Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this evening's Life In Pictures with Todd Haynes. This evening's event is being filmed, so please ensure that all mobile phones are switched to silent or airplane mode, and please refrain from any photography. Now please join me in welcoming this evening's host, Ian Haydn Smith.

[Applause]

Ian Haydn Smith: Good evening everyone, and welcome to this Life in Pictures with Todd Haynes. In 1988 when Todd Haynes was releasing *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, the German filmmaker Wim Wenders published a collection of his early essays. He called the book '*Emotion Pictures*', and I can't think of a better tittle that sums up the entirety of Todd Haynes' body of work. His is a cinema of intelligence, elegance and wit, also of satire, but it's a cinema of pure emotion, whether it's the heartbreak and betrayal of certain characters, or other characters trying to find their identity in the world. Let's take a look at some of his films.

[Clip plays]

Can you please welcome Todd Haynes.

[Applause]

Todd Haynes: That was beautiful.

IHS: It's lovely. It's all yours. Okay, I've got a picture in my head, I've had it quite a while, of a young boy on a rare rainy day in Los Angeles in the late 60s, perhaps going into the early 1970s, flicking through TV channels and suddenly comes across an afternoon matinee of George Cukor and William Wyler, and gets incredibly excited by this whole world of melodrama and women's pictures. And then a week later he suddenly discovers Douglas Sirk and Max Ophuls on another channel. Was that your youth?

TH: Well, I think you might be attributing too much to my youngest, my younger years. A Lot of those influences were filmmakers I encountered a little bit later, but certain films presented themselves to me at a very young age and made an inordinate, a massive impression on me. And sort of you know, began to sort of inflict some bizarre psychosis I think, that required a creative response, a creative answer. And an obsession started with *Mary Poppins* when I was three years old. What better way to start? But there would be certain movies that would just become my sort of stimulus for these sorts of periods of my life as a kid, and they, yeah they became… And then I started to make my own versions of them. The Zeffirelli *Romeo and Juliet* was probably the next huge obsession when I was seven, around the year you were, '68, so that's how old I was. And that was the first film I sort of made as a kid and really put a lot of energy and production and obsession into, playing all the roles except… I even tried playing Juliet, and my mum did a test in Super 8 so we could try double exposure in the house, I did a sort of painting of the Capulet ball on the wall, and I pop on at one point dressed as Juliet. I don't know where that film is. But ultimately I used a friend to play Juliet and I played all the other roles in different little tunics that I made out of towels. So something like that I would say.

IHS: You were always destined in your eyes to be a filmmaker, because it's interesting watching the films where you've written the screenplays, there's such a novelistic feel to them I wondered if at any point in time you were considering segueing into actual, just becoming a writer?

TH: Not really, no. I think, and I have to say I always feel, and still do, that my work is not really about invention, it's really about interpretation. I don't know that I, I mean you know, I also know that for directors that I love, sometimes it's the thing that best characterises what they do is the thing they don't see themselves, and I recognise that that might be true for me as well. But I do feel that my role, or my sort of practice I guess, is one of looking at the world and resorting it, and putting in a context, but not really, not inventing it. And maybe there are writers of course who would fall into that category, but I think images and something that happens between the viewer and the screen with music and sound and that temporal

experience is something that's hard for me to shake.

IHS: So let's jump forward a few years. You're at art college and you make *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, which pretty much is the last seven years of Karen Carpenter's life, starring Barbie dolls as all the characters. There's litigation and a copyright infringement lawsuit that prevents the film from being shown. I'm curious about the impact on you as a budding filmmaker and your career, and also the notoriety of the film, the impact of that on you as well.

TH: You mean because of the legal intervention? Oh you know, look, I was at a point in my career where just simply getting something shown was an event, was a new experience for me. And so making *Superstar* and then trying to find a place that would show it in New York City was the first challenge. It came out of an interesting, I think transition in experimental film in the United States. Out of the sort of 70s, 60s and 70s formalist era that kind of eschewed narrative, genre, spectacle, pleasure, Hollywood, and worked more purely in formal interests, right? And by the 80s certain experimental filmmakers, and I think this was starting to happen both in experimental realms and in mainstream films like in the films of David Lynch, where there was sort of a cross-pollination of influences and ideas. Sally Potter made a film called *Thriller* that was an experimental film that I saw in college, and it started to engage with genre but within experimental syntax. And that really got me going I think, and that was something that I brought to *Superstar*, but at the time *Superstar* didn't quite make sense to the sort of establishment of experimental film, venues in like New York City, like the Collective for Living Cinema which I revered, and all I wanted for my movie to get shown there. So I knew, we all knew that the rights issues was an imminent problem and its days were numbered, but when J. Hoberman of The Village Voice wrote a review of *Superstar*, because I'd sent a tape to The Village Voice and I knew how to do press releases because I'd worked in galleries, and Barbara Kruger wrote an article in Artforum, and they came out the same month, and I managed to get a screening at a very small little East Village theatre that coincided with these reviews. All of a sudden my film was something everybody wanted to show around the country, because The Village Voice had that kind of currency, cultural currency. And so to me it was all deliriously new and exciting and thrilling, and the film started to reach audiences outside of experimental film audiences, and I found that there was an interesting fluency and interest among different audiences for this kind of work. And it excited me, and I was like, "Wow, that's cool. I would like to keep doing this." Because I assumed, the reason I started the Bard programme is I thought I would make experimental films and teach in a college like Leslie Thornton at Brown, who's amazing, and that was going to be absolutely fine for me. I never thought I would have a career making films for the marketplace, and that that would become my career.

