

A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH TODD HAYNES

From his 1987 short film, *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, the tale of the pop star's rise and early death told entirely with Barbie and Ken dolls, Todd Haynes has been one of the most idiosyncratic anatomists of the culture. Carpenter's brother and musical partner Richard succeeded in having the film removed from circulation, ostensibly for Haynes's unauthorized use of Carpenter's songs, and *Superstar* remains unavailable to the public.

Critical acclaim and occasional controversy has followed Haynes from *Poison*, his adaptation of Jean Genet stories, to *Safe* (voted best film of the 1990s in a decade-end *Village Voice* critics poll), the story of a housewife (Julianne Moore) who literally becomes allergic to her entire environment, to *Velvet Goldmine*, discussed in this interview. The spectacular and ambitious *Velvet Goldmine* borrows the structure of *Citizen Kane* to chart the rise of glam rock and the Bowie-like star who is the movement's brightest flame. In this interview, Haynes discusses the intricacies of filming a *roman à clef* about a group of people for whom identity was always a nebulous concept.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *Velvet Goldmine*, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (November 15, 1998):

SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Todd Haynes. Before we start I just want to say how exciting it is to see your career progress. Todd was one of the very first filmmakers to come to the Museum, almost exactly ten years ago with *Superstar*, his notorious and right now out-of-distribution film. You've been back a few times and in the intervening years made, of course, *Poison*, and *Dottie Gets Spanked*, and *Safe*, and now this. It's an incredible progression from a little doll movie, *Superstar*, to this.

HAYNES: To big doll movies.

SCHWARTZ: It must be a weird time because you wrote the film such a long time ago. You were actually, I think—almost four years ago, when you were here with *Dottie Gets Spanked*—you were dressed in glam, your glam hairdo, in heavy Stanislavsky preparation for the film. And now it was made and premiered at Cannes a while ago, and it's just hitting the theaters now. So where is it at in your mind, this project?

HAYNES: It's funny. There is that strange lag time in films, in anyone's experience making films, whether you're working independently or in Hollywood. But it just seems like, with me, at times to get real extreme. And it's bizarre, the whole kind of press attention to the glitter-rock themes in fashion and claiming that it's going to be this trend is very surreal to me because it just seems so much the result of a kind of media construction where a film gets put out and it has a certain theme, and those themes are brought back to public attention—related books or documentaries or stuff comes out. But it's not really as if it's coming from some deep, profound place in society that people like to claim, like there's this need for glitter rock again

SCHWARTZ: It's Miramax's need for glitter rock.

HAYNES: Yeah, exactly.

SCHWARTZ: You've talked in interviews about the films of the 1970s, and the films that really did come from something, like *Performance*, and *A Clockwork Orange*, and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. It seems like nowadays the whole marketing mechanism is so much more evolved that it's hard for films to really get discovered, come out of the culture. So I'm just wondering, in making this film

and evoking the films of the 1970s, what you were thinking of in terms of the film culture?

HAYNES: It's a really interesting question. A lot of people probably read that book, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, about the whole decade of 1970s filmmaking. It's full of—did you read it?

SCHWARTZ: I read long excerpts.

HAYNES: I really recommend it. There's a lot of gossip and a lot of dishing But one thing that's so interesting about it, just purely from a business standpoint, is the way films have changed and the way they get distributed today. And it happened with *Jaws* in '75, when they decided that—if people remember, before '75, it was very uncommon for any major release to open citywide or nationally, open in all the theaters at once. It would usually be an exclusive engagement. And there would be this ability for a film to enter into this sort of consciousness of the public and be discussed, and people would read reviews and wait in line and talk about it. And finally weeks and weeks later it would open citywide. And that changed when *Jaws* was a major release by a studio and they decided, "Hey, let's just try every theater at once." And, of course, they made so much money that that's been the mold ever since. And it's changed the ways films get received. It changes the way, the possibilities for many different kinds of films to enter into the consciousness of all of us. That was an interesting change in the way they're marketed.

