# A Double-Edged Longing: Nostalgia, Melodrama, and Todd Haynes's *Far From Heaven*

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Six minutes into Todd Haynes's film *Far From Heaven*, the fragility of the domestic façade (of a harmonious, loving family) becomes obvious as the supposedly perfect, happy wife Cathy Whittaker receives a phone call from the police informing her that her husband is at the station (picked up, we later learn, for "loitering"). But we expected as much. From the film's opening frames, *Far From Heaven*'s saturated "technicolor" palette, its mournful yet resolute full-orchestra soundtrack, its gleaming vintage cars, spotless sets, and well-starched costumes all point to the film's reconstitution of a particular past, a re-presentation that relies on our cinematic knowledge. We recognize the narrative and mise-en-scène as intertextual, as generally drawing on a past representational style that includes most Hollywood film productions from the 1950s. For those audience members in the know, the film has a more specific intertext in its recreation of the "woman's weepie" (Singer 37), a melodramatic mode characterized by female protagonists forced to bear heartache, betrayal, prejudice, and other great injustices.

Reproducing cinematic melodrama, particularly the "woman's" domestic melodrama that reached its apotheosis in the work of Douglas Sirk, is a hazardous move, fraught with the usual dangers of reconstituting past forms (audience confusion and rejection, accusations of derivative filmmaking) and the added risk of trivialization stemming from the marginalized socio-historical position of the genre. As Christine Gledhill explains, "the relative invisibility of melodrama today is due to the rise of realism as a touchstone of cultural worth and to its ghettoisation as a

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women's form" ("Signs" 207).[1] As such, to recreate the melodrama with serious, painstaking devotion, not to mention big-budget commitment, to render it visible, or, as I argue, hyper-visible, is immediately a political act in its engagement with the culturally debased. Haynes's *Far From Heaven* not only legitimizes the domestic melodramatic form in its attentive, reverent reproduction of Sirk's expressionistic cinematic style, but implicitly addresses questions of representation and its relation to the represented.

The specificity of the "hypertextual" relationship that *Far From Heaven* initiates with the cinematic melodrama makes possible the film's simultaneous nostalgia and conflict. Hypertextuality is Gérard Genette's term for "any relationship uniting a text B (which I will call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not of commentary" (5).[2] Sirk's films have been repeatedly investigated by critics seeking to unravel their inclusion of contradiction and ideological crisis within the emotionally charged melodramatic mode. For Sirk, melodrama provides a style that enables an acknowledgement of "irreconcilable social and sexual dilemmas" (Mulvey 79). Consequently, Sirk's films provide limited escapist potential since the spectre of patriarchal oppression always threatens to overshadow any happiness the narrative allows. Laura Mulvey elaborates on a gendered viewing position and the problematic characterization of the melodramatic "woman's films" as pure identificatory pleasure:

> If the melodrama offers a fantasy escape for the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognisable, real and familiar traps that the escape is closer to a daydream than a fairy story. The few Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind evoke contradictions rather than reconciliation, with the alternative to mute surrender to society's overt pressures lying in defeat by its unconscious laws. (79)

For Mulvey, the "realness" and "familiarity" of melodramatic films troubles the simple categorization of such texts as mere fantasy, an argument implicitly relying on the opposition of experiential "reality" and illusory representation. In its mimesis of representation, that is, in its imitative reproduction of a Sirkian representation, Haynes's film privileges imitation over external "reality," downplaying what is commonly perceived as "actual" life (the facts and details termed "history")[3] in its intertextual reliance on the domestic melodramatic mode. This aesthetic and narrative referentiality produces a particularized nostalgic text, one that unabashedly longs for past styles and invests in the careful reproduction of aesthetic surfaces.[4] Consequently, the film appears to correspond to Fredric Jameson's derisive theory of the postmodern nostalgia film as ahistorical reproduction, as empty pastiche that substitutes aesthetic styles for actual history (*Postmodernism* 20). However, the particularity of the film's nostalgic reconstitution, its generic styling, and its self-consciously simulacral qualities eschew representations of verisimilitude and disperse textuality, casting doubt on any possibility of "real" history outside the film world. The film thus exhibits a seemingly contradictory nostalgia, a double-edged longing that realizes and embraces the illusion of its own object. This duality

undermines the so-called "danger of nostalgia" identified by Svetlana Boym, namely the easy confusion of "actual home"—the object of longing—with an "imaginary one," which gives rise to "phantom homelands" that plague the nostalgic with their impossible perfection (xvi).

