



[A Dangerous Method](#)

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) February 2012

There is a long tradition of films treating psychoanalysis, from its initial introduction to the Hollywood community with the pre-war influx of intellectuals fleeing Nazi persecution – as shown in Hitchcock's 'Spellbound' to the more comic 'Analyze This' – films which increasingly show that the analyst may be more screwed up than the patient.

Cronenberg's adaptation of Christopher Hampton's play shows how dangerous the talking cure could be and the relationship between Freud and Jung whose split created a fundamental division in psychoanalysis. Based on true, but almost unbelievable, events, this is ostensibly the story of Sabina Spielrein who begins as a patient and then through analysis becomes one of the first female analysts, but the core of the film is the relationship between the older Freud and Jung, whom he views as his successor.

Initially Jung idolises Freud but soon the two men are diverging. Jung establishes that Spielrein's hysteria stems from childhood abuse, leading her to consider herself 'vile and filthy and corrupt' and therefore deserving of punishment. This concentration on the sexual confirms Freud's theories that sexual desire and its repression were at the root of hysteria.

Faced with the nervous wreck that Spielrein has become Jung is persuaded to fulfill her desire for punishment, thereby cheating on his wife and stepping over the boundary between analyst and patient. Analysts are warned of the danger of transference, where the patient seeks a solution for their problems by concentrating their desires on the analyst, in this case the analyst is easily persuaded to fulfill his patient's desires.

Freud is played by Viggo Mortensen, who previously worked with Cronenberg to great effect in 'A History of Violence' and 'Eastern Promises'. He plays the founder of psychoanalysis as the elder statesman a celibate who sees sex everywhere and wishes to bestow the mantle of leadership on his young disciple Jung. Michael Fassbender is the young star exploring the new science whilst finding himself in conflict with his mentor. It is fascinating to see these pioneers explore the boundaries of the new science.

