

HOPE LIES AT 24 FRAMES PER SECOND

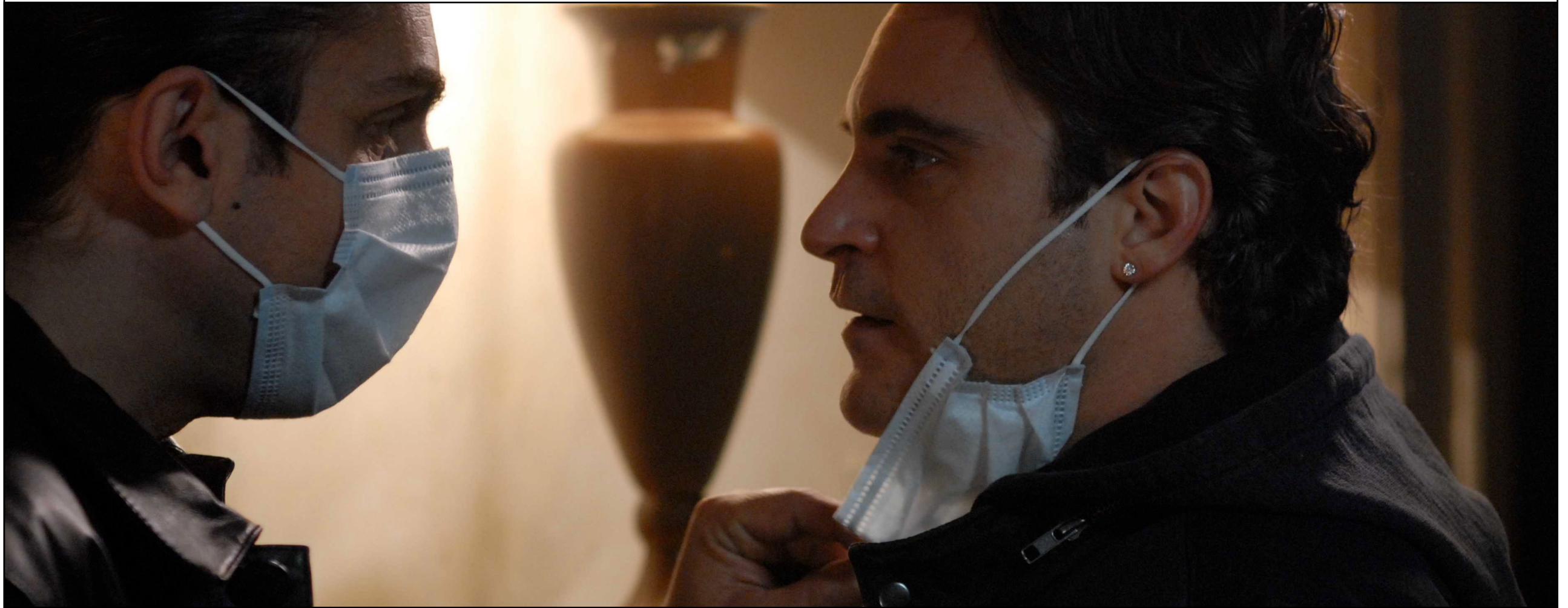
Cosmopolis



A Hope Lies Monograph

INTRODUCING

The Hope Lies Monograph

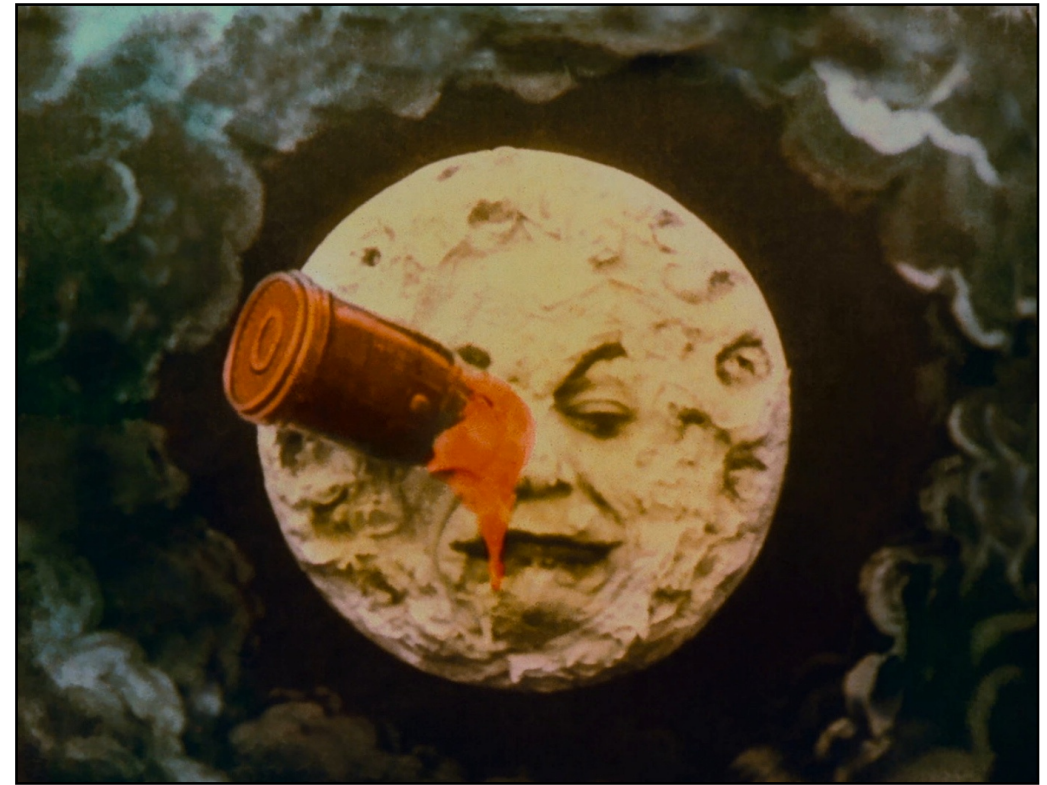


Welcome to the latest Hope Lies Monograph. Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second is an independently run film website based in the UK. Over the course of the last two years Hope Lies has built itself up from simple blog to being one of the most respected film websites in the UK (and, we're told, the 12th most influential in Europe...).

Cinema fascinates us. Every facet, from the latest Aki Kaurismäki feature to the most over the top blockbuster that Hollywood has to offer, gives us something to mull over, debate or be passionate about. Our long held tagline on the website has been "*From A Bout de Souffle to Zabriskie Point, Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second attempts to cover every corner of the cinema spectrum*" and that stand remains as strong as ever: we have a passion for the cinema that knows no bounds, and we hope that these Monographs reflect that.

Technology also fascinates us, which is why we've decided to experiment a little with this Monograph that you hold in your hands. We are utterly convinced that the future of reading delivery is digital: it's convenient, it's good for the environment and ultimately it provides a very satisfying reader experience. We say this as fans of what publications like Film Comment, Cinema Scope and Empire Magazine have been doing with their digital alternatives to their traditional publications, and if we can replicate/mimic one iota of the great work being done by those institutions then we'll be happy. As with any experiment there will no doubt be issues at first, but we thank you in advance for helping us to resolve any that may crop up.

Our aim with the website has always been to remain as influence-free as possible, so we're looking to instill similar innovative methods of delivery here too: we want to keep this free, but we don't want to be overly reliant on advertising (We appreciate just as much as anyone how mass advertising can ruin a clean user experience). Feel free to get in touch if you would like to be involved with that aspect of the Monographs.



This Monograph is designed to be read in landscape orientation. That's when it looks its best. If you'd like to read it sans film stills and whatnot then simply turn it to portrait scale.

Each Monograph, as the title suggests, takes a look at one film. There's no defining reason for why a film might be subjected to coverage, but it's probably a given that a timely theatrical release will lead to featuring. With that in mind we do have a mammoth special edition in the works in which we'll be taking a look at the complete oeuvre of a specific filmmaker to mark an anniversary, but more on that later.

