

# Heard Immunity: Poems and Pictures Now



**MoMA  
PS1**

## Introduction

Gregg Bordowitz

To begin, I want to address and acknowledge those who are sick with COVID or recovering from COVID, and those who are mourning losses due to the pandemic. We are all in the audience. Black and brown people are suffering disproportionately from the pandemic. Black and brown people continue to suffer and endure the most extreme effects of the U.S.A.'s deadly regime of white supremacy. Its officers maim and kill, using extreme discrimination to uphold a morally bankrupt system. Indigenous people and people of color are also the direct targets of racial injustice and violence. White people must listen, learn and understand how to unlearn racism. Having been raised in a racist culture, white people must work to educate each other and to withdraw complicity from racism in all its manifestations.

*Heard Immunity: Poems and Pictures Now* was conceived as a response to the Trump administration's criminal failure to respond effectively to current crises. It is also a statement of solidarity with uprisings and the growing rebellion for racial justice to end structural racism gripping all aspects of society. It is a call for an end to the violent brutality that white supremacy reproduces on a daily basis.

There is much reportage and a constant flood of information flashing across the screens of our devices. In the face of incendiary pixilation, poetry and art have a unique role to play. At the invitation of Peter Eleey, Chief Curator of MoMA PS1, I organized a group reading of poetry with images that pose singular responses to the existential conditions of this moment.

I am grateful to the poets Samiya Bashir, Dolores Dorantes, Cathy Park Hong, Joy Ladin, Fred Moten, and Pamela Sneed for each contributing their unique compositions and voices in self-recorded readings. I am also grateful to photographer Laylah Amatullah Barrayn for contributing photographs drawn from the many she has taken in New York and Minneapolis-St. Paul in recent months; her images are also poetic compositions. The photographer is my neighbor, and I see her out every day taking her camera to the streets, making portraits of people in their daily lives, posed and candid during these times of pandemic and rebellion.

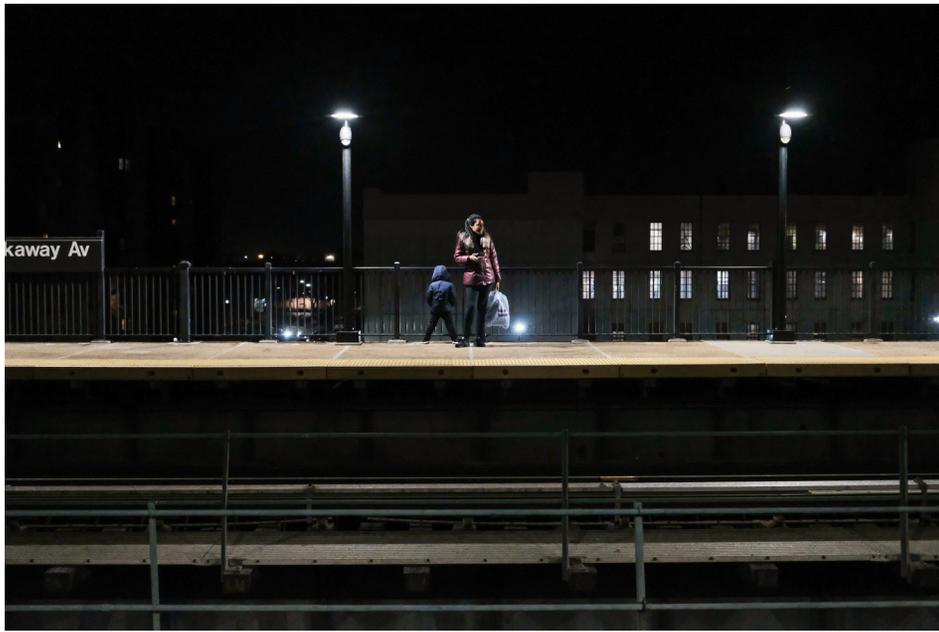
I know the poets' writings as an avid reader. I have varying degrees of familiarity with the participants; some are friends and/or colleagues. I admire them all. Fred Moten's compositions are lyrical—or rather musical—testaments to the conditions of identity as a performance, circumambulations of lives lived in defiance against lethal oppression. So too, Pamela Sneed's poetics are not psalms, not proverbs, perhaps prophecy—she speaks through righteous lamentations. Samiya Bashir, as multiple voices of a singular self, incants about the pains of the body taking the temperature of furnaces. Joy Ladin relates the words of the *Shekhinah*, the female aspect of G-d on this earth, testifying to the body's habitat at the earthly level of creation. Cathy Park Hong's poems issue from the "world cloud" in which market forces are brighter than the sun. And Dolores Dorantes's words capture the liquidity of a border river damned. There is earth, water, fire and air in this poetry, all the elements transforming under pressure of turbulence.

