

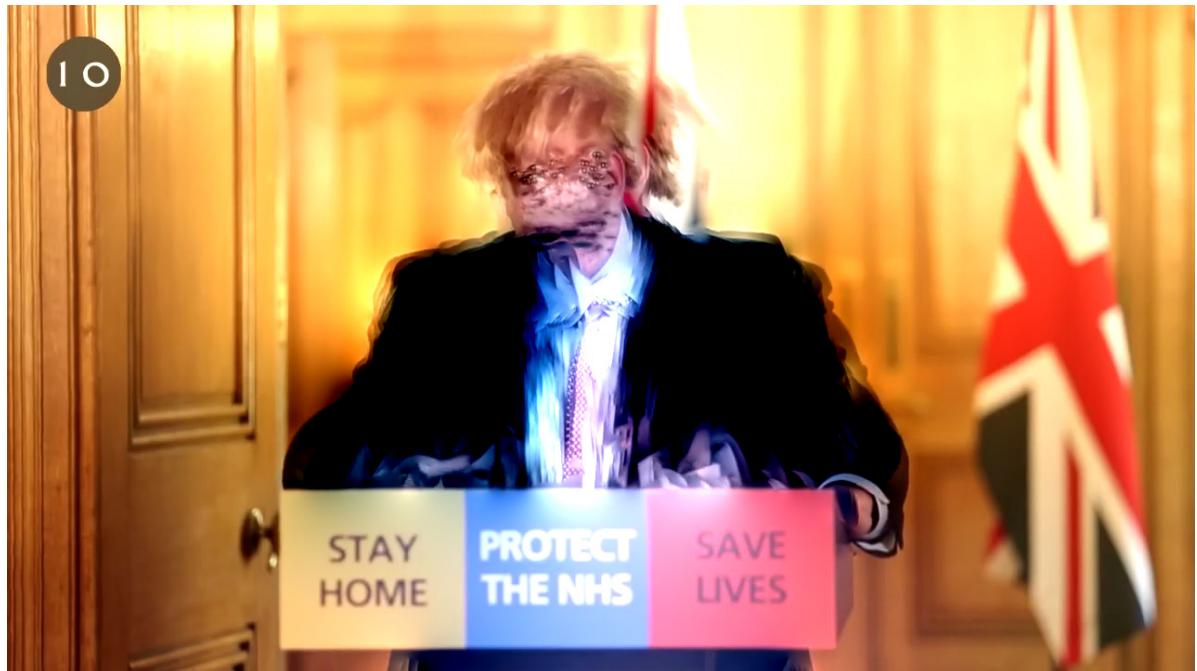


# **Coronavirus Press Conferences**

**March to December 2020**

**Pete Ashton**

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25th March

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26th March

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28th March

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29th March

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30th March

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31st March

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1st April

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2nd April

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3rd April

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4th April

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6th April

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7th April

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13th April



15th April



16th April



17th April



18th April



20th April



21 April 2020

21st April



22 April 2020

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23 April 2020

23rd April



28 April 2020

28th April



29th April



30th April



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02 May 2020

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03 May 2020

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05 May 2020

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11th May

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12 May 2020

12th May



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14 May 2020

