

Deceptive appearance(s)

Observations on some observations



The freewheelin'
Peter Geyer

Sometimes things
are as they are ...

Peter Geyer writes on psychological type and natural difference, the nuances of life and the possibilities of meaningful social understanding and change. He prefers INTP, but not stereotypically.

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Everywhere you look, people are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to be themselves. This is partly because other people have abandoned the notion of being themselves as an undue restriction on their activities.

Terry Eagleton

The serious problems in life, however, are never fully solved. If ever they should appear to be so it is a sure sign that something has been lost. The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solution, but in our working at it incessantly.

C G Jung

People just presume when you're a singer, you're an actor.

Renee Geyer

In a world as chimerical as ours, where some people select virtual realities in preference to others, appearances can be deceptive in more ways than usual.

Ideas or actions can be presented as being generally held, or positive or benign. 'Baby Boomers' and other generational categories are a case in point, as are type categories and the 'type community'—a label that presumes some sort of agreement, rather than a particular interest which can be expressed in a number of ways, often mutually exclusive.

The provocative columnist **Catherine Deveny** wants Baby Boomers to get out

of the way, for instance, on the presumption that those people have more or less identical experiences and views, and that a more contemporary approach ('Generation X') is needed (2007). The chanteuse Renee Geyer, in discussing the challenge of an unsought acting debut, comments wryly that people think that singers want to be actors by definition.

Similar myths of our time include that all mothers love their children; parents are, by definition, interested in their children's education; everyone is aware of the same things, such as global warming, the stock market, or superannuation; and the lives and peccadilloes of everyone, particularly sportsmen and women and sundry celebrities, should be made public.

Melbourne's 'cycling community' recently came out to defend itself against criticism of the behaviour of some bike riders on public roads, notably the 'Hell Ride' on a beachside road which occasioned the death of a pedestrian. Four-wheel-drive clubs and spokespersons regularly defend their vehicles against criticism, notwithstanding that the majority of 4WD drivers don't have anything to do with these organisations and possess varying levels of capacity in front of the wheel, to say nothing of the use of the vehicle in question.

In organisations, politics, and elsewhere, 'benchmarking' is regularly used to justify a policy or change. This is a process of comparison with what other organisations are doing worldwide: it does not necessarily mean 'improvement', although that was its original intention two decades or so ago. You can select the benchmark you think relevant. For some, if the results are about the same, then we don't have to do anything; if we're already better, then we can lower performance.

You might think of this every time you post a letter to a major city, for instance, and note how delivery times have changed. Standards are being met or exceeded, but, like unemployment rates, they're different standards from those in the past.

Lazy thinking leads to mediocrity, but it can also mean success. We can see this in individuals or organisations responding to charges or under pressure. Incongruously, the term 'refute' is often used for this kind of action. Evidence or argument is rarely, if ever, presented—but it seems to close down the discussion, almost soporifically.

I'm doin' things that haven't got a name yet.

Grace Slick

Cynicism and rejection of, or disinterest in, the past is regularly presented as something new for the current younger generation. I've not met that many people interested in history or reflection on the past, not even their own, so I'm unsure what's new here. The tools and content may be different, of course, and because of that, require understanding by observers and participants.

What's relevant is whether these activities will eventuate in new typologies, different behaviours for describing the same ones, or the advent of various forms of unconsciousness, or lack of development of a judgement function, which seems much the situation now, really. There's nothing new in that, other than it looks and sounds different.

There's also pressure to agree, or even to disagree in an agreed way. Relativism can be a way of avoiding conflict, 'seeing both sides', rather than making an inconvenient decision or conducting an examination or evaluation. Somewhat paradoxically, a person's opinion, however badly formed, now seems enough.

There seems to be an anxiety here as to what might happen if someone actually disagrees, and gives reasons for doing so. This seems to be an admirable alternative to name-calling or avoiding the issue, but perhaps *ad hominem* statements are acceptable these days. Such personal attacks run across all types, masquerading as truth.

I got nasty habits, I take tea at three

Mick Jagger

Generalisations about gender differences are always around, and have their own interest.

The publicist and woman-about-town **Mia Freedman** mused recently about a female tendency, in which she indulges, of buying books 'that tell us the most basic truths'—in this case, a diet book, *Skinny Bitch*.

'Are men better at accepting reality?' she asks. 'Do they have more common sense? Or are women just desperate for an expert to tell them what to do and *exactly* how to do it?' (2007). Several possible responses came to mind.

