



The House of Desolation

'The House of Desolation' Felt Existential Psychoanalytic Approaches to Dasein-icide

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"My mother was like a vine—you know... those that grow over a pillar... and over time damages it... my mother was like that".

"Feels like a carpet burn on my soul"

"My soul has been seared"

Abstract

It will be the aim of the current paper to theoretically discuss, as well as clinically illustrate, various contemporary psychoanalytic and Dasein-psychoanalytic voices in understanding chronic interpersonal trauma referred to as Dasein-icide. This disenfranchised state experienced by various analysands opens up a dialogical space wherein a general 'absence' in the right to experience one's subjectivity as well as one's own affective states and perceptions seem evident. The Other as psychological guardian, protector, elucidator, enhancer, clarifier and scaffolder seems absent as understood by various developmental psychoanalysts. The concepts of cumulative trauma (M. Masud R. Khan), pathological accommodation (Bernard Brandchaft), soul murder (Leonard Shengold), and micro-trauma (M. Crastnopol) will be explored through literature, personal anecdotal reveries, as well as verbatim case material.

Introduction

The power of *dasein-icide* 1 (DuBose, 2014) came to me, not only through clinical work, but as an awareness of how unknowingly it can present in daily being-with-others. I would thus like to start this paper with a personal anecdote. My son enthusiastically asked me to edit work that he was preparing for his class on Canadian history. At the time of this interaction my son was in grade 4, and as any enthusiastic 10-year-old, he wrote with must passion about his subject. His project was concerned with the coal miners of Northern BC in the late 1800s. In reading his work, I was taken by his sensitive interpretation of their sense of isolation, their pining for family, and their adaptation to various deprivations. He even ventured some moral dilemmas in that the need to find gold ultimately fostered greed and other forms of corruption of the soul. Given its importance, I approached the editing with a similar amount of enthusiasm, and wanted to ensure that he received a good grade. After my initial editing, having some concern that editing always seems, even on a PC, to be in red, I called him over for further editing. He again approached me with a buoyant look, made contact with his creation and "suddenly"² seemed to collapse. I could read in his face the impact of my work on his creation. He became quiet, tears welled up, and paradoxically in a voice filled with kindness³ said to me: "*Dad, there is nothing of me left*". I was taken aback by his reaction, experiencing a mix of self-awareness, shame, anger



and confusion that this had transpired between us—between my attempt to be helpful, and the impact it had on his own creation. Despite this moment of anguish, I turned to focusing on my agitation and feelings of shame as best I could, apologized and started reparation. I mentioned that my edits were not permanent and that we could undo them (if only we worked like Microsoft word!). I asked him to choose which edits he thought should remain, and that I would return the document to its original account. Out of a 30 minute editing task, he chose two words and seemed delighted by the changes. But most importantly, for me, he could let his dad's *dasein-icide* moment go. I experienced a deep sense of relief that he was not trapped with, or by me. He could move forward and I found his reaction and words deeply transformative and deeply relational—an **autochthonous** response to alterity.

The Concept of Cumulative Trauma

Moments of too-muchness, if not moments of not-enoughness, all possess the capacity to have a lasting impact on relational contexts and intrapsychic living. Although Freud may have been the most gifted clinician of our era, many works in philosophy, cosmology and theology write about man's desires and relational archetypes that both devastate and tantalize our shared human psychic equipment. Experiencing devastatingly tantalizing desires with, due, or in relation to the Other, as well as tantalizing devastation within ourselves and in relation to the Other, seems to serve as psychological soil for our greatest philosophers and poets⁴—culture's archetypal archivers. Freud's creative oeuvre articulated various such realities, and in now classical works (1915, 1920, 1923 & 1926) Freud maps various hypotheses wherein a lack of insulation sees the flooding of man's capacity. Similar to biblical floods, great damage can be created by a lack of a protective shield and only parts of the self may remain afloat or buoyant, able to, in time⁵, resurrect and rebuild around traumatized (traumatizing) states of being. If we are so fortunate as to have good-enough environments (Winnicott, 1945, 1958, 1960, 1969, 1974), the so-called good-enough parents (being welcomed, having ontological security) (Laing, 1960), a tolerable cultural environment⁶ as well as functioning biological equipment, many of us may survive and thrive within over- and under-stimulation. That is, if the stimulation-stress dialectic (stress equation) does not burden the native self excessively, the True Self or the *autochthonous drive* (Grotstein, 1997) remains largely saved/safe from excessive accommodation wherein the 'self' becomes largely an adaptational self⁷. Various 'adaptations' are possible—turning away from the Real and living as orphans (psychosis), living between rewarding and withdrawing paradigms of existence and walling off abandonment traumata (the so called borderline dilemma), living between inflation, deflation and a scarred sense of esteem (so called narcissism), negotiating master-slave or sadistic other and self-in-exile realities (so called schizoid compromise), to neurotic adaptations of control (obsessive compulsive), seduction (hysteria), distancing (paranoia), and many more. Even more insidious, and very relevant to the discussion to follow, are symptoms such as soul heaviness, soul fatigue and Sartre's soul ennui. Contemporary work, given nearly a century of observation as well as the extension of psychoanalytic parameters has also seen a greater *nuancing of trauma*—floods certainly do exist, but what to make of *lingchi* (Chinese for a death by a thousand cuts)? Many analysts describe nuanced interpersonal events that 'shock' them, shocks that repeat over time; "It was not like I was walking on egg-shells *per se*, although it did feel like it at times—it was more that I was trying to avoid min(d)efields!" Another analyst: "I am starting to 'see' my family. We were not beaten. It was *cumulative stresses of things that were not good*, not the



