



RE-RELEASES

Videodrome

In pursuit of sensational television programming that will push boundaries, a station CEO (James Woods) stumbles across a disturbing snuff-broadcast, which seemingly starts to melt into his own reality. Ahead of David Cronenberg's highly anticipated latest feature *Crimes of the Future*, dive into a brand new, director-approved, 4K restoration of one of the body horror king's original, most provocative works.

bfi.org.uk

There is much more to *Videodrome* than James Woods' mutant hand and seductive anthropomorphic televisions. This was Cronenberg's reaction to the video nasty scare of the early 80s, a grisly exploration into what might unfold if viewers replicated the extreme depictions of sex and violence available to them on videocassette. TV executive-turned-detective Max Renn (Woods) is a fine lead, but the dangerous philosophy of *Videodrome* is the real star here as it continuously asks provocative questions about society's relationship with entertainment and technology.

Greg Evans, bfi.org.uk, 14 March 2017

A contemporary review

David Cronenberg's audacious attempt at conflating medium and message produces more than just the time-honoured confusion of illusion and reality: it actually tests the audience's receptiveness to TV's 'post-narrative' properties of fragmentation and flow in an alien (theatrical) context. Accordingly, Renn's 'hallucinations' are not presented as formal breaks in the film's narrative structure, but as determinants of that structure. For a good part of *Videodrome*'s running time, Cronenberg actually risks a devilishly playful replication of the comparatively subjective video-viewing experience (grounded as it is in notions of personal programming, multiple channel choice, diversified attentiveness, and so on).

Videodrome is no tetchy attack on TV as an institution, as per *Network* – its tone is, if anything, more apocalyptic, while its quotient of black humour is significantly boosted – but a cheekily speculative fiction about that interactive space between the viewer and the screen which has exercised sociologically or psychologically oriented media theorists for years. The film inventively rephrases the question of whether the programming or the viewing psyche might best be construed as the true 'video nasty', and it wades (somewhat like *A Clockwork Orange*) into the screen sex-and-violence debate with the sort of inquisitive devil's advocacy that might have both the libertarian and censorious forces peering warily over the rims of their respective trenches.

Cronenberg's unique sci-horror movies have, of course, often themselves featured heavily in this very debate (as, it's conceivable, might this one, for its calculatedly complex use of sado-erotic imagery), and in some senses *Videodrome* offers a synthetic reprise of its director's oeuvre to date. For a

start, there's the matter of Cronenberg having been dubbed 'the King of Venereal Horror' – a soubriquet earned mainly on the strength of *Shivers* and it's surely more than a chance irony that *Videodrome* abbreviates so 'naturally' to VD. The video experience here is not only orgasmic, not only addictive or epidemic, but 'it bites'. Then there's the motif of the 'absent theorist', with the figure of the late Brian O'Blivion (one from the very heart and homeland of Marshall McLuhan) harking back to such early predecessors as Luther Stringfellow and Antoine Rouge in *Stereo* and *Crimes of the Future*.

As in *The Brood*, there are the psychic states 'made flesh': here developed in line with the dominant sense of visual punning to include living-tissue 'handguns' and 'hand grenades' – and topped, inevitably, by an exhibition of Rick Baker's magnificently gloppy special effects that's beguiling in its essential arbitrariness. The clinching unity, though, is again Cronenberg's reading (and re-writing) of Darwinism as a cautionary text, with both the human physique and psyche undergoing riskily rapid evolutionary change in adapting to radically new environments and cultural norms.

Eventually, perhaps, *Videodrome* has more coherence as 'A David Cronenberg Film' than as an Awful Warning on the video future. The ambiguity that attends the narrative hints of a hypnotic conspiracy (a genuine conflict of ideological image-controllers or a mere reflection of Renn's interior dualism?) keeps it a little too evasively shadowy to live up to O'Blivion's scene-setting rhetoric: 'The battle for the minds of North America will be fought in the Videodrome...' While the fact that a strong stomach is such an essential prerequisite for anyone engaging with the film's sophisticated wit does pose problems in terms of identifying the likely audience.

