

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

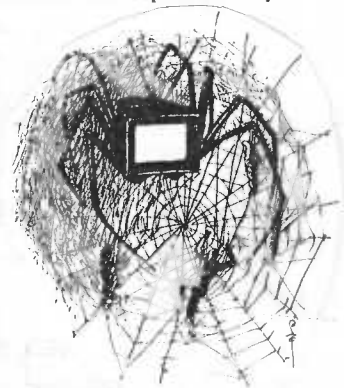
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A WEB IS FOR KILLING

AN ELABORATE WORRY ABOUT THE WWW ("WORLD-WIDE WEB")

On an ancient typewriter, Andy Rooney two-finger types his weekly three-minute sour diatribe (for "Sixty Minutes") on a true generalization perfectly expressed by Methodism's founder: almost nothing new is worth the attention of so short-lived & long-spirited a creature as homo sapiens--so we need to be forever cautioning ourselves against letting the **ephemeral** (a Greek word roughly meaning the daily drivel & fluff) crowd out the **eternal** (a Latin word meaning what lasts ages instead of only days).

As you can see (above), Wesley is dead but Gates isn't yet: on his as-it-were tombstone, I had to leave all four spaces, not knowing whether it'll read 19-- or 20--. But he often says he'll be dead before (my metaphor) he's finished half what's on his plate. (Being the wealthiest human ever, he wouldn't gamble for money but would, he says, if he could win time.) Reading him, his boyish technocratic enthusiasm, "accesses" for me my age-13 excitement over getting the most advanced Erector set! Nothing wrong with being young if it doesn't last too long: something wrong if youthful enthusiasm entirely deflates.



1 We've gotten all the way down to this Thinksheet's third line. Catholic thinkers are known for their analogical imagination, but you don't have to be a Catholic to think about this visual that says, with no words, "a web is for killing." The spider-monitor (television, wordprocessor, computer) has already cocooned three adults & a child. (The Hillsdale College "Imprimis" cartoonist has brilliantly combined two metaphors: [1] Monitors kill time, time is life, monitors kill life; [2] People who spend too much time on their home electronics are said to cocoon themselves away from everything outside the home....Of course the artist didn't have to think up the spider web: "The Web" is now the reigning metaphor for the worldwide computer internet, a web being an organic parallel to the inorganic net.)

2 A monitor is an active screen (active: it *makes* visuals), in one dimension an extension of the passive screen (passive: it *takes* visuals from a projector, still or motion). In his latest novel, Jn. Updike has a clergyman lose his religion & replace it with movie-going, moving from the beatific vision to the commercial visual--a metaphor indeed! Perhaps without drawing too much attention to myself, I might suggest that all Updike's novels are about the comma in FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT: his (anti)heroes are stretched out between their physical compulsions & their spiritual aspirations. In the Rabbit quartet, Harry Angstrom (yes, "angst") is forever torn over the existential question What's worth paying attention to? This 20th-c. middle-American perplexity culminates in IN THE BEAUTY OF THE LILIES (Knopf/95): What has been the role of **faith**, & the longing for faith, throughout this century's four generations of the flow of flesh? The family progenitor, that clergyman who supplanted the eye of faith (religion) with the eye of flesh (movies), had chn., grandchn., & greatgrandchn. whose lives are different because of his spiritual loss. (Of all the Updike oeuvre, this novel is the closest to being a sermon, in the form of a religion-&-culture cautionary tale.)

3 The screen, the monitor, "the medium is the message." Alongside this signature statement of Marshall McLuhan three decades ago should be put his signature phrase, "the sated sensorium." The medium, now, is the monitor screen, the field of dreams, designs, dialog, deeds. Child psychosociologists appear to have come to agreement that so much *what* chn. watch on the tube (sex, violence, everything commercialized) as *that* the only thing they do more of is sleep: the message is that the medium is eating the child, whose sensorium (ie total perceptual functionality) is supersaturated ("sated") with the flickering images. Activities-sated adults use the tube to sop up children's hours which formerly the adults spent with the children in their care, & the chn. passively submit to this pleasant, though sometimes boring, abuse.