extreme end of the scale, not the worst of it all, *but it's ongoing*.... I don't have enough words to describe it all accurately [as compared to an event/trauma]. I know now my mother didn't have the understanding to differentiate her own pain from our childhood, with how she treated us...."

With these various insights, analysands carry across valiantly the impact of *cumulative trauma* on the psyche, or in the insightful work of Margaret Crastnopol (2015), articulate the various micro-traumas that impact self functioning:

"Injurious relating on the grossly abusive end of the scale is the time-honored stuff of history, fiction, drama, and contemporary psychoanalytic theory. But negative interactions that are evanescent can ultimately also have a strong psychic impact. Like sharp rocks only vaguely if at all visible beneath the water at the shore, such potentially damaging moments may go largely unregistered. As a result, these subtler occurrences, *especially in the aggregate*, can create psychic bruises that are hard to notice and harder to minister to, with the consequence that they *accumulate invisibly*. Such injuries can distort a person's character, undermine his or her sense of self-worth, and compromise his or her relatedness to others." (Crastnopol, 2015)(italics added).

A very articulate and interpersonally sensitive analysand (Tanya) mentions that although she spends time with her mother she experiences it out of a sense of duty rather than deep care and want. This makes her feel "like a horrible person". Over a weekend Tanya spontaneously decided to invite her mom along to the local nursery and coffee, as her mother loves nurseries. While extending the invitation Tanya's mom immediately negotiates changes and with much stress and fortitude Tanya remains resolute to follow her initial work rhythms. Since Tanya expected her mother to make comments Tanya took a further psychic leap and informed her husband (Kevin) concerning the various felt psychic impacts cultivated by her mother's snide remarks. Initially Tanya's husband seemed reluctant to 'see' the pattern ("a few snide remarks about me, under the guise of humour") but decided to keep an open mind;

[Later the day]...I could tell by her body language that she was gearing up to make a snide remark toward me. I was telling Mom how I had a renewed interest in an activity, but how I misplaced the manual for my sewing machine. My mother's body language changed and she turned to Kevin and said in her snide, contemptuous but laughing way "You know my daughter always says that she rarely ever loses anything because she is quite organized at home, but it's not true, she can't even find the manual for her sewing machine (that by the way I had not used for 20 years)". Normally Kevin would agree and just laugh. Meanwhile I am feeling like it is all I can do to not burst out crying.

It would be ridiculous to start to cry over my mother making a comment about me misplacing my sewing machine manual, and I totally get it. *But I can barely contain myself, and I recognize that it is not because of THIS comment, but the 10,000 comments that have occurred in my life time before this one.*

But this time Kevin reached out, and put his arm around me and said; Actually she is pretty organized, and it must just be that she is just hanging out with me so much that she can't find things'.

I think my mother was stunned. She said something like, “silly me, I guess that wasn’t the nicest thing to say” I didn’t say anything and was clearly not impressed by her comment. And that was the end of that.

It didn’t stop her though, as she managed to get another couple of snide comments in that had less of a bite for me.”