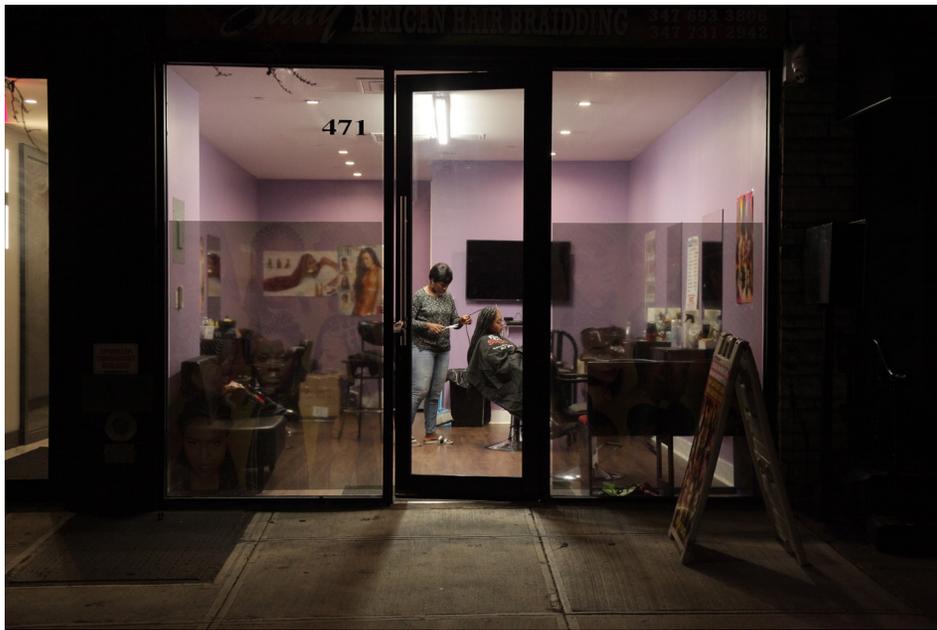
As a person living with AIDS, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and a number of other conditions that place me at higher risk for COVID, I've been shut in and watching, furiously typing at my keyboard with an increasing sense of failure and pessimism. *Heard Immunity: Poems and Pictures Now* is an offering, a gift, a call.

A vacuum of leadership overcomes all institutional life with rapidly spreading rot that emanates from the White House. Beleaguered cultural institutions—including museums, theaters, and schools—struggle against the lack of support and direction that a just government would provide. Fortunately, institutions are not the very walls that house our concerns. Institutions are made by the people, the individuals, who make them run. We are collectively rising to resist the high crimes and misdemeanors destroying our institutions. As the poet H.D. professed from London during the blitz of World War II, *The Walls Do Not Fall*. I believe that H.D. knew that the walls are not concrete or brick constructions. Organized together, we are the support structures standing to face and to fight the destruction that fascism viciously deploys.

The words of the poets and the images of the photographer say what needs to be said here. I have nothing further to add except my sincere gratitude to all participants for each of their eloquent and polyvalent contributions. Each opens dimensions into an increasingly flattened screen-world.







## Another thin filament pyrometry

Samiya Bashir

wild turkeys strut  
the yard  
limp in the face of fulfillment look delicious and  
the wind gusts and gusts — me? i await the woodpecker i love —

of course i call him, him  
and Woody because woody-ass words like  
hegemony but so —  
listen

don't ask me what matters  
know  
or don't know maybe just do it  
over there.  
i'm tired.  
time's been so

untethered i want to  
hammock in the sun  
i wanna leave the machines  
with you  
over there by you here  
have 'em i just sigh

if we're gonna swing and swing the trees let us  
hammock  
in our own damned peace or  
don't

i mean  
you could don't  
sigh

ssssssshhhhhhhhhh  
no  
really  
ssssssssshhhhhhhh







קרויס  
הוטן  
Kraus  
HATTE  
234 BROADWAY

@mpia2023

MORE JUSTICE MORE

## Beyond Fear

Joy Ladin

Fear not, I am the one who helps you...  
I will open rivers on the bare heights,  
and fountains in the midst of the valleys...  
Isaiah 41:13, 18

"7 Empowering Life Lessons from 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer.'" Emma Dibdin.  
*Cosmopolitan*. [www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/a9118169/buffy-anniversary-empowering-heroine-moments/](http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/a9118169/buffy-anniversary-empowering-heroine-moments/)

Are you ready to be strong?

Are you ready to follow me beyond  
the demons, vampires, misogynistic gods  
who teach you to stay hollow inside,

self-loathing and numb?  
Are you ready to stop  
stabbing yourself through the heart?

You're afraid to answer  
because, deep down, you fear  
you're less than nothing,

so anyone who would talk to you  
must be nothing too. Amiright?  
You were raised you to be afraid,

to believe the demons, the vampires,  
the misogynistic gods  
who warn you to hold your tongue

when cruelty and brutality,  
degradation and evil,  
stab you through the heart.

Fear likes you this way,  
self-loathing and numb,  
believing you're no one

I'd ever choose,  
a worm in a tunnel, chaff in a gale,  
a nameless pool of blood

I could never love.  
It's hard to keep showing up  
when people keep telling you

you aren't who you are.  
You, for example, keep confusing me with dust—  
er, men—dead for thousands of years.

Wondering how to tell us apart?  
I have power; they don't.  
I summon them all to judgment,

the fears that stalk you  
to the ends of the earth,  
the shame and disgrace

that nail you in your place,  
everything that gets in the way  
of you responding when I say

"Don't be afraid."  
I was here before fear  
and I'm there beyond it,

opening fountains  
in the midst of depression,  
trampling kings underfoot,

calling you to me  
across generations  
by paths you haven't walked, by ways you cannot imagine.

I'm the father who really sees you,  
the mother who understands  
you, every version, young and old,

real and imagined, future and past,  
the guitar-playing angel, the queer fluid light,  
the thresher of mountains, the solitary pine.

