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Then Becoming Now: An Analysis in Evolution on Painting and Fantasy Literature

Art is in a constant state of flux. It not only changes through time, but also through the eyes of each person looking at it. As a fluid set of media, it is also prone to bearing humanity’s bias and perception towards the things in our present world. Massive changes in our society are reflected in art, via the interpretation of the artist and then is altered even further by the understanding of its audience. A post-pandemic setting serves as a prime example of this change. Humanity has, of course, experienced pandemics before, each of them varying in severity. Here in the aftermath of a pandemic, art changes to the themes and interests of the artists and art-seekers, thus changing art from what it was before the pandemic swept across history. It is after one these pandemics where this paper will focus, with an attempt to look forward passed the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to identify change in art, specifically in the fields of painting and fantasy literature, in order to predict where art might go in the near future. The major pandemic that this essay will focus on via the method of a controlled case study is that of the Black Death, which ranged from the mid-14th century to the early years of the 15th. This particular choice was made for reasons that will mostly be elaborated on later, but one stands above the rest: The drastic change in artistic tone and theme coming out of painting and literature in the years following the pandemic’s outbreaks. These particular points of focus pose many questions over the future of art and what it might look like, especially with society’s increased reliance and use of technology. In studying this ‘age of digitization’, we hold an opportunity to judge what we might lose come a full-bore technological future, or what we might gain if the boundaries of technology and nature begin to transcend each other.

Art is a constantly changing and evolving in our post-modern society, especially with the lightning-fast speed of technological innovations. Art especially changes after larger societal change, which will be the focus of my essay project over the course of this semester. The first parts of the paper will look at specific fields of art in the present day and analyze changes that have occurred in the past three years, with an increased focus to 2020 and 2021 and the appearance of COVID-19. The next part of the essay involves the research of a past pandemic in the Black Death (~1350-1400), and to look closely at artistic and societal changes during that time, with a focus on the same fields from before. My main driving point to this project is to research a past pandemic’s impacts on artistic mediums, practices, and creative engagement in order to determine what art may go through post-COVID pandemic and the world changes we are seeing.

In terms of the theme this project will seek to address, I have a few items that need to be woven together in order to strengthen the thesis. Firstly, I must highlight the sheer amount of difference from a past pandemic to our present-day pandemic. These differences are not only in technology, but also some of our biology and how our society has changed and grown. These changes in humanity are reflected in the art we have produced over the centuries, visible via trends of popularity and differences in creative process and style. The final paper will narrow its focus onto the societal quakes and changes, as they are a major part of shaping contemporary art. Secondly, I will most likely face some degree of challenge in my search for sources about art in the past. Art’s subjectivity is no secret, and I will no doubt have some contradicting opinions on the art of the past; thus, I need to account for more than one interpretation of art and maintain an open perspective to all of the interpretations. Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic is still very new and is still happening, thus not much of it has been documented officially save for records and case counts. As much of an interesting experience it will be to document some of the things I have noticed during the pandemic, especially in the fields of art, it will be a challenge finding sources that encompass the entire art world. To remedy this issue, I will be looking at artistic pieces that show these changes in particular, and infer how the artists’ artistic processes may have changed in the face of the pandemic.

Below is a brief, point-form layout of the form of my essay-project. Each part in itself will be of substantial length, and will also be supported by its own set of sources and references. The first section of the essay will cover the intro to the project and its research, and also highlight and detail the fields of focus for the paper and why I chose those fields. It will be here that I demonstrate some contemporary pieces in order to build a baseline of where art was before the pandemic. The second part of the essay will be the case study of The Black Death, specifically the recurrences of it from 1350 until the early 15th century. I chose this time period because art, especially that of the visual variety, goes through some very interesting changes in relation to the pandemic they experienced. The final part of the essay will be the main comparison and conclusion of my research, where most of my opinion on where the fields of art are heading will take place.

Part 1 – Highlighting the fields I want to focus on; Intro to the technological age

* Focus on are the side of painting installation via galleries and physical display spaces, and also the area of literature and writing.
  + I acknowledge that literature isn’t exactly ‘traditional’ art, but it’s something that I think will experience a large change after the pandemic. I personally believe that fantasy literature is an art form in itself and will develop why I feel this way here as well.
* Develop the idea of art’s changes after massive world events, and briefly introduce why these changes happen.
* What are the technological aspects of the post-modern age? Explanation of technology’s influence on the artistic process and artistic showcase
  + Here I will include artists/pieces I wish to engage into the over-arching topic of the essay; why do these topics bear significance to me? The art world?

Part 2 – Case Study

* Briefly summarize my period of focus: The Black Death pandemic in the 14th century.
  + Detailed summary of the pandemic’s behaviour over the course of the 14th century in order to gain some insight on where the chosen fields of art were going into the pandemic and where it ended up after the recurrences of plague up until the early 15th century.
  + Particular focus on the artists coming out of the pandemic, and what the artistic influences were on their art in the years to follow.
    - Focus on artistic creative engagement after such an impactful time
* Comparison of the Case Study of The Black Death to the COVID-19 pandemic; how the two are similar and how they are different
* Can we predict where art may go? How will studying past behaviours and fluctuations of art help us in understanding this?

