

Chapter Five:  
Spacey Rising

**“I wanted to do something so left of center that no one would be able to figure it out”–Kevin Spacey on his role as Mel Profitt in *Wiseguy* (1991)<sup>1</sup>**

**“Some days, I don’t have a clue as to what I’m going to do. I go out to dinner. I read until one or two in the morning. I don’t party. I can’t tolerate arrogance. And I have a little dog named Legacy who has the biggest ears you’ve ever seen”–Kevin Spacey’s “self-portrait” for *Entertainment Weekly* (1991)<sup>2</sup>**

“Scuse me, would you like to sit down?” A young man with badly tinted blond hair and a small scar down one cheek offers a heavily pregnant Meryl Streep his pew on a crowded train. A closer shot of said young man displays his disconcertingly sneery smile; after he flashes her a quick wink sensible Meryl frowns and folds her hand over her engagement ring. Her suspicions are later justified when the ruffian follows her to a therapy group meeting and puts a gun to her head. He forces the group to surrender their assorted valuables and then makes a swift exit, seemingly a little contrite–“I’m really sorry about your ring, lady,” he tells our heroine–never to be seen or heard from again.

So that was *Heartburn* (1986), Kevin Spacey’s movie debut. Billed as “Subway Thief” in the credits, he has just six lines of dialogue and about two minutes of screen time. “It was horrifying,” he said in 1999. “I couldn’t wink [at Meryl]. I was so nervous that my face was twitching.”<sup>3</sup> Kevin was cast in the film by director Mike Nichols, who had worked with him on Broadway in 1984-85 when the actor had understudied *Hurlyburly*, David Rabe’s bleakly comic play about a misogynistic, toked-up group of mid-level Hollywood hustlers. “Kevin was still in his mid-20s,” Nichols noted, “yet at one point or another, he played every part, which included replacing Bill Hurt, Chris Walken, Harvey Keitel and several others, and each time he played it brilliantly.”<sup>4</sup>

“Bill Hurt terrified me, completely terrified me. He was the best actor around–everything I thought an actor should be. He would walk into a room, and I was freaked out by him. I used to sneak into the theater to rehearse because I was an understudy and they never let you rehearse on the stage. You’d have to sneak in. I was out there one day, and I looked up and Bill Hurt had walked onto the stage. He’d gotten there early. This is literally what he did to me. Arms folded, he sizes me up. ‘My, my, my, what *have* we here? A dedicated *actor*? What *are* you doing?’”<sup>5</sup> Kevin later recalled of his *Hurlyburly* days (he also appeared in the film adaptation in 1998).

It seems somehow fitting that Spacey made his cinematic debut opposite Streep, widely regarded as the finest actress of the 1980’s, as he would be considered the finest actor of the following decade. Kevin’s first film role also gave him an opportunity to play tricks on the audience–the polite young man who surrenders his seat to a lady in need actually has an ulterior motive. Like many subsequent Spacey characters, the Subway Thief is not all he seems. Just like his scar...

Ah, the “scar.” After his expressive eyes his most distinctive<sup>6</sup> facial feature, the inch-long groove Spacey sports down the right side of his kisser is not a scar at all but a skin wrinkle, a genetic characteristic of the Fowler family: father Geoff had them also. This has not stopped Kevin playfully claiming that he received it “in a duel”–perhaps he was thinking of the fencing pictures that brother Randy took in 1976? Spacey does have at least three genuine scars, however. The crease above the lid of his left eye is the legacy of a childhood altercation with a cat named Prince

Albert,<sup>7</sup> while the dimple on his left cheek results from a cyst that was removed by surgery in the late Eighties after it grew to painful proportions. In *See No Evil, Hear No Evil* (1989), it is particularly prominent. He also bears a small “<” shaped furrow above one eyebrow, the mark left by a cardboard coathanger cover thrown at him by Randy during a spat between the siblings in 1968.

