Acknowledgments

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Ann Douglas directed my dissertation at Columbia University, out of which these essays grew, and she was the first person to encourage my efforts at bringing together cultural criticism and autobiography. One of the amazing things about Ann is that she can see the value of work that is very different from her own, and she knows how to help her students find and then follow the paths that are most meaningful to them. In this regard, she is the most courageous, unselfish, and imaginative teacher I’ve ever had. I think that she, more than anyone else, has helped me find my voice as a writer.

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*Widescreen Dreams* is dedicated to the memory of Gary Lucek. Gary was my closest friend and on-again, off-again boyfriend during the late
eighties and early nineties. In 1984, as an undergraduate at Columbia, he organized a study group that sought to initiate gay men into current political and theoretical discussions about gay identity, culture, history, and activism. He also conceived of the study group as a much-needed social alternative to gay bars and dance clubs. In the spring of 1987, I joined the study group and became revolutionized by the community of gay men that I met there and by my relationship with Gary. He helped me discover myself as a gay man in mind and body.

At Yale University's third annual Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference in October of 1989, Gary delivered a paper entitled "Out on Vinyl: Readings Between the Grooves in Gay Male Pop Music," a semiautobiographical analysis of the relationship between gay men and 1980s pop music. The paper inspired me to want to write something in the same vein, and so I began to write what has now become the second chapter of this book, "Love Barbra," an essay on my relationship as a gay man and as a proto-gay child to the music and films of Barbra Streisand (I discuss Gary's essay in more detail in that chapter).

In December of 1992, after a severe bout with depression and a series of other misfortunes, Gary killed himself. When Gary died, my world fell apart. Since then I've traveled very far in my grief, but I continue to live out the ripple effects of his death.

At Gary's memorial service, one of our friends recited Elizabeth Bishop's 1976 poem "One Art." The poem is a litany of things the speaker has lost—door keys, spare time, memory, "my mother's watch," beloved houses, cities, rivers, "a continent," and finally, "even . . . you." Somehow, she has learned to live without all of them, "though it may look (Write it!) like disaster" (178).

I remember at some point in the late eighties thinking that my life would be unimagineable without Gary in it. This might have occurred to me when I was involved with ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and when, as I recall, Gary had just, mercifully, tested negative for HIV. Or maybe it was around the time of the AIDS-related death of Gary's ex-boyfriend Bill, and I began to ask myself, What if something should happen to Gary? I was afraid that if for any reason Gary were gone, I wouldn't know how to survive.

Now the unimaginable has happened: Gary is gone, and I've written his life into mine in ways that I could never have dreamed.