

What is your |x|?

It's worth investing time percussing the walls for those segments that ring hollow. This avoids excavating too deeply into the cul-de-sacs of little value, and prevents waking up in a few months locked deep in a pontine sulcus with nowhere to go. It should take little time, and might not need much verbal prodding – a waft of the hand to this exit or that might be enough. When I ask a direct question I know I've done it wrong. When it's done best, they don't even know it's happening. It's about understanding vulnerability to various forms of psychic assault, and detecting the excess padding over the painful parts and the plated steel over the more essential. False fronts aren't uncommon.

I'm aware that the traits wielded are weighty but not fixed. Internal boundaries dissolve and recrystallise in near-identical configurations, while the whole package repeatedly exhausts itself before reinflating. This doesn't mean that they're changing, more just doing the necessary work to keep themselves going. It provides the rhythm and personal sense of continuity to make a good-enough life story.

Recently I was taught to consider parallel lives. A developmental history will tell you what you're working with, but then it gets personal. If, say, you had offered them this version of themselves a decade ago, would they have bitten your hand off for it? So I render them ballistically. I draw a dot here, which pierces the skull around the pterion, which is where I collide with them right now, and I draw lines from mouth to tail extending out in both directions. There's one line coming out caudally because I generally know where they've been, but the lines coming out cranially from the mouth flare out. If you look closely, you can see they're starting to shift even by the time they pass the incisors. I'm not trying to claim predictive certainty, but the more trajectories you've got, the more likely one of them is exactly right. There are, of course, ever-potential catastrophes, so I always have one life path rolling over the contour of the bottom lip and plummeting directly downwards. One sliding off the top lip and ascending vertically isn't usually necessary but you'll see it in the textbooks. This has little to do with whether they are high or low in Harm Avoidance, Novelty Seeking, Reward Dependence, or Persistence.

See, to me it's as if the mind is a beast with many legs, each leg running full tilt on parallel tracks. It looks good when they get the timing right. But the tracks start to diverge, and the legs soon get so far away from each other that each femoral head over-rotates in its acetabulum – dislocation, severance – and then that limb is free to go. Usually it never comes back. So as you move through this world I'm sharing with you, you can see these solo limbs with extreme and unbalanced minds of their own now. They're usually poorly kempt and inappropriately decorated, but they'll tell you where they're from and where they're going to.

Text by Adam Hines-Green

* This text is loosely based on various conversations between Adam Hines-Green and Sung Tieu about the work of C. Robert Cloninger, C. G. Jung's book *Psychological Types*, and one of Tieu's recent encounters with the astrologist Zoe Mercury.