

“Escape From Reality” by Mutlu Ergün-Hamaz

“Now, there’s nowhere for me to turn, there’s nowhere for me to hide from reality.”

Dogg Pound - Reality (1995)

This quote from the 90s HipHop-Duo “The Dogg Pound” suggests that reality is inescapable. There is nowhere we can turn, there is nowhere we can hide, reality will always come back to find us, to make us confront it. I remember as a teenager being obsessed with this song. It was stuck on repeat and I’ll nodded my head to it. There where plenty of realities I wanted to escape from as a teenager, there was the question of belonging and identity as an Anatolian German Alevi. There was the question of which bodies I felt sexually attracted to. There was the question of coming from a working class family and growing up in a White upper class neighbourhood. And many other realities I wanted to escape from mainly by using recreational drugs until I figured, I was actually naturally confused and didn’t really need any weed.

HipHop music really helped in keeping my eyes and ears open, political rap made me think a lot about racial realities in Germany. I had a few close friends, some of them White, they we’re very loyal and they would have knocked the teeth out of any Neo-Nazi that would have just looked at me the wrong way. But when I tried to talk to them about my experiences of everyday racism, it was like hitting a wall. They had difficulties in accepting the reality I lived, they had difficulties in understanding how such an absurd reality of racial oppression could be part of the centre of society and not just its fringes. Their denial of my reality made it finally very difficult to stay friends. It was only years later, through my anti-racism activism that I realised how far removed and at the same time how close our realities were. Through my work, I took a look at an image of a multi-stable figure. It was W. E. Hill’s (1915) famous adaptation of ›My wife and my mother-in-law‹, showing an image where the perception flips between seeing an elderly woman’s face or a young woman’s turned back. This *Kippbild* highlights two

realities that are related to each other. There is a dialectic between Whiteness and Blackness or POCness - one can't exist without the other. At the same time some White people do live very far removed from the realities of People of Colour. A headscarf wearing journalist in Germany, who openly shared her experiences of racial discrimination was once told by her editor-in-chief, a middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual White male, that sometimes he was wondering if she was living in another country. So it's like one image, one reality, but it is seen, experienced and perceived in very different ways. What's interesting though, is that People of Colour do understand very well how White reality works, whilst White people often remain ignorant towards the realities of Non-White people. Funnily enough, once the subject of racism is breached in a conversation, then White people's brains often shut off because they are too scared of saying something racist and People of Colour's brains often shut off, because they are too scared that their life experience will be denied. There's actual research about that. It explains the many brainless discussions I had about the subject of racism.

Our brains are rather funny things, sometimes they have a hard time distinguishing what is imagined and what is real. There is this really interesting experiment which was done with a group of basketball players. The basket-ballers were divided into three groups. The first group practised for one hour physically lay-up shots. The second group for one hour just did nothing. And the third group for one hour practised lay-up shots only in their minds. For one hour they sat there and imagined how they would pick up the ball, aim, throw the ball and that they would score. The first group, who practised physically 8 out of 10 shots scored, the second group, who did nothing, 3 out of 10 shots scored, the third group, which had only practised in their minds, 8 out of 10 shots scored. They were as good as the group that was practising physically.

Some neuroscientists even suggest that we are actually unable to perceive those things that we cannot imagine. There are stories about Native Americans that were standing at the beaches of the Americas and some were unable to perceive the large boats on which the Europeans arrived at their coasts. I do not believe it is a tale about the ignorance of Native

Americans, it rather highlights that they could not imagine such a large structure floating on the sea, therefore they had a hard time actually perceiving it.

Nevertheless, perceptions can change. I remember when my child was born and how that immediately and significantly changed the way I perceived the world. I began to experience joys and fears that I didn't even know existed. Many people experience moments in their lives that lead to a significant paradigm shift, a shift of how we perceive reality. It doesn't have to be a child being born, it can be many different things that fracture our reality. Maybe it's a nervous breakdown after a burnout, maybe it's the realisation that our body does not reflect the Gender we actually have or maybe it's the realisation because we move in a wheelchair or because we speak with our hands using sign language that society is disabling, instead of enabling us.

So let me now fracture this text: there is the famous children's song "row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream". In buddhism but also in sufism (Islamic mysticism) there is the notion that we are actually living in an illusion, that we are living in a dream. There is the notion that reality is far too ginormous for us to perceive, that our tiny egos actually stand in the way of seeing a divine truth. To finish with the famous words of the Rapper KRS-1: "Reality ain't always the truth/Rhymes equal actual life, in the youth."

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