This study is an investigation into the consequences of pursuing and reconstituting the phantom homeland within a generic framework that exposes, even celebrates "imaginary" home. I explore the intrinsic interrelation of melodrama and nostalgia, examining Haynes's film as a case in point of the textual implications of reproducing a mode and style deeply implicated in nostalgic longing. Haynes's film confronts the "danger" of nostalgia head-on, acknowledging and exploiting the confusion of actual and imaginary lost objects to create a purely cinematic revisitation of the past that calls these categories into question; it is a film comprised of refracting representations, of images reflecting further images. In its nostalgic recreation of a particular (Sirkian) melodramatic mode, *Far From Heaven* privileges representation over represented, a preoccupation with imitations that emphasizes the pervasiveness of textuality and the impossibility of ever really locating the underlying source, the imitated (or, in the language of nostalgia, the "actual home"). The difficulty of ascertaining any referential "reality" outside the representation functions to expose the simulacral quality of prejudicial authority, thereby denaturalizing patriarchal hegemony. The obvious artificiality of the sets, costumes, facial expressions, the mise-en-scène in general, points to the constructedness of the underlying social structure that causes the conflict and pain in the film. The very notion of "realness" is cast into doubt by *Far From Heaven's* self-conscious emphasis on imitation, using nostalgia as a productive filmic technique that disturbs conventional assumptions about the historic past. Rather than providing an exhaustive analysis of Haynes's film, this article seeks to unravel the tangled web that binds theories of nostalgia, melodrama, and re-presentation, discourses often predicated on binaries of thinking and feeling, mind and body. I echo Thomas Elsaesser in offering a disclaimer that, "[f]or better or worse, what I want to say should at this stage be taken to be provocative rather than proven" (43).

## Nostalgia and Pathology

Nostalgia is at the crux of discussions of re-presentation, often cited as a falsifying memorial force able to transform "real" history into fanciful entertainment (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 20). From its inception as potentially fatal pathology, nostalgia has been considered dangerous for its excitement of the imagination as well as its aforementioned power to substitute fictive ideal for practical reality. Seventeenth-century medical student Johannes Hofer coined the term *nostalgia* to describe a pathological homesickness "born from a disorder of the imagination, from which it follows that the nervous sap always takes the very same direction in the brain and, as a result, excites the very same idea, the desire to return to one's native land" (qtd. in Starobinski 87). The issue, then, is a problematic emotional reaction to obsessive thought patterns characterized, interestingly enough, as a problem of physiologi-

cal movement, namely the constant return of "nervous sap" to a certain point in the brain. As Hofer himself noted, "I should willingly admit that melancholy plays a part here, for the vital spirits, worn out by the single idea which occupies them, become exhausted and provoke erroneous representations" (qtd. in Starobinski 87). This misrepresentational quality of nostalgia has initiated a great deal of the criticism surrounding the phenomenon. The compulsion to return, the fallibility of memory, and the subsequent malleability of the past are central to understanding the potential problems and possibilities associated with nostalgia. There is an understandable tendency to read nostalgic longing as fundamentally concerned more with the present than with the past (Grainge 27). Certainly it was the unfamiliarity and discomfort of the "foreign land" that triggered the "disease" in Hofer's first patients, a student and peasant woman from Switzerland who suffered grave ailments until their return to Bern and the Basel district respectively (Rosen 341). In both cases the patients made full recoveries almost immediately upon returning home. In these early clinical cases of nostalgia, the home exists as an actual place, making return achievable, the nostalgic longing satiable. However, the evolution of the term to its current meaning of a more general "longing for the conditions of a past age" ("Nostalgia")—that is, the nostalgic object's shift from place to time— make the object of desire irrecoverable, producing an inevitably frustrated longing; though one may return to the homeland, one can never turn back time.