Returning to the psychoanalytic concept of *dasein-icide* Masud Kahn gives a detailed overview in a paper entitled “The Concept of Cumulative Trauma”⁸ of the various phases of Freudian and psychoanalytic thinking wherein the inner world is thought to adapt to the pressures and impingements emanating from the ‘human environment’. These pressures and impingements could be categorized as parental neglect, abandonment or seduction; to inner thoughts, images and feelings that either traumatize or continue to haunt the self, foreclosing a sense of inner harmony. Clinical concepts such as the repetition compulsion, inter-systemic trauma; and the ego destroying superego attest to such strains and conflicts.

Immersed in the language of both Freud and his mentor Donald W. Winnicott, Khan set his sights on the function of the mother as protective shield and insulating presence, where contact with the outer world sees the creation of both an awareness of stimuli coming from the inside and outside ‘worlds’. This insulation protects the budding self and concomitant ego functions, if you will, from flooding and traumatic entropy, accommodative strategies, if not from precocious adaptation. The latter is masterfully articulated by clinical psychoanalysts Michael Eigen (1977, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007) and Wilfred Bion (1957, 1958, 1959) and they continuously state in their work that *developing the apparatus to ‘have’ experiences for thinking and feeling* remain a lifelong task. Schematically Khan argues that Freud set out to articulate that ‘contact’ with the outer world, sees the creation of a “crust” and eventually a “protective shield.” It is important to read that Freud himself postulated that “*Protection against stimuli is almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli*. The protective shield is supplied with its own store of energy and must above all endeavour to *preserve the special modes of transformation of energy operating in it against the effects threatened by the enormous energies at work in the external world*” (Freud, 1920, p. 27, cited in Khan, 1963, p. 289)(italics added).

It is evident, given the many cases described by Freud, that parental seduction (over excitement/flooding) served as bedrock to the shock trauma hypotheses. Although we have moved further within Freudian discourse, his clinical and theoretical notations did bring into sharp focus not only the impact of the Other on the inner life of the child, but that which is created endopsychically also holds the ability to overwhelm the child throughout his or her development. Concerning this protective function as well as its ‘failures’, countless theorists have accentuated that without such functioning, that is, the parent as *psychological guardian, protector, elucidator, enhancer, clarifier and scaffolder, the psyche remains vulnerable to flooding*. Khan further states that the phenomena of cumulative trauma reflects the continuous “breaches in the mother’s role as a protective shield over the whole course of the child’s development” and that the “breaches in the mother’s role as protective shield are qualitatively and quantitatively different from those gross intrusions by the mother’s acute psychopathology...In this context it would be more accurate to say that these breaches over the

course of time and through the developmental process *cumulate silently and invisibly*. Hence the difficulty in detecting them clinically in childhood. They gradually get embedded in the specific traits of a given character structure. *Also, they achieve the value of trauma only cumulatively and in retrospect*" (Khan, 1963, pp. 290-291).

Supported by further relational insights, analysts such as Bernard Brandchaft (2010), Margaret Crastnopol (2015) and existential phenomenologists such as Todd DuBose (2014), all faithfully describe how the self adapts to shock and strains traumas. Crastnopol's (2015) psychoanalytic vision especially focusses on micro-trauma and she articulates the following constellations:

- Unkind cutting back
- Connoisseurship gone awry
- Uneasy intimacy
- Psychic airbrushing and excessive niceness
- Chronic entrenchment and its collateral damage
- Unbridled indignation
- Little murders and other everyday micro-assaults

It will be the aim of the current paper to address and make use of selected micro-traumas as defined by Dr Crastnopol. The reader is, however, advised to read Dr Crastnopol's work in detail. It is a transforming psychoanalytic treasure. I will also add another micro-trauma easily overlooked in western society, 'Killing with Kindness', as well as include separately, although part of Dr Crastnopol's book, the concept of pathological accommodation by the late Dr Bernard Brandchaft (2010). I now turn to the various micro traumas in service of Dasein-icide.

