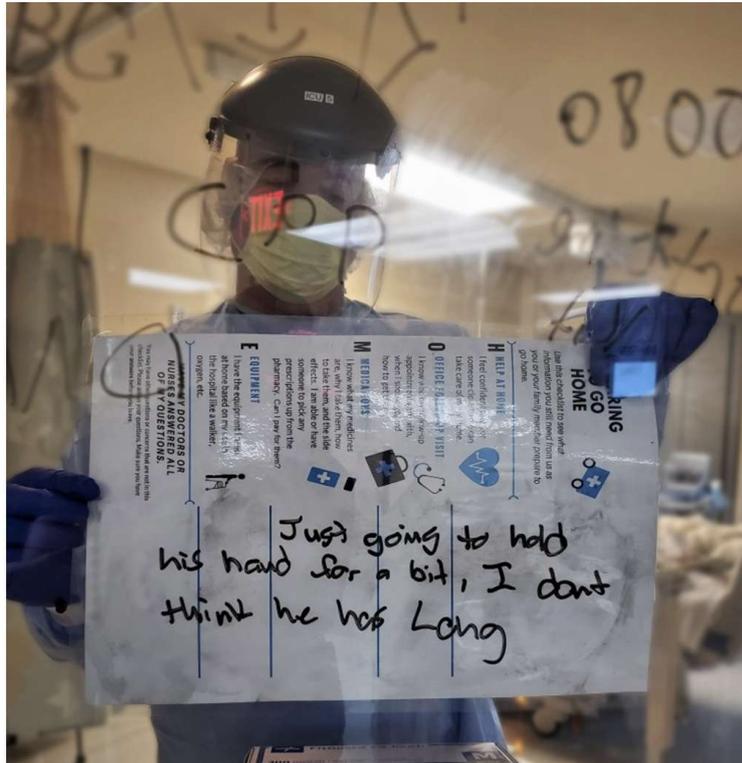


# Adrian Lahoud

## Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #20



Colby Hutson, a nurse at Ascension Seton Hays in Texas, holds a sign that reads: 'Just going to hold his hand for a while, I don't think he has long.' Photograph/ Ascension Seton Hays, Austin, Texas / Facebook

Here below you can find Adrian and Johnny Lahoud's contribution to Voices (Towards Other Institutions). The text, penned by Adrian, was brought to life by Johnny's reading.

### Last Rights

«Today with our friends in the NHS sitting in disciplinary meetings for speaking out against their managers and their government for failing to provide adequate protection to nurses, doctors and other care workers, and while their colleagues in the US receive memos from that country's largest health care services provider threatening to fire them for speaking out about the lack of basic protective equipment in their hospitals, at the same time as the NHS tries to lure retired Windrush nurses back to treat the sick, and while the black and coloured communities in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States are again confronted by what it means to be unable to mourn as one should, or as one is

supposed to, and while the police and military and security forces discover that mourning as one should and as one is supposed to is going to be more important than protecting your life from dying because abandoning the dying desecrates whatever it still means to be alive as hundreds of thousands of care workers demonstrate as they dignify the rest of us by accompanying complete strangers in their last moments which may or may not be any consolation for those left behind condemned to replay the horror of imagining loved ones alone in their last moments strangled by choke-holds or coupled to ventilators and support systems with no family and friends to console them, to tend to them or to hold their hands. And that gulf of horror is what yawns open in front of every transit worker that continues to have to drive trains and buses, it is what threatens an entire underclass of delivery drivers who risk getting sick and dying alone as they are marshalled to make up for the fact that some people don't have to leave their homes to stack shelves or save others. Those who are no longer working will have realised what it means for production's spell to be broken and now refuse to restart on command, this is why we see every kind of sadism being solicited. Exceptional cruelty will be required to restart the machine. But it will fail. The thrill is gone.

Still, look how unsteadily power lurches forward, greedily pawing at the situation. Make no mistake, there are no mistakes here. Competent incompetence asserts its dominance again. Not its subtlety. Not its intelligence or empathy. Just its dominance. Now the Boys Own, Cobra meeting, Tintin take-it-on-the-chin lot here, or the Red Dawn, A-Team, Top Gun version over there cannot message their way out of a live broadcast of a global body count, a body count that is the sole expression of an inability to imagine a form of power beyond the domination of disposable bodies because finally that will be the epitaph for the end of this world and I can't help but think...who would have ever imagined that we would be the ones to see the end of this system?

It's a sad spectacle to see how many still want to join the ranks of those prepared to sell their commitments to the highest bidder, while others get on with the work of organising survival, with trying to work out the right sequence of words in check-in-text-messages

to friends without sounding unduly alarmed, or needing to sound too upbeat, or wanting to really say how sick they feel because well you know everyone is struggling and it's not fair to unduly burden the already overburdened and besides I don't-know-you-that-well-yet, but even more because we recognise that caring for people we have nothing in common with is a community-in-death, because we realise that any society that abandons the sick, the elderly and the dying undermines itself radically because the circumstances of death-in-life matter a great deal.

In the photo of Colby Hutson, a nurse at Ascension Seton Hays Hospital in Texas, he is shown pressing a hand written sign to a pane of glass, presumably to family or friends who are out of the shot. The sign reads:

'Just going to hold his hand for a while, I don't think he has long'

Like fireflies trying to synchronise their flashing in an unfamiliar void, all around us alternative worlds flicker in and out of being.

But sometimes a single image can hold a new world in its frame, a portrait of the dying and the new born all of them gasping for breath.»

*Adrian Lahoud is Dean of the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art. Prior to his current role at the RCA, he was director of the MA programme at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths and a research fellow in the Forensic Architecture ERC-funded project; studio master in the Projective Cities MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design at the Architectural Association; and director of the MArch Urban Design at the Bartlett, University College London.*

Adrian Lahoud,  
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