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LOLITA DAVIDOVICH
STEVEN BAUER
FRANCES STERNHAGEN
GREGG HENRY
TOM BOWER
MEL HARRIS

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PINO DONAGGIO

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Production Designer
DOUG KRANER

Director of Photography
STEPHEN H. BURUM A.C.E.

Co-Producer
MICHAEL R. JOYCE

Produced by
GALE ANN HURD

Written and Directed by
BRIAN DE PALMA

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PLANET DE PALMA

by Anne Billson

A playground in the Californian town of Bay View. Child psychologist Dr Carter Nix (John Lithgow) tells a young mother called Karen that his wife Jenny has been delayed at the hospital where she works. Karen offers him and his two-year-old daughter Amy a ride home. On the freeway, with Amy dozing in the back seat of the car next to Karen's son Sam, conversation between the two adults becomes strained when Carter proposes to an incredulous Karen that she send Sam to Oslo to take part in behavioural experiments conducted by Carter's father. Karen refuses and tries to laugh it off, but Carter suddenly sneezes dust into her face. Temporarily blinded, she's forced to stop the car on a slip road, where he chloroforms her.

Two joggers appear on the road behind them. Karen slumps forward, setting off the car horn. The joggers hear the sound. The children stir in the back seat. Carter panics, but there's a cackle from the passenger window. His streetwise, sarcastic alter-ego Cain (Lithgow again, accessorised with sunglasses, leather jacket and cigarette) is about to take control, as he always does when Carter makes a mess of things. Cain says, "Kiss her!" and Carter reluctantly kisses the unconscious woman. The joggers see the couple and carry on jogging.

Carter is introduced as the perfect husband and father, but it takes only five minutes for this personable façade to be stripped away to reveal a kidnapper with a split personality. It's the sort of revelation that, once upon a time, would have been withheld until the climax of a movie. But this is just the beginning of *Raising Cain* (1992), which wastes little time in adding murder to Carter's crimes before veering off on a twisted roller-coaster ride in which the point of view keeps shifting, one genre morphs into another, dreams merge with reality, Carter's other alter-egos join the party, and the plot keeps doubling back on itself. In many films, such narrative inconsistencies would be flaws, the result of inexperience or ineptitude. But *Raising Cain* was written and directed by Brian De Palma, a man with some 19 features already under his belt, and he knew exactly what he was doing.

The only constant in this labyrinthine plotting is De Palma's technique, guiding us through the mayhem with all the trustworthiness of a pyromaniac showing us around a burning house. *Raising Cain* is an exhilarating celebration of the filmmaker's craft – but this is all part of the trap. The gliding camera movements and slick production values hoodwink us into thinking we're watching a mainstream, audience-friendly picture, not a

quasi-experimental one which evokes the psychological state of its characters as much as it tells their stories. You can't help thinking that *Raising Cain* might have been greeted more respectfully if only it had been shot in low-budget black-and-white, with subtitles. If only it hadn't been so much *fun*.

In modern film histories, De Palma is designated one of the 'Movie Brats', that generation of filmmakers who were instrumental in reshaping Hollywood in the 1970s. But despite occasional box-office hits like *Carrie* (1976), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *The Untouchables* (1987) and *Mission: Impossible* (1996), he has never achieved the status or influence of contemporaries such as Francis Ford Coppola or Steven Spielberg, perhaps because his most interesting films have been made in the margins. He was fired from his first Hollywood studio picture, a comedy called *Get to Know Your Rabbit* (1972) whereupon he retreated into the independent sector to shoot the psycho-thriller *Sisters* (1972), an imbroglio of murder, split personality, mad science and voyeurism, filmed in what would soon be recognised as typical De Palma style – with clever camerawork, shifting points of view, slow-motion, split-screen, sly voyeurism, dark humour, and homages aplenty to Alfred Hitchcock, not least a soundtrack by regular Hitchcock composer Bernard Herrmann.

