

5291-1906

12/09/2012

Lit. 4331

The Concept of Reality in *Feed* and *The Outsiders*

The concept of reality is subject to the viewpoints and interpretations of individuals. Individual knowledge, past experiences and socialization with other groups also helps to form a type of reality. It is also important to note that the way an individual processes signals through their senses also has an impact on their reality. An example that illustrates how fluid reality is can be seen in how a human's field of vision can only detect a small number of waves. There are a multitude of other colors and waves that humans cannot see; and as a consequence to their invisibility humans often forget of their existence. This example helps to illustrate how fluid the concept of reality is from person to person and how knowledge (current events and education) socialization, observations/experiences affect an individual's perception of reality. In this essay, the concept of reality will be defined by these traits. These reality traits can be perceived in M.T Anderson's *Feed* and in S.E Hinton's *the Outsiders*. Both novels use and view the concept of reality in similar ways. Socializing with others and processing the world through the senses are just a few of the concepts that both novels address. Despite these similarities, however, there are major differences in how both books use these traits. In *the Outsiders*, an empirical methodology is the primary technique in constructing a reality. The main protagonist, Ponyboy, interacts with other people of different groups, and by conversing with them he is able to understand their perceptions. This in turn, helps to broaden out his perception of reality. Furthermore, Ponyboy's use of scholarly knowledge and observations of the environment are also used. On the other hand, *Feed* illustrates how limited social interaction and narrow access to knowledge can negatively affect one's perception of reality. The main protagonist, Titus, has no experiences

outside what the feed gives him. Everything, his knowledge, his experiences and his interactions are a direct product of his feed and as such his feed becomes his reality. While Ponyboy uses a multitude of different sources in order to construct a reality, Titus only uses the information that the feed gives him. Though both novels address the concept of reality in different ways, the *Outsiders* and *Feed* highlight the importance of socialization and knowledge when forming a reality.

Within *Feed*, how characters perceive the world around them shapes their perception of reality. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, everything; education, human interaction, and one's senses are all managed by the feed rather than the individual. The novel describes the feed as everything. It is a source of knowledge, interaction and current events. However, the feed also takes the place of real life experiences and education leaving Titus as a passive recipient of the reality that the feed forms. Thus, Titus has no real consciousness outside of what the feed gives him. Though he does lose his feed for a little while, Titus laments not being able to stay in touch with the world and being bored. He does not truly take advantage of seeing reality outside of the feed despite the games that his friends and he play. Titus' overall ignorance concerning the world is proof of how the feed is essentially his reality. Titus is only aware of what the feed wants him to know; specifically the newest clothes, cars, media trends and shopping. Even in school, the feed and consumerism is what education focuses on. It is only after meeting Violet that Titus becomes aware of a whole different aspect of reality. This is especially evident when Violet first mentions what age she first gets the feed:

... *Except*, she said, *only about seventy-three percent of Americans have feeds.*

Oh, I said. *Yeah.* And I felt so stupid. *There's that many who don't?I'm sorry*, I said.

For what?

For not knowing. You know, that so many people don't have them.

No one with feeds thinks about it, she said... (Anderson 113.)

Titus does not or cannot think of a world outside his feed, and just the thought of people without the feed simply boggles his mind. As Violet mentions at the end of the quote those with the feed live in their own little worlds, both literally and figuratively. Without Violet, Titus is not even aware of the current environmental state or the United States' current relations with other nations. All he, and by extension the reader, gets are small tidbits of information that is compiled with various advertisements and media trends. Due to his unawareness of the world around him these concerns do not disturb him; or rather because he is not aware of what is happening it is almost like these problems do not exist in his reality as exemplified by the quote above. All his experiences and interactions occur through the feed. This is especially paramount when Violet and he go to a party and everyone is "... nodding their heads to music, or had their eyes blank with the feedcast." (Anderson 83.) Everyone is secluded from each other, which in turn limits the amount of personal interactions and by consequence narrows the characters' perspective of reality. Because Titus does not converse with others outside his social network, and because of the narrow stream of information given to him through the feed, Titus' is unable to see the bigger picture and thus his reality is confined to what the feed tells him is important.