It is this gap between the nostalgic sufferer and the past that gives rise to questions and problems of representation, re-production being the only means the nostalgic has for fulfilment: "Nostalgia (from *nostos*—return home, and *algia*— longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym xiii). *Far From Heaven* shifts Boym's interpretation slightly, since it is a romance with another's fantasy, namely Sirk's stylized, expressionistic cinematic world that challenges the notions of verisimilitude. In Sirk's films there is confrontation between fantasy and a self-conscious constructedness that results in the notoriously "unhappy happy endings" of his films: "[T]he strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, a cloud of over-determined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled in the last five minutes" (Mulvey 76). Certainly *Far From Heaven* represents a longing for a home that "has never existed"; however, unlike the typical pining nostalgic, who mistakes fantasy for "reality," Haynes's film indulges in and enjoys fantasy as such.

Conventional conceptions of nostalgia as longing for an irrecoverable past have stressed the personal aspect of the phenomenon, stressing "real" experience in the nostalgic relationship, assuming the fantasy of nostalgia inevitably stems from some shred of actual experience. Fred Davis's sociological study of nostalgia clearly articulates this common-sense understanding:

> [T]he weight of testimony seems to suggest . . . that the past which is the object of the nostalgia must in some fashion be a personally experienced past rather than one drawn solely, for example, from chronicles, almanacs, history books, memorial tablets, or, for that matter, legend. (Can I be nostalgic for the Ganges, a place

I have never seen, or you for the Crusades, a time when you have never lived?) (8)

While Davis seems to imply that the answer to his rhetorical question is "no," I would suggest that such a longing for representation is indeed possible, and such non-experiential nostalgia underlies Haynes's project.  Perhaps non-experiential nostalgia—a longing based on contact with representations, whether they be photographs, films, "history books, memorial tablets, or, for that matter, legend"—lays bare the fundamental textuality of the recollected site, its underlying constructedness. By longing for a past glimpsed only through representation, the two (historical reality and its textual representation) are collapsed and "reality" takes on quotation marks, its inescapable textuality made apparent and embraced.

It is this very problem of return and the inherent fictionality of the re-produced nostalgic object that is part of the critical potential of a nostalgic text like *Far From Heaven* in its re-presentation of an obviously textual past. Vera Dika makes a similar claim regarding the "return of the image" (in cinema and photography) in her investigation into cultural "recycling," pointing out the implications of aesthetic nostalgia as self-reflexively textual: "[T]he image is seen as 'returned' from the past, and is frequently composed of material referencing old movies.  That is, the image returns not as representational of the natural real, but as simulacral, as a copy of copies whose original has been lost" (3). It is this simulacral aspect of the "returned image" that is at the crux of debates surrounding postmodern re-presentation, particularly in film.  The dispute concerning cinematic recycling involves opposing interpretations of postmodern film as either an ahistorical, nostalgic mode of representation, in which style is substituted for substance (Jameson), or as an investigative, parodic form that questions and destabilizes ideological hegemonies (Hutcheon).  Linda Hutcheon posits the difference between postmodern parody and nostalgia as the former's use of "double-voiced irony," which functions to evoke and subsequently destabilize and dismantle the "horizon of expectation of the spectator" (110). Irony functions as "a critical edge to ward off . . . debilitating nostalgia" (176). However, this opposition assumes another either/or relationship between nostalgia, which is implicitly "sanitizing," conservative, and ahistorical, and postmodern irony, which is critical, undermining, and (implicitly) progressive (176).

Despite their disagreement over the intellectual and critical potential of postmodern representation, Jameson and Hutcheon seem to be in accordance in their conception of nostalgic film as an inherently "debilitating," even pathological whitewashing.  According to Jameson, representation has the potential to be historical (and therefore valuable), to critically engage with a "real" past or present, but the nostalgia film rejects this possibility, preferring to reproduce style and images rather than to engage in actual historicism.  Hutcheon points out hints of nostalgia in Jameson's own writing about the phenomenon, particularly in his privileging of a specific past and its appropriate representation over empty, aesthetic recreation: "[Jameson's] own rhetoric and self-positioning have themselves at times sounded strangely nostalgic, as he has repeatedly expressed a desire for a return to what he has always called 'genuine historicity'" (176). However, there is another

interesting "nostalgic" element in Jameson's discourse, a kind of nostalgia for nostalgia, that is, an apparent desire to re-pathologize the idealization of past and home:

> It seems to me exceedingly symptomatic to find the very style of nostalgia films *invading* and *colonizing* even those movies today which have contemporary settings: as though, for some reason, we were unable today to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience.  But if that is so, then it is a terrible indictment of consumer capitalism itself—or, at the very least, an alarming and *pathological symptom* of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history .  .  .  .  [W]e seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach. ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 25, emphasis added)

For Jameson, nostalgia is part of a larger contemporary disease of historical alienation, a position that presupposes the existence of some verifiable "historical reality."