Here's the soul you thought you lost.  
Here are myrtles and olives,  
deserts and brooks, entire continents,

I created for you.  
Here I am, the one who declares  
you have nothing to fear

and nothing to prove,  
who conceived you and souled you,  
calls you and carries you,

strengthens and stirs.  
Are you ready  
to be strong?

Time to remake the world.



## 8 Minutes 46 Seconds

Pamela Sneed

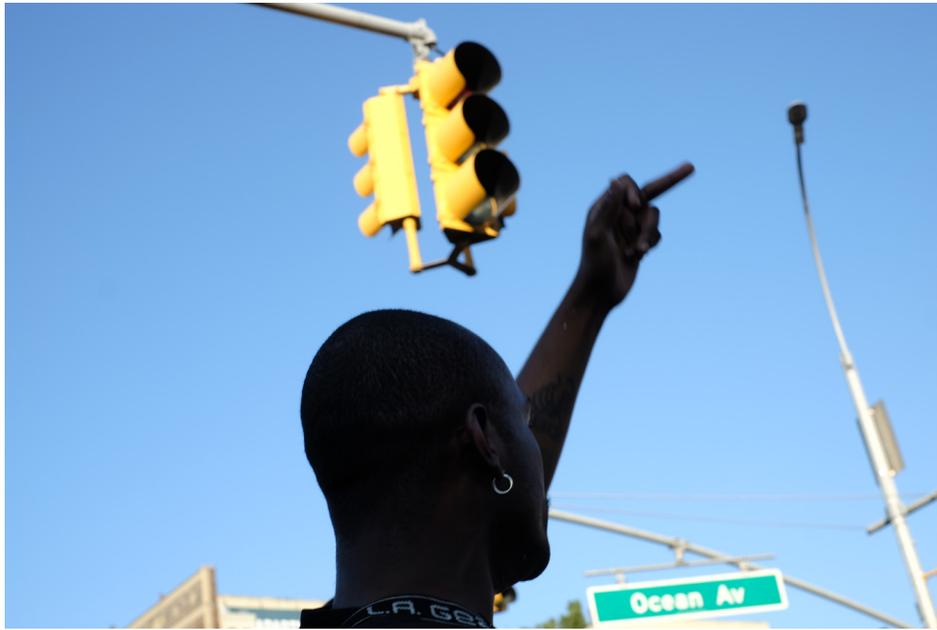
That they would sit on a man's neck  
Til his body breathe spirit gave out  
That they rendered him inaudible voiceless  
That 8 minutes passed  
8 minutes 46 seconds  
It took days and citizens uprisings for the police officers involved to be arrested.  
That the news showed that one officer casually sitting on the Black mans neck  
as if the man below were a deer/mountain grizzly/ a bounty/trophy subdued  
until there was no wrestling no life left.  
That the great AIDS activist Larry Kramer would die days later  
That we all owe him something of our lives  
That his memorial went on  
That the chat closed before I could say again  
Thank you Larry Kramer  
Keep fighting  
Before I could type George Floyd's name in the chat box  
Say the two were connected  
in the struggle for human rights.

## I Can't Breathe

Pamela Sneed

I suppose I should place them under separate files  
Both died from different circumstances kind of, one from HIV AIDS and possibly not  
having  
taken his medicines  
the other from COVID-19 coupled with  
complications from an underlying HIV status  
In each case their deaths may have been preventable if one had taken his meds and the  
hospital thought to treat the other  
instead of sending him home saying, He wasn't sick enough  
he died a few days later  
They were both mountains of men  
dark black beautiful gay men  
both more than six feet tall fierce and way ahead of their time  
One's drag persona was Wonder Woman and the other started a black fashion magazine  
He also liked poetry  
They both knew each other from the same club scene we all grew up in  
When I was working the door at a club one frequented  
He would always say to me haven't they figured out you're a star yet  
And years ago bartending with the other when I complained about certain people and  
treatment he said sounds like it's time for you to clean house  
Both I know were proud of me the poet star stayed true to my roots  
I guess what stands out to me is that they both were  
gay black mountains of men  
Cut down  
Felled too early  
And it makes me think the biggest and blackest are almost always more vulnerable  
My white friend speculates why the doctors sent one home  
If he had enough antibodies  
Did they not know his HIV status  
She approaches it rationally  
removed from race as if there were any rationale for sending him home  
Still she credits the doctors for thinking it through  
But I speculate they saw a big black man before them  
Maybe they couldn't imagine him weak  
Maybe because of his size color class they imagined him strong  
said he's okay  
Which happened to me so many times  
Once when I'd been hospitalized at the same time as a white girl  
she had pig-tails  
we had the same thing but I saw how tenderly they treated her  
Or knowing so many times in the medical system I would never have been treated so  
terribly if I  
had had a man with me  
Or if I were white and entitled enough to sue  
Both deaths could have been prevented both were almost first to fall in this season of  
death  
But it reminds me of what I said after Eric Garner a large black man was strangled to  
death over  
some cigarettes  
Six cops took him down  
His famous lines were I can't breathe and now George Floyd  
so if we are always the threat  
To whom or where do we turn for protection?





