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Hello, my name is Martin.

Welcome to the latest edition of The Big Issue. The magazine is celebrating Charles Dickens this week. As well as being a writer, he was also a great campaigner, and The Big Issue has been involved in a new exhibition about the injustices he saw as he walked around London at night, which you can read about on page 20. I read *Oliver Twist* back in school and I’m still a big reader now. I sell the magazine in Edinburgh, which is a very bookish place. It’s even been made a Unesco City of Literature. Read more of my story on page 46.
Make it sew
I'd like to send a message to Swan, the homeless poet who wrote the poem about the quilt made for refugees [April 10-16]. I love its sentiments and it becomes even more real if you read Sue Monk Kidd's book The Invention of Wings, wherever every quilt tells the life story of oppressed people. You have to read it – and keep sewing!
Jenny Cooper, email

Getting engaged
Daniel Wilson-Dodd [Comment, April 17-23] identified that one of the biggest challenges facing leaders in the care industry is the ability to keep employees engaged. This is an issue that extends across most sectors and many organisations in the UK. Indeed, there is good research available from the Engage for Success movement that only one third of employees are comfortably engaged with their work.
There are plenty of things that you can do to stimulate and improve the motivation of your people that have nothing to do with increasing pay. The key to achieving highly engaged people at work is by helping leaders and managers understand what holds an individual back, and then how to release their energy and commitment.
A more engaged workforce not only increases productivity but also reduces costs through less stress and absence. The adage ‘What gets measured gets done’ is an important one. Allowing staff to be innovative engenders psychological safety and a sense of freedom.
Tom Morrell, visiting lecturer at the University of East London

Don't bet on it
Good to see The Big Issue highlight gambling addiction [April 17-23]. The plague of fixed-odds betting terminals in high street bookies has brought hard gambling to public spaces. They are rightly called the ‘crack cocaine’ of gambling. But essentially, the ‘games’ available online are the same.
Kids (who can have bank cards from the age of 12) are encouraged towards them by constant advertising on social media and television. These days toddlers learn to play computer games before they can talk, and the blurring of lines between games and ‘gambling fun’ is growing all the time.
Just as with alcohol and tobacco, stricter legislation is needed to restrict advertising and availability.
Adrian Bailey, Glasgow

Read all about it
My home town, Belper in Derbyshire, appears to be at the forefront of the reading boom championed by The Big Issue. Certainly, the passing of plans for a new library to be built in the centre of town would suggest this, the existing library being deemed too small for purpose.
David Robinson, Belper
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Our period of incredible political flux shows no sign of settling. June's snap General Election announcement caught everybody on the hop. It won't be until mid-May that the political parties publish their manifestos. In the meantime, they talk of extra holidays, copy each other's plans for energy bill caps and argue about NOT doing live TV debates.

There is a fear that voter fatigue and poll apathy will keep people from engaging. It's understandable. While we live in a time of change with so many elections and referendums – out of Westminster and from devolved seats of power – it's hard to see the effect of good governance. Everything is about getting there, rather than the things that need to happen when they arrive.

However, to not engage is a mistake. THIS is the time to really make a difference.

While Brexit remains the flag under which this election sails, there are many problems that need addressed – including around poverty, health, social care, education, literacy, housing and pay equality.

Focus, inevitably, will sharpen on how much the main parties will spend on these issues.

But at The Big Issue we have been advocating a new approach. We believe that rather than funnel ever-decreasing resources at the problems once they've grown, we should learn ways to nip these problems in the bud and prevent them from happening in the first place. The prevention strategy is at the heart of The Big Issue thinking, and we're calling on the political parties who are clamouring for YOUR vote to put it at the heart of theirs.

Invest now for a better future. This is not an empty soundbite. It's a way ahead. Money spent now to help the poorest have opportunity saves welfare costs in subsequent years and allows there to be a route to success for those who were previously locked in.

This week we print our simple manifesto for the election, a Manifesto for Prevention, one that if implemented could make Britain better and make life chances for those at the bottom suddenly open up. The cycle of poverty could be properly broken, rather than maintained.

There are choices in this election, big choices to shape the future. We call on parties to embrace prevention. And for you to hold your candidates to account. Will they show a willingness to step outside the standard cycle and be brave voices for those who need a hand up?

Take our manifesto to them. Challenge them to back it.
We believe in a fence at the top of the cliff, not an ambulance at the bottom. We believe in prevention over cure.

More than £17bn a year is spent in England and Wales on short-run late intervention. And in Scotland, 40 per cent of public spending is targeted at problems that could have been avoided.

We believe prevention should be at the heart of every policy when it comes to poverty.

Better use of resources will improve the quality of people’s lives, will reduce the need for expensive state services and help safeguard the future.

We believe in planning for the future and making the most of what you have.

Investing in people’s lives early on will provide routes out of poverty, into better futures, for the poorest in society.

We believe in social opportunity, that social enterprises offer a third way to deal with social problems that governments and business can’t always see.

1 We want a clear commitment to literacy, with guaranteed funds for local library services.

2 We want to see a plan to revolutionise our NHS, with an increased budget for prevention, and a shift to social and community medicine.

3 We want social justice for all, with opportunities that give people a hand up out of poverty, into better futures.

STEP 3: Challenge them to back prevention, first
Will they follow The Big Issue plan of greater early intervention in fighting poverty, rather than expensive measures later on?
Will they pledge to dismantle poverty, work for better literacy and offer routes towards better futures rather than sticking plasters over local problems?
How are they going to tackle local poverty issues?

STEP 4: Once you get responses to your questions, tell us
We will assemble the responses and let readers know which candidates are committed to a prevention future.
You can tweet @bigissue using the hashtag #activistarmy
You can email us at editorial@bigissue.com
Or you can visit bigissue.com/activistarmy and complete our simple form.
As part of The Big Issue activist collective, you’ll receive updates about our prevention campaign, and additional calls to action, as the campaign grows.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!
You can only vote if you’re registered. The deadline for the General Election is May 22.
Register here: gov.uk/register-to-vote
My brother’s short life is a lesson in prevention

As it the slums that did it for Patrick Bird? Or the fact while he was born in the Second World War his mother was smoking up to 30 cigarettes a day.

Whatever, 43 years after the birth came the death, on the night of the biggest storms since the ones that wrecked the Spanish Armada at the end of the 16th century.

It was a tempest of unrooted trees, torn-up bridges and highways, ruined livelihoods, and a broken belief in our TV weather predictors.

My elder brother breathed his last unaware of the torment Mother Nature was handing out to the British Isles. But no tree collapsed on him, nor wall or roof, which was my first thought when his wife rang up and said he was dead. Rather he had died of medical complications. The struggle to keep him alive petered out that October night in 1987, ending his life in a nicely appointed council bungalow. All conceivably that could be done for him had been done for him. Operations, therapy, investigations, medications; a Rolls-Royce service that took my breath away was rolled out for this Irish-born boy who grew up in Notting Hill’s slums.

I miss him more than any other person who has “gone ahead”. His humour was fierce, his bravery indomitable, his generosity unequalled. But what an arse when it came to cigarettes, and drink, and the worst menu imaginable to sustain his at-times hardworking life.

Patrick was born with a congenital heart valve problem. He would have needed some intervention at some stage. But his daily insult to his body was too much for his weakened body to take. And he gave up the ghost, as Shakespeare would describe it, 30 years ago this year.

Everything conceivable was done for him other than to stop him killing himself. Prevention did not come in, and did not even get a look in. So much was done to obviate his death other than to stop him doing himself grave injury each day of his life.

Prevention, the best of all cures did not exist in the doctor’s surgery, or in the outpatients departments, or the intensive cares or operating theatres he passed through. The NHS operated like fielders chasing the cricket ball and trying to catch it wherever it went. And they were bound to drop the ball sometime. Ducking and diving, bobbing and weaving, Patrick Finbarr Bird was leading the doctors and nurses, surgeons and physiotherapists a rare dance. And yet he never stood a chance against himself.

To me my brother’s life is a lesson in why we need to prevent rather than cure. Why we need to put the smart money on preventing the mental self-destruction that ate up one of my brothers’ lives, and has eaten into others, including my own. How a blitzkrieg on the mentality that grows among our poorest is where we need to start much of our work.

I take a personal interest in prevention. Patrick would have needed medical help but it would not have done him in if he had developed as much skill in helping himself that he developed in killing himself.

Unless tomorrow is increasingly about prevention then the NHS will never reach its true potential of ridding us of diseases that we die from, and malfunctions we are born with. It is so awash with people like my brother who did not do the right thing about their bodies. And because the NHS is the greatest social invention our world has ever produced, it will always play fielder to whatever wobbly ball it’s thrown.

But prevention needs to happen in all parts of society and at all levels of government. That is why we have called for prevention to be put at the heart of this coming election. Brexit may be the form it takes but actually reinventing health and social support is the essence of what this election is truly about.

