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Author(s): Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky

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The Price of Heaven: Remaking Politics in *All that Heaven Allows*, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Far from Heaven*

by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky

Abstract: This essay investigates identity politics in Todd Haynes's 2002 film, *Far from Heaven*, and in two of its precursors, Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. It takes as its starting point two puzzling features of Haynes's film: the oddity of setting a remake in the same time and place as its original, and the film's banal representation of racism and homophobia. The essay proposes a reading of *Far from Heaven* in which the film questions the ability of melodrama to plausibly address contemporary forms of social injustice.

Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002) is a remake of Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*, a 1955 family melodrama about a bourgeois widow who begins an affair with her young gardener only to be ostracized by her high-society peers. Like Sirk's original, Haynes's remake is set in a suburban hamlet in the northeast circa 1957. Unlike the original, Haynes's film dispenses with the class and generational conflicts of *All that Heaven Allows*, replacing these with conflicts over interracial love and sexual orientation.

Haynes's film is not the first reworking of *All that Heaven Allows*. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, also revises Sirk's original. Fassbinder's version depicts the troubled affair of an elderly German cleaning woman and a significantly younger, black Moroccan "guest worker" who has come to Munich as part of Germany's postwar labor recruitment program.

Many writers have observed that Haynes's film stands in a complicated relation both to the two earlier texts, and to the contemporary moment. Some have argued that this is an "historical" film, bent on exposing the less than pristine realities secreted away behind the smooth patina of Eisenhower's America, and obscured by representations of the time (like Sirk's) that were constrained by convention and the Production Code.¹ Others have said that *Far from Heaven* arrogantly condescends to the past, overconfident that there has been significant social progress in the intervening years.²

Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky is a PhD candidate in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh. She is working on her dissertation, currently titled "The Ethnic Turn: Political Cinema in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, 1960–2005." This essay won first prize in the 2005 SCMS student writing competition.

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I will argue, conversely, that *Far from Heaven* eludes many of the categories that would allow us to make sense of its relation to either Sirk or Fassbinder, or its relation to the contemporary moment. By setting its narrative in the same time and place as the original, *Far from Heaven* fails to do what most remakes do—update the original. Nor does *Far from Heaven* quite fit Fredric Jameson's category of the "nostalgia film"—a film that evokes a past by imitating the stylistic tropes of that historical moment's representations of itself, but that is neither properly historical nor contemporary.³ Haynes's film is too self-reflexive to fit this description.

The greatest obstacle to making sense of *Far from Heaven*'s relation to the present is its seemingly banal treatment of race and sexual orientation. The displays of racism and homophobia and the surface-level injunction to tolerance and color blindness seem, from a contemporary vantage point, hopelessly outdated. If we insist on such a flatfooted reading, we are forced to conclude that *Far from Heaven* is indeed an "historical film" bent on highlighting our social progress, the difference between then and now, past and present; and we are left feeling an uneasy sort of relief that, at least, times change.

Far from Heaven responds to the problematic of coalition politics set up in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, which in turn recasts *All that Heaven Allows* as a film about identity and class politics. In this essay, I propose an alternative reading of *Far from Heaven*'s seemingly straightforward, and ultimately banal, critique of the racism and homophobia of fifties society. What is being represented in the film is not so much the twin ills of a bygone era, but the contemporary crisis over who, properly, constitutes the subject of historical agency. The film deconstructs the promise of identity politics and the coalitions forged on their basis. And as it disavows identity politics at the level of the narrative, the film distances itself from the melodramatic mode at the level of generic mode. The interest of Haynes's film lies in the way it questions the ability of the moralizing mode of melodrama to address the social issues of the contemporary historical moment.

The Nostalgia Film and the Remake. According to Fredric Jameson, postmodernism is the cultural correlate of a third stage of capitalism, what he calls "late" or "multinational" capitalism. Postmodernism is characterized by, among other things, the erosion of historicity—that is, the loss of "the perception of the present as history."⁴ Genuine historicity would entail a representation that achieves a defamiliarization of the present, one that "allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective."⁵ The nostalgia mode in film is just one more symptom of the postmodern erosion of historicity.

For Jameson, the nostalgia film may be understood narrowly or broadly.⁶ Narrowly conceived, it includes films set in the past and "about specific generational moments of that past";⁷ *American Graffiti* (George Lucas), a 1973 film about the 1960s, or *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski), a 1974 film about the 1930s, would fit this

description. Yet, for Jameson, this approach to the past is inevitably pervaded by pastiche, defined as the “the imitation of a peculiar or unique style ... without parody’s ulterior motive.”⁸ These films about the past are “never really a matter of some old-fashioned ‘representation’ of historical content, but instead approach the ‘past’ through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion.”⁹

In Jameson’s broader conception, a nostalgia film is any film—set in the past or in the present—that makes use of pastiche. And inasmuch as they typically make use of pastiche, remakes are paradigmatic examples of nostalgia films.¹⁰ Jameson uses *Body Heat*—Lawrence Kasdan’s 1981 remake of *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944)—as an example. Set in contemporary (1981) Florida, the film makes use of pastiche in its choice of Art Deco credits and in the virtual absence of the objects of late capitalism—such as high-rise buildings and contemporary appliances—that would allow the viewer to locate the film in the historical present.¹¹

The nostalgia film turns the viewer’s present moment into an eternal past that is beyond real historical time and thus closed off to the intervention of human agency. The resulting representation is neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the present, both of which necessarily elude us in this new historical situation.¹² For Jameson, it is not the case that genuine historicity would allow a representation of the “real past” (i.e., something other than a simulacrum of the past), but rather that historicity “can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history.”¹³

Far from Heaven appears to be a nostalgia film on both the broad and the narrow conceptions, and therefore doubly nostalgic: it is set in the past (1957), and it is a remake of Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* that indulges in pastiche. But I will argue that *Far From Heaven* does not do what nostalgia films do—it does not efface the present.¹⁴

Far from Heaven is not a typical remake.¹⁵ In his discussion of the remake, Thomas Leitch identifies four types, each characterized by a different relation to the original: the “readaptation,” the “update,” the “homage,” and the “true remake.”¹⁶ The first two are not relevant to this discussion, as they primarily engage the filmic remake’s relation to a classic literary text. The third taxonomic category sketched by Leitch is the “homage,” which has been mainly a European trend. The homage treats its cinematic precursor as a classic “in danger of being ignored or forgotten.”¹⁷ The homage defines the relation between two cinematic texts—it valorizes the earlier one without trying to replace it. It is a film that has no life outside of its intertextual relation to the original; it succumbs entirely to the authority of the original. The homage manages the “enabling paradox” of the remake—that it is like the original, only better—by opting out, by relinquishing any assertion of superiority.¹⁸ *Far from Heaven* should not be considered an homage because it is not primarily allusive: while it clearly hopes to refocus attention on a forgotten master, it also provokes a broader examination of the

representational strategies of that master. *Far from Heaven* retains an autonomy and ambition of its own, which is not characteristic of the homage.¹⁹

The fourth species of remake, the “true remake,” is, for Leitch, the paradigmatic form. The true remake relies most visibly on a triangular relationship between three texts: an original (usually a literary text), which it tries to usurp; a second remake, which it borrows from but disavows; and itself. Using *Body Heat* as an example, Leitch argues that the elements of pastiche, the evocations of the 1940s, function to call attention to *Double Indemnity* in order to disavow its own discursive markers; then it “liberates values that were present in the story [James Cain’s novel] all along but were obscured by the circumstances of its earlier incarnation [*Double Indemnity*],”²⁰ namely unseen sexual content. The true remake claims the story and concomitant prestige of the original and updates that story, then it borrows the discourse of its cinematic precursor while disavowing its story. The effect is that, “[t]he [true] remake ... takes what is presented as a classic, timeless story and updates it—partly by the paradoxical attempt to remove all markers of any historical period whatever.”²¹ This is accomplished by a systematic effacement of signs of the remake’s time period through the mining of a past discursive incarnation (the second version). “The true remake is pretending, in effect, that it has no discourse of its own to become outdated”;²² it presents itself as a work outside of time.

Far from Heaven does evince this kind of triangular relationship, situating itself *vis-à-vis* both Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* and Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, to which it does not make explicit reference. But while Leitch’s model of the true remake disavows both its intertextuality and its own textuality in a struggle against time, *Far from Heaven* disavows neither, citing a source—Douglas Sirk—for both. The film copies Sirk’s discourse more closely than his story. *Far From Heaven* copies scenes and sequences from Sirk almost verbatim (including the credits), while making major adjustments to Sirk’s original story. Because it explicitly locates itself in the past—the fifties—it cannot be said to be pretending it is contemporary. It is peculiar in that it does not update the original as *Body Heat* updates its original, *Double Indemnity*, simultaneously employing simulacra of the forties while eschewing the explicit reference. Rather, *Far From Heaven* produces the original as the original: the diegetic time of the original and its copy are the same (though produced close to fifty years apart, both are set in 1950s New England), and Sirk’s aesthetics have been closely reproduced.²³

The obvious question is: Why present a remake as an original—why “re-do” a film? One answer is that the project of the film is, as Sharon Willis puts it in her essay, “The Politics of Disappointment,” “archeological”:²⁴ it aims to excavate the social reality of fifties desire, a reality that could not have been presented in the original.²⁵ Following this reading, *Far from Heaven* is a backward-looking historical film that aims to represent the “real past” and fails—as nostalgia films inevitably do. But this reading cannot account for the imitation of Sirkian aesthetics and the observance of certain production codes of the time (e.g. the prohibition

against interracial sex on screen), and it turns *Far from Heaven* into just another example of postmodern artistic production à la Jameson.

