

An Eagle Bikes on the Back of a Whale—A Tale About the Body, White Space, and the Idea of Perception

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My sensory experience of the world is different than others. Impressions reach my nervous system and vibrate like a bowstring. It keeps shaking long after it is supposed to stop, way too long, and hypersensitive to variations, whether it is emotions, the weather, surroundings, or people. My sensory experience takes on atypical forms. I see and perceive things that are outside the scope of ordinary understanding. My sense of proprioception is off. This is perhaps the gentlest way of explaining schizophrenia. It is simultaneously a silent and loud state of being. Speechless because society cannot see my condition. Loud because my inner world is never at rest. Schizophrenia is ever-present. Loud noises, throbbing, pounding, and thoughts fill my head. I have no control over this strange state. The sphere I call my mind has never known silence. It is a term I do not understand. My mind is dominating, always deciding over my life: racing thoughts and a cacophony of voices bouncing forth and back like my skull was a rubber cell. I wish there were an escape route, a sign that said exit here, but no arrow points to the spot.

An eagle bikes on the back of a whale, and a spider devours its mate. A hippopotamus stands on a hat while reading Søren Kierkegaard, and an ant prays to God. Leaves whispers to the moon, and roses sharpen their teeth. A tie feels neglected, and he dreams of being a bowtie.

Ghosts mirror their empty holster in the lake. Everything feels deform and awkward; there is nothing that binds the body together; it is free flowing. Monumental voices slumber in the head of my thoughts. There are so many things that do not make any sense. It is all a mystery.

This mindscape of personal thoughts and the phenomena that pertain to my body is all-encompassing. Strange sensations absorb flesh and bone. Body parts become something other than me. The body seems twisted as if looking at it through a kaleidoscope. When I observe the mirror,

there is no real me. I do not see the person that is me. For what is me if you cannot see it? Sight is a strong ally for determining reality. We see and therefore perceive the truth of the world. But what if you cannot see? As in schizophrenia? What if muddy waters pollute the outer and inner sight? And sensory input that goes against all understanding permeates you? How do you know what is real? How do you understand what truth is? What I call myself, I cannot observe. The mirror is foggy. It only shows what it wants, therefore nothing. I have no perception if I am young or old. The manifestation of skin, muscles, bones, and hair are asymmetrical. I only see parts of the anatomy. Everything is disconnected. Nothingness is what is. From above, a fly observes me. I wish I were a fly hovering above reality. Nothingness, the mirror, and the fly are all there is.

Perceiving me through muddy waters and never really seeing what I am or as a living entity in the world has been a dilemma I have struggled with as long as I have had this condition. When I was a child, I often observed other children. If I looked out into the schoolyard, the other children's play seemed strangely staggered. The movements and bodies were separated from each other. When I looked, there were dark holes in the air. If one of the children approached a spot, a dark fog polluted them so that their bodies became almost invisible. I saw it as clearly as they were jumping rope and huffing but did not pay much attention to it. It was just the way it was.

How do you ground yourself when you do not perceive your bodily proportions? When parts seem to float out. Art uses a term to illustrate the space around a subject. It is called negative space or white space. It only shows parts of objects, and it is not possible to create a complete image. In opposition, positive space is used to describe subjects in a work of art and is the area of interest in the artwork. White space encompasses my world, and the subject is never the focus of my interest.

The weather is changing, and the fog is under my vision. Dolphins shoot up through the clouds. I understand nothing and the world seems unreal and grainy. The spirit of a dead and slaughtered tiger mixes in the fog. Everything is dirty, wrong, and stupid, stupid, stupid like the writing in my brain. Ridiculous as the body that sneers at the world because it is the only thing it can do. Seagulls fly away screaming, and the eternal fog persists. I don't see what's in front of me. I see nothing but the mist vibrating in front of my gaze. I am blind, blind in both eyes. The only thing in the room is the body, a strange object that is irrelevant. I am deaf, blind, and jointless. May God forgive me, and hell disappear.

When I was younger, I felt myself flash like a faulty fluorescent lamp, and the boundaries between the world and me poured out like water. It was hard to hold it together. I did not recognize myself in what was supposed to be me. I felt disconnected. Everything was fluid. I became insecure and doubted everything: my attitude, myself, and the body in space. My self-esteem and confidence did not feel like a firmly entrenched part of me. The image I had of myself was diffuse and confusing. I could not see what I was as a physical object in space. I saw elements as if I had glaucoma that ruined my vision.

The self is a strange entity; as an adult, I have thought about the connection schizophrenia has to the self. The longer I have had this condition, the harder it is to separate the self, identity, and schizophrenia from each other. For what is what? The confusion that arises in the tension between identity, self, and disease is existential. Because what plays into what? And what is real? The answer is that everything is real in my perception of being human. The mind exposes me to shock, confusion, desperation, and horror. The existential map is muddled in the schizophrenic experience.

If we return to the notion of white space. Look at a blank piece of white paper. What do you see? Most would say nothing or a piece of white paper, but the correct answer is. The white paper shows a ghost in a snowstorm. I often feel I am that ghost in the snowstorm. Well-functioning human beings do not see the ghost, but I do. It is my inner state of being. The tumultuous state my soul experiences daily. It is not an easy state to handle, but I do my best. Again, if we look at the white paper, something is alluring about this innocent piece of paper, not yet polluted by handwriting, drawing, or thoughts to be put down. The paper only presents itself as what it is—yes, you are right, a piece of paper. But when does it stop becoming a piece of white paper? When does the change appear? Is it when we begin to write on it? Yes, obviously, it alters into a paper with content. It suddenly has importance and a message. If we fold it into a paper airplane, it can fly. If we draw on it, maybe it becomes an artwork that could be exhibited in an art gallery. If we curl it and throw it into a paper basket, importance has suddenly been lost.

It is the same with our identity; you can shape it into whatever you like. Depending on the story you want to narrate about your life. In schizophrenia, there is a part of you, something unearthly that shapes itself. The control is lost, but it is possible to regain control again. Throughout the years, I have slowly started to feel better. I understand the condition now. I can work and control it. Simultaneously my perception of myself, body, and mind are clearing up. The fog is lifting from my mind. The world is no longer grainy and unreal. The deafness toward reality has shifted. I am in a new place that is more like a white piece of paper waiting to have a new reality inscribed.