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'If you don't know where to look, find somebody else who does'

Producer Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor on getting underrepresented groups into film, Arts supplement

'My grandfather loved ice cream in a way that only someone who hasn't grown up with such luxuries can'

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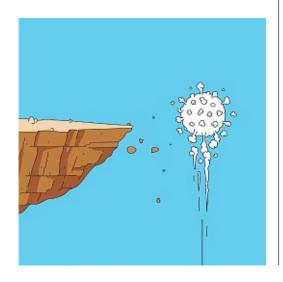




SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Post-Covid politics: a long way to fall



ile E Coyote, the cartoon character, runs off the edge of the cliff. For a second, before he realises there is no more ground beneath him, his legs keep pumping away. That may be where western societies are today.

This year's lockdowns have prompted the largest economic declines in memory. But most Europeans in par-

ticular still don't realise that they are falling off a cliff. That's because their governments have effectively nationalised millions of jobs by subsidising wages. This mid-air suspension won't last for ever. For instance, the British government's "furlough" scheme, which supports nearly 10 million workers, is scheduled to end on October 31. That could be the moment when Coyote looks down, yellow eyes bulging, and sees the mile-deep canyon gaping below. What happens to European and American political systems then?

The non-profit More in Common, which studies political attitudes in both regions, gave me an advance look at its report *The New Normal?*, based on interviews with 14,000 people across seven countries. There's good news here for Germany and the Netherlands, where the pandemic has boosted trust in government and national pride, and for Britons, drawn together post-Brexit by Covid-19. But Italians dread political instability, France has a vacancy for an anti-system leader who can vocalise the widespread anger and Poland has become even more divided. The US is the one country fully aware that it's falling off the cliff.

Certainly for most Europeans, Covid-19 remains a fairly distant disaster. The proportion saying they know anyone who died of the disease ranges from 5 per cent in Germany and Poland to 18 per cent in Italy. In no European country does more than one person in three – in Germany, one in eight – know someone who lost a job to the pandemic. By contrast, in the US, where jobs weren't protected, 45 per cent know someone left jobless.

Everywhere, Covid-19 has planted political time-bombs. Mental health and trust in others have worsened in all countries, with the biggest net declines in the US. Poland scores worst in Europe in those two categories: the country had a relatively mild case of coronavirus but its pre-existing polarisation has metastasised, especially after PiS, the populist ruling party, tried to hold elections during this spring's lockdown. Only 35 per cent of Poles express confidence in "our current government's ability to tackle the challenges ahead".

The French are just as anti-government. A stunning 78 per cent of them believe that "to put our country in order, we need a strong leader willing to break the rules". (A still hefty 71 per cent of Italians and 55 per cent of Germans say the same.) But a green, anti-system, leftwing "French Trump" would face one big challenge: persuading

France's large group of politically disengaged to start voting alongside the "identitarians". Neither the current far-right leader Marine Le Pen nor her father ever managed that.

In Italy, 48 per cent say the pandemic has worsened their financial situation, the highest proportion for any country. With Italian income per capita now probably lower than in 2004, many are tempted to bin their system. Polls show nearly 40 per cent backing the far right. The one bright light is that 80 per cent of Italians believe their compatriots "have demonstrated unprecedented

'Covid-19 has planted political time-bombs. Mental health and trust in others have worsened in all countries'

levels of solidarity in this crisis". Trust in Italy's health and welfare systems has soared. Those locked-down neighbourhoods singing from balconies were telling us something.

Many Britons have long hankered for the sense of national togetherness of 1940. Covid-19, killing more people in the UK than the German Blitz did, has revived that feeling. Britons are the nationality in the study most likely to agree with statements of solidarity: "The pandemic has shown me that most people in our country care about each other", "I feel that it is my duty as a citizen to follow social distancing and other rules" and "I have expressed thanks to healthcare or essential workers". It's not that Britons are uniting behind the government: they are the Europeans most inclined to place blame on "national government leaders". But the coronavirus is healing the divides of Brexit.

By contrast, the US, fractured before the pandemic, looks to be disintegrating. Americans score worst in the study for rising disappointment in their country, decline in trust in national government, increased division and predictions of political instability. These figures are particularly distressing given that Americans used to feature in surveys as optimists. If they are now more pessimistic than the French, that's terrifying.

As after the 2008 financial crisis, it may take years to discover what's at the bottom of each country's political canyon. But this study suggests a lurch leftwards. Asked whom government "cares too much about", respondents in most countries put "wealthy people" and "big business owners" top. Close to 90 per cent everywhere want corporations to "stop using overseas tax havens", to "commit to shifting jobs back from overseas" and to "guarantee fair wages for all workers". Large majorities (especially in Europe) back a Green New Deal. The beneficiaries of this political backlash could look more like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez than Donald Trump.

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INVENTORY EMMA DONOGHUE
WRITER

'I try to never talk about religion in interviews as it's so hard to do it without looking smug or creepy' Emma Donoghue, 50, is the author of international best-selling novel *Room*, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker and Orange prizes. Her film adaptation was Oscar-nominated. Her other books include *Slammerkin*, *The Sealed Letter*, *Life Mask* and *Hood*.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be a ballet dancer. I had the address of Sadler's Wells ballet school in a locket around my neck. Private school or state school? University or straight into work? Catholic schools run by nuns in Dublin, then a degree in English and French at University College Dublin, then Cambridge for a PhD in 18th-century English literature. Who was or still is your mentor? My father, Denis Donoghue, has published more books than me. He's a literary critic and still writing at 91. As a role model, he's been crucial. And Caroline Davidson, my literary agent, has been a very loyal guide. I've relied on her guidance and judgment for 30 years.

How physically fit are you?

Not very. I don't like exercise at all. My saving grace is my treadmill desk. If anything is going to keep me alive to 100. it's that.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Ambition. I have met many people who have the talent, but something gets in the way - self-destructive tendencies, laziness, getting too disappointed by the first failure.

How politically committed are you?

Committed is a tricky word. I have political views, but I keep my energy for my writing. I'll speak up about feminism, LGBT rights, Black Lives Matter, but I focus on changing people's minds through fiction.

What would you like to own that you don't currently possess?

If I'm ever in a museum and I'm looking at little medieval sculptures, my hand reaches out - I want to touch them.

What's your biggest extravagance?

Probably travel – until now. I'm an emigrant – I left Ireland for England at 20, then went to Canada at 28. I routinely zipped back and forth across the Atlantic – not exotic travel, but strengthening my relationships.

In what place are you happiest? With my loved ones. And I like really old places - [the stone circle at] Avebury, neolithic graveyards and dolmens in Brittany, standing stones in the west of Ireland. I love that feeling of connection to people who died thousands of years before. What ambitions do you still have? They're mostly forms of writing that I haven't done yet. At the moment, I'm trying to write a musical - the talky bits. What drives you on?

Telling the stories of people left out of history or misinterpreted. I've always had this burning feeling of hurry to tell these stories, especially stories of dead people from a

stories of dead people from a long time ago - I have a real sense of mission.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

It's probably the kids. Thrilled as I am by having written so many books, it's hard to compare with the impact you have bringing another person into the world.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Limpness. When people want things, but aren't going to do anything about getting them. I'm very energetic myself and have plenty of stamina, so I find it hard to be tolerant of people who don't. If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

you now, what would she think? I think she'd be thrilled about the books and plays and films - and she'd be amazed that I had children. At 20, I'd have thought that being a lesbian would mean I wouldn't have kids, so I think she'd be rather wowed.

Which object that you've lost do you wish you still had? I can't think of a single one.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

My mind goes immediately to climate change, but climate change is connected to all the others - they're all about whether we're willing to share the wealth, they're all about social justice.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

I do, but I try to never talk about religion in interviews as it's so hard to do it without looking smug or creepy.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

Ten out of 10, so far. Writing is a very satisfying job. **FT**

Interview by Hester Lacey. "The Pull of the Stars" by Emma Donoghue is published by Picador

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Reply

The Covid Marshal: a coronavirus western

or several days I have been trying to work out why the concept of Boris Johnson's Covid marshals is so inherently hilarious. At first it was the image of these enforcers of health guidelines as the modern equivalent of *Dad's Army*'s Air Raid Warden Hodges. But on further consideration, it is the grandiose title, "marshal".

The word just conjures images of old westerns, from TV series like *Gunsmoke* to films like *Wyatt Earp* and *High Noon*. A marshal, to me, is a dour, tobacco-chewing loner, quick on the draw and standing alone against the forces of disorder or violation of international treaty obligations. The Covid marshal vibe, on the other hand, is more souped-up parking attendant.

Illegal Gathering at the OK Corral somehow just does not have the same ring to it, although perhaps the plotline could be similarly dramatic. Wyatt Earp and his brothers stride out to break up a picnic for eight. "OK, real slow now, put down that egg and cress sandwich. Keep your hands where I can see 'em. Don't even think about reaching for the rosé."

You may laugh (I'd appreciate it if you did, that is the point) but I am secretly thrilled at the prospect of a new era of Covid westerns. Obviously we need a snappier title - something like Covid Marshal: £10 an Hour. I had thought of Covid Marshal: Enforcing Guidelines in a Friendly Manner but I worry it lacks dramatic tension. Naturally, there will be a whole supporting cast: the Covid marshal's snitch at number 17; the Covid marshal's comedy sidekick.

By the way, *High Noon* could totally work as a Covid western. "Covid marshal Kane, the Miller gang are heading this way! If you're still here when they get to town, there'll be seven of you in the same place."



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

For those who never saw this epic, it centres on a marshal's lone stand against the gang who have come to kill him on the day he is due to marry and leave town with his pacifist wife. Marshal Kane refuses to flee even when his pleas to the townsfolk to stand with him are rebuffed. Rather than doing the obvious thing, leaving the callously ungrateful town to its fate, he stays and fights. I suspect the Covid marshal would not stand and fight, but then the Covid marshal will not be played by Gary Cooper.

The new version practically writes itself. "OK people, the Miller gang are having a tea party at the village hall. I need five deputies to ride over with me and break it up. Obviously, we need to go in separate cars but don't forget your masks."

"Gee I'd like to help, marshal, but the Miller gang do fantastic brownies and his son was a finalist on *Bake Off*, there's bound to be a carrot cake. We can't risk it."

"Listen, goddammit, there's a virus out there. If we stand together, we can stop it."

"If we come, can we keep the cakes, marshal?"

"I'm sorry, we can only ask them to disperse. We have no powers to confiscate baked comestibles."

His wife has begged him not to go to the village hall. "I know these

people, they'll throw me out of the book club." But a Covid marshal's gotta do what a Covid marshal's gotta do. The mood turns ugly. He is badly outnumbered but at the last minute his gluten-intolerant wife dashes in to snatch the cakes.

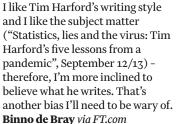
In another episode, we see the marshal standing at the town limits to greet a gang of rowdy kids heading into Costa Coffee. "Did you see the sign, kids? No more than six people together and I'm counting, oh, at least eight of you."

"But these two are only 11."

"Gee. I'm sorry, boys, but you ain't in Scotland now."

Elsewhere, the Covid marshal spots several men with guns; though unarmed and outnumbered, he doggedly stalks them down, tracking them to their lair. But in a shock twist they turn out to be grouse hunters and so have a permitted exemption. Happily, on the way home he catches some animal rights protesters and also a family of five who invited both grandparents to dinner.

Too tired to walk further, he calls an Uber to take him home. "I'm sorry, marshal," says the driver. "I'm out of masks. This cab ain't big enough for the both of us."



Y

@AlexanderSmith September 11 This is the lockdown ice-cream van feature I didn't realise I had been waiting for all this time

.....

An extraordinary account ("Bankruptcy, jail, ruined lives: inside the Post Office scandal", September 12/13) about how lack of accountability and controls can create a great miscarriage of justice. There should be more publicity about this case - when you see the type of publicity that UK banks got on PPI, this is much worse. Thank you for this detailed piece of work. **HC2** *via FT.com*

Re "Charles Dance: 'I'm not a movie star, I'm a working actor'" (September 12/13). I had always had him down as a "bit lightweight". Then I saw him in the BBC's *Bleak House* - only then did I realise how wrong I was and how he was one of the leading actors of his generation. **Etoilebrilliant** via FT.com

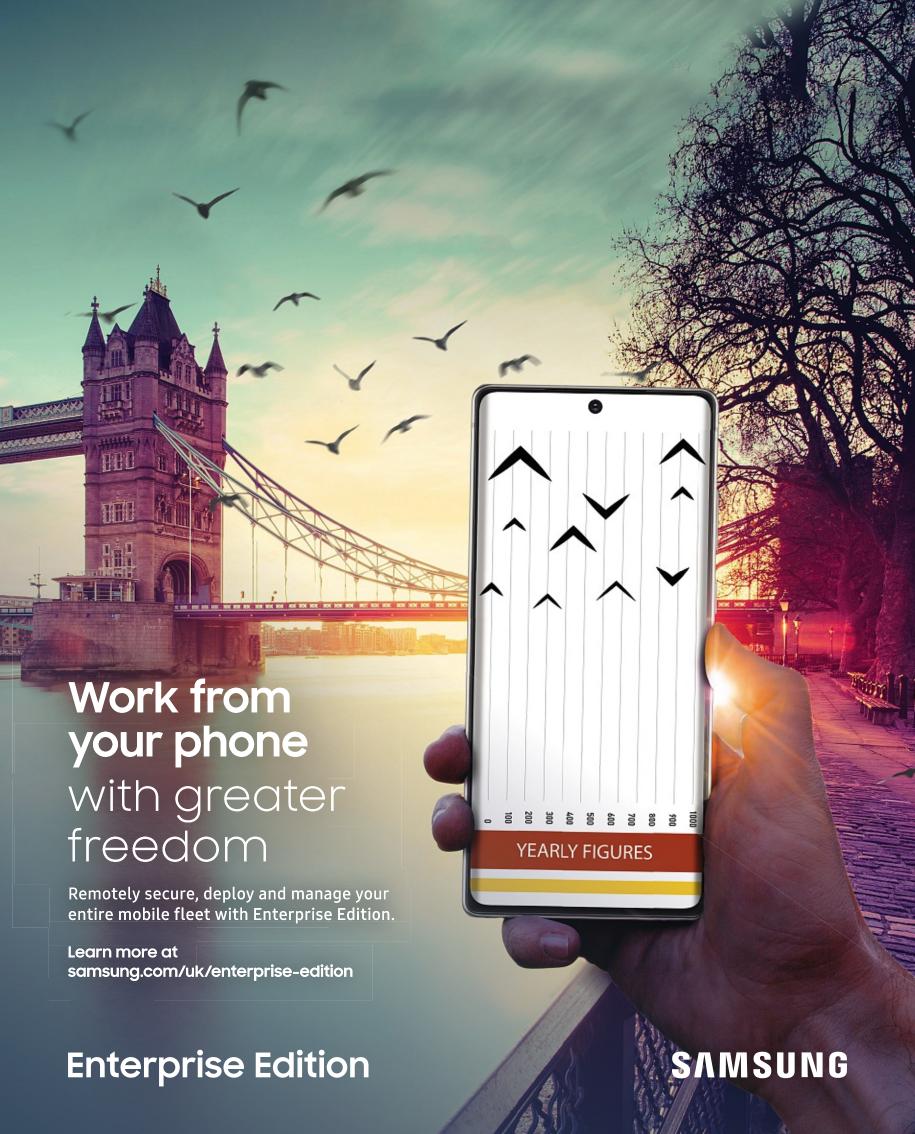
Re "Why populists have given up on promises" (September 12/13). The core idea of populism in most of its forms is a rejection of complexity hence the frequent appeals to common sense. But policy is complex. So populist policy is almost a contradiction in terms. Exercising power is the last thing most populists want to do. When they come to power, they mostly try to create sideshows and focus on destroying institutional stability to prevent anyone else exercising power in the future. So populism leads to a vacuum in political power, which enhances the power of the non-political sources of power. Gerard via FT.com

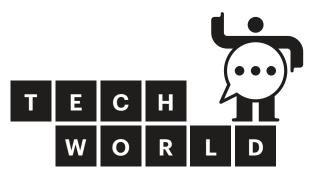
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BY ELAINE MOORE

Silicon Valley and the new screentime dilemma

f you want to wind up tech workers in San Francisco, try asking them about their policy on screen time. Even at the heart of an industry devoted to wheedling us all into spending more time online, screen addiction is treated as a real affliction. Only here, there is an added twinge of guilt.

Friends whose jobs are in tech and who have toddlers still get worked up talking about a story published in The New York Times in 2018 that quoted venture capitalists and high-ranking tech employees being hypervigilant about keeping their young children away from smartphones while working at companies that hook users to theirs.

Some friends rail at the hypocrisy of those interviewed - among them a former executive assistant at Facebook. Others get defensive as they acknowledge that they too have a strict time limit on screens of any kind - despite the nature of their own employment.