Far from Heaven “re-does” *All that Heaven Allows* not in order to expose the dirty laundry of the past, but rather in order to say something about the present. *Far from Heaven* is a very special kind of remake. If most remakes update the time and/or place of the original, but keep the narrative roughly the same, *Far from Heaven* imitates the discourse and preserves the historical setting of the original, but modifies the story in significant ways. By presenting the same story in a different historical setting, most remakes emphasize the timelessness of the story. By presenting a different story in the same historical setting with roughly the same aesthetics, *Far from Heaven* emphasizes the adjustments it has made to the narrative; herein lies its contemporaneity. The contemporary content of *Far from Heaven* is, as it were, the arithmetic difference between its narrative and that of the original. This difference is what needs to be explained.

Far from Heaven may be a species of remake, but it is not a nostalgia film, at least not in spirit, for it does not stage the past as present, and thus timeless. Nor does it stage the past as true history, the way an historical film does. Rather, it casts the present as past history, forcing us to register our historical situatedness. In Jameson’s terms, it may be considered an attempt to recuperate historicity and fashion an “aesthetic representation of our own current experience.”²⁶ It manages to put the past (represented by a discourse that self-consciously presents itself as discourse and not as reality) and the present (represented by new story content) together in the same frame. *Far from Heaven* forces one to ask: “What has changed since then?”

Haynes’s film receives a measure of its timeliness from the adjustments it makes, at the level of narrative, to *All that Heaven Allows*. These adjustments involve the expansion of identity positions, from class and gender in *All that Heaven Allows* to race, gender, and sexuality in *Far from Heaven*. But the adjustments owe much to Fassbinder’s own reworking of Sirk’s film in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Haynes’s impulse is not toward a timeless depiction, but the reverse. Time, history, and the nature of change are the subject of the film.

All that Heaven Allows and the Thoreauvian Ideal. *All that Heaven Allows* is the story of a middle-aged bourgeois widow, Cary Scott (Jane Wyman), her affair with a younger gardener, Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson), and the community that shuns her because of the relationship. The nature of Cary’s transgression is ambiguous. Does the disapproval of the community and her children owe more to Ron’s age, or his class? Is the object of their ridicule the inappropriateness of female desire, or that of cross-class fraternizing? From the outside, it looks as though only desire could explain their relationship. What else could Cary want with a “gardener” but sex (“a good looking set of muscles,” as her son puts it)? And what else could Ron want with Cary but her money? The age conflict refers us

back to the class conflict; the two are inextricably linked, but the film obscures the nature of the latter.²⁷

Cary's Stoningham community misrecognizes the union between Cary and Ron as one that transgresses class barriers and breaches decorum.²⁸ Ron may be working as a gardener, but he is not a wage laborer; he is not selling his labor-power for an hourly fee: he is a member of the bourgeoisie. Perhaps this is why Cary constantly reassures her children and friends that "if they knew him, they would like him." They would like him if only they knew what she knows—namely, that he is not only a gardener, but also a successful small businessman.

Early in the film, when Ron first introduces himself to Cary, he establishes the basis of the distinction. He tells Cary that 1) he is old Kirby's son, inheritor of the business, and not a hired worker; 2) he has studied agriculture in school (i.e., he is in some sense a professional); and 3) yard work is not essential to his livelihood—he has better things in store, namely, his nursery business (so he probably will not be coming back next autumn). The relationship is consolidated only after Ron is tied to the American philosophical legacy of Henry David Thoreau. With this philosophical foundation, Ron's status as "just" a gardener is fully disavowed, and romance becomes possible.

In her essay "Melodrama Revisited," Linda Williams posits that the primary ideological function of the melodramatic film text is to deliver moral legibility, or the assignation of guilt and innocence in a post-sacred world in which the surface of reality is deceptive, masking the hidden source of all value and meaning. The melodramatic text delivers this moral legibility by focusing on victim-heroes and the "the recognition of a hidden or misunderstood virtue."²⁹ In *All that Heaven Allows*, Ron is the character of unrecognized virtue: it is his virtue that Cary and the viewer come to see, and that Stoningham refuses to acknowledge.³⁰ But in what does Ron's virtue consist? He is virtuous inasmuch as he has rejected the consumerism of the country club set. Let us be clear: he rejects this consumerism *on principle*. Virtue is shown here by freely chosen actions.³¹ And Ron *can* be virtuous in this way precisely because he is not really the wage laborer that he appears to be. The wage laborer is not a wage laborer by choice: he cannot quit civilization, retreating to his inherited plot of land in the country to grow green beans in solitude. Ron appears in the film wielding Thoreau, a good chunk of land, and a beloved nursery project. Had Ron been cast as a "real" wage laborer, his censure of Cary's world would have looked comparatively weaker: a worker's declaration of moral contempt for such a world would seem like *ressentiment* and not the action of a free and noble individual. The sign of Ron's virtue is simultaneously the sign of his class position and the basis of Cary's admiration and of the community's misunderstanding.

All that Heaven Allows contains a critique of consumer society. But the critique is moralistic and not political in that it targets wayward individuals and not dysfunctional systems. Cary's people are craven: if pressed, they would

recognize the superiority of Ron's principles to theirs, but still they could not live by them. Ron's alternative idyllic natural world is cast as a nonexploitative, simple commodity-producing utopia peopled with charming petit-bourgeois artisans wringing their means of life from land, sea, and air. Ron and his friends value nature, authenticity, craftsmanship, and, ultimately, unalienated manual labor. They struggle—sufficiently free from material need—to realize their principles in practice. This is a conflict of values, and not a class conflict: it is a quibble internal to the bourgeoisie.

In his book on Sirk, Jon Halliday has remarked that the director built into this film "*the history of the concealed disintegration of the society*."³² He set the film in New England, "the place where contemporary America started, and started to go wrong."³³ In Halliday's view, "Hudson and his trees are both America's past and America's ideals. They are ideals which are unattainable—and, when they actually offer themselves in concrete form, are swiftly rejected by Wyman and her bourgeois friends on her behalf."³⁴ But, in fact, it is not the ideals that are rejected. Cary's friends know nothing of Ron's ideals: they assume that Ron is what he appears to be, namely a wage laborer. Cary is not unlike her friends: she just knows more about Ron. She admires him precisely for his ideals, as, if they took the time, they would too. If Cary rejects Ron (temporarily), it is for practical reasons, out of convenience, and with the knowledge that in another sort of world, she, too, could live by such principles. The ideals themselves are not contested in the film.³⁵

But if the film is sympathetic to Ron's Thoreauvian ideals, why does the natural world, the synecdoche of these ideals, appear so contrived?³⁶ A good example of this contrivance is the appearance of a deer in the picture window at the film's end, as Cary cares for Ron after his fall from the side of the mountain. Film scholars have said that the stylized representation of natural spaces serves an ironic purpose: to delegitimize the Thoreauvian ideal.³⁷ But another reading is possible. The use of techniques of Brechtian defamiliarization to depict Ron's world (so often commented on in the Sirk literature) situate the ideal in a mythic historical past, a time before modernity.³⁸ In other words, the contrived natural spaces may be seen as functioning nostalgically, rather than ironically.³⁹

Tracing the etymology of "nostalgia" in her essay "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," Linda Hutcheon tracks the term from its roots as a seventeenth-century medical term designating severe, but curable, homesickness to an eighteenth-century term designating an incurable psychic condition:

What made that transition possible was a shift in site from the spatial to the temporal. Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home ... [Sufferers] in fact, did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth. Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to—ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact.⁴⁰

All that Heaven Allows presents two different time periods contiguously: there is, on the one hand, the present of its production—the 1950s—represented by Cary's world; and on the other hand, a mythic pastoral American past the film



Figure 1. Cary (Jane Wyman) reads from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* in Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (Universal, 1955).

wishes to use as the basis for its critique of the present, represented by Ron's utopian world. Ron's world represents a space of innocence. One central feature of the melodramatic mode, according to Williams, is that it begins and wants to end in such a space.⁴¹

According to Hutcheon, the pathos of nostalgic representation "depends precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past."⁴² If the film's happy ending seems somehow hollow, it is because Ron's world does not exist within the same temporal frame as Cary's. Situating the ideal in an irrecoverable past is the source of the film's pathos; even a nominally reunited couple cannot affect the sense that, using Williams's terms, it is too late, that the real object of loss in this melodramatic text is time, a time when the ideal was also attainable.⁴³ What would the story of the disintegrating consumer society look like if there were no yardstick, no ideal, by which to measure the society's self-betrayal? The Thoreauvian point of view represents the ideal—"the good." And *All that Heaven Allows* tries to make that moral good legible, if irrecoverably remote.

