WELCOME, EVERYONE. I THOUGHT WE COULD SPEND THIS FIRST WEEK OF SCHOOL DISCUSSING THE BOOK YOU WERE ASSIGNED TO READ OVER THE SUMMER.

"THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE," ANYONE CARE TO TELL ME SOME OF ITS THEMES?

ANYONE?

OK, LET'S BACK UP A BIT, WHO WANTS TO TELL ME WHAT IT'S ABOUT?


YES, PETER? I THINK IT WAS LIGHT BLUE.

WELL, THE GOOD NEWS IS I'M CURRENTLY THE TOP STUDENT IN MY ENGLISH CLASS, AND THE BAD NEWS?

FALL 2011
DR EMILY ROSS
**READINGS FOR CW1 42.101.213**

**Note:** This is not a complete collection of all of the documents you will need to read for this class. Other items, such as the ‘Information Literacy Handout’, will be given out separately in class.

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1. It is/is not worth the expense and risk to make a manned flight to Mars.


Mars has fascinated Earth-bound humans since prehistoric times, due to its captivating red hue and proximity and similarity to Earth. The romance of space travel and the exploration of new worlds is a major argument in favor of a manned mission to Mars. Supporters claim that exploring and colonizing the moon and Mars will give us a better understanding of our own home planet, Earth. Other supporters are motivated by feelings of national pride, saying the prestige of the United States is at stake. Still others believe that the research required by such a complex mission will help the United States retain its position as a leader in science and technology.

The success of the Apollo program in the 1960s and 1970s created a generation of astronaut heroes that inspired the nation. "In 1969, America sent men to the moon, not machines," Ben Wattenberg said on PBS's Think Tank. "[H]uman beings are exploratory creatures ... mankind needs big ideas and big projects to ennoble and inspire society. Don’t our little boys and girls need heroes and heroines to say, 'Look at him, look at her, she’s there’?" President George W. Bush once said in an address to the nation, "Mankind is drawn to the heavens for the same reason we were once drawn to unknown lands and across the open sea. We choose to explore space because doing so improves our lives and lifts our national spirit."

Many supporters of manned travel to Mars argue that because of its similarity to Earth, Mars offers opportunities to discover the origins of life and ways to protect the environment on Earth. "We cling to the hope of a neighboring planet that harbors ... at least some primitive forms of life. If Mars contains even nanobacteria—or indisputable evidence of past life of the simplest forms—this will profoundly change our conception of our place in the universe," wrote Thomas Gangale. "If Mars is dead now, but was once alive, understanding how Mars died may give us a crucial understanding of how close we are coming to killing the Earth."

The Mars Society [a group that supports Mars exploration] shares that opinion. In its Founding Declaration, the society wrote, "As we begin the twenty-first century, we have evidence that we are changing the Earth’s atmosphere and environment in significant ways.... Mars, the planet most like Earth, will have even more to teach us about our home world. The knowledge we gain could be key to our survival."

And many scientists assert that the best way to attain that knowledge is with human scientists. "Robots can do a lot," Chris Welch, a lecturer in space technology at Kingston University, told the BBC "But having multiple trained human beings there would tell us so much more." Dava Newman, associate professor of aeronautics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, agreed. "It’s risky and it’s also very costly, but there’s just so much humans can do as explorers that we don’t have any other way to accomplish."

China, Russia, and the European Union have all announced plans to boost their space programs in coming years, including sojourns to the moon and Mars. Some people believe it’s essential to U.S. international status that the United States lead the way in space exploration. "Republican officials said conservative lawmakers who might balk at the cost [of a manned mission to Mars] are likely be lured by the chance to extend the U.S. military supremacy in space when China is pursuing lunar probes and Russia is considering a Mars mission," Mike Allen and Eric Pianin wrote in The Washington Post.