IHS: So we're going to stay with notoriety now, and also moving into genre with your feature debut, 1991's *Poison*, which won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. And it interweaves three narratives, firstly there's '*Horror*', in which a scientist has successfully distilled the human sex drive into a liquid form, unfortunately he think it's his coffee and drinks it. Then we have '*Hero*', which is a parody of TV sensationalist documentaries. And then we have '*Homo*', which is a film inspired by the writings of Jean Genet, and also the author's own 1950 short film *Un Chant d'Amour*. So this is *Poison*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

TH: That was me as the prison guard. [laughs]

IHS: The film opens with the intertitle, "The entire world is dying of panicky fight," which strikes me as summing up pretty much the conservative reaction in America when they found out that the National Endowment for the Arts had given you $25,000 to complete the film. Were you surprised by the level of controversy that the film attracted?

TH: Well no. I don't think any of us were surprised about any level of panic during those particular years, because there was a lot bigger stuff going on than the reaction to *Poison*. And it was a provocation the film, and it was an invitation, it was a, it was sort of an attempt to defend an embattled minority community that was starting to accept some of the terms of blame and culpability for that epidemic. And I thought, who better to look to for guidance than Genet, even if it was going to be very self-consciously filtered through my own very American interest in genre. But looking at the whole notion of the outsider, looking at the whole notion of the transgressor in all of these stories, that basically all three stories were the same stories, but they were told in different ways. And that hopefully it made you question or think about how the way stories are told embodies attitudes and prejudice and orientation, social orientation, that we all are affected by and maybe don't notice.

IHS: The critic Dennis Lim suggested that you never intended to be assimilated into the mainstream, but you infiltrated it instead. And I'm curious with your interest in genre, and subverting genres, if you sort of wanted to reach out to people, people would recognise, particularly '*Horror*', this sort of parody of 1950s sci-fi/horror movies, but at the same time give them something else as well.

TH: Yeah, and I think I was also just realising that although experimental strategies and radicals like Genet or whatever were influences and ways of sort of empowering me, I was also very much a product of that culture myself, and that those genres and those traditions and those movies were running through my bloodstream like everybody else. But that I also felt that rather than just feeding them back to the audience, I started to really feel after *Superstar* and definitely after *Poison* that audiences were smart, and they were, they could take on challenges. And what it revealed in the process of looking at a movie and watching a story, when there were certain things that were obstacles to our normal just feeding the market or the gut of the viewer, that interesting things could happen and sort of discoveries could be made along the way. And *Poison* also, alongside and maybe partly as a result of the controversy with the far right gained attention, and kind of discovered a larger audience than I really ever expected it to have.

IHS: And this is a film that then became grouped, and you as a director became grouped with people like Tom Kalin, Rose Troche, Gregg Araki, Gus Van Sant, Jennie Livingston, with this very diverse movement that became New Queer Cinema. What was it like, because you talk about currents at that point in time, it was striking being over her, being interested in film and suddenly hearing about this movement and slowly these films were filtering through into cinemas in the UK. And it was extraordinary, because a lot of them were playing with genre, but like this film which starts off on a comedy level, it takes us down into a very, very dark shadowy world.

TH: Well that mantle, or that classification that was given, that was a journalist, B. Ruby Rich's way of describing this movement that had everything to do with the AIDS crisis, and a lot of people were coming out of direct activism like myself as well, but were responding to it with narrative or creative responses. I felt that that was never a reductive term, I always felt that that actually described not only those artists, and you know people like Derek Jarman and Isaac Julien who were British filmmakers, and Derek Jarman of course who was a predecessor to this period and who was an inspiration to all of us, that it really defined not only a moment of filmmaking and a sort of an urgency, which is sort of rare in our world of narrative film in general, a kind of necessity and urgency to speak out and have this response. But also an engaged audience that was there, and maybe for the first time, I mean there was always gay, the arthouse audience was always maybe partly a gay audience or was a codeword for the gay audience, but now it was being defined exactly as that, a New Queer cinema audience that was going to buy tickets and go see these movies. And so it created a market as

well as a force of a need to express these ideas.

