

David foster wallace and short story videotape essay

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“ Videotape” Summary and Analysis In the short story “ Videotape” by Don DeLillo, a child with a video camera records a man who is driving behind them. She continues recording and captures the abrupt moment of him being shot and murdered. This recording is being watched by a husband, in the comfort of his home, while insisting for his wife to come and watch it with him. Humans have become desensitized towards violence and in some societies they have obsessed with watching acts of violence as entertainment. The most famous ones were the Coliseum Games in Rome; spectators would watch men fight to the death.

In today’s society, there are many forms of violence displayed in the media. DeLillo, himself, lived through the Vietnam War, which was broadcasted and could be watched with anybody who had access to a television. This exposure to violence has created an obsession that makes people want to watch videos such as the videotape that the child filmed. The man who was watching the recording of the murder was adamant in his desire for his wife to watch the tape. The reaction of the “ Video Girl” is one in which her reaction and feelings are unique. She seems to have been stunned by the noise of the shot and scared of the scene in which she is seeing the man collapse to the side. Just as the story describes how “ The way the camera reacts to the gunshot— a startle reaction that brings pity and terror into the frame, the girl’s own shock, the girl’s identification with the victim.

” (DeLillo Pg. 267) This is a clear example on how the little girl felt at the time of the horrific scene. If we know that this is a legitimate recording; society can react in different ways. Ways in which if we found ourselves at

the scene, that instant reaction would consist of horror and fear. The story shows the man sitting in his living room, watching this recording while in the comfort of his own home. A good example of his reaction is how the story describes it, " Now here is where it happens," (DeLillo Pg. 266) His reaction differs from the girl's because he is not experiencing the murder live; he is watching it on screen. Our reactions carry a sense of compassion.

This sense of compassion can be for the victim or for the little girl in the story who had to experience such a horrific scene. Society has a sense of excitement when viewing or experiencing a murder. Although, many say the opposite, that curiosity that lies in our heads will always tend to trigger our minds upon viewing recordings like these.