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Following his debut in *Heartburn*, Spacey guested on two television drama shows, *The Equalizer* (as a corrupt cop) and *Crime Story* (as a zealous young senator stung by the Mob) and began to work regularly in film. Director Howard Davies and writer Christopher Hampton chose him to replace Alan Rickman in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* on Broadway—“One morning this geezer walks in, slightly overweight, a bit wild...”<sup>8</sup>—but were thwarted by the show’s producers who wanted a more famous actor. “I didn’t care that he was unknown, his audition was brilliant,”<sup>9</sup> Davies (who promptly closed the show in protest at not being allowed to use young Kevin) later remarked. The moneymen were similarly unenthusiastic about the actress Davies and Hampton picked to take over the lead female role: a pre-*Fatal Attraction* Glenn Close.

Kevin was reunited with Mike Nichols for the blockbuster movie *Working Girl* (1988), a part he got by chance when the director fired another actor and needed a replacement on short notice. As sleazy business executive Bob Speck, Spacey has only one scene, though as the first bona fide “classic” movie on his résumé it is worthy of mention. “You could do worse than spend the day snorting coke on Melanie Griffith’s lap,” Spacey later mused on his brief role.<sup>10</sup> Kevin raised some eyebrows when he confessed in a 2001 *Maxim* interview to having had a bad experience with the drug himself “a very long time ago, 1986”:

“I just had one of those moments where you think, Oh, this was such a bad idea. I mean, my heart actually kind of did a little flutter and it absolutely terrified me. Of course, a couple of friends dying is the only lesson you need about drugs. And I feel lucky because I’m the kind of personality that if I had gone down that road, down the road of drinking, I’d be sitting on a barstool right now saying, ‘It should’ve been me, it should’ve been me.’ But I stopped. I literally recognised that if I continued to experiment in that fashion I’d be done.”<sup>11</sup>

Spacey would soon develop an addiction to heroin—but only on the screen. His first (and to date, last) regular role in a television series, *Wiseguy*, gained him a small cult following that would doubtless have reached epic numbers if the Internet had been in general use at the time. Mel Profitt is an extraordinarily complex character for an action drama from the dumbed-down Eighties, where supporting personnel typically had about as much depth as a July puddle. *Wiseguy* was produced by Stephen J. Cannell, co-creator of the noisily plotless *A-Team*, and premiered in the fall of September 1987, after the earlier show’s cancellation in June of that year. Shot in Vancouver, British Columbia, it concerns the exploits of undercover FBI agent Vinnie Terranova (played by Ken Wahl)—the “Wiseguy” of the title—who infiltrates criminal organisations, gathers evidence to destroy them and then moves on.

While Wahl himself gave a generally uninspired performance in the lead, the programme was distinguished by a bravura supporting cast that included Ray Sharkey as catlike mobster Sonny Steelgrave and Jonathan Banks as Terranova’s droll boss McPike. Kevin joined the cast halfway through the first season: his super-racketeer

Profitt becomes Terranova's second target. Initially reluctant to take the part—he turned it down three times—Spacey finally acquiesced after some forceful persuasion by Cannell. “Steve convinced me. He showed me the story arc. I watched [the show's pilot episode] for an hour and was astounded that it wasn't about car chases but about character. I read some scripts and saw that the writing was fantastic.”<sup>12</sup> This was another role for which Kevin was a late replacement, the original actor cast as Mel having been placed in a rehab centre by his father shortly before filming commenced.

A true Renaissance crook, Profitt involves himself in international drug smuggling, arms sales, espionage and prostitution, “the grease that makes the world such a great place to be,” as fellow undercover agent Roger Lococco (William Russ) tells Vinnie. Mel, who considers himself a “Malthusian,” keeps a bust of Georgian British economist Thomas Malthus on his luxury yacht and believes the crystal amulet around his neck contains his soul. “The man has an I.Q. of over 200 and he prays to hat racks...” Lococco remarks to his co-employee. “I hope you can figure out who this guy is, because he sure doesn't know,” Vinnie scribbles cryptically on a note to McPike after his first meeting with Profitt.

