

~

SHORE by Emily Johnson and Catalyst is about love. Its manifestation is a multi-part, many-day gathering, action, performance, and celebration. In the heart of the manifestation, the work of SHORE is connection.

I was honored to participate in SHORE: STORY, a reading curated by Emily Johnson on Sunday, April 19th, 2015, at Two Bridges Community Center, on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Featured readers were the young poets of Live Lines / ARTS! by the People, as well as Suhar Muradi, Ben Weaver, Emmanuel Iduma, Kao Kue, and myself.

The young poets of Live Lines range in age from 6 to 10 years old – and the evening was theirs!

This essay is my reflection on the SHORE: STORY evening and on what it meant to me to be a part of SHORE in Lenapehoking. Some elements of the essay are drawn from poems I was writing during the month of April, 2015, while Emily Johnson and Catalyst were in residence on this shore.

~

Bearberry

Beach pin weed

Switch grass

Little bluestem

Red maple

False heather

Black cherry

Shining sumac

Bitter panicgrass

MONDAWMIN

~

Who was first to go mad in the droning of the copters?
In surveillance. My girl, what was the year?

Then, what are all the given names of those been made mad since?

Gold leaf, softpress
scratch-off card of memory

For years of it, we lived by noncompliance.

Walking home in Lotus River before sundown
or the copper fields in curfew, the reaching fields around us at
Mandaamin

Oh honey, oh copper from a penny

To do nothing while they kill us is violent too.

Across the mall's parking lot, a pile of infant stars.
It keeps piling. Girls and boys, be lining up.

Flat-top goldenrod

Common goldenrod

Evening primrose

Prickly pear

River birch

Sweet gum

Common boneset

Lizard's tail

Netted chain fern

Fox sedge

White grass

Wild rye

Silver maple

Eastern cottonwood

Jack-in-the-pulpit

Sensitive fern

Golden ragwort



~

Home is a movement,

writes Bao Phi, my brother-poet, of SHORE: STORY,

in Minneapolis, July 2014.

He writes: I love poetry and community, so

this

is the place to be.

~

In the months since July of 2014, the movement
has been the place. To be.

Place where we are.

Home is everywhere

& Emerging in the streets.

Eric Garner, Kajieme Powell, Tamir Rice.

Michael Brown. John Crawford, Akai Gurley.

Freddie Gray.

Mya Hall. Rekia Boyd. Tenisha McBride

Did I say Freddie Gray?

Say Freddie Gray.

One day a young man walking home from the store, on a Saturday,
August afternoon, St. Louis.

Low bush

Loosestrife

Whorled yellow

Purple love

Dogbane

Bitternut

Alumroot

Horse-balm

Yellow forest

Common blue

Oatgrass

Service berry

Pinch pine

Scarlet oak

Sweet Joe

White wood

Swan's sedge

Common hair

One night a young woman, her car broken down, on a stranger's winter porch,
knocking for help, in Dearborn.

Doli's eyes

One afternoon a young man not walking, not knocking...then pulled
from the back a city van, by his broken neck.

Wild leek

One afternoon, when I wanted to buy a loose cigarette.

Bottle bush

One long white t-shirt, green around with trees.

Path rush

One bag of Skittles. One red flag, one blue X, one field of stars, in the blue of the X.

Bearberry

Then one day, 50,000 people, walking in the streets.

Beach pin weed

Surveillance. Memory, rattling as a train. Some days rain.

Switch grass

This has been that year.

Little bluestem

~

Red maple

Emily Johnson came to Lenapehoking / New York City in the windy blue spring of a brutal winter;
fall; summer. Grief, exhaustion, rage. (Next year will be better...) (Or, will not.)

False heather

I view our bodies,

Black cherry

says Emily,

Shining sumac

as everything:

Bitter panicgrass

Our bodies are culture, history, present and future, all at once.
Out of respect for and trust in our bodies and collective memories,
I give equal weight to story and image, to movement and stillness,
to what I imagine and to what I do not know.

Flat-top goldenrod

Common goldenrod

I view our bodies, says Emily.

Evening primrose

I see our bodies.