## Engines Within the Throne

Cathy Park Hong

We once worked as clerks  
scanning moth-balled pages  
into the clouds, all memories  
outsourced except the fuzzy  
childhood bits when

I was an undersized girl with a tic,  
they numbed me with botox  
I was a skinsuit  
of dumb expression, just fingerprints  
over my shamed

all I wanted was snow  
to snuff the sun blades to shadow spokes,  
muffle the drum of freeways, erase  
the old realism

but this smart snow erases  
nothing, seeps everywhere,  
the search engine is inside us,  
the world is our display

and now every industry  
has dumped whole cubicles, desktops,  
fax machines into developing  
worlds where they stack  
them as walls against

what disputed territory  
we asked the old spy who drank  
with Russians to gather information  
the old-fashioned way,

now we have snow sensors.  
so you can go spelunking  
in anyone's mind,  
let me borrow your child

thoughts, it's benign surveillance,  
I can burrow inside, find a cave  
pool with rock-colored flounder,  
and find you, half-transparent  
with depression.

## A Visitation

Cathy Park Hong

You are at home.  
You are wearing bicycle shorts though you don't own a bike.  
Outside your window, you see a flower you don't recognize.  
The voice of Gregory Peck booms: Honey Suckle.  
You don't know anything anymore.  
You remember an old trivia show you watched when you were young.  
The contestant went to Stanford.  
You remember his name: Stan Chan.  
The first question was always absurdly easy,  
almost as if it was testing your listening skills.  
The host asked Stan Chan what a nectarine  
was closest to: a. orange, b. peach, c. banana, d. grape.  
Stan chuckled: Well, I think I should know this one. It's a. orange.  
You remember the host's expression.  
You look at the toaster and think taco.  
An ad pops up in the air for a trip to Cabo San Lucas.  
The snow is still beta.  
You feel the smart snow monitoring you,  
uploading your mind so anyone can access your content.  
Circuits cross and you hear a one-sided chat:  
Da! Da! Da!  
You tap in the air for the volume control and listen to Ravel.  
You refresh your feed. Nothing from him.  
It is too hot here.  
You hate this satellite Californian town  
near the satellite tech campus where you and your husband  
used to work as data scanners.  
When they laid both of you off,  
you tried work as freelancers from your home offices.  
You used to chirp at each other like demented birds.  
Another chime.  
It's a real chime.  
A man delivering your groceries: a dozen cantaloupes.  
He looks like your husband.  
You think of inviting him in.  
Why did you order a dozen cantaloupes?  
You hear a woman crying.  
Lately, you've been fascinated by a user-generated hologram:  
an ethnically ambiguous boy who pretends to drop dead from a shoot-out.  
The boy wakes up when his mother comes home.  
She scolds him and turns off the camera.  
You blink to go offline.  
It is like all the quiet Sundays of your childhood.  
You think you hear your husband sigh but he's only breathing.  
He used to stare into the middle distance  
for weeks until you lugged him to bed.  
You tucked him in.

## A Wreath of Hummingbirds

Cathy Park Hong

I suffer a different kind of loneliness.  
From the antique ringtones of singing  
wrens, babbling babies, and ballad medleys,  
my ears have turned  
to brass.

They resurrect a thousand extinct birds:  
emus, dodos, and shelducks, though some,  
like the cerulean glaucous macaw,  
could not survive the snow. How heavily  
they roost on trees in raw twilight.

I will not admire those birds,  
not when my dull head throbs, and I am plagued  
by sorrow, a green hummingbird eats me alive  
with its stinging needle beak.

Then I meet you. Our courtship is fierce  
and indiscreet in a prudish city that scorns our love,  
as if the ancient laws of miscegenation  
are still in place. I am afraid  
I will infect you

after a virus clogs the gift economy:  
booming etrade of flintlock guns sag.  
Status updates flip from we are all  
connected to we are exiles.  
What bullshit

when in that same prudish city,  
they have one exact word to describe the shades  
of their sorrow, when they always sit together  
and eat cold noodles during white  
days of rain, always in one long table,  
though not all

as a boy, my father used to trap  
little brown sparrows, bury them in hot coal,  
and slowly eat the charred birds alone  
in the green fields, no soundsm,  
no brothers in sight.

Holiest are those who eat alone.  
Do not hurt them, do not push them, insult them,  
do not even stare at them, leave  
them to eat alone, in peace.





**1. the faerie ornithologie**

of fumi's  
dancing  
branches,  
feels the nonsensuous feel  
of feeling depth,  
the range  
of fringe or frill,  
the trill  
that various change  
of direction  
makes in murmur's  
various gathering of  
breeze, the tinge of various  
turn in murmur,  
fascinum, nonsense, blue  
not void or atom, return to exodus  
not between  
bird  
and all the various indecision.  
for there  
is nothing lost that may  
be found if  
here nor there sought is neither  
in tide and flight,  
array, repose  
and tarry

## 2. color field

in the color field there's  
blood at the root. our  
schedule is everyday  
sunshine blood, every  
dead nigger on the street  
in every record spinning  
around, every last one  
whirling. that's what  
every record records  
in the blue they see.  
which one of you  
motherfuckers can see  
and can't see that? black  
arts vs. black abstraction  
is a lie again and again,  
like you get not to see  
all that brutality in all  
that blue. you don't get  
to not see, motherfucker,  
but what happens when you  
act like you do? somebody  
black and poor can't  
breathe, everybody dying  
of their dying breath,  
nobody laying with them  
on the ground, all of us  
all fucked up with our  
phantom child, and  
you get to act like you  
alive in a brutal gallery?