Jameson's "nostalgic" reconstitution of pathological nostalgic aestheticization is on a continuum with popular estimations of the particular experience of longing as necessarily conservative for its idealizing force and historical manipulation. "Nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art," writes Charles Maier (qtd. in Boym xiv), evoking Thomas Kulka's estimations of kitsch as "deficient" (1), "parasitic" (41), its appeal "not generated by the aesthetic merit of the work itself but by the emotional appeal of the depicted object" (42). According to Kulka, "good" art is produced by "serious artists [who] typically refrain from depicting objects that are generally considered to be beautiful or emotionally charged" (42).  Such assumptions regarding quality art recall Gledhill's explanation of melodrama's frequent "ghettoisation," revealing provocative connections between nostalgia, kitsch, and melodrama as disdainfully popularist in style and subject matter, "depict[ing] objects or themes that are highly charged with stock emotions" (Kulka 37).  Once again, emotionality is central to estimations of cultural worth,[5] with "serious" (read thoughtful, intellectual) opposed to "emotionally charged" (read sentimental, popularist) furthering the Cartesian division of mind and body.  When read in light of this continuing legacy of dualism, conceptions of nostalgia as pathological "symptom" appear appropriate; nostalgia affects and *infects* the body, weakening proper intellectual response.  Hierarchies such as Jameson's, and even Hutcheon's, that posit historical realism or irony against nostalgic idealization and imagination dismiss the possibility of a productive nostalgia, of texts that affect and provoke the entire subject (emotionally and intellectually), encouraging self-conscious spectatorship in order to destabilize epistemologies of "history" and "reality."

## Thinking and Feeling:  Melodrama's Nostalgia

> "I'm not against the body or the head either:  only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate."
> —Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*

The dismissal of thoughtless emotionality is a fitting introduction to a discussion of melodrama, a mode commonly defined by (and derided for) its incitement of strong feeling through sensationalism, its power to inspire bittersweet tears of identificatory remorse. Critics of the mode have often aligned melodrama's affective power with its nostalgic constructions of family and home. According to Gledhill,

> [t]he Edenic home and family, centring on the heroine as "angel in the house" and the rural community of an earlier generation, animate images of past psychic and social well-being as "moral touchstones" against which the instabilities of capitalist expansion and retraction could be judged and in which both labourer and middle-class citizen could confront the hostilities of the modern world. ("Melodramatic Field" 21)

This nostalgic focus on the family as "moral touchstone" suggests an almost allegorical role for melodrama, reading its emphasis on the familial sphere as substitution for its larger concerns with socio-political upheaval. Much of Gledhill's interpretation stems from Peter Brooks, who explores melodrama as a genre responding to the loss engendered by the French Revolution and its consequences, such as:

> the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms—tragedy, comedy of manners—that depended on such a society . . . . [Melodrama] comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, the instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern. (60)

Within Brooks's theory, melodrama is a genre concerned with loss and substitution. Within this discourse of loss, melodrama's "moral occult," as Brooks terms the "repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth" (53), represents a compensatory strategy fulfilling the impossible desire to return to a kind of prelapsarian time prior to "desacralisation." For Brooks, the family becomes a site for this new mythology, providing a system of ethics to replace the spiritual value lacking in the larger structures of state. Within this framework, melodrama appears embroiled in problems of representation, a genre seeking to fulfill old needs with new representational strategies. Brooks's treatment of melodrama as what Gledhill calls a "specifically modern mode" ("Melodramatic Field" 29), as an attempt to satisfy longings for spiritual meaning after the collapse of the properly Sacred, emphasizes the modern desire for new means for transcendence. In these terms, melodrama appears to be part of a modern dissatisfaction with the oppressive restrictions of the symbolic for communication of the "unspeakable" expression of one's "deepest feelings" that can only be conveyed as sensations (Brooks 53): "[In the melodrama] the revelation [of unspeakable truths] occurs as a spectacular, moving sensation—that is, it is felt as sensation and not simply registered as ratiocination in the cause-effect logic of narrative—because it shifts to a different