Prickly pear

~

~

The people are still in the highway, fanned out, in little clumps
waiting

Orion;
regions forming in the Deep Field of the night

That's how clear the air is now after the heaving rush
only moments ago

Even the noise has stopped

Some young men are pouring milk
into one of the young men's eyes

Now,
blinking colored lights & open eyes

The cars move in clusters
Eye of God constellation & This

very new birthplace of stars

Young men pouring milk
deep open

Milk,

open looking up eyes

~

River birch

Sweet gum

Common boneset

Lizard's tail

Netted chain fern

Fox sedge

White grass

Wild rye

Silver maple

Eastern cottonwood

Jack-in-the-pulpit

Sensitive fern

Golden ragwort

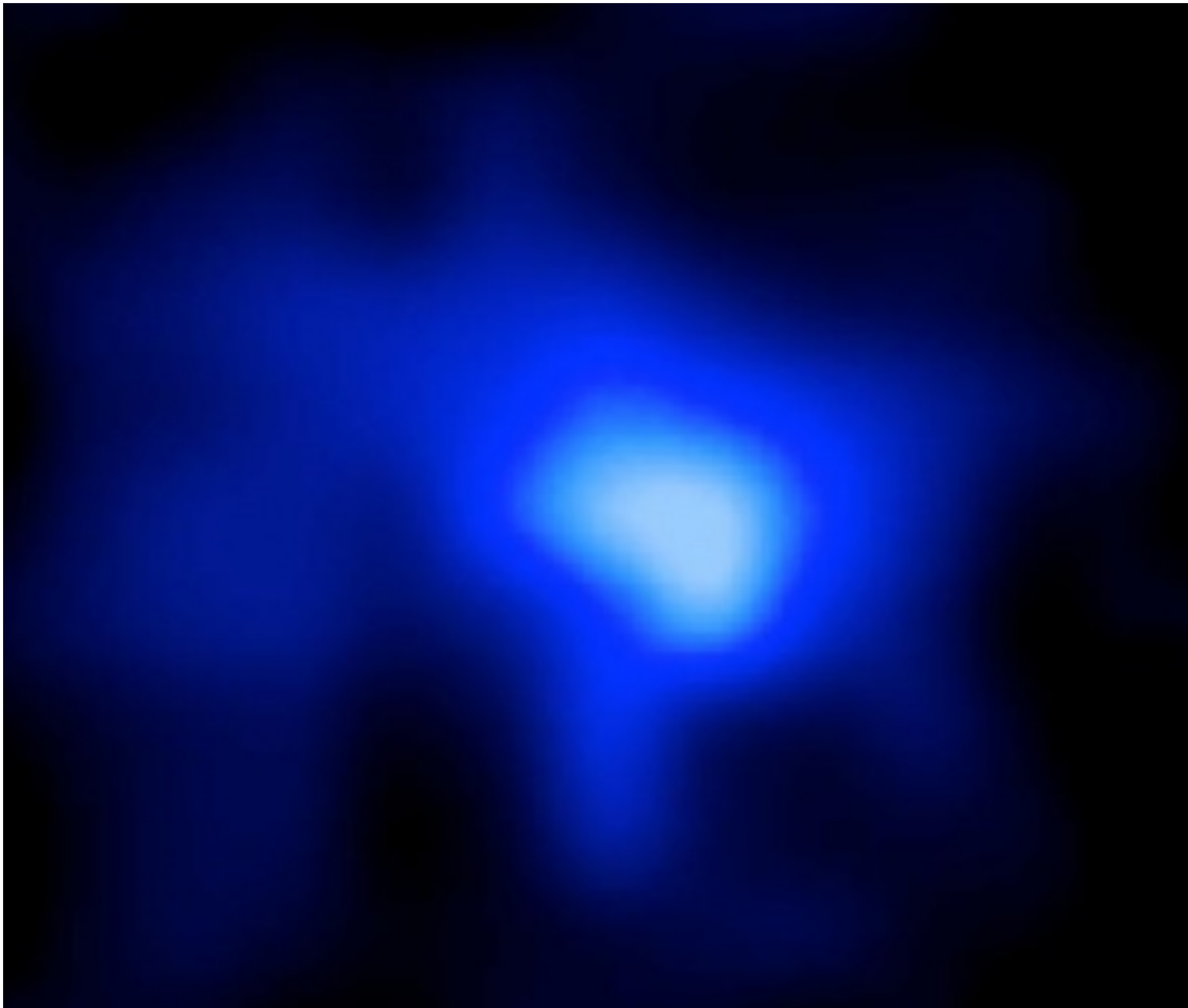
Low bush

Loosestrife

Whorled yellow

Purple love

Dogbane



~

What does a place know?

As much as a body.

Time, my friend reminds me, is after all a colonial construct.

Everything that's happened / will happen in a place / is happening already / now,
is what the place knows.

We live on the shore of

slavers' ships. Trumpet honeysuckle. Ruby-throated hummingbird. Disease.

of

Resistance, Rebellion, Solidarity, Would-Be-Free.

~

SHORE by Emily Johnson is about love. Connection.

What a place knows.

~

What a place knows.