But *Velvet Goldmine* was very much a—the 1970s are a really interesting era for a lot of different reasons to me. It's been well established how rich American filmmaking was during that period, and there was sort of a window of opportunity for director-driven films to be made, largely on the success of *Easy Rider*. That went away at a certain point, and we really haven't seen anything quite like it. And I think the independent cinema scene that people talk about in the 1980s was sort of a hope that there could really be some films with integrity coming out of again from directors. And I'm not sure that that's really been proven as true as we would like to think.

SCHWARTZ: There's also, of course, the way this film looks at music. The music scene in glam rock is the same kind of feeling, that you're celebrating a

period, and there's a double sense throughout the film of celebration and—

HAYNES: Lament.

SCHWARTZ: That's a good word. I was looking for a word like that. Yeah, at the same time, that must be a hard balance to pull off, when you're writing a film and making the film to get those two things going on at the same time.

HAYNES: In a way the lament aspect is what gave me permission to do a film this affirmative, yeah, so in a way, when I listened to bands like Roxy Music, I felt that there was this amazing amount of longing and loss, I guess. The lyrics are in [the] past tense. Most of it is set in this mournful look back to something lost, even from the very beginning, from the very first record. The whole sentiment it sort of stirs up is about loss and things that are no longer really available. There's a sort of mournful quality about that, which interested me a great deal. I wanted to cloak the whole film in that kind of a loss but still show you what was maybe possible for a brief time, through the fan's point of view and definitely framed by this very repressive 1984, which sort of stands in for the present day.

SCHWARTZ: So there is this double layer. It's like the 1990s looking at the 1970s—you put the 1980s in between. So it's looking at the glam rock period in the perspective of the 1980s in the present day. So I was just wondering where the 1980s layer came in.

HAYNES: The 1980s thing was really ... in a way I wanted everything in the film to be something that came out of the 1970s, even a look to the future. There was a very interesting element in the 1970s in glitter-rock music and themes that came out, particularly as it progressed from 1973 to 1974 to 1975. Where there was this sort of doomful sense of a doomful future lurking on the horizon. Bowie's record *Diamond Dogs* is a good example. It was based on the George Orwell book, and he wanted to actually do a musical or some treatment of 1984 and was refused the rights and did *Diamond Dogs* instead.

But also even like *Cabaret*, which was a huge hit in 1973 and fit right into this sort of metaphor for this decadent glitter culture and pop culture. That was

very celebrated at the time but with the sort of implication that there was something very dangerous looming on the horizon—that this decadence couldn't really last, that it was going to explode, and in many ways they were right, of course. There was something that really did come around. It wasn't maybe as glamorous and flashy and apocalyptic as they were suggesting, but there was something very repressive about to happen.

SCHWARTZ: And in film at that time you could have dark endings—the endings of movies in the 1970s were unsettling and disturbing. That sort of stopped.

HAYNES: Yeah, absolutely.

SCHWARTZ: You talked about loss before, and I'm wondering about how that relates to childhood because a lot of your films deal with childhood in different ways. This section in *Poison* of a suburban childhood seems to be, maybe—to have to do with your own suburban childhood, introducing dolls in your films—and then to start this film with Oscar Wilde, the delivery of a child at the beginning. So I was just wondering if there was any specific idea.

HAYNES: It's funny. With the exception of *Dottie*, really nothing in my films start from an autobiographical point. I find incredible personal material and connections in the process of researching, writing, and making the films, but rarely is that where I begin from. And it's funny, I'm almost more excited and intrigued by things that don't seemingly have any direct connection to my experience, like anorexia or something. And then in the process of doing it, discovering something very close that I can relate to.

And with glam rock, no. I wished I could have been Arthur Stuart. I wished I could have been that English kid. Because in America it was sort of impossible to have it hit you—virtually impossible, I think—to have it sweep you unawares, kind of just coming in from all sides and having that suburban mentality, being assaulted by all these possibilities. In America you had to be in the know a little bit more, it wasn't quite as mainstream a thing. And in a way it was those films like *A Clockwork Orange* and *Performance* and *2001* that were my equivalent to the glitter rock thing, films that took me out of my suburban life and gave me—you know, sort of

demanded interaction in a way. They entered your imagination, and they made you think, and they made you think that there are possibilities as an artist or as a filmmaker or as a young person.

