



SUTURE



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## CAST & CREW

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**Dennis Haysbert** Clay Arlington

**Mel Harris** Dr Renée Descartes

**Sab Shimono** Dr Max Shinoda

**Dina Merrill** Alice Jameson

**Michael Harris** Vincent Towers

**David Graf** Lt Weismann

**Fran Ryan** Mrs Lucerne

**John Ingle** Dr Fuller

**Sandy Gibbons** Sidney Callahan

**Mark Demichele** Detective Joe

**Sandra Lafferty** Nurse Stevens

Directed by **Scott McGehee & David Siegel**

Screenplay by **Scott McGehee & David Siegel**

Cinematography by **Greg Gardiner**

Editing by **Lauren Zuckerman**

Music by **Cary Berger**

Production Design by **Kelly McGehee**

# DEAD RINGERS OF FIRE

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by Philippe Garnier

When creepy Vincent Towers brings his half-brother Clay to his new digs, he explains why he lives in an empty bank building – '60s modern, white, loopily circular – instead of their father's mansion: "I chose this place for aesthetic reasons." Lacanian concepts notwithstanding, I think this is as good a yardstick as any to talk about what a mindfuck *Suture* is. Beyond all the intelligent and deep theories, the film invites you first and foremost to stick with the pleasure principle.

What strikes you most in watching *Suture* 22 years after its release is not so much how brainy or smart or even funny it is, but how ridiculously bold and self-assured it is – and *was*, for Scott McGehee and David Siegel, two young thirtysomethings making their first feature – and a self-financed one at that. As McGehee said at the time, a bit peeved at being asked once too often if they weren't anxious that audiences might find the black-white conceit too odd to allow for suspension of disbelief: "The worst thing for a first feature is if it doesn't do anything to stand out in any way."

Cheeky.

But then their film reeks of brashness and presumptuousness, except that, unlike most directorial first-timers, they didn't make their movie as if it were going to be their last, or try to throw in every idea they ever had in the course of their short lives. Instead, they made this cool, ultra-controlled, fully-realised *thing*, the likes of which no-one had seen in 1994. Nobody has made anything remotely close to this since – not even this pair. The nerve of these guys, strapping their already tricky financial gambit with the hundred-pound gorilla of their black-and-white, black-as-white scheme! And then making it work somehow, taking delirious pleasure in ladling symmetries, ironies, and all kinds of Rorschach whatchamacallits.

Even though *Suture* judges cops and psychiatrists equally inept, as any Alfred Hitchcock movie might, Siegel and McGehee are not telling that kind of story, or making that kind of movie. *Suture* is a film about identity swap and amnesia, the staple of many post-war American *film noirs*, but it is not (as movies like *Hollow Triumph* [1948, aka *The Scar*] or

*The Dark Mirror* [1946] are) overly concerned with the technicality and foolproof-ness of the dastardly deed. Questions about dental records or fingerprints or the flammability of plasticised ID cards are rarely finessed or elucidated upon, as viewers and critics often pointed out at the time of its release. The questions simply don't matter. After all, Vincent Tower's car was known all over town – he was a recognised figure, if not a popular one. Clay, on the other hand, is a nonentity, a stiff from a small town called Needles, a place he only remembers when the story demands it.

Siegel and McGehee take you for a ride, however intellectual it may be, and the ride is just that: an incredibly physical journey. There's a lot of texture and tissue in *Suture*. There's also a lot of irony. And if some of the clever details are a bit overwrought (the name of Dr Renee Descartes, for one), others are simply delicious: a man being surgically sculpted into another man is named Clay, except he's not anymore. Now he's Vincent, rising from the ashes of a white Bentley to take his place of privilege in – where else? – Phoenix, Arizona. Some of the quips are equally memorable, like "It's hard to have a line-up without a face." In fact, the whole sequence is hilarious, tweaking the most hackneyed of all *film noir* scenes with the forlorn cop, the argumentative lady witness, and the overbearing lawyer. ("Precisely, it boggles the mind.")

*Suture* is Hitchcockian insofar as it privileges the exterior over the interior, the physical over the mental, the niftiness over the story, the "bit of business". Like Alice Jameson driving a black Bentley – and what exactly is she doing on that roof parking lot? *Suture* also shares with some of Hitchcock's films a calculated hollowness, a sort of distanced quality from its actors, who at times seem to talk to each other from either side of a fish tank. Siegel and McGehee said in interviews that an air conditioner that couldn't be turned off in the converted bank building used for Vincent Tower's home made it necessary to loop most of the dialogue recorded there – which certainly contributes to the anaemic, almost zombie-like quality of several of the performances. All calculated, of course, as Mel and Michael Harris, Dina Merrill and Dennis Haysbert are fine actors. This eeriness is only appropriate for a place as supine and vacuous as Phoenix – all that air is its own form of suffocation, a uniquely Western sensation that Todd Haynes exploited similarly in *Safe* the following year.

