

Videodrome

Insidious effects of high tech

Never let it be said that Canadian film director David Cronenberg, or fledgling American actress (*Roadie, Union City*), veteran 'new music' star Deborah Harry are anything less than punctual. It's five o'clock on a November evening in the Harbourfront offices of radio station CKEY, on the top floor of the *Toronto Star* building, and they're almost the only two people to be found in this labyrinth of bright blue and red corridors, plush carpeting, and mirrored wall. Somebody had said five o'clock, but the rest of the cast and crew of *Videodrome*, Cronenberg's newest film, are nowhere to be seen.

Canadian actress Jayne Eastwood is on the phone in one of the boardrooms, though. (This becomes an Event). And Deborah has some pills for David. (No, they're probably vitamins, everyone seems to be paranoid about catching a cold. I stifle a cough). Time passes. The Canadian film industry is late, as usual. Or perhaps, as recent articles suggest, it Does Not Exist.

But then actors and technicians begin to arrive, and with them about a million pounds of lighting, sound and camera equipment. Media munchkins are relegated to a downstairs corridor while everything is being set up. There is, after all, a film to be made.

Miracle of movie miracles, an hour or so later the wheels are in motion. Station CKEY is now station CRAM (hmmm), and dancing in the studio booth, playing the mike like a female Jagger, is Harry as pop psychologist Nickie Brand. Worried that she might have edged over into show business with her phone-in show, Nickie is certainly quite a show herself—part media guru and part prophet giving advice to some very troubled people.

Cronenberg's films are often full of troubled people and their bizarre problems. In *Videodrome* the problems begin with an underground TV show of the same name—full of scenes of real-life violence and sex—and the highly secret organization that uses the show as, you guessed it, "the ultimate weapon."

As usual, however, Cronenberg's talent (horror merchant or intellectual savant?) for quirky, undeniably entertaining storylines hints at some serious thematic concerns about the way "technology is altering everything about us, even our bodies," as the director puts it.

On this evening's shoot things would appear to be fairly normal. (No exploding heads, suction cup armpits, or parasites slithering out of people's throats—'effects' work has not yet begun), although the high-technology atmosphere of the station does lend a touch of unreality to the environment. So do all the journalists, media people and their accompanying crews of technicians, crowded into the CKEY newsroom. There is even an NFB film crew here to shoot a clip of on-location footage to represent the Canadian industry in a film that will be shipped to our embassies abroad. Appropriately, *Videodrome*, a film about the insidious effects of high-technology media in our lives, is attracting its fair



● A view of the media—tomorrow: James Woods, Deborah Harry photo: Rick Porter

share of attention from its real-life progenitors.

Paying little attention to the media circus is tall, lanky, American actor James Woods (most recently in *Ted Kottcheff's Captured*, and also *The Onion Field, Eyewitness and Holocaust*), as he stands in the stairwell entrance to the station, waiting for his cue. He's remarkably relaxed, typically sardonic. Someone asks him if he's on his mark. Woods replies that he tapes his mark to his shoe. "That way I never go wrong."

Nothing much seems likely to go wrong on this latest Filmplan International production by executive producers Pierre David and Victor Solnicki. Budgeted at six million dollars, and bought by Universal (who put up 50% of the money) for worldwide distribution, the *Videodrome* set would appear to be the epitome of industry professionalism. A case in point: just before the call to action on this latest shot, first assistant director John Board asks for a halt and runs over to change the paper under an extra's arm from a *Toronto Sun* to a

Toronto Star. One must remember, obviously, which newspaper building is the location for the evening.

Cronenberg himself is genuinely enthusiastic about the film. Rumors abound that the special effects being designed by industry wizard Rick Baker (*American Werewolf in London*) will be rather intriguing: a hand that takes the shape of a gun, a man who inserts a videocassette into his stomach, TV sets becoming fleshy, living things... But Cronenberg is quick to emphasize his enthusiasm for other areas of the project as well. "In terms of character, in terms of acting, I think it's my strongest film to this point. It's actually quite funny stuff, too, not even black humour particularly."

As for Debbie Harry, he says, "We just don't think of her as having anything to do with rock music at all. She's a gentle young actress handling a big role for the first time, and doing quite well. The technology of film is not known to her. She's learning a lot about the process from Jimmy (Woods). He's very generous



● The master himself, Allan Ginsberg

photo: Robin Kobryn

that way as an actor."