SCHWARTZ: So at the time that glitter rock was big, how was it striking you? You were about thirteen or fourteen at the time.

HAYNES: I was even a bit younger than that. But yeah, it was, I was aware of it. And it was funny. When I did my research later I found out, because I grew up in L.A., that there was a really massive glitter rock scene in Los Angeles. And it was typified by very young, mostly teenage girls who hung out at this club called Rodney Bingenheimer's Old English Pub on Sunset Boulevard on the strip. And Bowie would go when he still had his long hair and then he went when he was the Ziggy thing, and Iggy went, and they all went and hung out at this place. And it was this really raging scene in LA. And the way it trickled down to me...

SCHWARTZ: At what time was that?

HAYNES: This was like from 1971 to 1974, pretty much. And the way I sensed it was more, because I did go to a private high school later on where I met kids who lived all over the city, sort of artsy private school. But at that point I was in junior high in public school. It was very much your neighborhood kids that you went to school with. But still there were these girls that were like these very precocious girls that—in the early 1970s in America people were into hippies. You couldn't buy a pair of blue jeans without taking them into the backyard and running them over in the car twenty times and putting them in the swimming pool for a week and then washing them fifty thousand times before you dare wear them to school because if they looked new, you were like so uncool.

All of a sudden the girls were wearing bright red nail polish, new shiny clothes, lipstick, like glossy, flavored lipsticks, and being very banal, very like, "Oh, yeah, Bowie ... Bowie's bi." (Laughter) And as I learned a bit more about what that was all about it was sort of a dangerous, something I couldn't quite meet. And yeah, it felt like I had to put it aside and go, "I'll get back to this later." I think you do when you're disturbed by things when you're young. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: One thing the film explores is that the boundary crossing was much more bizarre than it is today, there's a sense ... one thing that I think the film is doing is questioning the politically correct definitions of gay. And there's an idea that today there is more gay culture overtly in our culture, but that the definitions are also more rigid at the same time today.

HAYNES: Yeah well, more organized in traditional notions of identity politics, as people have termed it. And what was pretty amazing or radical to me in a lot of interesting ways about the sexual climate in this period, is that it was so bent on breaking down the neat little categories that we love as a culture. Straight, gay, male, female. It was really interested in blurring those lines. And that's far more dangerous to either side.

SCHWARTZ: So for David Bowie to come out and say I'm gay, and he called his parents assuring them that's he's not really gay. ...

HAYNES: Yeah. You'll hear every possible story about Bowie's coming out and all that. But it's pretty well documented. He explored, like most people did at that time. But I've spoken to the people who, like Mick Rock—the photographer who did all the Bowie record covers and Lou Reed—he was the MainMan photographer, for their company, traveled with them. And he was this—at probably any other point in history, just this nice straight guy, but who was just so was sucked into this world. And I think it took him about twenty years to begin to be able to really talk about what happened because it was a complete and total trip. People were really going for it, trying drugs and trying sexual experiments. And even if you weren't, you pretended that you were, made it look like you were.

SCHWARTZ: This may sound like really a sort of a simplistic question, but where in all your thinking now about glam rock, where did it come from? Because it's so different than everything in rock leading up to it was, towards expressing yourself and being natural. And so this total artifice, which you relate to Oscar Wilde and relate to British theatrical traditions, where did it come from? How did it arrive?

HAYNES: It was clear that there were traces of it in rock and roll from Elvis, Little Richard, The Kinks, and the Stones. There were examples of androgyny definitely throughout all those different periods, but never had it become so overt and so completely in-your-face before. And, I think, never had the whole idea of putting on a show been so much the point, but with a kind of element of attack and critique to 1960s culture and all of its assumptions. So it came from many different things. I think Warhol was a huge influence you can't underestimate, for both the way he produced The Velvet Underground, who became a key influence to people like Bowie, and to Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music. But the whole sensibility that ... put out there that you could become a star by dressing the part and performing. And you could recreate the star system in some dinky loft in New York, and it would be this ability to sort of, you know, replicate that whole process but deconstruct it at the same time.