register of signification, often bypassing language altogether" (Williams 53). The melodramatic is communicated via gesture, music, pantomime and physical acting, color and facial expression, neglecting language. The etymology of the term *melodrama* itself points to its investment in non-linguistic communicative forms: from *meloj* (music) and *drama* ("Melodrama"), *melodrama* as descriptive label implies a prioritization of emotional affectation.

*Far From Heaven*'s treatment of modern art suggests an awareness of representational issues, the diegetic treatment of new forms of communication implicitly pointing to the film's own extra-diegetic reliance on old representational strategies. Raymond Deagan speculates on modernist representational strategies in a conversation with Cathy at a modern art exhibit. When Cathy professes her adoration for a particular Miro painting and "the feeling it gives," Raymond responds with his theory of modern abstract art: "[P]erhaps it's just picking up where religious art left off, somehow trying to show you divinity. The modern artist just pares it down to the basic elements of shape and color. But when you look at that Miro, you feel it just the same." As Raymond speaks the camera focuses on the painting, Miro's abstractions filling the entire frame. The sparseness of forms, their flatness and geometric order, is at odds with the film's own lush, extravagant style. Deagan's characterization of the process of modern art-making as one of reduction, of paring down in an effort to produce emotional affect in the viewer similarly opposes *Far From Heaven*'s "excessive" melodramatic style, its antithetical relationship to "paring down." Deagan's theory relies on the indisputable newness of modern abstraction; his proposed contrast between the aesthetic originality of the art and its very traditional spiritual purpose can only succeed as a brilliantly counter-intuitive observation if modernist abstraction remains unproblematically new. Regarded in relation to this oppositional pairing—new forms, old ideas—*Far From Heaven*'s obvious employment of old forms, that is, its explicit aesthetic (as well as narrative) intertextuality, raises the question of a different coupling: does the recycling of past representational strategies necessarily imply an opposing pairing of old forms and new ideas?

In her investigation into melodrama as "mode," Linda Williams constructs melodrama as definitively nostalgic and emotional, "characterized by the retrieval of an absolute innocence and good in which most thinking people do not put much faith . . . . We go to the movies not to think but to be moved. In a postsacred world, melodrama represents one of the most significant and deeply symptomatic ways we negotiate moral feeling" (61). Elsaesser similarly constructs melodrama as dependent on a mind/body split, positioning the mode as part of popular culture's resistance to excessive intellectualization and abstraction in favor of a privileging of emotional affectation as a more "real" experience of the world (47). Recalling Williams's "thinking/feeling" structure of spectatorship, Elsaesser notes the sensationalism of melodrama in order to propose a hierarchy of reason and emotion that positions emotion as the true experience of "reality" above intellectualization and its implied removal from "reality." Williams's and Elsaesser's observations of melodrama's privileging of emotional response at the expense of intellectual reception reiterates the popular notion that thinking and feeling are mutually exclusive as

well as the critical perception of sentimentality, or nostalgia, as incompatible with the intellectual rigor of critical engagement (as seen in parodic and satiric revisitation). Beyond the obvious problems associated with this kind of "either/or" dichotomy of spectatorship, these assessments of melodramatic emotionalism falter in light of *Far From Heaven*'s hypertextual logic, its repeated quotation and revision of past cinematic texts. Such referentiality encourages a "thinking" audience, as one cannot help but be aware of the film's filmicness, of the representation as such.

Even those unfamiliar with film history cannot help but recognize the referential quality of *Far From Heaven*, its undeniable reproduction of past modes of representation. A familiarity with contemporary popular film is enough to alert one to the film's representational difference, its reproduction of out-dated modes of filmmaking and performance associated with the American technicolor films of the fifties and early sixties; everything from *Singin' In the Rain* to *Marnie* can serve as a personal intertext to *Far From Heaven*. The obviousness of the film's intertextuality fosters an intellectualized spectatorship, one that recognizes the film's textuality through its reformation of other texts.