That the critique of the decadent present is made under the banner of Thoreauvian transcendentalism, also notoriously nostalgic, is fitting. Sirk himself lamented that this aspect of the film had been so neglected in the film's reception.⁴⁴ Thoreau was writing in the period between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, when New England was undergoing a major "ecosocial transformation."⁴⁵ The agricultural and mercantile order of the colonial period was being replaced by the first stage of modern capitalism. The result was a starkly divided class society with new levels of immiseration, exploitation, and technological innovation.⁴⁶ Amidst these developments in the 1830s were worker's strikes, growing unrest, and the prospect of violent class warfare.⁴⁷ Faced with an organized

working class and economic crisis, Thoreau's model for social change posits the priority of self-transformation.⁴⁸ Leo Marx has argued in *The Machine in the Garden* that Thoreau's criticism of New England society is moralistic, and not political.⁴⁹ Echoing this view, Lance Newman writes in "Thoreau's Natural Community and Utopian Socialism": "Thoreau ... focused, again, on the importance of ethical regeneration, of programs for the moral reform of a backslidden elite ... The object of concern here is not the working class but the potentially salvageable bourgeois slave-driver of himself, who single-mindedly pursues material wealth."⁵⁰

It is worth noting that while *All that Heaven Allows* strategically makes invisible the urban space, the white working class, and the African American—figures whose reproach of consumer society cannot be contained by a merely ethical critique of the spiritual poverty of the elite—the hope for this society was embodied in the figure of the diasporic immigrant. This is not surprising, considering that Sirk himself was an émigré from Germany.

At a certain point in the film, a procession of happy, ostensibly petit-bourgeois subjects parade in to a party with Ron and Cary at Ron's friends' rural cottage. Each partygoer is introduced to Cary with a reference to his or her vocation: we have the beekeeper who moonlights as an "artist"; we have the bird-watcher and Audubon society volunteer; we have the plump, stubbly Mexican fisherman⁵¹ and his Spanish-speaking wife and daughter.⁵² The residents of Ron's idyllic premodern utopia are self-employed, and have an unalienated relationship to their own labor as well as to nature.

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul and the Internal Remake. By presenting a cross-ethnic worker solidarity, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*⁵³ ultimately inverts *All that Heaven Allows*, which it reads as depicting not a cross-class solidarity, but rather the alliance of petit bourgeoisie and haut bourgeoisie sanctioned by an ideology of individualism. Fassbinder's film recuperates the absences of the Sirk text: the urban space, the working class, and the racial minority. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* copies neither the discourse nor quite the story of *All that Heaven Allows*. In some sense, it updates the Sirk film, setting the action in another place (Munich) and time (contemporaneous with its making, the 1970s). The relationship between a much older, widowed cleaning woman and a younger man is central, though their age difference is more stark, and a racial element is added: Ali (El Hedi ben Salem) is a "guest worker," Moroccan and black; he is referred to both as "auslander [foreigner]" and "schwarz [black man]."⁵⁴ As in the earlier Sirk film, the woman, Emmi (Brigitte Mira), is ostracized by her family and community because of her relationship with this man from outside her social circle.

The mechanism of the remake is central to the internal structure of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. The film is divided into two parts: the first part is a disavowal of *All that Heaven Allows*; the second part is a remake of the first. The two parts are separated in the story by a "vacation" that is not represented in the plot; they are separated on screen by an enigmatic scene in an outdoor café. This three-minute



Figure 2. Cary (Jane Wyman) is introduced to Ron's (Rock Hudson) friends, an immigrant lobsterman (Nestor Paiva) and his family (Rosa Turich and Gia Scala), in Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (Universal, 1955).

scene opens and closes with an extreme long shot of Ali and Emmi sitting across from each other at a yellow table; they are surrounded by dozens of similar tables and chairs, all of them empty. The dialogue closely follows the dialogue in *All that Heaven Allows* between Cary and her daughter, Kay, as Kay confesses that she cares what others think of her despite her own better judgment. Kay's disclosure deeply impacts her mother, who decides she cannot marry Ron because the marriage will adversely affect those around her. Emmi, for her part, wet from the rain and weeping, lays her head on the table and tells Ali that she cannot tolerate being rejected by the community: "I am so happy yet I can hardly stand it, the way people hate us ... If only you and I were alone in the world." This last line encapsulates the theme of the first part of the film: the fallacy of a love that is "alone in the world." In the face of their troubles, Emmi proposes that they take a vacation, and go "somewhere where no one will stare at us." "When we get back," she says, "it will all be different. Everyone will be nice to us." Her prophecy is fulfilled in the second part of the film. When the couple returns from vacation, there is a marked change in people's attitude. People are, literally, nice to them: Ali goes from being a pariah to being sought after and admired.

The problematic of the first part of *Ali*—coming to terms with a love that is *not* alone in the world—reaches its culmination in the enigmatic café scene, but it first emerges in a conversation between Emmi and her coworkers. They are discussing the situation of a German woman who married a Turkish guest worker. The coworkers are disparaging the woman and rationalizing her subsequent alienation from the community. Responding to her coworkers, Emmi says of the married German woman, "Maybe she needs no one else, if he [her Turkish husband]



Figure 3. Emmi (Brigitte Mira), excluded by her coworkers because of her relationship with Ali, sits alone in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (New Yorker Films, 1974).

speaks to her." To which her coworker replies, "No one can live without others. No one, Emmi."

The plot of the first part of the film depicts Ali and Emmi's first meeting and their subsequent social rejection. Emmi becomes more and more isolated from the social alliances of her former life: first, her neighbors find the building suddenly dirty since Ali has moved in; then her coworker refuses to shake Ali's hand or even to recognize Emmi's presence during lunch hour; then her son kicks in her television and disowns her; then the neighborhood's petit-bourgeois grocer refuses to serve Ali until he "learns" German. At the end of this first part of *Ali*, Emmi is broken, confessing that her coworker was right—the autonomy of romantic love is illusory; no one can live without others. The second part of the film then explains the nature of this dependence. While the film opens with Emmi suspended in space and time, unattached, alone in a zone of depoliticized individuality, it ends by situating her in a class context.

When Emmi and Ali return from their vacation, the scenarios of the first part of the film are replayed, but with a difference. This difference is best exemplified by the scene that immediately follows the conversation between Ali and Emmi in the café. The petit-bourgeois shopkeeper, in an exchange with his wife, reverses



Figure 4. Repetition with a difference: in the second part of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (New Yorker Films, 1974), another ostracized character, Yolanda (Helga Ballhaus), a Yugoslav guest worker, is framed sitting alone on the stairs, much as Emmi is earlier in the film (see Figure 3).

his position toward Emmi and Ali under the pressures of the growing dominance of the supermarket in German society. Discrimination is bad for business.

Wife: Anton, don't forget she was a good customer ... Just walk out and say hello and everything will be fine ... She'll shop here again.

Anton: I suppose I'd better, now most of them shop at the supermarket ... You're right: one can't be too particular in business.

Throughout the second part of the film, relations between Emmi and her neighbors, family, and coworkers confirm this market logic. Her relationships with others are shown to be determined, in the last analysis, not by a distorted sense of decency and morality, but by need. The shopkeeper needs Emmi's business; her son Bruno (Peter Gauhe) needs her to babysit his daughter while his wife works; her neighbor needs her storage space; her coworkers need her cooperation in order to effectively petition their employer for a raise. At Ali's place of employment, when Emmi is ridiculed by his workmates ("Is this your grandmother from Morocco?"), she confesses not that she loves Ali, but that she needs him ("I need

you ... I need you so much”)—the old washerwoman needs the guest worker, just as the guest worker needs the washerwoman.

The coincident change of attitude in the community as a whole toward Emmi and Ali that marks the second part of the film is not explained within the diegesis. The structural repetition in the plot seems incomprehensible at the level of the story: how can it be that over the period of a “vacation,” the community’s attitude changes so dramatically and simultaneously?

There is a significant narrative “break” in *All that Heaven Allows* as well: Ron’s fall, which functions as a *deus ex machina*. In both cases, these narrative breaks should be read metaphorically; they signal temporal breaks. In *All that Heaven Allows*, the fall further confirms that Ron’s ideal world belongs to a mythic pastoral past before modernity. Similarly, in *Ali*, the time before the vacation and after seems to correspond to two distinct historical moments. The two films are distinguished by their differing judgments about that historical past. In *All that Heaven Allows*, the corrupt present is compared unfavorably to the glorious past. In *Ali*, the discrimination of the pre-vacation past does not appear worse than the fetishization of the post-vacation present: neither past nor present escapes negative judgment.

The remake mechanism at work within the film is what allows us to see this: the second part of *Ali* remakes the first part (in precisely the way *Far from Heaven* remakes *All that Heaven Allows*), setting it in the same time and place, but adjusting its story content. The adjustment to the story turns out to be the contemporary face of racism. Because in *Ali* the passage of time (a mere worker’s vacation) cannot justify the change in attitude (i.e., the realization that discriminatory practices do not pay), the film suggests that the new attitude does not represent an advance or progress or moral epiphany, but rather, a new incarnation of the original offense. The racism *Ali* suffers in the first part of the film is hardly worse than the racism of the second part. Sure, “everyone is nice,” but it becomes clear the problem was never a matter of “niceness” versus “meanness,” but of something more fundamental. The internal remake is a useful formal strategy for undermining the commonly held view that it is “progress” or “evolution” or “moral awakening” that accounts for the changes in the treatment of minorities; the mechanism governing change is shown to be the adjustments capitalism makes necessary. The mode of production is the culprit, while the treatment of the guest worker is a superstructural reverberation. *Ali*’s actual situation is little changed from the beginning of the film to the end. Whether he is rejected or fetishized, his circumstance is little improved; he is exploited and oppressed all the same. And *Ali* shares with Emmi this reality of exploitation.