SCHWARTZ: There was a lot of fascination with early Hollywood. I mean, we see the Jean Harlow picture as an homage to that.

HAYNES: Exactly. I don't think it could have happened, as you've already suggested without—it couldn't have happened anywhere but in England. It couldn't have happened without that tradition.

SCHWARTZ: But since you mentioned Warhol I have to ask you about Jack Smith, which was another—because now there's a discussion on the Internet in the experimental film group discussion about your film—

HAYNES: Really? I have to see this stuff. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: And Jack Smith—obviously, Jack Fairy—the relationship with Jack Fairy and Jack Smith.

HAYNES: Jack Fairy is named after Jack Smith. Was sort of meant to be that kind of character that Jack Smith was, who was this sort of, almost like a Little Richard, where it was going to happen no matter where this person found himself living, in whatever city, whatever era, he would become this thing, this bizarre collection of costumes and illusions. And the fact that Little Richard erupted in Alabama in the era that he did is incomprehensible. (Laughter) There's some incredible force inside that was just

going to happen. I just wanted—not to get into authenticity too much here, but to distinguish that from what the Brian Slade character represents, which is the much more savvy ability to sort of sense what's going on in the zeitgeist and pull from it. And maybe the Jack Smiths and Jack Fairys wouldn't ever come to life. And in many ways Jack Smith didn't. He remains a very obscure, peripheral figure, although a lot of people now realize how important he was, but he didn't have the impact he would have liked to have made.

SCHWARTZ: What's interesting in the film is that there's a lot of references to real people, and there's a lot of fiction. And obviously the big reference is David Bowie, but the film is not about David Bowie, and Bowie's music isn't in it. So I wonder if you could talk about what—how does Bowie play into this?

HAYNES: It is about Bowie. (Laughter) I can't not say that. Bowie is such a huge—he's the most influential figure in that whole period as far as I'm concerned. Maybe even beyond the music that he produced, the images he created are the ones that I think sum up the period most powerfully. And those images affected everyone around him, and people copied him. And he copied them. It was a kind of free system of equal opportunity stealing for everybody, which he was extremely articulate about—there was no hiding it. He called himself a human Xerox machine in the early '70s.

And what was funny about Bowie and amazing about him, and what made me know that I could only approach this film as a fiction, is that, the way in which he constructed himself many times over and then literally *à la* Warhol, there was this production of a play called *Pork* that came out in 1970 and played in New York and London, and it was the second-generation group of Warhol actors. And it was an outrageous play based on the phone conversations Warhol would have about parties that he had attended the night before, that Brigid Polk would transcribe before the diaries, and they turned it into this play. And it had nudity and sex and I think it was a white—like so 1970—a white set, all-white, white plastic table, and a big chocolate cake on the table, and that was it. And then, like a lot of nudity, and Cherry Vanilla was in it, and she was always popping her top off, and jumping into the cake and rubbing—all that kind of stuff. (Laughter)

Bowie and Angela [Bowie, then his wife] saw it in 1970 were blown away. "Wow! This is New York! This is really edgy." And the *Pork* cast had heard about Bowie, this guy who wears a dress. And they thought, "Wow, he's gonna be great," so they all met up. And of course Bowie was in just this big floppy hat and long hair, in hippie mode, which they were so un-into. Angela was wild, fantastic, and crazy. And they had all already plucked all their eyebrows and drawn them back in 1930s style, dyed their hair, were wearing platform shoes and glitter in 1970. Next time they saw Bowie he had shaved his eyebrows, dyed his hair, put on platform shoes. And when they set up this MainMan Studio, when Bowie changed managers and got Tony DeFries, who Eddie Izzard is doing a tribute to [in *Velvet Goldmine*].

The whole idea was literally as the film suggests in much broader terms, but not that much broader, "Let's put on a show." They hired the entire cast of *Pork* to be Bowie's entire company, MainMan. So they became the vice president of MainMan, the press attaché, the tour director. And these people had never been any of this stuff before, they were just these crazy New York nuts. And they performed Bowie's success to the world. And it worked. And they did everything that the film coyly, or not so coyly, suggests: play it like you're a star, buy two of everything, the best of everything, put it on RCA credit. So credit was just racked up. They would buy out huge houses that he had no business thinking he could fill, and they papered them and filled them with people, and they just really played it to the hilt.