If we fail circa 30 per cent of our children at school, and they become the unhealthy, the unskilled, the unsocial, then we need to look again at what school that goes wrong does to all of us.

It fills our lives full of the contradictions of violence and crime and disorder that we then have to deal with.

If all government departments followed the example of looking at how to prevent – as the NHS is now moving inexorably towards – then we would be moving towards a brighter future. As I mentioned in the Lords the other day, the NHS now spends over four per cent of its budget on preventative measures, and it will increase with time. This is a sign of increasing awareness of how cure need never happen if prevention rings true.

Last week saw World Malaria Day. Forty years ago we almost cured it worldwide. But the preventative eye was taken off the malarial rabbit, and it’s taken us these last 40 years to get back to where we were then.

Let us demand that prevention is put at the heart of this general election; for we know it makes sense. And as for all of that self-destructive urge that cohabits around drink and drugs and cigarettes, education and social support is the essence of what this will be about. Dismantling poverty though will do more than anything. And getting rid of poverty must start with preventing it.

John Bird is the founder and Editor in Chief of The Big Issue. @johnbirdswords john.bird@bigissue.com

John Bird, left, with big brother Patrick.
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MAKE A LOAN - CHANGE A LIFE
How have we become such an uncaring society? It truly baffles me. Is it that people think/feel that donating a pound to Children in Need or Comic Relief discharges their social responsibility and eases their conscience? The crisis in social care will affect everyone at some point in their lives… I feel ashamed at our society when I see people sleeping on the high street in a cardboard box.

KIERON LICKLEY

The budget for faster care. The system appears to me more broken now than at any time in my 14 years as a carer – I am told it is "more cuts".

DAVID LEYLAND

Too many issues – massive rise in homelessness, housing benefit cuts, lack of genuinely affordable housing either to buy or rent, lack of emergency housing, never mind the funding cuts to the NHS, education and social care.

EMILY CORNELL

How is it that the 6th richest country in the world needs food banks?

E FITZ-MORIATY (@EFM_UK)

The list is endless – NHS workers’ rights, employment tribunals, zero-hour contracts, equality issues, food prices, British farmers, age discrimination and retirement ages, the press, disabled rights, the fishing industry, fracking, renewable and affordable energy, loss of green spaces, empty houses… Politicians make promises they break.

JUNE ADAMSON

I hope any money saved from leaving the EU will be used to help the homeless.

HARRY FENTON

What happened to the targets on reducing the number of street homeless?

JEFF HALL

Key concern is the now policy vacuum over social care crisis – older & disabled ppl will continue to suffer in the interim.

GUY TURNBULL (@GUYTURNBULL1)

V imp to press GE2017 candidates to support UN nuclear ban treaty talks. The risk of nuclear war is real. Other WMD are banned.

FIONA MONTGOMERY (@FIONAMONTW)

My issue for GE2017 is ensuring Scottish readers/voters understand what issues are relevant in a General Election…“bursting prisons, hospital waiting times, lack of affordable housing,” cited by The Big Issue as election issues, are all devolved matters and the responsibility of the Scottish Government, not Westminster. Any discussion on these topics should take place during the next Holyrood election.

TINA JORDAN
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WHERE & WHEN

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Councillors in Oxford have backed a plan to allow homeless people to use empty buildings in the city as shelters – echoing The Big Issue’s ongoing Fill ‘Em Up campaign.

It follows the occupation of an abandoned power station, owned by Oxford University, by the Iffley Open House housing campaign group, made to leave the Old Power Station in Osney back in March.

Green councillor David Thomas was so impressed by the spirit of the radical group he came up with his own proposal to make vacant buildings available to homeless people as temporary shelters. Thomas’ motion was backed this week by the city council, and detailed plans to make use of appropriate empty buildings will be drawn up by September.

It follows the release of a report showing there are a staggering 200,000 long-term empty homes in England. These properties, unused for six months or more, have a combined estimated value of £43bn.

The Big Issue has urged central government and local authorities to address Britain’s chronic housing problem by incentivising use and exploring new ways to refurbish the nation’s derelict stock. Our Fill ‘Em Up campaign has explored various ways to restore empty buildings as a way of increasing housing supply.

In other housing news, the Homelessness Reduction Bill – which places a legal obligation on councils in England to provide meaningful support to resolve homelessness and prevent people falling into rough sleeping in the first place – was passed into law on Thursday before parliament was dissolved for the General Election.
FORAGING
BY MATTHEW NICHOLAS
Matt lives in a village in Yorkshire and has struggled with ME for the last 20 years, dealing with constant pain and fatigue. He is trying to support himself through his artwork. His paintings take six to eight weeks, sometimes longer, to create. To see more of his work visit: mattnicholas.gallery

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES
BY MICHAEL CROSSWAITE
After years spent travelling and squatting, Michael ended up homeless in London with a drug habit. “I got into a hostel and eventually got myself clean,” he says. “Now I’ve got a Peabody Flat and things are cool.” This piece comprises 12 small paintings on A4 black card. “With my painting, my thing is humour. The more ridiculous the better. I think the world is a very silly place and hopefully this comes through in my pictures.”

Street Art is created by people who are marginalised by issues like homelessness, disability and mental health conditions. Contact streetlights@bigissue.com to see your art here.
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How to switch off

Julia Hobsbawm

If I asked how connected you are, you might reply with ‘Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat’ or ‘The Tube, my mobile network and Netflix’. When more than one billion people on the planet were connected in a single day in 2016, and when in a single year this century more data was downloaded than in the whole of human history, you know that our connected world has changed us forever.

My belief is that the change we are undergoing is so rapid and so comprehensive that it has actually given rise to problems we are only just beginning to see or acknowledge: rising stress levels (10 million working days a year in the UK lost to ‘stress’) and low productivity (the world’s productivity levels are stubbornly stagnant and in some cases dropping, not rising).

Technology is not the only source of the problem but the way we have such blind faith in it and being ‘always on’ is a large part of the problem. But before you think you’re reading someone who hates the digital era and wishes us back in the dark ages when the wheel was the biggest new-fangled invention, I assure you this is not the case. I welcome the connected technology era, I live my life professionally and personally on networks dominated by connected-enable machines, just like we all do.

I just want to manage my connectedness like I do my overall health and well-being. I call this having social health – managing who and what you know, the time you take to be online and offline, to learn and share and socialise and crucially to do so face-to-face more than you are on Facebook.

Perhaps you already look after your health: you might be shocked to realise that the global market for ‘wellness’ and fitness – that’s everything from vitamins to meditation apps, trainers and gym membership – represents more than $3.5 trillion, twice that of the arms trade.

Now it is time for social health. Just like we count calories and carbs and go to the gym, it’s time in our personal and professional lives to work at working out what our healthy levels of connectedness needs to be. That includes having ‘tech-noshabbats’ offline (mine is weekly, on a Friday night) but it is also about trusting information I get less from algorithm-led sources and instead for actual people or brands I know – to have five-a-day information diets just like the other kind.

Social health means knowing when to ask someone you work with for a coffee to really find out what they are thinking instead of just hitting ‘reply all’ on the group email. It means reconnecting to the person in the database and reclaiming the value that a human will always have over the machine: our ability to communicate, to tell stories, to relay fact, opinion, to make things happen as a community. Not just as a series of linked nodes on a network.
LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

A t 16 I was not the most popular kid at school, especially with girls. I didn’t know what to say to them. I didn’t know what to do with my life. I wanted to be a rebel, but I was really just a suburban boy. The world had not opened up to me. It was an awkward age for me. It’s a rite of passage in America to try out for the football team, but I hadn’t fully grown yet, so I was laughed off the field. That’s how I wound up in the drama class instead. That was where all the girls were.

If I met the 16-year-old Dennis now I’d think, he’s a shy boy. Not a handsome boy. A shaggy-haired country bumpkin in a raggedy polyester shirt with polyester jeans. Casting about trying to work out who he is. I would tell him to take a breath. Take it easy.

Don’t take everything so seriously. He had a tendency to over-dramatise, take things personally. He was over-sensitive. I’d tell him, the world is lighter than he thinks. It’s what you make it.

Both my parents were very supportive. As I got older I got even closer to my dad – we became very good pals. And mom has always been my rock. I get my tenacity from my mom. And I had my brother Randy – we were in the same bedroom for 12 years so we’re really extremely close. He’s 6’5” so he’s always been my big brother. Of course we also fought all the time but if anyone else said anything against him...

I didn’t get serious about drama until I went to college. There was a teacher there, Cecil Picket, and he taught acting as a craft. Within a week, I knew what I wanted to do with my life. It was quite a gift, the way he talked about what acting was, the study of human behaviour. Once I decided what I wanted to do I became very driven. After college I worked as a waiter to save some money then loaded all my stuff in the car and drove from Houston to LA. That was it, I was going to do it. LA is a very tough town. It can be very hard.
mean when you first move out there. But I’ve been there 40 years and now I love the life.