Maybe their whole thing really got kicking when they found, or had to settle for, that striking white bank building. They went all circular, 360° tracking shots becoming the weapon of choice, the narrative becoming an almost unbroken circle: accordingly, they chose to start almost at the end, only to have pontificating Dr Shinoda, our narrator, take us "back to a proper beginning, to a time before identity has been confused". And, lest we forget,

there is Johnny Cash chunky-chunking his great 'Ring of Fire' on the car radio just before Vincent pushes the pound button of the payphone and Clay goes up in flames. Just when we think the boys have overplayed their hand a bit, Tom Jones bursts back in on the gurney ride with *his* version of the song, that great guitar track backing him all the way. (Jones, a Welshman who spent his whole talented life wishing he were one of the boys in the Million Dollar Quartet at Sun Records, ended up singing better and more Southern-like than any of them.<sup>11</sup>) Even the plastic surgeon, Descartes, goes full circle about what she thinks of Clay/Vincent. First, she assures Shinoda: "I've been around boys just like him my whole life – there should be a complex named after them. And in this case [she looks at the picture of Vincent and his skeet trophy], what you see is what you get." And then... she falls for him, only to be gently savaged by the filmmakers when she rambles on about "characterology" and "physiognomy", nipping and clipping the surgical threads around his "Greco-Roman nose", assuring him that a man with such a nose "couldn't kill anyone".

But then, all figures of knowledge and authority in this picture are essentially wrong – anticipating the parental anxieties in later films *The Deep End* (2001) and *What Maisie Knew* (2012). First and foremost, it is our resident psychoanalyst whose voice is upended: "How is it that we know who we are?", he ponders as the narrator in the film's great pre-credit sequence. He also states firmly, in the final words of the movie: "Of this we can be completely certain." It is a diabolical thing for the two writer-directors to give us this quote-happy doc who speaks in the seesaw manner of Alec Guinness, who explains Clay's dreams with the reductive patter of any good shrink in a Hollywood movie, yet is so ostentatiously wrong. Saddled with the task of recovering 'Vincent' his memory, he takes Clay to Vincent's house, where so much gunplay has occurred, and will again: "Dreams are memory triggers. Here, in your house. Your memory is here, I promise you." And when in the end Clay has clearly made up his mind to remain Vincent, the good doc opines to the viewer – once again in voice-over – that this will be "a false happiness" and that Clay "buried the wrong soul". But his sententiousness is just irony on the filmmakers' part, because the snapshots they offer of 'new' Vincent all belie there being anything wrong with wallowing in 'old' Vincent's wealth and threads: Alpine skiing, horseback riding, and luxuriating in Cartesian nook in Venice. No wonder these guys claim to love Patricia Highsmith's novels.

[Here, an aside to one of my favourite Hollywood hubris stories, statutory limitations having

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1 - Jonathan Romney pointed this out in a review, but played on the *N* word.

long lapsed. Sometime after the release of *Suture*, Siegel and McGehee try to buy the rights to Highsmith's already-filmed *This Sweet Sickness* (1960), and, in order to assuage the crabby old gal, send her their adaptation, which she must have liked as she agrees to sell. Elated, they then send her a DVD of *Suture*. The agreement is almost immediately rescinded, via her agent. Now, the question of interest: what did Patricia Highsmith find so objectionable in *Suture*?

But back to the images the filmmakers flaunt at the film's conclusion: there *must* be something wrong with them, as Siegel and McGehee have gone to such lengths to create a space of incredulity, a fissure in the suspension of disbelief that allows us time and space to ponder what's gone cockeyed with the world, and why it should be so. Why is everything so uniformly white around Clay? Why is Phoenix so homogenous and well-heeled? It is here that we fully enter the space they call "suture", enabling one to think, while still enjoying the ride. And enjoy it you do, so delirious is the filming: as with the almost amorous camera movements in the operating room, fleeting from gruesome instruments to drip machines, on cushions of opera music. Though Clay and his bandages and eye-grille may look like someone went medieval on his ass, *Suture* remains incredibly genteel and subdued and buffered, much like life among the one-percenters in Phoenix. The cops are dogged and convinced, but they, too, keep their proper distance.

Which brings us back to the black-and-white scheme, and around again to the Janus and Rorschach theme, motifs extending way, way back (and proudly so) into the genre. Nunnally Johnson's 1957 psycho-noir *The Three Faces of Eve*, for example, splintered Joanne Woodward's character into Eve White and Eve Black. But it's important to note that the black-and-white photography here is anything but retro: it's the most gorgeous widescreen white and grey ever made in the 1990s, influenced by '60s Japanese movies certainly, but here infused with something else: a sort of visual cotton wool that is most unsettling and most effective. And, should the "conceit" of *Suture* still be an issue, one simply has to wonder what this movie would look like had Siegel and McGehee made it in colour, in a normal commercial ratio, and with two actors resembling each other, or a single actor playing the dual role. One would probably have to come to the same conclusions as the hapless cop: "Too many loose ends." Whereas with this implausibly encompassing black-and-white scheme, *Suture* rises off the operating table as one of the few truly surprising and original films of the 1990s, and certainly the most stunning debut of any filmmakers from that period.



# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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by Jonathan Romney

"How is it that we know who we are?" asks the voice-over that begins Scott McGehee's and David Siegel's perplexing identity thriller *Suture*. The film opens with a tense, enigmatic sequence: a black man waits in a building at night, as an armed white intruder stalks him through glacial, strangely vacant architecture. The voice-over continues, speculating in measured, clinical tones on identity and the crisis of self brought on by amnesia. The scene ends with an extraordinary overhead shot – gun at the ready, the black man waits behind a shower curtain as his foe approaches, while we anticipate both a showdown and

an explanation. But we get neither – only a gunshot, a fade to white, and the voice breaking off with the enigmatic proposition that we should now go back "to a time *before* identity has been confused".

Was there *ever* such a time in the cinema of mystery? *Suture*'s opening works is a dramatization of the key questions underlying the Hollywood *noir* tradition – the questions asked by William Holden lying face down in the pool in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950); by the burnt-out case stranded in a diner out in nowhere in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1945); and by every Marlowe-style gumshoe who ever got coshed on the head and came round in a blur of swimmy vision and momentarily lapsed memory: "Who am I?" and "How did I get here?"

Be warned that the film's considerable surprise factor may be spoilt for you if you read



the following. *Suture* is the story of a role-swap between two half-brothers, Vincent Towers (Michael Harris) is rich, elegant, self-assured and almost certainly a parricide; we know little about the other, Clay Arlington (Dennis Haysbert), except what's obvious, that he's a poor, blue collar guy from the sticks. Clay has been invited to town by Vincent; they only recently met at their father's funeral, where Vincent was struck by the remarkable physical resemblance. He has dark plans: he wants to kill his 'twin' so that he can himself conveniently disappear, thus evading the rap for his father's murder. He persuades Clay to put on his (Vincent's) clothes, plants his own ID on Clay, uses remote control to blow up his own car with Clay at the wheel, and leaves town. However, Clay survives, though terribly scarred and amnesiac; the local doctors, reasonably assuming that the unrecognisable victim before them must be Vincent, decide to rebuild Vincent's rather than Clay's face. Plastic surgeon Renée Descartes (Mel Harris) studies pictures and videos of Vincent to restore Clay's features, while psychoanalyst Dr Shinoda (Sab Shimono) tries to reconstruct Vincent's identity – from scraps of Clay's memory and dreams.

Had McGehee and Siegel executed their script literally, *Suture* might have been an ingenious, poignant psychodrama about a man robbed of his own face and obscurely struggling to find his self again – and the interest for us might have been in anticipating a restored Clay foiling his brother's plans. As such, it would have been neatly served by the film's stylish visuals, its bleached-out widescreen depiction of a vaguely anachronistic urban landscape that immediately evokes both Samuel Fuller and *The Twilight Zone* (in fact, it's more directly based on Hiroshi Teshigahara's 1966 role-swap film *The Face of Another* [*Tanin no kao*] and Yoshitarô Nomura's 1962 *Tokyo Bay* [*Tôkyô wan*]). However, *Suture* adopts a "conceit" (as the filmmakers term it) that makes it impossible to regard the film merely as an essay in genre cool, and turns all our perceptions belly up. For though everyone in the film seems to think and say entirely otherwise, Vincent and Clay are not alike at all: Clay is black and Vincent is white. Yet no-one seems to notice. And when Clay is reconstructed as Vincent, he emerges from the bandages with his *own* face intact apart from an eyepatch. The usual notions of difference and identity thus become meaningless – or rather their meaning is suspended, as the film defies to provide our own working definitions.

All of which may be an unusually dense set of considerations to arise from a debut feature, but they are also a testament to the eclectic concerns of the film's San Francisco-based filmmakers. McGehee has an MA in Rhetoric from Berkeley, and before turning to filmmaking was working on a PhD in Japanese film history. Siegel studied architecture

at Berkeley, took a Masters in Fine Art at the Rhode Island School of Design and has also worked as an artist in San Francisco. They have been working together since 1989, making two prize-winning shorts before *Suture: Birds Past* (1989), in which vox-pop interviews about Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) are intercut with the story of two guys trying to video Melanie Griffith (daughter of Hitchcock's star, Tippi Hedren); and *Speak Then Persephone* (1990), a restaging of the Persephone legend in Orange County.

*Suture*, one imagines, might have started life as a straight thriller which then took a conceptual detour in the casting. In fact, McGehee and Siegel explain, the casting idea arose out of the writing: "We attempted to construct a story that was generally about identity. It was in attempting to work out the story that the 'conceit' came up. It started in genre conventions – amnesia, plastic surgery, twins, mistaken identity, psychoanalysis. They were the map we started from. It could have been two guys that looked exactly alike. Or it could have been a man and a woman. We felt that to pursue this idea we had to push it as far as we could take it so that people wouldn't be trying to make sense of it in a realistic way. And we still find people trying to create narrative scenarios in which one's mother was black and one's was white."