So, the ways in which real life and fiction and fiction making—and at this particular time ... the music industry ... was very susceptible to hype in ways that—because it was moving from a cottage industry in the '60s to what would eventually become [a] mega corporate industry in the late '70s—and at this particular point it was susceptible to these kinds of machinations of public points of view, like probably at no other time. They were just ripe, ready, poised for that.

SCHWARTZ: What was the production of this film like for you? Because it's so much about spectacle and it has to be big and spectacular, and I've rarely talked to directors about what your budget is and

things like that, but the fact is that it's been out in the press that you had a very limited budget, seven million dollars, to make this. Never having done anything on this scale, and working with that kind of budget, what was it like producing this?

HAYNES: It was horrible. It was really, really tough. Christine Vachon's book actually—people have had heard about it. She wrote *Shooting to Kill* and has some of her journals from this shoot. They're really painful for me to read because they bring it all back. It was the hardest thing I've ever set out to do. And if it were not for the fact that I really did surround myself with fantastic people, great actors who I loved working with, and I've become good friends with a lot of them, and amazing designers and technicians, and a really great crew in London, I don't know how I would have gotten through it. And Christine and I didn't really have fun ever while shooting it. But they all did. And I think we made it possible for them to have fun. Christian Bale said at the end, he was like, "Todd, I've never worked on a film before where I always know that there's all that bullshit going on with the production, but I never have not felt it before." Which I couldn't believe. I just felt like, "He's got to be kidding me!" Ewan [McGregor] didn't particularly have the same experience, but I'm just glad that was true for a lot of the actors.

SCHWARTZ: There is such a sense of structure to it, which I mean we were talking about before, which once you've seen the film a few times, you'll see how intricate it is. But you also wanted to have a feeling of freedom. So I'm just wondering what the writing process was like, how you found a structure to it.

HAYNES: Yeah, it was tough. It was a lot of distillation, I guess. A lot of ideas, trying to get them down to the purest sort of condensation, almost so that things became almost archetypal events in the classic rock and roll movie in a way. In a sense the story is kind of generic and it was never intended to be more than that. It really was meant to operate much more on a level of spectacle and music, like an opera or like a musical, which—you don't really go to for story, per se. Maybe operas you do. But musicals—the stories are symbolic of other things and the emotion is found more through the surrounding elements: the color, music, spectacle.

But yeah, I'm not sure, it may be a curse to the film as well.

I know a lot of reviewers are like, "It seems so disorganized and so all over the place when you see it on first viewing," and then many people see it a second time and really do see that it's actually very planned out. And it was very hard when we were shooting. We were running behind, financiers were kind of not being horrible, but slightly—well, they probably were to Christine [Vachon]—she was protecting me from it. But they were saying, "He's gotta cut scenes, cut scenes." And I really couldn't—I wanted to cut scenes. I wanted to lighten the load for myself more than anything. But I couldn't. Everything had some narrative piece of information that was going to connect to something else. It was this real jigsaw puzzle, that was very preplanned, and it was very hard to change that midstream. It was impossible to. So we really shot the script. If you read the script, it's weird how close it is to the film. That's unusual for films. It's very, very close.

SCHWARTZ: Ewan McGregor is so great in the movie, but it might have seemed such an odd choice in the beginning to cast a British actor in such an essentially American role. So just talk about casting him. He's a pretty good musician, pretty good performer.

