



ISSUE 3

SUNDAY 19 APRIL 2020

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

THE SOCIAL



**WHITE
RABBIT**

*Your time has come your second skin
The cost so high the gain so low
Walk through the valley
The written word is a lie*

One of the most enduring of the postpunk-pop-anthems was [‘Rise’](#), by [Public Image Ltd](#), a band whose musical legacy – and arguably influence

– dwarfs that of the Sex Pistols. Famously, he sang (on repeat), ‘Anger is an energy’; the implicit message being anger is a fuel for change in the form of radical action. This week our government’s symbolic response to a deepening, truly horrific and perhaps deliberately covered-up COVID-19 crisis in our care homes was to produce a badge. A badge. A fucking badge. The badge, presented to us in the manner of a dubious uncle at a Christening desperate to make amends for past misdemeanours and CARE-less behaviour, was stark in its simplicity: a four-letter word beginning with ‘C’.

Depending on who you consult or which book you read there are supposed to be either five or seven stages of grief: shock, disbelief, denial, bargaining, guilt, depression, and acceptance. Let’s, in the circumstances, forget acceptance. If you are experiencing acceptance I recommend you stop reading these transmissions. It is a truth universally acknowledged that one might experience all of these emotional triggers simultaneously. Grief, possibly more than love, hope or desire, is the thing that defines us and binds us together, makes us human. It is, unarguably, the one thing we will all experience; whether that be the death of a loved one or the death of a hero, or something as seemingly banal as the absence of a Saturday afternoon at the London Stadium. (It is one of the great mysterious revelations of lockdown that I even mourn my weekend visits to the Westfield mall, but this weekend I resent the fact the #Irons are not fulfilling today’s scheduled fixture against Burnley. I *grieve* those phantom three points. At least I can *fantasise* we might have actually got them. Just as I can project myself into late May and imagine sitting at The Social with a drink, looking forward to seeing a great new band downstairs.

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Benny’s Babbies with Cold War Steve**
- **Introducing *Exciting Times*, the most exciting debut novel of 2020**
- **The Social Gathering podcast from Steve Mason**
- **Life beyond the neutral zone with Fat White Family’s Lias Saoudi**
- **The View from Here: Pictish Trail**

+ *more*

Just as my colleague in this venture Tom, can fantasise that should the Championship season end tomorrow and Leeds be promoted, they are deserving of their ascension to football's top table.) LOL SOZ ETC.

Hancock's gesture was a kick in the collective bollocks; a 'there-are-no-words-left' epiphany. It was the grandstanding moment of a small man who has the demeanour of a spineless Dickensian mill-owner; someone who will inevitably become the Fall Guy for a Cabinet of monsters, nobodies, opportunists and creeps who had anticipated 2020 would be a smug victory march on the road to a non-existent destination they'd conned the country into believing named 'Takebackcontrol'. But when the shock and disbelief of that moment of great pettifoggery (if that even is a word) starts, what are we left with?

This week we have felt a lot of anger towards the government, the media, and their supine coverage of an unfathomable human and economic tragedy. Increasingly it feels like we're watching the outtakes Armando Iannucci thought were too insensitive (or simply too unbelievable) to make the cut for *The Thick of It* – from Johnson's rapid ascendancy to King of the Hand-Shaking Super Spreaders to Priti Patel's non-apology which would have been shocking in its insensitivity were it not for how predictable it was; to the Met Police holding an evidently not socially distanced tribute to the NHS Rave on Westminster Bridge. We are constantly told, even by those on the left, that this is not the moment for blame, analysis of, or enquiry into how the people democratically elected and trusted to look after us and the most vulnerable in this country have got this so disastrously and transparently, hideously, wrong. To which, we boldly reply, Get Fucked. Instead we are treated to a steady stream of banalities and performances cleverly crafted to distract from the magnitude of the failure of this particular clucksterfuck of a government. The same phrases met with a ubiquitous lack of scrutiny by all but a small handful of commentators. Noam Chomsky said, 'That's the whole point of propaganda. You want to create a slogan that nobody's going to be against, and everybody's going to be for. Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn't mean anything.'