Like many of Spacey's later screen characters—Buddy Ackerman, Jack Vincennes, Lester Burnham—his Profitt is a curious mix of vulnerability and menace. Abandoned in a Dumpster with his infant sister Susan at the age of two, he was later fostered by a wealthy family, drowning his adopted brother after the lad caught him kissing Susan (Joan Severance) and threatened to snitch to Mom and Pop. The creepily intense relationship between the two siblings is at the heart of Mel's twisted psyche. His most “normal” treatment of Susan is to use her as bait to gain Vinnie's co-operation and as a reward for his loyalty, something that drives him to tearful, violent rages as he imagines the two of them making love. Only Susan can give her brother his “special treatment”: a heroin-amphetamine mix injected between his toes. Relaxed in her arms, Mel flexes his feet and murmurs his catchphrase: “Only the toes knows.”

In Spacey's able hands—his own family history tragically tainted by it—the incest theme is never cheapened, made “sexy” or played for laughs. Mel's tirades are both pathetic and frightening. He elicits both our sympathy and our disgust. His death is oddly poetic: when Lococco uses the Malthus bust to smash his amulet, the increasingly paranoid crimelord, his empire crumbling, asks Susan to “send me home.”<sup>13</sup> She administers a fatal injection of heroin and sets his body alight in a rowboat off Long Island Sound. Unable to cope without her beloved brother, Susan goes insane and is committed to a mental hospital, and a disillusioned Terranova quits the Bureau.

Spacey appeared in only seven episodes of *Wiseguy*, but left an indelible impression. As Cannell puts it, “he ripped the cover off the ball every time he was onscreen.”<sup>14</sup> Kevin himself has credited the experimental early days of television as the inspiration for his loose-cannon performance, after mentor Lemmon advised him to follow the pioneers of the Fifties and “approach your work with total abandon.”<sup>15</sup> Unable to find another villain as memorable as Mel, later seasons resorted to more conventional heavies such as fashionista Rick Pinzolo and music mogul Isaac Twine—veteran comic Jerry Lewis even put in an appearance. The lack of recognition at awards time must have been galling for Kevin, particularly as Ray Sharkey, playing Mel's predecessor, had received a prestigious Founder's Award from the Viewers for Quality Television committee for his portrayal of Steelgrave. Even the wooden Wahl (who reportedly loathed his scene-stealing co-star)<sup>16</sup> won a Best Actor Golden Globe for the show in 1990.

“I tend to play characters that are on the edge of facing an internal confrontation,” Spacey observed in 1989, in one of his first professional interviews: this statement would prove equally valid in 1999. “In many ways, they are characters that are dead, but they don’t know it; walking corpses. They’re interesting to play because of the complexities. I try to give each of these characters a life and a sense of humor; not to just play one dimension of them. That’s one of the reasons *Wiseguy* became liked as it did, the character had such a bizarre sense of humor, eccentric. So I tend to be attracted toward roles where there is some crisis. I’m not interested in playing a witty character who stands around with a cocktail glass and makes charming remarks. I definitely like to play people with an edge, and it’s probably because I walk on one in my life.”<sup>17</sup>

After *Wiseguy*, Kevin was relegated to background player once more. Hollywood was still stuck in the Brat Pack era, where pretty boys were in vogue: at thirty Spacey looked too old for roles in “college” movies, even while actors his own age like Kevin Bacon and former classmate Val Kilmer continued to play young. “I was offered other series and there were opportunities to, sort of, do more of the same kind of thing,” he noted in 1996. “But I just didn’t want to become Kevin ‘Wiseguy’ Spacey for the next five years.”<sup>18</sup>

Kevin was paired with Severance again for the limp comedy *See No Evil, Hear No Evil*, a disappointing follow-up to their dynamic alliance on television. *See No Evil* starred Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor, both past their comic prime by several years, in the lead roles of a deaf man and a blind man who inadvertently “witness” a murder. Quite possibly his worst film (though 2005’s vapid *Edison* runs it close), and certainly one of his worst performances, Spacey adopts a stiff manner and unconvincing toffy British accent (“the killahs, Mistah Lyons, the killahs!”) to play Kirgo, the pantomime henchman of the piece.