I guess I had success relatively early. I struggled for a couple of years, but then I got the part in Breaking Away and that changed things for me. My brother drove me to the cinema when it came out, and when we got to the cinema there was a line round the block queuing to see it. That put a tingle up my back. And he said to me: “Looks like you’ve got a hit.”

The thing that would impress the 16-year-old Dennis most about his future would be the 16-inch reflecting telescope I got. It was a powerful piece of kit. When I was a kid it was always my dream to be an astronaut, maybe because I grew up in Houston. The telescope would interest the teenage me more than any of my films, except maybe The Right Stuff [the 1983 film about the Mercury Seven astronauts selected in 1958 for the first American manned spacecraft]. He’d love that, especially that I got to play Gordon Cooper. When the book came out I read it cover to cover and I thought, man if they ever made a movie of this, gosh, I’d love to play Gordon Cooper. He was always my favourite of the seven. Then when they were casting for it I went in and I got it! It turned out Gordon Cooper lived three miles from me in LA. So I went to meet him and we became friends and he turned me on to a flight instructor and eventually I got my pilot’s licence. The whole thing was just a dream.

Making Great Balls of Fire [the 1989 biography of rock ‘n’ roll hellraiser Jerry Lee Lewis] was a blast. It took nine months, with Jerry Lee Lewis on set every day. He’s an American legend. That was an incredible time. We actually got to rehearse at the original Sun studios with Jerry’s original band. Jerry Lee was one of my piano teachers. His advice on my playing him was: “You’re doing it wrong son.” He’s the greatest star in the world according to himself.

Success is the toughest thing to handle when you’re an actor. No one teaches you how to be a success. It’s very overwhelming. There were a few years I don’t think I handled it very well. Cocaine is a way of telling you you’re making too much money.

But I did eventually see that it was a choice between that and losing everything that was important to me. And that was before I had kids. So I booked myself into rehab for 28 days and I was lucky, I got it the first time. That probably made things worse for the first four years, because you have to find something to replace it. And you have to re-learn things. I replaced it with golf in the end, because you can get obsessed with golf. And after a couple of years of teeth-gnawing I got into meditation. And eventually things got better.

My life can be overwhelming for whoever I’m in a relationship with [Quaid has been married three times, including 10 years to Meg Ryan from 1991]. I have a very busy life, but I think I’m easy. I’m a lot of laughs, I’m a lot of fun, I’ll tell you that. Am I more thoughtful now? I try to be, let’s just put it like that. I love being a dad, it’s my favourite thing. It’s the biggest buzz and the greatest challenge you’ll ever have. Of everything I’ve ever done, I’m proudest of all of my kids.

I’d tell my younger self, when in doubt, be yourself. And I’ll try to keep your enthusiasm for as long as I can. I think so far I’ve been able to do that. I set my goals high, but I think I surpassed them. I did imagine being in lots of movies and, especially in the ‘70s, there were so many I wanted to do. And I got to do them. I’ve had a very lucky life. I had a fire in my belly then, and I still have it now.

If I could go back and live any time again, it would be the four years we lived in Maple Street. From when I was seven years old, till I was 11. It was the ideal American ‘50s suburban neighbourhood. Every day was an adventure, just me and my brother and our buddies, running in and out of each other’s houses. Running up and down the street, inventing games. It was a very happy time.

“Cocaine is a way of telling you you’re making too much money”

Dennis Quaid stars in A Dog’s Purpose, out in cinemas May 5

Words: Jane Graham @Janeannie

IN 1970
THE YEAR
DENNIS
QUAID
Turns 16...

Spacecraft Apollo 13 returns safely to Earth after a potentially fatal onboard explosion / The Miss World beauty pageant in London is disrupted by women’s liberation protesters / The Beatles break up
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Author, journalist, champion of the poor. As Charles Dickens pounded the pavements of London through the night, he drew energy and anger from the poverty he saw. Peter Ross shines a light on a new exhibition celebrating the writer's shadowy life.
WHAT THE DICKENS

It is three feet tall, likely made of oak, and can be viewed between the hours of 10 and five at 48 Doughty Street in the Holborn area of London. The walking stick of Charles Dickens (below) is too valuable a relic to leave the museum that now occupies his former home, but at one time it would have gone everywhere with him – as marks of wear on the grip and tip attest. While the hand that held it and the feet it helped along are now bone and dust beneath the flagstones of Poet’s Corner, the brain of the author, and, indeed, his heart are still evident to anyone who cares to read his work. More, Dickens’ walking stick stands as a better symbol of the man than his writing desk and chair – both of which the museum also owns. It is a reminder that he saw the world on foot, that the rhythm of his steps was the rhythm of his mind as he flitted, a restless shadow, through the city.

Dickens liked to walk 12, 15 or even 20 miles a day,” says biographer Claire Tomalin, “and he got very lost if he couldn’t walk like that. I think he used walking to nourish his imagination.” Also, one suspects, to nurse his wrath. Dickens was a habitual, even obsessive visitor of workhouses, prisons, fetid midnight streets, and any area of London – and elsewhere – where the poor lived and suffered and too soon died. His great subject as a writer and social activist, those he sought to portray and protect, were, he said, “the rejected ones whom the world has too long forgotten, and too often misused”.

His championing of these people is world famous, of course, in great novels such as Oliver Twist and Little Dorrit, but much less well known now is that Dickens was a journalist and magazine editor dedicated to exposing social evils, and a campaigner dedicated to eradicating them. It is this rather forgotten aspect of his life and work that the Charles Dickens Museum – in association with The Big Issue – is seeking to highlight in the forthcoming exhibition Restless Shadow.

Dickens worked as a reporter from 1829, when he was 17, and from the early 1830s covered the House of Commons. Joining the staff of the Morning Chronicle, he began publishing sketches of London life, which would first bring him to public attention. Success as a fiction writer arrived in 1836 with The Pickwick Papers, but he had by no means forsaken journalism. In 1850, he established a current affairs magazine, Household Words, writing and commissioning others including Elizabeth Gaskell and Wilkie Collins. Household Words has been an inspiration for the direction of The Big Issue under the editorship of Paul McNamee. “It’s the idea of highbrow populism, which is a driving force of what we do. That’s from Dickens.” Dickens established a second magazine, All The Year Round, in 1859, and this was where his classic essay Night Walks, republished here, first appeared. The walk through London he describes so atmospherically (which Google Maps suggests was about 10 miles) was prompted by a bout of insomnia caused by “a distressing impression”. This is thought to have been witnessing his father undergoing surgery without anaesthetic; his room, as Dickens wrote in a letter, was “a slaughter house of blood”.

There were an estimated 70,000 rough sleepers in the capital, and Dickens encounters some on his walk. A young man rises before him, a ragged spectre, feral with cold, from the steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields, and one thinks of George Orwell’s essay, Hop Picking, in which, intending to shelter in the crypt, he spends the night instead on benches in Trafalgar Square. One thinks too of The Big Issue, launched in 1991 at St Martin’s.

Were Dickens to walk from his grave in Westminster Abbey today, he would no doubt find plenty to anger and energise him in our society. We may have a welfare state, which his Britain did not, but it is striking how the inequalities of his time chime with the inequalities of our own. I am writing this in Glasgow where, in March, Matthew Bloomer, 28, just a little older than the man Dickens encountered, froze to death on a pavement outside a department store on one of the city’s main shopping streets.

“Why, in the name of a gracious God, should such things be?” Dickens asked, during a visit to Scotland, on witnessing a dying child. It is a question that anyone might, on hearing Matthew Bloomer’s story, very well repeat.

“As we experience more poverty, homelessness and social inequality, I feel passionately that we need the voice of people like Dickens to point out what a dreadful mistake this is,” says Tomalin, whose book Charles Dickens: A Life opens with an account of an inquest he attended into the death of a newborn, and the lengths he went to help its mother, a servant girl, escape a murder verdict. As described by Tomalin, Dickens is an agent and angel of reform – advising his friend, philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts to fund schools for the poor and a home for rehabilitating prostitutes. His secret motivation was, almost certainly, his own experience of poverty. When he was 12 his father was taken into debtors prison; he went to work in a blacking factory, living in lodgings, lonely, often hungry.

A 21st-century Dickens would, Tomalin believes, be outspoken on prison overcrowding, lack of social housing, and income inequality. “The gap between what you can hope for in life if you are the child of poor parents and rich parents is almost immeasurable. That’s the sort of thing he would have looked at.” His voice and sense of indignant curiosity feels immediate. It does not echo faintly down the centuries, it could come booming out of a radio phone-in on food banks, a blog on our failure to take in greater numbers of refugee children – angry, articulate and alive.