4 The author of HOLLYWOOD VS. AMERICA, longtime film critic Michael Medved,

views the screen scene an an America-enthusiastic child of Jewish emigré-escapees from Hitler. Almost everything he's saying about the child-eating moloch, television, applies with about equal force to computers, though the latter, unlike the former, have not yet much penetrated the underclass. I'll finish out this Thinksheet with some quotes from his Dec/95 "Imprimis" article (whence the spider-monitor drawing), "Protecting our Children From a Plague of Pessimism."

5 "America just might be bad for immigrants....the longer immigrants live in this society and adjust to contemporary American norms, the more likely it is that they will lose...[their original] optimism--and their chances for success suffer accordingly." The inner-disadvantaged chn. are "those who were born here" from parents who were born here. (This year, HarperCollins is to publish his SAVING CHILDHOOD: HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM THE NATIONAL ASSAULT ON INNOCENCE.) "The most deadly epidemic menacing our youth today--...isn't AIDS, or gang violence, or teen pregnancy--but the plague of pessimism," whose "main symptom is a **cry-baby** culture, a national orgy of whining and self-pity....a contagious cynicism and bleak visions of the future" more widespread among youth than "the puerile self-pity of the '50s and '60s." (The cartoonists had a picnic picturing cry-baby Newty complaining that the President hadn't given him enough attention. The first generation of TV-raised kids is now getting its fingers on society's power-buttons. The cry-baby whine of victors who continue to play the victim card can be heard in the land. Babies cry [1] to get their needs met & [2] to get their ego-need overmet, ie to get their way--which is bad for them & everybody else.)

6 "As a working film critic," I complain of "gratuitous brutality and loveless sex in American entertainment....the underlying message of hopelessness conveyed by these ugly, consistently dysfunctional images in our society--a message that encourages both self-pity and fear."...."The news business...ought to be called 'the bad news business' for its emphasis on disaster and destructiveness....killing is always covered, while kindness is almost always ignored....'reality-based' programming and the ubiquitous TV talk shows....everyday of the week...dredge up some new perversion or human tragedy" (eg, "'Lesbians Who Beat Up Transvestites'").

7 "The true power of the media is the ability to [my bf.] **redefine reality**, to alter our expectations about what constitutes normal life. In recent years, movies and TV have abused that power by advancing the notion that happiness and wholesomeness are outdated and impossible in today's world." It's OK to complain about "what Hollywood makes," but better to "focus attention on what America takes; to concentrate on the demand side, rather than the supply side, of media issues. If we are waiting for the entertainment industry to change its fundamental values we may be in for a long wait, but when it comes to altering our own private consumption of the popular culture we need not delay another day." Cutting your TV watching only $\frac{1}{2}$ hour a day would free up a load of time "to read a book, to listen to music, to exercise, to communicate with the people you love most, to work for causes you care about, or just to go out the door and enjoy this glorious world that God has given us."

8 Ingratitude is "the second principle cause of...pessimism." We should teach gratitude for this country & for parents. But "today's politically correct [public school] curricula convey the clear message that the older generation is comprised of a bunch of sexist, racist, homophobic, puritanical, Eurocentric, materialistic and generally benighted bozos," & "smear[s] the extraordinary and honorable history of" the USA, an "island of sanity and goodwill in the vast, turbulent ocean of historic human misery." But the schools proceed on "the current and crazy idea that any acknowledgment of the Almighty in our schools represents some dire threat to our children." "If our schools can't teach our children who to thank and can't explore the role of religious faith as the foundation for our civilization, then they contribute mightily to the sour and restless mood among the young."

9 But "Forrest Gump" taught optimism! "'Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get"--but all sweet! Jewish tradition: Say each morning, "Rise up like a lion for the service of the Lord!"