

TO UNSATE YOUR SENSORIUM FROM SENSATIONALISM,

SATISFY YOUR SOUL IN SIMPLICITY

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As I walked into an office this morning, the secretaries were supporting one another's disgust over what Marshall McLuhan, of somewhat fond memory, would have called their sated senses, eye & ear, on presidential-election news & nonnews: "Oh, if they'd only shorten the time we have to listen to that drive!" I resisted the temptation to tell them that shortening the time is a do-it-yourself: each of them is free to shorten the time spent in front of the tube with its godlike demand of full eye-&-ear attention. Or try eliminating the tube for a week, for your news reading only the newspapers--which, unlike the electronic media, which are time-instantaneous, are under your time-control (as one daily puts it, "News & Advertising Alive All the Day Long"). Or a still more radical askesis: for one month, only weekly newsmagazines. The point is that God wants you to be the lord or lady of your attending, not the serf-slave-victim of those who for their own advantage seek to capture & hold your attention....When I'd completed my business in that office & was in process of leaving, one of the secretaries said, "I just signed up for an evening course in stress-management," another responded, "We'll all stressed out; let's all go!" & the rest said, "Yeah!" & then they all hooted.

1. This Thinksheet's title suggests a limiting factor on "news": to intervene in dailiness, its regularities & boredoms, "news" must be sensational, for only the sensational will divert our attention & provide, in the entertainment sense, "diversion." Ergo, the eternal, the abiding, the quiet & deep & faithful--none of this is "news," "news-worthy." Video controls audio, a further limitation: only the camerable is newsworthy. "Values" are not newsworthy, but the candidates' use of the word is--& Bush will win because he can say "values" without whistling through his teeth.

2. Sensationalism is essentially, inevitably, fragmenting, scattering, stressing, ripping the soul to shreds of facts & tatters of feelings. We cannot expect our society to hand us the necessary compensatory centering, gathering, unifying, simplifying. If that job gets done, we do it ourselves; & no nostalgia will substitute for the self-discipline of satisfying our souls in simplicity.

3. A suggestion: Daily see to it that you give, to the abiding riches of the past, at least as much time as you give to the evanescent media of the moment, this time, our time. Bible reading, of course; but also other classics, of which I daily nibble away (about ten minutes each) on at least four. Just now, I'm readying each day a classic shortstory. But speaking of nostalgia, listen to this from yesterday's shortstory while keeping in mind those secretaries I overheard in that office this morning:

Rip Van Winkle & his equally indolent friends "used to sit in the shade through a long, lazy summer's day, talking listlessly over village gossip, or telling endless, sleepy stories about nothing. But it would have been worth any statesman's money to have heard the profound discussions which sometimes took place, when by chance an old newspaper fell into their hands from some passing traveller. How solemnly they would listen to the contents, as drawled out by Derrick Van Brummel, the school-master, a dapper learned little man, who was not to be daunted by the most gigantic word in the dictionary; and how sagely they would deliberate upon public events some months after they had taken place."

Of course Washington Irving wants to keep us laughing as he doles out his droll tale of a man who drowsed off for 20 years & then returned as a live history book with hair & skin, a newspaper not a few months but many years old. But we can add a layer of laughter; for the sensorium distance between us & WI, a sophisticate of his time, is at least as great as the distance between WI & his fictitious RVW. Neither one of them had a sated sensorium indicating a need for **attentional spirituality** or a course in stress-management or something....On this point of balance, see also #2180.2(6), but also the whole Thinksheet: "How to Read Pray the Newspaper."

4. Yesterday a harried New Yorker said to me on the phone, "I have come upon eight words that will help me through today & every day! They begin Psalm 34: 'I will bless the Lord at all times.'" And I added, in the Hebrew wordorder, "Always his praise shall be in my mouth."