In closing, we would like to thank you for downloading and giving this Monograph a shot. Please do check out the rest of the catalogue, and any feedback will be really appreciated.



MONOGRAPH

Cosmopolis



Cosmopolis (Cronenberg, 2012)

Noteworthy

1. Cosmopolis is director David Cronenberg's first collaboration with Robert Pattinson, star of the Twilight series and Harry Potter & The Goblet Of Fire.
2. Many have taken Pattinson's previous role as a vampire in the Twilight movies as a commentary on the vampiric nature of business types in the post-recession-era.
3. Cosmopolis features an impressive supporting cast, with the likes of Paul Giamatti, Juliette Binoche and Samantha Morton featuring alongside others.
4. The film is based upon a source novel by Don DiLillo. Cronenberg wrote the script himself



Robert Pattinson is Eric Packer in Cosmopolis

David Cronenberg's return to urban dystopia is an unusual beast. Abrasive, yet beautiful, thoughtful and visceral, Cosmopolis ought to appease those whom claim that the Canadian filmmaker has strayed too far from his early body-horror roots in recent years, whilst still appealing to those that may prefer his later, more emotion-

ally driven works. And thanks to the rather inspired meta-casting of Robert Pattinson, British actor-heart-throb and star of the hugely successful Twilightfranchise, the latest Cronenberg film has a third audience, those of that particular actors followers and fans. This is Cronenberg's first film with such a figure, and it's worth noting that

even the least profitable of the Twilight films has raised more at the box office than the combined Cronenberg oeuvre. It makes for a curious theatrical experience, with an audience made up of a rather diverse group of people.

The billionaire has become the unlikely protagonist du jour for the mainstream cinema of the now. From The Avengers' Tony Stark, through to The Dark Knight Rises and Bruce Wayne, via the faux-wrinkled oddity of Prometheus' Peter Weyland, Hollywood seems to have taken on board Justin Timberlake's The Social Network assertion that mere millionaires just ain't cool anymore. With Cosmopolis and Pattinson's Eric Packer, David Cronenberg provides us with a noteworthy alternative. Proto-autistic and driven by a lust for knowledge (quite a difficult task when one is apparently a genius), Packer is the archetypical "man on the edge" albeit with a story told in a manner that is anything other than ordinary. Structurally the work is tied to a journey. The source novel, by Dan DiLillo was heavily informed heavily by James Joyce's Ulysses, which itself of course owed much to Homer. We follow a day accompanying the businessman, as the character attempts to cross New York City in a limousine. Various figures from Packer's life join him along the way, and partake in his ultimate downfall, all to the backdrop of ominous Occupy-esque protests and a presidential visit.

The closest film to Cosmopolis in Cronenberg's existing body of work would probably be 1991's Naked Lunch. While the earlier film was a more liberal adaptation involving autobiographical elements relating to the author, though one might surmise that in adapting a work as well drawn as DeLillo's Cosmopolis is another example of the director tackling an existing literary work with a

heavily defined voice. The screenplay for the film, written by Cronenberg himself, sees stoic dialogue, delivered flatly, yet perfectly in keeping with the style of the source material. Symbolism is rife, with the notion of rats as currency providing a recurring image. Jingoisms and statements feed the dialogue with assertions like "They come from horror and despair" punctuating the flow of converse. It lends a surreal edge to the whole project. Elsewhere, militaristic speak is used to describe the relatively simple task at hand: crossing town. Packer's chief of security refers to a "Situation isn't stable" throughout, emphasising the perceived danger of the situation, and encouraging the general feel of dystopia that runs throughout the picture.



Contrary to the heavy dialogue of the piece runs an interesting sound design. The claustrophobic world of the limousine, a micro-climate separate from the world outside is marked by an eerie si-

lence. Dialogue cuts through the nothing, leaving a tonally intriguing echo behind.