The European Space Agency (ESA) has developed a long-term plan—known as Aurora—that will use robotics to first explore low-Earth orbit and then move farther out into planetary excursions, including Mars. The ESA intends to send a rover to Mars by 2009 and a manned mission to the moon by 2024 that will "demonstrate key life support and habitation technologies as well as aspects of crew
performance and adaptation." The final step in the Aurora program is a human mission to Mars in the 2030s.

Regaining the top position in science and technology is another reason to support a Mars mission. According to The New York Times, the dominance the United States once had in science and innovation has declined in recent years as the number of international prizes and journal publications awarded to European and Asian researchers has increased. Jennifer Bond, vice president of international affairs for the Council on Competitiveness said, "Many other countries have realized that science and technology are key to economic growth and prosperity. They're catching up to us." She warned that people in the United States should not "rest on their laurels." A poll by the Associated Press seems indicate that many people in the United States agree with her. Seventy-two percent of respondents in the poll deemed it important for the United States to be the "leading country in the world in the exploration of space."

"America is not going to remain at peace, and we're not going to remain the most prosperous nation, and we're not going to remain a free nation unless we remain the technological leader of the world," said Representative Dana Rohrabacher, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics: "And we will not remain the technological leader of the world unless we are the leaders in space."


"Two centuries ago, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark left St. Louis to explore the new lands acquired in the Louisiana Purchase," George W. Bush said, announcing his desire for a program to send men and women to Mars.¹ "They made that journey in the spirit of discovery.... America has ventured forth into space for the same reasons."

Yet there are vital differences between Lewis and Clark’s expedition and a Mars mission. First, Lewis and Clark were headed to a place amenable to life; hundreds of thousands of people were already living there. Second, Lewis and Clark were certain to discover places and things of immediate value to the new nation. Third, the Lewis and Clark venture cost next to nothing by today's standards. In 1989 NASA estimated that a people-to-Mars program would cost $400 billion, which inflates to $600 billion today. The Hoover Dam cost $700 million in today’s money, meaning that sending people to Mars might cost as much as building about 800 new Hoover Dams. A Mars mission may be the single most expensive non-wartime undertaking in U.S. history.

The thought of travel to Mars is exhilarating. Surely men and women will someday walk upon that planet, and surely they will make wondrous discoveries about geology and the history of the solar system, perhaps even about the very origin of life. Many times I have stared up at Mars in the evening sky — in the mountains, away from cities, you can almost see the red tint — and wondered what is there or was there. But the fact that a destination is tantalizing does not mean the journey makes sense, even considering the human calling to explore. And Mars as a destination for people makes absolutely no sense with current technology.

Present systems for getting from Earth’s surface to low-Earth orbit are so fantastically expensive that merely launching the 1,000 tons or so of spacecraft and equipment a Mars mission would require could be accomplished only by cutting health-care benefits, education spending, or other important programs — or by raising taxes. Absent some remarkable discovery, astronauts, geologists, and biologists once on Mars could do little more than analyze rocks and feel awestruck beholding the sky of another

¹ The Louisiana Purchase was a very large area of land that was bought by the United States from France in 1803. Two men, Lewis and Clark, spent more than two years exploring and mapping the area.
world. Yet rocks can be analyzed by automated probes without risk to human life, and at a tiny fraction of the cost of sending people.

It is interesting to note that when President Bush unveiled his proposal, he listed these recent major achievements of space exploration: pictures of the rings of Saturn and the outer planets, evidence of water on Mars and the moons of Jupiter, discovery of more than 100 planets outside our solar system, and study of the soil of Mars. All these accomplishments came from automated probes or automated space telescopes. Bush's proposal, which calls for "reprogramming" some of NASA's present budget into the Mars effort, might actually lead to a reduction in such unmanned science—the one aspect of space exploration that's working really well.

Rather than spend hundreds of billions of dollars to hurl tons toward Mars using current technology, why not take a decade—or two decades, or however much time is required—researching new launch systems and advanced propulsion? If new launch systems could put weight into orbit affordably, and if advanced propulsion could speed up that long, slow transit to Mars, then the dream of stepping onto the red planet might become reality. Mars will still be there when the technology is ready.