IHS: I've mentioned directors, but obviously there's a key person within the mix of this trend, and it was the producer Christine Vachon. I want to move onto her, because she is one of the most important people in American cinema in the last 30 years, but I thought it might be good to first of all see a clip from your next feature, *Safe* from 1995, in which Julianne Moore plays Carol White, a woman who contracts an environmental illness. And this is a key scene in the film, it's also one of my favourite scenes in 1990s American cinema, the scene where the girl is sat on Julianne's lap. This is a key scene that bridges the horror of the earlier part of the film, and we move slowly more into satire. This is *Safe*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

In any time I find it amazing that that film got made, and what I've read about it, it seems like the perfect collaboration between a director and a producer.

TH: I don't know how that film would have got made without Christine. I mean, even after *Poison* and a lot of anticipation for my next film, this was a very, very tough sell this story. The story of a woman who gets environmentally ill, she gets sicker and then she gets sicker, and then she goes to a recovery place and just gets sicker. The end. It was tough, and you know it took us two years to get the financing together. We needed a million dollars, and that was a big step up from *Poison*, but Christine just kept saying, "We're going to get it. We're going to get it." I would have given up, I just was like, my career had just started and I didn't really know if it really was going to be a career, and this was a very different turn from *Poison*. But her persistence, her conviction, her support, which has remained so seminal to our relationship all these years, and so really my entire career is owed so much to Christine's tenacity and perseverance.

IHS: It's interesting when you think people talk sometimes disparagingly of this stereotype of a producer, and thinking about your relationship, it strikes me that a better word would possibly be enabler, to work so closely with someone across the whole of a career, it's someone who shares a vision with you. And in some ways I can imagine that sharing that vision is also something of a benefit for you, someone you can bounce ideas off.

TH: Very much so. She's also the dragon slayer. You know she is out there dueling with the powers that be about the financing, and increasingly that, and this happens with producers and directors, the very best pairings of them, it puts us in different places often in the course of making a film. But that's why there's a remarkable level of trust and faith in what, we're both after the same ends. It means that we're always bound together, because she often has to see the big picture while I'm zeroing in on the specifics of getting a shot done. And you need both, there's no way these films could get made without both things being addressed.

IHS: The other major collaborator in this film obviously is Julianne Moore, and up until that point in time probably best known internationally for appearing in *Short Cuts*, Robert Altman, and *Vanya on 42nd Street*.

TH: That followed *Safe*.

IHS: Sorry.

TH: That's alright, but closely.

IHS: I'm just curious about the way that you work together because she is, in all of her works, she is an actor who is willing to go the full length with a role.

TH: I mean this idea of Carol White on paper, you know there was a lot of conceptual questions about identification and talk about obstacles to identification. This was a very, this was an almost invisible subject, not the normal person who carries you through a story. And she walked in, she read it, somehow got her hands on the script and read it, and felt like, she says, she's said to me, "You know I think, I knew what it needed to be in my head, and I was just going to go read for him, and if I

was wrong, I was wrong." But she just, she knew man, she just knew. And she came in and she read this voice, and all of a sudden - talk about the difference between the written word and someone right in front of you. But the thing about Julianne, and I have to say this is true about so many, it's true about Cate Blanchett, it's true about so many of these incredibly courageous actors I've worked with, they know how to, they respect a certain distance from the viewer. They don't have to gain your trust or your, they don't have to be likeable, there's nothing obsequious about the way they address the viewer in the film. She knows how to maintain a distance and trusts that the viewer is going to find a way to her, and that was just so true with Carol White. And there was almost no other way to play it, but it took such confidence and such a sense of absolute, you know a completely, thoroughly fleshed out idea of who this woman was.

IHS: And you're right in the way that you very briefly described the trajectory of the film. This is a character who doesn't play to any of the conventions of character that normally gains an audience's sympathy.

TH: Yeah, no, hardly. I mean if anything all of the things that people say about Carol throughout the course of the story, "Oh it's all in your head." "You're making yourself sick." "It's psychosomatic." Just not being trusted at any level, if anything that keeps feeding the audience's mistrust of her as a viable character who's worthy of your investment as a viewer. And in some ways Carol figuring out what is going on with her and taking certain steps toward addressing it helps give the viewer a way of caring about her in the process. But it kind of comes full circle, where she follows that trajectory through, and this is very much in line with not only perhaps things Douglas Sirk does in his films. But the TV movie, disease movie of the week, that basically puts the onus on the subject to come to some kind of redemptive understanding of who they are through acceptance of their illness, and acquiescence to it in a way, and that's what Carol does in the last act of *Safe* in this centre for recovery, this emblem of the recovery industry and its language. And so you're kind of going, "Yeah, this is what a movie like this is supposed to do," but every signal tells you it's not the right answer. And so it's sort of like watching your narrative expectations drive a character back into repression, and that narrative closure often is exactly that in movies. And we want it, we won't feel resolved walking out of the theatre until we get it, but there's a cost to it at times on the choices that characters make, and that was something I wanted to explore in *Safe*. But there's something in the middle of the movie that's the most hopeful maybe, where she's you know at odds with everything, she's not agreeing to the terms yet, and she's not saying, "Yes, I made myself sick, you know, because I didn't love myself enough and all of that."