HAYNES: I saw *Trainspotting*, and I was really blown away by that performance, and I couldn't think of an American actor in his generation who had the same kind of energy. There are some great young actors in America, but there is this sort of tradition now that's a James Dean throwback, the sort of Johnny Depp brooding, introspective, heavy, feet on the ground. And I wanted Curt Wild to be this volatile character who could surprise you, who could just leap in the air, this sort of flame-like quality. And I just couldn't think of anybody. I thought of like a young Sean Penn or something. But I couldn't think of a real parallel today. So he was the only actor going into the process of casting that I actually had a real firm feeling was going to work. Went after him pretty early. And all the actors are playing some hybrid. No one was really themselves. Johnny [Rhys Meyers]'s Irish, playing English, Toni [Collette]'s Australian playing English and American, and Ewan [McGregor] was Scottish playing American, and Christian [Bale] was English

playing Mancunian with his perfect Manchester accent. So everyone was faking it.

SCHWARTZ: Have you been able to see the film with enough audiences to get a sense ... I'm curious of how this film might play to teen audiences or younger audiences.

HAYNES: Yeah, that's what I really wanted. somehow, despite all its ideas and its poetic liberties and all of that, that it somehow could—because those movies—again, going back to those movies from the late '60s, early '70s, which came out of the drug culture like *Performance* was probably the one I paid the most attention to while I was making this film. They're esoteric, they're kind of like, they're purposefully vague and the stories are—they don't always hold together. But you don't care. You're in it for something much more trippy and kind of more self-revelatory and something that's going to make you learn something about who you are in the process of watching these films; like a drug experience, which is what these films really did come from. And yet those films don't get made today. I just can't think of anything quite like that that kids can sort of obsess over like I did, seeing them over and over again, play the soundtrack with your friends, analyze it—that's what I really hoped could happen.

SCHWARTZ: I want to give the audience a chance to ask questions. If anybody wants to jump in and ask about this film or any of Todd's other work.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You mentioned that most of your films are not really autobiographical as far as the childhood aspect, and I've noticed a kind of a commonality with *Safe* today and *Velvet [Goldmine]* that the protagonists, that is Julianne Moore in *Safe*, and Christian Bale in *Velvet [Goldmine]*, are kind of untouched the same way that the other characters are. The other characters—there's a scene in *Safe* where Moore, where they're standing around and Peter is asking, "Why are you ill?" And one person apparently was abused as a child and blames herself for a tragedy. And then in here you've got—Jack Fairy's beaten up by kids, discovers a way with the mask, Brian observes the two older men having sex, and yet the protagonists are kind of, they come along at this from another angle. And I'm wondering if that's intentional, if that reflects that

your upbringing wasn't maybe as traumatic as the supporting characters.

HAYNES: That's really interesting, I hadn't really ... It's true, Carol and Arthur are these observers in a way, trying to do the right thing, and fit in the right way. Obviously Arthur's more—

SCHWARTZ: He does get his share of torture, though, from his parents—

HAYNES: But you're drawing it to an autobiographical question. Let me think.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If there's an intent, if that's intentional or not.

HAYNES: No, I guess it's not. I really do see the two films as being opposite sides of a coin in that they are both very much about questions of identity. But one, obviously, *Safe*, which gives you no real, gives you the wrong answers to what we're supposed to be in the world. And *Velvet Goldmine* offers this little brief moment of radical alternatives perhaps to what the world usually favors. Yeah, but that's interesting, I have to think about it more. But I'm not sure how it relates to me personally. But I think that directors are observers and that's probably innate to us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was just listening recently to the 1966 bootleg tapes of Dylan and there was one reference—and listening to the audience call him Judas and get so upset at his electrification. And then watching your film, which I've now seen twice, the whole Bowie thing meant a lot to me when I was growing up, and to my perception I don't see that kind of passion for music. It might just be my perception. I was just wondering if you see that or what you think these days. I can't imagine anybody screaming if Madonna decided to come out and play swing or whatever. (Laughter)

HAYNES: Yeah, I hate contributing to something that's in me, an instinct that's in me, which is a bit *passant* I guess, someone who does look back a lot. And because when you do think about the late '60s, early '70s and the climate—just even the most generic sense in the most mainstream sense, the way in which we were sort of forced to question authority and have some contempt for power and money and people who just want to make it in the

world. Those ideas are so unbelievably foreign to the contemporary world that we're in now.

