

CASE STUDY: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF AN ESSEX PUB FIGHT

Richard was referred to me by an integrative practitioner after presenting with symptoms of what was described as a paranoid belief-system with borderline delusional characteristics. Specifically, he thought he was being personally targeted by the slogans and catchphrases of the motivational / inspirational / 'wellness' industry.

Do what you love!

Live laugh love!

This is your life! Do what you love!

If you don't like your life you can change it

Life is short – live your dreams!

Wear your passion

Today is the day you start to live your best life.

You have one wild and precious life. This is it!

The best time to start is NOW

Don't wait for the right moment. This is the moment.

Posters on tubes, in coffee shops and businesses, even printed on a carpet outside a meeting room in a hotel. An A2 signboard in the window of a greeting card shop: an image of a lemon-walled cottage in a Mediterranean citrus grove, with *You are absolutely capable of creating the life you can't stop thinking about* written on the side. Email signoffs:

Seize the day!

I'm too blessed to be stressed.

What most people register (or ignore) as largely harmless, if inane, derivative little burps of text, to Richard had become taunts, specifically formulated for and targeted at him. His evidence was:

- He was not doing what he loved
- There were aspects of his life he did not like and had tried to change, but had not been successful
- He was not living his dreams
- He was not wearing his passion
- Today was not the day he had started to live his best life
- He was not capable of creating the life he could not stop thinking about
- He was stressed and did not feel blessed

And so on. He had been marooned in conventional therapy for years, its established escalatory cycles of damage moving him from careers advice and professional guidance to CBT, into deepening feelings of hopelessness and a hardening mindset of falling self-worth that made him deserving of his setbacks and bad luck, and increasing lack of confidence about his ability to recover his lost status, ultimately advancing into beliefs about 'forces' holding him back. In our

second conversation, he voiced his growing conviction that ‘the universe’ was not only obstructing him from meeting his goals, but had now moved to mocking him for it.

Having been through months of careful questioning from therapists ostensibly designed to challenge his paranoia, but which had in fact encouraged him to construct a logically coherent model of ‘the universe’ involving economic, social, and political dynamics and systems designed to oppress him, Richard had begun to exhibit fear that the universe’s campaign against him would in time move from these taunts to one of physical endangerment. He feared a skidding car mounting the pavement to break his legs; freak weather blasting flying objects into his head; a shove in the back on a crowded platform, a plunge onto the rails. Improbable scenarios of misadventure ending him with him cracking his skull at the bottom subway steps, eating an unfamiliar meal to trigger a hidden lethal allergic reaction; being caught in the crossfire of an armed police response to a crime in progress.

His existing therapeutic trajectory would have demanded further hours of excavation for buried trauma, interrogation of his mental model of the ‘universe’ and his rationalisation of its hostility towards him as expressed through the medium of impersonal, ambient motivational lifestyle messages.

I advised a different approach.

I suggested that, instead of interrogating the origin and purpose of the messages, he takes a course of direct action in response to them. I suggested that, instead of interpreting them using the conceptual frameworks and the lexicon of therapy and ‘wellness’, he uses the conceptual framework and lexicon of a fight in an Essex pub.

Live your best life!

FUCK OFF

If you don’t like your life you can change it!

IF YOU DON’T LIKE YOUR LIFE YOU CAN FUCK OFF

The best time to start is NOW!

THE BEST PLACE TO FUCK IS OFF

Live your dream!

FUCK YOUR MOTHER

I advised him, in short, to respond to these messages by defacing them with hostile, profane, defiant counter-sentiment.

Richard asked for some time to process this suggested course of therapy. At the end of the session, he told me he intended to immediately discontinue our relationship. I never saw him again, but several months later, I noticed an advertisement in Embankment tube station. It featured cartoonish, hyper-real grinning avocados promoting a subscription service which would, for a fixed fee, deliver a balanced package of fruits, vegetables, and pulses to the home every week. On it, someone had written with a thick black marker pen in neat three-inch capitals, **SMASH IT UP YOUR FUCKING ARSE**