Lovers of the Dead
- Necrophiles Unaware

By E.J.B.

Those who find fascination in violence portrayal may be divided into two categories (1) Innocent youth exercising curiosity as they might for any aspect of life and death, and (2) Those who persist to the point of becoming addicts of violence, wallowing in its various forms. It becomes an obsession with them, a fetish, and they are held in servitude by it. They go back to it again and again. They are, in a word, necrophiles, lovers of the dead. The word derives from the Greek NECRO for corpse and PHILOS for loving, a loving of the dead, and well describes the mental cast of the addict. Eric Fromm used it in his The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness to describe "the passionate attraction to all this dead, decayed, putrid, sickly... the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical...the passion to tear living things apart..." He developed a dimension, biophilia-necrophilia, to describe two radically different types of people, the one attracted to that which is alive, growing, free and unpredictable, averse to violence and all that destroys life and to the mechanical. Biophilic-necrophilic tendencies are blended in most people, but one or the other predominates. The concept derives from Freud's eros or life instinct and death instinct.

With Michael Maccoby, Fromm devised a questionnaire to indicate a necrophilia obsession and the necrophilia
inducing TV program. Maccoby describes the type as "attracted to that which is dead, mechanic and rigidly ordered... Feeling bored (dead) inside they tend to look for thrills as a source of excitement." They find this in media and prefer certain types of TV programs. Maccoby found for example, of the heavy-viewers of TV, a majority are necrophilic. Of 300 mothers surveyed for TV viewing, 52% were biophilic and 5% necrophilic of those who watched an educational TV station; in contrast of mothers who preferred western and spy programs, 36% were necrophilic and 21% were biophilic.

Necro people feel lonely, bored and dead inside and seek TV for vicarious thrills. They view the violent shows to satisfy this deep-lying urge of which they are completely unaware. On the contrary the men, far from considering themselves sick, often believe themselves to have "machismo", an irresistible male charm enchanced by toughness or violence.

Necrophilia also relates to sexual perversion. And some regard the dead as sacred. The Necropolis of ancient Greece was a city of the dead, a cemetery with holy status where the dead were worshipped. Thus, the little congregation at the newsstand will include some image or fetish worshippers who have become addicted to deadness and gradually favour all its forms symbolically - decay, sickness, dirt, the zombie aspect of mechanical things, the rigidity of mechanism generally, and the destructive. While they were not born that way, the preoccupation with necrophilia added to a predisposition that started in childhood led them to it.

It is part of the unseen, conditioning environment. Readers have become necrophilious without knowing it as the source is highly respectable - almost every store has a newsstand, the "respectable" department store and the sleazy joint of second-hand tabloids, cheap novels, skin-books and violence.
The term necrophilious also offers a key concept for our understanding of the fascination for such ordinarily abhorrent human events as the relish of violence. It is useful for analysis in trying to understand the occurrence although of course it is not the only concept available. Psychiatry, psychoanalysis, abnormal psychology, sociology and religion offer other concepts and few basic causes, such as neurosis, psychopathia, hysteria, the oedipus complex, inferiority complex, narcissism, regression, schizophrenia, sin, and a host of theories.

With human beings we are always seeking the "why" of behaviour and no one term explains the complex creature called man. But necrophilia as opposed or blended with biophilia goes a long way in conceptualizing a fascination for one type of objects or mode of existence - the dying, the dead, the deadness of machines and a feeling of deadness in people. It is in striking contrast with life-affirming attitudes or behaviours. It offers a general theory of the phenomena that didn't exist until recently and then only in expletives such as "dirty-minded", "sacrilegious" or "four". We are, of course, concerned with the IMAGES, word or picture, of violence and their effects on the individual and society, but the word necrophilious refers likewise to objects in real life.

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