Little Murders, Everyday Micro-assaults and Non Recognition of Other

Little murders and other micro- assaults on Being include; "A vast and various group of behaviors, they include off-hand insults, slights, mockery, back-biting, discounting, damning with faint praise, and back-handed compliments" (Crastnopol, 2015, p.187). Any critique that focuses on one's *intrinsic value* as a human being, being treated with contempt, being ignored or minimized, as well as the subjective experience of being continuously countered, if not flooded, by a mono-culture (I am right-you are wrong) could function as an everyday micro assault⁹. Micro-assaults frequently create an attitude of silence and withdrawal, as a way to safeguard the autochthonous self. Analysands frequently allow for the emergence of painful themes of such assaults and the non-recognition of Being it engenders (even in the analytic dyad¹⁰). Kohutian and intersubjectivists all articulate this domain with much sensitivity and have created language to enhance appreciation of the complex interplay between our need for self-esteem nutriment and refueling, and the variations the Other can serve in strengthening our inner sense of value and goodness (mirroring, idealizing, twinship transferences). Examples may suffice. In a more classical example a young emotionally intense analysand caught in a *Tantalus complex* reflected; "I wish I had a penis—I always felt left out by my father...my father and brother would go fishing but I could not go cause I could not wee off the side of the boat...I was left out cause I was a girl. That is why I do sports that I can compete with men - show them I can do it. I would also clean my father's car, even with earbuds! Wanted it perfect for him. He said: 'great, very well done, but remember there is always room for improvement!'" Again one

can read, as it became evident throughout the therapy, that the analysand found herself always out of reach of the father's ideal and true tender presence—a desirable deserter. From a literary position the work of Franz Kafka¹¹ “A letter to my father” remains a literary treasure reflecting very similar moments of non-recognition of self.

Affective Overdrive, Engulfment and Gushing

The latter can be defined as the emotional and psychological flooding of another (with both positive or negative affect), foreclosing reciprocity and dialogical space; “the ardent person in overdrive expresses him or herself quite forcefully, with a long and strong flow of feeling” (Crastnopol, 2015, p.195). In affective overdrive the recipient may feel drowned or taken over by the other to such an extent that “the recipient may lose touch with his her inner psychological experience”(Crastnopol, 2015, p.195). Again the variations and permutations here are legion, and it should be added that the engulfer, gusher, or one in overdrive may do so paradoxically to protect themselves from feeling flooded, controlled or abandoned (affect as glue). Tragic consequences ensue. An astute and sensitive analysand reported the following:

“Spent time with mother again...she truly becomes different in her absence... *with her I am shocked again...* Eigen talks about the importance of having an experience that is nerve to nerve... for me it's a painful immediate experience. I have this area on my back, eczema.... she sees the spot and tells me she has a cream that could help. I said thank you and I would put it on—she said she wanted to... she went on and on and on. She was so upset! She actually started crying that I would not allow her to do it—that I would not allow her to take care of me. Seriously! So I allow her—I gave in. As she put it on she keeps on rubbing it in, rubbing it in, rubbing it in. I didn't like that. She reacts as if I withheld something from her..... it's all about her need, not my comfort. I feel manipulated. It is like exaggerated affect! It's a small thing in ordinary situations...She told me that she is very grateful to have me...She told me that she would walk and sooth me as an infant for hours by crying and telling me all her 'grief'— *she lavished bad times on me...* This is disturbing for me— as an adult at least I can show some resistance, I can say to her—I don't want to hear it!”

The analysand goes on to describe many instances of having to protect herself, from childhood onward, from mother's unreflexively sharing of private content; “As if she did not save me from her private content—she did not protect me!”

Sine Eaters—Martyrdom, Emotional Blackmail and Coercion

It has been evident in countless psychoanalytic works that many struggle to differentiate from their primary relationships, and when they do, they experience immense survivor guilt as they have been subjected to martyrdom parenting/relating; “oh, don't trouble yourself—I will sit here in the dark”. Seemingly altruistic and non-demanding, martyrdom hides the deep impact of intrapsychic and interpersonal extortion as it co-opts another's psychic state, capacities and the fundamental human need for intrapsychic freedom, generating anxiety, guilt, and shame if one does activate, or enjoys separateness. This has been artfully described in Sartre's Flaubert studies (House of Nauseating Recurrence, 1981) and the work of Rudyard Kipling (House of Desolation, in Shengold, 1999). I remain astounded by their brilliance and sensitivity. One



possible adaptation to this micro-trauma is found in what I referred to as sin eaters, i.e., those that carry the burden of depressive masochistic struggles, forever caught within the field of a *seraph introject*. An analysand (Jill) with burning mouth syndrome described her relationship with her mother as “100%”, that she was “*really one with her (mother)*”. Paradoxically, it was also this perfect mother that Jill experienced as a strict disciplinarian, restricting her daily activities with punishment (physical).