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Kevin’s increasing frustration with his post-Profitt career is evident in Richard E. Grant’s filmic memoir *With Nails*. In late 1989, Spacey and Grant worked together on Philip Kaufman’s erotic drama *Henry & June*, which chronicles the love triangle between novelist Henry Miller (Fred Ward), his wife June (Uma Thurman), and sultry French writer Anaïs Nin (Maria de Medeiros), in 1930’s Paris. It was notable as the first film to receive a NC-17 (“No Children Under 17 Admitted”) certificate from the Motion Picture Association of America, which allowed the scenes of lesbian and group sex to pass as “artistic” rather than pornographic (though they appear pretty tame by today’s standards).

Spacey, as Miller’s libidinous friend Richard Osborn—ironically a thwarted artist himself—despite receiving fifth billing, appears in only a handful of scenes and abruptly disappears two-thirds of the way into the movie. His character’s descent into madness happens offscreen and is related in one single exchange between Henry and Anaïs. “Osborn’s gone too—gone crazy—really,” Ward smirks at one bohemian gathering as Richard’s (unnamed) girlfriend weeps in the corner. “They just came and took him away.” Spacey was unsatisfied with his marginalised role, as Grant relates in his diaries:

“Kevin is *waiting* to play leads in movies, having done them in the theatre including Broadway. His when-will-it-be-me? *kvech* receives scant support from me...”<sup>19</sup>

“Meet Spacey for a viewing of *Batman* in Les Halles. He’s on a rant because he didn’t get any close-ups during his scene and has been in heated consultation with his agent and manager... ‘When it comes down to it, let’s face it, this is just another gig like any other and it’s the same old fucking routine and bullshit there always is.’ Kevin is *not* going to stop here, and carries on all the way to *Batman*. On the way back his rage is mercifully waylaid by *Batman*’s shortcomings, which he delineates with the precision of a neuro-critic, and which diverts me from my chestful of mucus [Grant was suffering from ‘flu during the shoot] and makes me laugh. Which spurs him on to even greater heights. I recognise this syndrome all too acutely and wonder whether having a brontosaurus-sized moan is common to every human or whether it is a particular speciality of actors. Whichever, it’s a relief to be merely a spectator at this entertaining outpouring of bile rather than its purveyor...”<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps seeking an environment where the lack of close-ups would not trouble him, Spacey returned to the stage to play “Uncle Louie” in the premiere of Neil Simon’s *Lost in Yonkers*. After eleven previews, the Broadway production opened on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1991 at the Richard Rodgers Theatre, where it ran for an impressive 780 performances.<sup>21</sup> Set in 1942, *Yonkers* tells the story of young brothers Arty and Jay, who are left in the care of their intimidating grandmother (Irene Worth) and sweet, childlike aunt Bella (Mercedes Ruehl) in Yonkers, New York, while their debt-addled father Eddie (Mark Blum) works as a travelling scrap iron salesman.

While the relationship between the boys and the two women is the play’s primary focus, two other adult children also make an appearance in the narrative. Bella’s quasi-mute sister Gert (Lauren Klein) is in two brief scenes while brother Louie, a small-time gangster, features in three substantial ones and adds an element of wry menace with his sub-*Godfather* schtick—“Gee, I hope not. If it went off, I’d have to become a ballerina,”<sup>22</sup> he tells Jay when the boy inquires whether the gun under his belt is loaded. “He’s incredible. It’s like having a James Cagney movie in your own house,”<sup>23</sup> Arty remarks near the end of Act One.

