



PATHOLOGY: A DIFFRACTIVE ENCOUNTER OF MACHINE/BODY

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Abstract: I've been thinking about poems and about college as rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and as diffractive techniques (Barad 2007; Gullion 2018) for thinking about the social world. This project emerged as a way for me to understand my embodied experience of abdominal surgery. I began with the creation of an art journal, and then wrote a poem to accompany the images. I created the images and the text while thinking about my experience of undergoing surgery and diffracting that through Haraway's (2016) ideas about cybernetics and machine bodies.

Keywords: diffraction; poetic inquiry; art journaling; rhizomes; surgery; endometriosis

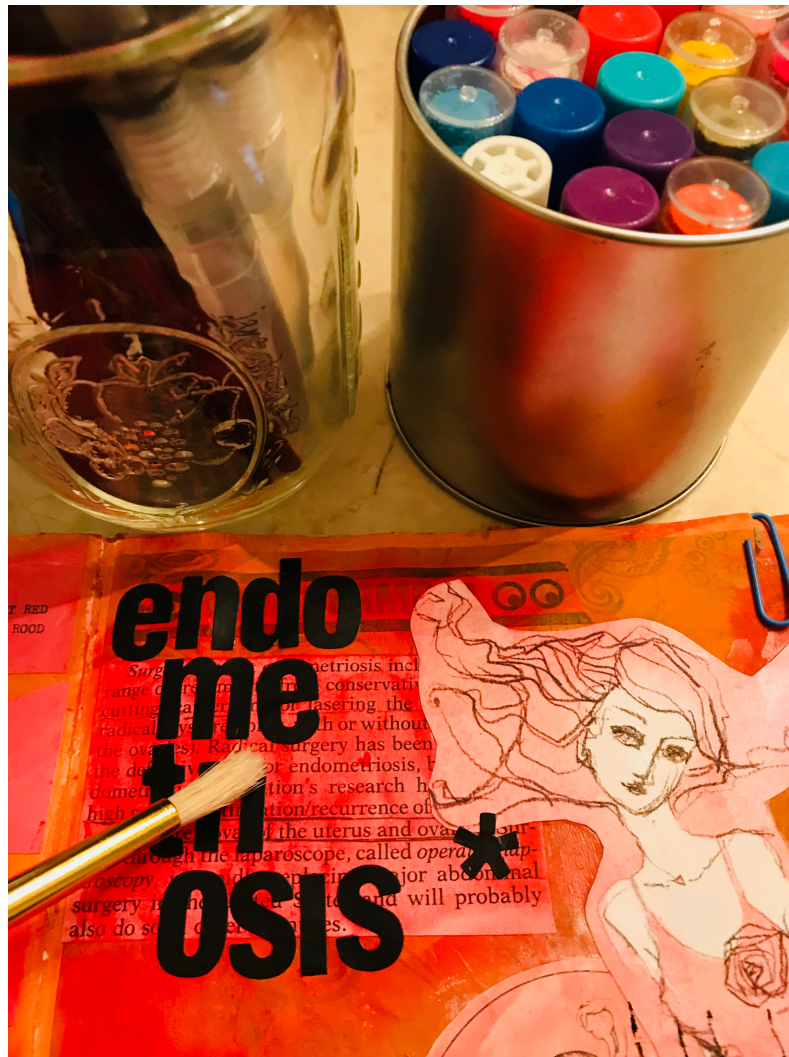


Figure 1.

I've been thinking about poems and about college as rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and as diffractive techniques (Barad 2007; Gullion 2018) for thinking about the social world. This project emerged as a way for me to understand my embodied experience of abdominal surgery. I began with the creation of an art journal, and then wrote a poem to accompany the images. I created the images and the text while thinking about my experience of undergoing surgery and diffracting that through Haraway's (2016) ideas about cybernetics and machine bodies.