## 3. are you one of these motherfuckers? yeah, yeah, you are.

this suspension, which is falling, whirling, unworlding storm,  
is for precision in mourning. we really don't respond to these  
motherfuckers. the discipline is our imagination. the whorl is  
a yardbird school, and a choir of uncertain azure in a scratch  
galaxy, the violent measure of a gleam in her eye. you can stop  
calling here for some kind of response to these motherfuckers.

what we got for you is precision in mourning and turbulence.  
we got a way of taking substance away in circling and surfacing,  
the slow obliteration of pain in pleasure, a release of coffee on  
dusty highway, an ongoing unravelling of quilting. we always  
got to be killing these motherfuckers in the edge of morning  
after morning of absolute and uncountable new remembering.

the immediate breathes through us before anything, but these  
motherfuckers can't understand that. we are instruments of  
clinical ecstasy and if you want to listen you got to give up  
everything. you got to give up listening to sharing in quilting  
in the bottom in oceanic engineering in the ungrammatical  
suffering of lynching and little children and our nonresponse.

when we salvage our surfacing and circling from your savage  
enclosure, it will be this miracle, right now, singing through  
can't breathe forever in this world and we ain't talking to you,  
motherfucker. it's gon' keep on being this miracle, right here,  
our praise, the denotative detonation of our phrasing, some  
times I'm blue, in the long goodbye of your everything burning.

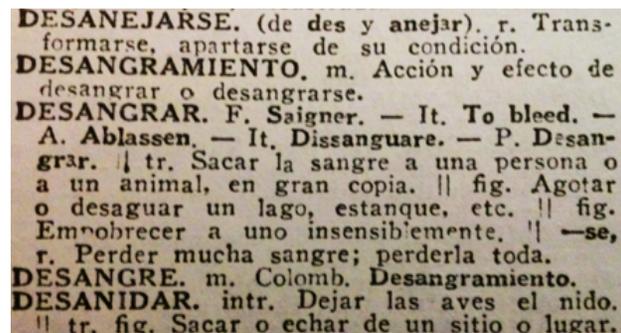


JUSTICE FOR  
GEORGE FLOYD  
JAMAR CLARK  
PHILANDO CASTILE  
TAMIR RICE  
ERIC GARNER  
SANDRA BLAND  
AHMAUD ARBERY  
BREONNA TAYLOR  
TON STERLING  
DOLLE GRAY



*But expressing emotion, they say, is not one of the attributes of exile.*

—Mahmoud Darwish



**DESANEJARSE** (from **des** and **anejar**). v. To be transformed, removed from one's condition.

**DESANGRAMIENTO**. m. The action and effect of bleeding or losing blood.

**DESANGRAR**. F. **Saigner**. ---E. **To bleed**. ---G. **Ablassen**. ---It. **Dissanguare**. ---

P. **Desangrar**. / tr. To extract the blood of a person or animal copiously. / To drain or empty a lake, pond, etc. / fig. To impoverish someone callously. / --se, v. To lose a great deal of blood; to lose all of it.

**DESANGRE**. n. Colomb. **Desangramiento**.

**DESANIDAR**. intr. For a bird to leave the nest. / tr. fig. To oust or dislodge from a place.

It gets fainter and fainter. The capacity for compassion. Life's purpose is the fulfillment of duty, under social pressure. The line of personal responsibility grows fainter and fainter. To escape. To escape responsibility. To escape responsibility through the fulfillment of duty: to submit. You are you, fainter and fainter. To escape compassion copiously.

Behavior only obeys a series of abstractions: it acts in fulfillment of duty. Without personal responsibility. It integrates itself, flees abandonment under social pressure. It doesn't admit fear. It doesn't accept pain. Callously. It denies itself: the focal point of pleasure and pain. So faint. It searches open-mouthed, like the child you were. It searches as if searching for the maternal site, with its mouth, to obey. Under social pressure, the hook that strengthens and is transformed according to the structure. You're vanishing. Without personal responsibility. The site of the watchtower. The tower, with its hook-mouth. Callously impoverished. To lose one's blood. To lose all of it. In this fog, the fulfillment of duty and responsibility are now an identical circumstance. Under laborious construction. The prison of identity. The identity of forty hours a week. To give life, in fulfillment of duty. To take life, in fulfillment of duty. Callously impoverished. Fleeing from pain. Without compassion. You're vanishing. You're a set pinned with the threads of the circumstances: social pressure. There, in the focal point of pleasure and pain, with yourself. You and not you, together. One muzzled and the other submitted, obeying in fulfillment of duty, with yourself. Pleasure and pain, assembling in secret. Under laborious construction. Vanishing.

We've all had this same experience. Pleasure and pain. Distorted. Under social pressure. The pleasure and pain of others. Under social pressure that opens its mouth. That searches in every sense. The force of nature, under social pressure, searching with its mouth. The immediacy of the senses, to communicate. Communicate. Communicate. The focal point with itself. The pleasure and pain of others. The true meaning of the world. Under laborious construction. Since childhood. We've all had this experience, far from our own feeling: to communicate. To open the mouth for the hook to slip in. In this fog where the blood shows through. To lose it. To lose all of it. In fulfillment of duty, because we think it's the same. The ability to see in all that fog: responsibility, the fulfillment of duty. To give or take life. The ability to see the clasp calling out to us in our own tongue, and at which moment, seeping through the fog. Blood. The blood seeping through the fog. To open. To open one's hand and memory: to communicate.

