

What are you doing the rest of your life?

Thoughts on equality, and time



The freewheelin'
Peter Geyer

Being yourself may
be the hardest thing
you can engage in

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*What are you doing the rest of your life?
The north and south and east and west
of your life?*

Sting

Whatever you or anyone else is doing now, or tomorrow, or what you did yesterday, you're not doing something else. Reading this article might mean not watching sport, doing the dishes, gardening or clubbing.

Many organisations provide gyms or encourage staff to be fitter, on the physiological basis that fitness helps the brain, so you can make better decisions (they also want you to be at work longer) (Stark 2011). That is, of course, if you discount content like knowledge and experience. A fit and healthy person without knowledge or insight is still a person without knowledge or insight, who may be better off down the pub or curled up with a good book.

Perhaps there's a confusion here between a *quick* and a *good* decision, although for some they are one and the same. Better not to think about too much in some cases, I suppose. 25 years ago, Janet Landman wrote about a growing cult of celerity in psychology and elsewhere, resulting in quick therapies and other dubious methods (1986).

If PM Julia Gillard is on *Masterchef* or at the football, then she's not reading, or meeting someone, or even sleeping. Perhaps if her predecessor had done more of the latter, his colleagues may have seen him as more agreeable to, but one can't say.

*You can be anyone you wanna be,
so why you wanna be someone else?*

Boz Scaggs

Being yourself, whether a self under stress or in equanimity, is always problematic. However presented, it can be unacceptable to others if you're you: people may see you as intimidating, for instance.

So, should you be someone you're not?

For some people this isn't an issue, as they don't know who they are. And there are those who don't have an interest in finding out, other than cursory social identifications such as roles in families, with friends or at work. However, requirements of jobs and their interviews provide mutual subterfuge, which can often come adrift.

If psychological type and its associated ideas mean anything at all, it's about who a person *is*: not what they do, or even who they might become (the latter often a well-meaning projection made by others, who may not see the real person in front of them. Being 'yourself' in a psychological sense is perhaps the hardest thing anyone can engage in, or seek to attain.

*I love rain. I read a great quote: 'Why wait
for the storm to pass when you can go and
dance in the rain?'*

Stephanie Gilmore

There are lots of things people do, *want* to do, or feel they *should* do, and there are plenty of organisations and people providing options and other demands. Hardware stores want you to feel pleasure through duty, work and chores, possibly involving lists, particularly on weekends or holidays. Interacting with technology, walking in the park, engaging with family and friends, or reading a book are all alternatives.

Or you could go dancing in the rain.

All of those activities hide underlying method, interest and desire. For instance, Australians as a whole are consistently identified as great book readers, notwithstanding that many public figures, often sports people, have never really completed one. Many professionals don't read, other than what's required for a project or task.

Usually, though, it's cookbooks, diet and health advice. But the books could be pulp novels or romance, more so than texts on history, science and politics, for instance; perhaps a guide to the structure of Australian political system, so that some might look at, say, government 'legitimacy' from a factual perspective, however painful that might seem. This may be a reason why, in our society, the same issues come up regularly and are not resolved—or even contemplated.

They think in terms of centuries, whereas I think in terms of weeks.

Sgt Blair, US Army, in Afghanistan

Much reportage in newspapers and other media appears based on an individual perception of what life is like, which often is not that of the interviewed or observed. Journalists use the same tactics and methods when the situation changes or different information is required. Politicians and business people are invariably interrogated in a 'yes'-'no' format which seems more important than the issue at hand. Perhaps this stops them thinking.

The suffix *-gate*, for instance, is applied to almost anything that might be a conspiracy or crisis, while the original Watergate scandal, 40 years ago, languishes in history, unexamined.

What someone thinks and why they decide are based on a 'we': the things everyone is supposed to be interested in, such as cooking shows and other reality-based unreality. Robert Marchetti, himself a renowned chef, thinks that celebrity chefs have issues with personal integrity (Lethlean 2011).

All of these ideas are driven by a presumption that all people have the same desires and interests—or, at least, *should* have—

from the most libertarian idea to the most repressive. The book publisher Pantera Press wants people to 'plan their reading', a method that might take away the spirit and meaning of reading for many (2010).

The philosopher John Gray has identified ignorance or lack of interest in ascertaining the facts, historical and otherwise, as a key to the invasion of Iraq and related events by the United States and its allies. In his critique he observes that a core presumption in this enterprise was that a particular interpretation of 'liberal democracy', 'free market' and so on, in an American image, is an essentialist attribute of people everywhere, and so there would be no problems in putting it into practice in a culture of different interests (2007).

In another context, Alan Gray observes that the track record of those predicting the future, utopian or otherwise, is pretty poor (2011).

An off-the-cuff observation by a soldier can deservedly give pause for reflection and consideration.

'Time Poor'

The pressure of time, or the lack of it, can be inferred from everyday events and pronouncements. A lengthy listing of things identified by someone that you must see or do before you die implies that life is a race or a competition of specific collections of experiences, a scenario that could provoke anxiety rather than enjoyment.

If it's in the forefront of your mind whether you're happy or not, you're probably not all that happy, or it's a struggle to be so.

Perhaps there's anxiety about happiness, or it has to be expressed as a kind of compulsory extraversion. Brendan O'Neill comments that compulsory happiness is an attribute of tyrannical regimes (2011). The 'positive psychology' movement includes elements of utopian compulsion.

When people don't have time, or perhaps the inclination, they are more likely to take up the jargon or spin words associated with a particular event, often without attention to meaning or implication. Type jargon has its uses, particularly at an introductory



The presumption is that people all have the same desires

level, but ultimately you have to go beyond the associated words and phrases to arrive at a meaning that is sometimes beyond words.

