



HANDS



FACE



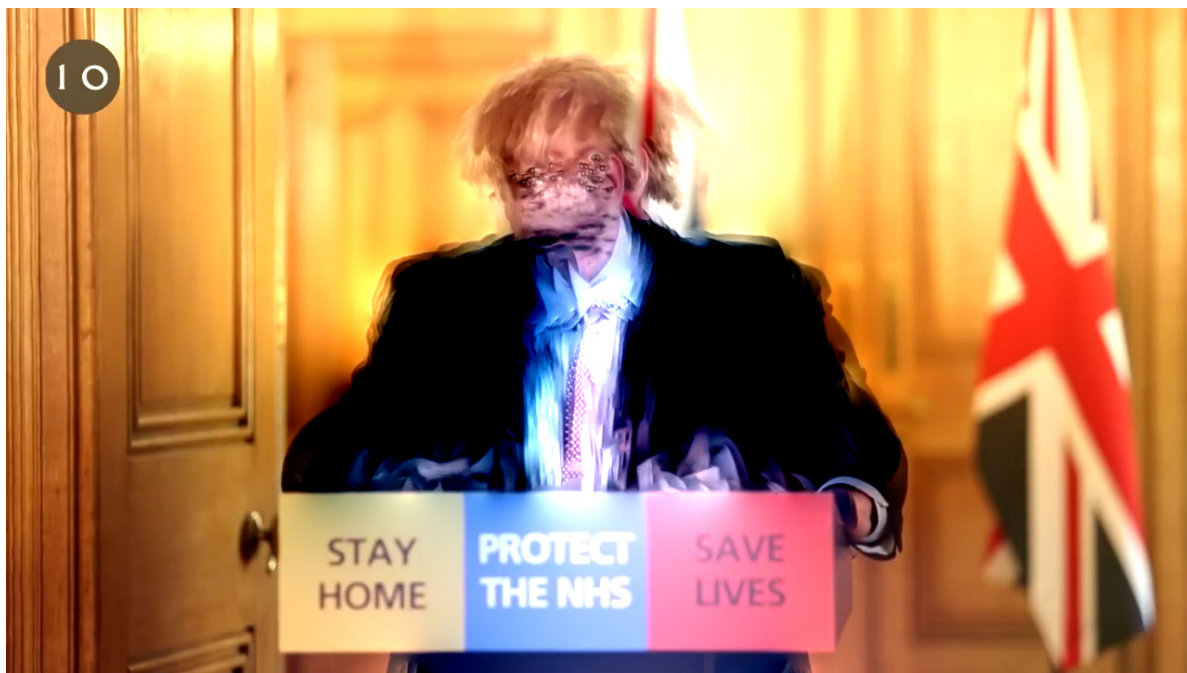
SPACE

Coronavirus Press Conferences

March to December 2020

Pete Ashton

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25th March

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26th March

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28th March

10



29th March

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30th March



31st March

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1st April