Calling the film *Suture* seems something of a provocation, with its play on surgical stitching and Lacanian theory (you could also read it as a symbolic disruption of the word 'sure': certainty undermined): "The name came early on, as a joke. You don't want to make a film that's about theory from that end: it would be very dull. This film's very loosely about suture theory; it's more about identity and identification. Suture theory is about how the system identifies with an accessible system – learning to understand the relationship between who he or she knows himself/herself to be, and a symbol of himself/herself that exists outside. That initial bond allows them to play in that symbol exchange which is language and culture. We might have come up with some elaborately structured system where point-of-view shots were reserved for certain situations about suture, but we didn't do anything like that. It's really on a metaphorical level that you talk about suture in the film."

One of the most distinctive aspects of *Suture* is its setting. Shot in Phoenix, the film uses buildings (notably Vincent's impersonal ice-palace home) that seem to belong to no recognisable time or space, and that look very much like 'found' places: "We were trying to create a sort of unreal space. We wanted Vincent's space to be like a warehouse, but we found there was no warehouse district in Phoenix. Then we found this empty bank. The original idea was a reconstruction of both of space and of Clay as a

character, and the commercial space which he eventually occupies, this circular space, plays metaphorically with what's going to happen. Phoenix is almost like an abandoned city, it's so large and overbuilt and the streets are so dead it feels empty – it has a high modernist, very spare aesthetic. We tried in all aspects to keep the film mid-60s modern. We were set on black and white widescreen from the start – we were watching a lot of black and white films when we were planning it. Those films seem to create an environment in which you can have a story going on, but the space is unreal enough that the formalism obliges you to think of ideas while you're watching them.”

The identity-swap narrative might have been fascinating in itself, but *Suture* includes further levels of interpretation through the two experts, Descartes and Shinoda, and this provides a whole new set of problems for the viewer. “From the genre plot, a character with amnesia implies a psychoanalyst. The way psychoanalysis has been used in films is really funny. It's such a strict discipline, and to make it as reductive as films have tended to makes it become a wildly categorical, hyperbolic interpretation within the films themselves – *The Dark Mirror*, *The Locket* (both 1946), *Ruby Gentry* (1952)...”

At one point, Shinoda (who presents the film as a case history in the opening voice-over) announces, “As Freud says, nothing is insignificant” – a cue to over-reading if ever there was one (we might do well to remember that, as Freud also says, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar). The evidence of our senses is sometimes undermined, sometimes over-confirmed by what we see. Few villains have ever been so *manifestly* rotten as Vincent, with his white suit, slicked-back hair and disdainful sneer, a cartoon incarnation of the generic evil yuppie. Yet when we find his features confirming what we know about his ‘nature’, are we more or less misguided than Dr Descartes is, with her ‘white Renaissance’ reading of Clay’s manifestly black features, in particular his “Greco-Roman nose” as a highly ideological signification of nobility of character?

It's here that *Suture* is most problematic, at odds with tradition of films in which a black character becomes white or vice versa – *Watermelon Man* (1970), *Soul Man* (1986), *Chameleon Street* (1989). Here the black man remains black, while being perceived as white. But there is the question of whether black and white here are anything other than a conceptual differentiation; is blackness used purely as a metaphor and thus stripped of the political realities of racial identity? It's true that Clay finds himself suddenly transplanted into a very white world of aristocratic chic and European ideals, represented on the soundtrack by Brahms, Wagner and Haydn. But

we know nothing of Clay's own cultural make-up. As critic Roy Grundmann has pointed out, the film's images show a black man, rather than an African-American: Clay is only ‘black’ because it's Haysbert that has been cast to play him. But what do we expect a black character to be?

The film opens up gaps for us to fill with our own meanings, so it's not surprising that the filmmakers feel that *Suture* will be read differently by black and white viewers: “I don't think you could help but interpret the film differently given the particular racial context within which you operate. In that sense it's a particularly American movie, because of that potential split in interpretation, which would be racially different in every other country. For us, the film is foremost about identity. We didn't set out to make a film about black experience in America. How we've attempted to control these social metaphors in the film is pretty broad – we've attempted to keep the film more in the parameters of sociology than of race, the way the homogeneity of society affects the construction of a personal identity.”

“We talked a lot about it – can we do this? Is it a fair game to be playing? The climate of culture in the US is that everyone's afraid of making the big mistake, even just participating in a cultural dialogue that is in any way outside what is defined as one's place in the culture. To say it's exploitative – in that we've created a reductive black character – is an argument one can make, but we think it's very, very narrow.”

That very reduction, though, is *Suture's* strength, because it obliges us to ask questions and suspend conclusions with in a way that's more of anomaly in cinema than it's ever been. By facing us with the stark polarity of black and white as colour (meaning purely chromatic difference), *Suture* challenges us to ask how they might mean something other than colour – and what racial identity might mean at all when its usual cultural signifiers are so radically suspended or exaggerated. Meanwhile, the film's neatest joke is on its soundtrack: the one pop song amid all those classical Teutons is Johnny Cash's ‘Ring of Fire’, as sung by Tom Jones – a redneck country anthem performed by a white Welsh boy who built his career on sounding like a black American.