When Hancock held up his pathetic little enamel badge like a LIDL-Neville Chamberlain, as if bestowing a Duke of Edinburgh Award upon the nation, we were reminded of something else Noam Chomsky said: 'How is it we have so much information, but know so little?' The British government have debased and infantilised the story around this outbreak; their single purpose being to distract us from the gross incompetence of those in power. There's a dead-eyed totalitarian vibe

to those daily briefings that I'm finding increasingly unsettling.

CARE. We care for each other in generosity and good humour, with hugs, smiles and camaraderie, by sharing the things we love whether they be food, beer, shelter, new music or literature. The Social in its physical iteration offers all of these things. Welcome to The Social Gathering Issue #3. If it helps you get through this particular Endless Sunday then please pause and take a moment to consider what 'CARE' means to you. And remember, in the immortal words of John Lydon: Anger is an energy.

Fight the Power.

GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES AND PRAY

THE SOCIAL GATHERING PODCAST, BY STEVE MASON

“Sir Edmund Hillary said... ‘For scientific discovery, give me Scott. For speed and efficiency of travel, give me Amundson. But when disaster strikes and all hope is gone, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton.’”

Within a day or two of launching **The Social Gathering**, Steve Mason got in touch offering to record readings from the truly incredible diaries kept by Ernest Shackleton on his 1914-17 expedition to Antarctica. At that point, we were planning posts to a website and a possible downloadable newspaper. Obviously we set yes, and, with that, **The Social Gathering** became a podcast series too. The introduction and episode 1 are up now, following episodes as soon as Steve sends them to us.

[Click here to listen to Episode One](#)

Voice and sound design by Steve Mason. Illustrations by Peter Turner.

LIFE BEYOND THE NEUTRAL ZONE #2

LIAS SAUDI

In the second of our regular collection of letters from Fat White Family's Lias Saoudi, the writer's mind travels from Brixton's Windmill to Sebald's Suffolk via a fictional Mexican border town and alights upon the most pressing question of the day: "will the pubs open again before the summer ends, and if they don't, what's to become of my sex life?"

I had the pleasure of finally reading Will Hodgkinson's short history of the Windmill this week, an eagerly awaited Rough Trade edition for obvious reasons, one must keep a careful eye on one's own canonisation, after all. For the most part Roof Dog is a great read, the only part I found a little irksome was his lauding of the Shinichi Suzuki method and the like; I have no personal problem with exquisitely trained young musical impresarios re-hashing the Mancunian prole art threat of The Fall, but surely the irony of it is at least worth pointing out?

Perhaps I'm just pining for a by-gone phase of the gentrification process, one where there wasn't such an emphasis on being able to keep time, and where having a father that bitterly disapproved of what you were doing wasn't just favourable, but essential. I suppose what I lament is the transmogrification of a culture of 'refusal' into one of 'acceptance'. I realised after many years spent battering my head up against the brick wall of a rigidly codified London music world that the only way I would ever transcend my lack of music training or education was by making friends with Saul (who knew all the chords) and eventually covering myself in faecal matter. Twice I made my way down to the crossroads then, so obviously it breaks my heart a little to think all of that unpleasantness could well have been avoided had I only had the good sense to grow up in the catchment area of the Brit School.

As I'm sure is the case for many of you out there my attention span has started to acclimatise to our 'new world'. At first, I found it difficult to read anything other than the increasingly grizzly headlines pouring in every day; a habit which has thankfully subsided now, oddly enough just as we seem to be reaching peak grizzle in this country. Remember reading about Italy when they were at this point? It was genuinely scary, right? Now other than a mild anxiety concerning the wellbeing of my mother all I'm really worried about is whether the pubs will open again before the summer ends, and if they don't, what's to become of my sex life?

For the most part I've been pouring my surplus attention span into finally winning my personal battle with Roberto Bolano's *2666*, a nigh

on thousand page labyrinth of tangential disorientation and lyrical sublimity, whose plot ferments around and within the fictional Mexican border city of Santa Teresa, where a seemingly never ending string of brutal femicides are unfolding, mirroring the situation of the real life Mexican border town of Juarez, which experienced the same orgy of bloodshed in the 1990s. It's divided into five books; in the first three of these the murders appear on the periphery of the imagination, they are gently alluded to amidst an accumulation of crisscrossing character developments and inhumanly deft narrative deviations. Then you hit book four 'the part about the crimes' and you are met with a hefty deluge of utterly unsentimental accounts detailing the precise nature of each act of supreme violence. Eventually the words 'vaginally and anally raped' are boiled down to nothing more than meaningless shapes on the page that you end up scanning across in search of the next plot development, in search of something conclusive in the great jungle that is Bolano's *2666*. Book five awaits...

