

Spring 2004

## Remote Controls and Pistols

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### Recommended Citation

Darrigrand, Roger (2004) "Remote Controls and Pistols," *ESSAI*: Vol. 2, Article 8.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol2/iss1/8>

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## Remote Controls and Pistols

by Roger Darrigrand

(English 102)

The Assignment: Write an essay in which you argue for or against the position that we are creating a society where people no longer take responsibility for their actions. Use your own experiences as well as outside sources and format the paper in MLA style.

I am a child of the one-eyed demon that is so lovingly bestowed the title television in our society. My umbilical cord was a twelve foot black wire plugged into the wall and wrapping my mouth around the long silver antenna was the closest I came to suckling from the teat of the one who raised me. Like an angst driven teen though, I now despise the one who brought me into the world. I hate the hours I spend watching senseless nothingness on television instead of doing the countless number of more productive things there are to do in life. I cringe when I think of how many books I have not read, my ability to only speak one language, and the lack of time I spend with loved ones and then look at the amount of time I have invested in sitting mindlessly in front of the boob-tube.

Despite all this inner anger, I still find myself constantly coming to television's defense. When people like John Grisham try to single out the media as the one to blame for the actions of individuals, I cannot agree. I do see most media today to be full of nothingness and/or poor values. Forms of media are tools, and if in the wrong hands can do horrible things. Yet, although television and other media forms in today's society play a major role, to single handedly blame them for the violent actions of individuals is preposterous.

To begin, there is no denying that television and movies are two very powerful examples of today's media. No one can argue that the influence of having access to nearly every home in the Western world and the power of cinema to display anything from advertising to art is something to be taken lightly. According to Susan B. Neuman's book, *Literacy in the Television Age*, even in 1987 an estimate of seven hours and seven minutes a day was spent with the television on in the average household (11). This has had the power to bring a homogeneous view to the media watching world in a way that has never been witnessed before. The impact of film and television with their mixture of sight and sound has mesmerized several generations and brought together what Marshall McLuhan called the "global village" (31).

So what sort of messages are being conveyed by this powerful media? A look at films in today's theaters and a stroll through the daily television channels will show that there is not much being shown that will educate the viewer, but more what will sell. Advertising dollars are the key to making the media world go round and sensationalism is what keeps the audiences' attention and wallets captivated. Watching the summer blockbusters released into the theaters with advertisements promising action and death, or Brit Hume of Fox News' "Special Report" yelling out the daily news into the camera in a tone to scare the viewer into continuing to watch will show that the media has learned to captivate their audience with loud noises and violence. According to the video documentary *Brother of Mine: Youth Violence and Society*, studies show that by the time most children reach the age of eighteen, they have seen nearly 28,000 murders just on television.

These impacting media forms of film and television have found a way into the daily lives of most every individual in the Western world by way of selling sensationalism and captivating violence. They have become the power which Neil Postman outlined in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: "People will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (vii). But for society to throw up its arm or shake its fists at television and film as the reason to blame for the ills in today's world is outlandish. To take the blame and shift it off the shoulders of individuals and onto the

makers of film and television programming is nothing more than a lack of responsibility of media consumers to take into account their own actions.

Those looking to blame the media instead of the consumer tend to be searching for the scapegoat with the most money. Seldom do we see the people who committed horrible acts of crime blaming media, but the lawyers who want to blame the makers of media for allegedly brainwashing their clients. Lawyers have found that instead of looking at the blatant facts showing that their clients have chosen to pull a trigger and kill, they would rather point the finger at other indirect possible influences on their clients who have committed the crimes. Rarely is there seen a case of lawyers wanting to sue the parents of their client or others who might have influenced the guilty party who do not have a large enough bank account. Even if influences other than media were being singled out, it would still be an absurd view not to hold the guilty party accountable for his or her actions. This is yet another example of how people have let the law take away from the accountability of individuals or parental duties. As Christopher Daly writes in his essay “How the lawyers Stole Winter,” “[b]y focusing on liability and not teaching our kids [...] we are making their world more dangerous’ (404).

No matter how strong film, television, and all other forms of media may be in society, people cannot let the idea that they no longer have control over their lives take control over them. The decision to pick up the remote control or a pistol is not a decision made by those who make media. No matter how deplorable or sensationalistic media may become, to use it as the excuse for the actions of individual people is unacceptable. As Oliver Stone wrote, “[o]nce grown and gone horribly wrong, those children must answer for their actions—not Hollywood directors” (609).

So, I could sit and complain how the media of today has devalued my life by robbing me of my best years. Scholars can wax poetically over how the inanimate object shining brightly for seven hours and seven minutes every day in nearly every home is to blame for the loss of the fundamental values in the American family. But until consumers choose to become responsible for what they take in, no one can blame the horridness of their own actions on anyone but themselves. If better values and a better society are what people want, then let us rise up and take responsibility for what we say and do. Let us fight as individuals to foster what we plant in our minds and the minds of our children. But please be civil. Let’s wait and do it during a commercial break.

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