In A Christmas Carol, two starving infants appear; the personification of Ignorance and Want. How would Dickens feel to learn that, 174 years later, they are still with us? “Unsurprised but outraged,” says actor Simon Callow, who created an acclaimed theatrical version of the story. We could do with him now, couldn’t we?

“We certainly bloody well could,” Callow agrees. “I feel that all the time. Where is our tribune of the people?”

Helplessness and despair are natural emotions for anyone considering the state of the world; a feeling there is nothing we can do about the many complex problems confronting us. But if Dickens teaches us anything, it is that human agency is a powerful force. “Dickens would have entirely endorsed the ethos of The Big Issue,” says Callow. “A hand up not a handout” is exactly what he believed. He knew he couldn’t so easily have become a criminal or simply destitute, but there was a spark inside him that refused to accept that, and he wanted to ignite the same spark in everybody else.

The name of that spark is hope. Out of the shadows, light.
S
ome years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night, for a series of several nights. The disorder might have taken a long time to conquer, if it had been faintly experienced on in bed; but, it was soon defeated by the brisk treatment of getting up directly after lying down, and going out, and coming home tired at sunrise.

In the course of those nights, I finished my education in a fair amateur experience of houselessness. My principal object being to get through the night, the pursuit of it brought me into sympathetic relations with people who have no other object every night in the year.

The month was March, and the weather damp, cloudy, and cold. The sun not rising before half-past five, the night perspective looked sufficiently long at half-past twelve: which was about my time for confronting it.

The restlessness of a great city, and the way in which it tumbles and tosses before it can get to sleep, formed one of the first entertainments offered to the contemplation of us houseless people. It lasted about two hours. We lost a great deal of companionship when the late public-houses turned their lamps out, and when the potmen thrust the last brawling drunks into the street; but stray vehicles and stray people were left us, after that. If we were very lucky, a policeman’s rattle sprang and a fray turned up; but, in general, surprisingly little of this diversion was provided. Except in the Haymarket, which is the worst kept part of London, and about Kent-street in the Borough, and along a portion of the line of the Old Kent-road, the peace was seldom violently broken. But, it was always the case that London, as if in imitation of individual citizens belonging to it, had expiring fits and starts of restlessness. At length these flickering sparks would die away, worn out—the last veritable sparks of waking life trailed from some late pieman or hot-potato man—and London would sink to rest. And then the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement, anything suggestive of any one being up—nay, even so much as awake, for the houseless eye looked out for lights in windows.

Walking the streets under the pattering rain, Houselessness would walk and walk and walk, seeing nothing but the interminable tangle of streets, save at a corner, here and there, two policemen in conversation, or the sergeant or inspector looking after his men. Now and then in the night—but rarely—Houselessness would become aware of a furtive head peering out of a doorway a few yards before him, and, coming up with the head, would find a man standing bolt upright to keep the lighted place, any movement, anything suggestive of any one being up—nay, even so much as awake, for the houseless eye looked out for lights in windows.

Under a kind of fascination, and in a ghostly silence suitable to the time, Houselessness and this gentleman would eye one another from head to foot, and so, without exchange of speech, part, mutually suspicious. Drip, drip, drip, from ledge and coping, splash from pipes and water-spouts, and by-and-by the houseless shadow would fall upon the stones that pave the way to Waterloo-bridge; it being in the houseless mind to have a halfpenny worth of excuse for saying “Good-night” to the toll-keeper, and catching a glimpse of his fire. I chose to wander by Bethlehem Hospital; partly, because I had a night fancy in my head which could be best pursued within sight of its walls and dome. And the fancy was this: Are not the sane and the insane"
equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming? Are not all of us outside this hospital, who dream, more or less in the condition of those inside it, every night of our lives? Are we not nightly persuaded, as they daily are, that we associate preposterously with kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and notabilities of all sorts? Do we not nightly jumble events and personages and times and places, as these do daily? Are we not sometimes troubled by our own sleeping inconsistencies, and do we not vexedly try to account for them or excuse them, just as these do sometimes in respect of their waking delusions? Said an afflicted man to me, when I was last in a hospital like this: “Sir, I can frequently fly.” I was half ashamed to reflect that so could I—by night. Said a woman to me on the same occasion: “Queen Victoria frequently comes to dine with me, and her Majesty and I dine off peaches and maccaroni in our night-gowns, and his Royal Highness the Prince Consort does us the honour to make a third on horseback in a Field-Marshal’s uniform.” Could I refrain from reddening with consciousness when I remembered the amazing royal parties I myself had given (at night), the unaccountable viands I had put on table, and my extraordinary manner of conducting myself on those distinguished occasions? I wonder that the great master who knew everything, who could call dreams the insanity of each day’s sanity, did not mistake is rectified and the sense of loneliness of each day’s life, did not mistake is rectified and the sense of loneliness of each day’s life, did not

In the market

Covent-garden Market, when it was market morning, was wonderful company. The great waggons of cabbages, with growers’ men and boys lying asleep under them, and with sharp dogs from market-garden neighbourhoods looking after the whole, were as good as a party. But one of the worst night sights I know in London, is to be found in the children who prowl about this place; who sleep in the baskets, fight for the offal, dart at any object they think they can lay their thieving hands on, dive under the carts and barrows, dodge the constables, and are perpetually making a blunt pattering on the pavement of the Piazza with the rain of their naked feet. A painful and unnatural result comes of the comparison one is forced to institute between the growth of corruption as displayed in the so much improved and cared for fruits of the earth, and the growth of corruption as displayed in these all uncared for (except inasmuch as ever-hunted) savages.

When there was no market, or when I wanted variety, a railway terminus with the morning mails coming in, was remunerative company. But like most of the company to be had in this world, it lasted only a very short time. The station lamps would burst out ablaze, the porters would emerge from places of concealment, the cabs and trucks would rattle to their places (the post-office carts were already in theirs), and, finally, the bell would strike up, and the train would come baying in. But there were few passengers and little luggage, and everything scuttled away with the greatest expedition. The locomotive post-offices, with their great nets—as if they had been dragging the country for bodies—would fly open as to their doors, and would disgorge a smell of lamp, an exhausted engine would blow and heave and perspire, like a railway waggons, with growers’ men and boys lying asleep, and in the desert region of the night, the houseless wanderer is alone.

Daylight was coming

The conscious gas began to grow pale with the knowledge that daylight was coming, and straggling workpeople were already in the streets, and, as waking life had become extinguished with the last pie-man’s sparks, so it began to be rekindled with the fires of the first street-corner breakfast-sellers. And so by faster and faster degrees, until the last deers were very fast, the day came, and I was tired and could sleep. And it is not, as I used to think, going home at such times, the least wonderful thing in London, that in the real desert region of the night, the houseless wanderer is alone.

The full, unabridged version of Night Walks will be published on bigissue.com
Sign of the Times

Truth is stranger than fiction – but now it has also become more entertaining. Adrian Lobb talks to three film-makers about how the “golden age” of documentaries may be the cure for our post-truth world.

In a so-called post-truth age documentaries have never been more important, as film-makers coax out new ways to inform and educate as well as entertain. And they have never been more popular.

Take Making a Murderer, the utterly compelling, adrenalised, immersive true crime story that became the TV phenomenon of 2016. It utilised all the long-form storytelling skills of the current golden age of drama, ending with as many questions for us as viewers as for the law enforcement officers of Manitowoc County and Wisconsin’s judiciary system. Why were we watching – were we complicit in a form of misery porn or active in a project shining a light on failings in the US justice system? These questions are picked up in new Netflix doc Casting JonBenet, which looks to repeat Making a Murderer’s success, before that show’s second season airs later this year.

New technology enables cameras to get where they never could before, which doesn’t only help David Attenborough in the natural history sphere, but enabled Exodus on BBC2 to tell real-life refugee stories, filmed on mobile phones from Syria right across Europe. Their next project is Breadline, where they aim to help people who rely on foodbanks to record their own stories.

While hard-hitting political and activist documentaries have long had a strong history at the Oscars, Michael Moore’s crossover into the mainstream seemed like an anomaly. Now, factual films are big box office. OJ: Made in America won this year’s award, with its stunning portrait of the rise, murder trial and fall of a sporting hero through the lens of race relations in LA. Also nominated was Raoul Peck’s uncompromising I Am Not Your Negro, using the words and works of playwright and essayist James Baldwin to present uncomfortable truths about race in the US.

“I grew up watching Hollywood films and there was not one single film where I could see my story,” says Peck. “And when I was a young man, there were not many writers you could read and think: this is my story, this is my narrative. Baldwin did it not only from the point of view of the black man, or the black gay man, he did it from a very humanistic point of view.

“He wrote 60 years ago about moral monsters and today it is even more impactful,” he continues. “We live in a world of images and suddenly started to see images of the reality of young black men and girls being killed by the police. But it is nothing new. In the film there are at least three pictures when you see Malcolm X or Martin Luther King or Medgar Evers holding a sign saying ‘End Police Brutality’.