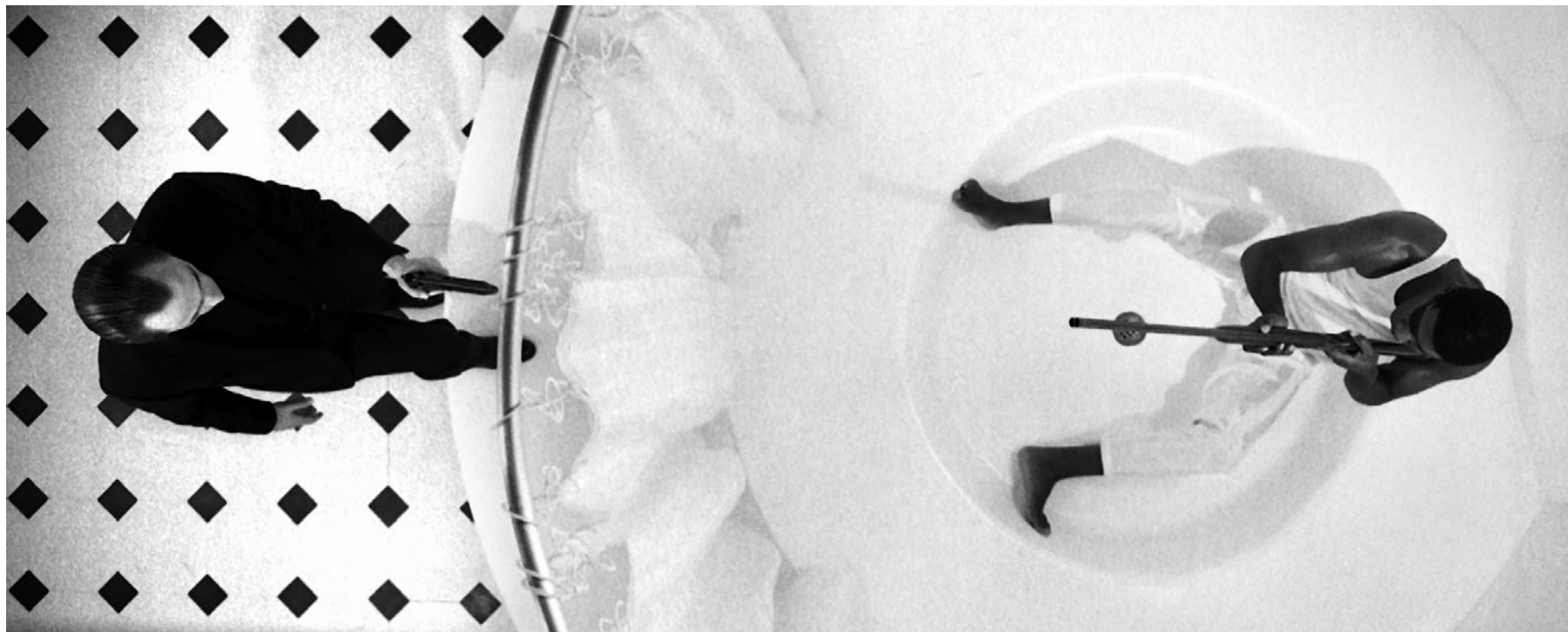
*This article was originally published in the February 1995 edition of Sight & Sound. Reprinted with permission.*



