



Calling All Canaries! Submissions of texts and images for publication

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From: **Taraneh Fazeli** <_____>
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Subject: Calling All Canaries! Submissions of texts and images for publication

My Dearest Fellow Canaries,

First a brief introduction to the entire group for those I may not have met yet: I am a newish Canary who came via Jesse. We attended Cooper Union together years ago. While she and I worked together in various art capacities after school only recently did we get to talking about our experiences with chronic illness. In the past several years I've had resurgence of symptoms so the time spent with the Canaries helped me realize that I needed to make some big changes in my life: the first step leaving my job and NYC to take a "break" a la an arts residency, where I am now.

WHAT and WHERE:

The thing I am conjuring/mobilizing the knowledge of the Canaries towards: As part of the art residency that I am in at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH) Core Program I am contributing to a printed book. My text will function as a set of research notes for a larger curatorial project focused on spatial temporal controls of the ill body in various discourses and institutions and, as mentioned above, this emerges from a dialogue with the Canaries.

In addition to these texts in the main book, I'd like to invite all of the Canaries to do a project in the form of a 'zine or broadsheet poster which will accompany the book and have a life beyond that. The curatorial prompt I've come up with attempts to mobilize and share with others beyond this group some of the creative knowledge embedded in the Canaries hive mind. The idea is that the publication will be entitled, "**Notes for the Waiting Room: On Illness's Ontological Condition/For Psychosomatic Solutions**" and will investigate recuperating the term "psychosomatic" by charting various strategies for coping with the isolation and mental malaise that is part of physiological illnesses, particularly chronic illnesses which wax and wane unexpectedly. The knowledge produced by our experiences living with auto-immune disease gets right to the heart of the dividing lines that modern biomedicine and other discourses have drawn between the mind and body and this is an invitation to submit images and texts addressing that.

WHY: Or, where this idea came from...

So, sadly, I'm pretty sure that we've all been there. A fact of chronic illness is the largely unpredictable ebb and flow of symptoms which manifests in the anticipation of and subsequent living through the dreaded flare state, or relapse of illness. First it may start with a few sleepless nights where we find ourselves unable to focus on anything other than whether that new ache partnered with a rash might merely be a bruised knee with eczema on top? Or perhaps it is actually the sign of something terrible building, the tip of the iceberg in sight?? We wonder, maybe if we sleep a few extra hours and cut out the dairy that has been inching slowly back into our diet (because, hey, we have to enjoy life a little)...??? Then, bam, too late. Unable to move from bed much less have the energy to deal with the noise and stress and chemicals and bullshit out in the world, we are stuck numbing the pain and boredom with back-to-back episodes of Orange is the New Black while we agonize in our own prison over the minutes, hours, days missed at work, with friends, with lovers. While we "should" be reading all that Foucault we always meant to get to or finally writing our memoir, instead we are just. w.a.i.t.i.n.g. Wanting relief. Wanting a hug, but settling for a little swipe swipe on tinder. Staring and blinking at the ceiling fan cutting the light from the hall, measuring the collapse of time. Or wondering, as I was

*reminded this weekend by our comrade and author of Sick Woman Theory Johanna Hevda that writer Fred Moten had succinctly put it in his call for collective action: “What are **we** going to do?”*

This was me shortly after I hit my residency (hard). During a flare we find ways to deal with the symptoms and dig ourselves out by any means necessary—herbal supplements, reductive bone broth diets, injections, isolation from chemical and emotional irritants, and so on. This group has been hugely helpful to many of us, fostering solidarity by information sharing about treatments that are either experimental or hard to figure out across siloed specialties (e.g. immunologists that don’t speak to endocrinologists or nephrologists, much less acupuncturists or psychologists).

Amidst my flare, at our last meeting an interesting conversation on battling the mounting distrust of our own bodies due to the ever-present fear of relapse unfolded. For some this manifests in obsession and possible hypochondria while, for others, it shows up in avoidance that takes the form of over-intellectualizing and channeling the experience into advocacy. In recognizing our confusion around how to take seriously symptoms that may or may not be constructed via the mind when dealing with illnesses like autoimmune diseases that can go un- or misdiagnosed and, even when given a label, still remain mysterious, I asked for some practical suggestions on how people have dealt with the alienation, and mental malaise that is part and parcel of the physiological symptoms of a flare. In other words, putting aside the judgment that comes with a symptom’s presumed mental origin, what are the ways we deal with repetitive bouts of illness physically, psychologically, emotionally?

I was amazed at some of the strategies that were shared that day which ranged from doses of magnesium (Brina?) and letters to one’s future self post-flare (Marjorie), to a silly youtube video that reflects the absurdity of trying to move through the world [upstream on crip time](#) (okay, that’s me now), to embodiment exercises that focus one’s energy on the healing of another (Bonnie), etc. Right after that meeting Jesse and I spoke about the interconnectedness of discourses around auto-immune diseases with those that surrounded hysteria and hypochondria. We considered a question I think is at the kernel of much of the Canaries conversations: what might be gained by recuperating the term psychosomatic at this stage in the game? So I thought: what if the ‘zine/broadsheet I had the opportunity to produce and distribute at the Museum mirrored the multi-headed hydra that is the Canaries (art collective and advocacy/support group) by offering a space to share and collect information on the state of being in a flare it by those who have experienced them.

Recognizing the real heat of the Canaries is in the way we intervene in different discourses and institutions as artists and creative practitioners performatively, this collection would will be distributed both in an art context and biomedical context: to MFAH audiences via an exhibition in the Spring and, also, to patients waiting at various doctors offices. As this collection will challenge the unilateral and hierarchical transmission of treatment from doctor to patient and promote solidarity and lateral knowledge sharing instead, we might consider calling for public submissions that could be added to the Canaries website later and including scores for the type of interaction we’d like to see between the ill and various types of caregivers.

Patient to patient, friend to friend, doctor to doctor, mother to daughter, the script is in need of the Canaries to do some flipping.

HOW/LOGISTICS:

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Fondly,
Taraneh