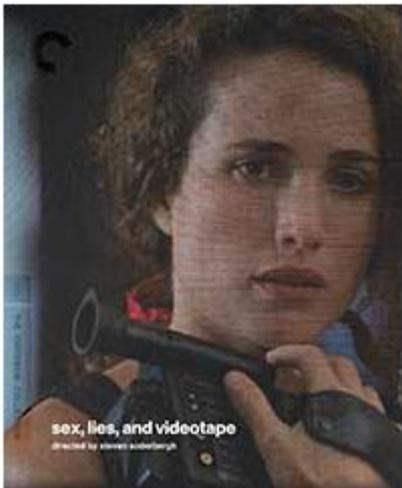


## Sex, Lies, and Videotape [Criterion Collection] (TheaterByte Blu-ray Review)

JULY 18, 2018 [BY BRANDON A. DUHAMEL](#) [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



Sex, Lies, and Videotape is writer/director Steven Soderbergh's 1989 feature film debut. The title promises the tawdry, but instead delivers a multilayered character examination on the complications of the narcissistic end of the Reagan era 1980s and the seeds of the personal video age we are living through today wherein everyone is armed with their own video devices.

Set in the sun-soaked suburbs of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Sex, Lies, and Videotape follows a couple, Ann Bishop Mullany (Andie MacDowell) and her husband John Mullany (Peter Gallagher) whose marriage is stagnating. The introverted Ann has pulled away from her husband and the couple is no longer having sex, which leads John into the arms of Ann's more outgoing sister, Cynthia Patrice Bishop (Laura San Giacomo). The lives of all three are disrupted when an old friend of John's, Graham Dalton (James Spader), shows up in town.

Graham is an eccentric character who likes to videotape women as he asks them about their sex lives and then later masturbate to the videos. When Graham grows closer to Ann, she eventually finds herself at his place, but when she finds his store of videotapes with women's names on them, she freaks out and bolts from his home. After telling her sister Cynthia, Cynthia finds herself curious and makes her way to Graham's home. She ends up recording a video for Graham

and doing a little something extra on video. When Ann finds out about it and Cynthia's affair with John, it drives her right back to Graham.

While many viewers were expecting the salacious, what we get is a visually beautiful film with very little sex and no outright nudity. The gorgeous scenes set in upper middle-class homes bathed in sunlight and greenery play off of the tight camera angles and Soderbergh's judicious use of set designs.

Soderbergh's screenplay is exactly crafted so as the plot plays out toward an increasingly muddled (in a good way) conclusion as the protagonists tangle themselves in a web of lies and selfish desires. At one point, Cynthia professes her desire to have sex with John in her sister's bed. These people prove themselves not good people and their choices manifest themselves in their complicated lives.

## The Video

This new digital transfer of *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* was created completely in 4K on a DFT Scanity film scanner from the original 35mm camera negatives. Thousands of instances of dirt, scratches, and warps were manually removed using MTI Film's DRS, while Digital Vision's Phoenix was used for jitter, flicker, small dirt, grain, and noise management. A more complete provenance and rundown of how the film has been restored over the years can be viewed in this disc's text special feature 'A Note on the Picture and Sound Restorations'. The restoration was overseen from start to finish by Steven Soderbergh.

The film is presented on Blu-ray in its original 1.85:1 aspect ra-

tio in an AVC 1080p encodement. It looks stunning, to say the least. The film's grain structure is intact, organic, and filmic. The image is clean and textured, and the colors are quite natural and shadows are nicely nuanced.



Andie MacDowell and James Spader in *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989). Courtesy the Criterion Collection  
5 Photos

## The Audio

*Sex, Lies, and Videotape* has been plagued with audio issues dating back to its original on-location recording due to its low budget and a particularly loud generator. A detailed rundown of the issues and multiple issues, and many remixes over the years (including the one on this release) can be seen in the excellent special feature by sound editor/re-recording mixer Larry Blake on this release entitled *Generators, Noise Reduction, and Multitrack Audiotape*. The sound was originally remastered in 2009 by Larry Blake. The original stems and premixes were transferred to 96kHz files, and a new set of stems was created,

featuring music upmixed to 5.1 surround. In 2018, the original dialogue-edit elements were located and the film's dialogue was completely remixed by Blake and Soderbergh with special attention paid to noise reduction (reducing the noise of the generator that has plagued the audio of the film since its original 1989 Cannes debut).