It is shocking to me how really it wasn't that long ago, but it feels so far away. When you really get back to the mindset even watching a show like *Laugh-In*, which was a big popular mainstream hit on television, and the implicit political ideas in that show. Or it's interesting to watch *Saturday Night Live* over the years, the way humor has political focus or undercurrent that seems purposeful. The earliest *Saturday Night Lives* seem to be the most targeted to stuff that was going on in the world. And then you get to the different other generations of it, and they are just going through the same motions with the same kinds of skits but there's no point, there's no real target, and the humor is weak and silly and sort of gimmicky.

I keep thinking, "No, I don't want to reject what's going on today without really examining it closely." It's a very different world that we're in, and I do think young people in certain cities—there's a great progressiveness and openness to ideas that wasn't possible when I was young. But I think they don't always know what to do with that. There's not really a place to direct it. Everything was like a protest when I was growing up and in college. Any problem, you just go out and start protesting. And people don't have any—not that that was always practical and good. But it's very different.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wonder if this is accidental or not, but the Curt Wild character, at times he looked like Kurt Cobain. And my friend and I were just talking about that, and that's sort of like what you're saying, about, with the hybrids and how these people come out from the various parts of the country. And it's interesting that there he is in that film almost, even though it's not about his music or anything, but it was really striking.

HAYNES: It's really funny. For being such a control freak that I am, that, I have to confess, was absolutely and totally accidental. And Ewan himself didn't even realize it. He just happened. His physical features with that wig on just looked so much like Kurt Cobain.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The spirit of him, too.

HAYNES: Yeah. That wasn't something that he planned at all. He was really thinking of Iggy and Lou and the historically accurate, useful people to look to. But it wasn't really something that we picked up, on set. It was something that we saw in the editing room. The only time he brought it up is when we were having one of our earliest discussions of the film. He hadn't even read the script yet and we were in London having coffee and he said, "You know, actually once I was mistaken for Kurt Cobain." And you can't—when Ewan's skinny, lost a little weight, and [has] his normal hair, you don't see it. I was like, "Huh, I really don't see it." And he said he was at some rave once, and I think it was after Kurt Cobain had died, and girls who were tripping were coming over a mountaintop. (Laughter) And they saw Ewan. And one girl was like, "Oh my god." (Laughter) and Ewan went [gesture]. (Laughter) And it went out of my head from that point on. I don't mind it for the reasons you said, because it does sort of—

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's like there's where the passion was in music.

HAYNES: Yeah. He's named after Kurt Davis, a friend of Jim Lyons, my co-story writer, who was this great sort of gay punk guy who died, a great spirit.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The whole David Bowie thing is interesting. Even the film is named after a David Bowie song, right?

HAYNES: Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yet in the bedroom scenes when this poster is on the wall of all the glam rock people, there [are] no David Bowie pictures. Is there a reason for that, except that they wouldn't let you play his songs?

HAYNES: It was tricky to know what kind of real-life real characters to put into background scenes because we were reconstructing it all. It was meant to be a parallel universe to the real universe, or like a dream that you have where all of the real things are mixed up and out of place. So, you obviously know all those bands well, which people in England will know better than in America, and again it's a quick shot where we just sort of pan by. So I didn't want to draw a huge amount of attention to which

of the peripheral bands would play. But again, we picked people from the more mainstream side of the glitter scene, like Bryan Ferry or any of the art-school tradition that the film is really focused on. We chose to do the more glitzy ones. But yeah, Elton John's in the magazine.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about the decision to make a fiction film on this real period and if there is any sense of how you would address people who may feel something's missing, who were all so excited by that period, who want to get to the real stories or rumors or figures or whatever.

HAYNES: To me the whole tradition of trying to get to the real truth, particularly when we tell movies about famous people, is very suspect and wrought with all kinds of contradictions. And yet they're fun, we all like it, and we don't care. There's a real pleasure in just watching it—"Oh, that's Tina Turner, that's what happened."

And in a way the glitter rock people, while being so dismissed afterwards for this kind of attitude were ultimately maybe a few steps ahead of that conundrum, in that they were acknowledging the artifice from the outset and with a great deal of wit and irony and pleasure in what was inherently fake, not just about standing up and the fact that I'm up here in the spotlight in glitter clothes and you're down there in the dark watching me. That there's a huge difference there.

