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The Threat of Peace

"Eustress" is a term which describes an emotional state of fun-fear or pleasurable discomfort. It is the opposite of "distress," but we shall see how what begins as distress can lead to eustress. The fact that most people live their lives in a programmed series of distresses and fears, creates a social environment wherein security and comfort are only present if a certain amount of crisis prevails.

The human mind abhors a vacuum. Wild animals have no such problem. Every cell of their brains is a functioning bit of data. Only when domesticated or conditioned by researchers is a necessary survival engram replaced by another. Man is the only animal who, when bored, cannot entertain himself. As a result of too soft a life, he must be continually reminded of his existence. Any sensation will do. In other words, something must be happening, or life becomes not only meaningless, but genuinely painful. How many times is the expression heard, "What's happening?" A satori-like Shangri-La existence eagerly sought by many would be unbearable if realized. Not because of the pressures of peace but by the inability of most minds to independently devise enough thoughts to maintain mental stimulation.

Stress has become such a predictable--and therefore comfortable--way of life, that it is demanded. A paradox has evolved wherein humans are constantly bombarded by stress situations (which they crave) and then cautioned to reduce emotional stress. This remarkable sequence can be likened to the weekday sinner who goes to church each Sunday. A conscious attempt at *reducing* emotional stress amidst a society which *fosters* habitual stress can only compound frustration.

I have written at length on the hypocrisy of the human race. History and empirical evidence more than bear out any rantings I may add. Part of that great hypocrisy is man's--especially contemporary man's--lip service to "freedom" and human dignity, when in reality his self-awareness is sustained by a series of masochistic maneuverings. This is where distress becomes so commonplace that it represents comfort, security, and--fun. Such is the evolution of eustress from an otherwise distressful situation.

Blatant examples of this transition are most common in an erotic context. The pleasure/pain factor is the entire basis of sado-masochistic activity. Invariably, what begins as an unpleasant experience evolves into eagerly anticipated gratification. Here, we have a basis for eustress phenomena. If a child receives little attention except when it misbehaves and then, through punishment, the child is made most profoundly aware of its own existence--it begins to court punishment. If punishment is received at the hands of someone who is stimulating, the attention is well worth it.

Substitute that microcosmic situation with a macrocosmic one in an adult world and without any overt sexual connotation. Here's the picture:

A man feels insignificant. There is overpopulation and underrecognition. He is made to feel like a big shot because of his consumer buying power or a token title which his firm has bestowed on him. He still feels insignificant. He is married and has a family which he might be able to feel pride in, if less demands were placed upon him which

he is either loathe or unable to meet. This makes him feel like a jackass. But he sees a guy on a TV show with whom he can identify. He feels a little better while watching the guy on TV or thinking of him. Still, he feels insignificant. He has a few heroes whom he sees on other TV shows: sports figures, a tough cop, maybe bad boy Eric Estrada or everybody's hero, Johnny Carson. He lives vicariously through all of them.

Even, unbeknownst to himself, he lives his viciousness vicariously through his "angry" indignation (and unretrognized identification) with the fiends and killers he sees on the news. But good or evil, benign or malignant, none of these people are *him*. They're getting attention. He's not. He feels insignificant. Well, if he feels insignificant, maybe, just maybe, it's because *he is*.

It's not that he's necessarily dumber than some of those who are getting the attention he isn't. Chances are good some of them are, in their own way, just as programmed as himself. But there's only room for so many to stand in a spotlight and he's left out.

What does he do? What alternatives are open to him to be able to pinch himself and know he is still there? He can get into some kind of trouble, great or small, and receive attention. The only drawback to that is that he'll have to answer a lot of questions and encounter situations which may be less cope-able than his ennui. The other way is to "get involved" in something--anything--which will grab his emotions enough to qualify his existence. His very own problems are apparently not good enough for full-time mind occupancy. They're not serious on a world-shaking level. And nobody he talks to about them gives a shit. But if he burdens himself with common-denominator crises of a local, state, national, or international nature, he can find plenty of company, share gripes, make friends (and enemies), and generally feel as though he is All Right.

He has chosen a life of eustress and the safety which accompanies it, in preference to the solitary distress of living a dangerously unprogrammed life. Why is this man's unprogrammed life dangerous? Either because he has problems which are not universal enough to share, or because his mind is such a vacuum that its own resources cannot pull him out of his feeling of insignificance.

Now, somewhere out there exist pretty sharp cookies who know about man's need for eustress, and are more than willing to supply it. Aside from being rather profitable, it masks, through the gifted art of misdirection, what's really happening. Everything is a softening-up process for something else. You have been set up. You are being set up. Someone, somewhere, who is on the take is not missing a trick in the book. You have been conditioned to look in the wrong direction at the wrong things, find great fun in that which you should soberly evaluate, and take very seriously that which should be ridiculed and laughed out of sight and sound.

