

ENGLISH: *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

“Sometimes people find themselves living in a world created by other people.”

Throughout our lives, we are constantly exposed to various events, people and moments in time that have a profound influence over the way in which we view the world. David G Myers, a prominent social psychologist once said, ‘There is an objective reality out there but we view it through the spectacles of our beliefs, attitudes and values’. Thus, our reality is fickle and it is our beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas that all contribute to the individual’s perspective and thus are determining and constituent factors of one’s subjectivity. The subjectivity of human understanding of the past can greatly affect our perspective of the present world, as we attempt to fill in the missing pieces of our fragmented experiences. Perspective, however, is not the only influencing factor, but the specific and central component to an individual is shaped by upbringing, with our parents having the power to majorly manipulate what is translated into our morals and beliefs. This power can be further inflicted upon our version of reality as we enter new surroundings and if not equipped with a healthy or positive mentality, those in control can invasively destroy the life of others by endowing their autocratic rule to alter or remove a piece of the past.

Sometimes, our past experiences can cause us to become completely distinguished from our former selves and it is our fragmented perspective of the past that creates our world. In ‘Spies’, by Michael Frayn, narrator Stephen’s reality is formed by what he believes has occurred in his past, however he has become so far removed from his younger self that he is confused and perplexed about what ‘may or may not have happened’ in the close all those years ago. Frayn’s use of a narrator who speaks of himself in the third person highlights that the same individual from two different eras can become markedly disparate, and further demonstrates that our realities change over a life time to the extent that we cannot even recognise ourselves as a child. Older Stephen attempts to put some sort of order and focuses on the activities of himself as a child; however the extent of separation from them both means this proves extremely complicated. Stephen can only recognise himself in ‘monochrome... from the black and white snaps’. Throughout this ‘collection of vivid particulars’, Stephen often has to rearrange the events of his past as he is unaware which segment occurred first and he uses imagination to make sense of the ideas and images whilst attempting to imagine them in a physical context. It is this younger sense of self that dominates his reality of the past and this creates a sense of dislocation and unreality about all these events, with Frayn also causing the reader to question their understanding of the narrative. The novel *Spies* highlights the role in which our everchanging perspective and our childhood in shaping and modifying moments in the present and our fragmented interpretation of our former self can manipulate the world we live in.

On the other hand, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, our reality is influenced by way in which we are raised and our parents ultimately have the capabilities to mould and manipulate the world we are a part of. For Keith Hayward, much of his domineering actions are a product of his home life. The relationship shared between best friends Keith and Stephen is greatly dominated by Keith as he constantly endows his higher status upon Stephen who acts as a passive ‘disciple in the presence of this dominant figure’. To Stephen, Keith’s life seems perfect and presents a marked contrast to his own haphazard family life and he never questions the Hayward’s ‘unshakable correctness’. However Keith’s personality and imitated phrases including ‘old bean’ are all the result of intimidation from his father Ted who dominates the household in ways Stephen cannot imagine. Ted isn’t interested in anything that cannot be quantified or measured and his contempt for ‘silly games’ of ‘let’s pretend’ is clearly evident. It is his father’s need for immaculateness that dominates Keith’s world as he is frequently ordered by his father to ‘clean his room’ or ‘do his homework’. The abuse from his father causes Keith to dominate his friend as he is empowered by this relationship, however Stephen sees that ‘without [him], there is no one to be braver than’, illustrating that for a child whose reality is dominated by abuse, having a friend whom one can dominate is critical. By the end it is clear that when Keith threatens Stephen with the bayonet after viewing his own father employ the same vicious act on his mother, that fear rather than respect

underpins their relationship and the pain and abuse from his home life become too hard to bear. “you think that hurt, you don’t know what hurts’. This example clearly demonstrates that the way in which our parents nurture us and choose to act during our lives can have a dire effect on our own individual view of the world and the way we approach relationships with others.

In contrast, the world we live in isn’t only vastly influenced by our upbringing but our reality of the past can be greatly manipulated by those who hold power over the present when entering new surroundings. Stanley Kowalski is the ‘King of New Orleans’ in ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ and when Blanche comes to live with her sister, his dominant reality is challenged as she readily interferes with the life he has created with Stella by ‘decorating with candles and wafting perfume’. Stanley utilises his power to tear Blanche and what he believes is a falsified reality as he believes she is ‘swindling’ both him and Stella and thus causing Blanche to live in a world where her reality is decided by Stanley. Stanley’s one-sided interpretation of Blanche’s past depicts her as a whore whose story thus far has been a ‘pure invention’. Blanche requires Stanley to validate and agree with her version of the truth, however he refuses to, not allowing Blanche to penetrate his constructed world. As a result he destroys any chances of happiness with her boy friend Mitch, as she is ‘too dirty to bring into the house with [his] mother’. This illustrates that we must rely on others in order to confirm our realities or they are left with little meaning. Stanley chooses to disregard the heartache of Blanche’s past which contributed to her sleeping around and ‘depending on intimacies with strangers to fill [her] empty heart’. By inflicting his opinion of Blanche on others, Blanche’s credibility is completely obliterated. Blanche and Stanley’s contrasting views of the world clearly exhibit that our realities from the past can be determined by those who possess power over the present as we are left to suffer in a world created by others. The way in which Stanley is able to alter Blanche’s world conveys that our past is open to interpretation with those in control of the current surroundings with the ultimate decision, creating a new version of history.

Similarly, the power of others in shaping our world can be displayed on a much greater scale with the government having the authority to distort a nation’s view of reality by removing an aspect of their dark history. Until March of 2010, multimillion dollar search engine, Google, adhered to the internet censorship policies in China to remove all results concerning the devastating Tiananmen Square protests. Internet censorship in China is among the most stringent in the world and ironically these censors have prevented Google searches of the word ‘freedom’. As a result forming a generation of Chinese people’s realities in a world constructed by those who assume ultimate power, as they are left exposed to the limited information the corrupt government will allow them to. The Chinese Government wished to remove the tragic deaths that occurred by instead allowing the more glorious information about the square to be searched. Through attempting to gratify the nation with a version of reality deemed palatable and satisfying, the choice and awareness for an entire nation was removed due to this cover up. This ‘constructed’ world which embodies perfection emulates the notion that where we live has a vast impact on our reality as numerous Chinese people were removed from any other versions of the truth. Very often, we have little choice over the factors that determine what we view as the truth as we possess a lack of “freedom” to do so. Others that maintain positions higher up in status can inflict their totalitarian rule to remove a major event from tainting a nation's reputation and ultimately alter what is allowed to pervade our consciousness.

Overall, it is clearly evident that our reality is fickle and is subject to constant manipulation and alteration through many ‘spectacles that form our attitudes and beliefs’. Our world can be constructed by our former selves causing us to question our lives thus far or by those that have raised us from birth who have a dramatic effect, and if not nurtured with necessary care children can adopt abusive and unorthodox behaviour that forms the basis of their world. However, when we enter foreign surroundings our realities are left vulnerable with those in control assuming power to create a disparate truth. This power can also be utilised over an entire nation in which a piece of history can be removed from ‘cyber space’, thus having the disastrous capability to alter and limit the contents of reality.