Having seen the weird intensity that shouty YouTube videos and brightly coloured mobile games induce in some children, I can understand why the subject is fraught. But I grew up in a house where the TV was always on - a fifth member of the family burbling in the corner - so I'm usually nonchalant about the amount of time I spend looking at my phone.

When friends compare tricks for avoiding theirs (lock it in a cupboard after 8pm, set the display to greyscale, delete social media apps), I stay out of the conversation. Even so, I took note when the unwelcome weekly iPhone stats showed that I was spending



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

lockdown looking at my phone for more than five hours every day.

Remote work, school and socialising have forced many of us to stare at our screens more than ever - whether we like it or not. Evan Spiegel, co-founder of addictive social messaging platform Snapchat, made headlines two years ago when he told the FT that his young stepson was only allowed an hour and a half of screen time each week. At the recent FT Weekend Festival, he was asked how this policy had fared during the pandemic. Not well, as it turned out.

"He's with us all day long, so we have less of that frustration of, 'Hey, let's hang out as a family - maybe it'd be better for you to read a book," Spiegel said. "We understand that for him to maintain that connectivity with his friends,

'Multiple Zoom calls are in no way addictive.
Neither are online tests.
Boring content could end up being a natural curb on screen time'

he really has to use his phone." The pandemic has changed the role of technology in his household, Spiegel admitted, though he still held out hope for a slightly better balance, with a little more reading and a little less phone.

Like many parents, technologists tend to develop particularly strong feelings about the role of tech in children's lives once they have their own. Unlike a lot of parents, they have the funds to put those feelings into practice and the confidence to believe they can do better than the status quo.

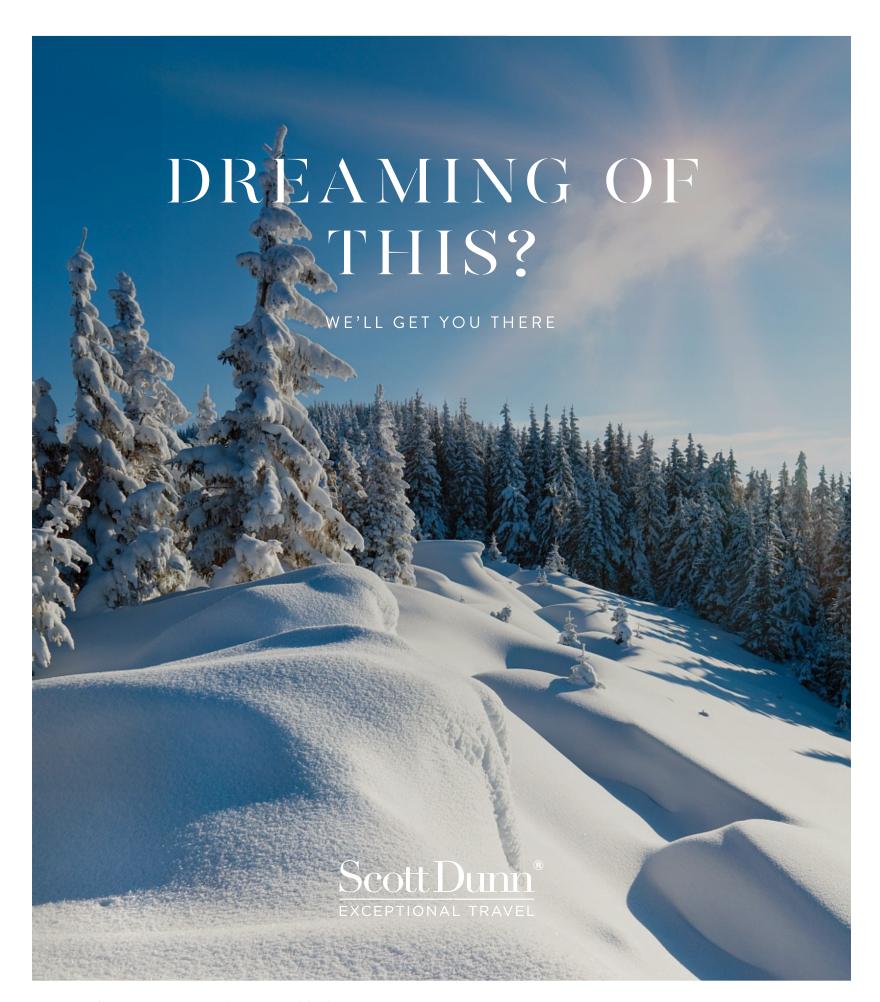
WeWork founder Adam Neumann and his wife Rebekah did more than set screen-time boundaries for their children they founded an entire Manhattan elementary school called WeGrow. Neither had a background in education but that did not stop them creating a curriculum that championed yoga, farm trips and entrepreneurialism. Rebekah was quoted as saying: "There's no reason why children in elementary schools can't be launching their own businesses." After WeWork's planned market listing dissolved into chaos, the school closed.

A more modest proposal to deal with the screen-heavy experiment in remote work and education we are all still adjusting to is to accept that this digital life is not always engaging. Multiple Zoom calls are in no way addictive. Neither are online tests. Boring content could end up being a natural curb on screen time.

There is also some good news for those worried for their children. A study on children aged six to 17 published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry found there was no noticeable detriment to a child's psychosocial functioning unless they were using electronic devices for more than five hours per day.

This sounds like bad news for me – even if I'm not a child aged six to 17. But I've accepted constant screens as the price to pay for seeing interesting content. The only thing I plan on turning off is my screen-time notifications.

Elaine Moore is the FT's deputy Lex editor



Dreaming of mountain views, powdery snow and fresh alpine air?

The Alps are calling and we're here to get you there. We know how much you're looking forward to hitting the slopes this winter. That's why when you book your holiday with Scott Dunn, we'll take care of every detail and provide flexibility for peace of mind.

ow far can common sense take us in the field of statistics? At first glance, not very. The discipline may be vital but it is also highly technical, and full of pitfalls and counterintuitions. Statistics can feel like numerical alchemy, incomprehensible to muggles – black magic, even. No wonder that, as I described last week, the most popular book on the topic, *How to Lie with Statistics*, is a warning about disinformation from start to finish.

This won't do. If we are willing to go with our brains rather than with our guts, any of us can think clearly about the world by using statistics. And since much of the world - from US electoral polling data to the spread of Sars-Cov-2 to the hope of economic recovery - can most reliably be perceived through a statistical lens, that is just as well.

A useful first step is to find out what exactly the numbers are measuring. Statisticians are sometimes dismissed as "bean counters", but most of the things in the world that we might want to count are more ambiguous than beans. For example: some studies suggest that playing violent video games causes violent behaviour. Before you leap to amplify or deny - that conclusion, ask yourself whether you understand what is being claimed. What is the definition of a violent video game? (Pac-Man devours sentient creatures, which sounds violent. But perhaps the researchers had something a little edgier in mind.)

To move to the question of real-world violence: every time there is a mass shooting in the US, we are reminded that nearly 40,000 people there are killed by guns each year. It is a shocking number – but few of these deaths occur during mass shootings, and more than half are suicides. The problem is vast and urgent, but it is not necessarily the problem that we assume.

Such questions suggest that the

subject of statistics is even more confusing than we thought. Perhaps this is true, but there is nothing particularly technical about the answers. These are questions about the world and the words we use to describe it. There is no jargon here. All we need is some curiosity about what lies behind the numbers. And if we have no curiosity, I am not sure there is a cure for that.

The second step is more fun: faced with a statistical claim, find a way to put it into context. Is it going up or down compared with last week, or last year, or a decade



TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST



Can you put a number on that?

'These are questions about the world and the words we use to describe it. There is no jargon here. All we need is some curiosity about what lies behind the numbers' ago? Is it big or small, compared with something more familiar?

Not all such attempts make sense. There is a long history, going back at least to a 1981 speech by President Reagan, of comparing the US national debt to a towering stack of dollar bills. The bigger the debt, the bigger the stack. This may help to create a sense of alarm but it doesn't do much for clarity.

In 2011, NPR's "Weekend Edition" tried to illustrate the US national debt by saying, "If you stack up 14.3 trillion dollar bills, the pile would stretch to the moon and back twice." That does not help. Indeed, it is triply unhelpful, since most of us lack an intuitive grasp either of how far away the moon is or of how many dollar bills there are to the yard, and even if we had both we would still be stuck with the question of whether \$14.3tn was a worryingly large debt or not.

More useful is to think of the debt as a sum per person. At the end of 2019, US federal debt was nearly \$23tn, which is about \$70,000 per US resident. I don't know whether that is more or less alarming than trying to measure it out in trips to the moon but it is certainly vastly more informative. Try the same trick with the UK health secretary Matt Hancock's summertime claim that the NHS could save £100m in five years if all overweight people lost five pounds. A few seconds with a search engine and a calculator will tell you that this works out as 30 pence per person in the UK per year.

Everyone should familiarise themselves with a few basic facts about the world. If you know the population of the country you live in, or that it is about 3,500 miles from London to New York, you can use these landmarks to orient yourself when encountering a statistic for the first time. When you meet a strange number, says Matt Parker, the author of *Humble Pi*, you can use one of these more familiar numbers to make an introduction so that you better understand the stranger. I love that way of putting it, not least because it suggests that every number is a potential friend rather than a traitor waiting to be exposed.

I'm all in favour of expertise, including statistical expertise. But in many cases it is neither necessary nor sufficient. There is a lot to be said instead for being curious, asking questions and stopping to think.

Tim Harford's new book is "How to Make the World Add Up"

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The number of people who work for the NHS in England, making it the country's biggest employer

ricia Foster was undergoing treatment for cancer when the coronavirus pandemic struck. As doctors and scientists raced to unravel the fearful mysteries of Covid-19, her radiotherapy continued unabated at the Christie, a renowned oncology centre in Manchester.

Like most Britons, Foster has relied on the country's taxpayer-funded NHS at big moments in her life: the birth of her children and the arrival 18 months ago of a grandson. But for much of her 59 years, she had scarcely given it a thought. Then came two searing reminders. First, her sister's life was saved "virtually in an afternoon" when she was rushed into surgery after a heart attack. Months later, Foster received her own cancer diagnosis. Thanks to NHS staff, she says, her prognosis is good.

Her fealty to the world's most famous and durable experiment in universal healthcare has been reaffirmed, the bonds stronger than ever. Foster, who lives in the prosperous Cheshire commuter enclave of Altrincham, says that at the Christie she saw "people from very poor parts of the north-west and people from very affluent parts... and nobody went ahead in the queue, nobody was left behind. Cancer is a huge leveller - anyone can get it. But now I feel not just 'anyone can get it', but everyone has got the same chance of being fixed."

Britain's response to coronavirus has been riddled with flaws - of hubris, ignorance and incompetence. Deep and short-sighted cuts to public-health budgets left England without the infrastructure to carry out mass testing and contact tracing. Successive UK administrations had planned for a flu pandemic and lacked sufficient personal protective equipment for a highly contagious respiratory virus. But one institution has emerged with its reputation enhanced: the country's National Health Service.

A potent blend of safety net, cultural trope and political football, the NHS and the values of fairness and equity it embodies have been crucial to the way Britons see their country and themselves for more than 70 years. Founded in 1948, in the teeth of intense opposition from much of the medical profession, which feared losing both autonomy and income, the NHS immediately uncovered a heartbreaking volume of unmet need. People who had delayed seeking treatment for conditions, sometimes for decades, finally dared to ask for help.

By one estimate, it now employs an astonishing one in 17 Britons; few families lack a relative or friend in the service. (The roster has included two of Foster's siblings.) Roberta Bivins, a historian of the NHS who teaches at the University of Warwick, suggests this close connection and, in many cases, economic reliance on the service have nurtured a national possessiveness about the healthcare system: "It's ours because we know the people who work in it. It's ours because we pay for it in our general taxation. It's ours because we depend on it absolutely."

When the film director Danny Boyle placed a parade of dancing nurses and sick children at the centre of his opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics - a moment when countries seek to distil their essence for an international audience - the rest of the world was baffled but Britons understood, and revelled in it. Indeed, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, the country at times seemed transformed into one giant, performative tribute. Windows in suburban streets blazed with "I love the NHS" rainbows and blow-up letters with the message "NHS Hero". Lots of countries clapped for healthcare workers. Britons alone clapped for a health system.

The story of Britain's fight against coronavirus is, then, also the story of a country's seven-decade love affair with its health service, and how politicians and health leaders weaponised that devotion to ensure the NHS was not overwhelmed at its moment of greatest peril. But the decisions taken in the name of that salvation have exposed the service's fragility and structural flaws as nothing has since its foundation. Now Britons, keyed up to a protective pitch, may have their loyalty to their beloved, but perennially overstretched, system tested as never before. Are politicians ready for the consequences of the tidal wave of emotion they have unleashed?

The first warning most Britons had of the toll Covid-19 would take on health services came in March in the form of TV footage from Lombardy in Italy, showing people breathing their last in horrifically makeshift conditions. Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents the nation's hospital leaders, says: "What we were seeing in Italy was a health service being overwhelmed to such an extent that people literally couldn't get any treatment whatsoever and were

lucky in some cases if they were able to be put up

in the gym down the road with a temporary camp

bed. The phrase used an awful lot was 'a war zone'." Health leaders had been receiving alarming reports of the disease's spread and lethality since the start of February. Stephen Powis, national medical director of NHS England, says the estimates he and his colleagues were hearing from expert committees pointed to "around 500,000 deaths over the course of the epidemic. The hospitalisation rates ranged from 2 per cent to 8 per cent. You don't need to be a modeller to... work out that that level of death and hospital admissions would overwhelm any health system in the world."

As one south London doctor told me: "We were just bracing for the hit... I was working alongside Italian doctors and they were in very close contact with their colleagues in Italy, so they were incredibly anxious, almost hysterical, because they were



THE NHS TOPS ALL **PUBLIC POLLS FOR BIG ISSUES FACING BRITAIN AND IF YOU LOSE SIGHT OF** THAT, THEN YOU **LOSE EVERYTHING** AS A POLITICIAN'

Jennifer Dixon, head of the **Health Foundation charity**



Clockwise from above Tricia Foster, who was being treated for cancer when the pandemic struck: a nurse working in a hospital in northern Italy is comforted by a colleague in March, when Italy's health service was under its greatest pressure: the Leave campaign bus in 2016 said Brexit would allow £350m a week to

seeing what was happening in Italy and they knew it was coming our way."

Any country and its leaders would have dreaded such a looming humanitarian disaster. But in the UK, the stakes were especially high because of Britons' unusually intense relationship with their health service. And as the government prepared to order Britain into lockdown in March, prime minister Boris Johnson and his advisers had good reason to understand how that love for the NHS could be deployed.

Four years ago, Johnson, then the insurgent leader of the anti-EU "Leave" faction, had sanctioned the message, devised under the aegis of his closest adviser Dominic Cummings, that a vote for Brexit could deliver an extra £350m a week for the NHS. Richard Sloggett, a former political adviser to Matt Hancock, the health secretary, says: "It is clearly a Cummings playbook, where you use the NHS in a way which drives behaviour. because it has got such strong public support and public affection for it."

It was scarcely surprising, then, that the government's appeal to the country to observe the new national lockdown was framed in terms of safeguarding the health service: "Stay at home; protect the NHS: save lives." The exhortation was instantly and stunningly effective, with supposedly individualistic Britons obeying the instruction more faithfully than ministers and health officials had

Coronavirus may have been a new threat, but this message was one the nation had been primed to receive for more than 70 years, suggests Bivins. As the American daughter of insecurely insured parents, she knows first-hand the fear of medical bills. Bivins says her adopted nation has been "inculcated to believe, through successive decades, that if people don't behave in a particular way the NHS will disappear or simply become impossible to fund and therefore we will be left often in the condition that poor people in the US are left.

"So that's the implicit comparison that gets made and this has really been a deliberate political strategy because the NHS is so evocative and so emotive for British people."

> f there is a degree of self-congratulation about the assumed superiority of the NHS to other systems, there is a price to be paid for the decision to fund a developed nation's health system almost entirely from its tax base. While the NHS often hymns the high

marks it scores in a periodic ranking of health systems by the Commonwealth Fund, it rates far higher on access and efficiency than it does on the outcomes of the care it provides.

A period of austerity that began in 2010 had led to sustained, historically low funding settlements that have only increased its fragility. Just weeks



17.9%

The proportion of total public spending on health in 2018-19, up from 7.7% in the 1950s

◀ before the pandemic began, the service had been enduring its customary winter trials, with thousands of patients forced to languish on trolleys for hours for lack of a bed.

A confluence of government failings, past and present, would have become concrete if the terrifying scenes of an overwhelmed health system seen in parts of Europe had materialised in the UK. "The NHS tops all public polls for big issues facing Britain and if you lose sight of that, then you lose everything as a politician," says Jennifer Dixon, a former NHS doctor who has been scrutinising health policy for 30 years and now heads the Health Foundation charity.