“The new thing is that now we can see it. You cannot hide the truth any more, and if you do, you will really be a moral monster. We’ve lost the complexity of the world. We became lazy in the western world. I call it an intellectual gentrification process – we need to go back to the fundamentals, to a wider analysis to see how this world functions.”

Rashida Jones, better known for acting in Parks and Recreation and The Social Network, is one of the directors and co-producers of new Netflix docu-series Hot Girls Wanted: Turned On, exploring the increasing impact of technology on our sex lives and relationships.

“I read that one person is now documented in a day more than somebody 100 years ago was in their entire life,” Jones says. “It is crazy.”

She is talking about how intimacy and privacy could become almost alien concepts for younger generations, who have shared their entire existence online. But she could just as easily be talking about the resurgence of
documentary making. “People love entertainment, as was proved by who was elected President of the US,” she adds. “And we tend to get a lot of our information from television and the movies. Our priority is to make sure we give as much information about the characters in our films and leave it up to the audience to decide how to feel. There is a weird paradox where privately everyone is obsessed with sex, but publicly we still consider ourselves a puritanical nation. Around 70 per cent of broadband is used for porn but people can’t talk about it, there is no intellectual, academic or public debate about it – so how is it going to get any better?”

Maybe there is hope that we might find some promised land beyond post-truth, and the popularity of documentaries might get us there. “I think the inherent nature of documentary film-making is that it is educational,” Jones says. “There is a huge responsibility to present the facts in a balanced way and make sure the truth is key.”

I Am Not Your Negro is in cinemas now; Hot Girls Wanted: Turned On is out now on Netflix @adey70

“POST-TRUE CRIME”

Casting JonBenet, written and directed by Kitty Green, offers a new angle on the most famous cold case in recent American history. Six-year-old child beauty pageant queen JonBenet Ramsey was found murdered at her home in Boulder, Colorado, on Boxing Day in 1996, sparking a huge investigation and wild public speculation, with suspects ranging from family members to local police and a professional Santa Claus impersonator. Rather than revealing new evidence or aiming to solve the case, Green’s documentary examines our relationship with public tragedy. She asks local actors to audition to play the Ramsey family in a never-to-be-made film, and through the audition process, hears their theories on the case, before, crucially, teasing out the personal tragedies that exist in the shadow of a more famous, public tragedy.

“There’s definitely been a trend towards true crime,” says Green. “But now it feels like we are moving beyond it. We could be post-true crime. Our role has to be to analyse things from all angles, to show the contradictions and the paradoxes. It is just propaganda if you have idea and your conclusion before you start. “We set out to make a film about some of the narratives people tell in order to deal with something they can’t understand, like the death of a child, which is incomprehensible. Nobody really knew what happened yet there were all these fictional narratives bandied about. I’d ask about Patsy Ramsey [JonBenet’s mother] and people would tell me about their own mother. It was fascinating how quickly and easily they opened up – about issues from sexual abuse to domestic violence.

“The film is out when everyone is questioning fact and fake news. If we’re not going to know who killed JonBenet, hopefully we can have closure in some other way.”

Casting JonBenet is on Netflix

Above: JonBenet Ramsey, who was murdered in 1996. Below: auditions in Casting JonBenet
When you watch something on TV it’s not completely real, there’s a screen,” says Mohamed Sarrar.

“In Borderline audiences hear our stories, they hear my story, and no one else can tell my story like me.”

Sarrar, 28, is a political refugee from Sudan. After being arrested back home on unspecified charges, he felt his life was in danger so his family paid for him to be smuggled to Libya in the back of a truck. From there, an overloaded boat with 70 souls crossed the Mediterranean. He took a train from Italy to France, hiding in the toilet to avoid the ticket inspector, and eventually arrived in Calais, where he spent two and a half months in the ‘Jungle’ before making it to the UK.

His story, like that of so many other people forced to take desperate steps to survive, doesn’t seem ripe for laughs, yet humour is such a fundamental part of all our lives – why should it be different for refugees?

When we think of Sudan, images of war and poverty dominate but Sarrar remembers the short comedy films that are popular in the country.

“They are stories that we can relate to,” he says. “Like, in Sudan we can borrow a lot of things in shops and pay a month later. In these comedies they make the reality bigger, like this man owes money to everybody, even to his landlord, so he had to find another place to stay but then the house was haunted!”

Even in the Jungle, there were lighter moments during dark times. “I remember one day I was at the train station trying to jump on a train but there were a lot of police and security guards. With some friends we decided to hide in a big pipe until the night. We
tried to jump again during the night but it was not possible. In the morning we were very cold and hungry so we went to the police, hoping that they would arrest us and drive us back to the Jungle (the station is very far from the Jungle: three hour walk, so we used to walk six hours almost every night). The police put us inside the car, so we were happy… but they just took us back to the train station! The police said ‘return to the Jungle’ but my friend didn’t want to get out of the car, he didn’t want to walk! So we didn’t have a chance to go to the UK but we didn’t have a chance to get arrested by the police as well! Humour helped me, just to sometimes not take things too seriously.”

Another refugee, 33-year-old Baraa Halabieh from Syria, agrees. “Humour doesn’t know borders,” he says. “Across all the cultures people laugh at the same things or situations, and in addition to that every culture has its own sense of humour, like jokes about cities or accents or playing with rhyme. My name in Arabic means ‘innocent’ but when French people pronounce it, stressing the R in their accent it means in Arabic, ‘prostitution!’”

Sophie Besse is a theatre director who ran monthly drama workshops for refugees in the Jungle to give them a way to express themselves. She decided to create Borderline after meeting refugees who had made it to the UK and discovered their journey was not yet over. “I realised their situation in the UK was very difficult because they felt isolated,” she explains.

“This is where the PTSD starts. As long as they are in the Jungle they are fighting to survive but when you’re in the UK, you’re in a waiting space. You can’t work, you can’t study, there are no more volunteers and suddenly it kicks in: what you went through, what’s happening in your country, who you lost.”

Borderline, “a comedy about a tragedy”, stars a cast of seven refugees alongside the same number of professional actors, and is a mix of black humour, singing, dancing and general clowning around. The undoubted star of the show is Enayatullah Jalalzai from Afghanistan. We have all had memorable birthdays but there is one Jalalzai will never forget. “I left my home on my own the day of my 16th birthday,” he says. “I followed several smugglers that my uncle paid, went to Pakistan by car, then we walked to Iran through the mountains. It took me one month to cross Iran: on foot, cycling and by car. My friend was killed there. Then I walked two days and two nights to get to Turkey, where a smuggler kept me prisoner for 25 days until my uncle sent more money. I was arrested on the Bulgarian border, they took all my clothes. In Bulgaria I took a bus to Croatia and then a train to Hungary, Austria and Germany. From there I had to walk into France because the police arrested me on the train. The whole journey to the Jungle took me three months.”

Sophie Besse met Jalalzai in Calais, where he lived alone for five months, and instantly spotted his star quality. “He has got the most tragic journey but at the same time he’s a natural clown,” she says. “He’s the one that makes us laugh out loud. For him, it’s his way to deal with life.”

“It was the first time I was acting – I loved it!” grins Jalalzai, now 17. “I love comedy, I love making people laugh and feeling happy. Many funny things happened in the Jungle. One day my friends cut the top of a fence so we could jump on the lorry but it was still too high for me so my trousers got stuck on the fence and my bum as well! We made fun of each other, we laughed and we forgot about everything!”

He recognises that taking part in Borderline gives him the chance to share his story – and talent – with audiences. “They see I am real,” he says. “They hear my story, they meet me, they see I am human.”

When Sarrar, Halabieh and Jalalzai started their journey, they could not have imagined it would end with them appearing on stage but they are naturals. Even when asked the question all comedians hate – can you tell us a joke? – Jalalzai doesn’t hesitate:

“In an airplane there were three people. One from Saudi Arabia, one from the US and one from Afghanistan. When the plane flew over Saudi Arabia, the first man threw his golden necklace out of the window, ‘We have so much gold in our country!’ then when the plane was above the US, the second man threw some money out of the window, ‘We have so many dollars in my country!’ Then the plane arrived above Afghanistan. The third man was thinking really hard and suddenly he took the US man and threw him out of the window, ‘We have so many Americans in my country!’”

Borderline is at Brighton Fringe, May 15-17, The Warren Main House. The Big Issue is media partner for Brighton Fringe. psychedelight.org
MA by Research in
DICKENS STUDIES
October 2017-September 2018

A one-year, London-based programme of supervised study and research, with a stimulating programme of seminars and research workshops led by experts in Dickens and 19th-century studies. Teaching takes place at the Charles Dickens Museum (48 Doughty St, WC1) and at the University of Buckingham’s offices in Bloomsbury. The course includes field trips, access to the Museum’s rare collections, and memberships of the International Dickens Fellowship and of the Dickens Society.

