

Realities



It is a staple of New Age belief that we all ‘create our own realities’. This is, of course, a silly, unfounded and wooly-headed idea that no sensible person subscribes to, and yet... what, really, *is* ‘reality’? For most of us, I think, reality is our day to day experience of life, the information delivered to us by our senses and also, naturally, our *memories* of daily experience. But both of these fundamental aspects of reality, sense and memory, are sadly subject to manipulation.

Consider a famous experiment in human perception that dates to the 1890s; Dr. George Stratton devised a pair of goggles that reversed all the images coming into his eyes, turning them upside down. And then he wore these goggles for several days, so that he was seeing the world around him upside down. The results were astounding; after about three days of seeing the world reversed, Stratton began to see things *right side up again*. In other words, the mental software that processed data coming in through the eye adapted to the new situation. Later, when Stratton took the goggles off, he saw things upside down for a few days, until his brain readjusted.

But think about this for a moment; if the brain routinely processes something as fundamental as *up and down*, and we aren’t aware of it, how can we be sure that *all* of our data isn’t being processed in one fashion or another? Well, in fact - and of course - all of our sense data *is* processed; *everything* we see, taste, touch, smell and hear is converted into electrochemical signals that the brain *interprets*. And the power to interpret is the power to edit, to enhance, to rearrange. We may not be aware of it, we may not like the idea, but in fact

all of us are *deciding*, on some level, what the world is like, what it looks like, smells like, tastes like, feels like.

And memory is even *more* subjective. In a series of recent studies, researchers have determined that memories are amazingly fluid. You've heard, probably, that DNA evidence has begun to exonerate hundreds of American prisoners - but did you know that many of these wrongly convicted men and women *confessed* to the crime they were accused of, and *even have distinct memories of committing it*? University of Michigan researchers believe that just being interrogated is enough to implant a false memory in some individuals.

University of California researchers have discovered that it's even easier than that. They administered a survey to college students that asked detailed questions about food preferences. Then, many of the students were given 'false feedback' - okay, they were lied to -and told that they must have had a bad childhood experience with strawberry ice cream. When prompted, 40% of the deceived students came up with memories of getting sick; clear, vivid, *completely bogus* memories.

So we unconsciously process all of our sense data, our experience of the present, and we unconsciously rearrange our memories, our experience of the past - is it really so crazy, then, to suggest that we are, unconsciously at least, creating our own reality? And really, are we so sure that it's impossible to do so consciously?

