



by all these right-wingers denouncing you as a homosexual pornographer.

Todd Haynes: Yes, that was very exciting.

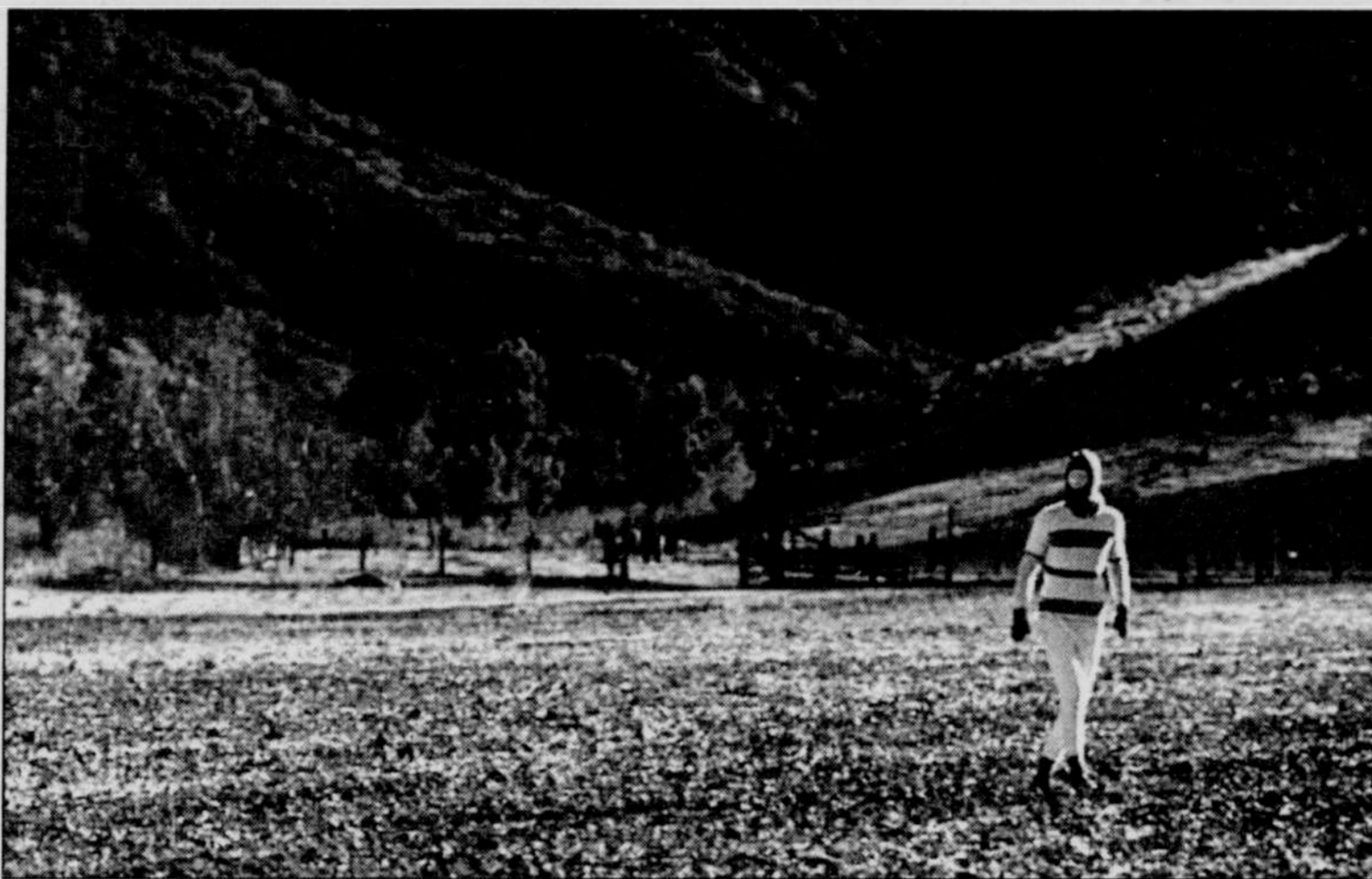
CM: Do you look back and think, "That was the way to do it!"

TH: Um...[laughs] no. It all came so out of left field, and it more made me really frustrated at, once again, the Democrats, because no one took my side. It was me being forced to debate all these right-wing conservatives simply in relation to theories about...money for the arts in America. You know, it was all about *that* issue; it wasn't even about my film, which anyone who saw could say, "No, it's not pornographic"—even those guys. But none of them had even seen it, so it was just this abstract argument about the National Endowment for the Arts. There was no Democrat or liberal on my end saying, "This is important." It was just me.