I was particularly intrigued to read that one of the 'basic truths' is, 'If he doesn't call you, he doesn't like you'. This is something that has never occurred to me, as a male who may have (and has) several reasons for not ringing up an interesting female whom I've found attractive in some way. Being stuck for words is only one. Maybe things are simpler and clearer elsewhere.

In a certain way, he looked like Elvis

In a certain way, he seemed like Jesus ...

Everyone dreams of him just as they can

Elvis Costello

AFL player **Robert Murphy** has made a name for himself with his quirky reflections produced weekly for *The Age's* sports section. A self-professed lover of music, Murphy was recently asked his favourites on Channel 10's *Before the Game*. Oasis, Rolling Stones and Beatles turned up, with locals You Am I and others. Curiously, so did Elvis, albeit as a potential tattoo.

I'm intrigued that a man in his twenties could roll out such a list, most of it customarily attached to an older generation, and conventional at that—in the case of Elvis, an older group of people than me. The apotheosis of Elvis continues apace, I suppose.



The apotheosis of
Elvis continues apace

Photo: Gill Clack

Curiously, this doesn't seem to have any connection with Elvis's earlier, most creative period, but with Las Vegas and appearances in jumpsuits.

Other sports have been in the news for not being role models, a long-standing sporting tradition in many ways. That's not to say that it's all harmless, although curiosities emerge every so often in the search for the perfectly-behaved player.

The cricketer **Mark Coghlan** was recently dismissed from the Australian Institute of Sport (Saltau 2007), apparently for having an untidy room. One wonders how this misdemeanour is connected to his performance, or the implicit presumption that a tidy room leads to exemplary cricketers on the field.

Iraqi soccer coach **Jorvan Vieira** might have a different view, however. 'A very organised and meticulous man', who resigned his post, notwithstanding his team's success in the recent Asian Cup, because of the chronic disorganisation he faced. 'I'm so tired', he said, 'this is not good for my health'. (*The Age*, 2007).

Regulations and rules seem to be coming from everywhere these days, and I doubt it's helpful to anyone, a crushing of the spirit, other than those who think that we like to do what we're told. It's no accident that the more rules are imposed, the more breaking away from, or through, them becomes volatile, even deviant.

Of course, the more rules there are, the easier it is to be labelled that way, even if you're just going about your business. This is the same society that has institutionalised Schoolies' Week, a form of approved misbehaviour where rooms don't have to be tidy and other behaviours are permitted, for a specified time and place, anyway.

To feel good about yourself when you have no material grounds for doing so is to do yourself an injustice.

Terry Eagleton

More people seem to be wanting 'closure' these days—or at least expressing it in public arenas. Death, divorce and other

personal tragedies seem to be the focus, notwithstanding that the random process of grief and its associated emotions has its own way with each person.

One wonders whether wanting this closure means there was never any openness there to begin with: the blocking out of reality, at any rate, or a natural emotional process. Perhaps there's a presumption here of a required level or type of happiness.

Life doesn't seem to be about that kind of measurement; rather something you might take as it comes, with high and low spots depending on who you are and what you experience. But perhaps I'm not the right person to judge others' desires, and we should leave it to philosophers (Lim, 2007).

So it seems we have to be like others, or compared against others, but not really in any depth. It's easier to talk about broad categories of people than to find out what people actually think or feel, or how they live their lives.

Did you ever wake up

And have bullfrogs on your mind?

That's a sure sign

There's bullfrogs on your mind ...

John Sebastian

Reporting what's happened is not the same as *interpreting* it. Ideally, facts count. There is some benefit in this method, although the reporting of court cases can be confusing if you forget that what is reported is what was argued, not the 'truth'. But if interpretation is left to the uninformed, or if material about an important event has a clear implication which isn't discussed, then we're in trouble. We can't each be running around with our own sets of facts. Sometimes things are as they are, as **John Sebastian** points out.

If you're a politician or a leader (however defined), altering this perspective might mean less media-flouncing and actually engaging in the work of reflection and learning, so it's not a hopeful prospect. And it's easier to stick to appearances, anyway. ❖

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I am ... little inclined to concede any particular value to the philosophical gesturings of the poet, for in his hands the intellect is a deceptive instrument.

C G Jung

Mankind in general judge more by their eyes than their hands; for all can see the appearance, but few can touch the reality.

Niccolo Machiavelli