Space exploration proponents deride as lack of vision the mention of technical barriers or the insistence that needs on Earth come first. Not so. The former is rationality, the latter the setting of priorities. If Mars proponents want to raise $600 billion privately and stage their own expedition, more power to them; many of the great expeditions of the past were privately mounted. If Mars proponents expect taxpayers to foot their bill, then they must make their case against the many other competing needs for money. And against the needs for health care, education, poverty reduction, reinforcement of the military, and reduction of the federal deficit, the case for vast expenditures to go to Mars using current technology is very weak.

The drive to explore is part of what makes us human, and exploration of the past has led to unexpected glories. Dreams must be tempered by realism, however. For the moment, going to Mars is hopelessly unrealistic.
When he goes to the movies, Ravel Centeno likes to sit on the aisle and stretch his feet out—a fact that by itself speaks volumes about his personality, according to a new study. The study, commissioned by the British movie theater company Odeon, examined how theater seating habits reflect personality. And as the summer movie season reaches its zenith, the research says you are where you sit. Psychologist Donna Dawson divided moviegoers into four different personality types based on their seating preferences and cited examples of movie characters who fit those types.

Those who sit on the aisle, like Centeno, are "detached observers"—people who like to have their own space, who are observers and tend to be quieter. "That's funny, because I'm a writer," Centeno said Thursday as he waited to see A.I. at the Cineplex Odeon at Universal CityWalk. "So that's what I do (observe people)." One celluloid example of a detached observer, said Dawson, is Jack Nicholson's Melvin Udall character in *As Good as It Gets*.

Other personality types, according to Dawson:

The "front row film fanatic": Extroverted, assertive, and competitive, these are people who like to see movies with others, not on their own. An example from the movies might be Mike Meyers's Austin Powers or Julia Roberts's Erin Brockovich.

The "middle-of-the-roaders": These are the people who like to sit in the middle, fittingly. They are people who are flexible and try to get along with others, such as Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma. Gloria and Tom Candelaria of Redlands say that seems to fit them. "We like the middle because it's not too far back and not too close to the front," Gloria Candelaria said as she scanned the marquee at CityWalk. Tom Candelaria said the "middle-of-the-roader" label seems to fit them because "we're easygoing."

The "invisible rebels": Those who sit far in the back are people who are rebellious and like excitement but don't necessarily seek the limelight, the study said. A typical example is Clint Eastwood's Man with No Name and Sigourney Weaver's Lt. Ripley in the *Alien* films. "The back row is where things happen; it's an exciting area of danger and lots of passionate smooching," Dawson said in the Odeon report. "It tends to attract people who are rebellious."

For some people, though, sometimes a chair is just a chair. "I don't know—wherever there's an empty seat," said filmgoer Chris Marshall of Lake Hollywood, when asked where he likes to sit. "That works for me."
1. Film Review “Boat”


“Boat” is a Korean Japanese co-production charting the experiences and cross cultural friendship of a couple of smugglers, and was directed by Kim Young Nam, whose indie feature “Don’t Look Back” won awards back in 2006. The film is certainly a pan-Asian affair, with a script by Japanese writer Watanabe Aya (previously responsible for “La Maison de Himiko” and “Tennen Kokekko”) and a multinational cast including Ha Jung Woo (“The Chaser”) and Tsumabuki Satoshi (“Pandemic”). It was released in Japan under the title “No Boys, No Cry”, which is arguably more meaningful than its Korean moniker, as the boat and the profession of the characters only really play a part during the early stages.