As opposed to the knowledge-based, individual way that reality is constructed in *Feed*, *the Outsiders* concentrates on a more empirical and social notion of reality. The way that Ponyboy perceives the world is not only through firsthand knowledge and his own experience; but also through his senses and observations. This aspect of Ponyboy is especially evident when

he first meets Cherry Valance and he discovers that Socs and Greasers have more in common than he initially thought. “It seemed funny to me that the sunset she saw from her patio and the one I saw from the back steps was the same one. Maybe the two worlds we lived in weren’t so different. We saw the same sunset.” (Hinton 40.) Ponyboy is only able to extend his greaser reality through interactions with Cherry and Randy Adderson. It is through conversing and observing them that Ponyboy is able to understand their worries, fears, and the fact that the Socs are human just like the Greasers. Otherwise, without interacting with the Socs, Ponyboy’s reality would be limited to the experiences that he goes through as a Greaser. Furthermore, Ponyboy takes a great deal of notice of his natural surroundings as noted by his fascination with sunsets and how he enjoys stargazing. Ponyboy’s concept of nature and of the environment around him (whether social or natural) is what forms his perception of reality. Having other characters, like Cherry, able to interact or appreciate what is already part of his reality (in this case sunsets) helps to form a bridge between his reality and the reality of the Socs. His ability to observe others and his environment further illustrates how Ponyboy uses his senses to create his perception of reality. His appreciation and observations of nature and the Socs are not only kept to himself, but shared with others:

The sky was lighter in the east, and the horizon was a thin gold line. The clouds changed from gray to pink, and the mist was touched with gold. There was a silent moment when everything held its breath, and then the sun rose. It was beautiful. “Golly”- Johnny’s voice beside me made me jump- “that sure was pretty.” (Hinton 77.)

His knowledge, insights and experiences are thus not only kept to himself but are shared with his brothers and his friends. By reading *Gone with the Wind* and reciting “Nothing Gold can Stay” to Johnny while out in the country, Johnny is able help place these works in a new perspective

for Ponyboy. This is especially evident at the end of the novel when Johnny shares his thoughts concerning Robert Frost's poem and helps Ponyboy to come to terms with his grief. Due to the way the characters share knowledge and insight with each other their concepts of reality also become more fluid and interchangeable.

Reality is impacted in both novels by the way they address socialization, knowledge and observation. However, there are slight variations to how these concepts can affect reality. Within *Feed*, limited knowledge and the lack of social interaction are tightly intertwined. Because all knowledge (both scholarly and current events) is flittered through the feed, Titus lacks firsthand experience and the ability to think for himself. He has no concept of the outside world because his entire reality is revolves around the consumerist mentality of the feed. The majority of the citizens in *Feed* do not even share experiences with each other. Each individual literally lives inside their own bubble. "I could feel all of my family asleep in their own way around me, in the empty house, in our bubble, where we could turn on and off the sun and the stars..." (Anderson 147.) Even at parties, each character is off pursuing their own activity. This extreme individualistic notion of socialization undoubtedly influences the way that the characters perceive their world. Without socialization, Titus and the other characters are only able to perceive the narrow reality given to them through the feed. *The Outsiders* utilizes the positive values of socialization and knowledge in their conception of reality. In addition to the value of these traits, *the Outsiders* also places worth on sensual information and observation. By socializing with other characters, especially characters from different social standings, Ponyboy is able to broaden the scope of his reality. It is through socialization with Cherry and Randy that Ponyboy can observe the Socs and see that they really are not that different from the Greasers. Furthermore, by talking with and sharing ideas with Johnny, Ponyboy is also able to see different

perspectives and meanings in *Gone with the Wind* and “Nothing Gold can Stay” that otherwise, he would have been blind to. The details of the countryside and nature are also more descriptive than in *Feed*. These descriptions highlight Ponyboy’s observations about the world around him and help to create a common ground between different characters (e.g. Cherry and the sunsets.) Thus, not only does Ponyboy use socialization and knowledge to help create a sense of his own reality, but he also uses his senses.

Though *the Outsiders* and *Feed* address reality in different ways, the main traits of reality remain the same. The use of socialization, knowledge and observations all help to construct a reality for the characters. In *Feed*, the lack of socialization and the narrow stream of knowledge limit the main character perception of reality, leaving him in a state of ignorance. Due to Titus’ attachment to the feed and how the feed essentially provides him with everything he needs to know, the feed becomes his reality. The little to no social interaction with other characters also limits Titus’ overall perspective. Though he does interact with Violet, Titus is not receptive of her thoughts and insights, as illustrated when he deletes all the memories she sent him. On the other hand, Ponyboy fully utilizes socialization and observations in order to broaden his conception of reality. By talking with and sharing ideas with not only Johnny but also Cherry and Randy, Ponyboy realizes how similar the Socs are to the Greasers. By conversing with Johnny, Ponyboy is also able to see another perspective in literary works that otherwise he would not have known. Furthermore, through his social observations and appreciation for nature Ponyboy illustrates how he uses empirical contemplation in order to evaluate his reality. Despite the different ways both novels relay reality there is a stressed importance on social interaction, knowledge and observation and how these traits are not only fluid but also help to construct an individual perception of reality.

Works Cited

Anderson, M.T. *Feed*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 2002. Print.

Hinton, S E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Puffin, 1997. Print.