Pattinson leads the players admirably. He's in every scene in the film, many of which would no doubt be deemed "challenging" in most quarters, and carries the piece laudably. An eclectic cast of supporting players surround Pattinson, from Juliette Binoche, who's art dealer is a writhing, coil of sexuality, through to Mathieu Amalric's memorable pastry terrorist. Samantha Morton, Kevin Durand and Paul Giamatti fill out the cast, while it's relative unknown Sarah Gadon as Packer's ephemeral wife that impresses most of all. Visually the polar opposite to her husband, Gadon's Elise makes for an intriguing symmetry to the figure. Symetry, and notions of, is one of the key reference points in the career of Cronenberg, so it's apt that it raises it's head here.

Packer repeatedly refers to the idea that he is "looking for more". Everything in the world of the billionaire is given a heightened

spin, leading to a surrealist slant throughout. An acquaintance of Packer's apologises on the behalf of a second, deceased friend for the latter's "unglamorous" end, wary that those left living have been let down by the dead mans "normal" passing. A conversation concerning the romanticising of a former career as a cab driver descends in to repetitive one-sided statements reminiscent of an Hallmark card. A rectal examination descends in to something of a sex act thanks to the heated nature of business table buzz talk. It's ridiculous, but accompanied by a sharp wit. Cronenberg knows exactly what he's doing. One cannot help but recall Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* at times, with the commentary on the establishment and key-word declarations placing the more recent film firmly in the shadow of the latter. This notion of a financial apocalypse, of post-Occupy demonstrations, is stirringly relevant. Our protagonist's obsession with death leads us to question whether or not the man is actually alive in the timeline presented in the film itself, or if what we are witnessing is some kind of lucid dream or hallucination. It's a fascinating work. It's a film to dissect and mull over, to interpret and theorise about. It's also something of an audience divider, and, somewhat ironically, is the directors least commercial work for quite some time.

Ultimately, and in spite of it's initial visage *Cosmopolis* is a celebration of the imperfect. Basking in the asymmetrical (both literally via a prostate and the MacGuffin of a hair-cut, and figuratively in the characters own attachments) Cronenberg's hero is ultimately freed when he is placed in a position out of his comfort zone, in which he is the one who is out of place from a comprehensibility perspective: He finds himself in a situation he can't explain with logic, bringing upon an ultimate form of self destruction.

MONOGRAPH

eXistenZ



eXistenZ (Cronenberg, 1999)

Noteworthy

1. eXistenZ opened at the Berlin Film Festival, where Cronenberg took home the Silver Bear.
2. The film is based upon an original idea by David Cronenberg, who also wrote the script. It was the director's first project since 1983 and that year's Videodrome to be based on an original screenplay.
3. Also somewhat unusually for a David Cronenberg project, eXistenZ doesn't feature any of the director's usual repertoire of performers.



Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jude Law headline Cronenberg's eXistenZ

eXistenZ is that most curious of works within any clearly defined filmmakers body of material: the transitional picture. The proto-cyberpunk / virtual reality thriller makes for a very clear punctuation point between the director's early and late periods. The cerebral of now combines with the visceral of then. That eXistenZ sits between

as diverse a pair of works as 1996's Crash, and 2002's Spider is one thing, but that it fits there perfectly is quite another. That the film draws upon themes as far back as Videodrome, and subverts them for the end of a century pushes the work very clearly in to a meta-territory where the

brain meets the body in a way quite like no other in the director's filmography.

Before moving on to *eXistenZ* let's step back and take a look at the bilateral career of Cronenberg. His early, arguable most beloved period saw the Canadian filmmaker define the body horror sub-genre with films like *The Fly*, *Rabid* and *Dead Ringers*, while the post-millennial Cronenberg oeuvre revolves largely around the mental (as opposed to the physical), the performer Viggo Mortensen, and consists of the majority of the director's works produced outside of North America (Vienna and London provide the backdrop to three of the five films produced in this period, prior to 2002 the director had only shot one film outside of Canada and the United States, 1993's *M. Butterfly*). *eXistenZ* sees a melding of the mind and the body, the early themes and the later, making it the ultimate transitional picture for one of the world's most intriguing filmmakers.

