



# Long Live the New Flesh: David Cronenberg's Somatic Dialectic From Shivers to eXistenZ

*Douglas Mann*

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In the last quarter of the twentieth century, David Cronenberg was one of the three or four greatest horror film directors in the world, and a leading light of Canadian cinema. At the same time he was the most cerebral horror film maker in North America, bringing in existentialism, Freudian psychology and Marshall McLuhan's theory of media as extensions of the human body into his work.

LONG LIVE THE NEW FLESH argues that Cronenberg's films from 1975 to 1999 show a remarkable consistency of vision, a "somatic dialectic" that explores the monstrous side of our Cartesian mind/body dualism when it is disrupted by a misguided science to produce "creative cancers." Cronenberg's focus on how the human body can become infected by perverse viruses and technologies is repeated in almost every film he made from his student days in the 1960s until the end of the century. Yet his picture of the human body is a complex one that requires four interlocking theoretical pictures, outlined in detail in each of the four chapters of the book.

The dialectical side of the somatic dialectic comes from the fact that Cronenberg is a self-confessed theoretical bricoleur, using bits and pieces of philosophy, psychology and cultural theory from diverse sources in his films. There's some traditional Gothic horror in them, along with some Freudian psychopathology, a McLuhanesque understanding of media, and finally some Baudrillard-style postmodernism. Yet these four theoretical pictures are dialectically interwoven in his cinematic corpus, with his earlier films emphasizing Gothic and Freudian themes, his later ones a McLuhanesque view of technology and the desert of the real in which most of us now live.

In addition to the four main chapters of the book, which carefully chart the ebb and flow of this dialectic of the body in his work, there is a postscript on how a more subtle version of the New Flesh can be found in his later films *A Dangerous Method* and *Cosmopolis*. There is also a detailed filmography of all his feature films up to 2014, including synopses and production staff and cast lists, along with a bibliography of books, articles and interviews on the director.

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## THE AUTHOR

Douglas Mann has been teaching courses in philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and popular culture since

the 1990s at a variety of Canadian universities and colleges. He is the author of Structural Idealism, Understanding Society: A Survey of Modern Social Theory and Great Power and Great Responsibility: The Philosophical Politics of Comics. He is also the co-author of Philosophy: A New Introduction, and has published over a hundred articles on philosophy, social and political issues, technology and popular culture.

"Man is an animal that thinks too much, an over-rational animal that's lost touch with its body and its instincts." - Dr. Hobbes in Shivers

"Long Live the New Flesh!" - Max Renn in Videodrome

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