But the service's thin fiscal diet has left it well-accustomed to rising to emergencies, an attribute that was on full display in the earliest phase of the pandemic. While public health officials and ministers appeared slow to grasp the need to expand testing and contact tracing to halt the spreading contagion, the NHS showed a turn of speed markedly lacking elsewhere in the UK response. Within days it had completed an extraordinary deal to take over almost the entire private health sector; within weeks it had erected vast field-style hospitals – the key logistics role of the army not greatly emphasised as ministers and health leaders alike presented the "Nightingales", as they were christened, as a consummate achievement of an agile NHS.

Despite reforms set in train a decade ago that were designed to disperse power and localise decision-making, the service is still run with an iron grip from the top. David Hare, who as head of the Independent Healthcare Providers Network led negotiations with NHS officials, says: "We can argue whether that's the right or wrong thing, but one of the advantages of 'command and control' is that when you need to communicate rapid instructions through a system, the connective tissue is there to enable that to happen very, very quickly.

"The NHS is one of the best systems in the world for reacting to an emergency situation," he adds. "And the pace at which it moved was phenomenal. We did a very complex deal with NHS England in less than a week, which has stood the test of time."

At one level, this is a tale of triumph, of a health service that against the odds found beds for all who needed them, where clinicians huddled on video calls with colleagues, learning at warp speed how best to keep patients alive and disseminating that knowledge with a rapidity and generosity that only a universal public health system could.

But it also revealed a system with a severe shortage of beds, nurses and doctors, contributing to the decision to stop all non-emergency surgery and discharge anyone deemed medically fit, simply to ensure the UK health system was not overwhelmed when the pandemic struck. Martin Vernon, a geriatrician and formerly a senior official in charge of care for older people at NHS England, says minis-

ters and health leaders delivered a "stylised, very narrow-field view of 'protection'", which in effect defined "the health service as 'the hospital'". Everything – hospital care, general practice, outpatient appointments – was "skewed into one particular narrow field of medicine, namely respiratory support during Covid".

Morning after morning, living the hermetically

sealed existence of lockdown, I would sit and watch grieving relatives and survivors alike tell their stories on national television. And each at some point was invited to pay obeisance to the staff - the NHS staff - who had tended to them. The national mood found expression in a genial centenarian, second world war veteran Tom Moore, who raised £32m for NHS charities after walking 100 laps of his garden and, in a wonderful moment of pandemic theatre, was knighted by the Queen (at an appropriate social distance) for his efforts. This feat, it was clearly understood, was motivated by one thing and one thing only: his gratitude to the health service for the care it had given over his long life.

But as staff struggled with a devastating lack of PPE and testing, this myth-making sometimes felt dissonant. One consultant described to me the "hellish, hellish" early weeks of the crisis, when two-thirds of the patients in the 18-bed psychiatric ward he oversaw – as well as himself and three junior doctors – came down with the virus. "At one point, for an entire hospital of hundreds of patients, we had six testing swabs and the guidelines were you need to test two or three times to rule out Covid-19... For the whole of March we had a really catastrophic shortage," he says.

Stephanie Snow, a University of Manchester academic who is leading an oral history project recording staff and patients' memories of the NHS since its foundation in 1948, says that initially staff had experienced the weekly "clap for carers" as "a very positive thing and it seemed very supportive".

"But as time went on... some of the testimonies that we've had from NHS staff showed they were less keen on that. One said, 'If you create a narrative about NHS staff being heroes, then does that mean you're creating a narrative like in a film when it's OK for the hero to die as part of the greater good?"

here have long been contradictory aspects to Britons' love for their health service. When asked whether they are prepared to pay more tax to fund it, most agree. But there is little consensus about what form this should take. Nor is it clear that they would support tax rises of the magnitude required to bridge the gap in expenditure. Even amid the swell of pro-NHS sentiment, Nigel Edwards of the Nuffield Trust think-tank says he is "not a great believer in the idea that we've had a seismic shift in public opinion".



'IT'S OURS BECAUSE WE KNOW THE PEOPLE WHO WORK IN IT. IT'S OURS BECAUSE WE DEPEND ON IT ABSOLUTELY'

NHS historian Roberta Bivins





Clockwise from above: historian Roberta Bivins; nurses at a Liverpool hospital embrace as they celebrate the NHS's efforts in April; foreign secretary Dominic Raab and chancellor Rishi Sunak join in the 'clap for carers' in London in April People have "always been quite willing to hold two completely incompatible beliefs at once", wanting more money for the NHS but voting against political parties that propose tax rises, he suggests.

Austerity was officially declared at an end by the previous Conservative administration in 2018. Yet the consequences of one of the developed world's most aggressive exercises in deficit reduction have rarely reverberated so loudly as in recent months.

Nowhere was this truer than in the care-home sector. Even during the years of attrition, the core healthcare budget received above-inflation increases, although population growth and the demands of an ageing society meant that funding remained broadly flat. By contrast, local government, which includes social care, did not receive even paper protection, opening up a gap between resources and demand which the Health Foundation forecasts will have risen to between £2.1bn and £12.2bn by 2023/24. Vernon says coronavirus has shone "a bright light on the underbelly of the health and social-care system [in which] the most vulnerable people in society are actually in receipt of the least comprehensive care".

The structure of social care is also a problem. Unlike the NHS, which offers free-at-the-point-of-use care to all, social care is means-tested and largely delivered by a fragmented network of private providers, for which, as became brutally apparent during the Covid-19 crisis, neither health leaders nor ministers have ever taken full responsibility.

Michael Macdonnell, a former senior executive at NHS England, describes social care as "strikingly divorced from the health system. It was very foreseeable older people were going to suffer very badly [during the crisis] yet nothing was done, partly because nobody thought it was their job to do it."

The dependence of many care homes on the NHS for their business created a dynamic in which operators felt powerless to refuse to take patients, even though the shortage of testing kits meant they were often flying blind on their Covid-19 status. One carehome operator told me: "If the NHS says, 'You will take this person' and we have not got a clue what the person's Covid status is, I would say 95 per cent of those homes took these residents because they didn't want to rub the NHS up the wrong way."

Chris Hopson, chief of NHS Providers, strongly denies that NHS trusts systematically discharged patients they knew or suspected had Covid-19 into care homes. "That implies there was a deliberate piece of malfeasance on behalf of the NHS, which is just not true," he says. But he acknowledges that the long-standing weaknesses of social care – including its lack of scale or national heft – were revealed during the crisis. "We've tried to deal with this pandemic the best way we could and the care sector has done the same; it's just that it's massively suffered from those huge structural disadvantages and that is a scandal, but that is not the NHS's fault."

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4.5m

The number of patients on the waiting list for NHS consultant-led care in March 2020, pre-pandemic

s autumn sets in, ahead of what could be a brutal Covid-19 winter for the NHS, the rainbows are gone. Now the windows in my neighbourhood display posters with a harder-edged message: "This home supports a pay rise for NHS heroes." Tricia Foster agrees. "At a point in time when everyone's concern is about a pandemic, it seems as if the right place to spend money has to be in the NHS. It is a huge employer as well," she says. But she wants to see some of this money spent on top-flight managers, noting that the health service is not always as "streamlined" as it could be.

Britons' enthusiasm for protecting their NHS has assumed a darker aspect as it becomes clear that many of those who stayed away to spare staff have delayed seeking treatment for serious conditions. One cancer expert told me that the toll from people presenting late with the disease would eventually exceed that of Covid-19 itself.

A government likely to be judged harshly in the eventual public inquiry for manifold failures in the UK's response has a vested interest in framing victory narrowly, emphasising its role in ensuring that no Covid-19 patient who needed a hospital bed was denied one during the crisis. Richard Sloggett, now head of health for think-tank Policy Exchange, says: "They want to be primarily judged on the NHS not being overwhelmed, not on some of these other issues which have gone far more awry and where they were underprepared."

Ministers may have difficulty maintaining that narrative, however, as the NHS struggles to make up the ground lost during the pandemic, while depleted staff brace themselves for a possible second wave. Before coronavirus, the service was missing its waiting-time targets by record margins. The National Audit Office had estimated that by March of this year waiting lists for treatment would be 400,000 higher than they had been two years earlier. Vernon points out that this equates to "4.5 million people waiting by March 2020 for various things to be done in NHS consultant-led care... and then the pandemic hits on top of that."

The fragilities that affected the NHS's capacity to respond to coronavirus have also left it in perilous shape to deal with its aftermath. Hospitals, starved for years of capital expenditure – some still occupying buildings that pre-date the service's very foundation – must now divide those antiquated premises into separate Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 treatment areas. If the NHS is to continue to offer the quality and volume of care it has done for the past decade, warns Vernon, "we have somehow got to find a way of operating a health service not just at its previous level of capacity but at substantially more than that."

This may mean recapturing a bit more of the spirit and structure of the service in 1948, by diminishing the dominance of hospitals and strengthening the care people receive in their own communities. Vernon adds: "[NHS founding father] Nye Bevan's conception was very much around providing a core, localised health offer to people that dealt with things like basic access to a doctor, dental care, eyecare, spectacles and cheaper access to medicines."

Back then, "there wasn't a culture in the country of using hospitals in that way that we've seen in recent years. The culture was very much your local doctor." Born less than a decade after the NHS was established, I remember this GP-centric era well. Our family doctor, silver-haired and avuncular, was a regular fixture in my life. He had even delivered me in a local nursing home, then driven to my parents' house after midnight to convey the tidings to my father, whose diary entry for the day records that he and the doctor "both drank enormous whiskies".

As always in the NHS, money is going to be a problem. Ageing populations and policy choices have reshaped the UK welfare state over the past 60 years or so. Health is now the largest single item of government expenditure and has swallowed up a steadily increasing portion of all public spending. Calculations by the Institute for Fiscal Studies before last December's general election show health's share increased from 7.7 per cent of spending in the mid-1950s to 17.9 per cent in 2018-19. Any significant increase for health would put the squeeze on already hard-pressed areas, such as education, justice and local government.

The expansion of the state in recent months, to shore up jobs and the economy, has left little room for additional investment in the NHS, suggests Edwards from the Nuffield Trust. Yet the risk for the government is that the public - pumped up with NHS worship for the past six months - will demand more than it is prepared, or able, to provide.

Edwards says the higher cost of running a Covid-compliant health system means "we are going to be paying what we are paying but getting significantly less than we were". He does not believe ministers have yet grasped just how devastating and lasting a hit to NHS productivity the pandemic has delivered: "I get the strong impression they have been in a bit of denial about it."

The NHS's leaders believe the crisis has made the case even more strongly for changes that they wanted to implement before the pandemic struck. Powis points out that the government won the last general election on a manifesto commitment to big increases in nurses and GP appointments. "In general, I think what Covid has taught us is that most of the things that we wanted to do prior to Covid were exactly the things that we need to do, and we just need to do them harder and faster and Covid has shone a light on that."

WE HAVE TO FIND A WAY OF OPERATING A HEALTH SERVICE NOT JUST AT ITS PREVIOUS LEVEL OF CAPACITY BUT AT SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN THAT

Martin Vernon, geriatrician







PROTECT THE NHS

Clockwise from above:
Boris Johnson at a
podium with its NHS
message at a Downing
Street press conference
on March 20 this year;
the opening ceremony
of the 2012 Olympics
celebrated the health
service's role in British
life; war veteran Tom
Moore, who was
knighted for raising
millions for the NHS

UK governments often want to leave their mark on the NHS. Already there are mutterings in Westminster about whether its operational independence should be curtailed and ministerial control strengthened.

But even as the blame game gathers pace, little direct criticism has so far accrued to the service

But even as the blame game gathers pace, little direct criticism has so far accrued to the service and its chief executive Simon Stevens, who is known as a skilled operator in the Westminster jungle. Not often seen publicly at the height of the pandemic, Stevens appeared only once at the daily Downing Street briefings. Instead, he became the face of the Nightingales, closely identified with the rescue mission that ensured the NHS never ran out of beds.

He was not involved in some of the more contentious aspects of the government response, such as testing, contact tracing and the supply of PPE. One NHS figure said: "I think it was evident from the outset that this was going to be a shambolic response and I think he's done quite well to emerge unscathed and focus on the NHS's priorities. NHS England is a commissioning organisation – it wasn't his job to deliver some of this stuff in the way that it was for Public Health England [the public health agency] or the health department, and I think he's quite rightly stayed out of it."

Sloggett adds: "The Department of Health is where the responsibility for pandemic response ultimately sits, so Simon's not as in the firing line as he would be, for example, on performance targets, where clearly the operational power sits with him to deliver improvements."

Jennifer Dixon argues that, while she cannot predict how long the "aura" around the NHS will last, for now the service is "pretty untouchable in many respects. Governments often justify major reform off some kind of narrative of disaster or failure... and I just don't think that narrative can wash for some time, given what's happened."

The bond between Britons and their health service has only tightened over the past six months – and, even when the pandemic fades, its newly enhanced place in the public imagination is something that the government will have to reckon with for years to come. Looking back to that first Thursday when people clapped for the NHS, Dixon recalls: "I have to say I found myself being very emotional in clapping... and I surprised myself because I'm pretty hard-bitten.

"I think what people were clapping for - it was the NHS, of course it was - but I think they were clapping with relief that something somewhere would hold you if everything else failed. Other kinds of welfare provision have all sorts of provisos and small print but the NHS is just there, no matter what. It's social protection writ large."

Sarah Neville is the FT's global pharmaceuticals editor







My virtual Trump diner

Chatting to old pals back home in Wisconsin is how Neil Munshi takes the political temperature in the US. But, he wonders, has the media taken its infatuation with 'real American' voters too far?

After parties in high school, we'd sometimes

end up at a 24-hour diner in a strip mall a couple of miles from my house. For a few bucks, you could get the kind of burger Shake Shack has since made fashionable, a Coke and fries or a cup of neon-yellow chicken soup. You could smoke inside. It was fantastic. Off-duty cops would filter in. Maybe second-shifters from the Briggs & Stratton engine plant. Sundry weirdos of the sleepy Midwestern night.

It's been nearly 20 years since I've been to that diner in suburban Wisconsin. But it is exactly the kind of joint I could imagine a correspondent from one of the national dailies visiting to get a sense of "real America" - whatever that means - in the run-up to the presidential election on November 3. This "Trump diner" story, and the media's obsession with the inevitably white, allegedly salt-of-the-earth types who populate those institutions, has become a running gag.

Every national newspaper and many foreign ones have run these stories. The worst of them go along these lines: Joe Sixpack, a furloughed foreman at a factory that makes American flags for coal miners, is seated in a booth at the Heartland Café in Rustoleum, Ohio. He supported Donald Trump in 2016 and continues to do so today. He could do without the tweets, but he likes that the president "tells it like it is". So do his friends, each of whom is wearing a shirt with a name tag, a Confederate flag and/or an eagle on it. The reporter would like you to know that these people are not racist but then immediately quotes one of them saying something *pretty* racist.

For some, these Trump diner pieces are not just annoying but evidence of a deeply ingrained institutional bias that prioritises white voters over everyone else and erases from the working class the black, Latino and Asian people who make up over 40 per cent of it. They reveal exactly who the media considers "regular Americans". For those who rate themselves realists, these are the folks who decided the last election and therefore deserve our attention.

I now live in Nigeria, but like many Americans, I am obsessed with the election. And even as the national conversation has turned to race this summer, it has been impossible to avoid Trump diners. Earlier in September, there was a New York Times piece from one in Omaha, and a variation on the theme in the Washington Post focused on bagel shops not far from my childhood home, as unrest raged in Kenosha 50 miles down the highway, sparked by the police shooting of Jacob Blake there.

At 17, I'd never have thought to solicit the opinions of the factory workers or weirdos or cops at the diner (not least because of the faint whiff of marijuana that clung to my clothes). But that is not why this genre bothers me. I grew up brown on the white side of the greater Milwaukee area, one of the most segregated metropolitan regions in the country. These diner pieces are not universally invalid. Some are well done. And collectively they do portray parts of a Midwest that I recognise from my lily-white hometown (97 per cent white during my childhood). But they often paint these places as representative of a part of the country that also includes majority-minority cities like Milwaukee and Chicago.

The chief lesson the media seem to have taken from 2016's surprise US election result was that we had missed it because we did not cover the country's largest demographic group – non-college whites – enough. In the four years since, we have paid penance by overcorrecting.

This seems slightly absurd given that white people have never actually been absent from the national conversation. What are we supposed to be learning here? Must we treat the country's dominant group like some obscure, poorly understood tribe? Have white people not decided every election in American history?

I'm somewhat sympathetic to the media argument for focusing on these voters.

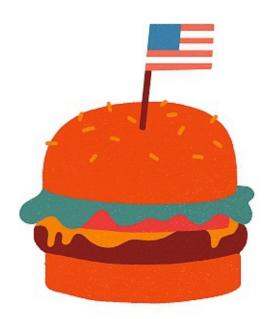
After all, Trump eked out the 2016 election in ▶



Illustrations by Peter Phobia

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'We tend not to get an equivalent – or even proportional – amount of coverage on what is driving black voters or compelling them to stay home' ◆ Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin by driving up votes among non-college whites.

But what we also need are "diner pieces" that focus on the other, far less covered group that could genuinely alter the outcome this year. Reporters covering 2020 should be thinking about how around 20,000 black or brown votes in Milwaukee, 10,000 in Detroit and 40,000 in Philadelphia would have flipped 2016.