By Act Two, however, the gloss is off. Angry at his uncle for bullying his younger brother and belittling their hardworking father, Jay challenges him: “What are *you* doing? Hiding in your mother’s apartment and scaring little kids and acting like Humphrey Bogart. Well, you’re no Humphrey Bogart...”<sup>24</sup> Louie is impressed with his nephew’s boldness: “You got bigger balls than I thought, Jay. You got a couple of steel basketballs there...”<sup>25</sup> Offstage, Louie ends up enrolling in the Army—more to avoid his fellow gangsters than from any patriotic leanings, however.

*Lost in Yonkers* is one of Neil Simon’s most celebrated plays, winning the coveted 1991 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. While Spacey’s relatively minor role did not command as much attention from critics as the key parts of Grandma Kurnitz and Bella, reviews of his performance were favourable. *The New York Times* noted that he played Louie with “a commanding mixture of malevolence and avuncularity”<sup>26</sup>—two more common Spacey traits—and he was nominated for a Tony Award for the role as Best Featured Actor.

“Kevin is a writer’s dream,” Simon enthused in a 1991 interview. “I could have used him in at least six of my plays, including as Oscar in *The Odd Couple*.”<sup>27</sup> *Lost in Yonkers* also received Tony nominations for Best Play, Best Leading Actress (Ruehl), Best Featured Actress (Worth) and Best Director (Gene Saks). Only Saks went home from the ceremony at New York’s Minskoff Theater empty-handed: on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1991, after a full ten years of treading the boards, Kevin Spacey was finally accorded the recognition he deserved. While the Tonys are often described as “the

Oscars of live theatre,” in reality they count for very little in Hollywood, something that was made sharply clear to Spacey when *Yonkers* was adapted into a feature film two years later. Worth and Ruehl made the cut, but Kevin’s role was given to Academy Award-winning actor Richard Dreyfuss.<sup>28</sup>

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Although Kevin Spacey played leading roles in two well-regarded TV movie biopics in the early 1990’s, as disgraced televangelist Jim Bakker in *Fall From Grace* (1990) and crusading lawyer Clarence Darrow in *Darrow* (1991), major parts in cinematic releases proved harder to come by. He was cast in *Glengarry Glen Ross* after Al Pacino, impressed with *Lost in Yonkers*, recommended him to director James Foley. “It was depressing to be shooting a movie in which the greatest actors around were calling me a pussy every day for six, seven weeks. I felt like I was the pillar in the center of a storm, being assaulted from all sides,” Spacey later noted. “One day, Pacino chewed me a new asshole. Al, unbeknownst to me, had asked the sound guys not to do sound. The camera was on me and Al started improvising: ‘Kevin, you fucking piece of shit!’ I thought, Did he just say Kevin? He didn’t let up; it got very personal. I looked like a car wreck. But at the end of the scenes, he walked over and put his arm around me and said, ‘That was terrific.’”<sup>29</sup>

In 1992, shortly after making a notable guest appearance as an eccentric tycoon in the TV drama series *L.A. Law*, Kevin scored his first co-starring cinematic role in Alan J. Pakula’s risible domestic thriller *Consenting Adults*. The first Spacey movie to examine the dark underbelly of suburbia (as he would do rather more successfully in *American Beauty* some seven years later), *Consenting Adults* concerns two couples, Richard and Priscilla Parker (Kevin Kline and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), and their new neighbours Eddy and Kay Otis (Spacey and Rebecca Miller).