The film initially follows Korean smuggler Hyung Gu (Ha Jung Woo), who transports illicit goods and drugs across the sea to Japan for his boss Bo Gyung using a small boat. His main contact on the other side is a young Japanese man called Toru (Tsumabuki Satoshi), with who, despite their communication difficulties, he strikes up a friendship of sorts. Their lives and jobs become more complicated when Bo Gyung orders them to ferry a young woman (played by Cha Soo Yeon, recently excellent in the disturbing “Beautiful”), who has been kidnapped after her father absconded with gang money. Rather than following his orders, they decide to take her up on an offer to find her father first for a considerable sum, not least since Toru in particular is in dire financial straits.

Despite its drug running and kidnap premise, “Boat” is actually a laid back character drama rather than a thriller, with director Kim showing the same indie sensibilities as he has in the past and concentrating on the human aspects of the story rather than anything too straightforward. Indeed, the film moves along at an unhurried pace, as the early scenes of smuggling and crime drama quickly give way to characters simply hiding out, talking, and trying to work through their problems. The relationship between Hyung Gu and Toru does not develop along the expected lines, and the film never becomes a clichéd buddy picture, with several rather harsh turns. Both are quite odd, unconventional figures, each with their own sets of problems and motivations, which inevitably leads to a number of clashes. This works very well, and Kim does a great job of making the two men very believable and sympathetic, despite the fact that they clearly operate to a large extent on self-interest.

The other characters are also refreshingly better written than in the average more commercially minded production, and the film eschews the usual kind of artificial romance and melodrama, even during its latter stages. Certainly, Kim never avoids the often cruel and practical realities of life, and the film essentially revolves around a series of difficult choices, weighing the importance of self against family and friends. Through this, he explores human nature in a quiet, though frequently powerful fashion, and the film has a genuine emotional complexity which keeps the viewer engrossed throughout. Although it is a bit slow at times, and possibly a touch overlong, Kim has a great eye for detail, and without ever allowing the plot to drift too far into the background, he gives the proceedings a contemplatory, observational air.

Helping to keep the viewer involved is a sly sense of humor, which does make for quite a few amusing scenes, albeit frequently in a suitably bitter manner. Language problems inevitably arise throughout, with the characters often communicating in a mix of Korean, Japanese and English, leading to some funny moments and misunderstandings. The film does work at times as a comedy of errors, with Hyung Gu in particular being a bit daft and prone to errors, and he comes across as a bit of a likeable dunce, as do several other members of the cast, with Toru being the only one who seems to have his head fully screwed on. As a result, the film is generally quirky, though without being wacky or overtly gag filled, and Kim skillfully balances this with its more serious concerns.

“Boat” certainly is a bit livelier than most other indie films, and is arguably all the more entertaining for it. Kim’s approach effectively combines both slow burn humanistic themes and engaging drama, and he shows himself again to be a talented and unique voice in Korean cinema.


**3. Film Reviews “Sucker Punch”**


1/5

*Sucker Punch*, a barrage of green-screen effects and comic-book portentousness from *300* and *Watchmen* director Zack Snyder, is hands-down the most nightmarishly awful film of the year. A field day for schoolgirl fetishists and fanboys with a penchant for steampunk (but with Snyder's leaden dialogue, you've got to call it steamclunk), this staggering failure borrows from Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*, Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *The City of Lost Children*, Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, and a variety of psych-ward melodramas from *The Snake Pit* to *The Uninvited*.

If that sounds like it'd make for a cool mash-up, maybe it would have - if Snyder had anything on his mind apart from exploding zeppelins, fire-breathing dragons, Japanese samurai fights, and Carla Gugino doing a campy Polish accent. One of the creepier aspects of the plot - if you can call this ricocheting pastiche a plot - is that Baby Doll (Emily Browning), the sorry lass who has been committed to Lennox House for the Mentally Insane by her sleazeball stepdad, is set to have a frontal lobotomy.

Talk about apt metaphors: It's nothing but brain-dead delirium on screen.