~

Bitternut

Alumroot

Horse-balm

Yellow forest

Common blue

Oatgrass

Service berry

Pinch pine

Scarlet oak

Sweet Joe

White wood

Swan's sedge

Common hair

Doli's eyes

Wild leek

Bottle bush

Path rush

~

On April 12th, 2015, 25-year-old Freddie Gray was arrested by officers of the Baltimore Police Department on no charge. He died later that day in police custody from officer-inflicted injuries.

After two weeks of protests, interaction between police and community members became violent during the afternoon and evening of April 27th, 2015.

‘The violence began around 3 p.m., as students fresh out of school gathered met shield-carrying police officers at Mondawmin Mall.’

– From an article in *The Baltimore Sun* on April 28th, 2015, under the headline ‘Baltimore descends into chaos, violence, looting.’

‘It began at a large transportation hub for high school students over at Mondawmin Mall. I think some 4,000 to 5,000 students intersect there at some point after school to get to their homes across the city. It is a major transportation hub for several high schools in the city. And there was a social media posting that advertised an event called a “purge” that was to begin at 3pm right around dismissal time. I got there around 3:20. When I got there, students had definitely started to engage in some behavior that definitely set things kind of in motion and I walked into hurling bricks and rocks. The crowd had swelled by that point. I also walked into a situation where police were in riot gear. I believe they had been there waiting for dismissal in anticipation of this event. So the two were definitely facing off by the time I got there and really it escalated from there. The police started to push the crowds back; the crowds started to swell. More police reinforcements showed up and they started to go into the neighborhoods from there. Officers began being injured. Students started to get arrested. The neighborhood started to come out. And it was an all-out face-off.’

– Erica Green of *The Baltimore Sun*, from an interview on National Public Radio on April 28th, 2015.

In the days and weeks that followed, city officials and the mainstream news media referred generally to these events as ‘the Baltimore riots.’ Community organizers and protesters continue to refer to these events as the Baltimore Uprising.

In South Africa, April 27th is celebrated as a national holiday called ‘Freedom Day’, commemorating the first democratic elections in that country on April 27th, 1994, following the downfall of the apartheid regime.

In 1994, in my first year out of university at age 22, I was living in South Africa as a volunteer teacher in a high school in what was then known as the ‘homeland’ of Lebowa. I had returned home to the

Bearberry

Beach pin weed

Switch grass

Little bluestem

Bearberry

Beach pin weed

Switch grass

Little bluestem

Red maple

False heather

Black cherry

Shining sumac

Bitter panicgrass

Flat-top goldenrod

Common goldenrod

Evening primrose

Prickly pear

River birch

United States during the election, following an experience in an automobile accident on South Africa's N1 highway in which my friend Alex Schmoke, also a volunteer teacher, was killed, on April 4th, 1994. At that time, Alex's older brother Kurt Schmoke was serving as the mayor of Baltimore. I had come home for Alex's funeral.

Sweet gum

'The area was estate countryside in the 19th century, characterized by large homes built by prominent city residents on the hilly countryside several hundred feet above the Inner Harbor area. Mondawmin takes its name from the estate owned by Dr. Patrick Macaulay (1795–1849), physician, city councilman, B&O Railroad director and patron of the arts. Tradition relates that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [author of the 'epic' poem 'The Song of Hiawatha'] visited Dr. Macaulay, who asked him what to name his home, then surrounded by corn fields. The poet allegedly looked around and replied, "Why not Mondamin, after the Indian corn god?" (Mapmakers later added a "w" to the name, and it stuck.)'

Common boneset

Lizard's tail

– From the Wikipedia entry for 'Mondawmin, Baltimore'.

Netted chain fern

Fox sedge

'Mandaamin' or 'Mandamin' translates from the closely related Algonquian and Ojibwe languages into English as 'corn' or 'spirit of corn'.

White grass

Wild rye

~

Silver maple

Eastern cottonwood

Jack-in-the-pulpit

When we gather for SHORE: STORY, at Two Bridges,

Sensitive fern

Emily and others have been planting all day, in wind & sunburn, shrubs in the Rockaway dunes.

Golden ragwort

In a long bright room made of windows, floating between the rush of the FDR and new green trees, over the river, the poets all are gathering, with all of their people.

Low bush

Way down at the island's southeast edge, across the Lower East Side, across Chinatown

Loosestrife

In the Goldie Chu Community Room at Two Bridges

Whorled yellow

Sahar Muradi, Ben Weaver, Emmanuel Iduma, Kao Kue, and I read with the real poets, the young people, who in the room make a city, neighborhoods, landmarks, McDonald's, different trees. Then they move us around it, the city, in the room. They move us inside it. They welcome us, and, together we move.