As had been the case with *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the director had to fight the project’s producers to get the still-somewhat-obscure “guy with the receding hair from New York”<sup>30</sup> cast. “I suppose they thought I would have been nice as the driver or the boat captain,” Spacey told *Premiere* in a contemporary interview, “but not in this leading role opposite Kevin Kline. So Alan, bless him, fought for me in a way that you always dream someone will—especially in Hollywood, where chances are often tough for actors who don’t look a certain way...I’ve played supporting roles in films for a while, in the hope that I would learn something. And I certainly have. But it’s a frustrating experience, because the relationship that you’re searching for with a director doesn’t really occur. Directors feel that if they’ve hired a competent actor in that small role, then they can concentrate on the three or four actors who move the plot along.”<sup>31</sup> He certainly took the part seriously, bleaching his hair and losing almost 30 pounds through a vigorous physical training programme to play the superfit Eddy.<sup>32</sup>

The nominal “hero” of *Consenting Adults*, Richard Parker, is an embryonic Lester Burnham. Stuck in a job he hates (composing advertising jingles), he is chastised by his wife for his staid attitude to life—“[Eddy] may not always play by the rules but at least he’s in the game,” she tells him after their ebullient new friend fakes a car accident to get the Parkers out of debt. Attracted to the voluptuous Kay, Richard is persuaded by Eddy to forsake his “50 percent existence,” at least for an evening. “I wonder what would happen if you and I got up in the middle of the night, went next door and crept into the other man’s bedroom...” whispers Kevin II enticingly.

In best Spacey style, it's all a scam. Richard duly arrives at Eddy's house, sleeps with a woman who appears to be Kay, and then returns home, only for "Kay" to be found bludgeoned to death by a baseball bat the next morning. Clever Eddy didn't spend the night with Mrs. P. at all and has a cast-iron alibi, while Richard, having inadvertently implicated himself, is charged with the crime. Priscilla divorces her husband and takes up with Eddy, however, when he recognises her voice on a radio talent show, an out-on-bail Richard realises that Kay is alive (quite how he didn't notice that the woman he made love to was not his comely neighbour in the first place is never explained).

Having discovered that Eddy is attempting to collect a \$1.5 million indemnity claim on his wife, Richard tracks Kay to a seedy motel and confronts her. Shortly thereafter Eddy, who has been tracking the pair, gives Kay the "bat treatment" and slips away. Now implicated in a second murder, Richard flees. Fortunately for him, Priscilla discovers a forgotten plane ticket Eddy used on the night of the fake Kay's death and realises the truth. Richard performs a commando-style raid on Eddy's home and Eddy, now in full-on crazed mode, reveals to Priscilla his plan to murder her and shoot Richard as a homicidal intruder. After the obligatory physical smasheroo between the two Kevins, the good wife steps in and coshes Eddy with—yup—another baseball bat just as he is about to gun Richard down. The final scene shows a reconciled Richard and Priscilla moving into a very secluded house—with no neighbours visible for miles.

Badly-plotted and ploddingly-directed, with a dreary lead performance from Kline and a histrionic one from Mastrantonio, *Consenting Adults* nevertheless boasts a fine showing from Spacey, his creepily charismatic hustler the film's only saving grace. During his final confrontation with the other Kevin, you almost want the devious conman to win—in the movie's most striking shot, the camera lingers on Eddy's splayed body as Richard and Priscilla leave the room. Fixated on the real draw, we barely notice them go.

As one contemporary reviewer noted: "No one makes for a better nut case than Kevin Spacey. In both television and movie roles, he has flitted around the edges of stardom for years, doing marvelously peculiar turns that more often than not steal the thunder of the bigger-name performers. And, as Eddy, he is given his first real opportunity to fully express his fruitcake talent... In the end, it's the lusty, Mad Hatter gleam in Spacey's eyes that sticks with us. Even when the movie asks us to suspend our disbelief far beyond what is reasonable, he deliciously spins his web. In a just universe, his name should become a household word."<sup>33</sup> Just three years later, it would be.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Tayman, John. 10 June 1991. "Man on the Edge," *People Magazine*, volume 35, no.22.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Harris, Mark. 7 June 1991. "Kevin Spacey Holds Court," *Entertainment Weekly*, issue 69.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Fleming, Michael. October 1999. "Playboy Interview: Kevin Spacey," *Playboy Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in O'Haire, Patricia. 8 January 1996. "A film bad guy's arresting roles: critics love his creeps, but Kevin Spacey's acting on a new plan," *The New York Daily News*.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Weinstock, Jeff. Summer 1998. "The spin on Kevin Spacey," *Smoke*.