OK, if you're a 15-year-old boy (or a 30-year-old boy, or a girl with a '50s pinup jones), there's no denying that the girl-gang casting of *Sucker Punch* - pouty, pigtailed Browning; the regal, Nicole Kidman-esque Abbie Cornish; punky Jena Malone; plucky Vanessa Hudgens, and the exotic Jamie Chung - has a certain allure. But even with the strip-club fantasy costumes and the drop-downs into video gamelike alternate universes, the eye candy quickly gets stale.

Baby Doll is sent to this gothic hilltop asylum, where she shares a ward with the aforementioned inmates, named Sweet Pea, Rocket, Blondie and Amber. Oscar Isaac is Blue, Lennox House's sinister overseer. One way to keep track of which reality Baby Doll finds herself in is to watch Isaac's face: If he's got a thin mustache going and he's in shark skin, it's the nightclub/bordello reality. If he's clean-shaven, in a white caretaker's jacket, it's the "normal" world.

Gugino (Snyder's muse: She was in *Watchmen*, too) likewise changes appearance. She's Lennox House's empathetic psychiatrist, counseling her patients in a comfy office on one plane of reality; she's a madam-cum-Method acting coach, leading her leggy trouperes through various elaborate scenarios on another.

*Sucker Punch*, in case this hasn't been made clear, toggles back and forth, to and fro, between alternating mindscapes, as Baby Doll and her team embark on an epic scavenger hunt. They need to find a map, then fire, then a knife, and then a key.

"The fifth thing is a mystery," intones Scott Glenn, playing a kind of Zen master who seems to have boned up on his riddle-me-this delivery by watching episodes of David Carradine's *Kung Fu*.

"Begin your journey," he tells Baby Doll. "It will set you free."

Exit the theater. It will set you freer.
Ever since “300,” Zack Snyder has been the darling of the Warner Bros. lot, left to try his hand at the most famous graphic novel adaptation of all (“Watchmen”) and even given a kids’ movie about talking warrior owls from Australia. And they’ve anointed him the savior of the “Superman” franchise.

But with “Sucker Punch” Warners gave him enough rope to hang himself with. This is the most epic miscalculation since the Golden Summer of M. Night Shyamalan. An unerotic unthrilling erotic thriller in the video game/comic book crossover vein, “Sucker Punch” is “Last Airbender” with bustiers.

Snyder rounded up five of the most buxom young actresses in the biz, women who give five of the flattest performances ever in a humorless quest fantasy about Pussycat Doll inmates trying to escape from an insane asylum.

I’d quote a witty line or two, if the script (co-written by Snyder) had any. I’d mention the emotional peaks if the movie managed one.

“Sucker Punch” is a flatly played flat-looking exercise in green screen filmmaking, “Sin City” without the sin. Emily Browning plays a young heiress committed to Lennox House by a hateful, nameless guardian who framed her for the murder of her sister. There, she takes the (striptease) dancing cure of a Polish psychotherapist (Carla Gugino) and joins four other young women in an escape that they plan to carry out in an alternate reality.

Scott Glenn is the “Wise Man” who gives “Baby Doll,” as Browning’s character is known, the marching orders for her quest. She must obtain five talismans to escape. She has five days to get out before a lobotomy is administered (by Jon Hamm of “Mad Men”). So she enlists Rocket (Jena Malone), Blondie (Vanessa Hudgens), Sweet Pea (Abbie Cornish) and Amber (Jamie Chung), her fellow dancer/hooker/inmates, to join her.

Every time Baby Doll “dances” her super erotic bump and grind for the paying customers, the five of them turn up in a different battle zone of their imaginations — a World War I battlefield with steam-powered German zombies, Zeppelins and a battle machine straight out of “Robocop,” a medieval fortress siege with dragons and an oddly configured WWII bomber. They pull out their samurai swords and Navy SEALs machine guns and mow down whoever is in the way of their acquiring a map, a key, what have you. These furies in fishnet stockings are neither convincing substitutes for Uma Thurman in “Kill Bill” (plainly an inspiration) nor involving characters. At times, their digitally enhanced battles look like state of the art (circa 2005) video game graphics. Scantily attired, they still aren’t sexy. In mortal danger, they still aren’t sympathetic.