I've also picked up W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* once more, having abandoned it two days into my last UK tour around 6 months ago, a tour I'd hoped to conduct sober for the first time. For 48 hours I was on a regime of green tea and literature, for 48 hours I was aglow with a rampant smugness, my wellbeing in the face of seemingly impossible odds glistening like a new-found treasure. In my head I heaped silent pity upon my poor comrades, as their minds and bodies once more embarked upon the soul-withering series of chemically induced convulsions that constitute your average tour with Fat White Family. My abstinence was thwarted shortly before the second show in Edinburgh sadly, when my dear friend Laura showed up with some innocuous looking, seed-like magic mushrooms. I had to leave the stage halfway through the gig to be sick for 15 minutes, Saul's tender delivery of Goodbye Goebbels coming through the walls as I wretched with terrible violence into a sack of rubbish backstage, my tour manager patting me on the back the whole time asking me whether or not I was OK.



With little more than endless trips to and from Budgens to look forward to in London now, and what with a spitefully voluptuous spring frothing up all around us, baring its now all but forbidden charms, Sebald's book seems positively medicinal. His account of a voyage on foot up the east Anglian coast in the summer of 1992 reads like an ecstatic dissection of time and place, baffling in its sheer learnedness. Not unlike Bolano, it's his ability to suddenly sing sideways which is so mesmerising, only here the devil is in the academic detail as opposed to its population of characters and their respective libidinal thrusts. No sooner than five chapters in do I find myself loitering around the rookery at Streatham Common, staring at a magnificent cherry blossom, waiting for a Sebaldian voice to spring to life in my head. For a moment I toy with the idea of the blossom as an analogy for 2666, but swiftly realise this is perhaps the most pretentious thought I've ever had, and quite probably the most pathetic. Back to remaking Shawshank it is, then...

