

Fleeing Reality:

Escapism in Dance and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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Escapism

Mankind has a history of becoming disillusioned with reality. The Enlightenment,¹ the Lost Generation,² the Beat movement,³ and the 1960s counterculture,⁴ are just some examples of the various cultural, artistic, literary, and intellectual movements that resulted from a general dissatisfaction with the status quo. This discontent stems from the fact that, for some, facing reality—that which is immediate, experienced, and accessible—means facing a daunting unknown. Collectively, humans have created means of establishing order, whether they be laws, rules, or social codes, in order to create some stability out of the uncertainty of the day-to-day. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes that “facing reality...implies accepting one’s essential powerlessness, yielding or adjusting to circumambient forces.”⁵ In other words, humans have put in place these systems of order as a way of claiming control over what “nature or society imposes on a human being.”⁶ When these systems fail to make harmony of the world, however, one is left with two options—either give in to reality or escape from it.

Does escaping reality, however, inherently mean accepting defeat? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines escapism as “the tendency to seek, or the practice of seeking, distraction from what normally has to be endured.”⁷ This definition carries a negative connotation—“has to be

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "History of Europe", <http://www.britannica.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/EBchecked/topic/195896/history-of-Europe/58391/The-Enlightenment>.

² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Lost Generation", <http://www.britannica.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/EBchecked/topic/348402/Lost-Generation>.

³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Beat movement", <http://www.britannica.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/EBchecked/topic/57467/Beat-movement>.

⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "United States", accessed November 04, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/EBchecked/topic/616563/United-States/77893/Domestic-issues>.

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "escapism, n.". OED Online. September 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/64246?redirectedFrom=escapism>.

endured” implies a certain lack of agency over life occurrences, and indeed, escapism is largely seen as something sought by those dissatisfied with the trajectory of their lives and unable, or rather, unwilling “to connect meaningfully with the world.”⁸ Therefore, escapist are often stereotyped as depressed individuals who rely on mental diversion as a means of removing themselves from the banal aspects of daily life. Escapism, in this sense, provides a coping mechanism to deal with the challenges of reality. However, the generalization that escapism is mainly used by those who cannot effectively handle the tribulations of life is one that carries little merit.

Escapism goes hand-in-hand with imagination. Tuan writes, “culture is driven by imagination and is a product of imagination. We humans are pleased and proud to have it.”⁹ This “pride” is due to the fact that imagination, unlike reality, is free from external pressures or limitations. Using imagination allows an individual to exercise control over a world that is uniquely his or her own and subject only to personal rules. Several scholars and mental health professionals agree that escaping into a fantasy world can be a therapeutic process.¹⁰ It allows individuals to play out dreams, wishes, or aspirations in the safety of their reveries. This self-generated getaway, therefore, provides a safe place for one to work out the challenges of reality by imagining scenarios, the various trajectories one could pursue, and the possible outcomes for each of these trajectories. In fact, throughout the course of a day, the human psyche alternates between states of complete consciousness—that is, fully attending to the present—and

⁸ David L. O’Hara, “C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness and Beauty – Edited by David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls.” *Religious Studies Review* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 154–154. doi:10.1111/j.1748-0922.2009.01359_1.x.

⁹ Tuan, *Escapism*, xiv-xv

¹⁰ Bella DePaulo, “Solitude, Part 2: The Benefits It Brings, and the Special Strengths of the People Who Enjoy It,” *Psychology Today*, 24 March 2011, [http:// www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single/201103/solitude-part-2-the-benefits-it-brings-and-the-special-strengths-the-peopl](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single/201103/solitude-part-2-the-benefits-it-brings-and-the-special-strengths-the-peopl).

daydreaming. The transition between the two states is quite fluid, each type of awareness weaving in and out of the other without warning or any identifiable impulse. So although escapism “offers the individual an avenue to a more desirable state of being than the one presently experienced,”¹¹ whether or not a person seeks this alternate state is not necessarily indicative of psychological health. The need to escape is truly a human condition.

Tuan argues that “imagination is constantly at work, enchanting and reenchanting the world; that is to say, it enables people to see import (magic and beauty) in nature and humanly made things hitherto unrecognized, or recognized and forgotten.”¹² Evidently, there is a divide in opinion about what exactly escapism brings to a person. In fact, opinions about it are polarized—one side argues that escapism is destructive to psychological and emotional health, the other, the opposite; that escapism can, in fact, be therapeutic and cathartic.