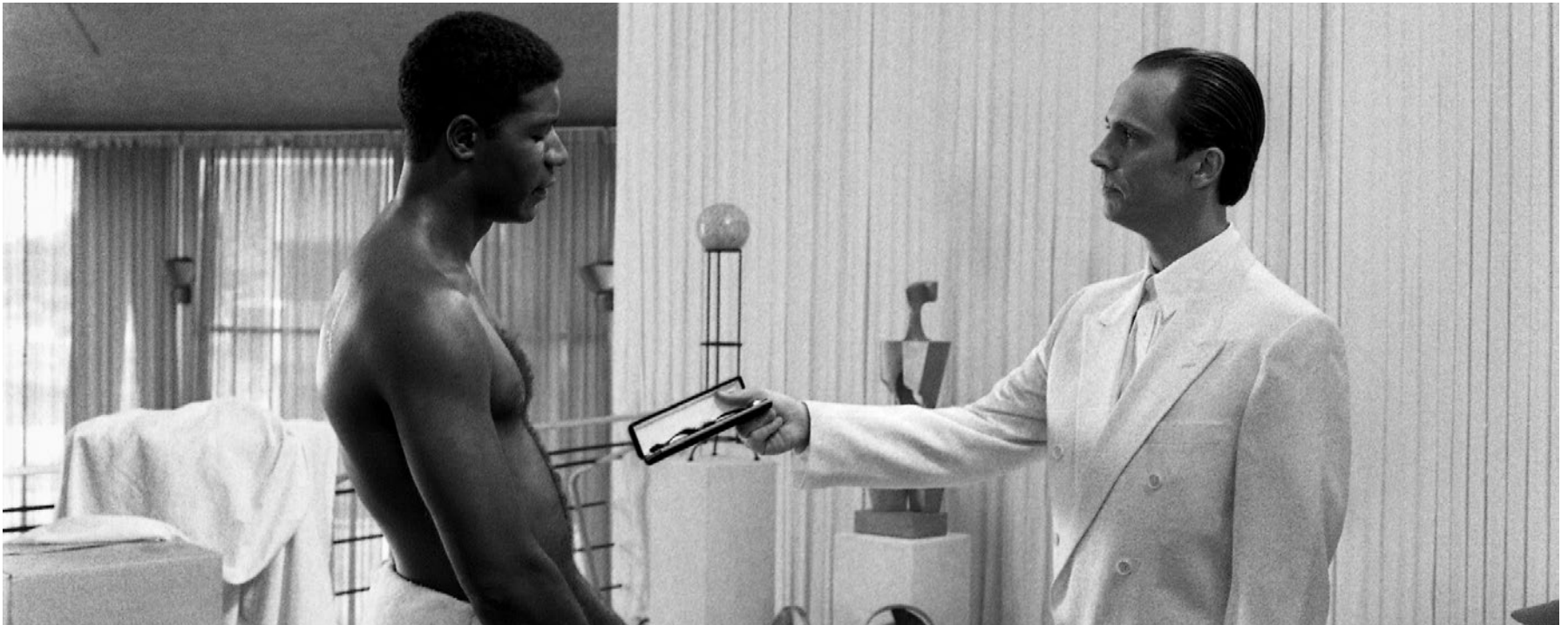
## SCENES FROM SUTURE

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"This set was completely designed, and built in a warehouse in Phoenix. This shot was very explicitly described in the script, and it came out exactly as described. It appears at the beginning, as a sort of pre-telling of the climax, and it fades to white. We call it the 'suture' moment, because it immediately precedes the title card, but it's also emblematic of the relationship between the two men, a perfect diagram of them. Here, Vincent returns in black, and Clay's wearing white. We used excessive light and overexposed the film by a couple of stops, which increased the contrast. We decided we wanted it to be a black-and-white film, rather than *noir*, something that would be clinical and different."



"This is the moment where Vincent intimidates Clay into wearing his garments and his watch. It's the moment where he foists his identity onto Clay. The space is white-curtained and all Vincent's belongings are still covered; he's only recently moved in. This shot is in a sequence where we deliberately 'jumped the line' – we shot two people looking directly at each other, from both sides; when cut together, it makes them appear as if they're changing positions. There was an air-conditioning system in the building that we couldn't turn off, so all the dialogue in most of these scenes had to be re-recorded or really filtered, and it gives it this other-worldly quality. We used a lot of sounds that were recorded for [Steven] Soderbergh's *Kafka* (1991), recorded in huge stone buildings in Prague. Very low-level stuff, very subliminal, but it gives an eerie quality to these scenes."



"This is the scene of the bandage removal. When Dennis Haysbert lifted up the mirror, no-one knew it was a two-sided mirror, and when Renée Descartes had walked into the room, there she was in the back of the mirror as well. It worked out so nicely, because you don't know when he lifts it up whether he hadn't perhaps turned the mirror to the wrong side. Why is there a reflection on the other side? There's that shift: for so much of the film we see photos of Vincent, and Clay looking into mirrors. Now suddenly it's Renée. She's the doctor reconstructing the patient in some image that really came from her. It highlights the theme nicely, but it's totally accidentally."





"The Rorschach blot itself was suggested by the space in Dr Shinoda's office. We hadn't thought of having an oversized, dominating blot until we found the location. A big abstract expressionist blot, it highlights how fast and loose we're playing with psychoanalysts. Everything about our use is oversized and overly reductive interpretation of Clay's dreams, a too-simple analysis of everything. It's surprising that no post-modernist painter has done huge Rorschach blots. Phoenix, where we shot the film, is designed so that a central street goes up the centre of the city. It's a mirror city, it folds out so that the streets on either side have the same numbers in different directions. It's the city of Rorschach blot."



## CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

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***Suture* opened to a mostly very positive critical reception, with many critics on both sides of the Atlantic finding it a refreshingly thought-provoking departure from the neo-noir norm.**

*Suture* is an exceedingly smart and elegant American indie in an unusual vein. Part mystery thriller, part psychological investigation and part avant-garde experiment, first feature from the team of Scott McGehee and David Siegel will be a fest favorite and put them on the map as filmmakers. An adventurous distrib should be able to situate this nicely in specialized slots, but pic's chilliness and formalism will make it an unlikely bet for commercial breakout.

(Todd McCarthy, *Variety*, 16 September 1993)

Steven Soderbergh says that when he saw a rough cut of *Suture*, the remarkable debut by writer-directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel, he immediately signed on as an executive producer. "I couldn't believe people wouldn't want to see this movie," he said. It's easy to see why he was excited. McGehee and Siegel have created a film that operates on several very precarious levels, and fairly dances. Like Soderbergh's own *sex, lies, and videotape*, it questions the meaning of identity, and the fate of the ego vs. modern technology. Like his *Kafka*, it explores variations on totalitarianism – in this case the tyranny of anonymity and of modern medicine – and almost as an afterthought debunks racism and ageism. But first and foremost, it's a thriller of the first rank.

