

“Ranting and Rambling on being Culturally Schizophrenic: being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present”

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By Erik Witteborg

(Disclaimer: My story isn't necessarily the story of another. My reflections are to reflect solely on my own thoughts and feelings. However, I do not believe my story to be singular and if others identify with parts of my own journey then I welcome those compatriots. Equally if some are repulsed or angered by my narrative I respect that as well. Your feelings are yours and they are valid. Our truths can differ without either being found fictitious. I respect your autonomy and love you for exercising it.

“Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth.' Say not, 'I have found the path of the soul.' Say rather, 'I have met the soul walking upon my path.' For the soul walks upon all paths. The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.” Kahlil Gibran)

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"I mean you came out fine and ended up *normal*, but your kids 'prolly won't. I mean you do know that the *deafness* gene skips generations, right?"

"Oh yeah!" I responded with fake enthusiasm.

“Like for example, this you-and-me-having-an-offspring generation? Skipped. Done.”

Then I chucked the deuces at her and snapped 'em shut -- letting my ASL scissors cut ties that never should've looped together, cutting the bonds that had, in a blink of an eye, turned to bondage and burdens unwarranted and unwanted. That 'deafness gene' once again striking out at

me through a striking, differential-mugshot of a purple-looking bruise mark on my, "defective DNA," as seen through the lens of this pompous-sounding Aryan-esque, Hitler-channeling Hearing girl.

I turn away from her to turn-off her attempts at assuaging her pointed comments. I turn away because my Deaf genes taught me that if I can't see her, I don't have to hear her noise. Then I wipe my pants for that metaphorical semblance of washing away a wish-I-wouldn't-have, wrist-watch-is-it-that-time-again, wish-washy relationship washed from my hands and onto my jeans. I wanted put on blast all channels, broadcasting that, "Look at this dude right here turn and walk away, no Levi, no Wrangler logo, just that Conexion-26 brand. These are Deaf jeans encompassing Deaf genes. I walk away supported by legs made strong from stomping on wooden-floors to verbally-vibrate kinesthetic-requests for visual attention."

But, no, Coda's don't suffer hearing-judgment, right?

Then why has this scenario happened about 4 times too many?

Please talk about how I don't belong. I didn't choose to be born Deaf, Deaf eggs and Deaf sperm did that, life decided that, and YOU decided to leave me in the middle, straddling two worlds, because you're not there yet in your journey to be as-radical-as-necessary to understand fully that being Deaf is not about ears. You don't even grant me the option of membership because YOU still have colonized-thoughts of what it means to be Deaf. You proudly preach and publicize the ethnic nature of being Deaf while one foot is still posted on the old podium of pathology. I don't blame you for it, I can't, the system churned this slippery slope of butter-thinking. But I also can't stay quiet while it happens. Because I hate the system that made you think like that, that's why.

Why do Hearing people make comments about how I, "speak good," when I know I 'speak well!' Comments like, "you'd never know you had Deaf parents, based on your accent. "No, but you might realize my anger when I put the accent on 'you' as I fingerspell 'f-k Y-O-U' from my pant-pocket. Because I'm angry, with a positive, righteous anger that kindles at the way you've been told to think about me and my kin. You make me bristle.

The framing is askew when people perceive my coda identity as one that was formulated from being born hearing and having been exposed to the Deaf through acculturation. Such thinking is deficient in its foundation. Instead the framing should reflect that I was born Deaf and only later did I internalize a Hearing identity. As such my Deaf identity was not cultivated by acculturation, it was called into existence through enculturation; Deaf by birth right.

The introduction of a second identity through an internalization process created, in the beginning, a duality that could only then be solved by the creation and embracing of a third: coda identity. Thus, duality, for a time, was a box to which multiplicity was key.

Imprisonment by pigeonholed categorization is convenient for that permitted-ease of Deaf-studies to gloss-over a whole section of us, but fuck that Imma fly the coop. You insist on driving this binary-car, this two-door coupé, while I'm stuck in the middle with a gearshift up my parenthesis, underscore, parenthesis, underscore, parenthesis: ()_ and so the only path to self-actualization is through breaking this glass-ceiling, this windshield, à la coup d'éaf.