Trump won Wisconsin by fewer than 23,000 votes back then. But 93,000 fewer black voters - the most consistent Democratic-voting bloc - in the Milwaukee metropolitan area cast ballots compared with 2012. What will happen this year?

Black non-voters have "enormous power to reshape politics", as Karthik Balasubramanian, an assistant professor of information systems at Howard University who worked on Barack Obama's campaigns, put it in a New York Times op-ed earlier this year. But we tend not to get an equivalent - or even proportional - amount of coverage on what is driving black voters (or compelling them to stay home). Some balance would seem to be in order.

At first blush, the events of the past few months offered the perfect opportunity to expand the scope of coverage. Instead, the national conversation on race brought on by the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis became – in the wake of the Kenosha unrest – a conversation about white voters.

The conventional wisdom is fairly straightforward: "riots" inevitably redound to the benefit of "law and order" Republicans, especially those making nakedly racist plays for white grievance votes. The flood of punditry pushing the narrative that the events in Kenosha spelled Joe Biden's doom was incessant. In the end, the armchair commentary seems little more than projection. The race remains stable. Joe Biden is up 7 per cent in the latest FiveThirtyEight polling average – down 2.2 percentage points from the day a policeman shot Blake. In Wisconsin, Biden's

lead has risen from 4.6 per cent to 6.8 per cent in the RealClearPolitics polling average over that period.

Demographics help explain why the media ignores black voters in particular and minorities more generally – 77 per cent of US newsroom employees are non-Hispanic whites, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center study. The British media (including the FT) fare much worse – 94 per cent are white and 0.2 per cent black, according to a 2016 City University survey.

But demographics do not excuse how easy it would be to remedy the immediate coverage imbalance, as opposed to the deeper institutional one that must be addressed. There are gathering places in black and brown neighbourhoods too – barbershops and community centres and, yes, diners. There are also, even in the deeply segregated cities of the Midwest, restaurants where people of all races eat together. The point is that these people are findable. These pieces are doable. And the presidential votes of the customers at a greasy spoon in Motown will be just as consequential in this election as those in Macomb County.

I am a brown first-generation American who married a European and has spent most of the past 15 years living in New York or abroad as a journalist. Objective reporting aside, my politics are not hard to noodle out. The friends and acquaintances I have made in the 20 years since I left home have been, shall we say, simpatico. But I grew up in a very white town in the heart of Republican Wisconsin.

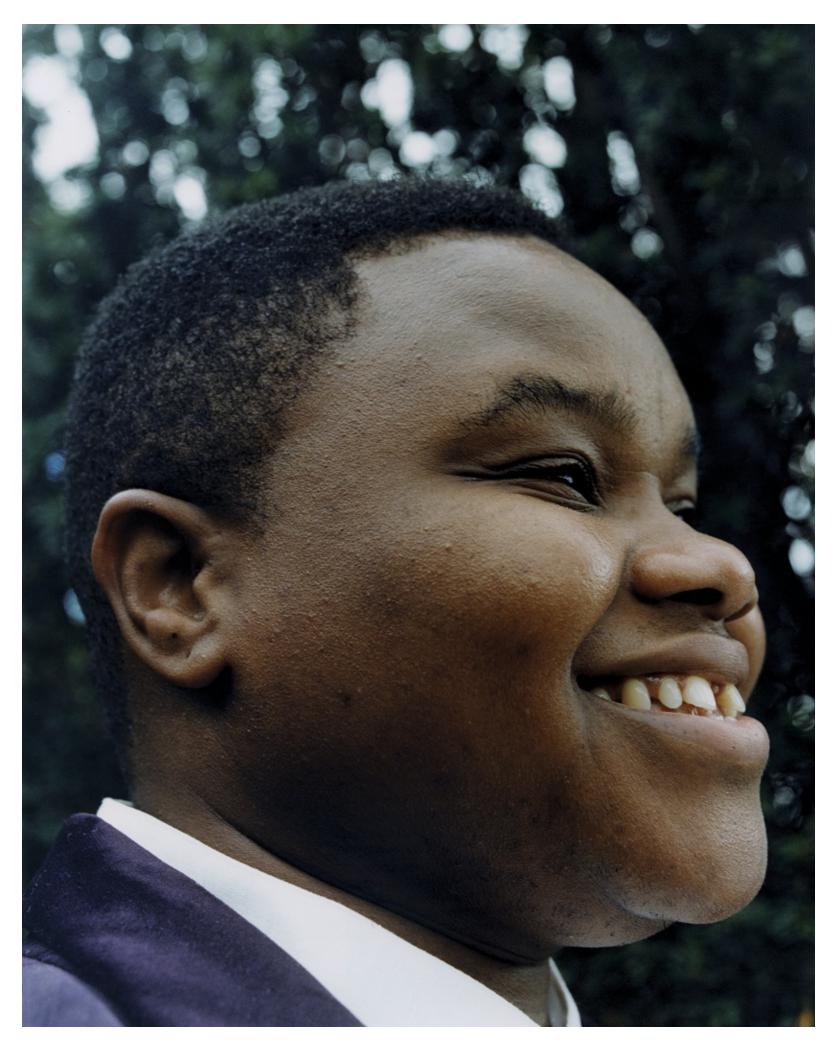
For the past four years, half of which I have lived on the other side of the world, I have turned to my oldest friends in a few WhatsApp groups - mostly dedicated to inside jokes, Marvel movies and *Seinfeld* references - to take the temperature of politics in what is shaping up to be one of the most important states in this election.

I am fully aware of the irony of criticising my colleagues in the media for focusing on these voters when this article - in the media - is ▶

Continued to page 41







THE JOY OF FILM

From music videos to full-length features, writer and producer Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor is part of a new generation of talented young black film-makers in Britain. She talks to *Caitlin Quinlan* about telling stories that the mainstream has long ignored. Portrait by *Tino Chiwariro*

oy Gharoro-Akpojotor thinks big. Over the course of our discussion, the words "expand", "space" and "open" saturate her ideas about the needs of the film landscape she's come to know in the UK as a writer and producer. Her film-making philosophy places an urgent focus on disrupting the exclusive and narrow systems that have made up the industry for decades. "To see more black work, more queer work, more female work on screen" are her ambitions.

"When you come from a place where you've had to hustle, you've had to make everything happen for yourself, and someone tells you 'no', it's not a no. It just means they have no idea how to do it, or it's not for them," she says, speaking over the phone. "People have a particular way they want to do things and I still find at times I'm told things have to be done a certain way. But why can't we do them the other way?"

Blue Story, produced by Gharoro-Akpojotor and written and directed by rapper and music producer Rapman, is a good example of this other way. The film chronicles the lives of young black teenagers caught up in gang violence between warring postcodes in south London. It initially faced a temporary ban by some cinema chains, following at least one

violent incident outside a screening. Ultimately, though, its striking box office success revealed just how starved cinema audiences have been in the UK for diverse content.

"People went to go and see the film several times in the cinema and that's just because they haven't seen themselves on screen before," says Gharoro-Akpojotor. Blue Story is a powerful, deeply felt piece of work that humanises the kinds of young men who are largely demonised in the media for their gang affiliation, offering to engage with their lives in thoughtful and balanced ways. The film spoke to a specific audience but it was a hit across demographics. "I don't think anyone expected white guys in their fifties to like the film," she says. "But they did."

Born in Nigeria, Gharoro-Akpojotor came to the UK when she was 16. Her interest in film was piqued during her A-levels, thanks in part to a discounted cinema ticket scheme, and she applied to the film studies course at Queen Mary University of London, where her discovery of queer cinema and the French New Wave expanded her tastes.

At the time, she says, she "just knew films happened, but not how they happened at all". Reading *A Killer Life*, an account by American producer Christine Vachon of

her career in Hollywood, helped Gharoro-Akpojotor understand what producing really is. "On a practical level, you raise money, you find crew, you find the cast," she says. "But what else is there to it?" Vachon's book described the merits of working on art that carries personal resonance and that can change perspectives.

"I look at producing and I see the beauty of storytelling in all departments," Gharoro-Akpojotor says. "The idea that all of us have come together to create a vision and to tell a story fascinates me every single time." She sees her role on set as the "enabler", the person who understands a director's aims and brings them to fruition.

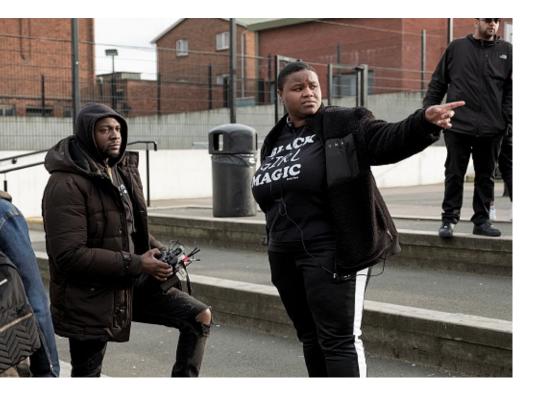
Her interest in producing led her to work on music videos and short films, learning the ropes before feature film opportunities arrived. 2016 was a breakthrough year: filmmaker Joseph A Adesunloye's debut feature White Colour Black, which she produced, was selected for the London Film Festival and she joined the British Film Institute's LGBT+ mentorship programme, guided by Ben Roberts, who is now the BFI's chief executive. Last year, Gharoro-Akpojotor was nominated as Breakthrough Producer at the British Independent Film Awards for ▶

'I was struggling to find films about myself, where I could see black women or gay women on screen, so I figured I would start producing so I could see that representation'

Producer and writer Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor

FT.COM/SKY ARTS SEPTEMBER 19/20 2020





'You're telling me there are no black first assistant directors in the entire world? If you don't know where to look, find somebody else who does'









Top (left to right): Gharoro-Akpojotor on the set of 'Blue Story' with writer-director Rapman; a still from the film. Above (from top): 'Haircut', 2018; 'The Arrival', 2019; 'White Colour Black', 2016 **◆** *Blue Story*, which grossed £4.4m in its first two months.

Her producing aims have always been spurred on by a desire for greater inclusion. "I had this short film I wanted to make but I didn't know how I could make it because it was about a queer couple and I didn't know any lesbian film-makers," she says. "I was struggling to find films about myself, where I could see black women or gay women on screen, so I figured I would start producing so I could see that representation."

A report on race and ethnicity in the UK film industry conducted by researchers at the London School of Economics this year concluded that "black and ethnic minority groups face tremendous levels of exclusion from the film industry", and that while gender representation has improved, the same cannot be said for race. Film productions, which have to meet diversity criteria to receive BFI funding, were "over twice as likely to represent gender difference rather than race/ethnicity".

These issues are not just apparent in front of the camera. "People have pushed for on-screen representation but still the crews are very white or very male," Gharoro-Akpojotor says. "You're always told, 'We couldn't find anyone.' But it's about giving people chances and trusting people. You're telling me there are no black

first assistant directors in the entire world? If you don't know where to look, find somebody else who does."

Gharoro-Akpojotor is an engaged and accommodating producer, aiming to "create an atmosphere where everyone feels seen, heard and emotionally present", she says. Eva Yates, a commissioner at BBC Films, reiterates this. "That's Joy," she says. "She kicks all the doors open for others to follow through."

So what makes the UK an attractive place to make films, especially when the US seems to have more opportunities for black creatives? Gharoro-Akpojotor acknowledges that "the States are way ahead of us with the content they're making and the people behind it", but says that she sees change blossoming in the UK.

"Over here, I feel like we're starting our own mini-revolution where suddenly there is a push for more inclusive voices to appear and to be seen and heard," she says, citing Fiona Lamptey, a co-producer on the BBC's recent Windrush drama Sitting in Limbo, and whose interest in creating black sci-fi inspires Gharoro-Akpojotor. "The stories have always been there but I think we're at a point where people are finally listening and deciding to showcase those stories."

She is eager to praise her contemporaries, citing directors

Shola Amoo (*The Last Tree*), Jenn Nkiru (Beyoncé's *Black Is King*) and Koby Adom (*Noughts and Crosses*), and credits another black female producer, Yvonne Isimeme Ibazebo (*Top Boy*), as "somebody who paved the way for a lot of us to be here".

The likelihood of change in the industry is greater on screen than behind the scenes, Gharoro-Akpojotor believes. "The practical side of it is that it equates to money on screen, but change elsewhere will take more time," she says. "We have so many diversity schemes but we just need more people to come into the industry, to know that there are job opportunities for them."

The next few years will be busy for Gharoro-Akpojotor, now the recipient of a BFI Vision Award that will help to fund new projects. As well as producing work with a roster of black talent including Adom, Matthew Jacobs Morgan, Annetta Laufer and Ronke Adekoluejo, she is writing and directing a debut feature of her own, putting herself in the spotlight for once.

"I want to enable a lot of young black queer girls or those who are female-identifying, who don't know if they can be in this space, to believe they can do this because someone who looks like them is doing it."

More on film on page 35

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HOW GALLERIES ARE FACING THE FUTURE

The Covid-19 crisis is accelerating the art market's shift from expensive showrooms and glitzy fairs to online alternatives and more intimate spaces, writes *Georgina Adam*

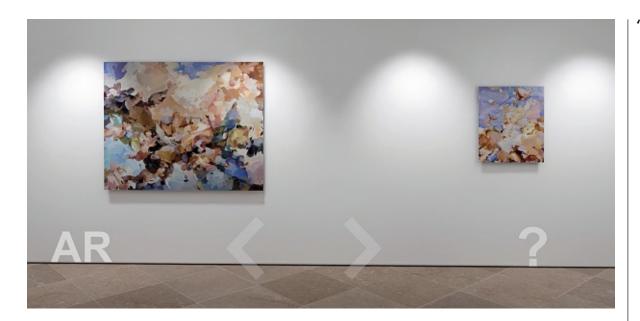


here has been no shortage of gloom for London's commercial art galleries of late: closed for months by Covid-19, deprived of the international art fairs where they do a significant portion of their business and still facing the uncertainty of Brexit. UK galleries expect a 79 per cent drop in revenue this year, according to an Art Newspaper survey from April.

But now that the London art trade is beginning to peek out of its cave, albeit with many galleries opening by appointment only, it is considering what the future may look like and how it can adapt to a new normal. What we're likely to see is not so much a radical break, despite Covid-19, as the acceleration of trends the city's art market has been experiencing for several years.

The most natural change in an era when human interaction is suspect is for galleries to bolster their digital presence; big players like Thaddaeus Ropac are reinforcing their investment in state-of-theart technology to enable virtual visits - for example, a walk-through of the Daniel Richter show in its Salzburg gallery. Using augmented and virtual reality, a company such as Vortic can give a viewer a 3D tour of a gallery show or let them see what an artwork - even a sculpture - looks like in their home. On Vortic, a Grayson Perry pot, for example, can be rotated and turned up and down - just as a collector might do when holding it.

For the digital strategist Süreyya Wille, tip-top image quality is essential: "Collectors want to see a really good scan of the piece. This is even more important to them than visiting the gallery virtually." She was already working with White



'Now that people can't travel, there will be much more emphasis on local communities, far from the craziness of the ever-expanding market we knew'

Rachel Lehmann, Lehmann Maupin

Cube before the crisis and says that, since Covid-19 struck, other clients have been looking to move all their programming online for this year.

Some galleries have been changing their footprint, abandoning expensive street-level locations for an upper floor. Even before Covid-19, footfall at art galleries was plummeting, mainly because art fairs offered a one-stop shop, the opportunity to see many dealers in a single visit.

According to Emily Walsh of the Fine Art Society, which gave up its grand New Bond Street building in 2018 for three storeys on less expensive Carnaby Street, "There was a two-year gap after we left, which gave us time to reflect on our model - we didn't want a full-on shop. We wanted something smaller and more sustainable."

While landlords may have become a bit more understanding of late - the Fine Art Society had five months rent-free - it seems unlikely that many galleries will return to the old model. In Mayfair, notably, they are in competition with the fashion industry, which, though also hit, has deeper pockets and needs the plate-glass window presence.

Shared buildings are another way to go. These are different from a single building housing multiple galleries - such as the Pedder in Hong Kong - offering instead exhibition rooms for temporary hire, along with offices and other facilities.

New York gallery Lehmann Maupin is opening next month in Cromwell Place, a new exhibition and working space in South Kensington (disclosure: Iam chair of the membership committee, which vets applicants). Rachel Lehmann says the gallery wanted a London





From top: Flora Yukhnovich's 'Barcarole' at the Victoria Miro gallery in Venice, shown online via Vortic; Katherine Bernhardt and José Luis Vargas in 'Voodoo Mayo Ketchup' at Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate; an online walk-through of the Daniel Richter show at Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg

Facing page: Cromwell Place exhibition and working space, opening next month

presence and "a more intimate space for our artists, where we can hold talks, performances". These plans are particularly fitting for the post-coronavirus era: "We think that now that people can't travel, there will be much more emphasis on local communities, far from the craziness of the ever-expanding market we knew before," she says.

