

protection and security, and not hysteria, pressure, and terror. I hate actors who have to involve everybody else in their own process of work. To me, that is not professional. If an actor needs to be anxious and sleepless to work, let him do it by himself. Don't ask me to provide that for him. A professional actor should be able to go out there and do his stuff with your guidance and help. And if he has trouble, you find a way to help him. That's the reason why I'm interested in being an actor, to see what your dynamics are on someone else's set where you don't have the responsibility of being the director. You only have the responsibility to your character and to deliver that character.

**EGOYAN:** You see different things. There are certain hierarchies that you feel should be falling into place, but you're just an outsider at that point. It becomes almost this nightmare situation where...

**CRONENBERG:** ...suddenly you are not the director anymore. I haven't had that. For me it was quite pleasant. In fact, I over did it on *Nightbreed* because I was so obedient that I didn't actually offer anything as a normal actor would, being so worried about being a director. I didn't do that on *Blue*. I talked to Don McKellar. I said, "don't think I'm trying to direct. What I want to do is be an actor who can give you possibilities that you choose from."

**EGOYAN:** That worked better. Don told me that you insisted on a crane shot for every appearance.

**CRONENBERG:** Oh yeah, right.

**EGOYAN:** That you insisted on being driven there in a Lamborghini, and that you were being very demanding and quite intolerant.

**CRONENBERG:** I think I was such a suck,

actually. I probably overdid it the other way. It was terrific experience, and I achieved what I wanted, which was to perform better. I found some things out about myself.

**EGOYAN:** A fondness for carpets.

**CRONENBERG:** I got my web feet on screen again. They haven't been on screen since *Crimes of the Future*. But I don't think you could see them. They're curling into the nap of the carpet. It was great fun to do that for exactly that reason. You literally want to play another role, not the director.

**EGOYAN:** When you do a film like *Blue*, do you entertain any fantasy of ever going back to a small budget? There is no romantic notion in your mind...?

**CRONENBERG:** I don't consider it romantic to make a low-budget film. It's just a different way of working. In other words, I am saying I could do a version of *M. Butterfly* for two million dollars. Absolutely, I could. I could do it more like the play. I could do it in Toronto. It would be a totally different movie, obviously. But I could do a project that I could call *M. Butterfly*. That's one of the interesting things I learned from doing *Friday the 13th* and *Scales of Justice*. I do a maximum two pages a day when I shoot a feature. I come in with a script that's 80 pages. It's not as outrageous as it sounds. That, to me, is the trade off. I cut on paper so I don't go in with a 120-page script. That means I can shoot two pages a day, no more, and not have an impossible schedule and an outrageous budget, which, if I had 120 pages I would have. All of this goes into the way I make movies, and over the years I've seen what works for me and what doesn't. So I've got my chops down. I don't even have to think about that anymore.

Then, suddenly for television, instead of doing a maximum of two pages a day, I'm doing seven to 11 pages. That's a huge jump. Can I do it? Well, I did it. I did it on *Scales*, and I did it once really well, I thought, and once not so well. As one might expect, the rigour of doing that forced me to do some things formalistically that were rather bold, things that maybe I wouldn't have dared to do in a feature. When I do features, I want to leave as much possibility in the editing room as there can be. I will do a close-up even though I'm sure that I am not going to use it that scene. Then, in the editing room, I find that I've thrown away two other scenes, and I'm making up a third scene, and I need that part of the close-up. I want to be able to have that if I need it. Well, I gave that up, and I got more rigorous for television. I proved to myself that I can do that and be excited by the rigour of it. What you don't get is as much money. And your crew doesn't get as much money. If I have the choice between being paid \$20,000 to do a feature, which I can do in the way I want to, and the same feature really, but I'm going to get paid a million dollars, what should I do? Of course I want the million dollars. Why not?

**EGOYAN:** At this point you must have a sense of what type of images settle in a viewer's subconscious, the images that will stay with the viewer, the images that are going to create the sense of excitement on the part of the viewer that you desire. Do you find that your approach to designing a shot has become reflexive?

