

# Silence and other intrusions



*The freewheelin'*  
**Peter Geyer**

There seems to be  
a presumption that  
extraversion is the  
way to happiness

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*On the night I was born they had the radio on  
A countdown survey from numbers forty to one ...*

*I was born to rock, I was born to roll ...  
I ... got it in my soul ...*

Donald Roeser

*Don't you wonder sometimes  
About sound and vision?*

David Bowie

*In the dark I hear a siren  
It screams out into the night  
Someone else is in trouble  
I am not the only one*

Eric Burdon

*I've lived in houses composed of glass  
Where every movement is charted  
But now the monitor screens are dark  
And I can't tell if silent eyes are there*

*My words are spiders upon the page  
They spin out faith, hope and reason  
But are they meet and just  
Or only dust gathering about my chair*

*Sometimes I get the feeling  
That there's someone else there*

Peter Hammill

*Someone is calling from the den  
'When does Survivor come on?'  
I hear the car door slamming  
Footsteps on a gravel.*

John Cale

*Don't look at the carpet  
I threw something awful on it  
See*

David Bowie

*Half of sex is fear.*

Kip Hanrahan

*Football is just a series of random events.*

Malcolm Blight

In some ways, silence exists only in the context of sound. The crunchiness of a footstep on gravel becomes significant and apparent mostly because there are no apparent other sounds. A siren sound hurtling down the highway, the hiss of tyres on wet tarmac, the *doof-doof* from a passing vehicle cuts briefly past other, fainter noises to gain attention and provoke a response.

We could take the view that silence is what remains after the undertones of background and other sounds: the tapping of a keyboard, for instance; music flowing over the fence; the call of a bird; rain and wind spattering on a window; and so on.

By standing mute looking at something like the Grand Canyon or a desert view, there seems an implied under-sound, which may be the awe of introverted feeling. Where I live, a walking distance from the ocean, something different occurs, in that the sound of waves crashing on the beach sometimes insinuates itself up the hill and into a silent house.

In either of these experiences, if you're like me, you're also left with thoughts to hear. I'm not one of those who have the ability to exclude their thoughts from consciousness through meditation or other techniques. I've tried to do that from time to time, but there seem to be issues of safety and integrity involved. Those who literally lose themselves—or seek to do so—in the music or sound or surrounding event, take an opposite perspective.

I can lose myself in specific music and other compelling things, but rarely in a group context. When I hear that ubiquitous *doof-doof* sound emanating from cars, I wonder about the loudness of the sound inside the closed windows.

I also remember that, 30-odd years ago, I drove regularly to the football in my ancient Holden, with a couple of friends. Our entertainment on the way (but never back) was to enthusiastically sing songs emanating from my tape player plugged into the cigarette lighter outlet.

If you are an extravert,  
you have **no idea** what  
it's like to be an introvert

They weren't Top 40 songs, but rather my selection of Peter Hammill, Jack Bruce and the like, so hardly anything anyone else confronted by this sound would know. The car windows were down, so we must have sounded genuinely frightening, particularly at traffic lights. Our beards and long hair were probably suitably intimidating, even though we were a genial, non-aggressive lot and had no interest in that sort of thing.

Even in those days I habitually turned music down in the car and elsewhere so it would not interfere with what other people wanted to hear, or *not* hear. Silence is a presumption, or acceptable noise of some sort at any rate. Not all that long ago, I realised I presumed introversion as a starting point for most people I encountered. Perhaps it's because I managed to get enough 1-on-1 conversations or avoided group settings or other reasons, who knows?

I think it's true, in any case, that if you're an extravert you have no idea what it's like to be an introvert, regardless of whether or not you're acquainted with your inner world. The reverse applies too, of course, as well as for other opposites. So you have to ask people, get them to tell their story, or their perspective.

Earlier this year I was in Hobart to teach a course. The venue was on one of the piers down on the water, which to my mind was quite pleasant. I was wandering over to Salamanca Place to buy a newspaper to start the day, when I noticed a place on the way offering breakfast and outside tables. This seemed fairly congenial, even on a brisk morning, until I got closer and heard a rather loud radio sound coming from the café, so I sadly gave up the idea of watching the world go by from there.

I walked past at similar times later in the week and saw a man sitting outside right under the speaker. I wondered how he could hear himself think, and why anyone would want to sit there in that precise seat. I saw him there on other occasions and concluded that this was what he preferred. Maybe he didn't notice the sound.

Not long after that I found myself in Perth and wandered down to a McDonald's for breakfast. This wasn't a deliberate choice;

however, it was the most congenial of the food on offer, mostly from around an intersection bearing a striking resemblance to many places in the United States, with a combination of fast food and fuel on the corners. I ordered something reasonably palatable from the café there and walked outside to empty seating and a repetition of the Hobart experience.

I've never worked out what the benefits are of being shouted at in the morning, or any time, really, but I put up with it, mainly because there wasn't any place to go. I presumed from this that morning exuberance is *de rigueur* these days. Not sure what it does for productivity, or anything else, but it's there, anyway.