In a manner rather similar to how Cronenberg's twin approaches to the cinema line up in *eXistenZ*, the twin entertainments of video games and mainstream cinema are brought together in the film itself. In 2012 the two mediums are clearly entwined, synergy rules, making it easy to underestimate just how much Hollywood struggled to latch on to the then-rising star of hobbies and entertainment with any real sense of authority or understanding back in the early days of gaming. That the cinema is a form of virtual reality in itself makes for this struggle to be all the more confusing. In terms of early attempts to capture the video-game aesthetic on-screen Brett Leonard's *Lawnmower Man* underwhelmed, somehow managing to feel dated as before it hit theatres, while *Johnny Mnemonic* saw the future Neo starring in one of the great financial dis-



appointments of the era. The annals of the American film industry are littered with failures that tried to capture the essence of the video-game, and for every moderate success (*The Last Starfighter*) there's five of the calibre of *The Wizard*. Yet, in 1999 all that changed. To an extent. While *The Matrix*, the greater commercial success of that year went on to redefine the blockbuster and inspire a franchise that eventually imploded in on itself, it was the lesser known film of the two that translated the core mechanics of the video gaming experience with a greater degree of success.

Cronenberg's success lies with the translation of the video-gaming medium to that of the cinema, and the manner in which he immediately presents the former medium as one ground in the organic, as opposed to the technical, with a refrain that remains present throughout the picture. From the opening credits of the film, in

which the human anatomy merges with maps and circuit boards to create an unrecognisable collage, through to the guns made of



bone used to commit acts of virtual destruction, via that all important “living” console that acts as the “players” gateway to the experience, Cronenberg is very keen to portray the virtual as an animate, breathing extension of the mental. Such trailing was actually rather prescient, with the film preceding such corporate jingoisms as Sony’s “Emotion Engine” and modern body-enabled devices such as the Nintendo Wii and Microsoft’s Kinect, which encourage the user to dedicate their whole body to the cause of saving the world / winning the World Series / Pacing Men. The structure of the film, and the layered realities within the movie gives Cronenberg the perfect sandpit in which to play with what is real and natural from the off. There’s an emphasis on the sexual, with the common Cronenbergian insistence that the sexual equals the alive. It’s explicitly stated that sex heightens the emotional connection between the viewer / the user / the player and the experience.

We’re well aware of how obvious and even contrived it might sound to declare a relatively poorly received science-fiction film (commercially at least) as “ahead of its time” but it’s apt here. The disciples of the lead female protagonist, Allegra Geller, meet in a church, anticipating the cult of technology. Microsoft was bracing itself for the Millennium Bug (Windows 98 ruled the world), with the future technology behemoth of Apple still on the cusp of cultural reappraisal. Mobile phones were just about commonplace, but the iPod and the digital lifestyle that that brought with it didn’t yet exist, while Grand Theft Auto was a top-down, 2D controversy that had yet to break through to the mainstream. Even EA’s FIFA series was still in the realm of the nerd, two years away from the breakthrough of the Playstation 2 and the Friday nights of socially acceptable gaming that that console brought with it. Organic tech, that learns from its user and the rise of the smartphone and the emotional relationship between man and device is now the everyday (it’s likely that many of you will be reading this essay on a machine with which you have an emotional bond), so much so that we barely notice it. Further prescience lies in the manner in which Cronenberg’s unit’s are even called pods, bringing to mind not only the device that would follow, but the place from which Apple’s product would lift its name (the ship in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, and the notion of the self-sustained, independent units that exist as a part of it). In Cronenberg’s virtual world, the odd man out is the one that isn’t tuned in and connected to the digital (Jude Law’s Ted (for Wurman’s TED presumably) does not have a bio-port, the manner by which a human connects to the mainframe). In fact, the digital is so well defined and interconnected that it no longer is digital, its a part of the human anatomy.