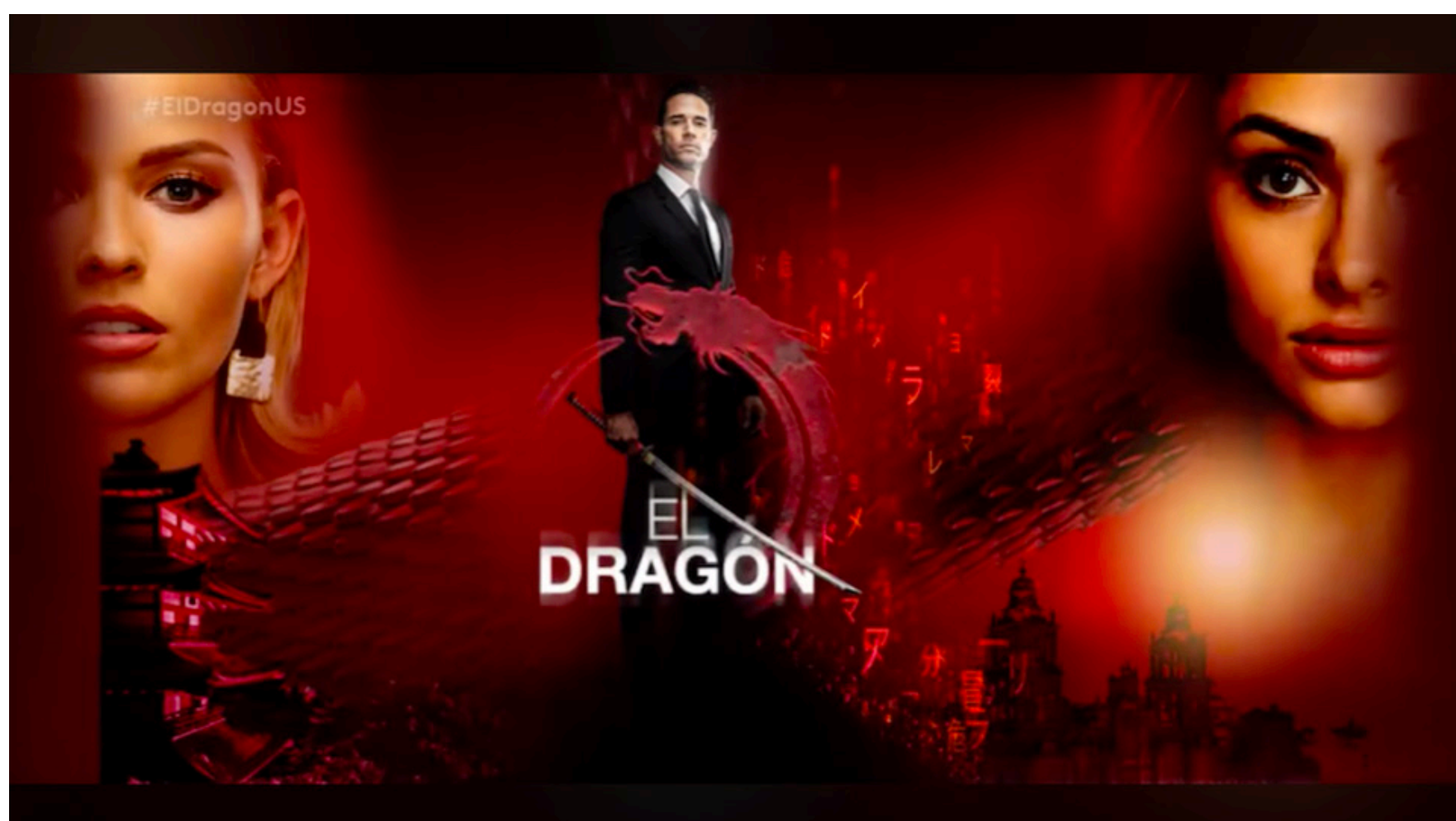
Pic: Alex Sebley

THE WASTED TIMES TV GUIDE

LEWIS JAMIESON

Fourth week of lockdown and we've all done *Succession* twice, we're not sure about the new *Westworld*, the kids have got bored of Disney+ and we're all wishing there was one more episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (or – even better – a Leon special). So what's left to watch? **Lewis Jamieson** has trawled the outer edges of our streaming services to find a load of TV programmes that are perfect for late night lockdown anti-social gatherings.

EL DRAGON - RETURN OF A WARRIOR is by turns shockingly violent, emotionally drenched and downright comic, the 38 (!) episodes of Series One somehow manage to incorporate soap style love arcs, moments of outright violence (albeit with much of the gore off screen), multiple plot twists and stereotypically Mexican levels of sentiment. Despite the rampant drug use, executions, pitched battles, and sexual violence it's packaged into something nearer to the likes of *The Man From UNCLE*, less grit, more escapism...



[Read a whole load more recommendations here.](#)

EXCITING TIMES

NAOISE DOLAN

Editor Lettice Franklin of W&N introduces one of this year's standout debut novels...

At the restaurant he put his phone face-down on the table, so I did the same as if for me, too, this represented a professional sacrifice

So writes Naoise Dolan, about Julian (a banker), watched by Ava (a TEFL teacher), in the second paragraph of *Exciting Times* – a novel I was lucky enough to publish this Thursday.

That one sentence shows one of the things I love most about Naoise's writing – her attention. She notices the implication of one action that many might ignore. She succinctly explains just why that action that we ignore might nevertheless affect us. She doesn't miss any detail of our 21st century behaviour. She reveals the way that wealth, class and status underpin every single social interaction. She revels in the ever-changing power balances between two people, the 'sacrifice', the time spent 'facedown', the games that two can play at. She shows with great emotional awareness, wit and candour how two people get to know each other, get to talk to each other, get to maybe sort of love each other.