**To do is to undo**. Copiously. You live because someone cast enough light onto the edge of the highway. The decomposition of light. You live because you removed yourself from your condition while your family prayed, trapped in the fire, undoing darkness and substance. To do is to undo. You live because the soldiers set their march and their checkpoints above the nest. The soldiers plotted a safe shelter with your blood. To lose one's blood, to lose all of it. To lose one's identity. You live, like an animal or like a room ousted from its place. To lose one's place. To lose one's mind. To lose one's address. Because it's precisely *this bird leaving the nest, draining the pond, to be callously impoverished, to be transformed*, that you embraced as you embraced life.

*But expressing emotion, they say, is not one of the attributes of exile.*

—Mahmoud Darwish

Se vuelve cada vez más tenue. La capacidad de compasión. El cumplimiento del deber es el motivo de la vida, bajo presión social. La línea de la responsabilidad personal se vuelve cada vez más tenue. Escapar. Escapar de la responsabilidad. Escapar de la responsabilidad a través del cumplimiento del deber: someterse. Tú eres tú, y cada vez más tenue. En gran copia escapar de la compasión.

El comportamiento sólo obedece a una serie de abstracciones: actúa en cumplimiento del deber. Sin responsabilidad personal. Se integra, huye del abandono bajo presión social. No admite el miedo. No acepta el dolor. Insensiblemente. Se niega a sí mismo: punto central del gozo y el dolor. Tan tenue. Busca con boca abierta, como en las épocas de infancia. Busca como si se tratara del lugar materno, con la boca, obedecer. Bajo presión social el anzuelo que se refuerza y se transforma de acuerdo a la estructura. Te estás borrando. Sin responsabilidad personal. El lugar de la torre que vigila. La torre, con su boca de anzuelo. Empobrecida insensiblemente. Perder la sangre. Perderla toda. En esa niebla el cumplimiento del deber y la responsabilidad son ya la misma circunstancia. En trabajosa construcción. La cárcel de la identidad. La identidad de cuarenta horas por semana. Dar la vida, en cumplimiento del deber. Quitar la vida, en cumplimiento del deber. Empobrecido insensiblemente. Huyendo del dolor. Sin compasión. Te estás borrando. Eres un set clavado con los hilos de las circunstancias: presión social. Ahí, en el punto central del gozo y del dolor, contigo mismo. Tú y no tú, juntos. Uno amordazado y el otro sometido, obedece en cumplimiento del deber, contigo mismo. El gozo y el dolor, en secreto, ensamblan. En trabajosa construcción. Borrando.

Todos hemos tenido esa misma experiencia. El gozo y el dolor. Distorsionada. Bajo presión social. El gozo y el dolor de los otros. Bajo presión social que abre la boca. Que busca en todos los sentidos. La fuerza de la naturaleza, bajo presión social, que busca con la boca. La inmediatez de los sentidos, para comunicar. Comunicar. Comunicar. El punto central consigo mismo. El gozo y el dolor de los otros. El sentido verdadero del mundo. En trabajosa construcción. Desde la infancia. Todos hemos tenido esa experiencia, alejados de nuestro propio sentimiento: comunicar. Abrir la boca para que entre el anzuelo. En esa niebla donde se trasluce la sangre. Perderla. Perderla toda. En cumplimiento del deber porque nos parece la misma cosa. La habilidad para distinguir en esa niebla: la responsabilidad y el cumplimiento del deber. Dar o quitar la vida. La habilidad para distinguir, en qué momento, desde la propia lengua nos llama ese broche, traspasando la niebla. La sangre. La sangre traspasando la niebla. Abrir. Abrir la mano y la memoria: comunicar.

**Hacer es deshacer.** En gran copia. Tú vives porque alguien echo luz suficiente a la orilla de la carretera. La descomposición de la luz. Tú vives porque te apartaste de tu condición mientras tu familia encerrada entre el fuego, rezaba deshaciendo la oscuridad y la sustancia. Hacer es deshacer. Tú vives porque los militares plantaron su marcha y sus retenes por encima del nido. Los militares urdieron con tu sangre un refugio seguro. Perder la sangre, perderla toda. Perder la identidad. Tú vives, como animal o como habitación echada de su sitio. Perder lugar. Perder piso. Perder la dirección. Porque es justo ese *dejar las aves, agotar el estanque, empobrecerse insensiblemente, transformarse*, lo que abrazaste tanto como a la vida. insensiblemente, transformarse, lo que abrazaste tanto como a la vida.