Jill was constantly watched over; rarely allowed to venture outside the house, and had no friends or supporting family. Although the closeness was initially experienced as “good”, i.e., her school years, adult life proved problematic—excessive compliance, returning home to be with mum, and stifling the need to explore and expand her psychic horizons became areas of conflict. Jill did move ‘against’ the status but was usually met with grave consequences; “I got cheeky, when I was not allowed to do what I wanted. Mother used to slap me in the face when I did get cheeky”. The latter also served as basis for various psychosomatic symptoms (bruxism, later burning mouth syndrome) and persecutory dreams. The closeness foreclosed many adult avenues at autonomous self-expression, individuation and self-support, and after Jill’s mother passed away, Jill was left emotionally destitute, isolated, and deprived of a full and creative life.

Killing with Kindness

It may seem paradoxical that kindness can be experienced as burdensome in relationships. Julie, a deeply private, if not schizoid analysand communicated this reality as follows: “It is difficult to describe, but being in hospital is extremely stressful, not just the fact that I am under the influence of other’s care, their way of doing, but they actually act and think that their help is *only but good*. If you say ‘no’ it immediately changes their approach to you. At times they think—‘oh, she is old’. They can decide. What frightens me is that they can even send people to your house to be ‘helpful’.” It can certainly be said that such analysands are just sensitive, as I have frequently heard, although it avoids the deep reality that dependency, at times, comes with a kindness that has its own order and ministration, if not technocracy. The analysand made me aware of a multitude of ‘attitudes’, some seemingly benign (‘Oh—it’s ‘cause she has grey hair’), and its impact in how relationships are morally ‘intended’ and ‘structured’ ala Harry Stack Sullivan. Although couched in ‘I am doing this ‘cause’ I want to do good’ the aphorism ‘The road to hell is paved with good intentions/Hell is full of good meanings, but heaven is full of good works’, comes to mind. In two creative works (Jones, 2009; Pond & Palmer, 2016), written by mental health specialists, killing with kindness as dasein-icide is thoughtfully addressed, that is, mental health practices that make use of compliance and surrender (AA for example) as an overarching strategy run various unrecognized psychological risks. They argue that relational contexts designed in authoritarian fashion (although seen as caring) could re-voke pathological accommodative transference-counter-transference matrixes, unwittingly eclipsing the undernourished selves of the very persons they are trying to support, repeating a variation of dasein-icide.

Wearing Teflon, Spoiling, Deception and Pathological Accommodation

According to Crastnopol (2015); “Wearing Teflon is the ability to slough off one’s flaws or mistakes, and is often accompanied by the tendency to externalize and attribute them to



someone or something else” (p. 204). Crastnopol’s description seems very reminiscent of Neo-Kleinian Gianna Williams’s (1998) concept of the ‘no-entry’ system of defense. The ‘no-entry’ system of defense is part of the *Omega function*, wherein the Other is not only impervious to frustration, but is also overflowing with projections. The *Omega function* may be viewed as part of the disorganized-disorientated attachment style, where patients have been exposed to frightening and frightened parents, usually both. As obdurate/obstructive Other (Eaton, 2005), in contrast to serving as a welcoming Other, the recipient of such relational interaction (again over time) may adopt accommodative attitudes, rebel, or collapse a viable sense of self. It is especially virulent where the Other feels always in the right (‘Mother knows best’), spoils attempts at differentiation and individuation, and approaches the other from within a paradigm of paternalistic deception. ‘For your own good’ is thus used to justify running interference with a *person’s liberty and sense of freedom*. The work of Alice Miller (1981, 1988, 1994) remains a testament to such cultural and interpersonal practices. It is not difficult to envision that there are relational dyads and cultural trends that function under the shadow of the *Omega function* and thus serve as psychological soil to a ‘fitting in’ (giving in) agenda, a false *Dasein* that forecloses a creative mandate to live from the True Self. In its extreme, it could foreshadow the death of desire (Thompson, 2017), a divided self pervaded by ontological insecurity (Laing, 1960). Central to Dr Brandchaft’s clinical sensibilities he defines “pathological accommodation” at the root of such states of mind:

“The term *accommodation* refers to the child’s response to this relational trauma, for children adjust to threats to their attachment relationships by attempting *to fit in with* their caretaker’s world when their caretaker cannot recognize and respond to theirs. The needs and feelings of the parent are then privileged by the child at the expense of the child’s authentic self experience.” (2010, p. 3)