IHS: And this distance is also accentuated by, not just the way that you've shot the film, which has this Kubrickian glacial distance, but also Ed Tomney's remarkable score.

TH: Yes, thank you for mentioning it, I think it's such a huge and essential part of the film and how it works. I mean just noticing it just then felt like it was reverberating from beneath us. And of course there was a Brian Eno temp score through the entire movie.

IHS: Doesn't every film have a Brian Eno temp score.

TH: Doesn't every film, and I've worked on all sides of Brian Eno's amazing trajectory as an artist in my films. But he really, and there's one Brian Eno song I couldn't give up, a piece of music that's in the movie I couldn't give up. But Ed really made it his own, he really found, and he loves Eno like we all do and it's an influence, but he really made it his own.

IHS: Let's actually go on to more Brian Eno now who appears musically in your next film, *Velvet Goldmine* from 1998. It's a fictional account of the glam rock era with two characters who may or may not be David Bowie and Iggy Pop. We're going to see a, the first appearance on stage by Curt Wild, played by Ewan McGregor, who does a fantastic

impression of Iggy Pop, and also gives the current onscreen exhibitionist, Michael Fassbender, a run for his money, as you will now see.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

I love one of your descriptions of the film as being, "lubed-up and coated with glitter." Unlike a lot of other films in the 90s that were made about the 1970s, which feel falsely nostalgic, there's a real love in this film. Could you talk about your own relationship with that era and the glam era particularly.

TH: Well that era, I mean you know I missed it. I was, I'm an American, it wasn't the same cross cultural, the same sort of massive commercial event as it was in the UK. I learned a great deal about the history of glam, the history of queer articulation, representation, theatre, art from the British, Oscar Wilde onward. And, but this really was a story about a love affair between American and the UK, and of course this is the, Ewan represents the American factor, that rejection of 60s ideology that came at the very end of the 60s in the form of The Doors and Jim Morrison, and obviously The Stooges and MC5 and bands like that. But it took David Bowie and his unique accumulation of so many different references and ideas that were in the cross currents of that moment. Gay rights liberation of the early 1970s, and just the continued questioning that was starting in the 60s that was eventually going to enter identity itself and sexual identity. I mean glam rock presupposes sexual ambivalence in every viewer, every listener of the music you know, and that in and of itself, that insistence on a sort of destabilised notion of self. Because it was questioning you know gender, it was questioning sexuality, and what it did because it was this bisexual imagination, and this androgynous imagination, it implicated everybody. And I found that even in the 90s when it came out, you know I was ready for the, to be, get the gay community excited again after *Poison*, and they were all a little like, "Hmmm," because bisexuality destabilises all, you know gays and straights alike, and I find that to be still a radical act and still exciting. And something about the 70s was ready for it, and it did affect, it did enter the United States in all these, you know Elton John and all these other bands that had to sort of follow in the footsteps of Bowie. But it became this sort of delirious mimicry of gender, of fame, because Bowie basically performed his fame before he really was an international star, and identity. And questioning identity and destabilising identity has definitely been a continued interest of mine in my movies.

IHS: It's interesting that you've said that the 70s was a time, essentially the last progressive decade of the 20th Century, but sadly almost 20 years on from this film it seems like the last progressive decade up till now.

TH: I know, we just keep thinking, "Oh my God, Reagan was the worst thing that happened," and then George Bush happened, and now Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz is happening, and you know Donald Trump, it definitely…

IHS: Yeah, it's so much better here. I'm curious about how you locate the emotional core of this film, because you have a narrative that begins with Oscar Wilde, is constructed sort of around the narrative structure of *Citizen Kane*, and yet what I find astonishing with this film is just how emotionally engaging it is.

TH: Well I think that's because of the, you know Christian Bale's character, and Christian Bale's performance. Because what was so cool about glam rock also was that it gave, it engaged, it brought the fan into an active participation with the spectacle, and asked you to dress up, and asked you to take part in it. It's why like *Rocky Horror Picture Show* became this cult ongoing phenomenon, because audiences would dress up in the transvestite garb and interact with what was going on on screen. And so that was why the *Citizen Kane* structure made sense, I wanted the stars to be like Kane, who's being described and filtered through all these various conflicting points of view. But in this case the spotlight's turned around on that silhouetted journalist who's interviewing everybody and ultimately becomes

about him and his emotional investment, and what it opened up, the possibilities that it opened up for him, even if where we find, the framing story is in 1984 where everything has been closed back down again.

IHS: Yes, I find it quite fascinating that when people talk about Christian Bale they talk about *American Psycho*, but I think it started her. And yes Ewan McGregor and Jonathan Rhys Meyers are amazing, but the two people who really stood out for me here is him and Toni Collette.