Pleasures do accompany the provocations, though: James Woods brings a suitably edgy quality to the first-person perspective, and Cronenberg once more conjures up a host of blandly sinister Toronto unknowns in effective support. Debbie Harry utilises her own poster-icon status to add resonance to her role as an S&M caricature (in one sequence *apparently* echoing her character name of Nicki Brand with a taste for knife nicks on the shoulder and cigarette burns on the breast). But, operating exclusively as a function of Renn's particular voyeurist impulses, she is eventually almost as constrained here as she was by her limiting roles in *The Foreigner*, *Union City* and *Roadie*. None the less, however one receives the movie, it's a certainty that Cronenberg's customised line in living, breathing videocassettes will totally transform anyone's innocent conception of 'software'.

Paul Taylor, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1983

VIDEODROME

Director: David Cronenberg
Production Companies: Filmplan International, Guardian Trust Company, Canadian Film Development Corporation, Famous Players
Executive Producers: Victor Solnicki, Pierre David
Producer: Claude Héroux
Associate Producer: Lawrence Nesis
Production Manager: Gwen Iveson
Production Co-ordinator: Roger Héroux
Location Manager: David Coatsworth
Location co-ordinator: Bill Wiggins
Production Assistants: Howard Rothschild, Richard Spiegelman
Assistant Directors: John Board, Libby Bowden, Rocco Gismondi
Screenplay: David Cronenberg
Director of Photography: Mark Irwin
Special Video Effects: Michael Lennick
Special Effects: Frank Carere
Editor: Ron Sanders
Art Director: Carol Spier
Set Decorator: Angelo Stea
Set Dressers: Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson, Gary Jack, Ed Hanna
Scenic Artist: Nick Kosonic
Costumes: Delphine White
Wardrobe: Arthur Rowsell
Make-up: Shonagh Jabour
Special Mak-up: Rick Baker
Special Make-up Artists: Steven Jason, Bill Sturgeon
Opticals: Film Opticals of Canada
Music: Howard Shore
Choreography: Kirsteen Etherington
Sound Recording: Bryan Day
Sound Re-recording: Paul Coombe, Michael Hoogenboom, Elius Caruso
Supervising Sound Editor: Peter Burgess
Creative Consultant: Denise Di Novi

Cast

James Woods (*Max Renn*)
Sonja Smits (*Bianca O'Blivion*)
Deborah Harry (*Nicki Brand*)
Peter Dvorsky (*Harlan*)
Les Carlson (*Barry Convex*)
Jack Creley (*Brian O'Blivion*)
Lynne Gorman (*Masha*)
Julie Khaner (*Bridey*)
Reiner Schwarz (*Moses*)
David Bolt (*Raphael*)
Lally Cadeau (*Rena King*)
Henry Gomez (*Brolley*)
Harvey Chao, David Tsubouchi (*Japanese salesman*)
Kay Hawtrey (*matron*)
Sam Malkin (*sidewalk derelict*)
Bob Church (*newscaster*)
Jayne Eastwood (*woman caller*)
Franciszka Hedland (*belly-dancer*)

Canada 1983
87 mins

Park Circus

NEW RELEASES

Queen of Glory

From 26 Aug

Official Competition

From 26 Aug

Wildhood

From Fri 2 Sep

Eric Ravilious: Drawn to War

From Mon 5 Sep

Bodies Bodies Bodies

From Fri 9 Sep

Crimes of the Future

From Fri 9 Sep

In Front of Your Face

From Fri 23 Sep

Flux Gourmet

From Fri 30 Sep

RE-RELEASES

Lost Highway

From Fri 2 Sep

Videodrome

From Sat 10 Sep

Jackie Brown

From Fri 16 Sep

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