(John Anderson, *New York Newsday*, 18 March 1994)

Is it a thriller? A commentary on race relations? A meditation on identity? Well, like the Rorschach prints that keep showing up behind the characters, *Suture* is open to interpretation. But no matter how audiences read it, the film is daringly original. And as with any true original, it challenges the audience with a mind-blowing journey to the outer limits. All you have to do is accept a devilishly wild premise: that a white man and a black man could be mistaken as twins.

(Larry Worth, *New York Post*, 18 March 1994)

More than an exercise in clever casting, Scott McGehee and David Siegel's ambitious feature debut, *Suture*, is a hard-boiled thriller with a subversive heart. Shot in glorious widescreen black-and-white Panavision, *Suture* exudes a smart-assed style that beckons closer inspection of its already riveting pulp narrative.

(Lawrence Chua, *The Village Voice*, 22 March 1994)

The dynamics of race and the city-scape of Phoenix are linked inextricably, forming a visual and mental puzzle of surreal impossibilities. The film is steeped in the absolutism of – and the American obsession with – skin color, even as it deadpans indifference. The Arizona setting is key; it provides both irony (the state is generally white and conservative) and a geographic spaciousness to anchor the film's chilly, barren aesthetic. *Suture* is part wiseass political commentary, part glorious gimmick. And as a spectacle about race, class and the odious allure of wealth, it's inventive enough to inspire renewed hope in the unlimited possibilities of cinema.

(Elizabeth Pincus, *LA Weekly*, 25 March 1994)

Perhaps the most promising offering from a pair of novice filmmakers in the suspense field since the Coens made *Blood Simple*. *Suture* is a wildly unconventional thriller in which its protagonists, two brothers who supposedly look identically alike, are actually cast with two actors who are completely dissimilar physically. This novel conceit isn't an attempt to be politically correct in an age where non-traditional casting dominates the stage, but rather a provocative attempt to look at identity and perception.

(Mark A. Altman, *Film Threat*, August 1994)

#### **The following year, the film opened in the UK to similar acclaim.**

The seemingly perverse decision to have Vincent and Clay played, respectively, by a white and a black actor makes perfect sense, complementing the immaculately balanced ironies and structural antitheses of the narrative. Then again, everything in the movie – the music (from grand opera to Tom Jones), the fluid camerawork, the sets, and the cool, clinical performances – is made to fit snugly and tellingly into the overall scheme of things, with an easy expertise that wholly transcends any distinctions made between post-modernist experiment and suspenseful entertainment. In short, one of the most impressive feature débuts for some years.

(Geoff Andrew, *Time Out*, 25 January 1995)

Its theoretical backbone is formed by Lacanian psychoanalysis and impenetrable French Seventies film theory. But this elegant, sophisticated piece is of interest to more than just earnest devotees of those dark sciences. *Suture*, for a start, looks exceedingly handsome for a low-budget picture – shot in black-and-white CinemaScope (a now-rare format which adds to the film's early Sixties feel), with high-key lighting and sleek period-modernist design.

(Sheila Johnston, *The Independent*, 26 January 1995)

Clay is a black man. Vince was white. And the two don't resemble each other in the slightest. What the hell's going on here? I promise you I've given nothing away, simply set up the guessing game. It will leave you smiling at the success of McGehee and Siegel's experiment in perception and identity, and amiably teased at the same time by seeking clues that suggest a rational explanation. They are there, all right: listen very carefully to the opening words of the analyst who is telling the tale. He's the one reliable narrator. [...] I doubt if I'll have a more titillating 90 minutes this year.

(Alexander Walker, *Evening Standard*, 26 January 1995)

Gloriously shot in black-and-white, this is in many ways a good old-fashioned thriller dealing with such themes as amnesia, identity exchange and guilt, unobtrusively recalling Hitchcock's *Spellbound* while managing to preserve a cool integrity all of its own.

(Steve Beard, *Empire*, February 1995)

*Compiled by Michael Brooke*



# ABOUT THE RESTORATION

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*Suture* has been exclusively restored for this release by Arrow Films. The film is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with stereo 2.0 sound.

The original 35mm camera negatives were scanned in 4K resolution on a pin-registered Scannity at Prasad Corporation/Digital Film Technology in Burbank.

Film grading and restoration was completed at Deluxe Restoration, London. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Overall image stability was also improved.

Additional grading was done at Box Motion Studios, New York under supervision from filmmakers David Siegel and Scott McGehee.

The original stereo soundtrack was transferred from the original 35mm magnetic tracks and was restored to minimise hiss and similar noise issues to produce the best quality results possible.

This restoration of *Suture* was produced in collaboration with and has been approved by David Siegel and Scott McGehee.

## Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Film scanning and audio transfer services by Prasad Corporation/Digital Film Technology

Colleen Simpson, Paul Stambaugh

Restoration and grading services by Deluxe Restoration, London

**Baselight Colour Grading** Stephen Bearman

**Restoration Department Management** Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones

**Restoration Department Supervisors** Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker

**Restoration Technicians** Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire

**Audio** Tom Barrett

Grading services by Box Motion Studios, New York

Hilary Jacobs, Marika Litz

All film and audio materials made available by KinoCorp

Special Thanks to David Siegel, Scott McGehee and Mike Spreter for all their assistance on this project.