TH: I know, I so agree. I think they cement the film, they give you the emotional throughline for the film. When he packed up his Arthur Stuart costume and said goodbye I just, I kind of wept. Because I, you know everyone was like, "Oh I'm so in love with Johnny, and Ewan's so hot in the movie," and it's all true, and I love how much girls love *Velvet Goldmine*, it's so consistent how much it's affected teenage young women, but I think I was in love with Arthur all the way through.

IHS: The other star of the film is the costume designer, Sandy Powell, and before we talk about her…

TH: She is the star of the film.

IHS: Let's have a look at another example of her work from 2002, this is *Far From Heaven*. It's a beautiful, devastating portrait of marital breakdown and also prejudice in 1950s American. This is *Far From Heaven*.

[Clip Plays]

[Applause]

My heart always sinks when I'm required to pick a clip from a film that Sandy Powell's designed the costumes for because it's virtually impossible to pick one single clip. She's remarkable, both *Velvet Goldmine*, *Far From Heaven* and now *Carol* as well, she is quite astonishing.

TH: She is quite astonishing.

IHS: How much information or how much collaboration do you have, or do you just give her the script and sort of say, "Go for it"?

TH: Well no, we you know, she, I think she loves it that I care about all those details, I think it means something to her. It's true for every creative department that I know of and heads of departments, production designers and costume designers and DPs, you know I think everyone wants to feel that they have a foundation that they're on, that there's a strategy, that there's a language, and then, and that you know the director does care about every element that they bring to it. And in a period film like this, and in a film where we're quoting Douglas Sirk, and where clothes and decor and lighting and music almost speak louder, and almost contribute to the oppression and the diminishing of the characters in the story, or speak their desires in ways they can't you know, all of it's essential. I mean we had, you know we had meetings that went on for days about colour alone, but Mark Friedberg the production designer, Sandy, and Ed and I, and this was the first film that Ed Lachman shot of mine as well. So it was, but then there are accidents that happen where she designs all those dresses in autumnal colours, and of course autumn was a theme in the script and you hope you're going to get some autumn you know while you're shooting in New York in the Fall, but the fact that those women walked out to the exterior of the house and the colours are identical to the colours that she had already dressed them in, those were little gifts that you know you can never even control no matter how much attention you're paying to detail.

IHS: You mention Douglas Sirk, and you've talked over the years of your love of Sirk's films. What I find fascinating with this is that it is a wonderful homage to Douglas Sirk, but it strikes me that it's quite possible one of the most experimental mainstream films ever made, and yet it doesn't ever get acknowledged as that.

TH: I so agree with you, and it sort of blew me… You know I was so proud that, and shocked that the film reached a wider audience of anything I'd done to date.

And yet we were vigorous, we stayed true to that artificial form, that expressionistic language that his films display so beautifully, that you know humbled Fassbinder when he first saw them into, all of a sudden, post, beyond that sort of '68 Marxist fraternity that he was a part of, and distinguished himself from that fraternity, from the Godardian traditions by addressing the domestic stories and female-driven narratives that began to characterise his career as well. But yeah, I just couldn't believe, it was like to me, it was like, "Yes, the form still works!" Because it's one of the most, you know people have dismissed it, the melodrama. It's still, the term is a derogatory one. But there's a story also that I love, a woman who had gotten a screener of *Far From Heaven* and hadn't had a chance to watch the movie but had read about it. And she had I think a three year-old daughter, and the kid was asleep on her lap watching the film, or she thought the kid was asleep. And she got to the end of the movie at the trains station scene, and she looked down and her little girl, I think it was a girl, was crying. And she said, "Honey, what's the matter? Are you okay?" And the little kid said, "Mummy, how come that nice lady can't be with that nice man?" And I thought, "Wow," that is amazing to me, I don't know if I'll ever achieve that again in my films. Something that where it operates in very complex levels of critique, and maybe Brechtian distanciation and all of that stuff that Sirk really was informed by, and then it also operates at the purest, simplest, truest level.

IHS: Part of the element, again coming back to Julianne Moore, but not just Julianne, the whole cast, are the performances. And I find it interesting that your retrospective you've recently had at the Lincoln Center, and you were asked to pair one of your films with another film, and interestingly you didn't go with Sirk, you went with Max Ophuls' *The Reckless Moment*. Which, to watch the scenes with Patricia Clarkson admonishing her friend is interesting because for me it is more like Ophuls in a way, that you have these subtle changes in personality, the people you thought were quite nice, it's almost imperceptible the shifts that happen in their personalities.

