

Pigeonhole Episode 17

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

[mellow ambient music plays]

Simple questions to ask

DOUGLAS KID: Now, I ask simple questions and provide conceptual frameworks illustrating how massive forces of an automobile collision erased conventional understandings of my essence-identity and reduced me to a collection of cells struggling for survival in an indifferent universe.

[upbeat, jazzy tune fades in]

First question... *'what is reality?'* Answer: reality may be seen as matter/energy existing within the space-time continuum. [dissonant string music plays at the same time as the jazz tune]

Second question: 'what is a human being?' Answer: a human being can be regarded as a discrete mass of biological tissue - a matrix/factory where electrochemical exchanges, interchanges occur. Reality shapes/defines human beings as biological tissue, awash in nutrient molecules, interacts with external matter, energy, gravity. Most human beings from birth acquire abilities to process reality. Imagine however, processing reality; but at a slower rate; so much slower, society leaves you behind. For weeks, my body existed, but I was separate, outside of time.

[jazz fades out into mellow ambient music]

I don't know. There's part of me that's kinda clinical and stays on the surface and not goes into the emotion. And the strange thing about it is, I died. The person I was before my brain injury is gone. But obviously, I'm not...well, I'm not...dead. But I still grieve for the person that I lost, that I was. I do.

[ambient music shifts into pensive piano music]

Humans and identity

When I was in states of coma and amnesia, I was very much human. Parts of our society thrive on people that are injured. There's entire structures; in fact, much of our economy is built on people that their mission is to save people. And yes, they did save me. Obviously, I was completely out of it. But yes, I was very much a human being, and my treatment, if there weren't the money-making aspects of it, would people be saved with traumatic brain injuries? That's kind of cynical to ask that question, but...there was certainly a capitalistic aspect to healthcare. And I have to believe at a core level, physicians are there to help people. I do. I mean, I don't know why I second guess that. It's not all about money.

[piano music winds down as new, slow piano music plays]

Human beings emerge from and exist within reality. Personal experience illustrates how sensitive the mind/body are as processing tools of reality. Envision the gelatin-like brain defined,

ordered, separated by dense bone into compartments of knowing.... Consider this working system suddenly, violently shaken so hard, brain damage ensues. Total negation of self occurs. For a while, loss dominates. Time passes. Slowly brain tissues heal, reconstitute, reassemble, restructure at the cellular level. Cognition flickers, self steals back, reclaiming the void. Now, examine one restored human being processing reality in space/time, but with a tendency to slip/disorient.

Yet throughout recovery process, a great desire to realize identity, uncover meaning, discover belonging, find community, and celebrate.

[piano fades out into weird, techno lounge music]

The episode

2005's longest day swept past, no awareness of self or time, detached - apart. Vague impressions of the outside world: sounds, voices, some comforting/familiar, brought the world closer, then receded. Who am I? What am I? When did this happen? Why was I held captive? In an agitated state, compelled to flee - ripped tubes from throat/body - left bed, only to hit the cold, antiseptic floor, hard. Subdued by staff - tears streaming - fought with every fiber of my being for release; until finally collapsing under the weight of strong hands, exhaustion, sedation; ensnared - entombed in my mind - enmeshed by a strait jacket, unable to escape, pinned to my bed. Few visible scars exist - others indelibly submerged.

As memories surface, tears well in my eyes, splash down my face.

Brutally cold winter's night, at home lying in bed, exhausted; caught a reflection in the mirror, but did not recognize the stranger.

Who is he? Looks familiar, but....

Suddenly, the sinking realization: face in the mirror was I.

Time then dilated for many intense minutes, body convulsed, mind collapsed, tears fell. Like falling from a great height, I shattered on the cold, hard ground of pitiless reality. The episode left me breathless.

My mental/physical decomposition that night was hardly surprising. Only eight months passed since 4:34 pm, Tuesday, May 17, 2005, when I initiated a call, then failed to yield to a 6,500 - pound SUV traveling 50 miles per hour, and it smashed into me. Catastrophic injuries: severe traumatic brain injury with hemorrhaging led to coma/amnesia of 75 days; massive internal bleeding from lacerations to rectum, liver, spleen, abdomen; compartment syndrome injury to my right leg; multiple hip fractures; cardiac arrests; respiratory failure; MRSA. I was discharged, September 15, 2005. Instead of daily workouts in hospital, I underwent 3 sessions per week of outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy. By October 2005, I resumed my work as an industrial designer. In January 2006, eight months after the accident, returned to university. All pressures combined to produce the episode.

Like using a treadmill that suddenly spins too fast, I fell. Exhausted, brain ceased to process, overwhelmed by fear, shutdown, shuddered. Time sped by so fast – too fast – I could not breathe. I felt like I plummeted towards a bottomless pit looking to swallow me whole; hoped if enough fell, the pool of tears would break my fall; then gently I would float to the surface safe, whole, alive.

Twelve and a half years removed as of this writing, searing remembrances of my first temporal dissonance remain. As memories surface, tears well in my eyes, splash down my face.

[techno lounge fades into mellow jazz]

The Crucible of Trauma: Melding the Fragments Whole

From death, coma, amnesia straight-jacket separated by walls of damaged tissue to rebirth
Feeling hearing touching verbalizing trying recalling organizing standing walking
Drive to relive (replay) so events turn out differently compel fear frustration
Grieving quietly (passing) turns to identification/acceptance/belonging
Renewed, refreshed, driven to express, find community, roads to
Oświęcim Paris Berlin Vienna Palantino Sliema Montréal

[mellow jazz continues, then fades very slowly to silence]

Wrap-up

[upbeat theme music]

CHERYL: Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at www.whoamitostopit.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

Music in the episode

"[Jazzmasters and Delay Pedals](#)" by Rest You Sleeping Giants. (Source: freemusicarchive.org. licensed under [a Attribution License](#).)

"Cool Vibes," "Impromptu in Blue," "Meditation Impromptu 01," and "Port Horizon" by Kevin MacLeod. (Source: incompetech.com. Licensed under Creative Commons: By [Attribution 3.0 License](#).)