## Re-presenting: Pastiche and Retro

It is important to situate *Far From Heaven* within the discourse of re-presentation, which also pathologizes "unthinking" imitation. In contrast to parody, which works to undermine and even dismantle the imitated object, pastiche is the "neutral practice" of imitation, "blank parody" in Jameson's terms: "[Pastiche is] without any of parody's ulterior motives, *amputated* of the satiric impulse, *devoid* of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the *abnormal* tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some *healthy linguistic normality* still exists" (*Postmodernism* 17, emphasis added). The italics emphasize the unmistakable discourse of pathology in Jameson's construction of any mimesis of representation as already "abnormal." His prose emphasizes again and again the emptiness of pastiche,[6] its fundamental lack, which infects and abolishes normality or "normal" representation—a necessarily problematic assumption. Jameson's derisive attitude toward style, toward aesthetic knowledge, may be at the heart of his objections to nostalgia and pastiche. His devotion to "Marxist History" (Hutcheon 109) is paired with a refusal to consider style and, indeed, stylization on a continuum with "history," both sharing textual identities as subjective and interpretative. Textuality does not erase guilt or deny pain; rather, it emphasizes the failure of absolutes, the imperative of interpretation. In Jameson's estimation, nostalgia in filmic representation implies the erasure of the multiple realities of history. But another interpretation can regard nostalgia as inevitably pointing out the endless multitude of historical experiences, its rosy representation an obvious selection of a single interpretation, a self-consciously limited estimation of a past moment. Hutcheon proposes that postmodern films "suggest instead that there is no directly and naturally accessible past 'real' for us today: we can only know—and construct—the past through its traces, its representations" (109). In a film such as Haynes's, pastiche's pathological "lack"

of normal representation—a "normality" Jameson implies would contain and correct the imitation of pastiche—becomes a means for liberation from the binds of a dualistic representational economy in which the original and the imitative stand in opposition.  Jameson's estimations of pastiche rely on a passive audience easily provoked into unthinking nostalgia; however, an acknowledgement of spectator awareness produces the possibility of a "more active nostalgia and intertextual exploration than a term such as 'pastiche,' which has nowhere to go but deeper into the recycling factory, implies" (Brooker and Brooker 7).  The notion of "active" spectatorship undermines the blankness of pastiche, promoting the notion of self-conscious re-visitation via re-presentational texts.  As Peter and Will Brooker explain, within this "active" framework, pastiche becomes more about "'re-writing' or 're-viewing' and, in terms of the spectator's experience, of the 're-activation' and 're-configuration' of a given generational 'structure of feeling' within a more dynamic and varied set of histories" (7).  *Far From Heaven* is a useful example of this "re-" theory of pastiche in the film's self-conscious longing for, and reproduction of, a style of representation.

*Far From Heaven*'s "mimesis of representation" chooses stylized fantasy over researched verisimilitude.  Locations are carefully modelled and filmed to look like pristine, colorful sets;[7] actors and extras look and move as if imitating actors, not people on the street.  As a simulacral text, *Far From Heaven* does not so much deny or disguise history as gesture towards its slipperiness, its ephemerality.  As such, the film corresponds to Kaja Silverman's theory of "retro" fashion:

> Because [retro's] elements connote not only a generalized "oldness," but a specific moment both in the (social) history of clothing, and in that cluster of closely allied discourses (painting, photography, cinema, the theater, the novel), it inserts its wearer into a complex network of cultural and historical references.  At the same time, it avoids the pitfalls of a naive referentiality; by putting quotation marks around the garments it revitalizes, it makes clear that the past is available to us only in a textual form, and through the mediation of the present.  (150-151)

To some extent Haynes's entire film could be positioned within such quotation marks, but more specific scenes and images fit very neatly into Silverman's "retro" framework.  In particular, the first meeting of Cathy and Raymond and Raymond's subsequent gift of an autumnal branch register as a direct quotation of an exchange between Carrie and Ron in Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*.  The details of this re-presentation forge an explicit continuity between the Cathy/Raymond and Carrie/Ron relationships (note the alliterative association between the two pairs of names); the obvious artificiality of the branch, the spotlessness of the costumes and the pristine countryside undermine any claims to verisimilitude.  In moments such as this, *Far From Heaven*'s simulacral status becomes obvious, the presence of the film's intertextual predecessor belying any attempts to read the film as historically "authentic."