In comparing dance, especially improvisatory techniques such as the Gaga and Gabriel García Márquez’s novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, both the destructive and therapeutic sides of escapism are evident. Dance, among other art forms, can be viewed as an “escapist” form in that it allows a person to lose track of time and enter a world that is separate from immediate reality—a world generated by introspective movement. This escapism is fundamentally different from the escapism portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. With only three exceptions, the novel’s characters actively seek relief from the tedium of their day-to-day lives in the village. The issue, however, lies in the fact that their desire for escape is fueled by unhealthy obsessions and the need to validate their existence, not necessarily by the human

¹¹ Elizabeth C. Hirschman, “Predictors of Self-Projection, Fantasy Fulfillment, and Escapism.” *Journal of Social Psychology* 120, no. 1 (June 1983): 63.

¹² Tuan, *Escapism*, xv.

urge to seek momentary escape. What ultimately is the reason for this difference? In other words, what determines whether escapist behaviors lead to an individual's psychological downfall, or to healing and rejuvenation?

The Gypsies and Escapism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: Planting the Seed

One Hundred Years of Solitude tells the story of the Buendía family across five generations as they found and settle the magical town of Macondo. The reader is completely immersed in the telling of the family's history, invited to partake in the journey from Macondo's inception and ultimately forced to abandon the Buendías and the other villagers the moment the town is wiped off the map by a prophetic wind reminiscent of a biblical apocalypse.

Shortly after the founding of Macondo, a tribe of gypsies arrives in García Márquez's fictional town, setting up tents and stands to display the wares and inventions they have brought with them from their travels around the world. Macondo is located in the northern Caribbean region of Colombia, surrounded on all sides by swamps and generally inhospitable terrain. Because of its remote location and the inability of its inhabitants to find a passable route to other towns, Macondo has been completely isolated from the outside world. As a result, the arrival of the gypsies stirs great excitement not only because it means interaction with this strange race of people now residing in the village, but also because the mystical and mysterious objects they bring with them will help usher the sleepy, isolated town into modernity.

The arrival of the gypsies offers a captivating sense of magic and allure for many of the people of Macondo. However, not everyone welcomes the gypsies and their inventions. José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of the town and one of the novel's main protagonists, befriends Melquíades, the wisest and most intriguing of the gypsies. Melquíades introduces him to various scientific instruments—the telescope, magnifying glass, and magnets, to name a few—and in doing so, sparks an obsessive interest in José Arcadio Buendía to experiment and discover for

himself the wonders of the physical world. Noticing the change in her husband's behavior, Úrsula Buendía begins to lose patience with the fact that he has "completely abandoned his domestic obligations" and shut himself up in a room for hours on end reading manuscripts and performing his experiments. At one point, José Arcadio Buendía announces his latest discovery to his family: "The earth is round, like an orange." Úrsula meets this discovery with a response that is equally blunt and also indicative of her conservative sensibility: "If you have to go crazy, please go crazy by yourself!"¹³ After putting up with his incessant need to question the universe and discredit ingrained, cultural beliefs, she finally has enough and attempts to turn the entire village against the gypsies. However, "curiosity was greater than fear,"¹⁴ and the people of Macondo continue to visit their tents and pay money to experience phenomena from the outside world.

What exactly was it about the gypsies and their magical displays that bothered Úrsula so much? For José Arcadio Buendía, their inventions and scientific knowledge were a way for Macondo to make contact or at least become familiar with the discoveries of the world beyond the town's swampy isolation. He reveled in the ritual of discovery, hypothesizing, testing, and retesting until he found the answer he was looking for, while Úrsula viewed his seemingly pointless experiments as leading only to his withdrawal from the family and to its ultimate public embarrassment. Perhaps for Úrsula, a pragmatic person set in her ways, the allure of the gypsies was tainted by the idea that their mystical displays led a person to adopt unrealistic conceptions

¹³ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

of existence and reality; and indeed, the objects, discoveries, and overall enchantment the gypsies brought to Macondo did, in many ways, elicit certain distortions of reality.

The gypsies did not remain in Macondo. They left shortly after they arrived, with a new tribe returning every ten years or so. Although their visits were sporadic and unpredictable, each built on the previous one, adding to the town's sense of wonderment and satiating its need to be enchanted—a need created by the very first gypsy-visitors. Metaphorically, the gypsies transcended the boundary between reality and the supernatural. This seed of enchantment planted by the first tribe led to a certain reliance on escape from the everyday tedium of reality. For every character in the book, the gypsies' magical displays on their lived experience was manifested in different ways.

