

Monologue

Antonia Sicheri-Peel

Year 12

“Watching the Contagion Cabaret film made me acutely aware of how much we use art to communicate, especially in times of struggle or hardship or stress such as this. We use other people’s words when ours fail and when speaking seems impossible we find other ways to talk. The film made me think of this and I found that I had done the same thing, unconsciously and without meaning to throughout all three lockdowns. The Contagion Cabaret influenced the way I think of the pandemic and lockdown because I can now only do so in conjunction to art.”

Somewhere around the time that the outside became illegal the world came into a sharp, almost painful focus. My mind snagged and got caught on the seams of things that would have previously passed me by: the softness of an empty hand, the soft glow of the English sun, the unending, omnipotent, all-consuming *quiet*. The view from my small bedroom window became a mirror that seemed to narrow subtly and imperceptibly each day, the empty streets echoing exhaustibly back at me. I started to understand the poets that I had never shared a kinship with, the ones that spoke of missed opportunities and shapeless days that eventually created the fabric of a formless year, leading sadly and laden with grief into a boring, anaemic existence. Time seemed tainted with an unshakeable futility that soaked through the skin and settled, slightly too comfortably, into bones that had started to feel older than they had any right too. Lying in bed became an extreme sport, heart settling heavily into the cavity of my chest. I was almost as empty as the outside. I should never have been so tired.

But then, with the same assuredness that I imagine God having when creating light, there was Art. And then music and film and literature. I found myself reaching for books in a way I haven’t done since I was a small, letting my fingers trail through the pages and feeling the dust that had started to accumulate there, brushing it off and staring at the pages with eyes that were just a little older. The familiar words felt foreign and strange but that sensation wasn’t entirely uncommon anymore. If I could have taken the words into my hands and squeezed them dry, I would have. I started to sleep with a stack of books next to my bed. I remember it feeling important at the time. I found a solace in novels and plays and characters that smiled at me through a screen or from the confines of a page, telling me that maybe things feel aimless right now but this moment will find its place in history and we will move on. There is always a next chapter. In the days that stretched forever, and the nights that followed, I turned to art to articulate the things that I dare not, I turned to art to keep my mind alive with something other than the anxiety that had both become normal and fanatical, to break through the numbness of isolation that had sunken into the grey matter of my brain and made a home there. I turned to art because when being alone became a necessity it was only art that proved that I didn’t need to be lonely.

I realised with a startling clarity while reading about the black death, I found the morbidity vaguely comforting, that this maybe the only time I share a universal experience with people that differ from me in nearly every conceivable way. Hundreds of others look out the window in the same way I do, reminisce to the same extent, pouring over pictures and

videos of the time before. They, too, start a hobby just to drop it days later, crying and laughing in houses that sometimes feel more prison than home and looking vacantly at a screen that demands they be productive while never before feeling less motivated. I have never been so intrinsically linked with so many others; all of us living through this shared human trial. Separated yet together. Independent yet part of something so much bigger. Tethered together like a long trail of lifeboats- struggling to stay afloat but, despite that, doing it anyway.