In offering an economic explanation of the situation of the guest worker in Germany, *Ali* links the struggle of the black guest worker to that of the white charwoman; they are presented as aligned subjects of historical agency.⁵⁵ The film may therefore be read as a look at the challenges of uniting a proletariat fractured by race, culture, and the unexorcised fascism of the German working class.



Figure 5. The scene that separates the two parts of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (New Yorker Films, 1974): Emmi (Brigitte Mira) and Ali (El Hedi ben Salem) decide to go on vacation.

The starkly visible age difference between Brigitte Mira (Emmi) and El Hedi ben Salem (Ali)—significantly exaggerated from Sirk's Wyman and Hudson—underscores the nature of their attraction. Faced with the postmenopausal Mira's age-worn visage, it is infeasible to understand the Emmi–Ali union in terms of traditional romance and individual love-object predilections. This couple cannot withstand a reading that casts their relationship as one founded on “love at first sight,” as the diegesis seems to suggest. This cliché depends on the view that desire is autonomous, spontaneous, and not itself socially produced. But *Ali* suggests that even the couple's “love” is socially determined, and inexplicable without reference to their structurally analogous social positions in the society.

Thus, the dialogue between Emmi and Ali on the dance floor in the penultimate sequence of the film must be read allegorically. Ali and Emmi are dancing at the Asphalt Pub to the same music they danced to upon first meeting.

A: Me sleep with other women.

E: That doesn't matter, Ali. Not at all.

A: I no want, but all the time nervous.

E: You're your own master; you can do what you like. I know how old I am; I see myself in the mirror. I can't tell you what not to do ... but when we're together we must be nice to each other. Otherwise life isn't worth living.

A: I want no other woman, only love you.

E: I love you too. Together we're strong ...

Another clue to this allegorical reading is Ali's name, which is, of course, not "Ali" but "El Hedi ben Salem." The use of "Ali" suggests that this character is a kind of ethnic guest-worker everyman.⁵⁶

More support for an allegorical reading involves Barbara (Barbara Valentin), the blond proprietor of the Asphalt Pub. At one point, Emmi orders a cola, and when Barbara serves it, she adds nonchalantly but apropos of nothing, "By the way, I'm the owner." The remark is puzzling because it is narratively unmotivated. Why is this detail here? The relationship that Ali begins with Barbara serves as a foil to his relationship with Emmi. The pub owner is young, blond, and a petit bourgeois. She is happy to serve guest workers in her pub, offers a postmodern array of Arab and western music on the pub's jukebox, and is eager to make couscous for Ali whenever he comes to visit her. Emmi, by contrast, is an older worker and a former member of the Nazi party. Thoroughly depoliticized, she is excited to celebrate her wedding dinner at an Italian "Osteria" that, she proudly reports, Hitler frequented between 1929 and 1933; and she refuses to make couscous, reproving Ali, "In Germany people don't eat couscous." Ali turns to the pub owner each time Emmi erupts; the first time on the question of couscous, and the second time when Emmi and her workmates admire his physique in the third person as if he were being priced on an auction block—"what soft skin he has," they say as they circle him, fingering his muscles. When Ali becomes disturbed by the scene, Emmi, by way of explanation, tells her friends, again in third person, "He has his moods; that's his foreign mentality."

The encounters with Barbara are explicitly staged as exchanges: the offer of couscous ("I'll put the pan on" the blond says eagerly to Ali) precedes a sexual tableaux depicting the pub owner as she comes to collect her fee. But the pub owner's willingness to exchange couscous for sex suggests the film's understanding of the role of culture in worker solidarity. As Ali turns from Emmi's unexorcized fascism, he encounters in the pub owner a relationship characterized by sheer commodity exchange: couscous (with all its symbolic cultural content) for sex. What appears on its face to be her cultural tolerance (and Ali seems drawn into this view initially) is revealed to be exploitation. Like the petit-bourgeois grocer, the pub owner is concerned with her bottom line. Culture is not sacred here; it, too, can be co-opted, repackaged, and sold. If it takes couscous, give him couscous. Ali flees from Emmi's latent fascism, only to face a more sophisticated predator.

In the pub owner's hands, couscous is evacuated of the affective content Ali associates with it—North African identity, history, tradition, and culture; couscous becomes merely a unit of exchange. It is the pub owner's disclosure of her class status that aligns her with the grocery owner. It also explains Ali's eventual repudiation of Barbara, when he tells Emmi as they dance "I want no other woman, only love you." To which Emmi replies, "Together we are strong," suggesting the

necessity of an interethnic alliance against capitalist exploitation and its super-structural reverberation, racism.

As soon as Emmi says, "Together we are strong," Ali collapses on the dance floor and must be hospitalized for a stomach ulcer. His collapse and hospitalization act as a qualifier that acknowledges the specificity of racial oppression without undermining the necessity of an interethnic proletariat alliance. To the degree that Emmi's subjectivity is socially determined, so is Ali affected by the social context. The impact of the outside on Ali is registered by his hospitalization from an ulcer. That the guest worker experience of racism in Germany penetrates to the literal core of his being—his stomach—suggests the urgency of the situation.⁵⁷

The final hospital scene in *Ali* articulates a relation between race and class in which racism is cast as a threat to the organism, to life itself. In some sense, racism emerges as primary, trumping everything else: without life (and a compromised digestion jeopardizes the most basic requirement for life), there is no chance for worker alliance. This is the predicament, clearly recapitulated at the end of the film: racism endangers the very cross-ethnic solidarity that will spell racism's demise.

For the German film historian Thomas Elsaesser, Fassbinder takes a distinctly anti-identity politics stance:

What makes the depiction of oppressors and oppressed in his films ultimately so difficult for some audiences is that Fassbinder refuses to assume that there has to be a natural solidarity between victims. Instead, one finds an almost Buñuelian vision of the right of outcasts and underdogs to be as mean, inhuman and evil as anyone else. His portrayal of the victims of society shows what has made them who they are, giving rise to a picture of cruelty among the underclass which reflects but cannot explain the cruelty of the dominant class. The decision of not judging his characters from an external vantage point thus obliges him not to be partisan toward marginal groups solely on the basis of being marginal.⁵⁸

What Elsaesser describes is a cinema in which victims *both* suffer *and* do not behave virtuously. In Fassbinder, suffering by itself is not enough to establish virtue. If the melodramatic mode's use of suffering as proof of virtue is assimilable to "partisan[ship] toward marginal groups solely on the basis of being marginal (i.e. victimized)," then it is this equivalence between suffering and virtue that Fassbinder refuses by interjecting the counterweight of the victim's own cruelty. Recalling Linda Williams's terminology, this is melodrama without victim-heroes: suffering does not establish moral virtue, and moral virtue is never misrecognized because it is beside the point. Elsaesser calls this a "non-judgmental relation to destructive or evil characters"⁵⁹; Fassbinder has called it "indulgence [toward characters] to the point of irresponsibility."⁶⁰ This nonjudgmental stance is what makes *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*'s critique of the social world political and not moralistic, like that of *All that Heaven Allows*.

The point here is not that Fassbinder's characters are unvirtuous, rotten, contradictory, and misguided, and that if they could only be made aware, they would

change and would begin to make the right life choices. Rather, we have here a situation in which the dominant ideology is internalized and lived out daily by everyone, in one way or another. The utopian moment in Fassbinder does not rest with the virtuous individual activist who imagines himself impervious to ideology, who imagines that he can change the world by his acts of individual resistance and by his choice to live his own life (like Ron) *as though* conditions were ideal. Nor is the utopian moment to be found in the depiction of a mythic past as in *All that Heaven Allows*. The utopian dimension for Fassbinder is, as Elsaesser has pointed out, embodied by the characters that, though admittedly not virtuous, take “the ‘system’ literally, which is to say, by believing in equality, love, generosity, trust.”⁶¹

In *Ali*, the dance scene is simultaneously a moment of victim solidarity and the embodiment of the film’s utopian drive. That this solidarity collapses by the film’s end makes the impulse toward solidarity no less desirable or ideal. The point is that solidarity is not “natural”; it is something to be sought, but something that does not depend on the virtuousness of its seekers. The film shows the necessity of class consciousness, even if it presents, without illusions, the obstacles to its realization.⁶²

Far from Heaven and Coalition Politics. *Far from Heaven* is set in 1957 (at the time of the Little Rock desegregation struggle) in an insular New Haven, Connecticut, suburb. Cathy (Julianne Moore) and Frank Whitaker (Dennis Quaid) are featured in advertisements for Frank’s television company, Magnatech. Their marriage is hardly as perfect as the ads suggest; Frank has affairs with men, and Cathy begins a “friendship” with Raymond Deagen (Dennis Haysbert), her African American gardener.