<sup>6</sup> Spacey was once described by the playwright Lanford Wilson as "medium everything," (quoted in Smith, David. 25 April 2004. "Spacey: face in the crowd," *The Observer*)—a phrase which captures his blend-into-the-background, Everyman look perfectly. His features are the ultimate "blank canvas," as Jerry Stahl noted in a 1996 profile: "Viewed one way, they look perfectly normal. Viewed another, his very averageness seems so extreme, so hypernaturally bland, as to render him terrifying. It's a composite of a hundred other faces. Keyser Söze and Verbal Kint rolled into one. The perfect mask for an actor." Stahl, Jerry. October 1996. "Hollywood's King of Cool," *Buzz Magazine*. Terence Blacker

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observed in a 2004 article that “[Spacey’s face] is not particularly beautiful or unusual; it is a face of natural, intelligent curiosity, one whose features have been interestingly etched by experience, good and bad.” Blacker, Terence. 21 April 2004. “Spacey’s curious incident of the dog in the night-time,” *The Independent*.

<sup>7</sup> Rayner, Richard. 1 October 1999. “The Spaceman Cometh,” *Harper’s Bazaar*.

<sup>8</sup> Davies, Howard, quoted in Benedict, David. 25 April 2004. “Kevin confidential,” *The Independent on Sunday*.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in White, Lesley. 19 December 1999. “Spacey’s Odyssey,” *The Sunday Times Magazine*.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Fleming, Michael. October 1999. “Playboy Interview: Kevin Spacey,” *Playboy Magazine*.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Welch, Mike. Fall/Winter 2001/02. “Hide and Seek with Kevin Spacey,” *Maxim*. Spacey’s experimentation with illegal substances is possibly the “messaging around” that Emanuel Azenberg referenced in his 1999 interview with *Elle*.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Fleming, Michael. October 1999. “Playboy Interview: Kevin Spacey,” *Playboy Magazine*.

<sup>13</sup> Mel’s demise could perhaps be compared to Oswald’s in *Ghosts*. Fearing the mental collapse his inherited syphilis will inevitably lead to, he asks his mother to lend him “a helping hand” to take an overdose of morphine before his next attack: “Mother, give me the sun...” he pleads as madness descends. Ibsen, Henrik. *Four Major Plays*, pp.162 & 163.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Werts, Diane. 31 December 2004. “DVDs Show How Crime Did Pay For Future Stars,” *Newsday*.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Werts, Diane. 31 December 2004. “DVDs Show How Crime Did Pay For Future Stars,” *Newsday*. Jim Profit (played by Adrian Pasdar), the psychotic, amoral anti-hero of the short-lived 1996 drama series *Profit*, on which Cannell served as executive producer, was reputedly “inspired” by Mel.

<sup>16</sup> Vawter, Ron, quoted in Hadleigh, Boze. *Celebrity Diss & Tell*, p.189.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Poe, Amos. Fall 1989. “Kevin Spacey,” *Bomb Magazine*, issue 29.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Leyva, Ric. 24 July 1996. “Star Watch: Kevin Spacey Won’t Let Success Spoil the Fun,” *The Standard Times*.

<sup>19</sup> Grant, Richard E. *With Nails*, pp.74-75.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, Richard E. *With Nails*, pp.85-86. After being offered a provisional role in his next movie by the director Robert Altman, Grant muses: “I feel poised to give this good news to Kevin, knowing that he will dispatch himself like an Exocet missile in Mr. Altman’s direction within a sec” (p.96). Ironically enough, Spacey’s eventual Old Vic collaboration with Altman (who according to Spacey’s acerbic Buddy Ackerman character “couldn’t direct his way out of a paper bag”) proved a disaster.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin himself left the show in early August 1991, to film his part in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

<sup>22</sup> Simon, Neil. *Lost in Yonkers*, p.57.