Seminar speakers include:
- Michael Slater
- Joanne Shattock
- Judith Flanders
- Michael Eaton
- Tony Williams

For further details, please Google ‘University of Buckingham London Programmes’. For enquiries about the course or to apply, contact Ms Nancy Zulu on email: nancy.zulu@buckingham.ac.uk or telephone: 01280 820156

An Open Morning for prospective students will be held on 20 May. The course is offered in partnership with the Charles Dickens Museum, London.
This is one of the earliest photographs showing the lives of ordinary people. A few years after the technology was introduced in 1839, Edinburgh-based David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson turned the focus on the local fishing community in Newhaven, including Jeanie Wilson and Annie Linton, seen in this picture dating back more than 160 years. Their pioneering work is being shown in an exhibition opening later this month.

**A Perfect Chemistry: Photographs by Hill and Adamson**, May 27–October 1 at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; nationalgalleries.org
A common myth about Palestine is that it was a land without people waiting for a people without land. According to this myth, Palestine was an empty land when the Zionist settlers arrived there for the first time in the late-19th century. In my new book I try to refute this myth by following the history of a notable Palestinian family from the early 18th century up to 1948.

The book tells the story of the most important of Palestine’s notable families: the Husaynis. They lived mainly in Jerusalem but also had branches all over the country. The family played a leading role in the cultural, economic, social and political life of Palestine. The chronicles of this family show clearly that in Palestine there was a vibrant human society and the land was far from being empty: it was full of people with aspirations and hopes, like in so many other parts of the world, which were shattered in 1948 when Palestinian life was destroyed in the country.

Between 1517 and 1917, Palestine was under Ottoman rule. The Ottomans ruled with the help of the local Arab Palestinian elite. The elite was made up of notable families residing in the towns and cities of Palestine. You became a notable family in two phases. The first was proving a lineage that went back to the days of the Prophet Muhammad. The closer the family was linked to the prophet, his family and his friends, the more prestigious the family was. Families all around Palestine used to have a genealogical tree on the entrances to their homes proudly displaying this connection to the glorious past. In places such as Jerusalem there were several such notable families, and the families themselves elected one family among them to be ‘the first among equals’.

The second phase was to receive the approval from the Ottoman Sultan from Istanbul for your status. Once the approval of the other families and that of the government in Istanbul were obtained a family was considered to be a notable one. There were several methods a family could use to pass the two phases successfully. For the first one it was good to marry your children to an already established family. As for ensuring the support of Istanbul, this, at times, required bribery as well.

The way the Husaynis received this recognition is unique. They originally had a different family name. Their original family name indicated a humble origin – not fit for becoming a notable family. Another family called the Husaynis, a notable one, rebelled against the Ottomans at the very beginning of the 18th century. This original Husayni family held all the important economic and political positions in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem province (which covered a large part of Palestine).

As retaliation, the government in Istanbul removed them from all their positions and were about to confiscate their possessions. The head of our family, not yet called the Husaynis, found out that his great grandfather and great great grandfather of the rebellious family had a similar name. The family had a soap factory and with its products, and the similar lineage, they convinced Istanbul to grant them the rebellious family’s name, fortune and positions. Ever since that moment in the early 18th century, the Husaynis, as they would be called now, became the most important family in Palestine.

My book follows the trials and tribulations of the family following these events, things which were experienced by the Palestinian population as a whole. During the rest of the 18th century, they had to cope with local rulers from Egypt, Syria and Palestine itself who rebelled against the Ottoman Empire and became, for a short while, the rulers of Palestine. The family dealt well with all these challenges, remaining the most prominent family in the country.

The 19th century brought with it new challenges. Napoleon Bonaparte’s occupation of Palestine had only just ended and an Egyptian ruler, Muhammad Ali, held the place for nine years between 1831 to 1840. Once more, the family survived these troubled years. It also adapted very well to the modernisation European influence brought to the country. This included sending their children, including their girls, to modern schools, exploiting the new opportunities the reformed Ottoman empire offered for political careers and influencing the cultural life in Palestine.

The only challenge they could not face successfully was the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. They adapted well to British rule at first (Britain ruled Palestine between 1917 and 1948) but when Britain gave full support for the idea of turning Palestine into a Jewish state, they could not lead their people into a successful struggle. In 1948, they and other Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homeland and became refugees, and a different generation and social class began a new phase in the history and struggle of Palestine.

Ilan Pappe tells the story of a notable Palestinian family to reveal the region’s complex past.

“In Palestine there was a vibrant human society and the land was far from being empty”
First up this week is Peter Cozzens’ *The Earth is Weeping*. Subtitled *The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, it is indeed a weighty tome, clocking in at more than 500 dense pages of facts and analysis of the battles between the American armies and the Native American tribes in the latter half of the 19th century.

Cozzens has written many books on American and Native American history already, and the author sees this sweeping overview in one respect as an answer to Dee Brown’s iconic 1970 book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.

Cozzens argues that that book, with its huge cultural significance, was far from balanced and lacked the subtlety and nuance needed to fully examine the Indian Wars from all sides. *The Earth is Weeping* is the author’s attempt to do just that. Cozzens argues coherently that while many atrocities were inflicted upon the tribes, it was not a cogent Washington policy to commit genocide on the Native Americans. Similarly, Cozzens is open and insightful about both the warring nature of the tribes, and the differences between tribes in different parts of the country. Many tribes viewed the white man’s government as protector against rival tribes, and there were even differences of attitude to the invaders within a single tribe.

Cozzens addresses all of this without histriornics, and while his prose is slightly workmanlike, it does build to a cumulative picture that packs a real punch. Massacres were committed, orders disobeyed, and battles won and lost – and Cozzens’ meticulous research and sourcing brings it all to life on the page.

While there was undoubtedly both good and bad behaviour on all sides, this overview does still build up to a depressing picture of a shameful period of American history. It is not a book that will send you away feeling good about humanity but it’s a deep and thoughtful approach to its difficult subject matter.

In terms of style and content our second book this week couldn’t be more different, and yet there are echoes between the two about the extremities and limits of human endeavour. Meg Howrey’s *The Wanderers* is a lyrical and thoughtful novel about a team of expert astronauts put together for a first manned mission to Mars.

Fictional examinations of the pressures of space exploration are all the rage at the moment but Howrey carves out an interesting niche for herself, delivering the pensive and profound narrative through seven different points of view. Our crew of three – Helen, Yoshi and Sergei – along with their relatives and a member of the ground staff consider what it takes for such an expedition as they go through a gruelling 17-month simulated mission somewhere in the American desert.

The tension and conflict between the drive to explore new experiences and the comfort of home life with friends and families is examined with deep philosophical insight, and the author uses her multiple narratives to look as much at what explorers leave behind them as what lies ahead of them.

There is even a hint of philosophy at times, with questions about the reality and meaning of their experience coming into play as the narrative progresses. Far from being a flash-bang space opera, *The Wanderers* is a smart meditation on the nature of exploration in all facets of our lives.
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CITIZEN JANE

Turf wars

This documentary about Jane Jacobs' battle against the overdevelopment of 1960s New York is just as relevant today

Citizen Jane isn’t an especially inventive documentary. A combination of experts saying things to camera and archive footage, the film doesn’t exactly reinvent the form. But I can’t say that mattered. Within a few minutes, one of the talking-heads says something that had me hooked. An academic specialist on town-planning – the film’s less-than-sexy subject matter – explains that every two months the urban population on this planet grows by the equivalent of another Los Angeles.

Wow. That’s a lot of people, and the galloping rate of urbanisation provides blunt relevancy to this film’s account of plans to develop New York back in the 1950s and 1960s. Against a black-and-white shot of Manhattan skyscrapers in their jazzy prime, a thin black band containing the film’s title splits the screen in half, and you sense lines being drawn: the subtitle pitches exactly that, billing what follows as a ‘Battle for the City’.

On one side we have Jane Jacobs, a middle-aged woman in owlish specs with a choir-boy bob who was at the forefront of defending postwar New York from the bulldozers. Opposing her is New York City’s planner-in-chief, Robert Moses: ardent enthusiast for the automobile – and for demolishing residential buildings to make way for multi-lane freeways – and vigorous exponent of architectural modernism in all its high-rise puritanism. In his cocksure alpha male assurance he makes Mad Men’s Don Draper look like a wilting wallflower.

Emerging from the well-chosen clips, Jacobs and Moses seem like opposites, but the film prefers to imply rather than dwell on any great differences. At its absorbing heart are conflicting ideas of how urban life should be organised. Moses is, I suspect, a familiar figure from any UK city – Glasgow, Bristol, you name it – blighted by postwar planning: his modus operandi is to raze to the ground parts of New York that grew over decades, in favour of anonymous tower-block residences and a tangle of highways.