In the months leading up to publication, we have been lucky enough to have many authors come to us praising the novel – from Hilary Mantel to Nathan Filer – and I wanted to end this introduction with Luke Kennard's description of the novel, which articulates all I love about it: *'Devastatingly perceptive and articulate in every sentence. Whenever I wasn't reading it I was worrying about the characters as if they were people I knew. It's a joy to encounter a book so compulsively readable and painfully funny while simultaneously deeply insightful on love, on sexuality, on social class, on their links as terribly inextricable in the 21st century as they ever were. Dolan is a major talent and this is a formidable debut.'*



EXCITING TIMES by Naoise Dolan is out now. [Click here to read an extract on the social.com](#)

BENNY'S BABBIES

COLD WAR STEVE

& BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

In September 2019 (a properly different world it was then!) the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery approached Cold War Steve to work on a commission based around their amazing Digital Image Resource. The idea was to dig deep into the archives and give some of their fantastic pieces the CWS treatment, and in doing so to emphasise the unique brilliance of the collection sat online, a collection that anyone can access at any time.

Little did we realise then that we'd be sat here 8 months later, the gallery closed and all of us pretty much barred from the outside world – galleries, pubs, cinemas, schools and most shops shut and us all trying to figure out 'what next?' and how to cope daily during this mad weird time.

This weekend, The Social Gathering got this amazing project on loan until it can be installed on the walls of the gallery where it deserves to be. We are ridiculously proud to offer the official unveiling of 'Benny's Babbies', Cold War Steve's biggest and most ambitious piece to date, a joyous celebration of his city Birmingham!



[Download the full high resolution artwork on the site](#) and enjoy written contributions inspired by the work from Kit De Waal, Jonathan Coe, Joe Lycett, Dr Pogus Caesar, Stephen Duffy, Emalee Beddoes-Davis and Christoper Spencer aka Cold War Steve.

Our friend Sophie Green (of DJ tag team C&S Strategies) keeps a daily diary on Instagram stories documenting the ups, downs and in the middles of life in the new abnormal...

Thanked God for immigrants (thank you Jeremy Deller).

Missed drinking cocktails on a Saturday afternoon with Jen and Louise. Missed making Louise uncomfortable with excessive displays of physical affection. Missed trying to get Jen out of a cab and into a bar while she enquires about the driver's entire life history.

Ate a ridiculous amount of sugared almonds. Never really got what the fuss about them was before until someone got me some good ones for Easter. Now I get it.

Felt like a husk of a woman without even the slightest sexual urge.

Looked back on a lot of photographs from exactly a year ago when The Chemical Brothers played The Social. It was probably the busiest, hottest, best night I've ever experienced in there and looking at the picture of all the bodies pressed together made me feel a proper physical longing.

SOPHIE GREEN

[Click here](#) to read all of this week's observations

Follow her [@fishlill](#) on Instagram for daily Isolation Observations

THESOCIAL

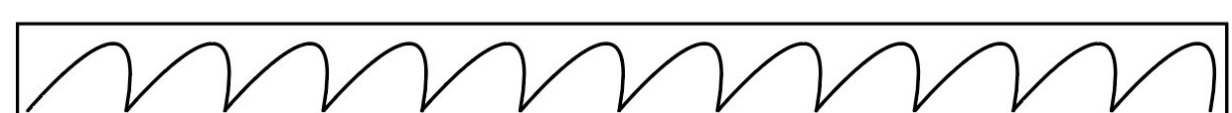


Every night during the lockdown, The Social is opened up online for drinks from 6pm. Different guest landlords will be on hand to start proceedings and to kick you out if you overstay your welcome. Our virtual Peggy Mitchells have included Nadine Shah, Happyness, Steve Mason, The Orielles and Annie Nightingale.

Until we can actually meet again, join us Monday to Saturday on Twitter [@thesociallondon](#) and Facebook [@thesocialw1](#)



BECAUSE NO
ONE SHOULD
DRINK ALONE.