De Palma's failures have proved as vital to his career as his successes; after each box-office debacle he has stepped back, scaled down and created something more personal. On the other hand, the line between success and failure in his work has sometimes been hard to define. *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), *Blow Out* (1981) and *Scarface* (1983), for example, flopped on their release but subsequently acquired devoted followings and underwent critical reassessment. Perhaps they were ahead of their time, or perhaps they appeal more to younger generations accustomed with the sort of genre slippage that is nowadays par for the course. *Raising Cain* might be seen as an early adopter of the 'rubber reality' school of non-linear storytelling and unreliable narrative that would became increasingly popular in its wake, spreading from the science fiction mind games of Philip K. Dick into crime, thrillers, horror, comedy and romance. But *Raising Cain* goes even further down the rabbit hole, since it's not just the story but the film itself which is leading its audience by the nose. That dust Carter sneezed into Karen's eyes? De Palma sneezed it into our eyes as well. From this point on, we can no longer trust what we're seeing.

De Palma started preparation for *Raising Cain* just as *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), his big-budget Hollywood adaptation of Tom Wolfe's 1987 satirical bestseller, was being written off as a catastrophe. "You've got to be a genius to make a movie this bad," wrote Richard Schickel in *Time*. De Palma always had his champions, chief among them Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker*. So when she too added her voice to the damning consensus by calling *The Bonfire of the Vanities* "an exercise in wrong-headed style", he felt "completely lost".

Clearly the filmmaker needed to find himself again, even if it meant stepping back into a genre from which he'd been trying to break free. After *Dressed to Kill* and *Body Double* (1984), and despite branching out into gangster films and a war movie (1989's *Casualties of War*), his name was still associated with psycho-thrillers, and he was repeatedly dismissed as a purveyor of style over substance, a manipulator and misogynist. This last accusation seems especially unfair in light of his 1970s work; in a decade when the films of Martin Scorsese, Coppola or Spielberg could only rarely muster a strong female character, *Sisters*, *Phantom of the Paradise*, *Obsession* (1976), *Carrie* and *The Fury* (1978) all featured big, complicated, unconventional roles for women. In *Raising Cain*, the story sides with Carter's adulterous wife (Lolita Davidovich) and also pumps the minor role of Dr Waldheim the psychologist (Frances Sternhagen) into a funny, poignant, fully sympathetic character.

But *Raising Cain* is not your average psycho-thriller; it's a psychological assault course of narrative feints and false signposts, echoed in the way Pino Donaggio's deceptively sweet lullaby of a score acquires undertones of menace, or evolves into a cacophony of *Sturm und Drang* during the melodramatic set-pieces. Characters we thought were dead turn out to be alive, others pop up for a scene of two before disappearing, others we assumed were imaginary turn out to be real. Seldom has 'style-over-substance' left its audience feeling so destabilised. If there were ever a tagline that summed up a director's oeuvre, it's *Raising Cain*'s "De Mented, De Ranged, De Ceptive, De Palma". In press notes the film was originally described as a "romantic suspense thriller" but when an early screening was greeted by hoots of laughter, this was quickly changed to "a devilishly funny film which combines wry humour with shocks and thrills".

It wasn't the first time a De Palma film had wrong-footed a publicity department. On their initial releases, *Phantom of the Paradise*, *Obsession*, *The Fury* and *Blow Out* proved slippery subjects for distributors, who never quite knew how to market this knowing mix of genre, quirky humour and cruelty. Audiences too were sometimes bewildered by movies that were sold to them as straightforward entertainment, but which repeatedly threw them off-balance with their rejection of realism, invitations to partake of the voyeurism on-screen, and refusal to wrap up the plots in reassuring fashion. Rare is the De Palma film with a feel-good ending; the viewer is invariably left unnerved. To add to the destabilising effect, several of his movies are bookended with sequences that are subsequently unmasked as TV shows, dreams, or movies within the movie. Like Carter Nix, the films present themselves as something familiar, but turn out to be altogether more troubling.