There may actually be no rationale to this practice. It seems that if you're in a plane these days (Virgin Blue and Qantas come to mind) that the landing is accompanied by some nondescript rock music. Maybe it's to hide the sounds of engine and metal from the queasier passengers or the involuntary swearing when the plane bounces around a bit after touching down. But it continues on until you disembark: perhaps afterwards, too, for all I know.

Perhaps, too, FM music (as that seems to be what it is) has been around for so long that no-one takes any notice. I've never been an FM listener (it's other people's music, after all), but I decided to check it out recently in my car, and even the one or two songs I knew seemed nondescript. The music offered by taxis in Sydney and Brisbane seems alarmingly similar as well.

I have the idea that the music played was not there to upset anybody, or challenge them, which is a pity, because I think we can all do with some of that. Maybe I chose the wrong stations. I hope so.

But here and elsewhere there seems to be a presumption that extroversion (*sic*) is the true way to happiness. Personal enjoyment must be expressed in exuberant fashion, and reflection taken perhaps as melancholy. The recently-retired Western Australian premier, Geoff Gallop, seemed to apologise for his melancholy, something I thought was unnecessary if it was a natural part of him (Wainwright 2006).

Having said that, I understand that being yourself can become dangerous for your health if there are constraints put on what might be normal behaviour for you, but not accepted as normal by others.

The ADHD/Ritalin debate continues, almost 30 years after David Keirse decided to get involved with the Association for Psychological Type in the United States, in the hope that it would be a forum that would help to stop children being given Ritalin in schools.

That was, of course, well before Ritalin and ADHD became matters of course in this country. In a recent article debating its use, Roy Eccleston (2006) somewhat ingenuously provides a list of symptoms listed under the categories 'Inattention', 'Hyperactivity' and 'Impulsivity', and asks 'could you have ADHD?'

Well, according to this list, I might, particularly in the inattention area, where lack of preparation, forgetting things, careless mistakes, etc, are, and have been, part of daily life for me as long as I can remember. I don't think that my sort of inattention, which seems normal behaviour for the sort of person I am and for other people who, like me, prefer perceiving, is what ADHD people are after—but you never know.

And in this context it's quite clearly not a good idea to be a particular kind of extravert, notwithstanding the growing public pressure to act in that way. These sorts of lists have to be interpreted with some sensitivity, but even with all that, there seems to be in this issue a somewhat mechanistic view about what children and adults *should* be like, as opposed to what they *are* like.

Public debate seems in most instances to be about fitting in. With Ritalin and ADHD you can have it both ways, in that you fit in if you don't have ADHD (as defined), but you can fit in as well if you do have it, providing you take Ritalin or something similar. It may also be easy to say you have ADHD than to understand and accept yourself, spending your life contained within a description or term, a label. Like a type code, I suppose.

Type codes can be beneficial, as when you want to get some context for someone's

behaviour. So it may be useful to understand that John Howard, Morris Iemma, Steve Bracks, Paul Lennon and Helen Clark, amongst others in the political sphere, probably prefer ISTJ. If political reporters took that as a proposition, we might be spared a lot of waffle and gain a bit more insight. One can only hope.

Even if you know something about type, there's still the context, epigenetic in some cases, by which you get to understand the other person. Recently a person well-known in type circles complimented me, in that I expressed and disclosed more personal feelings than had been experienced with other INTPs. Certainly, other INTPs tell me they wouldn't say the same things—or have driven a car with INTP number plates, as I did for a while. In certain groups and places where there are other expectations, however, it doesn't look like that at all.

At the AusAPT conference in Brisbane, a fairly genial event, I chose a dinner table with a few friends, notwithstanding its position up the front of the room, which is not my preference at all. Agreeable food and conversation flowed, until the appearance of the entertainer, a magician, who appeared young and quite nervous.

I'm unsure what entertainment lies in these sorts of performers, but each to his own. I would have much preferred conversation, or saying nothing and listening to others. Nothing intrusive, at least as I saw it.

Unfortunately for me, the performance was interactive, with people encouraged to act outside themselves. My initial involvement was quite benign, but as the performance went on, I realised that this person knew my name and could call on me at will, without warning. I found that possibility so stressful that I had to work out how to leave without drawing attention to myself. I managed the first but not the second, but at least I managed to escape.

The technical term for this, associated with NTs, is something that the Keirse associate Ray Choiniere calls *public fool*, naturally involving a subjective experience, not the experience or opinion of others. So others enjoyed the entertainment, and may even have been the same type (the magician was INTP), but felt safe or unconcerned.



**Being yourself**  
can be dangerous

## Being unpleasant is part of the human condition

Generalisations about behaviour and what people are or should be like, or what their current interests should be, abound in the media and elsewhere. Recently I received a call from a survey company appointed by my bank, who wanted to know about my dealings with my 'Relationship Manager'.