“If you do not dance,” Dr. Vera Gorski (Gugino) purrs in exaggerated Polish-accented English, “you have no purpose.” Snyder doesn’t let any of his young vixens dance. Or let us see them dance.

The only “Sucker Punch” here is to your wallet if pay non-matinee prices for this. Just be grateful it wasn’t in 3D. Well, maybe “Superman: Man of Steel” will be Snyder’s comeback. If Warners lets him direct it.

“Sucker Punch”

**MPAA rating:** PG-13 for thematic material involving sexuality, violence and combat sequences, and for language.

**Cast:** Emily Browning (Baby Doll), Jena Malone (Rocket), Jamie Chung (Amber), Vanessa Hudgens (Blondie), Abbie Cornish (Sweet Pea), Scott Glenn (Wise Man), Carla Gugino (Dr. Vera Gorski), Jon Hamm (High Roller)

**Credits:** Directed by Zack Snyder, written by Snyder and Steve Shibutya, produced by Zack and Deborah Snyder. A Warner Brothers release. Running time: 1:47
"Sucker Punch" is certainly the strangest dance musical of all time. Each time the female protagonist goes into her bump-and-grind, the routine is depicted as a video gamer’s fantasy of violent combat against zombie Germans in World War I, or cyborgs, or dragons. It’s like Roxie Hart of "Chicago" ran off for the weekend with some pimply adolescent Xbox fiend.

The film abdicates so many basic responsibilities of coherent storytelling, even coherent stupid-action-movie storytelling, director/co-writer/co-producer Zack Snyder must have known in preproduction that his greasy collection of near-rape fantasies and violent revenge scenarios disguised as a female-empowerment fairy tale wasn’t going to satisfy anyone but himself. Well, himself, plus ardent fans of Japanese-schoolgirl manga comics. "Close your eyes. Open your mind. You will be unprepared," is the movie’s ad slogan. Indeed. You will be unprepared for a film packing this much confusing crud into a little less than two hours of solitary confinement, which feels more like dog hours, i.e., 14.

Unlike Snyder’s "300" (which I rather enjoyed) and "Watchmen" (which I didn’t), "Sucker Punch," co-written by Steve Shibuya, is by loosest definition an original, not based on a graphic novel. The time is the 1960s. Up in Brattleboro, Vt., a salacious, greedy, quasi-incestuous stepfather commits his stepdaughter to an asylum. With a lobotomy in her near future, this young woman, Babydoll, joins forces with a few other tough-as-nails unfortunates — Sweet Pea, Rocket, Blondie and Amber — and plots an escape.

But wait! The movie’s really taking place inside Babydoll’s incessant dream life. Whenever she dances, she imagines herself and her comrades to be warriors in battles across space and time, taking and meting out all sorts of pain. But wait! Those fantasies are really part of another Babydoll fantasy, wherein she’s a kind of brothel employee under the thumb of a sharkskin weasel named Blue, who uses the brothel to front for various illegal activities. The ladies undergo what appears to be dance-therapy led by Madam Gorski (Carla Gugino). When Babydoll "dances," the "dancing" is never shown; the "dancing" is shown metaphorically, as martial arts and "Call of Duty" and who knows what else, all monitored by the leader known as Wise Man (Scott Glenn).

The script seems to have undergone a series of small strokes, and right in the middle of "Sucker Punch" is Emily Browning, an utter blank as Babydoll. Only Abbie Cornish’s Sweet Pea and Gugino’s Gorski bring any sense of natural authority or charisma to Snyder’s private party. "All that gyrating and moaning ... the dance should be more than just titillation," Cornish tells Browning after her first "number." In a film that’s largely about thighs and deavage and blurring the line between fetishized weaponry and other objects of desire, that line is a hypocritical joke. So is the film’s rating. "Sucker Punch" got by with a PG-13. I’d like someone to see it, and then see "Win Win," which got an R rating for a few "F" words, and then defend the Motion Picture Association of America’s Ratings and Classifications board and their priorities with a straight face.