When *Raising Cain* was released in 1992, fans and detractors alike recognised its director was no longer just borrowing from Alfred Hitchcock, whose influence can be inferred from the unexpectedly early demise of a major character, the killer watching a slowly sinking car

containing the corpse of his victim (both echoes of 1960's *Psycho*), and a cameo from San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor, one of the locations in *Vertigo* (1958). In *Raising Cain*, De Palma is borrowing as much from himself as from Sergei Eisenstein, whose runaway pram from *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Patyomkin*, 1925) he had already "quoted" in *The Untouchables*. There are nods to Michael Powell (the psychologist in 1960's *Peeping Tom* using his own child as a guinea-pig, as well as a recurring impalement motif already glimpsed in *Carrie* and afterwards recycled in *Mission: Impossible* and 2002's *Femme Fatale*), and to Dario Argento – one of *Raising Cain*'s shock reveals is a reworking of a memorable shot from *Tenebrae* (*Tenebre*, 1982). But all these directors were contributing to the visual syntax of film and, as De Palma said of Hitchcock to Peter Keough of *Sight and Sound*, "It's almost impossible not to fall into his grammar, which is, of course, the best."

De Palma is far from being the only filmmaker to salt his work with visual quotations of older movies – nowadays you'd be hard-pressed to find a shot that hasn't already been seen before, many times. But De Palma scarcely bothers to conceal his borrowing, something that has always seemed to infuriate his critics. In fact, it's arguable as to whether it's conventional borrowing at all, as opposed to a peculiarly De Palma-esque variation on the French New Wave's cut-and-paste reconfiguring of Hollywood conventions in ways that were then reclaimed by American filmmakers in the 1960s, including De Palma himself with his early freewheeling counterculture comedies such as *Greetings* (1968) and *Hi, Mom!* (1970). But critics will always be more generous to, for example, a French *auteur* such as Léos Carax, with his obvious homages to Jean-Luc Godard or Georges Franju, than to De Palma when he inserts a male killer dressed in women's clothing, à la *Psycho*, into *Dressed to Kill* or *Raising Cain*.

With De Palma, the style is the substance, and is not just (as many critics would have it) "showing off". The director's sense of place is masterly – his camera typically tracks through locations, mapping out the territory so we're left in no doubt as to who or what is where. In *Raising Cain*, there's a bravura four-minute Steadicam shot of two detectives escorting Dr Waldheim through police headquarters. It's not just a pleasure to watch (and peppered with humour as the psychologist keeps trying to wander off in the wrong direction), it's also delivering a massive chunk of psychobabble as Waldheim analyses Carter's mental condition for our benefit as much as for the detectives'. All De Palma is trying to do is avoid what he described to Keough as, "that awful scene that happens in every thriller where you bring the audience up to speed. Should we sit them in an office and have them drink coffee, and have her talk for five minutes? How do you make that interesting?"

Making things "interesting" is the director's modus operandi. *Raising Cain* is not real life – it's Planet De Palma, a strange and intoxicating world in which a routine conversation or car journey is transformed into an operatic event. For all its borrowings, this film was *sui generis*. There would be nothing quite like it until 10 years later when, licking wounds reopened by the failure of *Mission to Mars* (2000), the director retreated to France and made *Femme Fatale*.

Anne Billson is a film critic, novelist and photographer whose work has been widely published. She has lived in London, Tokyo, Paris and Croydon, and now lives in Brussels.

CAIN'S CAMERAMAN IS ABLE ALLY

by Mary Hardesty

This article originally appeared in the November 1993 issue of American Cinematographer *magazine.*

The relationship between director and cinematography has been described as a marriage of two talented yet different souls, but in some respects this relationship is even more intimate and intense than a marriage. How many married people spend 14 hours a day together, making creative decisions under pressure day-after-day for months, often outdoors in bone-chilling or blood-boiling weather?

In assessing the work of Stephen Burum, ASC, whose résumé includes four Brian De Palma films (*Body Double*, *Casualties of War*, *The Untouchables* and *Raising Cain*), three Francis Ford Coppola films (*Rumble Fish*, *The Outsiders* and second unit on *Apocalypse Now*), as well as Danny DeVito's *The War of the Roses* and the upcoming *Hoffa*, no one could argue that Burum is, to say the least, a fan of Italian-American style.

Is it merely coincidence that the multi-award-winning director of photography, who has an Italian-American wife, has spent a large part of his career working with Italian-American directors?

A mysterious Mona Lisa smile creeps across Burum's face as he contemplates the question. "I guess I like Italians and get along with them. They have a nice operatic sense of drama," he observes. "Francis, Danny and Brian all have a sense of what life is really about and they always tell a story in an interesting way. In their films, if someone is in love, they're really in love. I think that theatrical drama is what makes people pay money to go to see a movie. These directors are all able to distil a common experience down to its most theatrical elements."