TH: Yes, I mean although I think that happens in Sirk too in these astonishing turns of you know the kids in *All That Heaven Allows* being so concerned that Jane Wyman's going out with Rock Hudson until she breaks up with him, and then all of a sudden they're like, "Mum, we sold the house, we're getting married," and no one cares, gives a shit, you know. And she was like, "What? I just broke up, I just changed my whole life for you." But *The Reckless Moment* is just one of, and Ophuls in general is just such an inspiration, there are a lot of references woven into *Far From Heaven*. In fact, the only shot I literally lifted from any film was the shot of Julianne breaking down and crying finally after she says goodbye to Raymond at his house, and it's literally, I just watched the scene of Joan Bennet breaking down. Because that pent up performance in *Reckless Moment* is so astonishing, and she holds it in for the whole film, and then finally when James Mason dies and he offered her a potential way out but it was too late, and she breaks down and cries and it's just an incredible moment.

IHS: You mentioned cinematographer Ed Lachman. Let's move onto him next, but first we'll see a clip from *I'm Not There* in 2007. It's a fictional account of Bob Dylan's life through six alter egos, characters. And here we start with Jack, Christian Bale playing the first of two Dylan alter egos. It includes Arthur Rimbaud played by Ben Whishaw, and it introduces us to Jude, Cate Blanchett. If we could show the clip please.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

By any standards this is an extraordinary film, and before we move onto the narrative and the casting, could you talk about the colour palette that you employed, because there are some richly beautiful colours with the Woody Guthrie scenes, and then we move onto the black and white and…

TH: Well it was, it was you know, it was quite a thesis project that I took on and

then I was… I mean look I had been refused the rights to Karen Carpenter's music and it had condemned *Superstar* to a life of you know suppression. David Bowie said no to all the songs I wanted in *Velvet Goldmine*, which I ultimately think made for a better film. But I wanted to make a movie about Bob Dylan and I thought there's no way to do fake versions of Dylan songs, without getting the rights there's just simply no way. And you know of all the people, the scariest of them all, I went to him through his manager and Jeff said, "Just write it out you know and don't mention like 'voice of a generation', and don't say genius." And so I wrote as much you know of sort of lugubrious and sort of sophomoric or sort of you know uncommercial, which it is, a description of the concept. Suppositions on a film concerning Dylan, and sent it to Bob with my movies you know, which he took on his trailer at some point and watched I assume, because he likes weird movies and art films and stuff. And you know a month later we get a call from Jeff Rosen saying, "Yeah, you got the life rights and all the music." And basically it was this gift, you know saying, there was a point where we had to keep extending the rights because I was still writing and researching and all that, and I said to Jeff you know, I called him up and I said, "Jeff, you know this is an intense thing, I feel like I have a responsibility," because I'm the first person to have ever been given the rights to tell Dylan's story in any way yet on film, except for him. And Jeff said, "Oh Todd, don't worry about that. This is your own weird, unique thing. All you have to do is do that." And I'm like, this is Bob Dylan's manager. This is the keeper of the gate, you know. He says no to everybody, and I was given this extraordinary freedom, and I still really can't believe that, I still can't believe I have the music in it that I have, and those actors and… But you asked about the look. And so the 60s became the sort of you know bracket of what, because there was so much that happened in the 60s with Dylan, and all of those personas sort of had their roots in the 60s, even if some of it dips into the early 70s, sort of the Vietnam era. But I wanted to look at and use and draw from the rich language of 60s cinema which was explosive at the time, and try to find an appropriate visual language and stylistic vehicle for each of the stories. And so it was a thrilling experience, because I got to research not only those films and those filmmakers, but of course all the Dylan music, and all of the you know sort of poetic and literary references that were informing him as much as I could. But so it was an amazing experience, and Ed did just such an exquisite job.

IHS: And was Cate Blanchett the first of your characters to come on board?

TH: You know I think it might have been Richard Gere, and who played that weird you know cowboy recluse version of Dylan, the Billy the Kid character, as if Billy the Kid never did because there's theories that suggest as much, that Billy didn't die to the gun of Pat Garrett. And Richard Gere was so lovely and so generous, and he agreed to do it for so little money that it made all of the other actors have to follow suit, and they all had to do it for a song so to speak. And it was just you know, it was the only way we could really get it done. But I had to sort of, I had to sort of hound Cate a little bit. I knew she could do something extraordinary with this challenge, but she was you know, she was like you know, "Really? You think so?" And then we'd sit and watch the clips of Dylan from '66, and see that androgynous body and that jittery you know strangeness that I think, because it's such a famous moment the year he went electric that it's lost some of the shock value that it must have had at the time. And you see it in the great Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home*, because he draws from all the Pennebaker footage, the colour stuff, and really he had just, once again, so utterly transformed from the Dylan of Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* only a couple of years, only a year before. So it's just phenomenal how much of a shapeshifter he really was.

IHS: There's a line from *Far From Heaven* that I think applies to this, but also I'm aware of time, we have to move on to *Mildred Pierce*, that I think applies to that film as well. One of the characters said, "Do you think we can ever see beyond the surface of things?" and it's something I think that applies to so many

of your films, but if we can see this sequence from *Mildred Pierce* please.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

There is one thing with this miniseries that whether we're looking at the surface or underneath is no doubt the Monty, Guy Pearce's character, is dodgy as hell. [laughs] Could you talk about the pleasures of actually having the freedom of working across a much more expansive time period, well of six hours pretty much, five or six hours.