<sup>23</sup> Simon, Neil. *Lost in Yonkers*, p.61.

<sup>24</sup> Simon, Neil. *Lost in Yonkers*, p.87.

<sup>25</sup> Simon, Neil. *Lost in Yonkers*, p.88.

<sup>26</sup> Rich, Frank. 22 February 1991. “Review/Theater; Simon on Love Denied,” *The New York Times*.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Tayman, John. 10 June 1991. “Man on the Edge,” *People Magazine*, volume 35, no.22. *The Odd Couple*, first performed in 1965, is a comic tale of two mismatched men—sloppy chauvinist Oscar and fastidious hypochondriac Felix—who are forced to share an apartment following their respective marital splits. After a successful Broadway run (the play was directed by *Hurlyburly*’s Mike Nichols), it was adapted for the screen in 1968, with Walter Matthau reprising his stage role, starring as Oscar alongside Spacey mentor Jack Lemmon as Felix: this version was helmed by *Lost in Yonkers*’s Gene Saks.

<sup>28</sup> In an odd twist of fate, Dreyfuss (along with Kevin’s former Juilliard classmate Elizabeth McGovern) would be directed by Spacey in the world premiere of Joe Sutton’s *Complicit* at the Old Vic in early 2009. His participation in the play was subject to some controversy owing to his use of an earpiece on stage, allegedly because of his inability to learn his lines in time.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Fleming, Michael. October 1999. “Playboy Interview: Kevin Spacey,” *Playboy Magazine*. Seven years later Spacey appeared in—and co-produced—the similarly themed *The Big Kahuna*, another sharply scripted tale of seller intrigue set in the drab hospitality suite of a Kansas hotel (and like *Glengarry* based on a play—*Hospitality Suite* by Roger Rueff, a former chemical engineer whom Spacey had earlier helped secure an agent for). As cynical lubricant salesman Larry Mann, Kevin is in his element, his stage training clearly in evidence in both his effortless delivery of Larry’s long, dry monologues—“Now it’s the days of Larry and Phil—Phil and Larry—and Bob—three guys who are about to be royally fucked up the ass”—and his intense rage later in the film as he confronts the naïve Bob (Peter Facinelli) over his blindly-parroted religious faith. As one contemporary critic noted: “This is the Kevin Spacey we all love to love: voluble, fast, funny, with a verbal dexterity miles beyond that of any



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other American actor. He doesn't read dialogue, he toys with it, diddles with it, makes it dance loops in his mouth, ultimately spits it out in lacy filigrees or bubbles with bubbles inside." Hunter, Stephen. 12 May 2000. "Big Kahuna: A Well-Oiled Act," *The Washington Post*.

<sup>30</sup> This is how Spacey was described by one studio executive to director Curtis Hanson, who was unable to offer him the leading male role in the film *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle* (1992) after the same studio (Hollywood Pictures, a Disney subsidiary) insisted on a bigger name (quoted in Fleming, Michael. November 2002. "The Most Daring Director in Hollywood," *Movieline*). Ironically, the actor eventually cast (Matt McCoy) was scarcely better known. Hanson finally secured Spacey's services five years later for *L.A. Confidential*, in which McCoy played a small supporting role.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Bagley, Christopher. October 1992. "Cameos: actor Kevin Spacey," *Premiere*.

<sup>32</sup> Spacey employed a similar strategy to effect Lester's physical transformation for *American Beauty*, installing a personal gym in a trailer near the film set.

<sup>33</sup> Hinson, Hal. 16 October 1992. "Consenting Adults," *The Washington Post*.