



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Videodrome

### Videodrome

*Director:* David Cronenberg  
*Production Companies:* Filmlan 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 Make-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  
89 mins  
Digital 4K

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](http://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

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Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive, Film London and  
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Sun 26 Jan 15:15

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### Videodrome

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Thu 16 Jan 21:00

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Sun 19 Jan 11:45; Thu 30 Jan 20:40

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

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