In “The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk,” Sharon Willis finds that “it is the moments of referential ‘breakthrough,’ those instances where the film incorporates contemporary social issues of race and sexuality, that remain problematic and that trouble—or disappoint—the film’s logic.”⁶³ The logic to which Willis here refers, and which she claims is “disappoint[ed],” consists primarily of the structural analogy between racism and homophobia, established by the film’s visual organization.⁶⁴ The idea is that there is a “symmetry within its [the film’s] architecture between racial and sexual oppression, bringing together the violent repressions of both racial mobility and sexual choice.”⁶⁵ Willis duly observes the stark differences in the representation of Raymond’s and Frank’s positions. Raymond is hypervisible, surveilled continuously by the white community, while Frank remains invisible, until he enters a gay zone. Raymond is deprived of a point of view and never depicted without Cathy, while Frank is granted a point of view in scenes that do not include Cathy. Raymond is featured in an interracial relationship devoid of erotics, while Frank is featured in the only sexually charged scene in the film—between him and a young man on vacation with his family. Raymond suffers the worst fate of the film when he must

sell his business and leave town, while Frank can keep his corporate job and his new relationship. Willis concludes from this that “Race ... is displaced into the interracial bond and replaced by the white-black couple. Thus, the film’s ‘racial angle’ fades into a white perspective of fascination with the ongoing mystery of a black world elsewhere.”⁶⁶ In other words, the film, by refusing Raymond black subjectivity—“a black world elsewhere”—turns race into a floating signifier that eventually attaches itself to the interracial bond, leaving the question of black identity unanswered.

Willis presupposes that the structural symmetry clearly established between racism and homophobia in *Far from Heaven* is an instance of analogy rather than of disanalogy.⁶⁷ She takes for granted that the objects of racism and homophobia—the black man and the gay man—are analogous subjects in an alliance against heteronormative, mainstream American society: this is her starting point. So when these figures are represented in such starkly different terms, the only possible conclusion is that the film disappoints its own logic.

But perhaps the film never accepted the logic that Willis ascribes to it. She overlooks the possibility that *Far from Heaven* might be interested in the difference between racial and sexual identity, rather than their similarity. In fact, *Far from Heaven* questions the coalition of “others.” Rather than disappoint its own efforts at liberal multiculturalism, it points to the political impotence of identity politics—in which political activity is organized around the interests of particular groups that are united on the basis of a shared social identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, rather than around policy issues or class. And thus, it refuses the consolation of a political alliance of oppressed, politicized identities joined by a “chain of equivalences.”

In one scene that closely follows *All that Heaven Allows*, Cathy and Raymond are talking outside of her house. Raymond tells Cathy three important things about himself that unsettle her expectations: 1) he is a responsible father raising a daughter alone (“Well I guess between Pa’s business, my shop, and looking after my little girl, there’s not much time for reflecting”); 2) he owns a plant shop in town (“It’s just a little place, down on Hawthorne. Started out as a service for gardeners, ordering plants and fertilizer. Till I opened the store. ‘Bout six years ago. The only thing that business degree’s been good for yet”); and 3) he has a business degree. This information is close to what Ron Kirby established in his first meeting with Cary, and amounts to a corrective (as it did in Sirk’s film)—namely, “I am not what I seem.” When Cathy understands Raymond’s difference to be quite literally “the color of his skin,” the “friendship” can commence, just as in *All that Heaven Allows* where the barrier to Ron and Cary’s relationship is overcome when Cary learns the “truth” about Ron’s class status (i.e., that he is not a wage worker). In the remake, racial difference is reduced to its “essential” truth—it depends, in the last analysis, on “skin color,” not on culture or class. Hence this scene reproduces the cliché of color blindness that is undermined throughout the film.⁶⁸

The cliché of color blindness is primarily undermined in the scene in which Cathy breaks off her relationship with Raymond.

Cathy: It just isn't plausible, Raymond, for me to be friends with you. You've been so very kind. To me. And I've been perfectly reckless and foolish in return ... thinking—
Raymond: What? That one person could reach out to another? Take an interest in another? And that maybe, for one fleeting instance, could manage to see beyond the surface—beyond the color of things?

Cathy: Do you think we ever really do? See beyond those things? The surface of things?

Raymond: "Just beyond that fall of grace/Behold that shining place." Yes, I do. I don't really have a choice.

Cathy: I wish I could ... You're so beautiful.

Raymond advances the cliché of color blindness (managing "to see beyond the surface") that has determined Cathy's actions until now, only to have Cathy, in good postmodern fashion, suddenly refuse this opposition of depth and surface, essence and appearance, declaring, instead, the reign of appearance.⁶⁹ This disavowal of depth mirrors the film's own disavowal of what some have argued is the film's "archeological" project of recuperating the actual fifties buried beneath the glossy images of its own representations. The scene discussed above would suggest the film's acknowledgement of the impossibility of such a project—in other words, the impossibility of archeology, of getting at the "actual" fifties, of recuperating the past itself.⁷⁰

While *Far from Heaven* may have little use for a specific black consciousness, it does have a political understanding of race. When Cathy tells Raymond on a public street that there is no seeing beyond the surface of things, a white man from across the street interrupts: "You! Boy! Hands off!" The seriousness of the surface of things is thus underlined. And it is the surface of things that will ultimately determine Raymond's fate. To say that there is nothing "beyond" the surface of things is not to retreat to superficiality.⁷¹

This moment of interpellation—"You! Boy! Hands off!"—is an illustration of what in *Black Skin, White Mask*, Frantz Fanon calls the "fact of blackness."⁷² Fanon rejects a conception of black subjectivity in which it is either a mere means to class consciousness (as one finds in Sartre) or an expression of a shared history or culture (as one finds in negritude). Instead, Fanon posits a black consciousness based in experience. The "fact of blackness" is a moment of interpellation—a child saying to his mother, "Look, a Negro!" Fanon complains: "Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently than the white man."⁷³ And so, in Fanon, "the regime of the look" is installed at the heart of the race problematic:

All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some very debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed. He belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have

never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one's father! Granted, the Jews are harassed—what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. But these are little family quarrels. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance.⁷⁴

Far from Heaven draws a similar distinction in its representation of the hypervisibility of Raymond (a racialized subject) and the relative invisibility of Frank. The idea of being a slave of one's own appearance is present in the film's view that surface—appearance, the visible—is indispensable for any account of racism. To be discriminated against on the basis of appearance is not an incidental feature of racism; it is the heart of the matter.

In its juxtaposition of racism and homosexuality, *Far from Heaven* shows how much Raymond's hypervisibility impacts his prospects for economic mobility and love. Willis observes: "While Frank is expelled from his family and from heteronormativity, and Cathy is expelled from suburban wifely normalcy, neither ends up as bereft as Raymond. He is literally pushed off the film's map, and off his own map as well, since, by his account, he has never even been to Baltimore."⁷⁵ Raymond's status as a petit-bourgeois business owner is untenable. The difference that defines him—hypervisibility—fares worse in the world than the invisibility of the closet.⁷⁶ Frank, at least, can maintain his executive job with the television corporation. It may be true that Frank is exiled—airbrushed from the image of domestic normativity peddled by Magnatech—yet still, his livelihood is not jeopardized by his identity (as Raymond's is). With these differing fates, the absent term "class" makes its appearance: while Frank continues to be identified with the corporate giant Magnatech, it is suggested that Raymond, expelled from the petit-bourgeois class, must begin to sell his labor power for wages in Baltimore. The oppression that Raymond is shown to suffer is, in the film's last analysis, economic.

In *Far from Heaven*, the three identity categories—race, gender, sexuality—so clearly designated by the film's structure, ultimately fail to come together in a "rainbow coalition."⁷⁷ By film's end, the characters representing these categories, which today are the politicized identities of identity politics, each go their separate ways and suffer different fates alone. I have been arguing that by calling attention to the differences in the fates of these characters, the film undermines the view that, beneath it all, there is a common interest among these identities, that there is a "chain of equivalences" that could form the basis of an alliance.⁷⁸

Like Fassbinder, Haynes takes an anti-identity politics stance, but unlike Fassbinder, he does not posit the ultimate desirability of an alliance based on a shared class interest. In contrast to *Ali* and *All that Heaven Allows*, *Far from Heaven* refuses to name capitalism in its indictment. *Far from Heaven's* characters suffer oppression at the hands of social conventions that belong to a certain period in American history; they are not shown to be linked to the economic organization of society. While the film suggests some of the affective dimensions of oppression,

it fails to diagnose its sources; and it declines to envision the contours of a utopian future.

Identity Politics and the Melodramatic Mode. Having considered identity politics in melodrama, we should also consider the melodrama of identity politics.⁷⁹ In *States of Injury: Freedom*, Wendy Brown analyzes the structure of desire of the politicized identities of identity politics in terms of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*—"the moralizing revenge of the powerless."⁸⁰ For politicized identities, the suffering that is the cause of *ressentiment* depends upon the exclusion from liberalism's universal ideal subject—white, masculine, and middle-class. Politicized identities gauge their social injury by this ideal's rights and privileges (e.g., educational and career opportunities, protection from hate crimes, the possibility of upward mobility in return for "hard work").⁸¹ So while politicized identities present themselves as self-affirming, in fact, they depend for their existence as identities on the very ideal (bourgeois, white, male) whose universality they must deny, but end up reinscribing. Like Nietzsche's vengeful slave, politicized identity deals not in political action, but in a "moralizing politics." Satisfied with its moral superiority, politicized identity is committed to nothing but its own powerlessness.⁸² This is shown by the fact that identity politics fights its battles for the limited goals of legal rights and social acceptance.⁸³ According to Brown,

When social "hurt" is conveyed to the law for resolution, political ground is ceded to moral and juridical ground. Social injury ... becomes that which is "unacceptable" and "individually culpable" rather than that which symptomatizes deep political distress in a culture; injury is thereby rendered intentional and individual, politics is reduced to punishment, and justice is equated with such punishment on the one hand and with protection by the courts on the other.⁸⁴

In Brown's view, the juridical focus of identity politics precludes a fundamental attack on capitalism, the structure that is ultimately responsible for social injury.