Though the film may painstakingly recreate a hermetically sealed 1950s film world, the spectator can only ever regard the film through present-day, twenty-first-century eyes, a spectatorial position that cannot help but perceive the artifice,

the blatantly stylized lighting and color, the "acted" acting. And yet, despite all this self-conscious stylization and the audience's subsequent awareness of the film as a text based on other texts, the film deals with very "real" problems engendered by patriarchal hegemony: homophobia, sexism, racism and its incumbent taboo on miscegenation. But those "real" socio-historical issues are intertextually contained, representing a further nostalgic nod to Sirk's films, which typically dealt with the destructive effects of social inequality. The collision in *Far From Heaven* of the familiar and the strange in a multitude of ways (a style that is at once peculiar and known, a subject matter that is strange and unnervingly familiar) produces an uncanny text that simultaneously directs the viewer to the past and the present, refusing to articulate a hierarchy of "realness." As a work of nostalgic, stylized social criticism, *Far From Heaven* directs the viewer both to the past and the present—certainly few would claim that the social inequalites in the film are a thing of the past. But in its strategic nostalgic intertextuality *Far From Heaven* suggests a kind of metatextuality, making patriarchal oppression as textual as melodramatic acting styles and expressionistic lighting. The absurdity of the suffering engendered by prejudice (racism, homophobia, sexism) is accentuated by its artificiality, its constructedness and the frustrating knowledge that things don't have to be this way. Thus the film's artifice and stylization disperse textuality to a high degree, undermining the very possibility of naturalness or the innate, heightening the pathos of Cathy and Raymond's final parting; they are separated by the repercussions of discourses of bigotry and hate.

The multitude of diegetic frames (windows, doorways) and mirrors within *Far From Heaven* recalls similar self-reflexive images of mediated representation in Sirk's films, integrating self-conscious presentations of characters and scenes that point to the simulacral nature of Haynes's text. In particular, *Far From Heaven*'s repeated use of the mirror as mediating device structures character relationships within a discourse of the reflection, of the copy,[8] that undermines the possibility of "real" direct connection. The repeated focus on reflection rather than reflected prioritizes the image. A moment of mother/daughter bonding as Cathy "puts on her face,"[9] Cathy's aborted attempt to discuss her husband Frank's psychological therapy designed to "cure" his homosexual desires, Frank's transgressive gaze at the young man that will lead to the dissolution of his marriage—all of these exchanges (of looks and words) are mediated through mirrors, the imagistic quality of the moment acknowledged and even emphasized in the camera's own framing, which often presents viewers with the reflection at the expense of the reflected. This emphasis on the image as such, as mediated, as copy, is part of *Far From Heaven*'s intertextuality, its nostalgic structure. Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* similarly employs windows, doorways, and even a television screen as framing devices that self-consciously position characters as representational objects. In *Far From Heaven* emotional attachment and alienation, family relationships, and sexual desire become inextricably linked to representation, as supposedly "real" human connections (mother/daughter, wife/husband, lover/beloved) become part of a larger textuality, a representative fabric that fails to prioritize between the "real" original and its copy. This self-conscious emphasis on representation is part of the

film's larger intertextual relationship.  In its nostalgic recreation of a particular past mode of melodramatic filmmaking, the entire film can be regarded as a mirror image, an imitation without irony or trivialization, which is able to include the seriousness of suffering without laying claim to "truth" or "reality," and which encourages a thoughtful, self-aware style of spectatorship (one is constantly reminded that one is watching a film) that includes emotional response.  The textuality of pain, particularly pain inflicted by patriarchal hegemony, is no denial of its painfulness, but rather further evidence of its changeability, the artifice of its causes; as such, the film overturns common efforts to naturalize bigotry, whether based on gender, race, or sexuality.  This equalization of the imaginative and the experiential, once pathologized in Hofer's discourse of nostalgia, becomes here a new perceptual strategy, one that acknowledges the fantasy of authoritative "history" and through hypertextuality finds new representational methods for addressing unabating experiences of pain and prejudice.

