

Ways of perceiving, Curation exhibition essay

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Covid-19 and its impacts on cultural products and endeavour

For thousands of years performers have been performing in physical venues from the gladiators in the colosseum in Rome to the actors at the Globe theatre in Shakespearian times. But never has there been such a sudden, drastic change like there has been in the past year with the coronavirus pandemic. I have come to be fascinated with just how drastically and to what extent everyone's lives have been shaken by the pandemic, "Coronavirus will profoundly damage the arts but new creative spaces will also open" (Linehan, 2020). People in professions including artists, performers, venue staff and many others have especially felt the impact of the pandemic on their jobs and many have been out of work since the pandemic started over a year ago despite the measures the government have put in place to try stop this from happening. I plan to setup an exhibition showcasing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the UK while specifically looking at how it impacted the creative arts sector in particular.

In the entertainment and theatre industry alone, all live performances have had to be cancelled, once busy areas full of performances became deserted almost overnight. After the pandemic settled in theatres tried to put on performances by offering virtual arts for people to view online, such as the BBC's "Culture in Quarantine" (Thorpe, 2020), giving people an easy to browse arts portal full of all the kinds of creative arts people might want while stuck at home in the coronavirus lockdown. This wave of people being legally forced to stay at home, even paid to stay at home, created a huge spike in subscriptions to video streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+ (Vena, 2020) due to the mass boredom people felt by not being able to go out and do things they enjoyed before the pandemic. Something as simple as going out to a restaurant became illegal.



Fig One, A near-deserted South Bank outside the Tate Modern gallery in London last week. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/REX/Shutterstock, 2020

I will have a timeline for my exhibition showing the stages of how the pandemic came about in the UK, when certain restrictions were put in place and the impact, they had on industries focussing on the creative arts. I will show pictures of London especially after lockdown (BBC News, 2020) and showing just how much it changed because of lockdown. Many film productions companies have also released films on

streaming services due to the closure of all cinemas. This has created an enormous shift in the entertainment industry that could continue after the pandemic as online releases prove popular. In turn this could obliterate the cinema industry with people choosing to stay in the comfort of their homes and rarely going to enjoy the “big screen experience”.



Fig Two, A deserted Piccadilly circus: Getty images, 2020

A big aim for my exhibition is to reflect on a year that has been extremely tough for everyone, especially raising awareness of how it impacted my field of study; creative arts and also mentioning mental health, an issue that matters to me a lot. Some research asks the question “Is the cure worse than the disease?” (Dorling, 2020). This research looks at the impact of coronavirus is having on people’s mental health, especially young people who are far less affected by the disease than the older generation. As coronavirus is still ongoing my exhibition would most likely need to take place after when the pandemic is pretty much declared over. This way I can finish the information and fill in the gaps where we don’t know how the pandemic will play out. There have been growing calls for an inquiry into the governments handling of the pandemic (Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, 2020), but have been refused so far at the time of this writing on the basis that the pandemic is still ongoing.

As people enter the exhibition, there will be a scrolling electric screen with lists of victims’ names of the pandemic, this will be designed to set the tense tone of the exhibition and how sad the pandemic has been for so many people just from losing loved ones. After they pass this, there will be a collage of images showing London pre-covid and then a collage comparing what the covid lockdowns did to the once busy streets including figure one and two. This is just the start of the exhibition to show just how much the pandemic totally shook the world and changed it while asking: will life ever be the same again? I would also have a repeated clip of Boris Johnson’s famous “You must stay at home” message that officially started the dreaded lockdown.

As a product designer, I wanted to make the next part specifically focussed around my area of study, expanding to the whole area of creative arts and not just product design but I would of course be mainly focusing on that. For university students personally, in-person lectures have been mostly cancelled so there has hardly been the chance to develop their designs properly in a professional environment. This in

turn is creating a wave of designers who are likely to be less experienced in a professional workshop or studio than designers before them. This extends to every other course too, many people have found online learning lacking, it is far easier to get distracted and often there can be technical issues or lack of motivation to do anything.

I think it is important for the exhibition to especially look into the impact of the pandemic on students of all ages and how much damage it has done to their studies. There have also been suggestions from the Department for Education that behaviour is out of control due to lockdowns (BBC Newsround, 2021). I'm thinking the exhibition could take up residence in the science museum for a few years and depending on its success, could travel around the country or be withdrawn. The science museum as a venue would allow for lots of people to visit it easily as it has excellent transport links and is in a famous venue for science which is why an exhibition on the impact of coronavirus might be appropriate. Failing this, the design museum would also be an excellent venue as it is a museum solely for design. With my exhibition focussing solely on design, this would be an excellent venue choice, also with excellent transport links.

I would aim to have the exhibition up and running at the start of 2022. If the pandemic is still a major issue at that time, social distancing measures could be introduced with the exhibits and information being more spaced out. After the collages of images showing lockdown before and after in London and around the UK, I would then have the timeline. This is to give a brief overview of what happened with the pandemic, the points at which entertainment venues were forced to shut would be specifically highlighted, including universities and companies involved with design. After the timeline it would highlight case studies on what shutting university has done to students, especially the impact on their mental health.

A basic aim for my exhibition would be to show what a detrimental impact the lockdowns have done to every industry, and how much the field of design has taken a hit just because of university students missing out on key in person learning. It's not often something people find important until it is gone. To also make my exhibition more effective, I plan to have interaction involved, even as simple as pressing a button and it playing a voice readout of how certain people have been impacted, for example a design business collapsed due to no revenue. An area dedicated to exploring what would have happened to the industry without any lockdown will be beneficial, it can examine if the deaths from the virus would have been significantly more, the same or even less if there was no lockdown. This is why I feel my exhibition would be better taking place after an inquiry into how the pandemic was handled as only then can it be properly examined and displayed in an exhibition. Otherwise there is missing data and the exhibition is almost complete, an exhibition that can only be completed when the covid-19 pandemic is.

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