MONOGRAPH

A Dangerous Method



A Dangerous Method (Cronenberg, 2011)

Noteworthy

1. Christopher Hampton, the British playwright best known for *Dangerous Liaisons* wrote *A Dangerous Method*. It's that rarest of beasts: a David Cronenberg film not written by the man himself.
2. The screenplay was actually initially written as a Julia Roberts vehicle. Keira Knightley would eventually replace her.
3. *A Dangerous Method* marks Cronenberg's third collaboration with Viggo Mortensen. Mortensen's *Eastern Promises* co-star Vincent Cassel also makes an appearance.
4. The film made its debut at the Venice Film Festival.



Viggo Mortensen and Michael Fassbender are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung

David Cronenberg's 2011 effort, an adaptation of the Christopher Hampton theatrical play *The Talking Cure* has been deemed by many to be something of a diversion for the particular Canadian filmmaker. Gone is the body horror shocks of his earlier work, the echo of which spread far and wide, even in to his more recent, "straight"

works, and in comes a dialogue heavy musing on the early days of psychoanalysis. Alas, that summation couldn't be further from the reality of the situation, with *A Dangerous Method* a perfectly appropriate accompaniment to all that has fallen before it, a subjective *Inland Empire* if you will, and the natural end point for a filmmaker

whose work has long dealt with such subject matter, albeit from the other side of the fence.

As the film opens we are thrown in to a scenario that is positively Cronenbergian, as a hectic horse driven cart speeds along moorlands, and a sequence which immediately dispels any notions that this is but your typical period piece. The camera remains within the confines of the cart, never allowing the erratic display of the figure inside to distract its gaze. Elsewhere we have the contextually surprising burst of violence that one would expect of a David Cronenberg film, the director himself having previously commented on just how important that initial spark is within each project (Eastern Promises had the naked Turkish bath fight, while A History Of Violence had its opening shooting). Here the defining moment comes courtesy of a letter opener, and while not as brutal as their earlier counterparts, within the context of the film it certainly marks a point of note.

A Dangerous Method tells of the relationship between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, the father and refiner of psychotherapy. Via their mutual friendship with fellow psychoanalytic's pioneer Sabina Spielrein the film charts the evolution of the pair's relationship, as they initially bond before falling out over professional differences over the course of a decade. Much of the focus of the film centres around Michael Fassbender's Jung. For the fourth time this year Fassbender impresses, in a performance that extends far beyond the usual period figure, following in the general spirit of the film. Keira Knightley, as the troubled Ms. Spielrein is quite simply a revelation, with a performance that finally cements the promise hinted at for so many years, and one that will hopefully be rewarded handsomely come awards season. Teaming up with

Cronenberg for the third time in successive films is Viggo Mortensen, and while he's on top form when he is on screen, said time in front of the camera is limited, leading his Freud to be little more than an extended cameo at best. The rapport between Mortensen and Fassbender is truly wonderful though, ensuring that the scenes shared between the two are consistently memorable, with special note going to the pairs first meeting, a 12-hour affair that takes in several meals and many a sight of Freud's Vienna.

The film is split in to chapters of sorts, with one particular episode dealing with the story of Otto Gross, a maverick psychoanalyst portrayed in A Dangerous Method by Vincent Cassel. Cassel's brief turn is the sort of appearance that terms like "scene stealing" were invented for, his raging lothario the poster child for the anti-psychoanalysis movement. He's a keen drug user, a womaniser and a drunk, and yet he is the one behind the clipboard, seeking answers for the lost. It's figures such as Otto Gross that ensure that A Dangerous Method is a surprisingly accessible work, not least for a film ground in such a complex and potentially alienating subject matter to a regular audience. As with Jean Renoir's The Rules Of The Game, a film with which A Dangerous Method is surprisingly reminiscent of, Cronenberg crafts a measured rendering of history, merging well-documented history with a dramatic cause. While I'm in no position to attest to the historical accuracy of Cronenberg's film, one might surmise that given the subject matter, and given the credentials of the source material, that Cronenberg and Hampton haven't ruffled too many feathers with their interpretation of events. It's no doubt patronising and unfair to suggest that the real story can't possibly have been *this* entertaining, but from what I gather this was most certainly the case.

MONOGRAPH

Credits

Hope
Lies at 24 Frames Per Second

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