

I heard it through the grapevine

Freewheelin' 4: Type, words and some music

Peter Geyer

As different types, we perceive and understand the world in differing ways. That applies to our construction of type as much as to anything else. Peter Geyer cautions that in interpreting and explaining type we may not always be 'singing from the same songbook.'

Love is like an automobile
Or maybe a freight train
Depends on how you feel.

Gone, like a Nixon file
Gone, gone, gone
Gone, like my landlord's smile
Gone, gone, gone.

—John Hiatt

Theories [are] more like songs than instructions.

—Adam Phillips

Different people use differing methods and mediums for explaining type and illustrating type preferences. Sometimes we cite political or public figures, the latter often through movies and television. The proposition is that if the characters are well developed (well *written*, not necessarily well *acted*), then a consistent personality can be ascribed to them.

One reason why great authors are acclaimed as such is that their characters are consistent and realistic in what they think, feel and do. A personality framework can be inferred. For obvious reasons this doesn't work if the characters are caricatures.

These observations and descriptions can be useful: but they can also be risky, because there may not be enough data to suggest a type, or the data may be misleading. This often has to do with the quality and purpose of the data, be it articles or scripts.

For instance, when the television series *Lois and Clark* appeared some years ago I watched it with interest. I concluded that Lois Lane was clearly ESTP and Clark Kent INFJ—a nice pair of opposites, and not inconsistent with some other portrayals of those characters. I was unable to confirm my assessment in the second series, in which the characters seemed to be more one-dimensional: there wasn't enough data to make a judgement, even if I used data from the previous series.

In general the same observation could be made about the most of the players in *SeaChange*, which has slowly taken on a more archetypal, story focus; perhaps even a morality play in some ways.

I found a similar problem in revisiting that old chestnut *The Good Life*. I know that David Haynes featured this program in his talk on type and situation comedies at AusAPT's National Conference. For me, however, watching it on its recent reappearance, I found the characters too thin and the acting too melodramatic to be sure of anything at all. Good comedy perhaps, but nothing about characters.

Fawlty Towers has always intrigued me. Sybil is easy as an ESFJ, but what about Basil? I have concluded that if he has a type at all, it is that of an INTP spending nearly all of his life in his inferior function, punctuated by more volatile shadow experiences. The incongruity of an INTP running a hotel business, where extraverted feeling is of prime importance, is pretty straightforward. It makes for great comedy, but great stress in real-life situations.

I suspect that INTP is fairly close to John Cleese's own type: from what I've read, he appears to be an INT at least. Actors, musicians and other performers seem to be mostly introverts. As do politicians, in this country at least: they have to do all that back-room negotiation.

It surprises me, then, to hear of some presenters of type making assertions like "I'm an introvert, so I shouldn't be able to do this" (meaning presenting). Introversion is about conscious orientation and energy flow; it's not about being autistic or sociopathic. That's not what type is about in principle, and it's not true anyway. (The opposite, by the way, is to claim that extraverts are manic and impulsive—and that has the same level of truth.)

Introversion-extraversion isn't the sole area for misspeaking about type. Each of the opposites provides stories. One I heard through the grapevine recently was an implication that sensing people don't have ideas! That would be news to Henry Ford and Thomas Edison, both of whom, in my view, preferred sensing: ISTJ and ESTP respectively. In a strict sense, if you don't have ideas, you can't even get up in the morning—because that's an idea in itself. An idea can also be presented in the outer world as a conclusion: I've often heard judging types say, "I've an idea; why don't you ..."

Ideas involve some sort of reflection, but tend to be associated with creativity. The problem is that our measures of creativity tend to imply *intuition*, and I don't think that explains more than a small proportion of creative output in the arts, for instance. *Sensing* creativity is using what's there; variations on a theme, or repeating a work. You can't have an orchestral performance without sensing creativity.

But let me elaborate on this theme.

I love listening to music, music that appeals to me, but I can't play a note (actually, I can; it's the second and following notes that are the problem!). As well as enjoyment, the songs I listen to give me insight into human beings and behaviour—much as movies and novels do for those who have that bent, or the television stuff I've alluded to earlier.

The American John Hiatt is a personal favourite, because of his realistic scenarios and wry humour. His latest output *Crossing Muddy Waters* (2000) contains a number of powerful, poignant and witty songs about relationship break-up (perhaps his own, it seems from listening) in his plain-spoken metaphor, complemented by songs suggesting that particular brand of American evangelism that came out of the Second Great Awakening well over a century ago, and is growing in popularity at the highest levels of US government.

I mention Hiatt, because like so many musicians in his field he appears to prefer sensing—I would think ISTP. I've mentioned in earlier writing (Geyer 2000) my view of Elvis Presley as ISFP, and from reading Christopher Sandford's excellent biography I would suggest that Bruce Springsteen shares those preferences. Springsteen's lyrics are about the now and the past, concrete stories of romance and tragedy. Hiatt is like that, but with a more sardonic edge.

Feelings, too, are double-edged. A person who expresses *emotions* in music is not necessarily a person who prefers feeling: even introverted thinkers, with inferior feeling, can express emotion (which comes out of the unconscious) with depth and sincerity. Jack Bruce's *Monkjack* (1995) is an excellent example, confirming his status as one of the premier singers of his genre.