Part 3 – Looking to the future

* Highlight the role of technology in today’s society; what do we use it for and why it’s all the sudden gained such a massive importance to our society (North America) in particular.
* Relate the change of art to the artists desire to strengthen their audience’s belief in their piece. This can tie into Tolkien’s theories of Primary and Secondary world beliefs, which both aid in strengthening immersion into the piece
* What might we gain from this experience of art in a pandemic and after a pandemic? What might we lose? Highlight the dangers of a technologically reliant society, but also the advantages of one.
* Finally, conclude my *prediction* of the fields chosen for the coming years and how they might be affected by the time spent during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  + How artistic expression may change based on the reliance on technology
  + What might we see with the digitization of art in the future? What do we lose/gain if this happens?

P2

* Case Study
  + Short description of the arrival of the Black Death and how it got there
* Art before the pandemic
  + What was the art like/what themes did it follow?
  + How common were artistic practices?
* Writing before/during the pandemic
  + Look at religion/religious writings here
  + What were common themes of writing?
  + What about literacy levels? What did this have to do with the style of writings?
    - A lot of writing during the time of the Black Death was life-guides/self-help types of books or writing, which is actually common today as well
* Post pandemic practices
  + How did the lockdowns/quarantines (if they were in place) affect artistic practices?
  + Did it affect the accessibility of art in any way?
  + How is art a way to show that the people blamed themselves and their sins for the BD, and not God/Christ?

P3

* + List the different styles of contemporary painting
  + What is a trend of painting that sticks out to me? Have an analysis of a piece here, including artist, description of the piece, why it sticks out to me and what it evokes in terms of feelings
* Writing as an art form; mention the growth of fantasy since the boom of LotR and its evolution
  + Genres, subgenres, and genre fiction/meta fiction
  + What is a work of fantasy that has stuck out to me in recent years? Short analysis here, including author, a short description of the book

P4

* COVID-19: A pandemic’s bearing on contemporary art
  + What is COVID-19 and what do the measures against it look like to the artist?
  + How is it affecting artistic practices and expression?
    - No galleries or exhibitions
    - Possible strain on ordering supplies, lack of outside contact for dissemination/promotion of pieces and business
* Technology in a pandemic
  + What role is technology playing in all of this? Is it making the pandemic better or worse? What about artistic practices, how is it attempting to alleviate those through the pandemic?
    - Art and it’s ‘aboutness’ (Elwell, 10)
    - Our world being reduced to Code (Elwell, 15) isn’t a bad thing. Our incredibly fast-paced society relies on code because it is something on which our ‘technological condition’ is based on.
    - Art has an ‘interspace’ now; a space where biology and virtuality blend together into one, coercive thing as a kind of ‘living art’. (Elwell, 17)
    - Translation of the real world into code, into art
  + Here, highlight the roles of galleries and exhibitions in recent years (late 90s to mid 2010s)
* Is painting different today, compared to what it was? What has changed in methods/techniques vs styles and trends?
  + Introduce the idea of change after a massive event that affects things like art; why does it affect it so?
  + Painting as functionless? (Godfrey, 15)
    - The lack of being able to physical stand before a painting; miss details, scale, physicality of a piece vs the digital having universal shareability but lacking all of the inherently physical qualities that code lacks as a digital form of expression
* Fantasy literature; why did I pick this particular branch of literature?
  + Talk about the time at home for people, picking up projects that have been on the back burners for years, and self-publishing
  + The internet! Mention places like Wattpad and other live/public writing sites for stories and other things

Other Resources/list of resources (Thus Far)

* For my first two sources, I picked two sources on the Black Death period. These in differ greatly, one is a collection of primary sources and the other is an analysis on painting after the Black Death.
* My next two sources I chose have to do with the presence of technology in digital art and culture. I picked these two because they match up very closely to the topics I wish to explore with the technological age of art, especially in relation to our society’s heavy technological reliance over the course of the COVID-19 measures.

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* This final source I chose is one about the evolution of literature after the Black Death pandemic. I’d really like to look at this in my project because I find that literature is one thing that really evolved after the 14th century, as literacy became more and more common. In terms of modern comparison, I want to look at the quarantines from summer 2020 to see if that amount of time would be enough for people to write things, perhaps resulting in a boom of new writings.

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~~Article for Artists during COVID~~ [~~https://news.northeastern.edu/2020/06/24/heres-how-three-artists-are-creating-art-and-surviving-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/~~](https://news.northeastern.edu/2020/06/24/heres-how-three-artists-are-creating-art-and-surviving-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/)

More COVID art <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/covid-art-museum-art-that-captures-the-hope-solidarity-and-chaos-of-the-pandemic-1.1017223#9>

Stanford message <https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1790>

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