2nd April

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3rd April

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4th April



5th April



6th April

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7th April

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8th April



10th April

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12th April



13th April



15th April



16th April



17th April



18th April



20th April



21st April



22nd April



23rd April



28th April



29th April



30th April



1st May



2nd May



3rd May



4th May



5th May



11th May



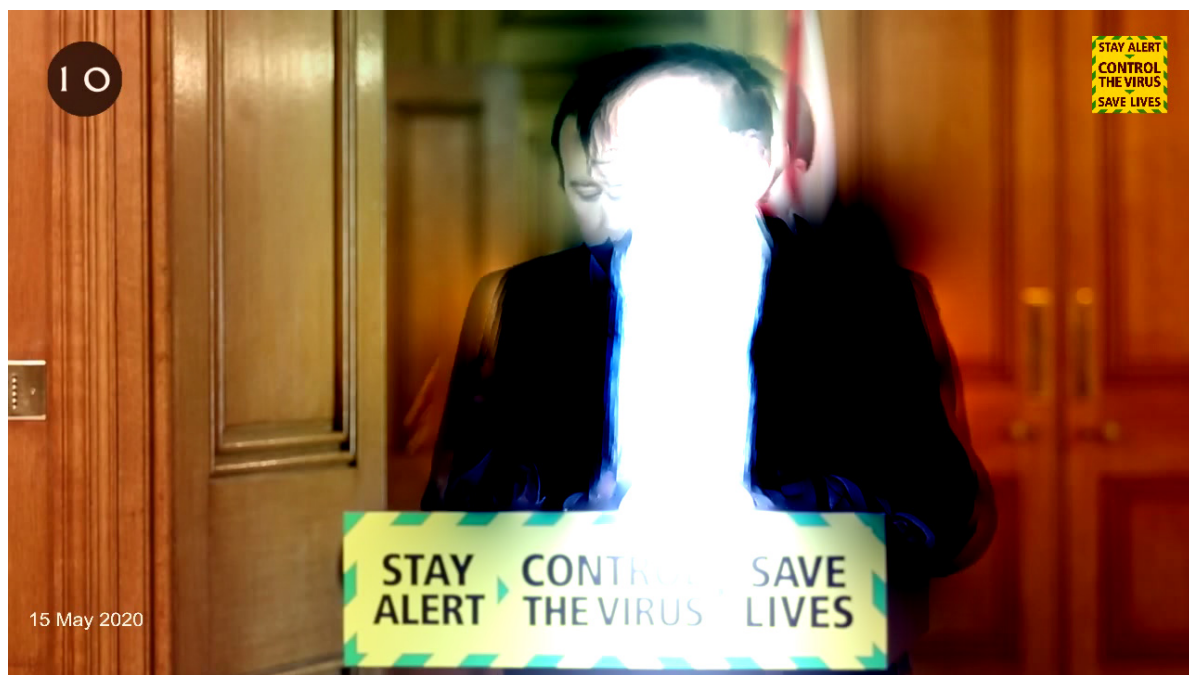
12th May



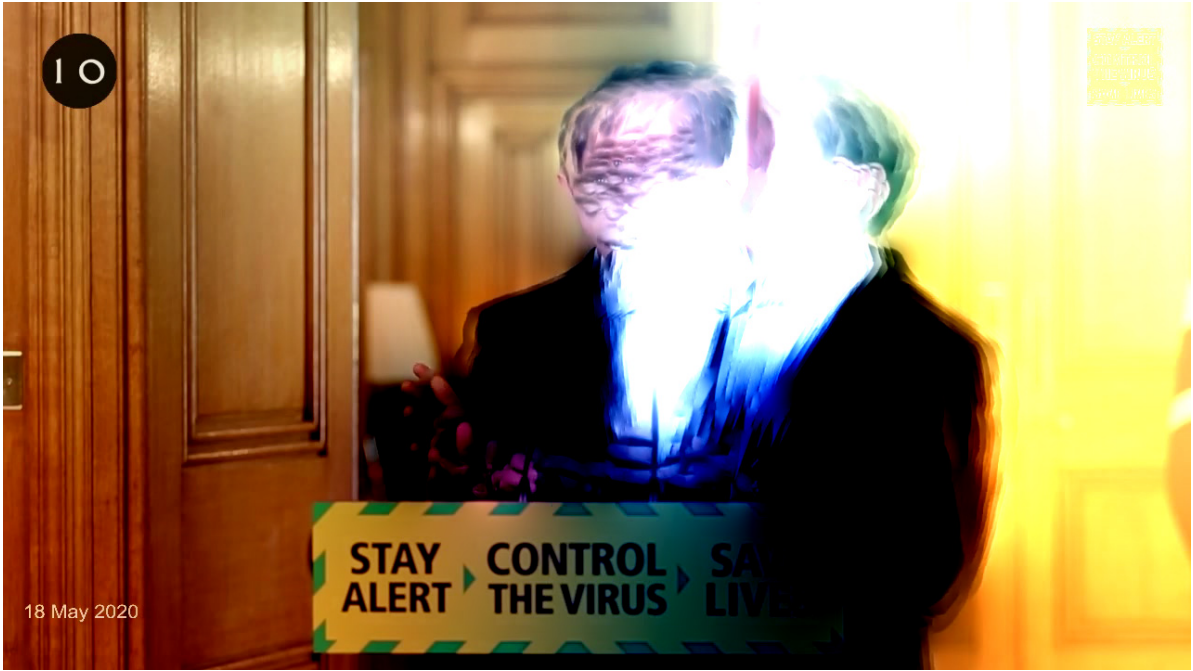
13th May



14th May



15th May



18th May



19th May



20th May



21st May



22nd May



23rd May



24th May

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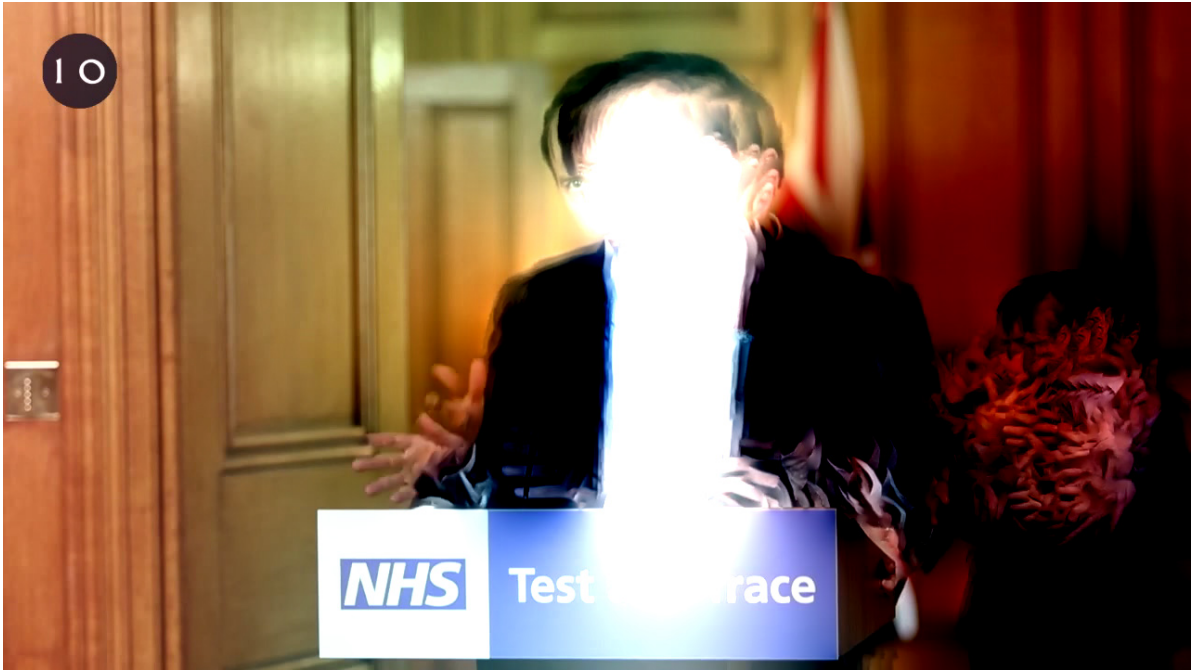