I can only speculate as to who decided that someone in a bank should be so identified, for what purpose that name was chosen, or who thinks that such a title actually means something to someone wanting money or a better deal. I discovered that these people are supposed to be in regular contact with you, or me in this instance, which I couldn't think of as being all that efficient or logical.

As my relationship manager had appeared nowhere but on my monthly statement, I wasn't eligible for the survey—although you'd think that the bank might find that information interesting in itself. He had other relationships to take care of, and I suppose one is hard enough without all the others.

And terrorists, for instance, are routinely described as inherently, totally evil, a 24 hour a day thing, when such an emotional state should make them a lot easier to catch than they are turning out to be. Some have been termed 'masterminds', as though no-one else is involved in thinking or planning, with the rest being simpletons or misguided people who have no ideas of their own.

I'm sure this doesn't help the anti-terrorism effort. It seems to be congenial to keep this sort of view before the public, rather than a more complex view of those involved as being in the same field for different reasons, and requiring some examination of the history and politics behind such acts.

The terrorist accountable for the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946, Menachem Begin, became prime minister of Israel in 1976, after having spent several years involved in the Israeli parliament in a way that surprised those who had considered him a 'fascist thug'. (Barker 2006).

Evil can't simply be restricted to people you don't agree with; you need other evidence. Some people are courteous at dinner, smile at children and pat dogs, but can be brutal

and vicious in the boardroom or factory. Being unpleasant is part of the human condition; sometimes being 'nice' is distinctly unpleasant for others—as is bullying disguised as cajolery.

In today's climate Michael Leunig feels we need to be better informed, as ignorance is the major threat to the civility of Australian society (2006). Novelist Melanie La'Brooy is one of many commentators who have pointed out the emphasis on fear in politics, rather than people on any side of politics actually doing anything (2006).

On a broader canvas this has also been investigated by Frank Furedi (2005). Lots of things are dangerous, but does this mean we should avoid risk altogether? Perhaps the idea is that if you aren't frightened then you should be, because people in power are engaged in that sort of activity, rather than something a little more helpful or productive. A leadership question comes to mind.

Good and evil is easy though, if you accept the presumption that 'everyone' is interested in the same thing, usually at an emotional level, although sometimes this can be confusing for some players.

The reedy, uncultivated voice of English footballer and metrosexual symbol (and so, good) David Beckham made its way to Annabelle Elmer recently, providing some shock to her system, apparently, as it was not what she expected (2006). What's curious about that is that Beckham's elocution has been on media display for several years now, so perhaps she didn't get past the pictures, or simply knew him as important from a celebrity perspective.

Nic and Keith got married recently (you're supposed to know who they are). This is obviously good, for photographers and their ilk at any rate, and nobody spoke incongruously or out of turn. Caroline Overington (2006) quotes one onlooker, Ann Lee:

The one thing that's interesting is that there's no vendors here ... If this was the US there'd be Nicole T-shirts at least. Someone's missed an opportunity.

If we're choosing intrusions other than silence, what do we want to hear or see?

A few months ago it was considered that the emotions of this country resided in Beaconsfield, in Tasmania. The mining accident there precipitated an invasion of media stars and reporters who presumed that Australians wanted to know what was going on each and every moment. Not many people said 'no' to that statement (at least in public), giving the event an aura something like the death of Princess Diana.

The excitement of the event and the posse of reporters involved led to claims of a more emotional approach to news being the new way to go, particularly that of Network Seven's *Sunrise* team (Brady, 2006). It didn't seem to me to be much, if at all, different from what has been going on for several years. I can't see anything different, except for the increased and unwarranted intrusion into people's lives, and the media presenter as celebrity and emotional bully.

Notwithstanding that, a recent article by Matt Price (2006) continues on this line of thought by talking about this group of people. Significantly for me, a photo was presented with Socceroo scarves displayed in numbers suggesting that emotion is transferable to whatever's big at the time, and you have to be in on it.

Whether you're actually interested in it seems inconsequential. The incongruity, even embarrassment, of a conservative man such as the Prime Minister leaping in the air for a goal scored in a game virtually unknown to him bears this out. But perhaps he likes doing that sort of thing and nobody ever knew before. One can't tell, although one can surmise.

It's all a little like *Big Brother*, I suppose: and whether you're talking about the TV show or George Orwell's *1984* is moot. This is particularly so as judgements on what has been described as sexual assault have been delivered by people (politicians predominantly) who don't really watch that sort of thing. I recall teaching one ISTP, a trained zoologist, who said he liked looking at *Big Brother* because it contained excellent demonstrations of primate-like behaviour.

It's fair to note that these judgements have been sought out by others, but perhaps a

'no-comment due to ignorance' might have been more appropriate than an uninformed opinion.

Perhaps the world, like football, is a random set of occurrences and you have to try and make sense of it any way you can. But that might be more for a time of silence, than any other kind of intrusion. ❖

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*The rest is silence.*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The world is a random set of occurrences and you have to make sense of it any way you can