In assessing the collaborative chemistry between a cinematographer and director, Burum chose to focus specifically on his work with De Palma. "Brian is just a great showman and, like Coppola or Spielberg, he's identifiable with a particular product," says Burum. "In Brian's pictures you will always have some sort of obsessive behaviour that creates part of the drama. There's also a moral message in all of his films."

These two elements exist hand-in-hand in *Raising Cain*, De Palma's latest suspense thriller. "He didn't want the audience to know exactly what they were looking at until all the pieces of the puzzle were laid out, so we deliberately didn't rack focus or add funny music or fog in the dream sequences," explains Burum. "We didn't want the audience to start to form their own opinions about what the female lead [played by Lolita Davidovich] is thinking. We wanted to experience what she was feeling and not automatically assign their own meaning to a scene."

Burum learned how to interpret a director's vision while studying film at UCLA in the 1950s. "In those days they trained everyone to be a director," recalls Burum. "People would graduate and go out to look for work as directors and not find any. My teacher, Charlie Clark [ASC], advised me to concentrate on being a production cameraman because there were more jobs in that area."

The foresight paid off. While other film students struggled to find jobs as production assistants or lab technicians, Burum was asked, at the ripe old age of 22, to be the director of photography on Disney's *My Family Is a Menagerie*.

Unfortunately, in the midst of his big break, Burum was drafted and spent two years stationed in New York, "wasting time" shooting training films for the Army. After his discharge, a film school friend got him a job as a camera assistant on musical television shows. Soon Burum was photographing a succession of glamourous leading ladies.

Working with the likes of Ann-Margret and Raquel Welsh taught the young cinematographer how to empathise with a star's concerns and still get the shot the director needs. As he came to be perceived as a team player and problem solver, the work started to roll in.

Burum was working on his 21st feature, *Man Trouble*, when he got a call from De Palma asking if he wanted to come to Palo Alto to photograph *Raising Cain*. "I was attracted to the *Cain* script because it had to do with dreams and split personalities," says Burum. "I thought it would be a real challenge to shoot De Palma's tapestry of dreams-within-dreams and characters-within-characters."

According to Burum, the audience is not supposed to completely understand the plot of *Raising Cain* until the last frame. "To enjoy De Palma's pictures you need to see them several times to really appreciate the layering," observes Burum. "The best thing about working for Brian is being in on the secret. The challenge is to give enough clues so people catch on without being blatant in how you go about it."

One way Burum accomplished this was to use light on the actors' faces to visually tie the dream and reality sequences together. Burum worked closely with production designer Doug Krayner (who also worked on *The Untouchables*) to create just the right visual mood.

"We had a long talk about contemporary night. Night time is mostly represented in the movies as blue, which goes back to the olden days of blue moonlight," explains Burum. "Nowadays you don't have a lot of blue moonlight in the cities where this script takes place. Most of today's street lighting is either a blue-green from the mercury vapour or yellow from the sodium vapour. Since the film is full of highly stylised suspense scenes at a motel, we thought we'd do a yellow night."

Accomplishing this look took a tremendous team effort. The motel was repainted to reflect the added yellow neon time, the lighting fixtures were refitted with yellow fluorescent lights, and sconces were added to lend the scenes a fifties' feel.

"If the neon is a primary colour, you usually don't have to worry about overexposing it," says Burum. "Doug and I worked together to come up with the right shade of yellow and choose the right transformers, so we didn't have to do a lot of extra work to make the neon look right on film.

"You could say the key to the whole picture is illuminating confusion," claims Burum in mock film scholar style, remarking that De Palma will enjoy the obtuseness of this statement.

To further add to the film's suspense, special effects teams brought in giant lightning arcs which had to be carefully choreographed to the camera's actions. A second camera was brought in to shoot a particularly demanding slow-motion scene in which a small child falls over a railing.

"It's mindboggling," exclaims Burum. "A crew on location is really a mini-city – 120 people, offices, telephones, faxes, first aid, caterer, security. This support made it possible to execute any ideas Brian or I had on the location.

"The grips and the prop guys could get me things at a moment's notice since they carry an entire inventory in their trucks. Things like parallels may never be needed, but they were there in case we had a great idea that required them. A well-stocked, well-trained crew is essential to making filming flow smoothly."