For José Arcadio Buendía, the invention of ice was especially exhilarating and instilled in him, and in Macondo as a whole, the desire to discover and achieve a state of perfection. A few generations later, Aureliano, José Arcadio Buendía's great-grandson, followed in the footsteps of his predecessors and also shut himself up in Melquíades' room to experiment with metals and study the cryptic manuscripts he had left behind. Úrsula, on the other hand, was mostly ambivalent towards the gypsies' mysticism. Instead, as the novel progresses, the reader becomes aware of her role in the family and in Macondo at large as the one who consistently remains anchored in reality, focused on the here-and-now, while the rest of her world cycles through repetitions of family names and the fated and inescapable life trajectories that accompany them, time ultimately going in a circle. Úrsula is cognizant of this vicious circle and even states, "I know all this by heart. It's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning."¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid, 193.

Another character who appears to be immune to the allure of the gypsies and the general enchantments of Macondo is Remedios the Beauty. She is depicted as an ethereal being existing in her own world, unfazed and unaffected by events that affect the Buendías and the other villagers. The characters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* epitomize the line that exists between destructive escapist tendencies and cathartic ones, some solely relying on their obsessive interests as a means of escape, while others are able to avoid falling victim to the crushing solitude the rest of Macondo experiences.

Parallels can be drawn between the gypsies, the magic of their art, and artistic ventures more generally, especially artistic ventures in dance. In the novel, whenever the narrator describes a moment in which a character is engaged in his respective “art” or “craft,” whether alchemy, making little gold fishes, proposing new theories about the world, deciphering manuscripts, or attempting to photograph God, García Márquez uses negative language to describe these “creative” actions. For example, in recounting the moment when José Arcadio Buendía discovers that the earth is round, the narrator states, “the children would remember for the rest of their lives the august solemnity with which their father, devastated by his prolonged vigil and by the wrath of his imagination, revealed his discovery to them.”¹⁶ The phrase “wrath of his imagination” conjures a negative impression of the creative process, as if implying that the “creative” exploits undertaken by the novel’s characters are fueled by some vicious, uncontrollable mental source, thereby reducing creativity, artistry, and discovery to sources of psychological danger. Perhaps “imagination” gets labeled as such in the novel because so many characters take their “art” to a level beyond momentary catharsis and temporary escape from

¹⁶ Ibid., 193.

reality. The line that exists within escapism becomes clear once again. On one side of the line exists the catharsis that results from fruitful artistic expression, Remedios being the only character in the novel that embodies this catharsis. Nearly all of the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, however, cross this line and their respective obsessions with their “craft” lead them to self-ruin, psychological downfall, and even death. What is common to many of these characters is the fact that they all experience states of complete focus and attentiveness, while they also simultaneously—and in a seemingly contradictory manner—experience states of detachment from their immediate reality. Dancers, likewise, experience polarization, different techniques eliciting the different results of escapism.

Dance and Escapism: An Overview

Art, in all its forms, has been used as a means of escape for generations. Artistic expression allows a person both to remove himself from every day tribulations as well as to communicate experiences and emotions in a way that can feel less vulnerable and exposed than direct disclosure—that is, by overtly talking about or conveying one’s innermost feelings. Dance as a performing art also falls into the category of an “escapist” art in the sense that a dancer has the opportunity to channel opinions and sentiments, and work through the challenges of life using an artistic medium. In this case, the medium is the human body.

Just as escapism is polarized into destructive and therapeutic elements in García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, dance similarly displays this polarization. Dance styles that are highly codified—that is, styles that build off a foundation of specific positions and steps—often place a certain limit on a dancer’s ability to experiment and generate her own free-form movement. Ballet and many modern dance styles fall into this category of systematized, technical dance. Dance education scholar Jennifer Roche argues that such styles hinder a dancer’s “moving identity,” which she defines as the movement signature a dancer forms throughout a career path. Part of the definition of the “moving identity” is the view of the dancer as a “fluid and mutable body-in-flux with the creative potential to significantly influence the outcome of the choreographic process.” Moreover, Roche writes that in recent decades, contemporary choreographers have moved away from canonical vocabularies, resulting in a greater acknowledgement of a dancer’s role in the creation of choreography. Indeed, many contemporary dancers are often asked and sometimes required to collaborate with choreographers in the

creation of choreographic material. This move towards offering dancers opportunities for deeper engagement in the creation of dance, Roche argues, has contributed to the identity of the dancer as a “self-in-process.”¹⁷ In other words, the dancer, in recent years, has assumed a more active role in the form in which they train and engage in artistically.

Despite the fact that many contemporary dancers are no longer treated as mere passive vessels through which choreography is transmitted, there are certain styles that leave all of the creative power and instructional authority in the hands of the choreographer or teacher. That is, movement and the way in which the movement should be executed is explicitly dictated to dancers, their artistic voices essentially stifled in the process of dancing. Dancing these technical and canonical styles may lead to creative, therapeutic release, but only to a certain extent. Their highly codified nature hinders dancers’ creative potential, and consequently, the opportunities for self-expression limited to the confines of the instruction given by choreographers and teachers. This limit placed on artistic expression ultimately affects dancers’ ability to utilize dance as a means of achieving catharsis.