Everything in this corner of the Canadian film world, then, would seem to be unfolding as it should. Familiar Cronenberg art director Carol Speir and director of photography Mark Irwin are on board once again. Shooting began in and around Toronto on Oct. 27, and wraps on Dec. 20.

Meanwhile, back on set, someone is telling James Woods that he looks like James Dean. He's probably heard that one before, but only the audience of *Videodrome* will know for sure.

John P. McKinnon ●

VIDEODROME scr. David Cronenberg d. Cronenberg d.'s personal asst' Richard Zywickiewicz 1st, 2nd a.d. John Board, Libby Bowden 3rd a.d. Rocco Gismondy ed Ron Sanders 1st, 2nd asst. ed. Elaine Foreman, Michael Rea cont. Gillian Richardson prod. assts. Richard Spiegelman, Howard Rothschild art d. Carol Speir 1st and 2nd art d. Barbara Dunphy, Tom Coulter art d. trainee Jo-Ann Landenheim video co-ord. Michael Lennick 1st asst' video Lee Wilson 2nd asst. video Rob Meckler d.o.p./oper. Mark Irwin 1st asst'/focus Robin Miller 2nd asst'/clapper/loader James Crowe stills Rick Porter set dresser Angelo Stea 1st and 2nd asst' set dres. Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson 3rd set dresser Gary Jack prop master Peter Lauterman asst. props Greg Pelchat cost. des. Delphine White asst' des. Eileen Kennedy ward. master Arthur Rowsell ward. asst' Maureen Gurney ward. trainee Denise Woodley head make-up Shonag Jabour hair stylist Tom Booth sd. Bryan Day boom Michael Lacroix gaffer Joek Brandis key grip Maris Jansons best key grip David Hynes grip Brian Daniels best boy Scotty Allen const. man. Bill Harman exec. p. Pierre David, Victor Solnicki p. Claude Héroux asst' p. Larry Nesip p. co-ord. Roger Héroux p. man. Gwen Iveson asst' p. man. Janet Cuddy prod. sec. Angela Gruenthal exec. p.'s sec. Ellen Rosen, Monik Nantel p.'s sec. Monique Légaré loc. man. David Coatsworth head carp. Alexander Russell asst head carp. Joe Curtin carp's Kirk Cheney, Alan Sharpe, Robert Sher, John Bankson labourer Charles Martin head painter Nick Kosonic scenic painter Janet Cormack, Reet Puhm painters Simon Harwood, Elaine Cohen, Bill Gibson transp. coord. Don Baldassarra head driver Randy Jones drivers John Vander Pas, Al Kosonic, Isidore Mussalim, David Chud casting (principal actors) Walker/Bowen, Clare Walker extras Peter Lavender comptroller Serge Major asst' compt. Gilles Léonard tech. advisor Denise Di Novi prod. acc't Lacia Kornylp asst' acc't Rachelle Charron book-keeper Maureen Fitzgerald receipt. Bonnie Gold unit pub. Jill Spitz, Suzanne Daningburg L.P. James Wood and Deborah Harry, Sonia Smits, Peter Dvorsky, Lynne Gorman, Les Carlson, Julie Khaner, Reiner Schwarz, David Bolt, Jack Creley, Lally Cadeau, Henry Gomez, Harvey Chao, Kay Hawtrey, David Tsubouchi, Robin McCulloch, Sam Malkin, Ronald Reece.

Poetry in Motion

In pursuit of the Muse

Scattered across the table is an amazing collection of full ashtrays, half-full cups of coffee, and masses of paper; notes scribbled on the back of other notes, lists of people to phone, and xeroxed copies of glowing reviews. No, this is not the set of a film about a young artist, although it could well be. It was once the kitchen table of the house that Ron Mann has been living in, and it is now the center of an incredible flurry of artistic activity.

The 23-year-old Toronto filmmaker has only recently made his feature film debut with a 90-minute documentary about four jazz musicians entitled *Imagine the Sound*. The film, which was shown at the Festival of Festivals, was nominated as one of the five most popular films. It went on to win the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival for best documentary and has already