Similar to the beautiful poem by Shel Silverstein entitled *Obedient* (in *Falling Up*, p. 90) an analysand I will refer to as Ruth, consulted me after her physician was concerned about her depression. I was able to learn from Ruth the power of possessive love and *being strangled into life*. According to Ruth:

“Mother is always right” and “you are always wrong”, “would tell me what to do, think and even what to dress. I was not allowed to do things by myself, like visit friends, she followed me everywhere. I even slept with her until I was 23. I took it till I was early 30s, I started saying no, going out. She would react with stress, at times crying throughout the night and say; ‘how could you do this to me, after all I have done’. One day she went for my throat, tried to strangle me... My mother buried me in her horrible youth. I felt so responsible for her—that was my jail... I had a dark night of the soul.”

Connoisseurship Gone Awry

Connoisseurship gone awry can be defined as a style of relating where one partner in the dyad acts like a hyper discriminating “master”. The master exposes the other to a process of exact thinking and reasoning, or an *excessively reasoned train of thought* (being ratiocinative). Caught within a hermeneutic of suspicion the recipient is always found to be ‘not-quite-there-yet’, always to be bettered, caught in the so called Pygmalion Effect as described by Robert



Rosenthal. The recipient is continuously undercut, their sense of agency and esteem minimized. An analysand I will call Margaret described this reality (scoliotic transference in our work) as follows; “My mother could not leave a room without saying what is wrong with it...adjust things continuously...Since she had scoliosis all was a constant adaptation for her. She was crooked... You would never say or know it, as she adjusted all her clothes....She was like that with us - it was actually a sign of love if she would say to you - that scarf makes you look unattractive. You look attractive ... if only your chin wasn't so. ...Mum would include and be positive towards all other people, but with me and my siblings she was different. We had to do everything perfectly - we all had to be a certain way....mum had scoliosis and she was diagnosed with an axis 1 too...”

I recall a particularly important experience with Margaret that served as a window into her micro-trauma. We were experiencing a period of intense rainfall, so much so that I used a small towel in front of the waiting room door for clients to dry their shoes. As Margaret entered the waiting room I was met with a scathing remark about its inappropriateness and I was left, not so much in the moment, but actually in her later absence, with a feeling of shame, embarrassment and a need to ensure it never to happen again. It became *suddenly an eye sore*. It was thus of psychological interest to later learn that Margaret developed cataracts after a severe separation experience. Both Rudyard Kipling and the psychoanalyst Harry Guntrip write about living in strict, unforgiving and exacting households, and all of these writers, as well as my analysand developed visual symptoms after traumas of separation. The price of being an eye sore?

Soul Blindness and Optic Rectomitis

Soul blindness can be characterized as the inability to see that a child, or the Other for that matter, possesses a unique sense of self, mind, interiority, or Soul. The dasein-psychoanalyst Eric Craig (2008) gives a touching account what could be meant by using the concept Soul, i.e., *as one's gathering of lived experience as unique to that situated life lived*; “In saying that the gathering of life-lived experience is situated, I mean only that as *Da-sein*, our gathering of experience is unavoidably contextualized, that is, shaped and structured by the manifold social, historical, existential, genetic, biological, and evolutionary contexts from which each of our existences arise.” (p. 259). As such the Soul remains forever unique, sacred, a true archive of a life lived. It should be approached with the same respect as a revered text. An analysand, Timothy explained the impact of its absence as follows; “My father, he had *optic rectomitis*. Nothing I did or said what good—all shit! He didn't teach me anything but criticized all I did. He was never wrong, would never apologize and would say the most ridiculous things, like you cannot trust a man that has a beard—things like that, blatantly wrong!” Another analysand, with similar father experiences used the term “*negatosis*” to describe the intrapsychic ‘talking’ residue of parental demand that would continuously run commentary on his performance, his sense of self, never allowing him a moment of psychic rest. Another analysand, Lea, believed that due to her mother's inability to truly see her, she never understood “the secret world of adults” and believed, similar to the song of *Pat Benatar* that “Hell is for children”; “I had to be like a trained seal, had to give a show...: I am pondering it, when did it start....as a kid....*little things*...I removed myself from my body.....body is a vessel only, put my mind somewhere else, preservation, protect myself....”