**MPAA rating:** PG-13 (for thematic material involving sexuality, violence and combat sequences, and for language)

**Cast:** Emily Browning (Babydoll); Abbie Cornish (Sweet Pea); Jena Malone (Rocket); Vanessa Hudgens (Blondie); Jamie Chung (Amber); Oscar Isaac (Blue); Carla Gugino (Madam Gorski); Scott Glenn (Wise Man); Jon Hamm (High Roller)

**Credits:** Directed by Zack Snyder; written by Snyder and Steve Shibuya; produced by Zack Snyder and Deborah Snyder. A Warner Bros. Pictures release. Running time: 1:50

Guns. Everywhere guns.

Let me start this discussion by pointing out that I am not antigun. I’m proknife. Consider the merits of the knife.

In the first place, you have to catch up with someone in order to stab him. A general substitution of knives for guns would promote physical fitness. We’d turn into a whole nation of great runners. Plus, knives don’t ricochet. And people are seldom killed while cleaning their knives.

As a civil libertarian, I, of course, support the Second Amendment. And I believe it means exactly what it says:

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. Fourteen-year-old boys are not part of a well-regulated militia. Members of wacky religious cults are not part of a well-regulated militia. Permitting unregulated citizens to have guns is destroying the security of this free state.

I am intrigued by the arguments of those who claim to follow the judicial doctrine of original intent. How do they know it was the dearest wish of Thomas Jefferson’s heart that teenage drug dealers should cruise the cities of this nation perforating their fellow citizens with assault rifles? Channeling?

There is more hooey spread about the Second Amendment. It says quite clearly that guns are for those who form part of a well-regulated militia, that is, the armed forces, including the National Guard. The reasons for keeping them away from everyone else get clearer by the day.

The comparison most often used is that of the automobile, another lethal object that is regularly used to wreak great carnage. Obviously, this society is full of people who haven’t enough common sense to use an automobile properly. But we haven’t outlawed cars yet.

We do, however, license them and their owners, restrict their use to presumably sane and sober adults, and keep track of who sells them to whom. At a minimum, we should do the same with guns.

In truth, there is no rational argument for guns in this society. This is no longer a frontier nation in which people hunt their own food. It is a crowded, overwhelmingly urban country in which letting people have access to guns is a continuing disaster. Those who want guns—whether for target shooting, hunting, or potting rattlesnakes (get a hoe)—should be subject to the same restrictions placed on gun owners in England, a nation in which liberty has survived nicely without an armed populace.

The argument that “guns don’t kill people” is patent nonsense. Anyone who has ever worked in a cop shop knows how many family arguments end in murder because there was a gun in the house. Did the gun kill someone? No. But if there had been no gun, no one would have died. At least not without a good footrace first. Guns do kill. Unlike cars, that is all they do.

Michael Crichton makes an interesting argument about technology in his thriller Jurassic Park. He points out that power without discipline is making this society into a wreckage. By the time someone who studies the martial arts becomes a master—literally able to kill with bare hands—that person has undergone years of training and discipline. But any fool can pick up a gun and kill with it.

“A well-regulated militia” surely implies both long training and long discipline. That is the least, the very least, that should be required of those who are permitted to have guns, because a gun is literally the power to kill. For years I used to enjoy taunting my gun-nut friends about their psychosexual hang-
ups—always in a spirit of good cheer, you understand. But letting the noisy minority in the NRA\(^3\) force us to allow this carnage to continue is just plain insane.

I do think gun nuts have a power hang-up. I don’t know what is missing in their psyches that they need to feel they have the power to kill. But no sane society would allow this to continue.

Ban the damn things. Ban them all.

You want protection? Get a dog.

\(^3\) National Rifle Association.