A shift to a smaller centre may be another solution. Last year, Carl Freedman Gallery moved to Margate, a couple of hours' drive from London, along with its associated business, Counter Editions, which sells prints of works by the gallery's artists and others. Director Robert Diament says the prints business had a Covid-19 dividend during lockdown, "as people wanted editions to use as backdrops to their Zoom meetings".

"I've definitely noticed an increase in people looking to move out of London," Diament says. "I recently toured three visitors looking to relocate here, including a London gallery director. I think Covid has encouraged people to re-evaluate what they really want from life."

Another art dealer tells me: "I think there will be companies going under, particularly the smaller galleries." But despite such doom-mongering, some dealers are still backing London, albeit with less largesse than before. In Soho, Niru Ratnam planned to open in a space in April this year. "Then Covid intervened, but we decided to go ahead and opened in July," he says. "We have a very lean model, and with no fairs, no expensive parties, so our costs are low. We are going back to the old model of talking to people and artists."





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NAMYOUNG A

WHERE NOW FOR BRITISH FILM?

DANNY LEIGH



oho is still quiet. Eternal home of the British film industry, the central London private members' clubs and poky top-floor offices in which business is done remain largely mothballed. The streets, once full of rakish life, are hushed. The new landscape of glassy developments is in limbo.

Film in Britain has more silence ahead. In the wake of the pandemic, film-makers face investors abandoning ship. Putting money into the sector is a dizzying risk at the best of times, and how far we are from those. Look ahead and the skies darken horribly. Yet squint further and another future might be taking shape.

For a sense of where British film goes next, you have to acknowledge where it was until recently. "Mixed fortunes" barely covers it. In July 2019, Netflix signed a deal to make much more of its content at the fabled Shepperton Studios, south-west of London. Two months later, Disney announced a similar arrangement at nearby Pinewood. For British film crews, craftspeople and technicians, steady employment beckoned, and who could argue with that?

The downside was both practical and symbolic. Now even finding a crewwould be murderous for British

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film-makers outside mega-studio systems who had already spent years having their prospects squeezed - budgets vanishing, cinemas uninterested, awards always in the same hands.

Last year, I bumped into an industry veteran, now in his sixties. He talked me through his projects - dinner-party-ish literary adaptations, biopics of 1970s rock stars. He remarked on how strange it was, making movies exclusively for people his age. Then again, he said, they were the only people who watched British films.

It was short-termist even before the collapse of a business model built on over-sixties sharing indoor spaces. British movies, like everything else, needed fresh blood. Film-makers had to be inspired to pick up cameras, new audiences seduced by 90-minute stories.

The solution arrived on cue, whether the industry noticed or not. In between the news about Pinewood and coronavirus, British film produced a signpost to the future. Street drama *Blue Story*, directed by Rapman, who entered the industry with vastly popular YouTube serials, became a huge box-office hit.

That this audience existed was a revelation - young, fervent, hungry

'British movies, like everything else, needed fresh blood. Film-makers had to be inspired to pick up cameras, new audiences seduced by 90-minute stories'

for stories reflecting their lives. The same democratic urge has since fuelled *Rocks*, a crowd-pleaser set among young London women, built on the narrative ideas of the non-professional cast.

Both movies make a Darwinian point. The film that finds no room for a generation that grew up with camera phones, YouTube et al is easily ignored. Luckily, if the remedy is already apparent, so too are a wave of compelling new filmmakers, among them all manner of backstories, most with a digitalnative savvy about other platforms.

At 15, fast-rising short-film director Charlotte Regan (*Standby*, *Little Monster*) was having reportage photography of the 2011 London riots printed in British papers.

For award-winning documentary-maker Charlie Shackleton,

after seeing TikTok claim the minds of children everywhere, the obvious next step was to use it himself, posting his experiments online and folding the app into new work (a video essay called *Criticism in the Age of TikTok*). There is no lack of gifted, adventurous British talent.

And should they now have to build careers without private financiers, well, for many that is nothing new. Some of the slack will be picked up by public funding some by the ingenuity of a Rapman, using YouTube to grow a fanbase.

What existential risk exists for British film will be among the old guard. So far, the sternest pressure is being felt by cinemas. British filmmakers could be forgiven limited sympathy for chains that never supported their movies and bet the future on faux-leather seats and hiked-up prices. Now, with every customer precious, what better time for multiplexes to change their ways? If the future of UK film will be defined by absences - of heavyweight investors and takers for premium seats - the result of both should be a colour burst of smaller, bolder British movies filling the vacant big screens.

If not, film-makers will simply go where there are audiences. The divide between screens dissolved years ago. This much is old news. Had cinemas been open all year, the British film event of 2020 would still be *Small Axe*, Steve McQueen's imminent portrait of London's West Indian community, made to air on television.

Either way, more upheaval beckons. At the commercial top end of the industry, creative processes that once stretched to checking the availability of Eddie Redmayne may no longer be enough. And in distributing public funds, decision-makers who once saw themselves mostly as diffusers of their own taste will find the brief updated. Now, they will have to look out for the next *Blue Story*, make sure that scant resources are equitably issued, that they have quick feet and an open mind.

None of this is the end of the world. For British film, the passing of one era should mean a brighter one beginning - de-gentrified, democratised, alive.

Danny Leigh is the FT's film critic

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Slung Low's 'Flood', commissioned for Hull City of Culture 2017, was performed by a professional cast alongside 100 local volunteers

THE NEXT ACT

Delivering food, staffing phone lines, making scrubs: theatres have been forced to close during the pandemic, but many have taken a lead role in their communities. Could this be the start of a change in what we think theatre is for? *Kate Wyver* reports

uring the UK's coronavirus lockdown, which began in March, the wardrobe department at Berkshire's Watermill Theatre made scrubs for the National Health Service. Chichester Festival Theatre gave over its visiting-artist rooms to hospital staff. Chester's Storyhouse provided a phone line to tackle social isolation. Throughout the pandemic, with doors closed and stages silenced, many theatres responded with generosity, effectively turning their buildings into community centres.

This has prompted theatremakers to ask some fundamental questions: what if these practices were the new normal rather than exceptional? What would a funding system that prioritised communities instead of buildings look like? And what, if anything, does this have to do with art?

In its last round of funding, for 2018-22, Arts Council England (ACE) distributed £407m to 186 groups in theatre. The system is skewed towards established institutions: half of the total funding was given to 13 organisations and almost a third to just two, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

Over the course of the lockdown, David Jubb, former artistic director of Battersea Arts Centre, wrote a series of blogs proposing a radical funding model. Rather than a disproportionate percentage being given to large institutions, Jubb suggested the money should go directly to a much greater number of communities and independent artists.

"No longer would these buildings be producing houses which control the direction and narrative of the cultural sector," he wrote, "they would be serving houses that support the creativity of their community."

"I think the real issue," he says over the phone, "is where you have vast concentrations of power." Imagine "a network of 500 community-connected venues" in place of the National Theatre, creating productions that "show off a much wider diversity of thought and ideas. It would mean a genuinely national theatre."

Funding artists directly would help support the theatre workforce, 70 per cent of which is freelance and much of which has no fallback in the Covid-19 era. Even before the pandemic, many freelance artists were struggling because of low wages, an unbalanced risk-reward relationship and a widespread belief among practitioners and producers that passion had to substitute for earnings.

"People are leaving our industry already," says Kate McGrath, head of Fuel Theatre, a production company that focuses on new writing. "They're brilliant, skilled people with years of experience that we won't get back. We need to avoid a situation where the only people who are left in the sector are people privileged enough to be able to weather this storm." With a system that better supported freelancers, McGrath argues, a career in theatre would be less precarious and the industry would gain a richer, more diverse workforce to create highquality art. ▶

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'Everyone should have access to a good quality of creative life... Whilst I can't do anything about the national picture, I can absolutely do something about the picture of my community'

Alan Lane, artistic director, Slung Low





From top: Sally Garner-Gibbons, a stage manager at Chichester Festival Theatre, with a pattern for NHS scrubs, which the theatre also made when performances stopped; a show staged by children's theatre group Wrongsemble for Slung Low in a car park in Holbeck, Leeds, in June

◀ Investing in artists with the express intention of helping communities could, advocates suggest, lead to a significant rise in engagement with theatre across the country. A 2015 report from the University of Warwick found that you are much more likely to attend the theatre if you are white, wealthy and well-educated. "The reality is, for millions of people, theatre doesn't even touch the edges of their lives," says Jubb.

In Leeds, Slung Low, a theatre company that takes a radical community-focused approach, has already put into practice a version of Jubb's method. Throughout the pandemic, the company has taken on responsibility for social referrals in the Beeston and Holbeck areas. This involves delivering 150-200 food-bank parcels a week, organising a volunteer response and dealing with requests for support for 7,500 local households.

"We believe we are in service here," says Slung Low's artistic director, Alan Lane, for whom community engagement is a moral imperative. "Everyone in the country should have access to a good quality of creative life, but we know that's not true. Whilst I can't do anything about the national picture, I can absolutely do something about the picture of my community."

Ensuring it is accessible to all, Slung Low presents performances on a pay-what-you-can basis, sharing resources for little cost. "We believe in understanding the privilege of public funding," Lane says, "and what that means to your relationship to your community."

David Byrne, artistic director of New Diorama Theatre (NDT) in London, which is focused on supporting emerging companies, isn't so sure. He argues that Jubb's method wouldn't make the best use of money or resources. "The artists won't be able to leverage that money into something greater," he says. "They won't be able to have the collective power and knowledge that organisations should bring."

In 2019, NDT won the Innovation Award from theatre publication The Stage for its radical funding model, which reduced the number of companies it engaged with but increased the investment and level of in-house support. "Fundamentally that's what we're there for," Byrne says. "Every penny of money we have is to go towards artist support."

Having been severely knocked back by the pandemic, NDT has closed its doors for the foreseeable future, stating in a letter posted on Twitter: "We would rather close than run a theatre that didn't truly serve its artists and community."

Those institutions taking the largest chunks of public funding argue that they already work in the community. Catherine Mallyon, executive director of the RSC, says that the amount of subsidy the company receives is justified not just by the reach, depth and quality of its artistic work but by "using the skills we've developed in that area to inform education and participatory community work across the country".

Like most theatres in the country, the RSC will be applying to the government's Culture Recovery Fund, an investment of £1.57bn into the arts. While theatres must consider innovations in funding and support, Mallyon says, "There's as much a challenge in how much the Arts Council gets to distribute as the way it's distributed."

Some believe that the current focus on community engagement distracts from the buildings' primary purpose: putting on a good show. "If it's a choice, in budgetary terms, between a worthy behind-the-scenes initiative or a piece of theatre that's available to the 'ordinary' punter, the latter must take precedence," says Dominic Cavendish, theatre critic and founder of TheatreVoice.com.

Byrne also believes theatres' priorities need to be more streamlined. "Being a theatre is enough on its own," he says. "There is a risk, by spreading ourselves too thinly, that we actually neglect the things we uniquely can provide."

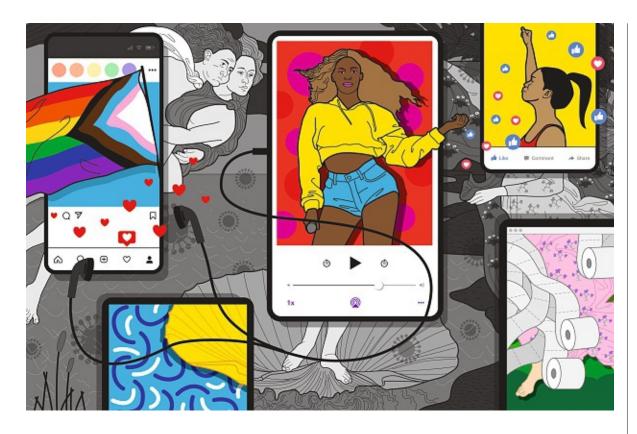
To recover from the economic blow of the pandemic, theatres and artists are relying on bail-out funds and demanding an extension to the government's self-employment and furlough schemes. But these solutions are sticking plasters.

"We have a choice about the future of the sector," David Jubb wrote on his blog. "Do we want plan A, a patched up but damaged version of our current way of doing things, or do we want plan B, something different and something better than we had before?"

Looking past the crisis, many believe that institutions need to use their funding responsibly, prioritising independent artists and communities in order to create a thriving future. As this fractured industry addresses the concern of how to rebuild post-pandemic, theatres must ask themselves: who, and what, is theatre worth saving for?

ART FOR ALL!

FERREN GIPSON



rt has a branding and outreach problem. The folks in Stem subjects seem to have these challenges licked. They have a jazzy acronym - Stem stands for science, technology, engineering and maths - and all of the coolness that accompanies topics like robots and artificial intelligence.

A few years ago, the creative sector tried to add an "A" for art to make Steam, but it never caught on. This summer, Arts Council England and the London School of Economics initiated an awkward new acronym: Shape, for social sciences, humanities and the arts for people and the economy. It reads a little like a backronym - an acronym that began with the end in mind - but I appreciate the concept. It takes a diversity of interests and professions to power a society, and that includes the humanities.

Still, an acronym alone can't drive visitors to museums or foster an interest in art in underserved audiences. Those aged between 16 and 24 make up 15 per cent of the population but only 10 per cent of museum-goers, according to a 2018 report by the Audience Agency, a publicly supported body. Similarly, people of colour aged over 35 go half as much as you would expect from their population size.

We have reached the point of recognising a disconnect between art and audiences but haven't yet determined how to bridge the gap. Two answers to tackling this challenge lie in telling a greater diversity of art histories and communicating these stories in more modern and accessible ways.

If you have ever tried to power through reading a museum's complex wall text, you know art discussions can be laden with jargon. In 2018, I started a podcast called Art Matters for the charity Art UK with the aim of discussing art from a pop-culture perspective with topics that would engage younger and more diverse audiences. It offers an accessible pathway to art history with low-jargon conversations on topics such as film, psychology and even Beyoncé. The series has been a useful way of connecting art to current events - a recent episode tackled the topic of epidemics by looking at art from the Great Plague of 1665-66.

Despite being an auditory medium, podcasts are proving to be an effective way of tapping into new visual-art audiences. Actor and collector Russell Tovey's *Talk Art* podcast quickly shot to the top of the art podcast charts (yes, that's a thing). Listeners commend him and his co-host, gallerist Robert

'The Getty Museum issued a social-media challenge for people to recreate paintings using items they had at home'

Diament, for their personable conversations with celebrities and artists. Part of the success of such podcasts is that art history is about storytelling; art content shines when there is an effort to bring audiences along for the discussion.

More traditional institutions are paying attention. This summer, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles issued a social-media challenge for people to recreate paintings using items they had at home. Users displayed incredible creativity – toilet rolls featured frequently – and the museum was flooded with submissions. This reaction proves that there is a latent desire for audiences to engage with art topics if the format is appealing.

Many people are intimidated by art and feel that there's a base level of understanding required to join the conversation. The Getty initiative embraced the visuality of art, served as a reminder that there are many pathways to engaging with it – all of them valid – and lay down a challenge to British galleries and museums. Institutions like the Royal Academy in London and the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading are doing similar work with their light-hearted Twitter accounts.

Another interesting byproduct of the Getty challenge was the exposure given to a diversity of artworks. British opera singer Peter Brathwaite, for example, made scores of stunning recreations highlighting centuries of black portraiture, including a collaboration with London's National Portrait Gallery. His efforts counter the perception that there are not many historical portraits of black figures. It is imperative that we do a better job of showcasing the many complex and diverse stories that are represented in art. In doing so, we preserve more histories and welcome wider demographics.

Social media have offered a platform for people who have not traditionally had a seat at the table. Anyone can recognise a gap in the field and address it. Accounts have amassed tens of thousands of followers by dedicating their feeds to female artists, artists of colour, LGBT+ art and more.

Their followings are proof positive that there is a hunger to hear these art histories, and these themes work brilliantly for museum programming - the Victoria and Albert Museum in London runs LGBT+tours with great success, as do Brighton Museum and the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge.

But there is only so much that can be done without Britain's museums and galleries changing meaningfully from within. We need to see a better balance of these stories represented in permanent collections. We also need a much wider diversity of people and interests represented on boards and executive teams. Ensuring that art - and writing and talking about art - resonates throughout the population hinges on the rising generation of storytellers, inside institutions and out, getting the funding and support they need to paint a brighter picture for the sector.

Ferren Gipson is an art historian and broadcaster researching modern Chinese art and intersections between art and popular culture



◀ about how I too incessantly focus on them. But here we are. My only defence is that these are the Wisconsin voters I have access to from afar. I go to my Trump diner for the same reason the political reporters I sometimes mock do: to find out how this is all going to shake out, filtered through the anecdotes of the aggrieved white people who hold disproportionate power over the American electoral system.

My best friends from home are white and generally, but not exclusively, liberal. They include a "Bernie Bro" who is holding his nose for Joe Biden and a Republican who has sent his girlfriend to a concealed-carry class so they can both pack heat. One Democrat decries "cancel culture" and another has become an avowed anti-racist. One buddy's father worked the line at the Harley-Davidson plant at the edge of town; another's was the company's president.