Psychic Airbrushin and Excessive Niceness



In this reality mother and infant are disclosed to each other in various ways; the mother 'touches', in the Heideggerian sense, her infant and child with a specific mood, vision and state of mind. She loves, she envisions, and dreams her child through her ministrations, and as such the child will be informed of its existence within the maternal orbit. Concrete biological existence is given psychic meaning—it is this contact with the world by being 'touched' that the maternal imprint, the unconscious mothering of the primordial Other is set in motion. The infant, like the mother, and the mother before her all struggle with the tension between the autochthonous drive and encountering the alienating experiences contact brings, as well as fated situations. It is so that the dyad can be infused by what I see as *techniques of goodness*, as I refer to them. In Crastopol's (2015) taxonomy it can be referred to as psychic airbrushing and excessive niceness. This is certainly not the same as idealization, more so:

"In airbrushing, the minimization of flaws is on a different level than it would be in idealization; it is more day to day, regular operating procedure than a psychic cleavage. And it subtly makes the disavowed faults that much harder to register and react to or compensate for. Also, in addition to the component of denial, certain "beautification" process occurs in airbrushing that more fully contradicts the possibility of there being any badness to begin with. Being subtle and therefore stealthful in its destructiveness is a feature common to all micro-trauma mechanisms" (p. 116).

It is as if disillusioned parts of the self and the other is sequestered off, overtly or covertly; "Of course you are very good at that, all my kids are, you are just imagining that that is not so!" Parental airbrushing can be devastating to a child's growing ability to know the mind of the Other, the 'truth' of a situation, and to be able to perceive reality and its vicissitudes. It is also true that if the parent continuously 'airbrushes' the child—the child may never know reality as is, and as such the reality of limitations.

Airbrushing can also be combined with denial and other defense mechanism coloring perception and self experience. After ensuring time with his parents (both were remarried), an analysand mentions that two separate experiences left him bereft of parental involvement and support. Each time he was to meet a parent they cancelled and provided excuses that seemed illogical. Worse, it made him feel as if he was impinging on/in their worlds. Paradoxically both parents would later text and say that they had a 'great time', that they hoped he had too, making the analysand feel guilty about his needs and feelings as well. Any attempt to address emotional difficulty in the family was met with 'make nice' and further silencing strategies.

Soul Murder

In two poignant psychoanalytic works (Williams, 2010, 2013), neither a case study *per se* nor an autobiography, the psychoanalyst Paul Williams (2010) describes various ways a mind/soul survives a developmental *wakemare*, i.e, being an "one unknown, unchronicled creature" (2010, p.103):

"The scale of deprivation was not due primarily to economic poverty... My parents hated other people, so that living together, being a family was torture. The lack of stimulation in childhood was punctuated by outbursts of capricious violence that were a feature of my mother's



psychotic personality and my parent's disastrous relationship. Emptiness and numbness were the backcloth to my and my sister's experience of violence... We were conditioned, in our retreat into silence, to expect attack whenever we were in the house. As a result, I found myself living in two contradictory states of mind. One was a persistent need to get food, whilst avoiding being savaged, and the other was an unrequited craving to find respite from these threats of violence and pressure to survive..." (pp. 116-117).

Severe deprivation (understimulation) as well as overstimulation, if not a combination of the two, sees the creation of a lived world characterized by a sense of pressure, cravings, being short circuited, frightened, split (gut-mind), push-pulled, unable to relax, and having no respite. The psychoanalyst Shengold (2011) adds, in his description of Soul Murder,

"Soul murder is a crime in which the perpetrator is able to destroy the victim's capacity for feeling joy and love." (p.121).

Whereas Sartre's work describes predominantly what I would consider soul blindness, it is evident that in soul murder the neglect and abuse experienced is to such an extent that a feral existence seems preferable, although it could be hidden to general observation. Jane, a chronically emotionally starved analysand, stated it as follows: "I get along with people, I have learned to 'track' in relationships. But if I am cornered, made to be and feel frightened, I turn feral, a street-kid, dangerous. I do not trust people". The writings of child psychiatrist Bruce Perry (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006) gives testament to many such adaptations, especially his work entitled "The boy who was raised as a dog". The examples given by Williams are vivid and extreme in the sense that the 'hero' in the narratives (2010, 2013) suffered from clear cut abuse and neglect. Shengold's work also gives examples, but of a more insidious variation, of soul murder, some I have come to see in especially narcissistic family and religious-cultural practices, wherein the presence of *childism*, to use Young – Bruehl's term (2012), seems ever present. Within such families and environmental *practices*, the following may be encountered: milieu control, demand for unquestioned loyalty (allegiance), authoritarianism, intimidation, myths of infallibility, the punishing of any deviation, scapegoating, shaming, holding doctrine over person (i.e. ideology/propaganda programming), a demand for purity, and forced confession ('tell the truth you little liar'). Many describe soul murder as being endopsychically *gutted*, being nullified, guillotined, eclipsed, entombed, marooned, exiled, being unchronicled, and falling into oblivion; "What happened to me... I lost belief, any trust in my gut, damaged trust instincts.... I have a mind-gut split... my love instinct has been damaged... to feel is to fear."