Linda Williams has suggested that the melodramatic mode is the formal complement of identity politics.⁸⁵ Like identity politics, the melodramatic mode speaks in the moralizing language of social injury, individual blame, and exclusion; it demands rights and recognition from the state and its citizenry. In melodrama, as in identity politics, virtue is equated with suffering; and victims, because they are victims, occupy the moral high ground.⁸⁶ Moreover, the melodramatic mode and identity politics are both predictable by-products of liberalism.

It is no surprise, then, that *Far from Heaven* should distance itself from the melodramatic mode as much as it does from identity politics. Most critics have taken for granted that *Far from Heaven* is unproblematically a melodrama, citing the emotion it reliably engenders in its viewers.⁸⁷ But we must think carefully about the film's relation to the melodramatic mode. Christine Gledhill has emphasized that in order for the melodramatic mode to deliver moral legibility in a post-sacred world, it also "must conform to realism's ever shifting criteria of relevance and credibility, for it has power only on the premises of a recognizable, socially



Figure 6. “Over-determination from without”: An empty pool evacuated after a black child has touched the water in Todd Haynes’s *Far from Heaven* (Focus Features, 2002).

constructed world.”⁸⁸ And, “As the terms of the world shift so must the recognition of its changing audiences be continually resolicited.”⁸⁹

Melodrama draws on realism in two ways. First, melodrama employs the filmic conventions that, at a given historical moment, look like realism. The second way in which melodrama draws on realism is by adjusting to the shifting signs of what Gledhill prefers to call “cultural verisimilitude,” or, roughly, contemporary public opinion on cultural and social issues, the reigning consensus on “reality.”⁹⁰

In order to maintain this cultural verisimilitude in the face of an audience’s changing experience of its situation, melodrama must adapt itself to the new consensus. It must present a constellation of moral dilemmas that the audience accepts as relevant to its own situation. So understood, melodrama is a peculiarly contemporary form, not because its narratives are always set in the present (they often are not), but because of “the genuine turmoil and timeliness of the issues it takes up,”⁹¹ and because of the currency of the filmic conventions it employs.

If we take seriously the account of melodrama put forward by Williams and Gledhill, we are forced to conclude that *Far from Heaven* is not straightforwardly a melodrama: it does not deliver moral legibility precisely because it does not draw on realism in the ways discussed above. First, it does not update its use of filmic conventions: even acting styles and scripts mimic the conventions of the past. More importantly, it lacks cultural verisimilitude. In its treatment of social issues—segregation, the taboo on interracial relationships, the isolation of the stay-at-home mother, a medical establishment that treats homosexuality as a disease—it fails to be timely. This is not merely because the film is set in the past and its discourse has been scrupulously designed to imitate 1950s styles of filmmaking. Certainly, there is a long tradition of historical melodramas that provide timely



Figure 7. Neither black nor white: Cathy's new, ethnically ambiguous gardener in Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (Focus Features, 2002).

moral lessons. Rather, *Far from Heaven*'s untimeliness owes to the fact that its moral lessons—its clichéd brand of antiracism, its injunctions to tolerance and inclusion of “others”—belong to the past as well. That was a time when the United States was, in the words of George Fredrickson, an “overtly racist regime,”⁹² when the battles for rights and recognition from the state was a live one, when discrimination by individuals looked like both cause and effect of social inequality and injustice, when legal segregation was the paradigmatic form of intolerance. The public consensus on these issues has undeniably shifted, although we may still feel dissatisfied with the current state of things.

If, as I have suggested, the source of affect in *Far from Heaven* cannot be attributed to melodrama, then how do we account for it? Attempting to reconcile pastiche and emotion, Richard Dyer's meditations on the source of the film's affect are revealing:

Some of the intensity of the emotional response to the film feels like a longing for there to be such films and a gratitude for having given us one now in which some of the elements we may stumble over in them (because of changing attitudes and tastes) have been dealt with, but then, just because of the differences, an intensification of regret that such films are not made. What happens in the film is sad but we may also be sad for there not being films that do sadness like this anymore.⁹³

What is it about this way of “doing sadness” that is so compelling? What is it about such films?

We may begin to address these questions by noting the strange social predicament in which we find ourselves: we know that inequality exists—that the dilemma of race, for example, continues in the American present—while grasping the inadequacy of representing its contemporary forms in the way it has been

represented in the past (i.e., melodramatically). The strangeness of this predicament has led some critics to read the film as condescending to the shameful past and basking in the present's moral superiority.⁹⁴ Such a reading registers the untimeliness of the social issues presented in the film, but attributes that untimeliness to arrogance, thus unwittingly assuming the progressive unfolding of history.⁹⁵ Instead, I am suggesting that the combination of the untimely representation of the moralistic dimensions of bias, on the one hand, and the inarticulate sense that all is not well in the present, on the other hand, points to the difficulty of understanding and representing contemporary forms of social injustice, and particularly racism. In that case, perhaps the source of *Far from Heaven's* affect is nostalgia—not nostalgia for the 1950s per se or for, as Dyer would have it, the films of that period, but rather, for the moral clarity of a time when unpleasant social realities seemed visible, on the surface of things, and in clear violation of the explicit ideals of American democracy. It is nostalgia for the moral righteousness of the fight for civil and political rights that characterized the era of widespread, socially sanctioned exclusion. In effect, it is nostalgia for a melodramatic approach to social injustice.

Far from Heaven thus forces us to confront the question of whether the melodramatic mode is able to represent the social ills of the present historical conjuncture—ills to which, in the language of Wendy Brown, a “moral and juridical” framework seems increasingly inadequate. Is, for instance, the racial melodrama still capable of delivering moral legibility, when legal segregation has been outlawed, and when explicit social exclusion is universally deemed unacceptable? How does one represent racism melodramatically when racism has shed its melodramatic skin? In other words, I am suggesting that *Far from Heaven* is a film that points to a very political problem that concerns Jameson—namely, fashioning representations of the present.

Conclusion. We are now in a position to take the full measure of *Far from Heaven's* contemporaneity. On the one hand, by setting the narrative in the same time and place as Sirk's original, and by copying its aesthetics, *Far from Heaven* calls attention to the adjustments it makes to the narrative of *All that Heaven Allows*. The contemporary content of *Far from Heaven* is expressed in the asymmetry of the lives of Frank and Raymond—an asymmetry that invites a consideration of the political possibilities of identity politics. It is the film's structural approach, its juxtaposition of the characters' lives, that engenders a politically incorrect comparison of their suffering. On the other hand, if we consider the characters' situations not in relation to each other, but in relation to the community's censure, we are struck by the film's dated and moralistic representation of social exclusion. *Far from Heaven's* approach to prejudice both registers what is satisfying in the moral clarity of melodramatic representations of injustice, and it suggests the need for a new mode of representation, one that is better suited to contemporary forms of oppression.

The latter interest in changing forms of social injustice was prefigured in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. The form of social injustice depicted in the first part of *Ali* is explicitly exclusionary, like that of *All that Heaven Allows* and *Far from Heaven*. But in the second part of *Ali*, where the first part is remade, racism transforms into an opportunistic appropriation of the “other.” Fassbinder identifies the source and unity of these changing forms: it is capitalist society. For its part, *Far from Heaven* recognizes that the social ills of society take on distinct forms at different historical moments, but declines to characterize the peculiar forms of the present. Nor does it give an account of what, at bottom, ails its suffering characters. *Far from Heaven* thus seems to be a film without hope. In *Ali: Fear East the Soul*, hope depends on the recognition of the shared interests of workers of different races and ethnicities. In *All that Heaven Allows*, hope resides in the pastoral vision of a simple commodity-producing society. But *Far from Heaven* is mired in the nowhere place of “left melancholy”—nostalgic for the galvanizing moral outrage of an activist past, but unable to mount a political strategy for the present, not even in the realm of imagination.⁹⁶

Notes

1. See, for instance, Sharon Willis, “The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk,” *Camera Obscura* 54 (18), no. 3 (2003); Robert Sklar, “Far from Heaven (film),” *Cineaste* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2003); Amy Taubin, “In Every Dream Home,” *Film Comment* 38, no. 5 (September–October 2002).
2. See James Harvey, “Made in Heaven,” *Film Comment* 39, no. 2 (March–April 2003).
3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 19.
4. *Ibid.*, 284.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See Anne Friedberg’s “Les Flâneurs du mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 106, no. 3 (1991), for a critique of Jameson’s taxonomy.
7. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998), 133.
8. Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 131.
9. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19.
10. *Ibid.*, 134.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 21.
13. *Ibid.*, 284.
14. Pam Cook, in *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), considers *Far from Heaven* to be a “nostalgic memory film” which is defined by the way it “reconstructs an idealized past as a site of pleasurable contemplation and yearning” (*Screening the Past*, 4). But for Cook, unlike for Jameson, nostalgia, understood as a yearning for that which is lost forever, is not inherently reactionary: “it can be perceived as a way of coming to terms with the past, as enabling it to be exorcised in order that society, and individuals, can move on” (*Screening the Past*, 4).