And it is in their parents that I feel I have at my disposal a fair cross-section of the white America for whom Trump has cast himself as the last line of defence. (The politics of the tight-knit, white-collar Indian-American community I grew up in are for another column – though the further irony of eliding that group of voters in favour of white folks here is not lost on me.)

My friends' parents, uncles, aunts and grandparents are nearly all Republicans. They range from Paul Ryan conservatives to coronavirus truthers. Most voted for Trump; some have had second thoughts or turned on him based on events during his first term (family separation at the border, "very fine" white supremacists in Charlottesville, nearly a couple of hundred thousand coronavirus deaths). Others have not. My buddies clue me in on their thinking from half a world away.

It is rarely clear cut. But at my virtual diner, the general trend has been a slight drifting away from Trump that seems to have run its course sometime around the 2018 midterm elections in which Democrats took back the House of Representatives. By now this drift has hardened into place. No one seems to be moving – not

for the mounting pandemic death toll, nor for Kamala Harris, nor for Trump allegedly trashing dead soldiers, nor even for protests and unrest just down the road in Kenosha. Though on that last one, more than one friend expressed concern that it could turn Wisconsinites toward the president.

That's the thing – I'm not actually learning all that much from my Trump diner. My friends' Trumpy uncles are still Trumpy. Their Romney moms are still generally turned off. My best friend's mom – a woman who I've never known to be particularly devout but who buttonholed me at a wedding last summer to tell me how hard it was to be a white Christian these days – is still posting about Antifa.

But the stream of Trump diner pieces is unlikely to abate, in part because Trump voters and journalists share far more than either would probably care to admit. Despite the general sense of bafflement underlying these pieces, the media often seems more comfortable covering these voters. It is not just that Trump's base is wealthier than the Democrats' – he lost voters making less than \$50,000 in 2016 – but a walk through the newsrooms of most ostensibly global western newspapers would reveal a demographic makeup not that far off a Trump rally, or my hometown.

So we will inevitably get another round of pieces about how the regular folks eating corned beef hash still support their president, lately dressed up with their comments on how Black Lives Matter protests have gone too far, and how race wasn't such an issue before all this.

There is a place for anecdotal journalism. But we should expand who we're willing to include in those snapshots of America. As we head towards an election that is likely to be decided at the margins, it would be worth considering more deeply what the people who live closer to them are thinking. I hear they also eat at diners.

Neil Munshi is the FT's West Africa correspondent

'The stream of Trump diner pieces is unlikely to abate, in part because Trump voters and journalists share far more than either would probably care to admit'



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'There's nothing anyone could do to keep me from working here'

James Rebanks's family have farmed their pocket of the Lake District for more than 600 years, a way of being he captured in his best-selling memoir *The Shepherd's Life*. On a trip around his farm, he talks to *Grace Cook* about his battle against intensive agriculture, his latest book and the power of the next generation. Photographs by *Sophie Gerrard*

ames Rebanks bounds over a barbed-wire fence and lands in a carpet of meadowsweet. Now visible from only the waist up, he spreads his hands among the flower heads of the buttery white perennial with a brusque caress that suggests this is a familiar pastime. The plants, which stand more than a metre tall, sway in the breeze, filling the air of Rebanks's Lake District farm with a sweet aroma that prompts him to lean forward and stick his nose in for a better sniff. "It smells a bit like almonds," he shouts across to the nearby lane where I am still sitting in a muddy trailer on the back of his blue quad bike.

Following a colossal five-hour thunderstorm the night before, it's a rare sunny day in these typical wetlands. Rebanks, whose 2015 memoir *The Shepherd's Life* became an international bestseller, and I are on a wildflower hunt, driving around his 185-acre farm among the rolling fells of Matterdale to locate the sodden bits of land this candyfloss bloom is sprouting from. If he was to write about meadowsweet, Rebanks says he would include the word "frothy". So far, so romantic. But he won't be picking a bunch to take home to his wife Helen. "They'd drop pollen everywhere and make a right old mess," says the bear-like 46-year-old in his broad, northern drawl.

Since 2012, when he first found an audience by tweeting about rural life under the moniker

@herdyshepherd1, Rebanks has straddled the roles of poet and pragmatist. One sees meadowsweet in a Wordsworthian-way, making his farm look wild and pretty and inspiring him to put pen to paper. The other sees a plant that provides habitat to insects, herbal fodder for his 650 Herdwick sheep and, crucially, is a key indicator that his ecological rewilding of the land is working. "It's one of the first things that takes off when we just give the land a bit more time to recover," he says.

Rebanks would probably reject any resemblance to the Lake Poets. That this area was so mythologised by Wordsworth, Coleridge and their group was the main reason he decided to write his first memoir. "[Theirs] was basically a middle-class, white, dead man's version of this landscape," he says with fervour. "The ultimate insult is that [affluent Britons] reckon they discovered the Lake District in the 18th century. No you effing didn't!" he laughs, with a hint of pugnacity. "You mean you came out of your parlour and went for a walk in the 18th century."

Rebanks's family has farmed this lush pocket of land for more than 600 years. "I wanted to put the working-class nobodies – our people – back into the books," he says. His prose is undercut with the same sense of down-to-earth realism. "It was a beautiful evening in the English countryside, with a peach-red sunset, but the fields were speckled with our dead cattle," he writes in *The Shepherd's Life*, recalling the foot-and-mouth outbreak of



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◀ 2001 that wiped out the livestock and livelihoods of almost 2,000 farms in Cumbria.

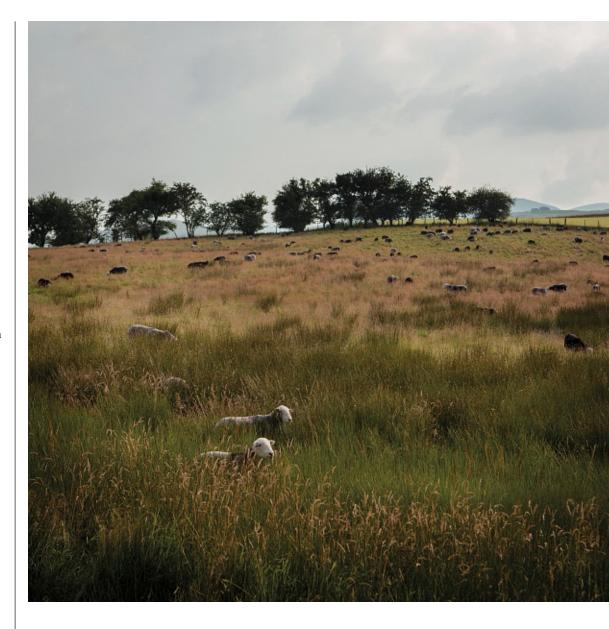
Rebanks wasn't always a bookworm. He fell in love with literature after he left school. In class, he played the clown and resented his teachers' insistence that "smart kids needed to leave the county to do anything worthwhile". He dropped out at 15 to work on the farm but after the death in 1991 of his idolised grandfather William - "the patriarch, the boss" of the flock and family - tensions mounted between Rebanks and his father, who had taken over the land.

He changed course at the age of 21, taking A-levels before winning a place as a mature student at Oxford University to study history. After graduating in 2003, he later became an adviser to Unesco in Paris; he thought earning "loads of money working a white-collar job" would give him financial stability when it was his time to inherit the farm. Yet corporate life was not for him – and he had returned to the farm full-time before his father's death in 2015. "There's nothing anyone could do to keep me from working here," he says, revving up his quad and looking back over his shoulder, gesturing to the sprawling fields thick with fresh mud behind him.

n his new book *English Pastoral: An Inheritance*, Rebanks contemplates not the past six centuries but the next six decades in farming. "We - you, me, everyone - all inherited this land and we have a duty to look after it," he says. He glances at his son Isaac, a sandy-haired eight-year-old who is on gate duty today.

In 2020, that inheritance seems fraught. Nature, says Rebanks, is at breaking point. The book opens with him recounting a childhood memory of ploughing a field with his grandfather, vividly describing the black-headed gulls swooping down to fill their beaks with the insects and worms unearthed by this mechanical work. Forty years later, and current methods of intensive farming - which involve chemical fertilisers, pesticides and over-ploughed land in pursuit of extreme efficiency - mean the gulls no longer come. The bugs have moved out. "The soil is trashed," he says. "Synthetic fertilisers kill the microbial network in the earth." It's no better for plants either. "It's like feeding kids junk food. The crops are overgrown but malnourished. They rely on truckloads of this fake sugar, like junkies."

In recent years, this, by his own account, "shy but stubborn" farmer has been outspoken about the modern, globalised food model. He uses his Instagram and Twitter accounts - which have a combined reach of 160,000 followers - as a vehicle for debating everything from American free trade deals ("effing sinister") to climate change ("if you think cows are bad [for emissions] you are way off the pace"). The accounts originally gained traction for their ability to transport city dwellers to the evocative English countryside, full of broad skies and verdant pastures. But Rebanks believes that the way to get people to reconnect with British farming is through political and environmental debate. To fix the "broken" food system, farmers "need to get the public on our side to spend more" on food by buying organic, local produce directly from farmers and butchers. The boom in vegetable boxes, born out of the pandemic and shipped directly to customers, now makes this an easier ask.



Rebanks never set out to be a "voice". For the first two years he tweeted anonymously and he wanted to publish *The Shepherd's Life* without a byline. "I didn't want to stick out... it's the rule all Cumbrians grow up with, to not think you're clever, not to show off. It makes people feel uneasy." Rebanks attributes this to an engrained attitude of egalitarianism, first brought to Cumbria by the Vikings around 900AD and today known as Jante Law. But *English Pastoral* is a plea to consumers as well as the wider farming community. "It is the story of a global revolution as it played out in... a radical and ill-thought-through experiment that was conducted in our fields," he says.

Rebanks is talking about traditional, familyrun farms - like his own - that, over the years, have had to battle against industry and nature; a keeping-up-with-the-Joneses method of farming that saw farms gradually spending more and producing more, but with less variety in their output. Arable farmers got rid of cattle; cattle farmers stopped growing vegetables. Small-scale farmers began buying £80,000 tractors and other 'The soil is trashed. Synthetic fertilisers kill the microbial network in the earth. It's like feeding kids junk food' shiny machinery they could not afford, then ripping out hedgerows and ancient trees to make the land more easily farmed by such mechanical beasts. But it was a catch-22 that caught up with them; specialist farms are left vulnerable to the market price of crops or cattle. "Some of the biggest, most efficient farms periodically go bankrupt," he says.

Farming was different when Rebanks was a kid. The tractors he'd ride around on were beaten-up and crusted with rust. Farmers grew crops to feed themselves, had fresh milk from their own cows and supplied the local villagers with an array of farm-fresh goods. Standing on a hillside in Matterdale in the 1970s, the land would have looked like a hotchpotch patchwork - each emerald field earmarked by bushy hedgerows humming with the chatter of crickets and the cheerful chirp of freshly hatched chicks.

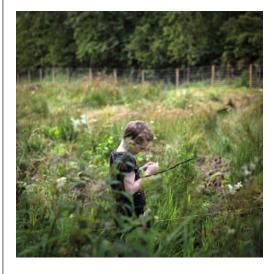
But the hedgerows disappeared after Rebanks's father Tom took over the farm, "That whole lump of land we're looking at, in the 1980s and 1990s we grazed as one big field," he says, surveying the fellside with a sun-induced squint. "Thirty-two acres, as one field." They also got rid of the pigs and cows they kept for fun and, at one point, even attempted to breed newer, "fashionable" Swaledale flocks, instead of the hardy Herdwick sheep that came over from Norway and are now native to this landscape. That modern experiment ended when all the Swaledales died one winter. (The Herdwicks striking with their snowy heads and charcoal fleeces - are the only breed that can survive the cold on these fells, and 95 per cent of the world's Herdwicks are in Cumbria.)

Big supermarket chains - and government grants that reward intensive production - are a prime target for Rebanks's criticisms. "They encourage us all to produce too much, then use us against New Zealand to crash each other's markets... You can't exactly shift 5,000 pigs or sheep yourself at a weekend market," he says bluntly. It's no better for arable or dairy farmers either. Profits on milk fell to 2.6 pence per litre in 2019; hugely problematic for the economy in west Cumbria, where the flat, coastal land is owned predominantly by dairy farmers but many villages don't even have a milkman. While cows graze in fields throughout the villages, local residents fill their fridges with plastic four-pinters from the shop.

Rebanks admits that he "thought he knew better" than his dad, who was forced into making changes by inheriting a difficult financial situation. "My dad probably needed me to shut up, be quiet, work hard and support him," he writes. But today he is trying to restore the farm to its former glory. The 32-acre patch is now seven fields, instead of one. He's just bought a small drift of pigs, as part of his new "nature-friendly farming" model that favours animal grazing instead of intense ploughing. He wants to start a meat collective with his local farmers - one neighbour produces venison, while Rebanks can supply lamb, beef and pork, as well as eggs. If dairy farmers began supplying residents, they'd make better margins by cutting out the supermarket. "They - we all - could produce half as much if we sold it direct," he says.







Facing page: native to the Lake District, Herdwick sheep are hardy enough to survive cold winters on the fells. This page from top: Rebanks looks into a "beck"; meadowsweet; Rebanks's son Isaac

he shepherd's fondness for wildflower spotting is a new hobby. Between his gruelling farm schedule, writing, family life and the odd trip to the local pub, he has little time to spare. But all across the farm, meadowsweet grows on the watery verges - a direct result of Rebanks's efforts to say no to fertilisers but also to replanting trees and ancient hedgerows. By allowing wildflowers to grow and fields to rest, he's encouraging the land to farm itself - rested soil traps and removes carbon from the atmosphere, while the sheep, cows and pigs act as nature's own plough, trampling the seeds to pollinate the soil. "If you came back in 10 years' time, this whole bank next to the beck [stream] will be filled with meadowsweet, it will be absolutely gorgeous," he says.

The re-emergence of those willowy tall stems represents a turning point. "This wildlife corridor has converted me from being mildly sceptical about some of the environmental stuff 10 years ago to being the bloke that lays down in the flowers and just enjoys the sun for 10 minutes on the way home from a day's work," he says, as the afternoon rays shimmer on the water. A buzzard soars above, swooping down to catch insects and mice. Once, he saw one catch a mole. "It makes me think, 'This is the good life, this."

The beck - a former drainage ditch currently being turned into a waterway that will run through the whole farm - is Rebanks's favourite spot on his land. "We've had eaglets and green sandpipers on this bank - no one has ever seen an eaglet in this valley before. Just by making the habitat, stuff happens really quickly," he says.

He's also involved in flood-alleviation programmes - the county's capital Carlisle has been hard hit by major flooding in recent years. Rebanks sees the programme - where he gets government subsidies for storing water - as a responsibility of sorts; he thinks all Cumbrians, farmers or not, are deeply attached to their landscape. Perhaps it's because of its relative isolation; with a population of half a million, the county has only one city, its small airport is currently not operational, and there's very little public transport to connect its inhabitants.

Rebanks is as "hefted" to this land as his sheep, which roam the fells untethered and unfenced, with an inherent sense of belonging that prevents them from straying too far. He jokes that anyone from south of Penrith is a foreigner, and says he only discovered the concept of idle chat at Oxford. "Small talk bores me to death," he says. While farming is hard and doesn't net him the sums a corporate job would, he wouldn't dream of being anywhere different; of doing anything else.

It's natural, then, that this idea of inheritance weighs heavily on his mind. "I love this land," he says, stuffing his hand into the dirt and rubbing it through his fingertips. "I look at it and I feel proud. It's mine. My people and the people before them shaped it." One day, it will belong to his four children. He glances at his eldest son standing on the banks next to him. "The best critic is going to be you, Isaac," he says, as Isaac, barely paying attention, suggests they plant even more trees. "In 30 years, will you think your dad did right or not?" Time will tell.

"English Pastoral: An Inheritance" by James Rebanks is published by Allen Lane

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THE ART OF LOOKING

Conceptual artist John Stezaker is known for his deconstructed images. *Josh Spero* examines how he cuts and pastes photographs to change and challenge their original meanings





ABOVE: 'NEGOTIABLE SPACE I' (1978) LEFT: 'MARRIAGE' (1988-89)

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ohn Stezaker likes to watch. To the British conceptual artist, voyeurism is not a crime but a technique, maybe even a medium. His new show features early examples of his photo collages and cut-ups that make this interest explicit. "Untitled (Photoroman)" from 1977 gives us a lurid glimpse of a woman in her nightclothes, drawn from a romance pictorial in a newspaper, with a slash of a couple *in flagrante* sliced through her. Other works are even titled "Voyeur".

works are even titled "Voyeur".