## Notes

[1] Linda Williams refutes the common assumption of melodrama's contemporary "invisibility," claiming instead that "melodrama is neither dead nor dying.  It has long been the alchemy whereby we turn our deepest sense of guilt into a testament of our virtue" (80).  I agree with Williams's assessment of the omnipresence of the melodramatic mode, which is based on "narrative with a high quotient of pathos and action" (51).  However, for my own discussion "melodrama" has a more specific meaning, referring to a particular cinematic style epitomized by Sirk's "women's weepies" of the 1950s.  I am concerned with the convergence of stylistics and social criticism, particularly the self-conscious treatment of representation and the problems and possibilities it entails.  My own treatment of melodrama depends very much on Gledhill's assessment of the mode, which she claims involves the "syphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive *mise en scène* which makes a work melodramatic" ("Melodramatic Field" 9).  It is this notion of simultaneously absent and present melodramatic representation that concerns me here.

[2] According to Genette, hypertextuality is a relationship based on "transformation" or "indirect transformation," which he labels "imitation" (7).  Genette is quick to point out that texts are never singularly intertextual; that is, *Far From Heaven* is not only "hypertextual," but includes a number of different kinds of re-presentations and references.  However, as we shall see, the most obvious intertextual referents are Sirk's films, in particular *All That Heaven Allows*, which tells the story of an upper-middle class widower who embarks on a scandalous affair with her gardener that turns her community and children against her.

[3] There is a moment in the film when "history" appears to intrude.  During a bedroom discussion between Cathy and Frank, a news image of Dwight Eisenhower is visible on the television set Frank watches.  However, this momentary "lapse" into "real" representation is further indication of fully dispersed textuality, as we glimpse Eisenhower's face projected in black-and-white on the surface of a screen.  The color, size, and framing of his image emphasizes its mediation, its representational status.

[4] In his interviews and commentary on the DVD of *Far From Heaven*, Haynes repeatedly stresses the film's privileging of the surface.  Even the film's dialogue explicitly points to the impenetrability of appearances: "Do you think we ever really do see beyond the surface of things?" Cathy asks Raymond in front of the movie house, the location of the discussion pointing to the film's own textuality, drawing connections between the cinematic

"surface" within the theatre and the "real" conversation on the street outside.

[5] Kulka is explicit about his purpose to expose kitsch's fundamental lack, titling chapters with directed questions such as "Why Is Kitsch Worthless?" (43). His dualistic theory of kitsch relies on strict categories of "good art" and "bad or mediocre works" (1), categories that he argues correspond to an audience's reception of a work as either thoughtful or emotional. He disregards the possibility of self-conscious spectatorship, assuming that consumers of kitsch are necessarily unaware and sincere: "Consumers of kitsch do not buy kitsch because it is kitsch; they buy it because they take it for art" (44). Kulka's estimations omit an ironic audience position and/or the possibility of a consumer who simultaneously thinks *and* feels.

[6] Certainly contrasts between parody and pastiche are useful for explaining this rather slippery textual phenomenon, and Genette's definition of pastiche as "imitation without satirical function" (24) is not problematic. I do not dispute pastiche as "neutral" mimicry, but rather wish to interrogate Jameson's emotionally heightened consideration of the term as pathological.

[7] In his DVD commentary Haynes remarks on this "studio back lot" aesthetic, describing careful dressing and representation of locations and attentive selection and direction of actors and extras. Interestingly enough, Haynes's painstaking re-presentational efforts initiate a new hierarchical discourse of naturalism, privileging certain representative techniques. In his commentary on a scene in which Cathy and Eleanor discuss homosexuality Haynes remarks with obvious pride on the "natural" source of the image's artificial aesthetic: "[The image] looks treated, it looks like it's been run through some kind of a process or someone pushed the "technicolor" button on the computer. But it's all done naturally. We used gels, we used reflectors, we used some supplementary lighting even in exterior day scenes. But for the most part it's just a magnificent crew."

[8] For a detailed and exhaustive investigation into the politics of the copy, see Schwartz.

[9] This common description of the act of applying cosmetics occurs later in the film. Frank's biting comment on Cathy's artificial beauty is another instance of the film's self-conscious acknowledgement of constructed identities.

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