15. Some commentators argue that *Far from Heaven* is not a remake at all. See Cook, *Screening the Past*, and Laura Mulvey, "Review," *Sight and Sound* 13, no. 3: 40–41.
16. Thomas Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake," in *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). See also Michael Druzman, *Make it Again Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes* (Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1975), and Harvey Roy Greenberg, "Raiders of the Lost Text: Remaking as Contested Homage in *Always*," in *Play it Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, ed. Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), for competing taxonomies. I discuss only Leitch because his taxonomy is most attuned to the temporal dimension (i.e., to the significance of updating or not), which I think is key to making sense of these films. See Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), for an assessment of these approaches and the taxonomic enterprise in general.
17. Thomas Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: The Rhetoric of the Remake," *Film and Literature Quarterly* 18, no. 3: 144.
18. *Ibid.*, 145.
19. In *Film Remakes*, Constantine Verevis categorizes both *Far from Heaven* and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* as homages. It seems quite clear that *Ali* does not imagine itself to be a secondary text at all, but one that attempts to apply certain of Sirk's insights to Fassbinder's own, more radical project. It is more plausible to claim that *Far from Heaven* is an homage; but, as I hope to demonstrate, Haynes's film is less recuperative and historical and more generative and contemporary.
20. *Ibid.*, 53.
21. *Ibid.*, 52.
22. *Ibid.*, 53.
23. Even Verevis, who is skeptical about "purely textual descriptions of the remake, particularly those which seek to ground the category in a rigid distinction between an original story and its new discursive incarnation" (*Film Remakes*, 28), thinks that the repetition of narrative units in the remake "most often ... relate to the content ... rather than to the form ... of the film" (*Film Remakes*, 21). He mentions *Far from Heaven* as a rare example of the way such talk (of story and discourse) can be "frustrated by those remakes which repeat not only the narrative invention of an original property but seek ... to recreate the expressive design of an earlier film" (*Film Remakes*, 28). I would only add that the uncommonness of this kind of repetition requires special attention.
24. Willis, "The Politics of Disappointment," 135.
25. Pam Cook has expressed a similar view. Cook writes: "Todd Haynes' probing beneath the surfaces of Sirk's melodramas reveals a hidden American history" (*Screening the Past*, 15).
26. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," 135.
27. See Chuck Kleinhans, "Notes on Melodrama and the Family under Capitalism," *Film Reader*, no. 3 (1978), for more on the relation between the age and class conflict in the film. See Michael E. Selig, "Contradiction and Reading: Social Class in *Imitation of Life*," *Wide Angle* 10, no. 4: 14–22, for an assessment of the relation between the conflicts of social class and "sex class" in Sirk films. See Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), for a historical review of the auteurist orientation of Sirk's criticism and for a critical assessment of scholarly close reading as a Film Studies methodology.

28. The misrecognition of the community is most obviously manifested in the language that is used to discuss Ron's vocation: he is repeatedly referred to as a "gardener." When Sara, Cary's best friend, learns of the affair, she asks incredulously: "You can't be serious. Your gardener?" The high-society cocktail partygoers similarly inquire, "A gardener?" to which another replies, "Why doesn't he find himself a better money-making vocation?" Even Cary's son, Ned, before he meets Ron, is disturbed by his mother's impending marriage to "old Kirby, the gardener[']s" son, to which Cary replies, "You don't know him." Ned answers, "We know the *type*."
29. Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8. Williams adapts Peter Brooks's treatment of the melodramatic mode in literature to film. See Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).
30. Perhaps it could be argued that Cary is also a victim-hero. After all, like Ron, her self-sacrifice goes unrecognized by her children and results indirectly in her headache symptoms. But I would add that to the degree that she comes to share Ron's ethical principles, her virtue multiplies in our eyes. If her love object were a scoundrel, would the breakup seem like such a self-sacrificing act? In other words, our perception of her victimization depends on our reading of Ron.
31. It is often the case in melodrama that virtue is shown by suffering. In *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Linda Williams has persuasively argued that in melodrama, victimization and suffering count as proof of virtue "for if virtue is not obvious, suffering . . . is." Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 29. My point is only that Ron is an exception to this rule. His virtue is demonstrated not so much by suffering (although he is shown to suffer at the hands of the Stoningham elite) as by deeds, freely chosen actions, which could only have been undertaken by a man in Ron's position.
32. Jon Halliday, in *Douglas Sirk*, ed. Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972), 61; (italics in the original).
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. It must be admitted that if Cary and Ron share the same ideals, they probably have a different assessment of how to behave in light of the gulf between "real life" and the ideal. For Ron, the ethical point of view dictates that one should act *as if* the "real world" were the ideal world; for Cary, to do so is hopelessly utopian. The conflict is not over *what* the "good" values are, but the conditions of possibility for the pursuit of those values.
36. Much of the critical literature around Sirk has focused on style, particularly his use of an "ironic *mise-en-scène*." It is worth noting that while scholars agree on the *fact* of stylization in the *mise-en-scène*, there is some disagreement on its effect and implications. Paul Willemen, for example, has said of Sirk's work that "It is extremely difficult to make any clear cut and precise distinction between stylization and parody." Willemen, "Distanciation and Douglas Sirk," in *Douglas Sirk*, ed. Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (Edinburgh Film Festival: 1972), 28. Elsewhere, Willemen has lamented the sophisticated viewer that misreads Sirk's films by "turning it into camp," a danger connected with an overinvestment in parodic readings of stylization. Paul Willemen, "Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System," *Screen* 13, no. 4: 133. See Lauren Berlant's "National Brands/National Bodies: *Imitation of Life*," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) for a critical assessment of the use of stylization in the funeral scene featuring Mahalia Jackson in *Imitation of Life*.

37. See John Mercer and Martin Shingler's *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004) and Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981) for this view. Mercer and Shingler grant that "From the opening scene of the film Ron is symbolically linked to a typically clichéd notion of nature" but agree with Schatz that the clichéd representation functions to highlight the way in which Ron's "alternative lifestyle" is not much better than the one Cary has fled. After all, "Ron ... seemingly free thinking, still adopts a paternalistic attitude toward Cary, forcing her to choose between the life and security that she has known or his 'new' way of living." Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama*, 67. Thus, by the film's end, the pathos of the false happy ending owes to the continuation (in a new guise) of Cary's oppression by patriarchy.
38. One could object that the *mise-en-scène* of Cary's world is similarly artificial. The difference is that in the case of her world, the style is consistent with the narrative: Cary's people are as inauthentic and contrived as the representation of the spaces they inhabit.
39. Linda Hutcheon—trying to understand why postmodern artifacts can be simultaneously deemed, by different critics, as both ironic and nostalgic—argues that nostalgia and irony have gone hand in hand for a long time. Her point is that both irony and nostalgia (contrary to the Jamesonian view that casts nostalgia, but not irony, as always an obstacle to "genuine politics") are "transideological," that is, they "can be made to 'happen' by (and to) anyone of any political persuasion": nostalgia was a feature of fascism and negritude. (One could object that negritude too was ideologically problematic.) In Hutcheon's view, this is the case because "to call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a *description* of the ENTITY ITSELF than an *attribution* of a quality of RESPONSE." Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern" (1998), <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>. Based on the same textual evidence—the contrived representation of nature—I think one could derive both readings proposed above.
40. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," par. 8.
41. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 28.
42. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," par. 9.
43. According to Williams, "A melodrama does not have to contain multiple scenes of pathetic death to function melodramatically. What counts is the feeling of loss suffused throughout the form. Audiences may weep or not weep, but the sense of a loss that implicates readers or audiences is central. And with this feeling of 'too late,' which Peter Brooks has explained as the longing for a fullness of being of an earlier, still-sacred universe, time and timing become all important." Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," 18.
44. In interviews with Jon Halliday, Sirk has admitted that although he did not remember much about *All that Heaven Allows*, "I do recall the following influences on me ... One of the first of all American literary impacts on my thinking, when I was thirteen or fourteen, was a book my father gave me: *Walden* by Thoreau. This is ultimately what the film was about—but no one recognized it, except the head of the studio, Mr. Muhl ... The picture is about the antithesis of Thoreau's qualified Rousseauism and established American society." Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk: Conversations with Jon Halliday* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 113–14.
45. Lance Newman, "Thoreau's Natural Community and Utopian Socialism," *American Literature* 75, no. 3 (September 2003): 515–44.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, 517. Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) has emphasized the importance of