## The Supplements

The newly remixed and remastered 2018 audio is provided in a 96kHz/24-bit English DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 track that sounds miraculously good given the history of how bad and noisy this film this film has often sounded. The background noise from the noisy generator used during the production is pretty much gone and the dialogue has been redone with new EQ and noise reduction to make it sound fuller and less pinched than the last time the film was remixed. The 5.1 mix is subtle, with most sound effects remaining across the front three channels, very little in the subwoofer, and a small amount of atmospherics coming from the surrounds, but it sounds good for this film.

This edition comes packed with insightful special features in the form of interviews and 'making of' documentaries and featurettes with the cast and crew. They include a mixture of new and archival features, plus an audio commentary with Soderbergh from 1998.

- Commentary – In this commentary record in 1998, writer-director Steven Soderbergh talks with filmmaker and playwright Neil LaBute about all aspects of the film, including the screenwriting process; his approach to the film's style; and the dramatic trajectory of the film's success after it won the Plame d'Or at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival.

- Steven Soderbergh – Presented here are three interviews with director Steven Soderbergh. The first is a new introduction to the film recorded in 2018. In the second, a 1992 appearance on The Dick Cavett
- Show, he talks about his love for movies, especially Jaws, and the difficulties associated with immediate success. The 1990 interview finds him in Washington, D.C.
- Something in the Air: Making "Sex, Lies, and Videotape (1.78:1; 1080p/24; 00:28:55) – This documentary, produced for the Criterion Collection in 2018, features actors Per Gallagher, Andie MacDowell, and Laura San Giacomo discussing their work with director Steven Soderbergh on his first feature, and the ways that the film transformed their careers.
- James Spader (1.33:1; upscaled 1080i; 00:05:13) – This excerpt from NBC's Today with actor James Spader was recorded in September 1989.
- Larry Blake and Cliff Martinez (1.78:1; 1080p/24; 00:19:38) – Sound editor/re-recording mixer Larry Blake and composer Cliff Martinez have worked with director Steven Soderbergh since the beginning of his career. In this conversation, recorded in April 2018 for the Criterion Collection, they discuss the challenges of the director's debut film and the execution of his work since then.
- Deleted Scene w/ optional commentary by Steven Soderbergh (1.78:1; upscaled 1080i; 00:03:20) – Director Steven Soderbergh initially retained this scene between Ann (Andie MacDowell) and her therapist, played by Ron Vawter, because of the strength of Vawter's performance. The scene was ultimately cut because Soderbergh felt it made Ann appear too pliable.
- Generators, Noise Reduction, and Multitrack Audiotape 1.78:1; – Larry Blake discusses overcoming problems on the film sound of Steven Soderbergh's first film and the efforts to remix and remaster the sound for this new 4K restoration

- Trailers — In preparation for the theatrical release of *sex, lies, and videotape*, director Steven Soderbergh cut an unusual trailer that he distributor, Miramax, felt was too esoteric. They created an alternate version, but the director's wish that the imagery in it be subjective was honored.
- Soderbergh Cut (1.78:1; 1080p/24; 00:01:33)
- Miramax Cut (1.78:1; 1080p/24; 00:01:37)
- A Note on the Picture and Sound Restorations
- Booklet featuring an essay by critic Amy Taubin and excerpts from Soderbergh's 1990 book about the film

## The Final Assessment

*Sex, Lies, and Videotape* is one of the great American indie film debuts and one of the films that set me off on the path to paying attention to film as an art form when I was a teenager. It would go on to win the Palme d'Or (Steven Soderbergh) and Best Actor (James Spader) awards at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival. This new Criterion Collection release is top-notch, an absolute must own for cineastes.

*Sex, Lies, and Videotape* is out on Blu-ray July 17, 2018 from Criterion Collection