## A Tale of Two Pandemics

Pamela Sneed

The headline in yesterday's news blared A Tale of Two Pandemics  
Shocking Inequities in the Healthcare System  
what got me was use of words shocking and two  
Those of us who lived through the 1980s early 90s AIDS crisis already knew about  
the existence of two New Yorks  
Two twenty thirty forty fifty Americas maybe more  
Depending on age race class citizenship status  
Entirely different systems for those who aren't white straight middle class  
Those of us who saw our brothers friends sisters die at the hands of system that shunned  
Refused to treat  
Threw away the unwanted  
Still can't forget a gay friend waiting  
For Medicaid to treat HIV  
He got sicker and sicker.  
I asked why Medicaid took so long  
He said they're waiting to see if I'll die first  
That wasn't the America I learned about in elementary school  
I was instructed to put my hand over heart  
and salute  
That wasn't the free America we sang of  
People who are LGBTQIA already know there are two Americas  
A doctor who kept forcing me to take a pregnancy test  
Even after I insisted at the time  
I only have sex with women  
I saw his scorn/still a test  
He made me pay for  
And those women who were forcibly sterilized  
Had wombs their life force taken  
Left dry barren by doctors  
who never even stopped to explain  
Felt entitled to take scar women's bodies  
Breasts cut off no options or consolation given  
Women who aren't rich and white already know invisible lines you can't cross  
With no insurance or Medicaid  
Forced into black markets for drugs  
A land of botched care botched procedures  
Black people already know  
separate doors  
separate entrances  
treatments  
options  
Existing long after Jim Crow  
And I have kept waiting for this moment  
This time of a medical #MeToo  
When those who've suffered from botched procedures and the indignities  
Step out from shadows  
Speak and name the atrocities committed  
medical malpractice  
I won't blame all doctors  
some are good  
just middlemen like so many in a broken system doing what they can  
and I'm grateful for the good ones in this pandemic risking their own lives

But the image of medical researchers that we see in movies and on television who  
understand a complex problem  
pour through medical books and science journals  
Stay up all night burning midnight oil to find a cure  
Who weep with concern  
are mostly false  
rare like ones who find cures  
and refuse to patent or personally profit  
Those days have become myth  
what's replaced them are businessmen  
wanting status amongst peers  
entry to country clubs and power  
Gaslighters hustlers actors like Trump  
There is a doctor at a famous New York hospital  
star of his field  
charged with drugging and raping his patients  
No one believed til it was proven  
his victims  
were only black women  
the rest he left alone.







## Sometimes in a body

Samiya Bashir

little metal insects tic tic tic tic tic tic tic tic  
through bloodstreaks through musculoskeletal structure

sometimes a body sits by the window watches the online party feed doesn't go to the party  
sometimes a body makes itself sick when pushed it too hard too long  
says stop  
shhhhhh  
stop

the wonderful singer was telling us we were the black gold of the sun on repeat  
why wonderful singer?  
how much is black gold even worth?

sometimes a body finds drugs where it least expects them  
holes have been dug and drugs have been buried in the holes

how we small each other  
how we bind each other  
how light speed equals need equals constancy

sometimes a body counts twelve stars in the out of doors night where skies never blacken  
never clear

they look lonely

## Colophon

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In order of appearance

A young woman attends a sit-in organized by local high school students in solidarity with George Floyd protests, St. Paul, Minnesota.

By late March, city buses are left with dismal ridership. Dusk sets on the solitary commutes of essential workers.

Train schedules thinned to run every half hour. Platforms cleared and all but a woman and child were left, waiting for the next to arrive.

A mother and son navigate the early days of the pandemic in NYC, riding the express train equipped only with gloves and an expected uncertainty for what lies ahead.

A New Yorker gets her head right before salons are made to shut down.

New Yorkers continue to hold it down during a moment of a major transformation. The reimagination of leisure and pleasure during immense loss ought not to be lost in the greater story of this time.

In Brownsville, Brooklyn, emptiness sets in. The only thing to be seen below multicolored business awnings are the varieties of chainlink and steel covering storefronts.

By early March, street vendors had quickly adapted their hustles to offer the likes of cleaning products and hand sanitizer in place of whatever might have been sold there before.

Of the countless murals that line the streets of New York City, this one poses an imagined equation that with more justice must inherently come more peace.

The site of George Floyd's killing is quickly transformed into a multi-block memorial and healing space.

A mural-sized portrait of Michael Brown, the eighteen-year-old shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, is erected atop plywood at the George Floyd memorial in Minneapolis.

A young man reads out the names of police violence victims—those also present on the makeshift tombstones in the park—aloud to a crowd in Powderhorn, Minneapolis.

Hundreds sit and stand in front of the governor's mansion in St. Paul, Minnesota, to demand care and safety for the incarcerated, especially during a pandemic. Especially recognizing the inextricable link between Black life and imprisonment.

A protestor lifts a middle finger to the sky in Brooklyn, NY. The symbol perhaps beckoning to the popular demonstration chant, "The whole damn system / Is guilty as hell."

A woman, proudly donning the Oromo flag on scarf and umbrella, listens intently at a protest for Black lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Midday in mid-March on 5th avenue and 52nd street might usually boast a flood of foot traffic, but the most abundant body in this image is that of the flags.

Black students from across Minnesota gather and stand, fists raised, at the State Capitol in St. Paul.

A list of names grows along Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis. Its impetus is the simple phrase, "Justice for" and the question of where it might end remains unaccounted for.

What enjoyment looked like, coordinated. In Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn.

A Brooklyn man shares his pearly golds in the days before masks were mandated and the lower halves of faces were made only to be shown amongst intimate co-inhabitants. In other words, Joshua's was a rare sighting: a smile in public.

Sammy's Avenue Eatery, one of only a handful of Black-owned restaurants in the city of George Floyd's death, glows in eventide, providing free sandwiches for the likes of the Freedom Fighters and other community protection organizations.

While most streets in the city cleared out in the wake of quarantine orders, one thing easily found in NYC was fellow photographers like that of Marcia Wilson, weighted with the task of preserving Black life.

A couple makes what might otherwise be a routine grocery store trip in full protective gear. Their care is but an example of all New Yorkers' call to embrace the demands of late March in New York City, 2020.