Art journaling is a material discursive interface, a mixed-media project that combines visual elements with text. Painted pages are fixed with ephemera – patterned papers, photographs, images and text cut from magazines and other printed materials (I used a 1990s edition of *Our Bodies Ourselves* in this journal), memorabilia, inks, rubber stamps, markers, special pens, pastels, chalk – anything that can be used to make a mark (Gullion and Cooksey 2013:120). The book itself may have begun as a blank book, a handmade

book, or an altered book repurposed for art journaling. Writing is typically integrated into the visual elements of the pages; although a page may have no words, allowing the visual elements to do the expressing. In this journal, I used a variety of techniques and mediums, and I incorporated found objects associated with the event of my surgery.

Barad (2007:91) writes that,

making knowledge is not simply about making facts but about making worlds, or rather, it is about making specific worldly configurations – not in the sense of making them up [ex nihilism or] out of language, beliefs, or ideas, but in the sense of materially engaging as part of the world in giving it specific material form.

To diffract, we make something new.



Figure 2.

The concept of diffraction comes from physics and has been adopted in feminist theory as a means for describing that ways in which objects and ideas interfere with each other in a process of creation. My goal in creating this text and these visuals was not to tell the story of my surgery (although it will in some ways) and it was not to make meaning out of the experience (although you could use it to do so).

When waves crash into each other through a barrier, new patterns are created. This is the basic understanding of diffraction. There is an inter/ruption, and what emerges is not more of the same. In diffracting, we are not reflecting a reality but creating one.

I chose to focus on three moments in the poem, echoing a 2014 paper by Barad called *Diffracting Diffraction*. These moments, “like all moments [are themselves] a diffracted condensation, a threading through of an infinity of moments-places-matterings, a superposition/entanglement, never closed, never finished” (169).

November 10, 2016

My body, naked
In a cold, bright, white room.
On a metal table,
Unconscious.

A stretchy, white strap secures the smooth endotracheal
tube that descends down my throat. A whirring machine pushes
oxygen into my lungs, sucks
out carbon dioxide.
Breathing for me.

First aid tape secures the needle that stabs my wrist. Clear liquid pumps
into my vein. A spider web of wires sticks to my chest.

Five robotic arms penetrate my abdomen,
The metal gleams in the spotlights.

I diffract.

Break apart.

“Cutting together-apart
(one move)
In the (re)configuring of spacetimemattering:
Differencing/
Differing/
Différançing” (Barad 2014:168)

I become a “cybernetic organism,
A hybrid
Of machine and organism,
A creature of social reality
As well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 2016:5).

Become? Becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

One tiny robotic hand is a camera.
For I am woman.
“permeable to both ‘visualization’ and ‘intervention’” (Haraway 2016:43).

This body open,
Un-private.

“The technologies of visualization recall
the important cultural practice of hunting
with the camera and the deeply predatory nature
Of a photographic consciousness” (Haraway 2016:44).

The others are scissor hands. They snip at pathologic tissue. The texture and color
determines the cuts.