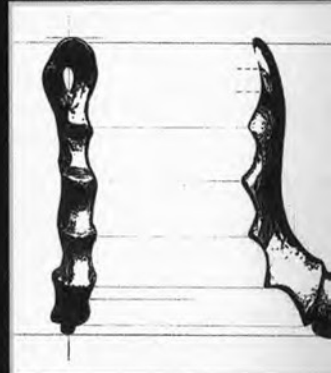
**CRONENBERG:** No. It's totally intuitive.

**EGOYAN:** Martin Scorsese says that he still is flummoxed every time he has to think of

## The Strange Objects of David Cronenberg's Desire

An exhibition of drawings, objects and creatures from the films of David Cronenberg

Organized by Seibu Department Stores, Tokyo, and the Cinematheque Ontario. Curated by Fern Bayer. At the Institute of Contemporary Culture, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, September 7 to October 17, 1993.



where to put a camera. It's still something that he approaches as though it was the first time. Do you find that visualizing something is second nature to you?

**CRONENBERG:** It is very intuitive, and when I get stuck, I don't know why I'm stuck. Suddenly, there is a scene that's really very simple, but I can't make it work. But this is very common, I think. In a way, it's knowing my own responses to the imagery, and I always have had a very visceral feeling for what wasn't right. I mean, this is one of my major discoveries coming from the written word and not having any reason to think that I had a particular visual sense at all when I started to make my first films. I wasn't a wonderful sketcher, or artist, or anything like that. So I didn't know if I would know the difference between a shot that

was working and not, nor did I care if the camera was at this level or that level. As I started to work and shoot my own first films, I found that I did have a very specific visual sense. Whether it was good or bad was irrelevant. It still holds. Over the years, I've also got my working technique down with the actors. Now I'm at the point where I am approaching my



Jeremy Irons in *Dead Ringers*, 1988

shoots like a documentarian. I'm relying totally on intuition to make the strongest visual statements.

**EGOYAN:** What images from your own films have shocked you the most by how vulnerable they have made you?

**CRONENBERG:** I'm at my most vulnerable verbally, not visually.

**EGOYAN:** I got a sense of that when I was

watching *The Brood* yesterday. The dialogue seemed really honest.

**CRONENBERG:** I think I'm still a word person. It's to say the unspoken thing. That is the thing that makes me the most vulnerable and reveals the most.

**EGOYAN:** Are there moments when an actor or actors have said, or expounded, a truth?

**CRONENBERG:** Absolutely. Things that I didn't know.

**EGOYAN:** Are there visual moments?

**CRONENBERG:** Yes, one example that has always struck me was in *Dead Ringers* when Jeremy (Irons) was playing the twins, and Elliot visits Beverley in the hospital. It reminded me of my father on his deathbed. That was really incredibly potent. I actually told that to Jeremy. But it didn't necessarily mean anything to anyone else. People have seen a million scenes with guys with oxygen devices up their noses. Visually they don't mean anything to them or to me. Yet, what Jeremy was doing was extraordinary. The way he was breathing and speaking was so accurately what my father did without Jeremy knowing it. That was incredibly potent. I can't watch that without being really touched and hurt at the same time. How much of that comes across, I don't know. It's very subjective.

**EGOYAN:** Are we condemned to aspire to make images that are so forceful that we can't watch them ultimately?

**CRONENBERG:** I think, in a way, that's what you want to do. I mean, that's where the catharsis is. *The Brood* is full of those things for me, because it was so personal, and I think in a way that's what you want. You want to press the tooth that hurts. That's what you really want to do ●

CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO

From left: maquette of the Fly Creature, *The Fly*, 1986; Peter Weller and the Agent from *Interzone*, *Naked Lunch*, 1991; drawing of 'Mutant Women' instruments, *Dead Ringers*, 1988; Videodrome helmet, *Videodrome*, 1983; preliminary drawing for Kiki's and Yves' transformation, *Naked Lunch*, 1991