Before a plethora of face coverings could be found in the city, surgical masks were the norm for lucky New Yorkers. Buses ran at capacities near empty; essential workers and brave, few commuters the exception.

A subway saxophonist plays what will end up being his final serenade for a while in Manhattan, NY.

In Brooklyn, the art of bodily ink that usually occupies the space of a tattoo parlor has migrated into the homes of artists. More and more people want to memorialize the movement and the phrases that feel all but omnipotent in an era of resistance.

## Participants

**Laylah Amatullah Barrayn** is a documentary photographer. Barrayn is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and has been published in *Le Monde*, *National Geographic*, *Vogue*, *NPR*, *VOX*, *Vanity Fair*, among other publications. Her work was recently nominated for a 2020 News and Documentary Emmy. She is the co-author of the book *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*. She is a member of Kamoinge, a pioneering collective of African American photographers founded in 1963. She was included as one of the Royal Photographic Society's (UK) Hundred Heroines. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, with solo exhibitions at The Museum of the African Diaspora San Francisco, The Taubman Museum of Art (VA), MAK Gallery (Venice + London) and the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporic Arts (NY). Her work has been shown collectively at the MANIFESTA Biennale (Italy); Brighton Photo Biennial (UK); The Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago) Barrayn is currently working on a book on contemporary Black photographers.

**Samiya Bashir** is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Field Theories* (Nightboat Books, 2017), winner of the 2018 Oregon Book Award. A multi-media poetry maker, she sometimes makes poems of dirt. Sometimes zeros and ones. Sometimes variously rendered text. Sometimes light. Her work has been widely published, performed, installed, printed, screened, experienced, and Oxford comma'd. She theoretically lives in Portland, Oregon, with a magic cat who shares her obsession with trees and blackbirds and occasionally crashes her classes and poetry salons at Reed College. However, as the 2019-20 Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize Winner in Literature, Bashir is currently in pandemic exile far from Italy and further yet from wherever home might be.

Since the late 1980s, writer, artist, teacher, and activist **Gregg Bordowitz** has made diverse works—essays, poems, performances, drawings, sculpture, and videos—that explore his Jewish, gay, and bisexual identities within the context of the ongoing AIDS crisis. Bordowitz is also the author of many books, including: *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986–2003*, and he has published numerous catalog and journal essays on art, literature, AIDS, and their intersections. A long-time faculty member of the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Bordowitz is the Director of the Low-Residency MFA program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Bordowitz was an early participant in New York's ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), where he co-founded video collectives including Testing the Limits, and a video-making affinity group within ACT UP—DIVA (Damn Interfering Video Activists).

**Dolores Dorantes** is an Acharya in the Buddhist tradition, a journalist, writer, therapist, poet, performer and sacred animal. She is a Mexican born in the mountains of Veracruz in 1973 but raised in Ciudad Juárez, right next door to El Paso, which is just across the US border. In 2011 she fled her country and was granted political asylum in Los Angeles. Dorantes is Black and Nahua indigenous from her mother's side, Spaniard and mestiza from her father's side. Recent books translated into English are *The River*, a collaboration with the artist Zoe Leonard, and *Style*. Her socio-cultural writings and political-social reflections, along with the majority of her books, are part of the commons at: [www.doloresdorantes.blogspot.com](http://www.doloresdorantes.blogspot.com). She believes in a United Latin America.

**Cathy Park Hong's** book of creative nonfiction, *Minor Feelings*, was published in Spring 2020 by One World/Random House (US) and Profile Books (UK). She is also the author of poetry collections *Engine Empire*, published in 2012 by W.W. Norton, *Dance Dance Revolution*, chosen by Adrienne Rich for the Barnard Women Poets Prize, and *Translating Mo'um*. Hong is the recipient of the Windham-Campbell Prize, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Her poems have been published in *Poetry*, *A Public Space*, *Paris Review*, *McSweeney's*, *Baffler*, *Yale Review*, *The Nation*, and other journals. She is the poetry editor of the *New Republic* and is a professor at Rutgers-Newark University.

**Joy Ladin** is the author of nine books of poetry, including *The Future is Trying to Tell Us Something: New and Selected Poems and Fireworks in the Graveyard*, and two Lambda Literary Award finalists *Impersonation* and *Transmigration*, and *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*, a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award and a Triangle Award. She holds the Chair in English at Stern College of Yeshiva University. Links to her poems and essays are available at [wordpress.joyladin.com](http://wordpress.joyladin.com).

**Fred Moten** teaches at NYU. His latest book, written with Stefano Harney, is *All Incomplete* (Minor Compositions/Autonomea).

**Pamela Sneed** is a New York-based poet, writer, performer and visual artist, author of *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom than Slavery*, *KONG and Other Works*, *Sweet Dreams* and two chaplets, *Gift by Belladonna* and *Black Panther*. She has been featured in the *New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *Hyperallergic* and on the cover of *New York Magazine*. She is online faculty in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Low-Residency MFA, teaching Human Rights and Writing Art, and teaches new genres in Columbia University's School of the Arts. Sneed has performed at the Whitney Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Poetry Project, MCA Chicago, The High Line, New Museum, MoMA and the Toronto Biennale. In 2018, she was nominated for two Pushcart Prizes in poetry. Sneed's *Funeral Diva*, a poetry and prose manuscript, has just been published by City Lights.

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