Dance genres such as classical ballet and some modern dance forms limit dancers’ ability for therapeutic, cathartic dancing in other ways as well. Classes in these styles are often held in studios in which there are mirrors. However, while mirrors offer many benefits for dancers, especially in assisting in training and learning choreography, it has been shown that overall, dancers feel better about their body image when they do not use a mirror.¹⁸ This result comes as no surprise considering the fact that modern Western culture places great emphasis and concern

¹⁷ Roche, Jenny, “Embodying Multiplicity: The Independent Contemporary Dancer’s Moving Identity,” *Research in Dance Education* 12, no. 2 (2011): 105–18.

¹⁸ Sally A. Radell et al., “The Impact of Mirrors on Body Image and Performance in High and Low Performing Female Ballet Students,” *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science: Official Publication of the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science* 15, no. 3 (September 2011): 108–15.

on physical appearance, and women especially are expected to adhere to extremely narrow standards of beauty. Moreover, mirrors do not provide an image that accurately reflects what the self actually looks like. Because the image one sees when looking in a mirror is a reflection—an image that is inherently distorted and corrupt—mirrors display a physical reality that is, in essence, an inaccurate snapshot of the human form, an illusion of sorts. Put more bluntly, “the mirror lies.”¹⁹

It is clear that dance styles that are highly codified and built from a foundation of specific positions and steps often place certain limits on a dancer’s ability to experiment and generate her own free-form movement, ultimately restricting the opportunity to use dance as a means of achieving catharsis. In contrast, the capacity for escape is enhanced in contemporary dance forms that focus on improvisation and self-generated movement. Israeli contemporary dancer and choreographer Ohad Naharin capitalizes on the catharsis and opportunities for momentary escape from reality dance provides in the movement technique he has invented, which he calls Gaga. As the artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company, Naharin has incorporated this technique into the company’s training, and other dance companies throughout the world have also begun utilizing the vocabulary in their classes. Gaga is based on raising a dancer’s overall awareness of his or her physical self. It “provides a framework for discovering and strengthening [one’s] body and adding flexibility, stamina, and agility while lightening the senses and imagination...and it allows for an experience of freedom and pleasure in a simple way, in a pleasant space, in comfortable clothes, accompanied by music, each person with

¹⁹ Fredric Neuman, M.D., “Mirrors Lie: The Fallibility of Perception and Memory,” <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fighting-fear/201212/mirrors-lie-the-fallibility-perception-and-memory>.

himself and others.”²⁰ Naharin further clarifies his philosophy of raising awareness of the self in relation to others when he states that “Gaga is about being alone in a crowd.”²¹ In other words, Naharin’s philosophy emphasizes the importance of two concepts that, at first glance, appear to be in conflict with one another. Becoming “reacquainted” with one’s body is the first concept—something that Naharin and his company members achieve through the use of prompts that call for an almost hyper-consciousness of one’s physical state. The second concept is a disassociation of one’s immediacy and presence in the studio. So while the goal of Gaga mindfulness prompts is to lead dancers to be almost entirely focused on sensations and where and what the body is doing in space, this extreme focus on the body simultaneously fosters the opportunity for dancers to escape in the sense that they are able to channel their attention on something other than the outside world. This is what Naharin means when he talks about being “alone in a crowd”—that is, being in a state that while highly introspective, is not completely isolating.

Another component of Naharin’s philosophy that adds to this controlled escapism—escapism that is not entirely solitary or withdrawn—is the lack of mirrors in a Gaga class. In an interview for *Dance Magazine*, Naharin tells dancers to “abolish mirrors” because they “spoil the soul and prevent you from getting in touch with the elements and multidimensional movements and abstract thinking, and knowing where you are at all times without looking at yourself.” He goes on to further explain that for him, dance is about sensations and “not about an image of yourself.”²² It is when a dancer relies too heavily on the reflected, inaccurate image of the self

²⁰ “Gaga | People.dancers,” <http://gagapeople.com/english/>.

²¹ Quoted in Gia Kourlas, “Gaga, the Exercise and Dance, Comes to New York,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2011, 7.

²² Quoted in Wendy Perron, “Truth in Movement,” *Dance Magazine*, October 2006, 56.

that a mirror displays that he or she risks using the escape dance provides in a destructive manner.

Escapism Polarized: An Analysis of the Destructive and Therapeutic Sides of Escapism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude and Dance*

Many of the characters in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seek relief, in some capacity, from their lives in the swampy village of Macondo. It comes as no surprise that when the gypsies first arrive in the village, the majority of the townspeople, most notably the members of the Buendía family, are eager to welcome the mysterious objects and innovations and let themselves be lured in by the captivating sense of magic and allure the gypsies bring to Macondo. The gypsies are responsible for introducing the town to scientific inventions and magical displays that ultimately fuel their longing for escape.