It’s a mix of misguided utopianism and Olympian disregard for the feelings of residents, which director Matt Tyrnauer conveys with nifty elegance by way of a sequence about Le Corbusier and an extended trawl through the Byzantine world of city-hall politics in the 1960s.

Cinema’s role as a propagandist for this kind of ill-thought-out, top-down planning is subtly criticised, through ample inclusion of 1960s promotional films that champion these new projects. In countless admiring shots of new buildings rising up, it’s funny how few humans share the screen, as if anticipating the buildings’ decline as deserted, uninhabitable ruins.

By contrast, Jacobs’ focus is stubbornly on those New York residents threatened by development: communities that have developed over decades in Harlem, the Bronx and Greenwich Village; lively, densely populated streets evoked through poignant documentaries. She celebrates the pavement-level, wonderfully human complexity of city life. It might seem chaotic but it works, and haughty modernists mess with this at their peril – as Moses was to discover when Jacobs began protesting about the worst of his plans.

For all its time-capsule evocation of a vanished New York – Greenwich Village may have survived Moses’ wrecking ball but not gentrification – Citizen Jane still resonates. With the urban population shooting up – China is described, alarmingly, as “Moses on steroids” – Jane’s arguments matter all the more: the battle continues.

Citizen Jane is in cinemas from May 5

FINAL REEL...

Following the Royal Academy’s recent David Hockney show, Exhibition on Screen offers filmgoers the chance to experience some of his key works. Hockney has an almost cinematic command of colour and light, so he’s suited to this big-screen treatment.

Words: Edward Lawrenson @EdwardLawrenson
Around 3000 people are currently condemned to death in the USA. Most have been there for many years awaiting their final execution date. Living conditions on Death Row can be harsh and dehumanising with prisoners often being locked up in single cells for 23 hours a day. Many have been abandoned by family and friends and often letters from overseas penfriends are their only contact with the outside world in their final years of life.

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Why do Brits love a loser?

Mindhorn star Simon Farnaby says washed-up characters make the best comedy. Interview: Steven MacKenzie

Meet Mindhorn. He’s the latest of a very British breed, whose potential for self-deception is fathomless and whose ego seems to grow in inverse proportion to their actual talent and ability. Mindhorn joins the ranks of Alan Partridge, Basil Fawlty and David Brent, heroes we love to see fail and fail – but secretly root for nonetheless.

Mindhorn is a character from a fictional 1980s Isle of Man-set detective show, played by Richard Thorncroft, who ex-Mighty Boosh-er Julian Barratt portrays in the film Mindhorn, in cinemas this week. The washed-up Thorncroft is enlisted by the police to help track a murderer on the run who believes Mindhorn is real. Back in the spotlight, Thorncroft turns out to be an even worse crime fighter than he was actor.

Simon Farnaby, best known as one of the Horrible Histories gang, wrote and co-stars in the film with Barratt, and explains that Mindhorn was inspired by shows like The Saint, Bergerac and The Six Million Dollar Man, which haven’t aged particularly well.

“There’s the theorem: tragedy plus time equals comedy,” Farnaby says. “It works for anything that takes itself seriously. Serious drama plus time... There’s a great scene in The Six Million Dollar Man when he does battle with a yeti [portrayed by Andre the Giant]. Yet you look at Lee Majors and it’s like he’s in Hamlet.

“We listened to interviews with David Suchet, Trevor Eve and all these sorts of actors, should I say respected but slightly pompous, always talking about their craft and process. Trevor Eve talks about Shoestring like a long lost brother: “I was happy to be recognised for Shoestring but I’m more interested in theatre...”

Does every actor fear turning into a Richard Thorncroft?

“It’s funny because I think Julian has turned into him,” Farnaby says. “I went to drama school but Julian didn’t – he’s a street actor, it’s all raw talent! But I remember one of my drama teachers saying, ‘There is nothing more important than your character’s shoes. They are literally what grounds your character to the ground’. Julian found that funny so we built that into his character Thorncroft. Then onset you’d find Julian going, ‘Could I get my shoes?’ The director would say, ‘We can’t see your feet, Julian’ and he’d reply that he needed them to feel like the character. You find yourself turning into these actors whether you like it or not.”

Mindhorn is a pathetic loser, yet just as we take other screen losers to our hearts, we want to see him win in the end.

“It’s to do with status, which is to do with our old class system,” Farnaby says. “Basil Fawlty’s anxiety is his status and how people view him. David Brent and Alan Partridge have that – the gap between how they see themselves and how we see them, it’s their blind spot.”

Steve Coogan shows up in Mindhorn playing an actor who also starred in the Mindhorn TV series but then continued to have a successful career. In other words, he’s a villain.

“The character he plays is just an arsehole,” Farnaby says. “And I think he enjoyed playing that straight-up arsehole – there’s no one better.”

Mindhorn is in cinemas from May 5

@stevenmackenzie

Simon Farnaby plays stuntman Clive Parnevik in Mindhorn

THE BIG ISSUE / p35 / May 1-7 2017
Early viewing recommended

ike most people with a mortgage, I feel simultaneously lucky to even have one in the first place, and also as if there’s a huge grizzly bear sitting next to me, just biding its time before it bites me in the arse.

I understand though, that this is a luxury problem. I was of the generation where it was possible to get an interest-only mortgage for £180 a month. If I was in my 20s now, I know that I would be living in an expensive flatshare with some random guy called Gordon who puts passive aggressive Post-it notes on his almond milk.

For this reason, How to Live Mortgage Free with Sarah Beeny should have been an eye-opening insight into alternative ways of living. Maybe a place of your own isn’t an impossible dream reserved for baby boomers and Russian oligarchs?

But of course, I was forgetting the cardinal rule of all property programmes. It is the law that they must focus on a small clique of posh, beard-cultivating, trust fund-bothering artisanal spoon carvers who live in converted packing crates on the Thames and have a budget of three million pounds.

Enter Kimberley, who was a part-time model. When she wasn’t modelling, Kimberley was wearing a hat with flowers on it and being winsome and kooky, like the love child of Mr Bloom and Felicity Kendal. She had somehow procured herself a rusty Dutch houseboat which she was trying to do up by brushing paint on it with the tiniest brush I have ever seen.

Beany, always watchable and always game, went to talk to her but you could see they were having trouble relating to each other. Instead, Sarah recruited her pal, designer and professional upcycler (ugh) Max McMurdo, to give her advice about how to make the most of the poky rustbucket.

“You haven’t got much storage under there,” he said, lifting a floorboard. “But it’s cold, so it’s a good place to put your potatoes.” (Living the dream, eh?)

There was something a bit fishy about both the boat and the set-up. When the renovation was revealed, it was packed with stuff that looked like it was from the props department. In the end Kimberley had also mysteriously managed to conjure £32,000 to do it up, which she vaguely waved away as something to do with getting her rental deposit back.

After meeting an artist who lived in a flat-pack church (AS YOU DO), it was clear that if you want to live without a mortgage, you’d better be absurdly lucky, a professional house builder or have untold amounts of cash to spend – or all three. For all of Beeny’s trade mark chutzpah, it wasn’t difficult to see this show for what it was; another way to showcase a bunch of nice houses we’ll never own in a million years.

“How to Live Mortgage Free with Sarah Beeny, Wednesdays, 8pm, Channel 4
Words: Lucy Sweet @lucytweet1

FIGHT THE POWER

Given Trump, Brexit and a global political system in chaos, mass popular protest is once again on the rise. People Power: Fighting for Peace (until August 28, Kennington, London; iwm.org.uk) has banners, posters, badges and placards from peace protests dating back to World War One and shows how they reflect the eras that spawned them (Photo Op by Peter Kennard and Cat Phillips, above).

Coming to an end this week, this is your last chance to see Game Changers: Another Way to Play (until May 7, Aldwych, London; somersethouse.org.uk), which explores the complex science and aesthetics behind game design – unpacking what on the surface seems simple but is actually far from it. It will show how the long history of games continues to shape those developed today.

Loosely related to play, The Tweed Run (May 6, various locations but starts in Clerkenwell, London; tweedrun.com) is now in its ninth year and sees cyclists dress up and pretend it’s the 1920s as they cycle around the capital’s landmarks. Expect lots of old bone-shakers with baskets on the front and the occasional Penny Farthing.

There’s a focus on the people that make the nation at We Built This City (until May 28, Birmingham; birminghammuseums.org.uk) – in this case the Irish and the contribution they
Claudio Monteverdi was a musical revolutionary. Over the course of music’s history, few composers have had a more radical impact on their art than the Italian, whose 450th birthday will be celebrated on May 9. The brightest musical spark emanating from the cultural hotbed of the Renaissance courts of northern Italy, his compositional innovations changed music forever. Granted, he didn’t act single-handedly but his genius shines far more brilliantly than that of his contemporaries.