In another way Annette Peacock, the avant-garde New Yorker whose earlier work 20 or so years ago suggested to me a preference for thinking, recently produced a startling passionate work (also about the end of a relationship), *An Acrobat's Heart* (2000). Her clear voice is expressive in a way almost the opposite of her swaggering confident and confronting work. I'm sure you can delve into your music collection and find similar examples.

Jung was clear that a preference for feeling did not necessarily (and, in some cases, definitely) indicate warmth, or love, which he associated with the Eros archetype. In his seminars on dream analysis (1984) he commented that:

... the feeling function has to do with the feeling of values, and that has nothing necessarily to do with love.

A feeling type can be as cold as ice if there is not Eros. He [*sic*] can maintain a feeling of hatred ... he can die with hatred all over him, or he may have a feeling of indifference and hold out against anything.

The preferences for judging and perceiving have their own issues too, usually around completion or productivity. Everyone procrastinates, of course, but it's on what you don't want to do (usually inferior function), not whether you're J or P.

I understand that if you study creative writing in some secondary schools, then the necessity for drafts and revision is emphasised. That is not particularly creative or motivating for P writers—why would you want to revisit what you've written when you can write something else?

Notwithstanding that, Ps can get into repetition for perfection; Bruce Springsteen's recording method comes to mind, completely at variance with almost every other thing he's done in his life. Productivity depends on what outcome you want. As with quality processes (all P in origin, by the way, as distinct from the SJ territory of quality *assurance*), some things take longer than others.

The history of that sort of music, however, is mostly about spontaneous creation: songs in the studio and instant arrangements. Spontaneous productivity favours Ps, particularly SPs—as we can see in the Beatles stuff Phil Kerr has produced (2000, 2001), or in Bob Dylan's reticence to do more than one take. There are other examples outside music, too.

If you want to gain some insight into the human condition and enhance your perspective on personality, you could do worse than pick up a book by Adam Phillips and leaf through it. Phillips is an Englishman who mixes psychoanalysis and literature with insight and precision, de-jargonising the jargon but not trivialising the ideas.

Phillips' latest book, *Promises, Promises* (2000), brings to mind (for me at least) Dionne Warwick and Burt Bacharach. On reflection, that pair can be seen as producers of a poetry in song and music understandable to the public at large, but based on underlying competence and skill of a high level in song, musicianship and arrangement.

Songs are flexible in that they offer possibilities for reinterpretation: a new arrangement, another singer, etc. Creativity, however you define it. But you always know it's 'Promises, Promises': it can never become 'Hey Jude' or 'My Way.' A theory such as type is like that: there are some principles at stake that underpin the interpretation, and they're always 'Promises, Promises', never 'My Way', as it were.

So words themselves might be abstract—and, from a post-modern perspective, relative in some ways; but when we're trying to articulate the particular view of personality that type represents, its very nature requires that we agree on concepts and a range of meaning; being 'on song' with type. The experience of type in individual lives can, of course, be different, but that's not the same as calling extraversion one thing and then another. There *are* wrong interpretations, and some opinions are simply that.

Words and interpretations can cover many events. The world outside the USA responded with varying degrees of amusement and alarm to the antiquity—mendacity, even—of the aspects of its method of electing a President that were laid bare recently. Indeed, for some people George W. Bush or, more accurately, a group of people associated with his father, the former President, has engineered a coup. Bruce Ackerman recently pointed out how different and anti-democratic those recent US events might have appeared if played out in, say, Mexico (2000). Food for thought indeed.

While the label 'democracy' has suffered a battering from an abstract perspective, the governing process (effectively outside that construct) goes on regardless: somewhat like Australians turning up for work on 12 November 1975. Is/was that 'democracy'? Well, who knows? The 'democratic' Greeks were scarcely so in their classical era. Perhaps that's just a definition of terms, or another song altogether, even though the name is the same.

In many ways, teaching or explaining type is a definition of terms or a repertoire, where you need to have your wits about you, to have practised your songs in the right key; where you point out that 'feeling' doesn't mean 'emotion'; introverts aren't autistic or sociopathic; sensing people can and do have ideas; and P can stand for 'productivity' rather than 'procrastination.'

I think one of the hardest things to do is to understand the world outside your own preferences. Perhaps the next hardest is to represent your own effectively. Either way, sometimes you need the charts in front of you to give you the words and music for the song you're trying to sing. ☒

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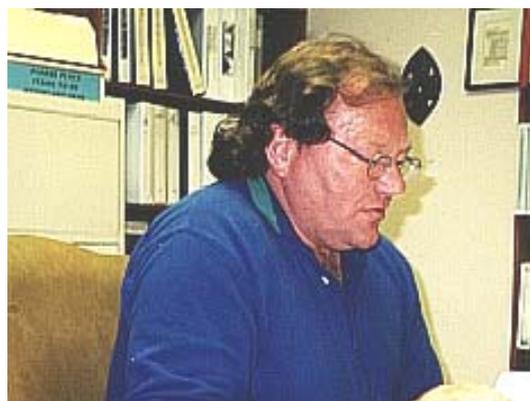


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... the truth of the one [type] is the error of the other ...

CG Jung, *Psychological types*, p.49