wasn't just a plea for a place at the table. It called into question the table itself" (quoted in Lahr 2019).
- 7 Haynes's role in NQC is the organizing principle of James Morrison's volume, but it also anchors Haynes's inclusion in nearly every study of NQC, including Benshoff and Griffin (2006) and Michele Aaron (2004). Nick Davis (2013) stands apart for his nuanced reading of *Velvet Goldmine* "as a film to which New Queer Cinema had been leading ... to force it along different paths" (244–45).
- 8 See Geller (2018) for a discussion of the backlash against feminism within film studies.
- 9 If Haynes sounds defensive of the tradition of the woman's film, he has good reason, as critics often dismiss it out of hand. Goldberg (2016), for one, refuses to take seriously Haynes's own claim that his films are part of this tradition, insisting that he must be joking (33). Hoberman (2002) also dismisses the tradition as "so-called."
- 10 Haynes often refers to Marcel Proust in interviews; see Lahr (2019) and Polito (2008).
- 11 Frank Rich notes Haynes's "decidedly unorthodox" approach to Sondheim in Pogrebin (2013).
- 12 In Morrison's 2007 anthology, the term *feminism* (applied to Haynes) only appears in Pick's discussion of *Safe*. Rob White (2013) acknowledges that *Safe* alludes to Akerman's "feminist anti-epic" but never uses the term to describe *Safe*. White's few references

to feminism are symptomatic of the discomfort many critics have with it; White never once ascribes it to Haynes or his work (6, 42, 44), despite its being used in the synopsis on the back cover: "Todd Haynes films are ... underpinned by a serious commitment to feminism." Only Haynes, in the concluding interview, repeatedly raises the topic of feminism and feminist film theory.

- 13 The discussion of history as social construction is an established subfield of film studies, one led, in fact, by Haynes's mentor at Brown, Phil Rosen. Such ill-informed claims are common in queer theory outside of film studies—a problem in queer feminism I discuss elsewhere (Geller 2013).
- 14 For example, see the interview with Keith Phipps (2014, 94).
- 15 Derschowitz cites Thomas Kail, director of *Fosse/Verdon* (2019), a Time's Up-era mini-series conceived to correct the erasure of Gwen Verdon's contributions from Fosse's body of work.
- 16 It may be because Willis breaks with auteurist hagiography in criticizing Haynes that Goldberg, who is fully within it, condemns her for the ideas he (inaccurately) ascribes to her: "She wants the satisfaction of the happy ending" (2016, 42).
- 17 For Ahmed, "By feminist classics, I mean ... the texts that reach us, that make a connection ... [often] ones assumed to be dated, to belong to a time that we are in no longer" (2017, 17).