Purple love

Dogbane

~



SHORE

~

The messages come as videos of the young people walking for nine days to the Capital. Each evening a small advance team arrives with blow-up mattresses in a van. The volunteers inflate them, in Newark, Philadelphia, rec halls & gymnasiums. Walking regular roads. Another group, in the west, is walking across the Nation for the People, & the Mother. Same walking.

Months ago now, in the place where the young man's body had been lying, on warm asphalt, a police stopped to let his dog piss on the candles and the flowers. New tunnels the size of pipes hewn into the mountain every day, rigs on fire across the field, fields of fire sure as night. Same walking, like it's the last thing we can do. The young people are singing, they comfort one another, at the edge of the roads & ridges, with handsewn bright-blue flags sending signals, coded, & clear as the long horizon which blue then white, then yellow, lit the original day.

~

~

I first met my poet-friend and SHORE co-reader Kao Kue in July 2013, in a workshop in Taos, New Mexico, with the poet Joy Harjo. Kao identifies as Hmong and her poems, which are story/songs, are threads of experience, retelling, ancestral memory, beauty, longing, loss, pain – and connection.

Bitternut

Alumroot

Horse-balm

Yellow forest

Common blue

Oatgrass

Service berry

Pinch pine

Scarlet oak

Sweet Joe

White wood

Swan's sedge

Common hair

Doli's eyes

Wild leek

Bottle bush

Path rush

Bearberry

One morning in our workshop with Joy, around a small table of heavy wood in the Sagebrush Inn, at the edge of the town, Kao reads her poems, and pauses when she begins to cry. She says, I'm sorry, forgive me. And our teacher Joy says, No. Don't apologize. This happened. Many people died. And you survived.

~

INCANTATORY

~

It's dark and after you disappear I climb down to the temple.
The icon is a wooden bird, five pieces, wired with copper.

The helicopters appear these days hours before the people
begin to assemble.

One of our tactics is to turn and face the masks.

Difficult, to believe these days that souls can leave their bodies
back there in the stoptime after pain. Lucky: not the soul's work to believe.

In the breathspace where your body was, resistance
—little world beneath the subfloor of a van

Anguish attaches; here, in little temple where

We never were compliant and we are not going back
to our bodies I am singing, to myself

~

Beach pin weed

Switch grass

Little bluestem

Bearberry

Beach pin weed

Switch grass

Little bluestem

Red maple

False heather

Black cherry

Shining sumac

Bitter panicgrass

Flat-top goldenrod

Common goldenrod

Evening primrose

Prickly pear

River birch

~

SHORE by Emily Johnson and Catalyst is about love.

Its manifestation is a multi-part, many-day gathering, action, performance, & celebration. In the heart of the manifestation, the work of SHORE is connection.

To honor connection, between human people, and between human people and non-human people, which is the world.

Love that is *of* and *is* the world.

Sweet gum

Common boneset

Lizard's tail

Netted chain fern

Fox sedge

White grass

Wild rye

Silver maple

Eastern cottonwood

Sensitive fern

Golden ragwort

Low bush

Loosestrife

Whorled yellow

Heartwreck

Happiness

Remembrance

Love



~

Photo Credits

- Photograph 1 : Accompanying an article on Time.com from September 3rd, 2014, under the headline 'Justice Department to investigate Ferguson, Missouri, Police'. The photograph, by Associated Press photographer Charlie Riedel, was captioned: 'Police wait to advance after tear gas was used to disperse a crowd in Ferguson, Mo. on Aug. 17, 2014.'
- Photograph 2 : This is a photograph of the beginning of the universe. From the *Voice of America* website: 'An international team of astronomers announced on May 15, 2015 that they have discovered the most distant galaxy ever detected. They measured the exact distance of EGS-zs8-1 (pictured in this Hubble image) and found that the galaxy is 13.1 billion light years away from Earth. The light from the galaxy now reaching Earth was produced back when the universe was only 5 percent of its present age. (Pascal Oesch, Ivelina Momcheva, NASA, European Space Agency)'. (As also reported in *The Guardian* on May 7th, 2015.)
- Photograph 3 : Nihígaal bee Iiná is a youth organizing group of the Diné Nation that describes itself as 'We are young Diné walking for our existence. We want to restore Hozhó and K'é.' The photograph is the group's profile picture on their Facebook page.
- Photograph 4 : Accompanying an article in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* from November 24th, 2014, by Jordan Stead and Anna Erickson, under the headline 'Demonstrators gather in Seattle to mark Missouri grand jury decision.' The photo credit belongs to Anna Erickson. The photograph was captioned: 'A protester pours milk in his eyes after being tear-gassed by Seattle police at the Interstate 5 entrance on Cherry Street.'