CM: Do you think that controversy helped launch your career? Do you think you got more of an audience that way?

TH: It's probably a double effect, but *Superstar*, the film I did about Karen Carpenter, in some ways has remained the more enduring thing that people first heard about me through—the way it traveled in bootleg form and became a kind of underground experience

Identity crises and conformity in the feature films of Todd Haynes: (from left) AIDS paranoia in *Poison*, repressed emotions in *Safe*, the glam boys of *Velvet Goldmine*.



that people would kind of share.

I hear bizarre stories. Lindsay Law, who was the head of American Playhouse, was like, "I saw it at Stephen Sondheim's house." And I'm just like, "Where the fuck did he get it from?" So it definitely took on a life of its own, and then that moment of high-profile issues about the arts, that whole crackdown—certainly [on] gay-themed work in that period—added attention.

CM: How did people respond to *Safe*? You were known as a gay filmmaker, but there were no gay characters.

TH: At first, the response in every way was one of kind of head-scratching.... But I don't think gay audiences were that much behind critical [audiences]...to start finally looking at the film on its own terms.

What was interesting is that it sort of forced people to think about, well, what is a gay movie? Is a gay movie defined by content? Is it defined by attitude? Are there gay ways or alternative ways of seeing the straight, dominant society that would qualify as a gay movie? Is it in the eye of the beholder, or is it in the

eye of the beheld? What defines it?

And these terms are nebulous because it shouldn't be necessarily about content or the movie that's exactly the same boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl structure except with men in it. Is that radical? To me, that's exactly the same. I don't care if it has two guys in it if it's going to formally and stylistically reflect dominant filmmaking without any critique. I don't want that to be a gay movie; I don't want to be associated with that as a gay movie, either.

So it broadened the questions, maybe, about what is a gay sensibility and what is the critical perspective you want to see from minority points of view.

CM: So, a *Queer as Folk* type, boy-meets-boy, all-positive love story—is that something we can safely say you would never do?

TH: Not as just described, no way. Uh-uh. Doesn't interest me at all. But I'm not interested in any kind of simply affirmative filmmaking. The films about women I do aren't simply affirmative, either. They're not about heroic women who save the day and win the war. You know, it's always about people who are struggling and who have to find reasons to resist their situations. Some level of resistance is a through line, I guess, of my stories.

CM: *Velvet Goldmine* was very sexual. Think of it as a bisexual movie.

TH: It was totally ignored by the gay press, too! That makes me mad! It was like it didn't even exist, which is bizarre to me!

I think it's an incredibly sexy movie, and it's about a really radical moment of sexuality that should be looked at! It's like, "Sorry, it's not 100 percent just boys," you know? That was disappointing.

CM: *Just Out* ran a full page on it!
TH: [Laughs] Awesome!

CM: Leaving a screening of *Velvet Goldmine*, I overheard a young woman saying, "I think that movie would've had a lot more to say to us if we were boys who liked boys!" On the other hand, I have gay friends who were bothered by the effeminacy of the boys. Do you think you really tweaked people's sexual buttons?

TH: [Laughs] I guess it just excluded everybody! Seriously, I think a cool thing about it, and what demonstrated some of what I'd hoped would happen—because the American theatrical release was not well thought out—is that



when it came out on video, it started to get into the hands of all these kids.

At one point there were like 75 Web sites devoted to the movie, some of them really ornate, and some of them *really* well frequented. It's really a movie that's made for an obsessive relationship, which is the fans' relationship to their object of desire, and it's based on those kinds of cult movies that came out in the late '60s and early '70s that I had an obsessive relationship with, so when I saw kids—a younger audience, a lot of girls and a lot of gay guys—and they were really *passionate* about it and *obsessive* and would analyze every little thing, that was fantastic.

CM: Was it partially because of the hectic atmosphere surrounding *Velvet Goldmine* that you came to Portland not long after?

TH: It didn't really have to do with how the film fared. It was more how exhausted I was by the production, and it just led to a realization that I wasn't completely happy in New York in general, and my life seemed to be increasingly defined by my work there.

It wasn't until I moved here to write *Far from Heaven* and really just luxuriate in a different kind of physical space...the atmosphere and climate, and spring and summer, and then meeting great, wonderful, smart, creative people in Portland, that made me realize what I wasn't feeling enough in New York.



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—Todd Haynes