- craft and art to this transformation. He has read the emphasis on self-transformation not so much as an intermediate step in the transformation of society as it is itself compensatory.
49. According to Leo Marx, "It is not the material or social conditions of life, it is not capitalism, that in his [Thoreau's] view accounts for the quiet desperation felt by the mass of men: it is their own spiritual inertia." Quoted in Newman, "Thoreau's Natural Community," 17.
 50. *Ibid.*, 10.
 51. The fisherman's accent in English sounds more like that of a native speaker of Italian than of Spanish, but his wife unmistakably speaks a few words in Spanish: "*Que bonita [of Cary]. Tanto gusto. Mi hija, Margarita.*" Some scholars, such as Judith Mayne, have thought them to be Italian. See Judith Mayne, "Fassbinder and Spectatorship," *New German Critique* 12 (Fall 1977): 69.
 52. It is worth noting that there was a sharp rise in Latino immigration, particularly Mexican immigration, to the United States during the 1950s as a result of the new demand for immigrant labor following World War II. Bracero programs, in effect from 1942–47 and from 1951–64, brought Mexican laborers to do seasonal agricultural work in the United States.
 53. The German title is *Angst essen Seele auf*, which means, roughly, "fear eats the soul." In German, this line is ungrammatical, presumably trying to mimic the speech of a nonnative speaker of German. The U.S. title is "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul." This may reflect the working title of the film, which was "*Alle Türken heißen Ali*" ("All Turks are Named Ali"). Most scholars writing in English refer to the film as "Fear Eats the Soul," which has the disadvantage of not reflecting the grammatical error. I will refer to it here by the U.S. title, which is not a perfect solution either, but has the advantage of suggesting the way the name and character of "Ali" function allegorically in the film.
 54. I recognize that "guest worker" (*gastarbeiter* in German) is a contested term used to refer to the hundreds of thousands of foreign workers recruited by the Federal Republic of Germany during the so-called economic miracle following World War II. The obvious irony of this misnomer is that guests, by definition, do not work for their hosts. See Rita C. K. Chin, "Imagining a German Multiculturalism: Aras Ören and the Contested Meanings of the 'Guest Worker,' 1955–1980," *Radical History Review* 83 (2002): 53. Hereafter, I will be using this term without quotations, though in some sense I mean them.
 55. Another example of this emphasis on the economic may be seen in the drama of the new Yugoslav worker at Emmi's job. Emmi's coworkers exclude this new worker from their wage negotiations because they worry she will jeopardize their chances at a raise.
 56. In light of this, it is interesting that *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul's* working title was "*Alle Türken heißen Ali*" ("All Turks are Named Ali"), suggesting that 1) Ali's experience is generalizable; and 2) Turks are in effect both "auslander" (foreigners) and "schwarz" (black). Relevant as well is the fact that Ali is North African and not Turkish, while in 1973, the top three guest-worker nationalities, in order, were Turkish, Italian, and Yugoslav. If one of the film's objectives is to generalize Ali's experience, why not make Ali typical rather than exceptional? Why invite the confusion of race with nationality? This complexity is precisely what is on display when the characters interchange "foreigner" and "black" in their discourse.
 57. The ulcer, and even the doctor's prognosis, come straight out of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. In the chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," Fanon understands the prevalence of the stomach ulcer in Algerian men in similarly social terms, as a disorder broadly caused by the "pathology of atmosphere" that accompanied the Algerian war. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 291.

58. Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 30.
59. *Ibid.*, 29.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 40.
62. In "Reading Fassbinder's Sexual Politics," chap. 12 of *Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), Richard Dyer has argued that several of Fassbinder's films (including *Ali*) exemplify a problematic political perspective, what Walter Benjamin called "left-wing melancholy." This term refers to a quietist leftist stance characterized by both a recognition of the desolation of capitalism and a refusal of the real world possibilities of collectivity, political mobilization, and social transformation. For Dyer, left-wing melancholy "does not see the working class as the agent of historical change—instead it stresses the working class as the victim of capitalist society and/or as hopelessly complicit in its own oppression." Dyer, "Reading Fassbinder's Sexual Politics," 177. Surely the working class can be a victim of capitalist society, complicit in its own oppression, and also the agent of historical change. What is certainly the case in Fassbinder is that successful political action is not depicted. But in *Ali*, there is a clearly marked class solidarity that is decidedly not a politics of identity.
63. Willis, "The Politics of Disappointment," 162.
64. *Ibid.*, 168.
65. *Ibid.*, 158.
66. *Ibid.*, 169.
67. See James Morrison, "Introduction," in *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All that Heaven Allows*, ed. Morrison (London: Wallflower, 2007), for a similar stance. By contrast, Laura Mulvey, "Review," *Sight and Sound* 13, no. 3 (2003): 40–41, takes the view that the film is pointing to a disanalogy: "At first *Far from Heaven* might seem to suggest that these two social oppressions [racism and homophobia] are equal and parallel in intensity, but as the plot unfolds social anxiety at homosexuality is shown to be infinitely less deep rooted than the hysteria caused by intimacy across the racial divide." Mulvey, "Review," 41.
68. The cliché is reinforced by the casting of Dennis Haysbert as Raymond. Haysbert played Clay Arlington in the 1993 black-and-white thriller-allegory of American race relations, *Suture* (Siegel and McGhee). In the film's diegesis, Haysbert is the identical half-brother of white actor Michael Harris. Within the film's diegesis, the two are supposed to look identical. Of course, from the spectator's perspective, they could not look more different: the one is black, tall, and strong, the other is white and scrawny. See Marcia Landy, "Storytelling and Information in Todd Haynes' Films," in *The Cinema of Todd Haynes*, for a thorough treatment of the use of cliché in Haynes's oeuvre.
69. Fredric Jameson (1991) considers this new "depthlessness" a symptom of postmodernism.
70. In "The Filmmaker's Experience: Question and Answer with Todd Haynes and Julianne Moore" (included in the DVD supplemental materials), Haynes says that many people have asked directly if the "message" of his movie is summed up by Raymond's line about getting beneath the surface of things, to which he has replied, "It's the contrary. Everything in this film is on the surface."
71. For an alternative account of "surface" in the film, see Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Beyond the Surface of Things: Race, Representation and the Fine Arts in *Far from Heaven*," in *The Cinema of Todd Haynes*.
72. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1991).
73. *Ibid.*, 138.
74. *Ibid.*, 115.

75. Willis, "Politics of Disappointment," 168.
76. The film also suggests the life possibilities of gay characters that are out of the closet. An example of this would be the inclusion of Mona Lauder's uncle, Morris Farnsworth, "the hotshot art dealer from New York," who snickers, with the socialites, at Cathy and Raymond in the art gallery scene. He is explicitly designated a gay character. Farnsworth is out of the closet, embraced by the group, and sees no common cause with Raymond.
77. And perhaps to this failed coalition we can add the figure of the Latino immigrant. There is an anomalous moment at the end of the film that depicts a new gardener at work in Cathy's yard. For a few frames, we can see that this gardener is neither black nor white; he has a long ponytail of straight, black hair and could be Latino, evoking ongoing "conflicts" between immigrants (mainly from Latin America) and African Americans around employment displacement and competition for low-wage jobs—yet another reminder of a highly fractured "rainbow coalition."
78. I use this phrase in the way that Slavoj Žižek does in his convincing critique of multiculturalism and the arguments of Laclau and Mouffe (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*) in "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" (*New Left Review*, September–October 1997). For other critiques of identity politics, see also Jameson (1991), E. San Juan Jr. (2002), Hardt and Negri (2001), Wendy Brown (1995, 2006), Adolph Reed Jr. (1999), and Walter Benn Michaels (2006).
79. See also Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics," in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
80. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 68.
81. *Ibid.*, 59.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, 60.
84. *Ibid.*, 27.
85. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 24, 43.
86. For this account of melodrama, see Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*; Williams, *Playing the Race Card*; and Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Picture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987).
87. See, for example, Amy Taubin, "In Every Dream Home," *Film Comment* 38, no. 5 (September–October 2002); Richard Falcon, *Sight and Sound* 13, no. 3 (2003); and Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007).
88. Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 37.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 236. "Cultural verisimilitude" was coined by Todorov and applied to film by Steve Neale. For Neale, "verisimilitude" should not be used as a synonym for "realism" or "authenticity," as he accuses Gledhill of doing, because according to Todorov, "the verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation to truth), but between discourse and what readers believe is true" (118–19). See Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1990), and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).
91. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 18.
92. In *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), Fredrickson considers the ideal type of the "overtly racist regime" to have been exemplified by the American South at the height of Jim Crow, in South Africa during apartheid, and in Nazi Germany.

93. Dyer, *Pastiche*, 178.
94. James Harvey wrote in *Film Comment*, "But it's the movie's condescension toward the past—unintended but unmistakable—that's most troublesome ... And in spite of a general level of intelligence and restraint, it goes on feeling that way—an enlightened movie about unenlightened people living in a ludicrous time ... If we (or our predecessors) were so dumb then, should we be feeling so good about today—watching this movie?" Harvey, "Made in Heaven," 55.
95. Pam Cook has argued that, in fact, *Far from Heaven* is questioning "linear progression, and the way we think of social progress and history." Cook, *Screening the Past*, 16. And certainly Todd Haynes takes himself to be rejecting progressivist models of history: "When most people see films set in the '50's today ... there's an immediate sense of superiority. It's all about the myth that as time moves on, we become more progressive ... So the '50's become a sort of earmark of oppressive politics and climate, which is flattering to us as we look back." Quoted in Geoffrey O'Brien, "Past Perfect," *Artforum International* 41, no. 3 (November 2002): 152–57.
96. See Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *Boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19–27; see also Dyer, "Reading Fassbinder's Sexual Politics," for a critique of Fassbinder's succumbing to left melancholy.