However, Macondo's ills are not due exclusively to the science and magic the gypsies bring with each subsequent visit. The relative disequilibrium that exists between the townspeople's desire for escape and their capacity for consistent mental presence in reality is also to blame for the characters' obsessive and destructive reliance on their respective escapist ventures. Macondo, as a village, also displays this disequilibrium in that it is inherently a realm in which reality and fantasy simultaneously reside. Supernatural occurrences in the town are often considered commonplace and rarely ever cause heads to turn. In contrast, the more realistic aspects of life in Macondo are usually met with surprise by the townspeople.²³ In other words, the villagers find it easier to comprehend supernatural events, while reality, in comparison, is harder for them to grasp. For example, the Banana Company massacre that occurs in the novel is

²³ Shannin Schroeder, "Advancing in the Opposite Direction from Reality: Magical Realism, Alchemy, and One Hundred Years of Solitude," *Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*, New ed, Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 193.

completely forgotten by everyone in the town and is pushed to the outskirts of their memory, whereas the presence of ghosts in the Buendía household is seen as a natural occurrence. Scholar Shannin Schroeder notes that Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the son of José Arcadio Buendía, feeling ice for the first time and declaring it to be hot is a reflection of the townspeople's overall misreading of reality.²⁴ This "misreading" is ultimately an indication of the villagers' inability to navigate the fantastical and realistic events that occur in Macondo.

Schroeder further argues that the balance of the magical and the real is a necessity in Macondo: "to do without reality is to go insane."²⁵ Indeed, José Arcadio Buendía proves this point as he descends further and further into madness near the end of his life.²⁶ José Arcadio Buendía's unbridled imagination is not depicted as a negative attribute at the beginning of the novel, however. It is his imagination and admirable conviction to settle Macondo in a fruitful area of the swamp, in fact, that ultimately leads the other families he is traveling with to have complete trust in him. Nonetheless, the trust is short-lived because José Arcadio Buendía is unable to maintain a healthy equilibrium between his fantasy world and his immediate reality. Eventually, his ever-increasing obsession with the gypsies' magical technologies convinces Úrsula, his wife, along with the rest of his family, that he has lost what little was left of his sanity. In the end, he is "dragged by his imagination into a delirium from which he would not recover."²⁷

What ultimately leads José Arcadio Buendía's imagination to shift from impressive genius to unhealthy delusion is the fact that he allows his fantasies to enjoy free reign.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ García Márquez, 106.

²⁷ Ibid., 80.

Although Melquíades constantly warns him about tampering with the gypsies' inventions, José Arcadio Buendía ignores his warnings and locks himself in his laboratory, tinkering with objects he badly misunderstands. For example, after witnessing a magnifying glass set hay on fire, he sets his mind on the belief that this invention has the potential to be used as an "instrument of war."²⁸ Moreover, José Arcadio Buendía's fascination with the gypsies' inventions comes at the expense of not being able to remain immediately present in reality. His fascination with alchemy and "scientific" experimentation also reveals a feverish desire to grasp and make sense of reality. Thus, in Macondo, it is reality that must be rationalized.²⁹

Indeed, from the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Macondo is marked as a town plagued by illusion and disassociation from reality. In the opening chapter, Macondo is described as a "city of mirrors," and this reference continues throughout the novel. The first mention of mirrors comes when José Arcadio Buendía dreams of a "noisy city with houses having mirror walls"—a dream that turns out to be a premonition of the founding of Macondo.³⁰ The closing chapter also alludes to Macondo being a "city of mirrors." However, this time, the metaphor is coupled with the word "mirage."³¹ In framing the village as one comprised of "mirages," García Márquez ultimately invites the reader to question how reality is situated in Macondo. That is, was Macondo doomed from the start to be subject to the destructiveness of illusion and escape? In the end, José Arcadio Buendía, along with the majority of his family members and the other villagers, are unable to reconcile their lack of control over their

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁹ Shannin Schroeder, "Advancing in the Opposite Direction from Reality: Magical Realism, Alchemy, and One Hundred Years of Solitude," *Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*, New ed, Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 193.

³⁰ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 24.

³¹ Ibid., 417.

immediate world and their desire for escape takes precedence. Ultimately, a majority of these characters experience psychological downfall and are swept away by the prophetic wind that erases Macondo and its “mirages” off the map.