TH: Yeah, almost six hours.

IHS: To explore these characters. And also the challenge of taking a very, very well-known story from the Joan Crawford version.

TH: Well the novel was so different, and there were so many components of it that were not part of the brilliant, beautiful Curtiz film that is really sort of a you know compression of the whole thing as films often are, but also kind of putting it back into the noir, half noir half melodrama, which he was trying to leave behind when he wrote *Mildred Pierce*. But I read it right as the financial markets were starting to tumble in the States, and I just felt like, wow, this is exactly, it's the depression era, it's nine years of the depression, and it felt like such an opportunity to speak about what was happening in the world through this great vehicle. But yeah, it was such a great challenge, it was new to me to work in long form, episodic narrative. I brought, Jon Raymond was the person, my friend from Portland who's a great writer and dear friend, and he was the one telling me to read the book, and we wrote it together, adapted it together. And working with HBO was the first time I think I felt like I was sort of working under the sort of solid foundation of a studio, but one run by really smart people who wanted to do challenging work. So the whole experience, but I also brought Kate Winslet and all these other people, and Ed Lachman and all these people who had never done TV. And we shot it on Super 16, that was the first time I used Super 16, Ed and I just did it again on *Carol*. So it really was like making a film for the small screen.

IHS: Actually, you mention *Carol*, let's sort of move into that and then we can talk about both. If we can show a clip from *Carol* please.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

Have there ever been so many fabulous cheekbones in one single movie? The reason I wanted to bring *Mildred Pierce* and that together is that, as James M. Cain was trying to do something different, Patricia Highsmith was as well with her novel *The Price of Salt*. And this was the first time that you came onto a project that was already in motion, what was that experience like for you?

TH: Well it was extraordinary. It was a learning experience like all of them have been. But, and I had a great relationship with Phyllis Nagy who wrote the adaptation, beautiful adaptation of the novel which is such a great novel. And for me this was really addressing the shape and form and tradition of the love story in movies in ways I felt I never had really exclusively looked at in other films that I'd made. And really what that led to is a real focus on point of view, and how much point of view sort of anchors you in great love stories, most, usually to the more vulnerable party, and what's interesting about *Carol* is how that shifts. So I worked with Phyllis a bit on the script and brought a few, some structural changes to it, the *Brief Encounter* sort of structure for people who know that beautiful film and will see *Carol*, or may have seen *Carol*. But yeah, you know what's funny is that even when it's your own script there's a point where you just discard it, you have to. In fact every stage of filmmaking is a process of discarding everything you expected it to be and trying really, really hard to look at what it is, because it's always little different and you have to allow for that you know. And so what you see on set is different from the script, and what you see in your dailies is different from what you saw in the flesh, and the dailies are not the same as the first cut, and then

you learn how the cuts start to play with showing people the film. And so each, you just have to be sometimes ruthless with yourself and you have to let your favourite scene go because it isn't supporting the whole experience. And so you know, not to say that, whatever, it's just part of the process, but Phyllis was a partner through the whole thing, as were these two extraordinary actors. And Ed Lachman and his amazing cinematography, and again working with Sandy, and Judy Becker who designed it who also designed *I'm Not There*.

IHS: You mention the two performances, and it's impossible to sort of put one above the other, but it's fascinating to see the binary performance that Cate Blanchett gives of both being herself being Carol, but also being Carol through Therese's eyes. And then you've got Rooney Mara who, for me this is the most extraordinary performance she's given so far because it is the quieter, it is the less showy performance, and it's in many ways the tougher performance perhaps, but it's extraordinary what she does with it.

TH: It is. That is really how you are carried through the story, and it's the simplest character and maybe the simplest story that she's ever been in of the movies I've seen her do, all of which have impressed me, each performance. But I thought, wow, what would Rooney who knows how to play down and be quiet and draw the viewer into the smallest nuance as we've seen her do with other roles, what would she do with this you know much simpler character? I think Fassbinder who loved Sirk, Fassbinder number two, this should be like a drinking game every time I mention Fassbinder or Sirk, he said that the simplest stories are the truest stories. And in many ways that's what makes great love stories so powerful is that they relate directly to our own experience, and they summon the yearning that we've all had for people in our lives at different times. And it's partly due to how you postpone satisfaction and create obstacles that keep the lovers from satisfying their desires, and make an audience think back and go, "Oh, if only things were different." They often become stories about society, moral you know stories about society, and why society gets in the way of people. But yeah it was really a fantastic experience, and I had less time to prepare because it had all come to me in a bundle with Cate already attached, but it was a no brainer.

IHS: Let's take some questions from the audience. I think we have time for a couple of questions. You can put your hand up and we've got some roving mics. Is there anyone? This gentleman there. Anyone else we can pass the mic to over this side? And there's someone down here as well, if you could keep your hand up please. Yes, hello.