But ultimately by saying that identity is fake and we dress up every day into who we are, and these artists are going to take it to such a degree that they are going to change who they are every year. It's going to be Ziggy Stardust and then Aladdin Sane and the Thin White Duke and Halloween Jack—an endless succession of characters that fans were invited to impersonate and mirror themselves with and change who they were accordingly. And when you're a young person and everything is unstable and every minute seems like a year, that to me was a really healthy offering, something that really was liberating and like, "yeah, it's alright." "Changes" was the word. There wasn't the whole idea of finding you and

sticking to it and being true to that. This was being questioned in a really brilliant way.

SCHWARTZ: What you're describing is what all your—as different as all your films are—what all of them are really about. And, of course, the ultimate film that questions identity is *Citizen Kane*, which is such a structuring idea for your film, and I'm wondering ... I guess two different questions: one is, how the *Citizen Kane* thing came in, and then it seems like what glam rock is about is so much about what your whole approach to filmmaking is about.

HAYNES: Well, no, I think—except that as I said earlier that I'm often more comfortable taking a critical perspective to issues in the world as I see it. And even in a film like *Poison*, which draws from Genet so heavily, I also had, like, a real, "I can't give Genet to the world." I can't do that. It's not possible. All I can do is quote from him but interpret it solely through my eyes as an American filmmaker in the early '90s doing a treatment of that work. And more, I'm talking about what in America right now makes that work pertinent or those issues pertinent. What problems or constraints or restrictions make that necessary to think about and then you can think about it yourself, find your own solution.

But glam rock—the *Velvet Goldmine* film is probably the one that does actually give you a little taste of something different, of a different kind of pleasure. There's just a reservoir around it of loss and the accessibility But I think I know, for people who have to bring a lot of history, memories, and associations to the period, this can be a frustrating film to watch. Especially the first time, where you're sitting there, "Wait, that's not—it's all mixed up." But I just think to really appreciate and embrace what they were doing you have to acknowledge its complete liberation from notions of truth and realness and what really happened. I also think we never know what really happens behind closed doors with famous people. We want to know. What we do know—and some of them give you no clues, they shut the door, that's it. And you sit there going, "Oh man, what's going on?"

But these guys flirted with their audience and put out so many clues and played their characters off stage and on stage and there's pictures of Bowie kissing Lou Reed and Mick Jagger and there's all

of this stuff circulating. And to me, that gets out into the world. That's real. That's like the stuff kids take home and look at and think about and fantasize, and it triggers real responses, physical and emotional. To me that's more real than anything we can ever know about famous people, and maybe more interesting. And these artists were actively engaged in putting those things out there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Actually I wonder if—because there seems to be not a moment where there's not music in the film—and if the music came before the structure of the images or how that worked?

HAYNES: Did people hear that question in the back?

SCHWARZ: There's so much music throughout the film, did the images come from the music? Was the music there first and that suggested the images?

HAYNES: Yeah, to a large degree the music was there in the writing stage, and whole scenes would be written almost verse by verse, paralleling a certain song, sort of like it was a musical in many ways. And it was interesting at times, like the song "Sweet Thing" by David Bowie. I wanted to use it in

the rooftop scene at the end. And the dialogue was written in and around verses. And then we couldn't use the song. And in this case we just lifted the song out and [were] left with this structure. And it worked really well without the music. I think I like it more. I think maybe the music underscores the points more than they need to be made. So that was an exception to the rule. But for the most part the music was there from the beginning.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And the other thing, if you make an equation between the transformation from Slade to the Stone character with *Ziggy Stardust to Let's Dance*. Like Bowie's transformation.

HAYNES: It never occurred to me. (Laughter) It was grotesque what happened to many of the key glitter figures in the 1980s. And I mean that, not to just shy away from focusing it onto Bowie, but in a way no one was exempt from that or very few people were, and actually Bowie is very critical about that period now. He is really dismissive about it, which is interesting in that it is actually his most financially successful period. But, yeah, a lot of horrible things happened then. (Applause)

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