Using intersectionality at cross-sections of the 'self' was akin to removing the Atlas-sphere from my perpetually crushed cervical vertebra and embracing it as a map, instead of an anvil. With my C1 liberated, I could finally embrace wholeness, I could *see-one* (C1).

The journey to discovering coda is one that is synonymous with self-discovery. It needn't be a mantra or a new way of life, the objective rather is for such a journey to serve as scaffolding -- providing tools to dig, build, dismantle, pry, design, and re-design your selfhood. For me it's the marriage of, "A Tale of Two Cities," two rejections, rejection from my home-world and rejection from an adopted-world. Ain't that the Dickens? Hostility from horizontal-rejections, the only way to go is up; elevation of self. To borrow from Freire, my journey towards more self awareness and adventurous excavation of my identities was at times, "an arduous process of transcending a colonial existence that is almost culturally schizophrenic: being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present. It is a condition that I painfully experienced in the United States, constantly juggling the power asymmetry of the two worlds, two cultures, and two languages."

Your framing presents me as a contradiction. My framing presents the 'self' as complimentary. One is a path to a healthy identity, the other, a dehumanizing roadblock that leads to something less than what could be, than what should be.

When I was a young Koda I was told that one day I would have to choose either the Deaf-World, or the hearing world. That every Coda *had to* eventually choose one or the other, that I couldn't exist in both, I couldn't be who I was, who I was growing into. This information came from a Deaf lady who was in a respected position, she told this to me and told this to my mother. My mother asked how I felt about it. I rejected that thinking, "that's not me!" I've wanted to break this system for as long as I can remember. Many years and many miles later, here's my grown-up answer to a grown-up question burdened and burned into a young Koda mind.

Being a '10' in a world where you were supposed to choose 1 or 0, is to reject a world that believes in a binary identity of one or the other. To be a '10' is synonymous with being whole and healthy. To be '10' is to be Coda with a capital C. When you choose to embody wholes instead of holes, you then manifest identities that are complementary rather than contradictory. I don't mean to say there is an absence of conflict. What I mean is that your internal identity can be fluid. A need to delineate every characteristic, to compartmentalize each tendency as a 1 or 0 is a task that is subtractive and not additive to a healthy identity.

To be Coda, is not to be 'only half-Deaf', as if it were even possible to be only half a raindrop and not a full raindrop. Is a lesser quantity of rain in drop related to a drop in quality of rain? A smaller amount contains the exact same chemical makeup, the same parts hydrogen and the same parts oxygen; quality is independent of quantity. What makes a mixture of things are not always two halves being combined, but rather two parts whole, mixed together to complete a recipe.

Coda, then, as its musical origins state, is both the first and the second, yet uniquely a third. We destroy the idea of coda when we employ reductionist thinking, it is only when we view it from a lens of emergence do we truly elevate it into a stable existence.

My question is this: When will Deaf Studies and Deaf Discourse start to build an authentic, humanized framework of Codas. When will they unpack and dialogue directly with, not just talk about, the individuals who compose of at least 50% of all native signers (Paddy Ladd shares an interesting statistic in regards to the number of hearing children of Deaf parents at least being equal to if not surpassing the Deaf population).

P.S. Stop calling me an ally, I'm not your fuckin' ally. I'm not an outsider supporting an insider. I was born, raised, and live in that circle, and I'm tired of being demoted to a second-rate Deaf

citizen. An audiogram is not a right to citizenship, this much we know from senior-citizens. Hearing-loss is not the path to a Green Card. And Coda's don't need passports to exist in the land they were born unto, and so, your police-state mentality, TSA agent copping-a-feel inspection is dehumanizing. The way you examine me, your criteria, your check-list for 'being', are they not the very same tools that the master used? You can continue to angrily grab my wrist in an action of transference, or we could hold hands and make happen acts of transformation.

(Disclaimer cont.: My truth of today, may not be my truth of tomorrow. My journey has never been static, it's ever growing in it wanderlust. The dynamic nature of self-identity is wonderful, I rejoice in it, I do not mourn having multiple-sections of self that overlap and thread, for these threaded fabrics represent the cloth wrapped over my naked body. A body that, like yours, is found naked underneath it all, human in our similarities, but more so, human in the similitude experienced by the differences we all share through biodiversity. I harbor no hatred for the all the 'YOU's'* I've used. I just want to love you up, like I love myself, and be loved by you in the way you love yourself.)