Conclusion

Obstructive and micro-trauma processes, from childhood onward, run the risk of swallowing, enslaving, colonizing, and entrapping the native self in various accommodative strategies. Freedom from entrenchment and being overwhelmed, poses unique challenges to the native self, seeing a lifelong pattern of deep psychological, if not soulful, struggle. This paper, similar to the work of Khan, Laing, Eigen, Crastnopol, Brandchaft and Shengold, set forth the languaging of such soul deprivation and tragedy, with the hope that openings may exist, and freedom found.



Notes

1 I am deeply thankful to Prof DuBose for his concept of *Dasein-icide*. The use of Dasein borrows from Martin Heidegger and various Daseinanalysts to signify a way of being involved in one's immediate 'world'(-ing), a world (-ing) inhabited by an *autochthonous self* that continuously owns its awareness of facticity and the contingent elements inherent in self-world (-ing) involvement. To experience one's own Being, one's own (ed) truth (representing this unique world-'ing' as Soul) includes a continual Being –in, Being-for, and Being- with.

2 The work of Shengold (2011) comes to mind here

3 The incident in US—the Philando Castile shooting where a four year old tries to sooth a distraught mother.

4 Eigen's (1999) trauma statements: "(1) In the beginning there is nourishment; (2) in the beginning (almost) there is trauma, and (3) in the beginning there is nourishment-trauma." (p. 145). Eigen's work on Toxic Nourishment (1999) and Psychic Deadness (1995,1996) remains central to my clinical understanding of Dasein-icide and will be articulated in greater depth in a forthcoming publication (Daws, 2018, EPIS).

5 From Noah to Odysseus, surviving a catastrophe is but part of the task confronted. Returning home, if not re-finding a home remains beholden to temporality, wherein *time should be given time*. Contemporary soldiers frequently mention that modern warfare further traumatizes as overstimulation is not allowed an extended period of decompression, a time used exclusively for grieving. Rather, modern soldiers are frequently exposed to a process wherein, and within, a short period of time the psyche is exposed to an overstimulating environment/event to only shortly thereafter be thrust back 'into' an environment seen as 'normal'. This in itself may actually be too much to bear, exacerbating psychic traumata.

6 The absence of a *handicapper general* as described by Kurt Vonnegut (2010) in his short story *Harrison Bergeron*. This short story also emphasizes the opposite of psychic airbrushing as micro trauma as described by the psychoanalyst Crastnopol (2015).

7 I hope my psychoanalytic colleagues can forgive my reservation to use the term "False self" as cultural trends have appropriated Winnicott's beautiful description, and as such has subjected it to moral violence.

8 Khan refers throughout his debate to the most prevalent paradigmatic traumatic situations archived to that point in clinical psychoanalysis (1915-1963); (a) castration anxiety, (b) separation anxiety, (c) the primal scene, and the (d) Oedipus complex (that includes birth, the loss of the mother as an exclusive love and sexual object, penis envy, the possible loss of the object's love, and the loss of the super-ego's love) (Khan, 1963).

9 Also see the work of Derald Wing Sue entitled *Micro-aggressions in everyday life* (2010, pp. 31-34) for his own taxonomy.



10 The work of Lakoff, R.B. & Coyne, J.C. (1993) entitled *Father knows best: the use and abuse of power in Freud's case of Dora* comes to mind.

11 A special thank you to Ms. Annelies Cramer for introducing this work to me. Deeply therapeutic.

12 "The author of this book, and the individual written about, are not the same person. It is a piece of literature that furnishes an account of the methods of a mind in its efforts to prevail in oppressive circumstances" (Williams, 2010 from the *Preface*)

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