Destructive Escapism in Dance: The Narcism of the Mirror

Just as the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are fueled by unhealthy obsessions with their artistic “crafts”—alchemy, making little gold fishes, deciphering manuscripts, etc.—dancers are also subject to similarly unhealthy obsessions with their art. Mirrors play a key role in leading dancers to adopt perfectionist tendencies that ultimately induce isolation and distortions of reality. The use of mirrors in a dance studio, while intended to be helpful to dancers and choreographers, can prove, in some instances, quite injurious. Perfectionism is a phenomenon that today’s society grapples with on a daily basis. Although pushing oneself to achieve ambitious goals is not inherently negative, this self-inflicted pressure has the potential to become maladaptive if one strives for unattainable ideals. Dancers, especially, are subject to these sorts of pressures, often pushing themselves, as well as being pushed by teachers and choreographers, to strive for perfection and meet high performance standards that are ultimately unrealistic.

As a result of the pressures, dancers are conditioned to be both highly conscious of their bodies and fault-finding. Because mirrors provide an immediate image of what the body looks like, they help to propagate the idea of perfectionism by facilitating overly self-critical evaluations. In other words, if dancers only consider the visual feedback of mirrors, their self-appraisal is entirely dependent on the false, distorted image in front of them. Their self-

criticisms, therefore, are based on an inaccurate representation of their bodies. Furthermore, if dancers become obsessed with perfection and come to rely completely on their reflection, then they will inevitably create distance between themselves and the creative, cathartic side of dance. Ruminating on minute, irrelevant aspects of the movement, the dancer becomes so hyper-focused on insignificant details that he or she begins to internalize these distorted perceptions of the body and to accept them as reality.

The idea that mirrors reflect inaccurate information about the self has been studied in a variety of contexts. In an article for *Dance Magazine*, former ballerina Allegra Kent writes about “the mirror mystique” and argues that for dancers the mirror can be both friend and foe.³² On the one hand, mirrors serve as a self-correction device, providing an immediate reference point for what one “should” look like. *Am I doing this right? Was I in the correct position? Do I look OK?* Mirrors help answer all of these questions, serving in a way as the dancer’s technical assistant. On the other hand, mirrors heighten aspects of self-consciousness, self-awareness, and self-perception, often leading dancers to establish baselines for what is “normal” or “correct” based on comparisons to some established “other”—the “other” being other dancers, teachers, or even reflections of themselves. These observations and implied notions of what is “normal” are arbitrary and subjective, and therefore are not and should not be naturally definable. In making comparisons to a “norm,” dancers are essentially setting themselves up for failure should they not meet these constructed expectations. The result of such subjective quantifying is a hyperawareness of both the body and the self, and how they are respectively situated in the immediate world.

³² Allegra Kent, “The Mirror Mystique.,” *Dance Magazine*, November 2011, 40–45.

The “mirror mystique” is not unique to dance. Its duality as both a practical and deceptive object has been explored extensively across various disciplines. In the sciences, for example, researchers often use mirrors as a means of studying how the brain receives and integrates visual information. Natalie Angier of the *New York Times* reports that scientists and medical professionals are currently using mirrors to study topics such as how the brain differentiates between self and other and to help treat disorders such as phantom limb syndrome, chronic pain, and post-stroke paralysis. “Mirror therapy” works by essentially tricking the brain through artificial visual feedback by either helping to deceive the patient that no pain exists or by giving them the impression of having two normal, functioning limbs. Mirrors and visual perception, therefore, “are inextricably linked, and the reflected image appears strikingly believable even if deliberately distorted.”³³

These applications of mirrors, for the most part, have resulted in favorable outcomes for patients undergoing treatment. Although in these cases, the distorting qualities of mirrors have indeed “tricked” the mind, this deceit can be viewed as a positive one—one that allows patients to confront their ailments through rose-colored glasses and enables them to acquire not a weak or debilitated vision of the self, but rather a healthier, more holistic conception of their bodily state. Why is it then that mirrors used in this context lead to recovery and rehabilitation while in other contexts they are psychologically and emotionally destructive? For dancers that rely extensively on mirror feedback, the latter has usually proven to be the case.

³³ Natalie Angier, “Mirrors Don’t Lie. Mislead? Oh, Yes,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2008, sec. Science, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/22/science/22angi.html>.

Melquíades, Úrsula, and Remedios: Heralds of Cathartic Escapism

Although the majority of the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are driven by destructive escapist tendencies and exhibit a disequilibrium between reality and fantasy, there are three characters who manage to stay on the positive side of the escapism continuum. Melquíades, the leader of the original gypsy tribe, embodies the harmony that the townspeople of Macondo lack. Although he is just as equally, if not more fascinated by the “scientific” advances of the day, he does not exhibit the same escapist or obsessive tendencies that the villagers exhibit.