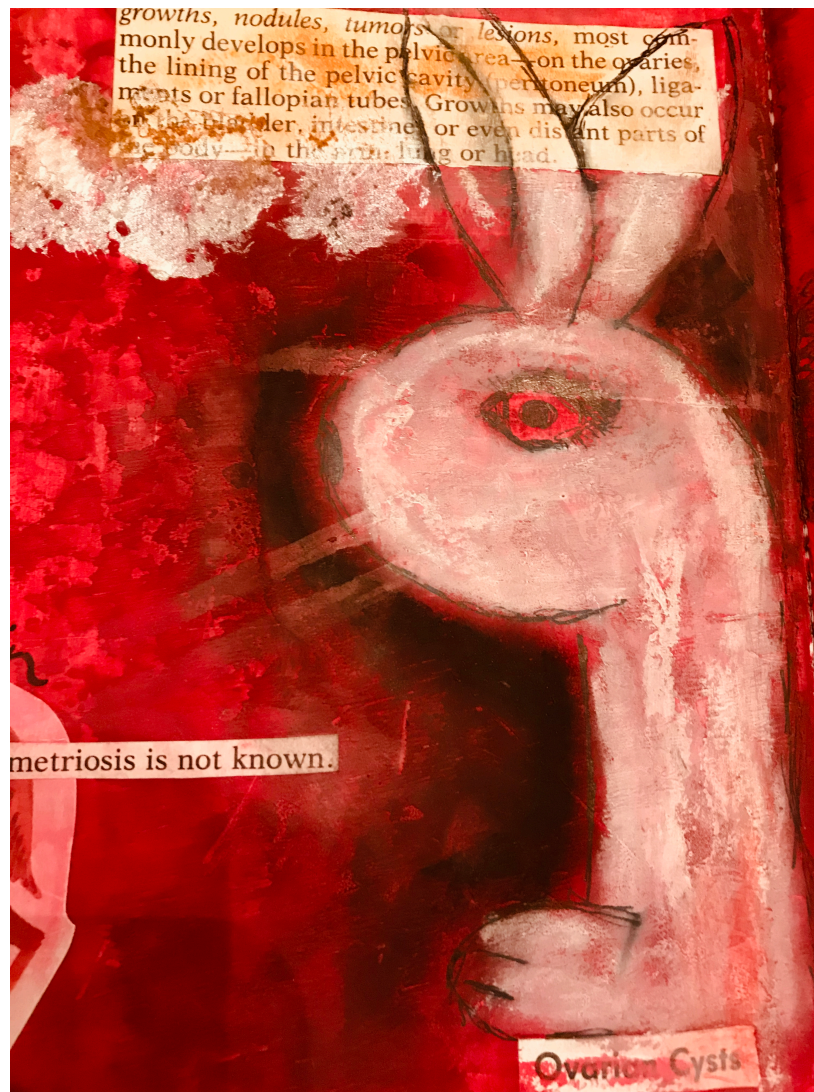


Figure 3.

November 12, 2016

Floating in narcotic dreams,
Radiation pain cloud
Interference patterns.

I find tape
Residue in unexpected places.
My outer thigh
My chest
My back.

Five cuts in a pentagram
Across my belly
Puckered with translucent
Violet surgical glue.

Danger Will Robinson.

Two days after Donald Trump won the US presidency, I had my left
Ovary and fallopian tubes
Removed and was diagnosed with Stage IV endometriosis.

I grieved through a hydrocodone haze, unable to conceive
How so many Americans could vote for him,
Why liberals were fighting over a safety pin,
The appearance of swastikas spray painted on buildings,
And talk of internment camps for Muslims.

My doctor would be barred from entering my country,
But for now he can enter my body.

I wake up on fire
Sweat-soaked sheets.
I think the doctor lied to us,
My husband said.
He made this sound easier. But this hadn't been easy.

"We are all chimeras,
Theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine
And organism" (Haraway 2016:7).