THE VIEW FROM HERE

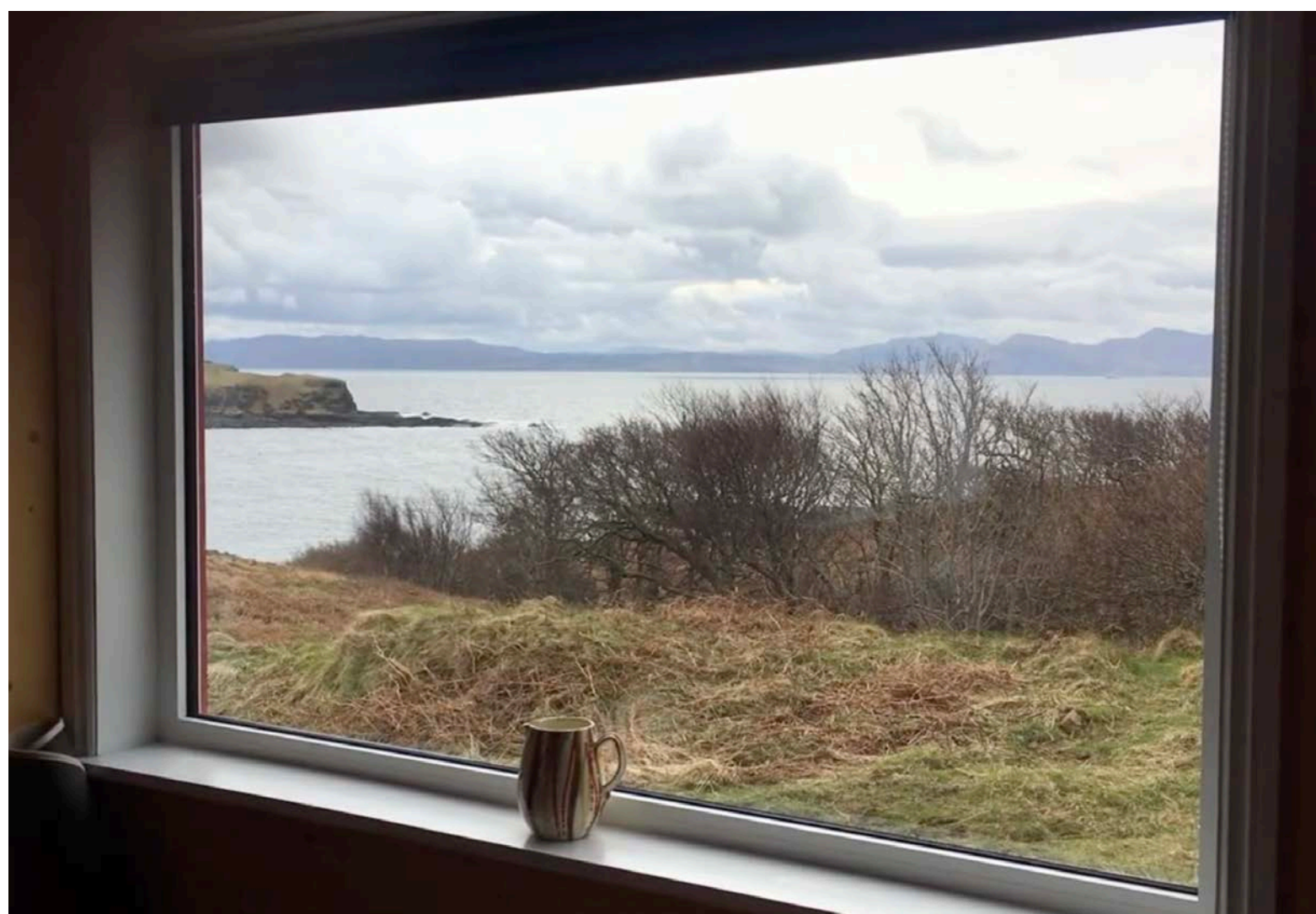
When starting The Social Gathering, we sent out a message to friends outside of Britain's big cities asking how our they were getting on in the rest of the world. How does isolation feel outside of our media bubble? What – if any – are the signs of hope that we can draw on?

Our second View comes from **Johnny Lynch**, aka **Pictish Trail**. Johnny has been one of our favourite artists for years, playing Social gigs and Caught by the River festival stage numerous times. As the man behind the Lost Map record label, he's responsible for a bunch of mindbendingly brilliant records (personal favourites: Ed Dowie's The Uncle Sold and Alabaster dePlume's recent LP To Cy & Lee: Instrumentals Vol. 1). We were drawn towards Johnny's view because he lives on Eigg, an island in the Inner Hebrides with a population of 105 people.