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18th May



19th May



20 May 2020

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24 May 2020

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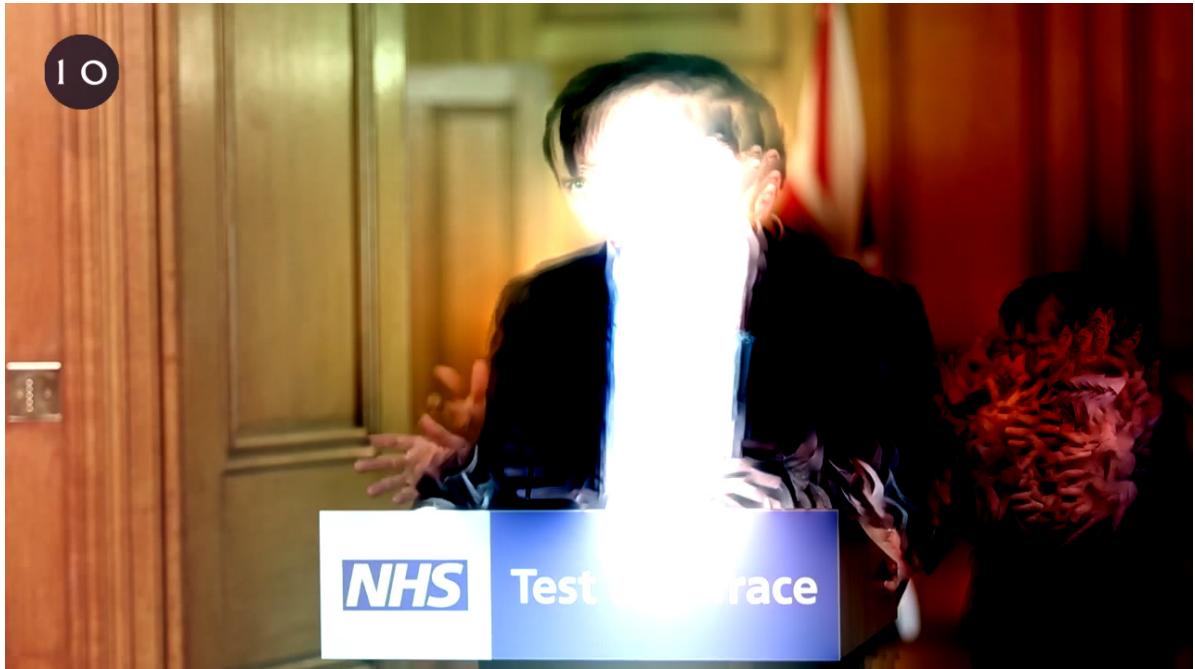
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31st July

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24th September

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12th October

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16th October

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20th October

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22nd October

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31st October

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5th November

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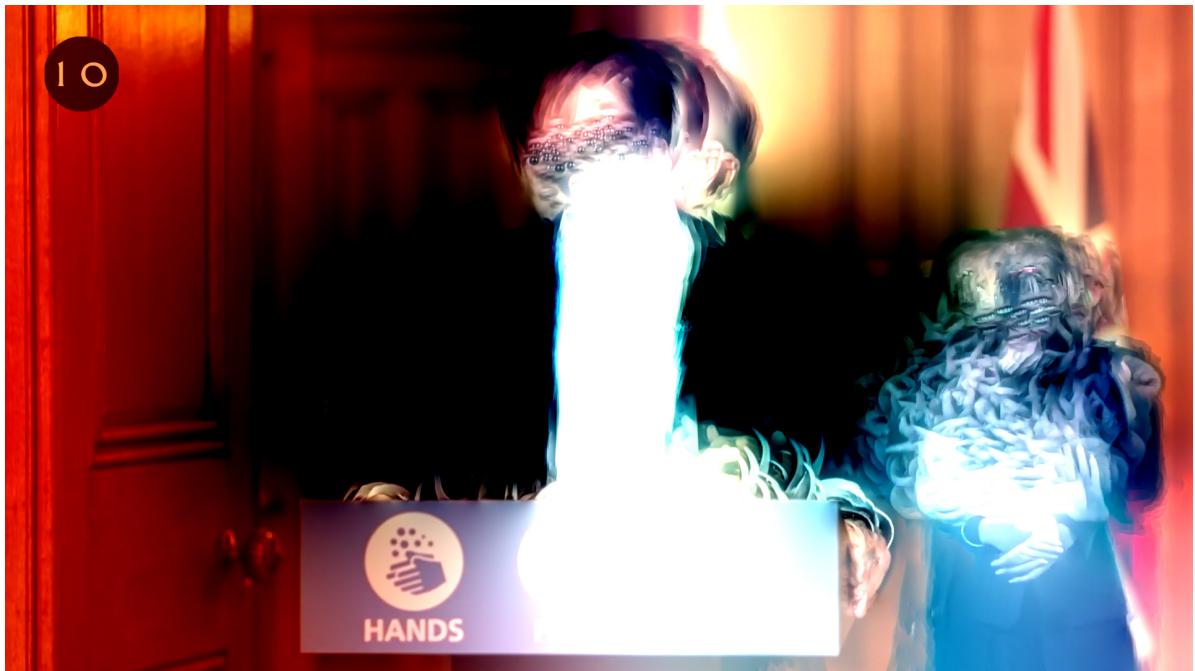
9th November

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16th November

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20th November



23rd November

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26th November

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2nd December

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14th December

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19th December

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21st December

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30th December

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pete Ashton  
February 2021

**Coronavirus Press Conferences  
March - December 2020**

by Pete Ashton

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