25th May

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26th May



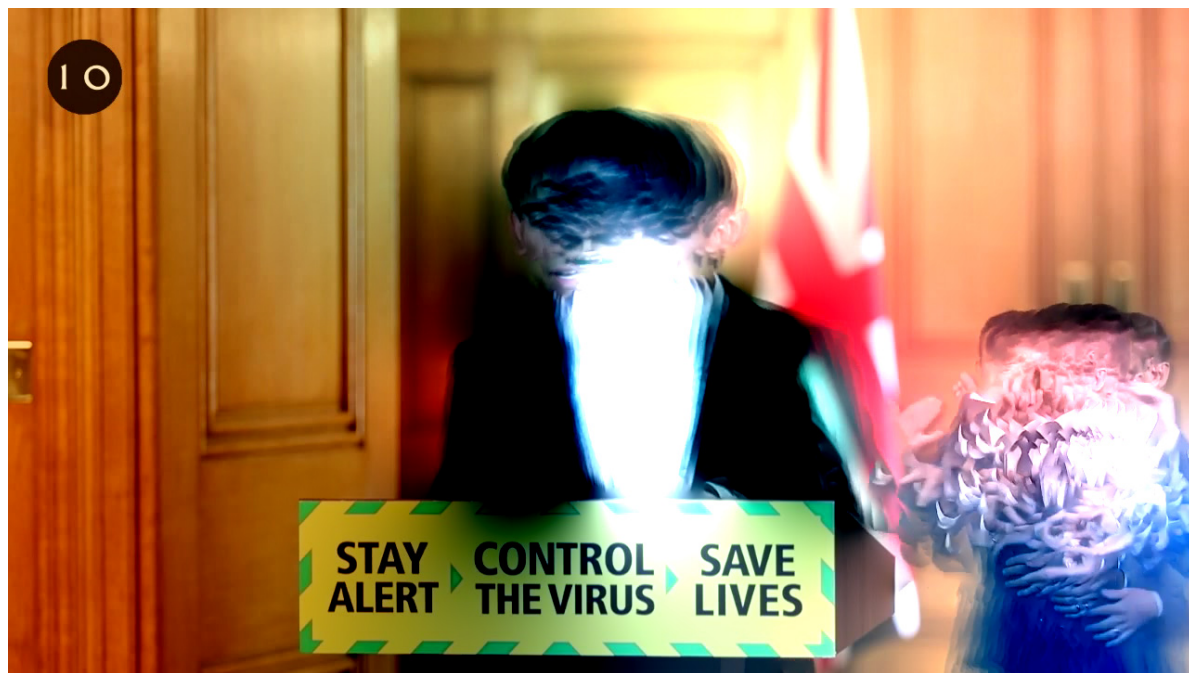
27th May

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28th May

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29th May

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30th May



1st June



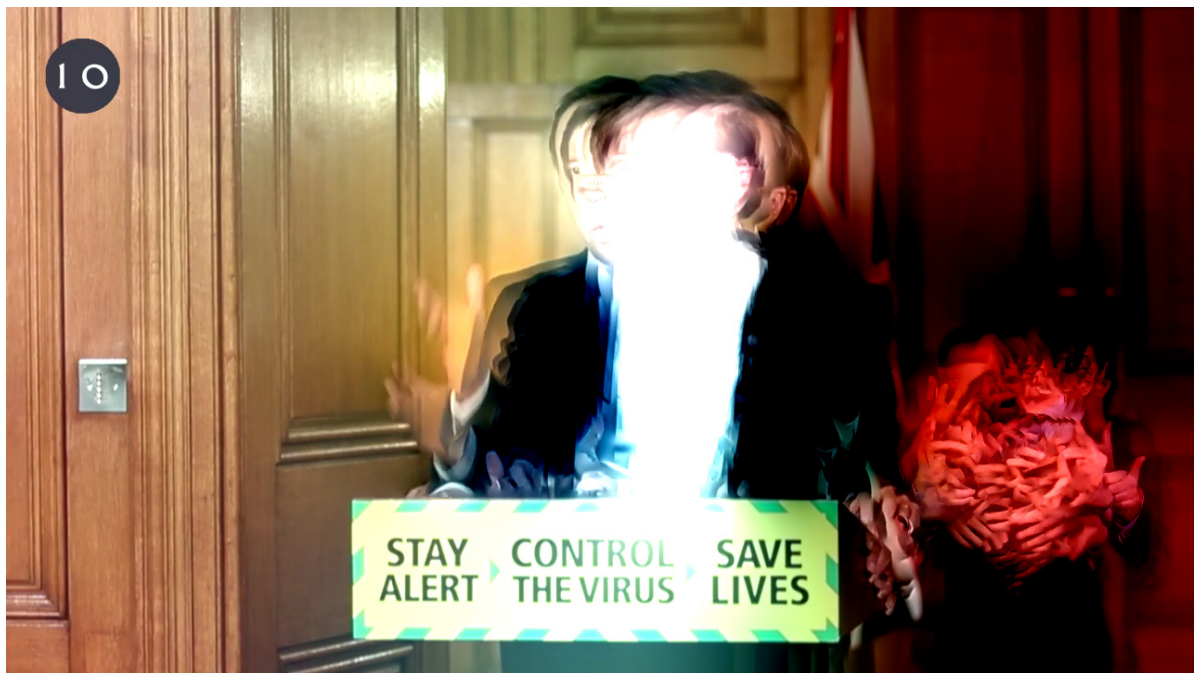
2nd June

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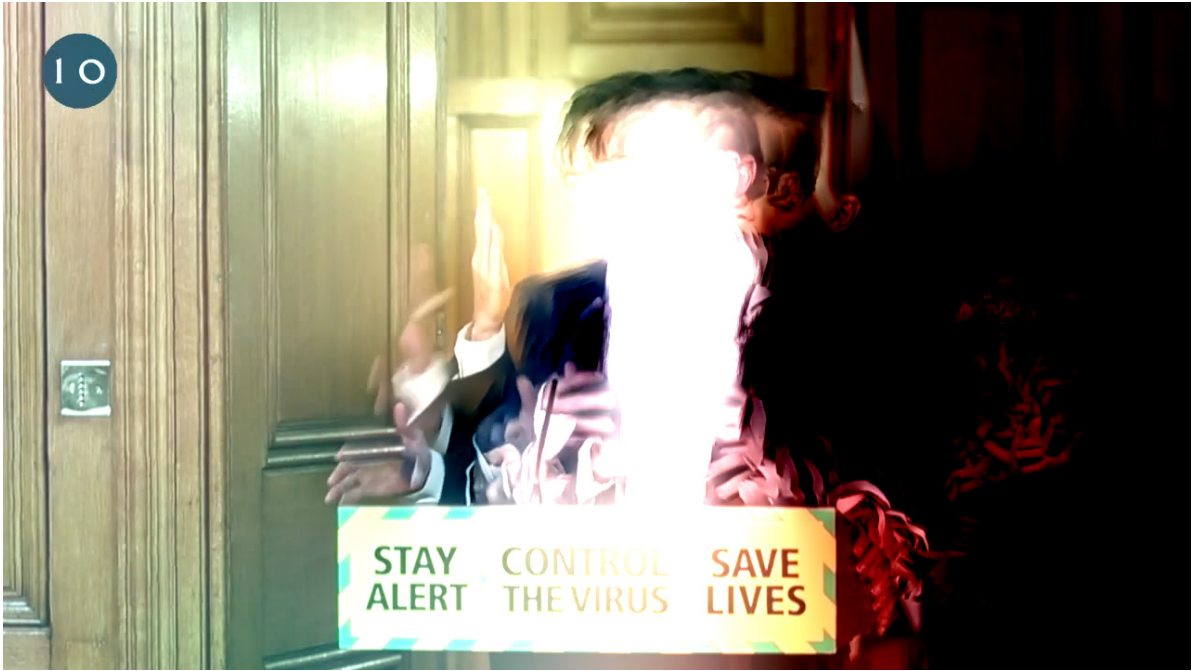


4th June

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5th June



8th June



9th June

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10th June



11th June

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12th June



15th June



16th June



19th June



23rd June



2nd July

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3rd July

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9th July



31st July

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24th September

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30th September

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12th October

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16th October



20th October

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22nd October



31st October

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5th November

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9th November

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12th November



16th November

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20th November



23rd November

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26th November



2nd December



10th December

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14th December

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16th December

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19th December

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21st December

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30th December

In March 2020 the UK government began regular press briefings about the emerging coronavirus pandemic. These took place at a podium at Number 10 Downing Street where a minister, sometimes the Prime Minister, spoke directly to a static camera for five or so minutes before introducing advisors and taking questions.

