Sonic Scope: New Approaches to Audiovisual Culture •

Aesthetics, Nostalgia, and a Post-Covid Era - Niamh Gallagher

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Aesthetics, Nostalgia, and a Post-Covid Era

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“Covid-19: ‘Our Generation’ s Great War’ ,” claimed a 2020 article from *Forbes* magazine.¹ It was during this period of history, where we as a human species have been fighting for our existence, that music and videography have given us solace. The future of music and video will be impacted through what art we consumed during this time period. We ask: will there be fewer staged events? What will music-making in the future look like? Will there be enough funding for the arts to sustain themselves this far into the future?

“Human symbol systems such as art and fashion styles emerge from complex social processes that govern the continuous re-organization of modern societies.” ² As a society we like to either build, for example, in the 1980s there was a new wave of rock music based on that of the 1950s, or reject what has come before us, for instance, in Western art music Minimalism began as a direct rejection of Serialism. In the words of Frank Zappa, “all the good music has already been written by people with wigs and stuff,” and each generation is just putting their own spin on it. If you compare the changing aesthetics from each decade between the 1950s to the 2000s, they are all vastly different with some bleed-through from times past. Like fashion, music trends also occur in cycles. In our current society, the music of the 1980s and early 1990s has seen a boom in interest. Artists, such as Tame Impala, or Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein’ s soundtrack to *Stranger Things*, have been able to encapsulate the 1980s “synthwave” aesthetic of futurism, captured visually by bright neons, shiny materials and huge shoulder pads. Moreover, there have been some more modern interpretations of the 1990s aesthetics of hip-hop and grunge aesthetic, seen in the rap and post-hardcore bands. But in twenty to thirty years’ time, will it be the recycled and remixed music of the late 1990s and 2000s that people of 2040-2050 will be nostalgic about?

Music of a time period also relates to what is going on politically, with it largely being a specific style-based subculture’ s voice against the constabulary. The punks were rebelling against 1970s social constructs and then in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher was a muse. In the future, will the artist’ s music and video output reflect climate crisis or will

the music heal polarising political conflicts (e.g. Brexit) and show how collectively we as the human race can come together regardless of race, gender or sexuality, amongst many other things.

Our current generation's constant use of social media has led to the biggest consumption of media known; music and video has never been so accessible. There has been an increase in different aesthetics due to this online culture and there is no one distinct genre of music that can be linked to the late 2010s. The rise of the platform TikTok highlights how short snippets and samples of songs can become popular without the full title or artist being known. This has created a climate of individualism and eclectic maximalism. In the future they might become even more so. On the other hand, due to the constant output of content, there has been push back where people are opting for minimalism due to things like noise pollution. So will the music of the future become quieter and more tranquil, the accompanying videos opting for stasis over intensity in order to offer us some sense of stability?

Bibliography

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Footnotes

1.

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2. Peter Klimek, Robert Kreuzbauer, and Stefan Thurner, “Fashion and art cycles are driven by counter-dominance signals of elite competition: quantitative evidence from music styles,” *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* 16, no. 151 (February 2019). 2