Burum finds that necessity becomes the mother of invention on every shoot and believes that it is critical for the director of photography to have a strong relationship with his crew

to solve any problems that come up. He offers an example of this support: “We filmed the interiors on a stage that was in a concrete slabbed building with laminated beams that were designed to support only the ceiling’s weight. My experienced grips knew that any additional weight on the beams would cause the entire ceiling to collapse.”

Burum’s key grip came up with a way to suspend the lights over the top of the set using aluminium poles and scaffolding. “We’ve worked together before and he knew I wanted to avoid putting lights on the walls themselves. Because every time we move a wall we have to relight, which takes forever,” says Burum, who likes to work with the same camera and lighting teams whenever he can. “Once you find a group of people who work together well, you try to keep them employed as much as possible to keep the team together.”

Over the years Burum has developed a particularly close relationship with De Palma, who is considered by some to be aloof. “We’re both very shy and introverted, so we get along very well,” says Burum. “I have no problem communicating with him. Brian has terrific body language, and I’ve learned to interpret it. If I’m halfway across the room, I can tell you what he’s thinking. Some directors just love to sit around and analyse every detail, but Brian doesn’t like to have a bunch of idle conversations. I also like to work in that environment because you don’t have as many interruptions to break your concentration. A production will always take on a director’s personality, and it’s up to the cinematographer to learn to work that particular way. For the team to work you have to understand the director’s timing and how he wants to tell the story, and then support him to the best of your ability, no matter what your position.”

De Palma’s movies have a distinct visual mark. He always presents the story from the point of view of the character, which means the camera crew must be exactly positioned where the person would naturally be.

“It’s an unspoken rule; Brian’s style puts you in the character’s shoes and sometimes this can make physical shooting a bit more difficult,” says Burum. For one tricky POV of Davidovich going from a dream state to a waking state, Burum mounted a Panahead on top of a Conner fluid head to enable the camera to execute a Dutch tilt at 90 degrees. “It’s a transition where you think it’s real and then she wakes up in bed to talk to her husband. The camera had to tilt up with her when she sat up,” Burum recounts.

De Palma’s propensity for extremely long shots also necessitates a strong collaboration among all of a production’s departments. *Raising Cain* features two long single-take scenes, one at the motel and one at City Hall. The sound, camera, set design, prop and location organisers had to carefully co-ordinate their responsibilities so no one would be in anyone else’s way during the City Hall shot. The four-minute-plus continuous Steadicam shot followed actress Frances Sternhagen as she delivers a complex speech while following a pair of detectives through a hallway, down a flight of stairs, onto an escalator, and into an elevator before ending up in a basement morgue.

Long takes may make the director of photography’s job more difficult, but Burum thinks the extra effort is worth it. “Whenever possible, I think it’s always better to deliver the information in one shot,” says Burum. “That way the audience has their own timing instead of being hit over the head with what’s supposed to be important.”

At the heart of Burum’s working relationship with De Palma is an element necessary in any successful team. “The nice thing about working with a director like Brian is that he takes his work very seriously, but also maintains a good sense of humour and perspective about it,” says Burum. “He understands that you make movies to entertain people. You do your best your work as a team and hope the audience likes it, but sometimes it’s not until years later that a movie comes to be appreciated.”

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Raising Cain is presented in its original 1.85:1 aspect ratio with 2.0 stereo sound. The High-Definition master was supplied by NBC/Universal.

The alternative 'Director's Cut' presentation was sourced from the same HD master and was assembled by Peet Gelderblom using an earlier draft of the film's screenplay. This version was completed with the approval of director Brian De Palma, and was supplied for this release by Shout Factory.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Production Assistant Liane Cunje
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Authoring & Subtitling DCU
Artist Nathanael Marsh
Design Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Steven Bauer, Anne Billson, Tom Bower, Federico Caddeo, Pino Donaggio, Elijah Drenner, Chris Dumas, Jordan Fields, Peet Gelderblom, Mel Harris, Gregg Henry, Paul Hirsch, John Lithgow, Cliff Macmillan, Jon Robertson, Jennifer Rome, Melanie Tebb, Gareth Tennant

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