## *A note on the restoration:*

While working on *Suture*, the restoration team noticed an intermittent banding issue appearing on the images that became more pronounced once grading was applied. Further research revealed this to be a fault on the original negative, most likely the result of lab developer pressure marks from tire rollers during initial photochemical processing. The negative was re-scanned using different settings in an attempt to diminish the effect of the banding, and a 35mm Interpolative was also sourced to compare the effect against the negative. Unfortunately, neither exercise resulted in a satisfactory solution to the banding issue and no digital restoration process proved to be effective in removing this artefact.

Upon re-examination of older distribution materials, it appears that *Suture* has always contained this issue, but subsequent printing would have likely softened its appearance through generational loss and compression. As no suitable digital solution could be found to remove this banding effect, the decision was made, together with the filmmakers, to present this restoration of *Suture* with this issue intact.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

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**Discs and Booklet Produced** by Anthony Nield

**Executive Producer** Francesco Simeoni

**Production Assistant** Liane Cunje

**Technical Producer** James White

**QC Manager** Nora Mehenni

**Blu-ray and DVD Mastering** David Mackenzie

**Artist** maarko phntm

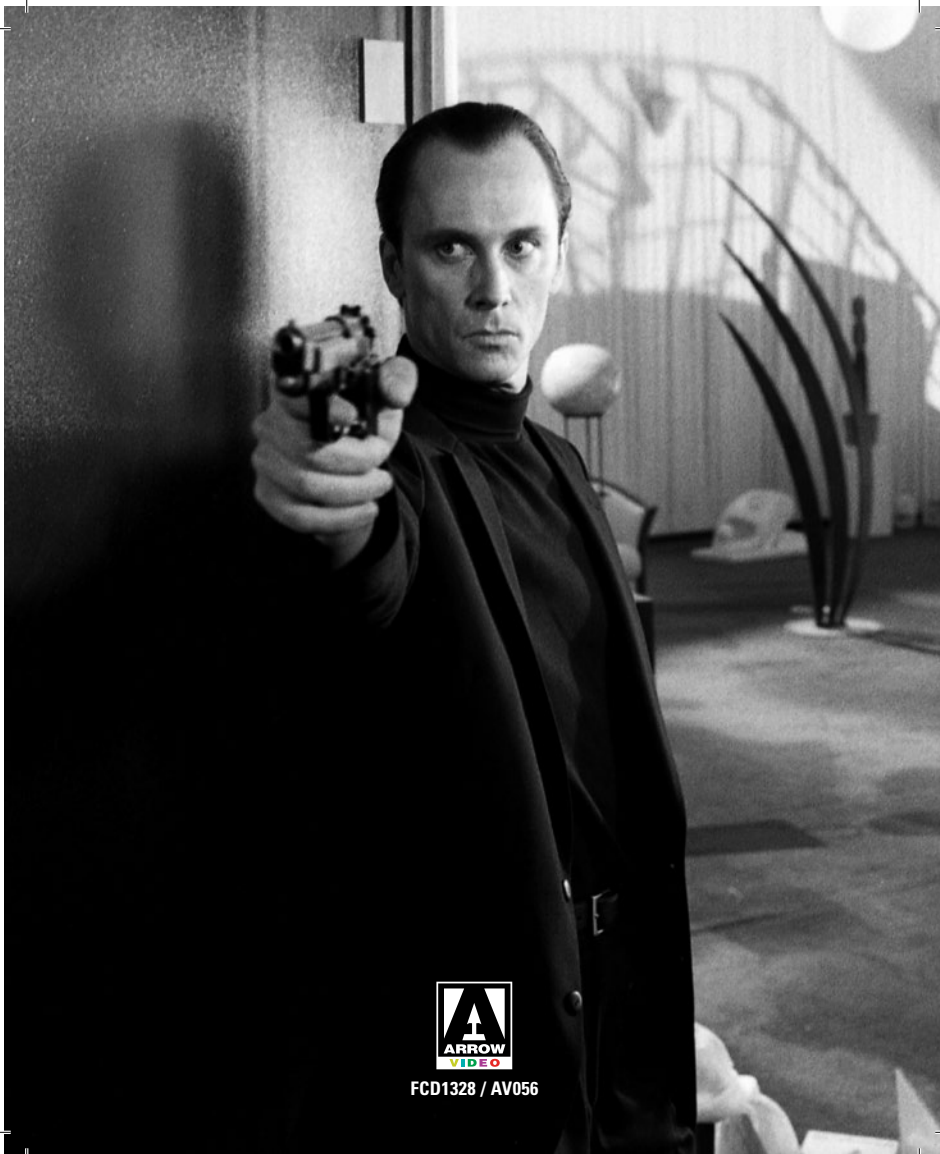
**Design** Jack Pemberton

## SPECIAL THANKS

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Alex Agran, Cary Berger, Michael Brooke, Elijah Drenner, Philippe Garnier, Mel Harris, Dennis Haysbert, Kelly McGehee, Scott McGehee, Jonathan Romney, Sab Shimono, David Siegel, Steven Soderbergh, Mike Spreter, Rob Winter, Lauren Zuckerman





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