Getting back to planned problems for entertainment and enjoyment. The soap opera is a masterpiece. Its evolution is concurrent with eustress needs. When women had enough personal headaches in an epoch where "women's work is never done," childbirth deaths, and suicides over being "compromised"--there were no soap operas. Not that it was right. Simply that no matter how devoid of imagination or how bored a woman may have been able to be, there was no chance of it usurping daily "shit work" requirements. Only the wealthy or spoiled could afford to be bored.

When radio inaugurated the soap opera, the medium became the message (ah, misdirection!) and women who listened while performing their chores were already being processed into a new form of consumerism. All the while, the troubles they heard were more interesting (and romantic) than their own, but they *were* troubles. Hence, another woman's problems became a vicariously glamorous substitute for what could, with luck, be the listener's. The genesis of the soaper is pretty well defined. Now, most who view them neither toil nor spin while doing so, but just absorb the blissful turmoil and sexy anguish, wide open for the inculcation of the *real* substance of the show: the products advertised. And the supreme irony is that the viewers prefer to believe that they are more independent and emancipated (like the women on the screen) than ever before.

In *The Compleat Witch* there is considerable exploration into the world of eustress, and the thrill rides of amusement parks are cited. Recently, sociologist Marcello Truzzi participated in a documentary on roller coasters with Vincent Price narrating. Dr. Truzzi's perceptive comments notwithstanding, it was interesting for me to see certain persons on the most "dangerous" rides let go of the safety rail, despite warnings to the contrary. When I worked carnivals and parks, there were always the nuts who let go at the wrong places. Sometimes they would fly out. Even get themselves killed. My point is, that even though the coasters were safety-tested, and eustress was the motivating factor in riding, and law suits weren't honored if a "Ride at your

own risk" sign was displayed--the stupid, careless, irresponsible member of society was not protected from himself. Fun-fear with complete safety has helped to foster irresponsibility and devalue life and property.

I would build a roller coaster that was very safe and scary, but with clearly understood visual and audible warnings to hang on and not to stand up while the car is in motion. Anyone of admissible age, who failed to comply with the very real warnings would be thrown out. Then, eustress would turn to distress--the unexpected.

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Separation of Church and State?

The U.S. has been bragging for years of its so-called "freedom of religion" and "separation of church and state." Atheists discovered long ago that freedom of religion may be nice, if one happens to be a deist, but that there is little, if any, "freedom from religion" in America. It seems that the imposition of another's religious beliefs is not only tolerated but encouraged in today's "emancipated" society.

The latest and most flagrant farce is the bold-faced stirring of religion and politics into the same shit-pot. Each of the three major candidates for U.S. President professes adherence to "Born-again Christianity." Each, in his own manner, advocates same, boasts of personal conversion, and extolls the benefits and desirability of a nation peopled with zealous evangelists.

Clearly, there is not any such thing as separation of church and state, when all presidential candidates both endorse and curry the favor of a singular religious belief for political ends. This disgusting sameness should be issue enough to keep anyone with more than ten watts of brain power away from a voting booth. Not one of the candidates has voiced an alternative refutation of the irrational Born-again movement, though to do so would make him enough of a symbolic hero to capture a storm of votes.

Why, assuming the most median line of so-called freedom of religion, is not one candidate a hard-shell Protestant (a Carter), another an old-guard Roman Catholic (a Kennedy), and a third a foreign-born Jew (a Kissinger)? Atheists and (horrors!) Satanists would then have an opportunity to select the lesser of evils, if they felt social responsibility to participate in an election. No, I repeat, *no* self-respecting Satanist, atheist, iconoclast, free-thinker, rebel, or just plain maverick could or would participate in the sort of election which is forthcoming.

The argument advanced that "If *you* don't vote, who *will*?" is a hollow one. Despots have used that technique for ages, and it is a damned fine one, from a manipulative standpoint. Buy it if you wish, but know you are being duped. The most fledgling student of political science learns that if a constituent doesn't outright attack a politician, he as much as supports him. It's the principle of dropping one thousand leaflets in one thousand mailboxes asking for support, receiving four of the leaflets back with caustic comments or dire warnings, and then announcing--with bright eyes and rosy cheeks--that you have the support of nine hundred and ninety six people. That's exactly the attitude of the "statistical" persuasion of the government under which we exist. As far as they're concerned, a sufficient show of votes--for any *candidate*--indicates complacency and begrudging acceptance of the present system. And a smug security that the public, angry as it may appear, is still malleable enough to be herded.

I would say that sort of tactic would be fine, were it not for the terribly insulting sameness and the imposition of the most irrational kind of church/state religious fundamentalism. Patriotism and religion have always been the refuge of scoundrels, probably because the idiotic public provides support. I still want to believe that there are a few humans out there who have the brains and courage to quietly say "No."