Melquíades, in contrast, is depicted as the voice of reason in the novel, frequently warning José Arcadio Buendía of the consequences of taking his experiments too far. Melquíades, being a wise man, understands that the inventions he and his tribe bring to Macondo are meant to promote progress and usher the town into modernity. The villagers, on the other hand, do not take the gypsies’ mysterious displays at face value and instead allow their awe and allure to fuel the escape they desperately seek from the tedium of their day-to-day lives in the sleepy, swampy village.

Úrsula, José Arcadio Buendía’s wife, also does not yield to Macondo’s escapist pull. Indeed, when the gypsies first arrive, she is the sole person in the entire village who is skeptical of the magical displays and scientific advances they bring.³⁴ As the novel progresses, the reader gains further insight into her pragmatic personality. Úrsula, in a sense, can be seen as the personification of the practicality and level-headedness the other villagers lack. As scholar Robert Kiely argues, “it is she who mends the pieces and sweeps the house clean after disaster, it is she who continues to raise various offspring long after her own children have grown to

³⁴ García Márquez, 7.

adulthood; and it is she who remains strong and clear-headed until the age of 114 or 122—as usual, no one is quite sure.”³⁵ The fact that Úrsula survives all of her other family members and lives to be well over one hundred years old is a testament to her resilience. She, unlike the other characters in the novel, does not easily give in to Macondo’s enticing illusions.

Remedios, the daughter of Macondo’s mayor, is perhaps the novel's most emblematic example of a character who is able to circumvent destructive escapist tendencies. She is described as “the only one who was immune to the banana plague. She was becalmed in a magnificent adolescence, more and more impenetrable to formality, more and more indifferent to malice and suspicion, happy in her own world of simple realities.”³⁶ It is ultimately her inherent innocence and uncomplicated view of the world that keeps her safe from the deep introspection and solitary behavior that plagues the Buendías and the other people of Macondo. Because she often states things matter-of-factly and her actions appear driven by impulse rather than by premeditated thought, many of the novel’s other characters view her as unintelligent and as the shell of a person. Indeed, the only characteristics the narrator describes are her purity of heart and overwhelming beauty. In this sense, Remedios functions not as a person but a symbol of what Macondo inherently lacks—a certain innocence and capacity for accepting the world as it is, without actively seeking ways to escape from it. Her persona is the “remedy”—the meaning of her name in Spanish—the town ultimately needs. In many ways, Remedios is also a symbol of an uncorrupted artist, and by extension, a dancer, “her nature [rejecting] all manner of

³⁵ Robert Kiely, “*One Hundred Years Of Solitude*: Memory and Prophecy, Illusion and Reality Are Mixed and Made to Look the Same,” *New York Times Book Review*, March 8, 1970, 5.

³⁶ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 229.

convention” as she wanders barefoot and naked throughout the Buendía household.³⁷ Her life is the only one that ends in a non-earthly way. In the end, Remedios achieves the ultimate escape from Macondo, ascending into the sky, presumably being summoned back into the heavens, a more fitting world for her purity of heart and mind.

Cathartic Escapism in Dance: Ohad Naharin and Gaga Movement Language

Danielle Agami, a former member of the Batsheva Dance Company, stated in an interview with *The New York Times* that, “The [Gaga] class is a playground, and you know you’re going to morph...you know when you leave that you’re probably going to forget about the thoughts you had 50 minutes before. They will come back, your brain [has been taken] away from work, from problems, and then you have some strength and positive energy to deal with your issues.”³⁸ Taking this description of Gaga by Agami into consideration, one is struck by the similarities in the language used to define the movement style. Both Naharin and Agami allude to the healing properties of Gaga, the momentary escape one achieves, and the “pleasure” and “freedom” of moving in such an unrestricted way. Indeed, much of a Gaga class is spent wiggling and twisting the body into seemingly formless positions, embodying a “conventional awkwardness.” Naharin states that “what is conventionally regarded as elegant and symmetrical can actually feel stiff and boring. I’m still creating what I think is beautiful movement, only it can be with a sense of distortion.”³⁹ Evidently, the relative freedom a dancer is given during the improvisatory sections of class aid in achieving a therapeutic state.

³⁷ Ibid., 196.

³⁸ Quoted in Kourlas, 7.

³⁹ Quoted in Perron, 51.