PICTISH TRAIL

JOHNNY LYNCH

It feels like a weird privilege to be able to experience the day to day changing of the season on Eigg right now. Ordinarily, I travel to and from the island quite regularly. I'd be at home for maybe a three week stretch, before taking a trip to the mainland for a fortnight, to do rehearsals and live shows with my band, or promotional stuff, label meetings. When I'd get back to the island, there would be noticeable changes. The hours of sunlight would be slightly different, the weather patterns would adjust, my kids will have grown up that little bit more. During this lockdown I'm getting the chance to live through the changes. We had such a stormy winter, particularly at the start of the year; it's been really pleasant to see the island slowly repair and regenerate. But, for obvious reasons, it's the quietest I've ever seen the island at this time of year.



[Watch Johnny's exclusive recording for The Social Gathering and read his full piece here](#)

Photo by Ben Cormack

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

CATHERINE ECCLES

Last week, Catherine Eccle stalked us through her archival journey piecing tracks from Andrew Weatherall's peerless MUSIC'S NOT FOR EVERYONE NTS shows into playlists. The second playlist is a five and a half hour deep dive through Andrew's 2018 shows. It's proof that while music may not be for everyone, it's certainly working its magic for some of us at the moment.

I'm the kind who finds reading about visual art unintelligible, never looks at a review of a book I haven't read, and is embarrassingly dyslexic about the musical canon. I know what music I like, but too often for comfort can't tell you what it is. Perhaps coming at artists unburdened by context makes the discoveries purer, sweeter, truer. I've been asking myself, as I dig deep into the MNFE archive, whether women are less likely to be geeks than men because of brain chemistry or inclination. Either way, there's nothing like a dose of obsession to get you through Coronatimes. With the weight of planetary distress bearing down daily, donning the headphones and walking through certain half-deserted streets to the music Andrew chose for MNFE is an act of survival.



Click to listen to Catherine's [2018 Music's Not For Everyone](#) compilation in full on Spotify: *A selection of tracks played by Andrew on thirteen NTS Radio shows during that year. I embarked on it the day of Andrew's funeral in March as the world was closing down, and over past weeks have distilled it into five hours twenty-nine minutes (co-incidentally only two minutes difference from the 2019/20 playlist) on Spotify. A journey through a topography of sound – it will take you places where social distancing isn't a concept.*

DIVERS TO DIVE: A PANDEMIC DREAM JOURNAL #2

DAVID KEENAN, illustrated by ELENI AVRAAM

THURSDAY 9/4/20

Hope is so often deferred, or given over to the future, as if only then, when we arrive at the idea of our destination, will we live or be redeemed or set free. The poet Edward Thomas, whose heart was stopped by a shell in the battle of Arras in April 1917, set out on a bicycle, in March of 1913, to find the first signs of spring as it came in across the southwest of England. And he found that there was spring in winter, and winter in spring. His Collected Poems, published posthumously, find hope renewed in the eternal renewal of time itself, in the magic of the passing moment, in which everything is forgiven, in the empty speech of birds, in a clot of dirt, fallen, between his fingers: “It is enough/To smell, to crumble the dark earth,/While the robin sings over again/Sad songs of Autumn mirth.”



An extract from David Keenan's Pandemic Dream Journal, which is published every Sunday evening. [Click here to read Issue #2 in full](#)

For more of Eleni Avraam's artwork visit whattimeislove.bigcartel.com

MAKING LOCKDOWN BEARABLE...

Limmy's Homemade Show / **Marvel Comics: The Untold Story** by Sean Howe / **Rattlesnakes** / Unorthodox / **Angel** by Working Men's Club / The fucking Tufty Club / **Sorry - 925** / **The Bass Rock** by Evie Wyld / **Uncut Gems** / **Coup d'état** EP by Steve Mason / **staunch Benny hats**, whatever the



weather / continuous streams of poncey deliveries to your front door / **not doing #MeAt20** / plants (all of them) / **Cowshed hand cream air drop** / DJ Randall / **Lung Shadows** / the Beard and Lipstick Scene / **train drivers in eyeliner** / the Bra Men / **conewidth not broadband** / courtesy Sir Jon Savage / **reliving and reloving The Great Eastern** / all week, dreaming of an island.

This week's Social Gathering was put together by Lee Brackstone, Carl Gosling, Tom Noble and Robin Turner. A huge thanks as always to all of our contributors, and to everyone who has helped to spread the word about what we're trying to do with this. We raise this glass for you.