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Children of the Night

Indeed paradoxical, is that with more interest in the unknown, occult, bizarre and kinky than ever before, there are fewer "night-people" around. One would expect that the new "freedom" of the sixties and seventies would have eradicated the old Calvinist dictum of "Early to bed, early to rise..." and established rational cybernetics in human beings' sleep patterns. Not so. Concurrent with the present backlash of neo-puritanism and born-again piety, is a reflexive shunning of the night. I personally know many who were once habitual night-people, living on a reverse polarity and thriving. Now they roll up their psyches at midnight. Not that they must, either. In fact, they seem to really suffer through their diurnal schedules, while bravely grimacing out how "nice it is to be up and around in the daytime."

Of course, excuses can always be produced for not strolling the streets at night; high crime rates have necessitated the closing early of many one-time 24-hour businesses. There are fewer

places to go and less things to do outside the home because of urban crime shutting things down. Immediately, the question is raised, "Are we truly more sophisticated and free now?" Or are we the unconscious slaves of an awesome and chaotic blandness? Theoretically, there should be round-the-clock business operations with working shifts equally divided and traffic rush hours eliminated. There is no *rational* reason for otherwise. Virtually all businesses use the same amount of power for lighting in the daytime as for night work, were it to transpire.

I first noticed a decline in Children of the Night in the early sixties, when JFK got everyone on a physical fitness kick. Health consciousness collaborated with crime in the streets and touched off a return to daytimeism. Gradually, a new wave of pulpit-pounders (whom the Church of Satan had unintentionally given a shot in the arm) added their old time religion, with its guilts about darkness and devils. The result, as we now have it, is a society steeped in violence, thriving on fear, and afraid of the dark. What a fine kettle of fish; more horror films than ever, yet try and find an all-night drug store or newsstand in a large city.

It was once cliched: "The city never sleeps." That was the city of Mark Hellinger, Ben Hecht, Dashiell Hammett and Cornell Woolrich. There was plenty of *Lebensraum* for real honest-to-Satan vampires and night-gaunts. Fashing neon outside millions of windows kept the pulse of the sweet mysterious night steady, and Broadway babies didn't sleep tight until the break of day.

Toffler's *Future Shock* is already here, but most don't even know it. Stumbling blindly in the sunlight, they regress, all the while believing they have evolved. Lovecraft's "new dark age" has arrived, but in the glare of day and self-righteousness.

There is no law against reversing one's schedule, nor is it taxable. Only economic and survival demands must be considered, and those who can work best at night, but unthinkingly opt for daytime, are simply swept up in the neo-puritan tide. It is up to the Children of Darkness to return a dignity to the night, rather than let it atrophy as a novelty for eustress-seekers.

From a diabolically magical standpoint, employing the Balance Factor, the ideal schedule of twenty-four hours duration is a complete negative polarity. This means that you substitute what normally would be "AM's" for "PM's". For example, the "good-est" people would retire at 10 PM and awaken at 6 AM. Now, if you are a vile evil creature, who just feels like balancing out the seething mediocrity around you, you reverse the procedure; go to sleep at 10 AM and wake up at 6 in the evening. You will have slept through the most harried, frenetic period of the day, when the static discharge of the multitudes is jamming the atmosphere and cutting creative productivity down to a fraction of its potential. If all this sounds rather Reichian, it is.

I function on such a schedule, and it works for me. I seldom retire before 9 AM and often stay up until noon. I actually like the dawn for many reasons, not the least of which is symbolic. It is the photophobic glare of the afternoon which I can do without, and usually manage to. Whether in the Circus Maximus or the Plaza de Toros, the Devil has always preferred the shady side.

Invariably, life follows art, and the sleep pattern of the vampire is presupposed by the kind of treatment gothic romance and Hollywood has provided. That's why it is taken for granted that a vampire arises at sunset and retires at sunrise. Idyllically, this sounds fine and bestows a great deal of charm on what essentially is both unnatural and impractical--especially for a creature Hell-bent on getting the most out of life, even after death.

During the summer, when nights are short, a vampire operating according to the rules might only get eight hours of activity and spend the remainder of the time in bed. In the winter, when nights are long, sleep would occupy a relatively normal period of time, thus eliminating the discomfort of coffin-sores. It is more reasonable to assume that any healthy, well-adjusted vampire would live on a fairly consistent reverse-polarity schedule. This seems to coincide with the mirror-image reversal legend and dichotomous theological persuasion. Inasmuch as the very nature of magic is paradoxy, i.e. things not being what they seem to be, the advantageous concept of reverse sleep patterns is but another example of misdirection.

(To be continued)

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