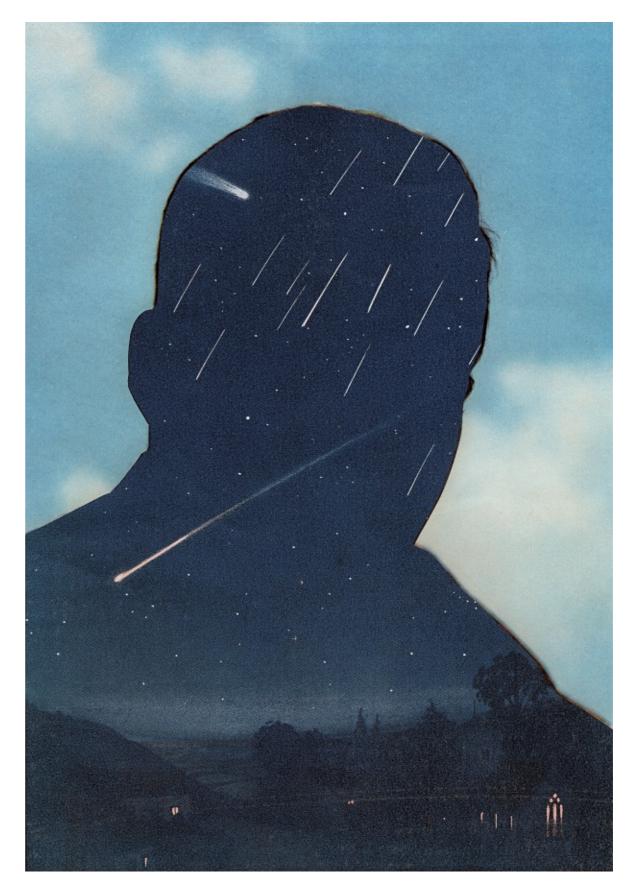
This is not a matter of sleaze, however, but a fundamental consideration of art and life. In a 2017 interview, Stezaker said: "Our relationship with the world is that of the voyeur; we are trying to reconnect with the world." If looking is how we understand what

with the world." If looking is how we understand what surrounds us, then we ought to think about how what we look at is constructed in social, aesthetic and ethical

ways - and not take it all at face value. The way Stezaker does this is by (literally)

deconstructing images - especially film stills - cutting and pasting them to see how a new conjunction changes the original meanings. In "Marriage" (1988-89), two film stars are diagonally reattached, creating a personal





LEFT; 'FATHER SKY' (1989)
FACING PAGE FROM TOP: 'UNTITLED
(PHOTOROMAN)' (1977); 'UNTITLED
(ASSISTED READYMADE)' (1977)

TO THIS BRITISH CONCEPTUAL ARTIST, VOYEURISM IS NOT A CRIME BUT A TECHNIQUE, MAYBE EVEN A MEDIUM

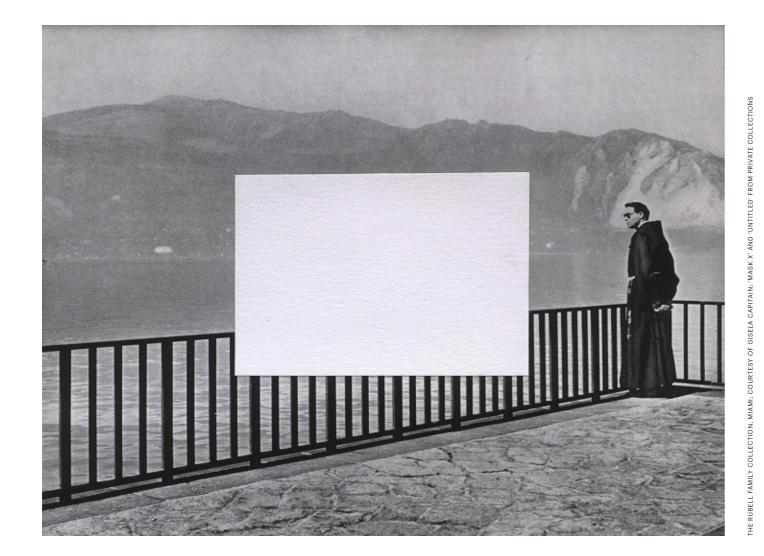
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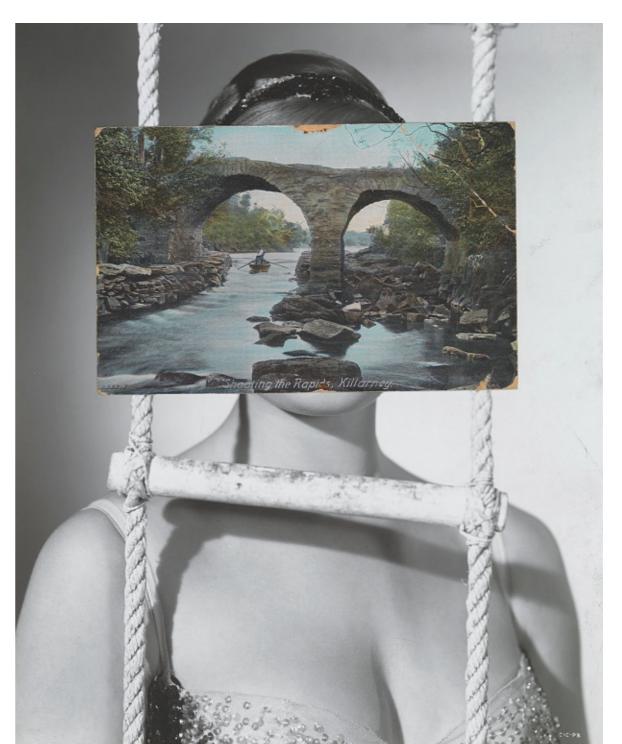


◀ tension between them while raising questions of gender and how we digest what Hollywood feeds us. "Mask X" (1982) takes a different approach, with a postcard of a bridge pasted over a film star's face. This brings out its own face-ness - the space under the arches suggests eye sockets. If we are looking at it, it is also looking at us. There is a fair dose of humour in Stezaker's work.

There is a fair dose of humour in Stezaker's work. For "Negotiable Space I" (1978), he frames a postcard of a train steaming along inside a film still in which a man leans back contemplatively behind his desk except now it looks like he's contemplating the train and we're getting a flash inside his brain. It could be a Hitchcockian train, pounding along with sexual energy, or it could be the world's most boring daydream. It all depends on how you look at it.

"At the Edge of Pictures: John Stezaker, Works 1975-1990", runs from October 2 to December 5 at Luxembourg + Co in London; luxembourgco.com





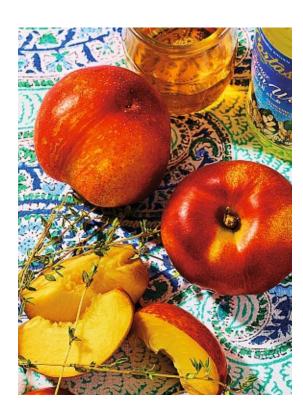
LEFT: 'MASK X' (1982) FACING PAGE FROM TOP: 'UNTITLED' (1989); 'TABULA RASA II' (1983)

THE SPACE UNDER THE ARCHES
SUGGESTS EYE SOCKETS. IF WE ARE
LOOKING AT IT, IT IS ALSO LOOKING AT US

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Ravinder Bhogal Recipes



Sundae school

s a child, I was in awe of my grandfather's astonishing appetite for ice cream - he ate it with all the uninhibited enthusiasm of an eight-year-old. On Sundays, I'd pester him to take me to Sno Cream, an ice-cream parlour in Nairobi that was a mirrored monument to 1950s American kitsch. Bhaji didn't take much convincing.

We'd hop into his musty old car and drive there fast. We'd march in - the cool blast of air-conditioning hitting our skin as we pushed open the glass door - and take our seats at the Formica counter. Half the fun were the stools that let you spin in dizzying circles until an adult yelled at you to sit still.

I'd sit next to Bhaji, my legs dangling, licking a chocolate-dip cone while he tucked into a banana split complete with whipped cream, sprinkles and maraschino cherries. I always ordered the same thing but secretly coveted a lick of everyone else's. I eyed up the towering sundaes, their sherbet-hued balls of gelato suspended between layers of strawberry syrup, and the peach Melbas that looked like they were topped with sweet shaving foam.

Bhaji's childhood had not been pampered. He moved to Kenya from India as a young man to escape provincial life. But he found things more difficult there than he'd expected - he was disoriented by language barriers, racial divides and the solitude. Making money was challenging too - he was dealt the fuzzy end of the lollipop in a few business deals. Yet he was also happy. He had traded security for independence and felt better off in unfamiliar territory than in the stifling provinces of Punjab.

On a recent visit to Nairobi, I sought out Sno Cream for old times' sake and found we were both older and wearier. I ordered a chocolate dip and my throat felt tight with emotion as I ate it.

Back at home I resolved to make an ice cream to honour my beloved Bhaji. The ephemeral freshness of home-made ice cream sets it apart from anything that you can buy in shops. The joyful thing about this one, made with honeyed summer nectarines, is that it doesn't rely on an ice-cream maker. And a slice of it, pieces of fruit hidden in its creamy crevices, will thaw out the most jaded of cynics.

My grandfather loved ice cream in a way that only someone who hadn't grown up with such luxuries could. He saw it as an emblem of hope, wholesomeness, healing and better times.

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikoni in London. Her book "Jikoni", published by Bloomsbury, is out now. @@cookinboots

Nectarine, honey and orange-blossom semifreddo

Serves six

- 6 ripe nectarines: 3 skin on, coarsely chopped; 1 peeled and chopped into small dice;
 2 skin on, thinly sliced
- a few sprinkles of thyme, plus a few extra whole sprigs for garnish
- 1-2 tsp orange-blossom water
- 4 eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 75g caster sugar
- 30g honey I used millefiori wild thyme honey
- 40g liquid glucose
- 500ml double cream
- 1 Combine the skin-on chopped nectarines and sprinkles of thyme with the orange-blossom water. Purée in a blender and then strain into a bowl, discarding the solids.
- 2 Combine the puréed nectarine, eggs, egg yolks, sugar, honey and glucose in a heatproof bowl and whisk over a pan of simmering water for 5-6 minutes or until thick and pale. Transfer the mixture to an electric mixer and whisk until cool.
- 3 Fold in the cream, then add the peeled chopped nectarine pieces and mix. Line a 2lb loaf tin with cling film, making sure there is enough hanging over the sides. Lay some sprigs of thyme at the bottom, then the two sliced nectarines, and pour over the semifreddo mix. Freeze overnight.
- 4 To serve, turn the semifreddo out of the loaf tin, carefully peel away the cling film and slice.

Photograph by Aaron Graubart





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Jancis Robinson Wine

Madeira: my desert island pick

his was meant to be a landmark year for me.
A significant birthday was to be celebrated with friends and family in several different countries. A daughter's wedding was planned. A book and a wine glass were set to be launched in various cities. We have had to postpone them all because of the pandemic.

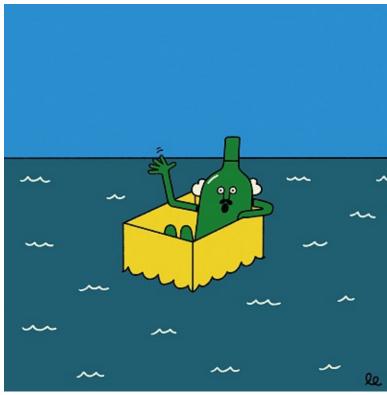
But the "work" event whose cancellation I regret the most was a tasting of a dozen wines made in 1870. Fine wine may be the longest-lasting thing we consume, but a century and a half is surely pushing it?

These 1870s are all madeiras (I use the present tense in the hope that our tasting in Tuscany can be rescheduled). Madeira is an exceptional wine in many respects. The best can last longer than any wine I can think of, without any deterioration, whether stored in a wooden cask, glass demijohn or bottle and - this is the really useful bit - whether or not that bottle has been opened.

I always choose madeira when asked what my desert island wine would be because I'd be able to spin out a bottle for months, if willpower permitted. I also choose it because, despite the palm-tree cliché, we don't actually know whether this mythical island on which we find ourselves stranded is bot or cold

Madeira would do the trick for both because its high alcohol, usually 19 to 20 per cent, would be warming in low temperatures and its characteristically high acidity would be refreshing in hot weather.

There is also the convenient fact that madeira, unlike vintage port, matures in barrels rather than in bottle, so there is no heavy sediment and, if my experience is anything to go by, much less risk of a hangover. Madeira is quintessentially refreshing rather than heavy.



As imagined by Leon Edler

The grapes that produce it - dark-skinned Tinta Negra mainly, supplemented by the much rarer classical white-wine grapes Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia - are all high in acidity, a natural asset only accentuated by this volcanic island's exceptionally high yields. There are no extensive rolling vineyards, just tiny green terraced strips of land, generally with multiple owners, on which vines, bananas and other fruits and vegetables are grown, often in a rampant mix.

When harvested, the grapes tend to be low in sugar. Much of the alcohol is added as spirit and then these fortified wines are aged for vastly variable periods and treated with more heat than any other wine would be. The heat treatment, whether created artificially or by extended ageing in a warm loft, is designed to mimic the effect that voyages to India had on wine loaded at the port of Funchal in the late 17th-century. Essentially, these trips created the distinctive tangy-but-roasted style of madeira.



Styles vary from pale, light essences labelled either Sercial or, if based on lesser grapes, Dry, which are guaranteed to set the appetite on edge; to rather nuttier Verdelho, or Medium Dry, that's still characterised by that tanginess; to Bual or Medium Sweet that can be like liquid Christmas pudding; to Malmsey, the traditional name for the sweetest madeira based on Malvasia grapes, whose cheaper imitations are labelled Rich or Sweet. Terrantez is another historic Madeira grape that almost disappeared from the island's vineyards but is slowly making a comeback.

Yet madeira, as closely identified with the island as embroidery

'There is no heavy sediment and, if my experience is anything to go by, much less risk of a hangover'

and Cristiano Ronaldo, is under serious threat. The big problem for the handful of producers still in business is that vine-growing is being abandoned, especially by young people, in favour of real-estate development - a trend exacerbated by plummeting wine sales in a place deserted by tourists this year. As in Champagne, there is considerable tension between grape growers and brand owners, with the former urging the latter to buy more than they feel they need this year.

The Blandy family have fingers in most of the island's commercial pies, including its hotels.
Fortunately, their wine company has been run since 2011 by Chris Blandy, a seventh-generation islander, who is determined to "re-establish madeira as one of the world's great wines", as their website declares. He is overseeing research that is more thorough than madeira has benefited from >

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Recommended madeiras

All prices are approximate and for 75cl bottles unless otherwise stated

- BARBEITO, BOAL RESERVA £15 for 50cl Weavers of Nottingham, Dorset Wine Co of Poundbury, Theatre of Wine of Greenwich, Caviste of Overton, Oxford Wine Co, Selfridges
- BARBEITO, THE ATLANTIC RAINWATER
 5-YEAR-OLD MEDIUM DRY
 £20 for 50cl Vino Vero of Leighon-Sea. Fortnum & Mason
- BARBEITO 10-YEAR-OLD SERCIAL RESERVA VELHA £31.95 Lea & Sandeman and others
- BLANDY'S 5-YEAR-OLD RESERVA RICH £14.99 for 50cl Waitrose, The Whisky Exchange
- BLANDY'S VERDELHO 1976 £220 in bond BI Wines
- HM BORGES 10-YEAR-OLD SERCIAL £31.65 Clark Foyster, £33 Wine & Green, Delicias
- COSSART GORDON TERRANTEZ 1975 £280 RRP
- D'OLIVEIRAS MALVASIA 2000 £68 L'Assemblage, Turville Valley, Theatre of Wine
- HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES MEDIUM DRY £12 Drinkshop.com
- HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES FULL RICH £11 for 50cl Majestic, Waitrose; £12.69 Cambridge Wine Merchants, £14 Ellis Wharton
- HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES
 5-YEAR-OLD MEDIUM DRY
 £11.80 for 50cl The Whisky Exchange
- HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES
 10-YEAR-OLD SERCIAL
 £20 for 50cl Waitrose and others
- JUSTINO'S 10-YEAR-OLD SERCIAL £35 Butler's Wine Cellar, Seven Cellars, Noble Grape



Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com.
International stockists on Wine-searcher.com

◀ for many years. And he is working on producing some geographically specific wines for the first time: single *quinta* (farm) bottlings rather than blends.

Earlier this month, during an online presentation of their grandest new releases (including the latest bottling of Bual 1920 - 1,199 bottles offered at £1,820 each), Blandy argued that madeira was the most versatile food accompaniment of all. His goal is to persuade sommeliers to serve various different madeiras throughout a whole meal, though presumably pandemic restrictions have put this campaign on hold for a while.

Anything to do with madeira is an even longer-term project than with other wines. As Blandy admits, the finest examples - those carrying a vintage date - need almost 30 years in wood to reach maturity. Although legally they may be bottled after 20 years in wood, they are never going to be cheap. The relatively new Colheita category, wines that can be bottled after only five years in wood, are effectively early-bottled vintage wines and can be found for about £30 per bottle.

You can find a young madeira to give some idea of the style - and a real fillip for savoury sauces - for as little as £12 a bottle. Just avoid anything sold as cooking madeira in a French supermarket; it will have been shipped in bulk and have had salt added to it. And be careful to distinguish between older bottles that are genuinely vintage dated

and those with the word Solera on the label. The latter used to be blends of wines of very different ages and were so misleadingly labelled that for a while the term was banned for new bottlings.