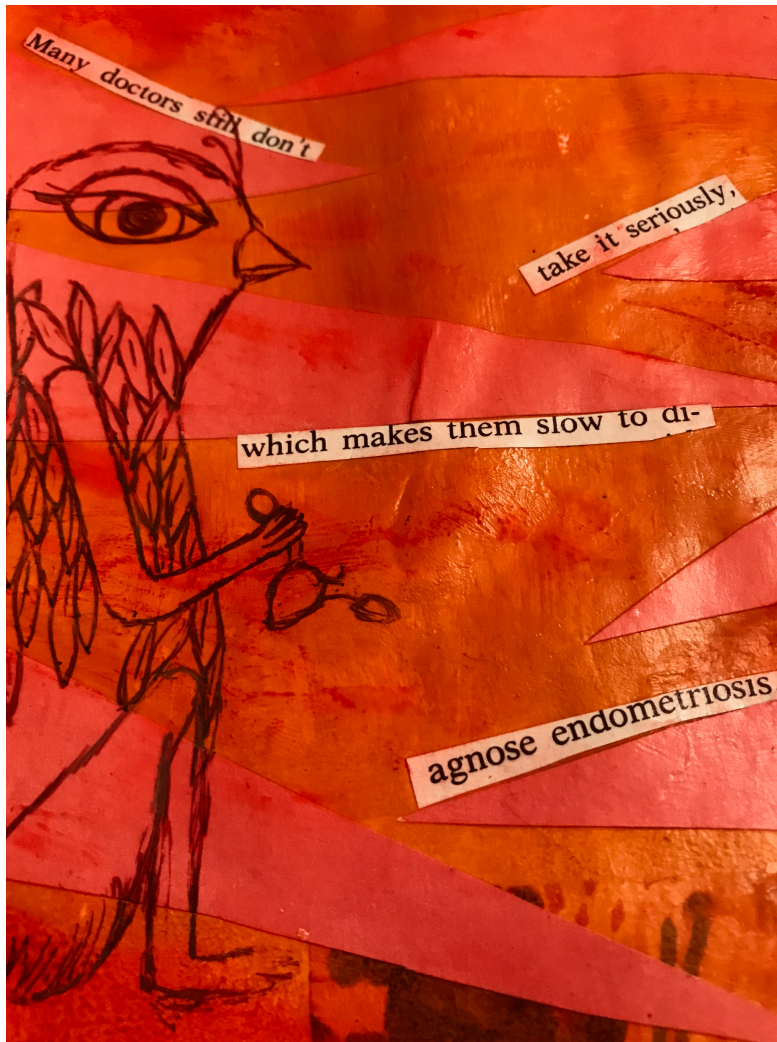


Figure 4.

Today

“The cyborg would not recognize
The Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream
Of returning to dust” (Haraway 2016:9).

I diffract.

Break apart.

“Cutting together-apart
(one move)
In the (re)configuring of spacetime mattering (Barad 2014:168).

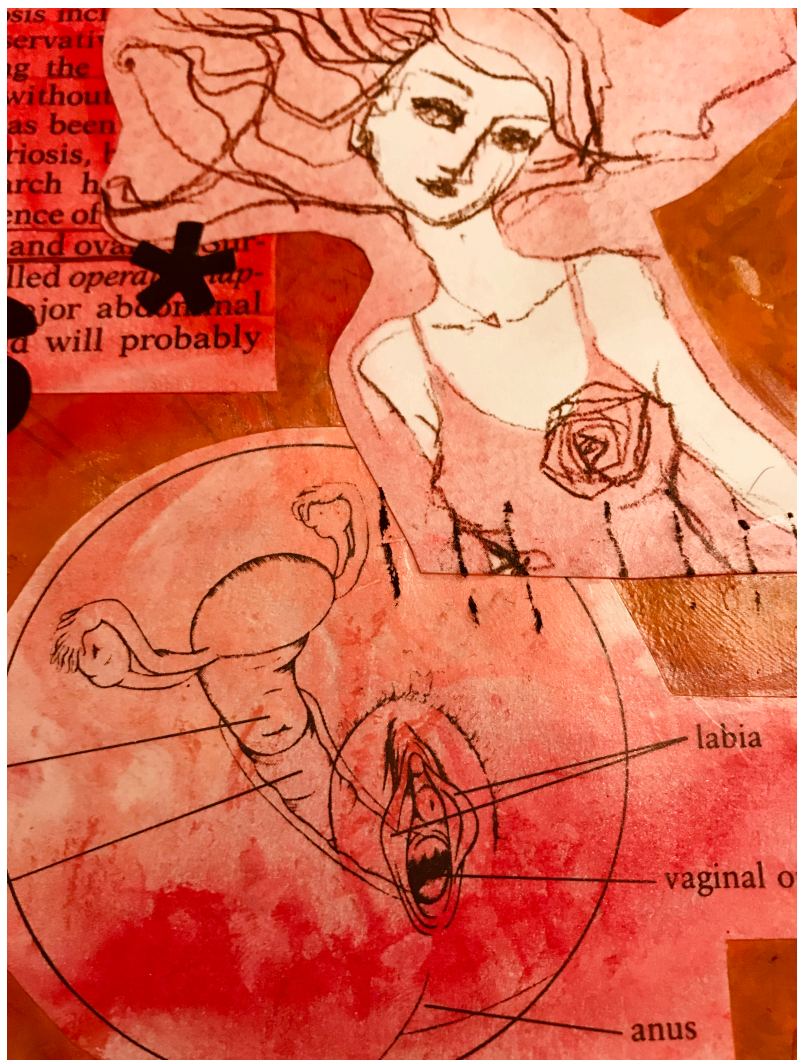


Figure 5.

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