Can anyone tell me how increasing the cost of a liquor license for a music venue somehow makes it safer?

Sue Acheson

According to the Federal Government, people smugglers have a 'business model', as though they're Harvard MBAs or read assiduously the latest management texts. Perhaps they're considered managerialists, as Australian politicians in general seem to be. One wonders which 'market' the government is aiming at by using this jargon, but perhaps they ought to get out more, do something else. Mary Van Valkenburg finds Harvard MBAs and their products insidious, and she's not writing about those putting people in wooden boats (2011).

Enforcers of the law occasionally possess Harvard MBAs, at least in Victoria, an attribute that doesn't appear all that popular with the membership. On the other hand, police spokesmen, apparently MBA-less, regularly state that an event 'beggars belief', notwithstanding that the event referred to is in fact a regular occurrence, however tragic. It seems of dubious benefit if these kinds of people respond in such a way.

Branding people

The 'branding' construct has grown in the public mind to such an extent that the phrase 'trashing the brand' has been applied to countries, as well as the usual suspects of corporations or sporting teams. Curiously, this leads to the implication that citizens are 'customers', interested in the saleable product of their nation, as well as a substitute for any kind of thinking in depth. That's not to say a lot of thought hasn't gone into the idea, nor that there's quite a deal of resistance in some quarters (e.g. Soper 2011).

The radical philosopher Slavoj Žižek has noted the 'pointedly apolitical tone' of the declaration of the Spanish demonstrators,

the *indignados*, who are

all concerned and angry about the political, economic and social outlook that we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice.

This includes the statement 'We are people, not products. I am not a product of what I buy, why I buy and who I buy from' (2011). One can understand their general indignation, even from this distance.

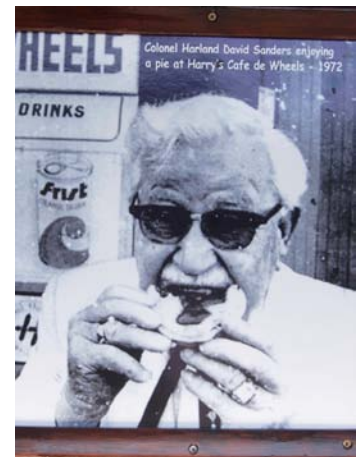
The retailer Gerry Harvey appears to think we should buy his products, and abuses us when that doesn't happen to his satisfaction. One wonders what he might think, if at all, about this Spanish declaration.

Personal brands appear to be a somewhat impersonal way talking about an individual and what they may stand for; of speaking to each other as though we're products and consumers, not human beings, in the amoral language of buying and selling. You can hide your real self behind such a brand, or dispense with a self altogether. This is a position antithetical to what psychological type started out to be as an idea or philosophy; perhaps then it's insidious from that perspective.

Millennials

If anything, 'Millennials' and similar labels are a reminder of how different people are, even if the information used to proclaim these kinds of generational differences is rather sketchy and inconsistent.

A plenary speaker at the recent APT International Conference in San Francisco used this term, somewhat incongruously, to describe a group of people who didn't like labels, or, at least, disliked the labels they didn't like. Much of what was said could have been applied to people and events in that same city over 40 years ago (without the technological advances, of course), including claims by older people of narcissism and the like—a contested topic in research on this group, and within the group itself (e.g. Buffardi and Campbell 2008; Trzesniewski, Donnellan and Robins 2008; Webb 2011). Jenny Diski has ruminated



You can hide your real self behind such a brand

on the dilemma of having experienced the London version of the 1960s and the freedoms claimed by the contemporary young (2010a; 2010b).

In examining difference between ‘generations’, variables such as education, technology and social change—to say nothing of different societies—have to be taken into account, as well as the parameters and presumptions of each construct.

Generational timeframes are contentious, particularly why one is better than another as a discriminator. Many statements about a generation’s attitudes could equally be applied to past groupings, if not to a core of individuals (e.g. Jones 2010). Almost nothing I’ve read in sample-of-convenience interviews with ‘Gen Y’ people about how they see themselves and the future would have been out of place in similar articles 30 to 40 years ago, to specific groups at least (e.g. Edwards 2010).

Not everyone of a ‘generation’ is *of* that ‘generation’, much as all INTPs aren’t alike, nor all Australians. This should be fairly self-evident, although, as indicated earlier, it’s a common and convenient, if flawed, way of thinking. Bennet, Maton and Kervin describe concerns expressed about educating a generation of ‘digital natives’ as a kind of moral panic, meaning that certain issues have been exaggerated or seen as unique without reason (2008). Access to employment and familiarity with technology vary widely.

Perhaps a problem that’s ‘generation’ related in a particular way, but also a general societal issue, is the notion of freedom, a somewhat problematic construct with many definitions. Daniel Akst identifies it with choice in the consumerist context, and the general issue of social freedom, particularly in the technological arena, is problematic (Stivers 2008; Jane 2010a, 2010b): how much privacy should there be? What can be said to and about other people? What is a ‘friend’? And so on.

Has anyone, on consulting a ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ page, ever found the question they wished to ask?

Ted Harrison

From a psychological type perspective, it may be that so many external things are going on, online and elsewhere, that the self doesn’t get developed, and so personality fits more the mediated relationships idea promoted by postmodernism. On the other hand, not many people appear to engage in becoming a self anyway, so there may be no difference at all in some ways. Certainly, though, the efficacy of typological instruments may be challenged.

C G Jung wrote that extraversion and introversion become ‘of practical importance only after a certain degree of differentiation has been reached’ (1936). Presumably, this is the case for his typology as a whole.



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