A modern flagbearer for topquality madeira has long been the house of Barbeito, run by Ricardo Diogo Vasconcelos de Freitas. The house style is to make some of the lightest, most ethereal madeiras and Freitas is always experimenting. He pioneered Colheita made from the reviled Tinta Negra in the late-1990s, for example, and he swears that a 1972 Sercial is one of his best wines ever even though it would only have been 7.2 per cent alcohol without fortification.

As Blandy points out, before it is bottled madeira is constantly changing. The 1920 Bual, for example, which has been in his family's cellars for a century, has been through many different stages and three different bottlings of it have been released over the years. (Madeira back labels have to state the bottling date nowadays, which makes life easier for consumers.)

The 840 litres that remain were moved from American oak barrels to glass demijohns last March to preserve their freshness, and his fervent hope is that his children will be able to release the next bottling of the wine in 2070 when it will be 150 years old - like those 1870s are today.

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Restaurants

Tim Hayward



SOLLIP CASSOULET: PORK BELLY, CANNELLINI BEANS, 10-MONTH FERMENTED KIMCHI AND PORK BROTH. PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM HAYWARD

Sollip, Bermondsey

here's a particular kind of restaurant you used to find only in California, though now you'll see them in Sydney, Paris, Chelsea and Notting Hill. It's a place where every sensation is almost pathologically subtle, as if the result of complex experiments to establish which of 50 shades of greige causes the least distress in mice. They lean heavily towards organic materials in their construction and decoration, and the soundtrack is either a very posh girl, breathily warbling the cover of a far more interesting original over a ukulele, or gongs. Staff are quirkily attractive, clad in white and ecru linen, and pad on silent feet, whispering like monks. Actually, I'm rather fond of them. It's probably because I once married a Pilates instructor, moved to California and am subsequently cursed with nostalgia for wheatgrass, yoga and anxiety. Mainly, though, these places make me yearn for a big and dirty grilled cheese sandwich.

At first sight, Sollip is just such a temple. It is located in Bermondsey, between the eye of the hurricane of London Bridge and the lowering mass of Guy's Hospital. It is a little beige jewel. Bomee Ki and Woongchul Park met while training at Le Cordon Bleu. She went on to success as a pastry chef, he to a string of interesting restaurants, most recently the late, much-mourned Ledbury. The menu is pitched as European fine dining with Korean influences but that implies some light blending, some homeopathic nuance. What actually occurs here is all-out down-and-dirty fusion and the results are fascinating.

On the face of it, a grilled cheese sandwich is neither calming nor cleansing and it isn't a classic starter or particularly Korean, but Sollip's "Gamtae Sandwich" resets expectations straight out of the traps. Duckett's Caerphilly is a spectacularly clean-tasting, creamy unpasteurised Welsh cheese; gamtae is a roast seaweed - in this case "sea trumpet" - not unlike the nori that we might find wrapping sushi. United in layers of soft white bread and fried. Honestly? There's never anything wrong with a grilled cheese sandwich, but this elegant little cracker of Cymro-Korean fusion opens an entire new chapter.

Gochujang has become a relatively widespread flavouring in the UK but at Sollip they make



'The menu is pitched as European fine dining with Korean influences but that implies some light blending. What actually occurs here is all-out down-and-dirty fusion'

Sollip Unit 1, 8 Melior Street Bermondsey London SE1 3QP sollip.co.uk Starters £3-£4 Main courses £9-£24 their own, adding extra seasonings
- in particular fish sauce - to
supercharge the umami. I can't
think of a better way of showing
it off than a classic steak tartare,
presented with a tiny sphere of
creamy sabayon in place of egg yolk.

"Catch of the Day" was a fillet of pink bream, with the kind of meunière crust that would gratify any Francophile zealot, but served on top of Chinese cabbage, leek jangajji – not un-akin to sweet pickled onion – and shreds of samphire. This one really felt appropriate to the room. It was subtly balanced and immensely restrained, centring and deeply purifying. Like sitting in lotus position on a silken zabuton while being fed unimaginably transparent slices of Gwyneth Paltrow.

Just the idea of "Sollip Cassoulet" reaches so far into the heart of French culinary self-image that it's practically a declaration of culture war but, God, it's stunning. There are chunks of pork belly but not cooked to a gel... with more bite... like warm lardo. The cannellini beans are correctly soft but separate and distinct in their skins like edamame rather than cooked to a beany slurry. There's the restrained harmonic honk of 10-month fermented kimchi, the tiniest thread of chorizo for the smoke and everything floats in a glacier-clear pork broth. It's cassoulet all right, but dismantled like a vintage watch, every piece polished, fettled and improved, then reconstructed in a tiny, handmade bowl... in Bermondsey.

I'm sorry, when the food is this good, I lose a lot of grammatical control. I don't mix metaphors so much as hit them with a stick blender. In a way, it's what Sollip is doing with its menu. But in this case, the results aren't confusing or wilfully off-piste, they're just rather beautiful poetry.

I know there are times in my life when I'd just be too damn cynical for Sollip, when its hushed subtlety and restraint would come across as arch or pretentious, but this is not one of those days. Today, I want to lie back into it, allow myself to relax into the now, be one with my present... and maybe have another of those grilled cheese numbers.

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GIDEON'S GUESTS, FROM LEFT: WALTHER RATHENAU, SOONG MEI-LING, GEORGE KENNAN, ANTHONY EDEN, ANNA AKHMATOVA

FANTASY DINNER PARTY

GIDEON RACHMAN

Over coq au vin, roast potatoes and burgundy, the FT's chief foreign affairs columnist unpicks the 20th century with five of its central figures

he first rule of my party is no geniuses and no saints. I find their company intimidating. So, sorry Gandhi and Einstein, you're not invited. Instead, I want guests with a few flaws.

The informal theme will be the history of the 20th century. That means grappling with the German question. My first guest is badly placed to give a rounded view, since he was assassinated in 1922. Walther Rathenau was a Jew and a German patriot. He was a brilliant industrialist and a noted philosopher, who became foreign minister during the Weimar Republic - before being murdered by the far right. He was also an internationalist and profoundly cultured. I will bring him up to date with the sad news that, after his murder, things only got worse (for Germany, if not for him). And we'll

discuss the key question - how could a culture that gave the world Beethoven also produce Hitler?

Of all Britain's prime ministers, it might seem odd to invite **Anthony Eden**, who was forced to resign after the Suez disaster of 1956. But Eden also fought at the Somme, resigned as foreign secretary over Munich and witnessed the second world war and the end of empire. He can talk poignantly about the past (watch him in the French documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*). And I'm sure he has beautiful manners and can bridge any awkward gaps in the conversation.

For that reason, I will place him next to Anna Akhmatova. The Russian poet perhaps breaches my dinner-party rules, since she was arguably both a genius and a saint. (The Soviet authorities labelled her "half nun, half harlot" and Stalin prevented her from publishing most of her poetry.) But she liked a chat and famously sat up all night talking to Isaiah Berlin about art, poetry and history when the philosopher visited the USSR in 1945. Given that she lived through the Leningrad famine during the second world war, I hope she is not put off by the opulence of the food.

Akhmatova will have a lot to discuss with **George Kennan**,

my fourth guest. He served in the US embassy in Moscow during the Stalin era and had a historic impact on the cold war, with his famous "long telegram" to Washington in 1946, in which he argued for the containment of Soviet power. Kennan had his doubts about modern American culture and even democracy – so I would be interested to hear his

'Soong Mei-ling died at 105, and will have a century's worth of memories to share'

take on Donald Trump. Of all my guests, he is the only one I met in real life – and I knew him to be a brilliant conversationalist.

With Germany, the US,
Britain and Russia covered,
we need somebody from China.
Please welcome **Soong Mei-ling**,
the youngest of the three glamorous
and powerful Soong sisters.
Her oldest sister married China's
richest man; the middle sister
became a high-ranking Communist.
By contrast, Mei-ling married
Chiang Kai-shek, who fought the
Japanese and the Communists and
then led the defeated Nationalist

forces into exile in Taiwan.
A political figure in her own right, she attended international conferences and became known as the "Eleanor Roosevelt of China". She died in New York at the age of 105 and will have a century's worth of memories to share.

The FT rules say only five guests but I am also inviting my wife **Olivia**, who has kindly volunteered to do the cooking. It is a ritual of our dinner parties that we discuss what happened while clearing up - and we sometimes find that we have sharply conflicting views on the guests. People I am impressed by, Olivia often seems to find ludicrous.

We'll meet in our front room in suburban London and start with something easy and delicious - gravadlax and champagne. Tempting as it is to serve Krug, that's a little too Jeffrey Archer, so I'll go for Gosset instead. For the main course, I'm opting for hearty home-cooking - coq au vin. Roast potatoes are an unorthodox accompaniment. But I like them, so we're having them, plus some green beans. The wine will be Clos de Vougeot. It features in the best film I've ever seen about a dinner party, Babette's Feast, and certainly loosens the guests up there. We'll try the 2000 vintage by Domaine Leroy. Pricey at £1,000 a bottle but I'm assuming this goes on expenses?

On the question of whether to serve cheese before or after pudding, I am with the French. But I also have that sad British urge to show foreigners that our local produce is not as terrible as they have been led to believe. So I'll serve some great English cheeses, such as Tunworth. It can smell pretty pungent, and we'll have to move it in and out of the dining room fast. We're now drinking red bordeaux - Léoville Las Cases 1990. In case Eden is outraged by eating cheese before dessert, we will serve something very English next - a jam roly-poly pudding. For those who can't stomach something so hefty at this stage of the evening, we'll also have a red fruit salad of raspberries, strawberries and blackberries.

At this point I will be drunk enough to abandon any remaining restraint about the wines, so will serve Château d'Yquem 1940. Apparently, it's still totally drinkable. The thought of the winemaker harvesting the grapes just after the fall of France is poetic. It captures an idea familiar to all my guests. For both nations and individuals, neither triumph nor disaster lasts for ever. So you might as well enjoy the moment.

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Games



A Round on the Links

by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

- 1. Who succeeded Theresa May as home secretary when May became prime minister?
- **2.** In 2016, Ladbrokes acquired which rival bookmaking chain?
- 3. Last month, which airline announced the closure of its bases at Stansted, Southend and Newcastle?
- 4. Which science-

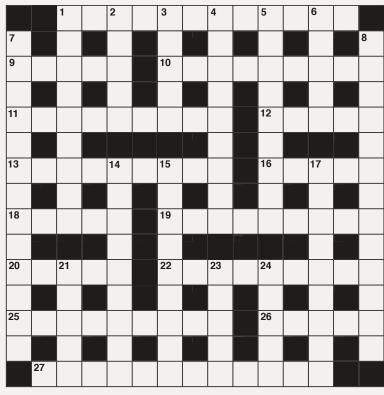
- starred Joanna Lumley and David McCallum as a pair of extraterrestrial "time agents"?
- 5. The actor Lucy
 Davis from The
 Office (above), The
 Archers and Chilling
 Adventures of Sabrina
 is the daughter of
 which comedian?
- **6.** What's the only number one single by the Kaiser Chiefs?
- 7. Which bestselling 1999 novel by Tracy Chevalier is set in 17th-century Holland?
- 8. What nickname for Ireland first appeared in William Drennan's

- 1795 poem "When Erin First Rose"?
- 9. Which James Bond film features the female characters Tiffany Case and Plenty O'Toole?
- 10. In British comics, which character was created to be the female equivalent of Dennis the Menace (below)?



No 506. Set by Aldhelm

The Crossword



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1 According to a popular saying (12)
- **9** Top grade (5)
- **10** Pragmatic, downto-earth (9)
- 11 Courtyard
- colonnade (9) **12** Abdominal pain (5)
- 13 Sadness (9)
- **16** Put forward, propose (5)
- **18** Oscar ____, poet and playwright (5)
- 19 Suffering from
- indigestion (9) **20** One living
- abroad, in short (5) **22** Short quotable
- quote (9) **25** Study of church cooperation

and unity (9)

26 Ancient philosopher such as Marcus Aurelius (5)

27 Tempestuous, boisterous (12)

DOWN

1 Source of reading material for each old philosopher following secretary (9) 2 Green lights for top of yew surrounded by wild oaks (5) 3 Strange type circling my hollow (5) 4 Exploding ball seems to be not responsible (9) **5** Gag after getting what sounds like each end of root vegetable (9) 6 Look around lake in the neighbourhood (5)

7 Strongly criticises

8 There's a charge

for this barrier (8, 5)

cleaner (6, 7)

one crying for domestic

17 Si upse 21 Si - bla 23 R of or 24 D is on se lead 9)

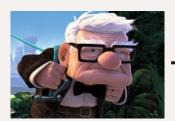
14 Awkward matter with hospital department's medical procedure (9)
15 Teams get rid of a blow that's not direct (9)
17 Stupid outfit upset with USA (9)
21 Spot on fruit – black (5)
23 Remove image of one diocese (5)
24 Dance company is on top under leader of dance (5)

Solution to Crossword No 505



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



Answers page 8

GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY



= ?



GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

The pandemic and the parent trap



ast weekend I chatted with Laura, a vibrant thirtysomething who holds a high-flying job in San Francisco. She normally lives in a cool apartment in a trendy district of that city. No longer. This summer she decamped to her parents' house on the East Coast with her boyfriend, initially to mitigate the challenges of the Covid-19 lockdown - and now to avoid California's wildfires. "I thought it would be a few weeks," she said with a rueful smile. "But it keeps being extended."

Many other millennials and some of the older of the Gen Z cohort might have a similar tale, particularly those who are younger than Laura. Earlier this month, the Pew Research Center released a survey which showed that the proportion of "young adults" (aged 18-29) in the US living with their parents is now 52 per cent, up from 46 per cent at the start of the year.

"Before 2020, the highest measured value was in the 1940 census at the end of the Great Depression, when 48 per cent of young adults lived with their parents," the Pew report observed. "The peak may have been higher during the worst of the Great Depression in the 1930s, but there is no data for that period."

The current surge partly reflects the pandemic: numerous students and professionals have, like Laura, returned home. But what is really interesting is that when you take a longer-term look, coronavirus does not explain everything.

The proportion of young adults living with their parents in America fell sharply after the second world war – down to 29 per cent by the early 1960s. That was an era when the combination of rapid economic growth, reforms such as the GI Bill (giving wider access to higher education), a building boom and an earlier marrying age prompted young adults to set up their own homes. The number rose only slightly above 30 per cent for the next two decades.

Fast forward to the early years of the 21st century, however, and the figure had jumped above 40 per cent. It has been climbing ever since. The chief cause is economic stress: young people who are laden with student debt and/or finding it hard to get a 1950s-style secure job are being forced back home. And while the pattern is more pronounced among Hispanic and African-American people, in the past year the biggest rise has been among young white adults.

Joint living is an emotive issue. It has advantages: for one thing, it can counter loneliness – and, as the economist Noreena Hertz notes in her new book, *The Lonely Century*, the issue of social isolation is a big problem in our digital age.

Reinforcing extended family networks helps young parents with another problem: the hellish work-childcare juggle. Indra Nooyi, the Indian-American former chief executive of PepsiCo, says that one reason she was able to build her career so successfully was that she lived in an extended

family structure and had people to care for her children. She thinks more families in the west should copy this if we want to level the gender playing field at work.

However, enforced communal living has big downsides too – and not just for the generation of middle-aged parents who have had their plans for peaceful retirement disrupted. Surveys have shown that Covid-19 has caused a sharp rise in mental-health issues: a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 11 per cent of people in the US had contemplated

'Being trapped back in the parental nest can make mental-health issues far worse for young people'

suicide during the June spent under lockdown (up from 4.3 per cent in 2018). Among those aged 18-24 it was 26 per cent.

While it would be nice to think - or hope - that joint living arrangements can mitigate this, psychologists have reported that the experience of being trapped back in the parental nest has sometimes made these mental-health problems far worse for young people. On a less extreme basis, it can contribute to apathy.

ood or bad, it is fascinating to ponder how this might shape behaviour in the future. Perhaps it will make the younger generation more willing to embrace risk - either in reaction to their frustration at this confinement or in the knowledge that they have a safety net. But it is also possible that it will create a more infantilised and passive mentality, with debilitating impacts - a far cry from the mood after the second world war, when a new feeling of independence and confidence among the younger generation boosted economic growth and prompted a sharp rise in household formation.

Either way, perhaps the most important point is this: based on their experiences in the latter half of the 20th century, the older generation's ideas of what a "normal" family structure or life cycle in America is are set in stone. But there is nothing inevitable or normal about our current situation.

While the trends triggered by Covid-19 might turn out to be temporary, we cannot bet on this being the case - or expect a return to the 1960s pattern. Just don't point this out to the stressed-out millennials (and their parents) who are chafing at the new co-living. As Laura said: "I love my parents but can't wait to get back to my own place. Idon't want to think this might go on - and on."

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