These ministers had not expected to be dealing with this. They had been chosen for their belief in Brexit and their loyalty to Boris Johnson ahead of any experience or competence in running their departments. The ideological purge of politicians and civil servants by the Johnson regime in 2019 had left the UK government ill-equipped by any standards.

It's a year into the pandemic as I write this and over 100,000 people have died in the UK. Vaccines are being rolled out but the country feels dazed and confused, battered by mixed messages and contradictory instructions.

This book covers the 89 press conferences uploaded to the Number 10 YouTube channel in 2020.

Watching them I was struck by how young they look. Dominic Raab, covering for Johnson when he was hospitalised with Covid, looks startled and terrified, while Matt Hancock has the air of an earnest son, very keen to get things right. Grant Shapps looks fresh from scraping a passing grade in his GCSEs, while Rishi Sunak reads his scripts in the manner of someone who definitely didn't write them.

And then there's Johnson, the leader who hates to lead, hates to give bad news, hates to make hard decisions. His ruthless self-interest has always been masked by jocular bluster, but it is particularly ill-suited for this. We don't need feel-good optimism. We need a framework to live and work in this new reality. We need honesty and clarity and compassion.

The speaking-to-a-fixed-camera trope, denoting seriousness and directness, lends itself well to the process I've employed in these artworks. The background is static while the speaker is animated. Extracting a shot every five seconds, I merge 100 or so frames using a focus-stacking algorithm, pulling out the sharpest points and smoothing the final result.

The algorithm is not designed for this, so the results are always interesting. Teeth and eyes multiply, dark hair dominates, and white shirts bleach the image centre into a void. Later someone remembers their accessibility obligations and a signer is introduced, transformed into a manic pixie, all hands and grins.

The result is a blur of chaotic emptiness. This is what it feels like to watch the Coronavirus Press Conferences.

Pete Ashton
February 2021

**Coronavirus Press Conferences
March - December 2020**

by Pete Ashton

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