One of Monteverdi’s most important achievements is the introduction of drama to music. His 1607 work L’Orfeo is often referred to as the first ever opera – strictly speaking it isn’t but it is the earliest (and best) example we have of a successfully integrated large-scale musical drama. Monteverdi’s theatricality, though, was honed and developed in his madrigals: secular songs for several voices in which he explored music’s expressive and dramatic capabilities. A new CD from Rinaldo Alessandrini and his Concerto Italiano, which brings together a number of madrigals from across Monteverdi’s career around the broad theme of ‘night’, provides ample evidence of this. Whether in the galloping rhythms and extraordinary rapid declamations of the Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda, the crushing discords and swooping gestures of the Lamento della Ninfa, or the bounding, skipping jollity of Quanto l’Alba in Oriente, Alessandrini and co delight in the vibrant theatries of this music. It never feels overegged, though: just fresh, insightful and enjoyable. The liner notes are excellent, with full texts and thorough notes on each of the madrigals. Another great touch is the inclusion of five short instrumental Sinfonias across the disc, which break up the otherwise rather intense vocal texture of the madrigals.

Alongside secular music for the court, Monteverdi wrote a lot of church music; in fact he became director of music in Venice’s St Mark’s Cathedral in 1613. Three years prior to this, though, he published what has to be considered one of the true masterpieces of sacred music, his Vespro della Beata Vergine. It is a huge work, setting a dozen texts from the Vespers service to a staggering variety of musical styles, from solo songs to choruses with full-on instrumentation. Another Italian group of early music specialists, or rather a conglomeration of groups, under the direction of tenor Giuseppe Maletto, has recorded this amazing piece and released it in time for the birthday celebrations.

And what a sound La Compagnia del Madrigale, Cantica Symphonia and La Pifarossa make on this fantastic double-CD set; it’s a wonderful showcase for this impossibly vast work. The singing is crystal clear, virtuosic but not showy, and the instrumental playing is glorious, particularly the boisterous sackbuts. Some may find them overly indecent oomph they lend to the climaxes. The passion these Italian musicians have for this music is clearly audible; the sound is so natural and compelling. The many moods of Monteverdi’s composition are captured perfectly here, from the quietly meditative to the resoundingly joyous – an excellent way to wish old Claudio a very happy 450th.
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CRYPTIC CLUES

Across
1. Choosing a candidate and taking another’s idea (8)
6. Sulk when I object to being out of work (4)
8. Such an er to find (4)
9. Antipodean, not Alan, who is a European (8)
10. Theatrical fireguard? (6,7)
11. Some put a house into the state (4)
13. Lover had a rambling rose (4)
17. The fewest number of persons required to work stick to the bare bones (8,5)
20. Meant to have represented (5,3)
21. Not a fictitious Spanish coin (4)
22. Young ones accepted article that will rub (4)
23. Females who are not experts – not clergy either (8)

Down
2. Everybody in sad disarray in an American city (6)
3. Potters about at the demonstration (7)
4. Young he turned tail first in southern Europe (5)
5. Otherwise greet us with a movement of the hands (7)
6. Excellence that is worth an order (5)
7. Large number in tartan are calm (6)
12. Desirable fault he removed (7)
14. Misplaced root final a lake (7)
15. Icy performer had right fish first (6)
16. A sweetheart possibly glowing (6)
18. Lunatic only upset about nothing (5)
19. Relating to sound (5)
20. Scaly anteater (8)
21. Bird of prey (4)
22. Biblical passage (4)
23. Sailing (8)

QUICK CLUES

Across
1. Distorted the face (8)
6. Oil pit (4)
8. Semi-precious agate (4)
9. Sixfold (8)
10. Scapula (8,5)
11. Immediately after (4)
13. Notch (4)
14. Misplaced root (7)
15. Icy performer had right fish first (6)
16. Sheep’s flesh (6)
18. Engage in conflict (5)
19. Relating to sound (5)

Down
1. American farm hut (6)
2. Troll; 3. Seagull; 5. Gummy substance (7)

THE BIG ISSUE / p45 / May 1-7 2017
GAMES & PUZZLES

SPOT THE BALL

Photos: Action Images

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A
B
C
D
E
F

To win Tartan + Tweed by Caroline Young and Ann Martin, mark where you think the ball is, cut out and send to: Spot the Ball (1254), 2nd flr, 43 Bath St, Glasgow, G2 1HW, by May 9. Include name, address, phone no. Enter by email: send grid position (e.g. A1) to competitions@bigissue.com

(Last week’s Spot the Ball revealed: England v West Germany, 1985)
“I’m a motor fanatic. I’m hoping to start my own business as a bike mechanic”

Martin Mackenzie, 36
OUTSIDE STARBUCKS, GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH

I’ve been back selling the magazine for a couple of months now. It’s going great. Sales are really whizzing for me this time. I enjoy having a quick word or a good blether with a lot of my customers – that’s one of the really nice things about the job.

Selling The Big Issue has helped me when things got tough. This time my problems started when I fell out of work. I had a driving job, taking patients from hospital and taking them home, or picking up carers and taking them to their next appointment. But it only lasted for six months, and after that I was out of work and struggled to get by.

Last year I was sleeping rough, camping outdoors on Calton Hill in Edinburgh. I’ve got a really good camping kit – I’d make myself Irish stew on a little gas stove. I don’t do things by half! I’m actually a big outdoors person but it’s obviously nicer to do as a holiday thing – it get tedious when you’re living that way and the cold weather comes.

Thanks to my Big Issue earnings, I’ve been able to rent a small room in the Gorgie area of Edinburgh. It’s a temporary thing, not ideal, not very secure. But it’ll do me for now as I try to get myself together. I’ve got myself a decent bike, and I like cycling to my pitch bright and early each morning.

I’m hoping to start my own business as a bike mechanic. I reckon I’ve got a pretty good, simple idea. I’d like to start a breakdown recovery service using a three-wheel rickshaw – the kind you see in tourist areas in big cities. I would have a repair kit in the back, and if someone breaks down I’d be able to fix their vehicle on the roadside or take them to their destination and fix it from there. I’m a bit of motor fanatic. I’ve always been able to fix up cars and bikes. And I love watching motor sports. I’ve actually got one of Lewis Hamilton’s hats. He chuck them into the crowd at big races. A friend of mine was at Silverstone – she managed to catch a couple, then passed one on to me. A prized possession, you might say.

The Big Issue has always led to better things for me – it’s been there to help me get back on my feet a few times now, and I’m determined to get back on my feet this time too.

Words: Adam Forrest
Photo: Robert Ormerod

FACTS ABOUT ME...

MY DREAM HOLIDAY
Spain. I’d love to do some hiking in the hills – in the sun it would be great, and maybe some gorge climbing or bungee jumping.

MY FAVOURITE SPORT
MotoGP racing. I like Valentino Rossi and Marc Marquez – great racers. I’m a big fan of Formula One as well.

ON MY PITCH...
I’m at Starbucks, George St, Edinburgh (Mon-Fri, 7.30am to 2.30pm)
10 reasons to visit your local health food store

If you've ever examined a food label, worried about the chemicals in your face cream or questioned the environmental impact of your washing up liquid - then, chances are, you will find plenty to interest you in a health food store.

1. **Range**
   With tens of thousands of different natural products to choose from, health stores are a one-stop shop for everything natural, ethical and environmental.

2. **Quality**
   Health food store owners are true gate-keepers ensuring that nothing poor quality or unethical reaches the shelves.

3. **Knowledge**
   Allow trained and knowledgeable advisors take you through the vitamin maze and develop the ideal programme of nutritional supplements just for you.

4. **Exciting New Products**
   Regular events and an eye for new product selection ensures that customers always have a fresh reason to visit. Ongoing research by manufacturers ensures that new products are being released every month.

5. **Specialist**
   Wholefoods, organics, raw foods, allergy-free foods, vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, sports nutrition, essential fatty acids, cruelty-free bodycare, environmentally-friendly household cleaners AND recycled paper products all under one roof.

6. **Compassion**
   Where else would someone take you by the hand, offer a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear, a knowledgeable mind and a kind heart?

7. **Community**
   At the heart of the natural health community in your town, health stores are often family-run businesses proudly serving the local population.

8. **Environment**
   Staying local to do your shopping reduces your carbon footprint and will also save you fuel!

9. **Experience**
   Ask in-store about Acne, Allergies, Children's Health, Digestion, Energy, Fatigue, Hair, Skin & Nails, Heart Health, Joint Mobility, Memory, Menopause, Men's Health, PMS, Sleep Disorders, Sports Performance, Urinary Health, Weight Control, Women's Health & much more. Don't be embarrassed, we've been asked before - and helped!

10. **Charity**
    Health food stores stocking Viridian products are part of a charity donation programme which has so far seen more than £250,000 handed over to charities including Friends of the Earth, NSPCC, Woodland Trust, RSPB, Save the Children and many more.

www.findahealthstore.com
Booking opens Saturday 13 May

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