

Pandemic Objects: TikTok Review

Alice Kunjumon, Monash University

How did TikTok become so popular? Harriet Reed's piece *Pandemic Objects: TikTok* very successfully demonstrates the bridge between twenty-first century TikTok and the 1930's 'The Lambeth Walk' dance; exploring how dance unites humanity in the face of unprecedented and difficult times (<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/projects/pandemic-objects-tiktok>). This is part of the *Pandemic Objects* online exhibition in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was published on 7 June 2020. Reed, Assistant Curator at the museum, wrote this piece, adding to her previous work relating to theatre and performance art, utilising a mixed medium of videos, photographs and posters.

The current popularity behind TikTok, and that of 'novelty dance', has its beginnings much further back in history than social media, and has been compared to the great phenomenon of the spread of the Charleston during the 1920s. 'The Lambeth Walk' continued to be a phenomenon even during World War II where people attended dances even with the threat of being bombed, and wearing gas masks, symbolising the 'resilience' of people during times of conflict; and parallels can be seen in the use of TikTok to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The text linking these parallels is accompanied by posters of musical advertisements from the 1920s and 30s and YouTube videos demonstrating how 'The Lambeth Walk' was performed. These visuals stimulate our imagination by elaborating on our knowledge of both the historical and societal context, further emphasising how World War II and 'The Lambeth Walk', and COVID-19 pandemic and TikTok are similarly significant.

Reed also demonstrates the significance of 'The Lambeth Walk' through the witty, edited video of Adolf Hitler and his soldiers 'performing' to the dance. She connects this 1941 video to our modern-day memes, showing how people use humour to handle perplexing times.

The opening black and white photograph of the girls laughing as their friend dances somehow resonates with the modern-day entertainment of TikTok, whereby such encouragement and affirmation is given in the form of 'likes' as you press the red heart sign on the TikTok app.

Reed provides an overview of TikTok, giving us an insight into the popularity and significance of this app to cleverly show how it uses our short attention span to create entertainment. As we listen to the YouTube videos of various TikToks linked in the exhibition, it's almost humorous to think that we are also caught up in this as we surprisingly recall the words and sing along to these songs!

Specifically, when examining TikTok, we can infer that the app allows individuals to feel understood through offering various personalised content and providing opportunities to be involved in the online community through encouraging individuals to take part in various trends, again echoing the community spirit felt previously when engaging in the trends of the 1930's dance halls.

If history has shown us anything, it is that people persevere through difficult times by building a sense of community. Through *Pandemic Objects: TikTok*, Reed has explored how this online platform of TikTok in the twenty-first century and the novelty dance, 'The Lambeth Walk', of the 1930s and 40s both promote positivity, and how TikTok has become a significant and meaningful part of our society – globally uniting us together while we combat this pandemic.

To cite this paper please use the following details: Kunjumon, A (2020), 'Exhibition Review: *Pandemic Objects: TikTok*', *Reinvention: an International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Volume 13, Issue 2, <https://reinventionjournal.org/article/view/738>. Date accessed [insert date]. If you cite this article or use it in any teaching or other related activities please let us know by e-mailing us at Reinventionjournal@warwick.ac.uk.