As stated in an earlier section, the absence of mirrors in a Gaga class also seems to play a role in the catharsis dancers often experience. Instead of relying on the mirror to provide direct visual feedback of what the body looks like, Batsheva dancers are trained to “listen” to their individual body “before telling it what to do” and to achieve a certain level of awareness not just of their physical presence but of their mental presence as well. Naharin further elaborates on the mindfulness needed in Gaga and explains that “being attentive to pleasure keeps one aware of taking care of oneself. The pleasure connects the flow of energy and information to your body, it heals you by giving you joy instead of punishment in movement.”⁴⁰ The psychological and emotional availability of which Naharin speaks is not possible to possess, he believes, through the use of a mirror. The philosophy behind not using mirrors in Gaga stems from the idea that dance and movement result from sensations, not about an image of the self that is reflected—and therefore inverted and distorted. Thus, according to Naharin’s argument and the entire Gaga philosophy, by employing a mirror in a dance class, dancers will not be able to attain the “pleasure” and “healing” that comes with being completely acquainted with the body.

A point that Naharin attempts to communicate about Gaga is that it is not a technique or vocabulary, as these terms are generally understood. Rather, it is a “toolbox” that a dancer can use and apply to any other movement technique. He states, “we look to unlock the treasures inside [dancers]: the ability to create sublimations of their sensuality, demons, anger, into movement. How to give up their ambitions and connect more to pleasure, research and discovery. We teach them that yielding is an advantage.” Naharin further elaborates that the Gaga “toolbox,” helps

⁴⁰ Jana Perkovic, “Ohad Naharin—Going Gaga Is the Difference between Dancer and Gymnast, *The Guardian*, sec. Culture, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/mar/08/ohad-naharin-going-gaga-is-the-difference-between-dancer-and-gymnast>.

facilitate a sense of discovery in dancers that ultimately helps them find happiness on a daily basis.⁴¹ Overall, Naharin believes that his technique fosters opportunities for dancers to achieve catharsis through movement due to the fact that Gaga encourages self-generated experimentation and improvisation, along with it emphasizing the importance of direct bodily sensations by holding classes in mirror-less studios. It is ultimately because of these two components—improvisation and lack of mirrors—that many Gaga dancers believe that the technique has allowed them to transcend their immediate reality and enter a realm of momentary escape.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Conclusions

“Escapism is human and inescapable,” writes Yi-Fu Tuan, “What is wrong with the unreal—with wild fantasy? Nothing, I would say, so long as it remains a passing mood, a temporary escape, a brief mental experiment with possibility. However, fantasy that is shut off too long from external reality risks degenerating into a self-deluding hell—a hell that can nevertheless have insidious appeal.”⁴² Here, Tuan captures what ultimately determines the line that exists between destructive and cathartic escape.

In Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, many of the characters become disillusioned with Macondo and their lives in this sleepy swamp town and seek ways of withdrawing from their immediate reality. Once they find their respective means of escape, instead of using it as a coping mechanism to deal with their personal tribulations, most take it to a level of extreme obsession. The characters become preoccupied with this “escape,” locking themselves up in rooms for days at a time, unhealthily lusting over temptresses, and falling ill with an insomnia plague. So what was originally intended to be a cathartic, easing activity turns into their ultimate psychological downfall. They lose touch with the world around them, the people they love, and even themselves.

Dancers, too, experience similar negative separations from reality. Dancers that solely train in highly technical and codified styles and are constantly being instructed to move their bodies to fit certain delineations face the greatest risk of losing touch with their immediate world in psychological and emotionally destructive ways. Because many of these dance forms

⁴²Tuan, xvi.

are also taught in studios with mirrors—deceiving objects that foster negative body image—dancers are hit twofold with elements that propel them to view their immediate world as emotionally and psychologically hostile. Because many come to rely on a mirror's reflection of their body, they adopt perfectionist tendencies that ultimately induce isolation and distortions of reality.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and dance, however, there are instances in which escapism is found to be cathartic and therapeutic by those who seek it. In the novel, Melquíades, Úrsula, and Remedios are the only characters who are ultimately able to avoid falling victim to the negative escapist tendencies that plague the other characters by finding equilibrium between Macondo's magical and fantastical occurrences, and the events based in reality. In dance, improvisatory forms that emphasize self-generated movement and limit the use of mirrors provide opportunities for momentary, healthy escape. Thus, in both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and dance as an art form, escapism is polarized—some examples demonstrating that escapism is destructive to one's psychological and emotional health, while others indicate the opposite; that escapism can, in fact, be therapeutic and cathartic.

Tuan explains, there is nothing inherently wrong or destructive by wanting to seek escape from the world.⁴³ It is only when this escape is fueled by obsession, the need to validate one's existence, or when it is taken beyond momentary evasion of life's tribulations that a person runs the risk of entering an alternate state of reality that can cause psychological downfall. Ultimately, the key to fruitful escape from reality is finding a balance between accepting the world we live in and all that comes with it, and knowing when and to what extent one can leave immediate reality. Indeed, the desire to escape is truly a human condition.

⁴³ Ibid.

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