Q: Hello Mr Haynes. My name's Nick and I've just graduated from film school, I specialised in directing. And it's only been a few months but so far that isn't proving the most employable skill, and I was just wondering because we kind of skipped over that in what we've just talked about, or what you've just talked about rather, what your advice was, would be from your experience about directors starting out?

TH: I sort of always kind of say the same thing, and it's just, you know and it doesn't necessarily give you any specific you know secrets, it's really just, and I think it's maybe easier today when there's so many different ways that people can make work. You know on the computer and digitally, and you know you can edit at home and all of those things, is just to do it and make work, because it's always a problem-solving process. And when you externalise that process and have something to show people and get their reactions, like to me it's really about, some people might think I have this you know all these intellectual ideas or whatever sometimes in my films, but I really, I'm really always informed by what viewers say when they look at cuts of mine, or when I show my movies and I travel with them and I get feedback from audiences and critics and stuff. It really fuels me and says, "Yeah, I can do that now, and I can go there now," you know. So it becomes hard evidence about how stories can be told and that there are many different ways of telling stories and you know I've tried to do

some different styles and approaches in these films, but really it's just so much, I just learn so much each time. And in a way, and I feel this with great actors and all the great people I work with, each time you start you kind of feel like you're doing it for the first time anyway, you kind of forget that you've done it before, and somehow that stripping down process gets you somewhere new each time.

Q: You've talked quite a lot tonight about genre and your interest in genre. Are there any particular genres that you haven't yet explored that you would like to address?

TH: Well, the next film I'm hoping to make is called *Wonderstruck* and it's based on a Brian Selznick graphic novel that he made for young people. He did the, he wrote Hugo, Hugo right? [*The Invention of*] *Hugo Cabret*, that became Scorsese's *Hugo*. And I've never made a film for younger audiences, and it's carried by three twelve year-old kids basically, and it's another love letter to a city, in this case New York and its past, so I'm excited about that

Q: Hi, thank you for this evening. I'm here studying screenwriting actually, and something you just said, the whole process of discarding what you expected something to be and discovering what it is. I wondered if you had a process for the way that you do that? Do you take it to friends, do you, or what you do to help yourself strip away everything and just see the heart of what you're working on?

TH: Yes, I have screenings, we have screenings of cuts. And you know, and I work, and the editing process is one of my favourites, and my editor Affonso Goncalves on both *Mildred Pierce* and *Carol* you know is the person I've been working with mostly recently, and he's an amazing, brilliant editor. But we show it to colleagues and friends, and people we know and people we don't know. We don't do like you know test screenings that studios do, but we have questionnaires, and I don't want to see who's telling me what their comments are, and it's intensely informative. And you hear consensus, and you know sometimes there's specific solutions, sometimes people suggest, aren't exactly the right ones, but you know you'll find the right answer based on what the feelings are and what the consensus is of people looking at the cuts. So yeah, it's an invaluable process, essential.

IHS: I chose a number of adjectives to describe your films in the introduction, and I didn't actually use the word empathy. To give two examples, Kyle Chandler in *Carol* and Dennis Quaid in *Far From Heaven*, you could have easily portrayed these people as two dimensional characters, and one of the things that's remarkable across the whole body of your work is the empathy you have for people. There's no right and wrong, there's not a moral construct that you're laying on top of these people. There's an attempt to understand everyone and the place they're at and where they're going.

TH: Thank you. I mean the Kyle Chandler performance in *Carol* and the character of Harge Aird is owed so much to things Phyllis was doing in the script. Patricia Highsmith is quite hard on the men in the book, and she bought such empathy and such complexity to their dilemmas on the page, so it started there, there is no question. But Kyle does such a beautiful job, and you know that's the thing about these female-driven films that are hard to get financed because women are the lead characters, you know ridiculously. But they're also hard to find men to play second to women, and you know absurdly, because they're just not accustomed to it, and so it asks something very special in these actors already to take part in these films. And for Dennis Quaid it was a complete and total departure from anything he'd done before, and he was so lovely and he paid such close attention, he watched all the Sirk movies. You know there's such a subtle, vulnerable, committed performance in that. And Kyle as well, and he was such a pleasure to work with on *Carol*, thank you.

IHS: If you want to find out more, or a different viewpoint on Todd's films, the PictureHouse cinema on Monday the 7th of December, there is a BAFTA Craft

Masterclass with costume designer Sandy Powell. Also the wonderful Criterion, the US DVD label have just released a beautiful remastered version of *Safe*, along with one of your very early shorts, *The Suicide* from 1978. And I wouldn't just recommend that you watch that, I would recommend with *Carol* coming out you start with *Carol* and do what I've done, spend a week working your way through one of the most sophisticated, elegant and articular filmmakers at work today. Can you please join me in thanking Todd Haynes.

[Applause]