



## Maria Sledmere, 'kissing / configuration': Notes on Eleanor Perry's *Unspeakable Patterns of the House* (salò press, 2020)

TAGS: anthropocene, ecopoetics, Eleanor Perry, metabolic poetics, Sianne Ngai

she doesn't  
know the abstraction into which she is woven.  
— Eleanor Perry, *Unspeakable Patterns of the House*<sup>i</sup>

Is it possible to feel, in your flesh, the way in which that feeling, that flesh, is also abstracted? What would it mean to be conscious of — to 'know' — your own abstraction in a way that turns upon a visceral sensation? In her book, *Theory of the Gimmick* (2020), Sianne Ngai proffers the visceral as a response to abstraction, even as the terms seem oxymoronic: the visceral's 'affectivity and corporeality seem to have made 'visceral' resistant to theory', while the "abstract" is over-deployed in 'many discourses'.<sup>ii</sup> In Eleanor Perry's recent pamphlet, *Unspeakable Patterns of the House* (salò press, 2020), lyric is eviscerated in a playful organology of bodily forms (human and more-than) and abstraction haunts the text through an understor(e)y of patterning and redaction in poetry's house of data. Borrowing Bernard Stiegler's term 'general organology' — a way of thinking the pharmacological co-relations and mutualism of human, technical and social organs — I want to argue that Perry's work embodies a *vascular imaginary* of nervous systems, life streams, 'nerve-riddled tissue', 'neutrino pulp' (2, 3) and metabolisms of abstraction, sensation and cellular process. Their precise, high-definition material liveliness offers a counterpoetics of the anthropocene which operates in the thick, simultaneous and glitching spacetime of an ecological *oikos*.<sup>iii</sup>

The *unspeakable patterns* of Perry's house are ecological folds of process, mutation and arrangement which might otherwise be hidden, 'unspeakable' within daily life. I describe them as vascular to emphasise how their paratactic style functions as a kind of vessel (with

many cuts, divergence and interruptions) for conducting energies and affects between the many selves that populate the work. Perry is constantly shifting between pronouns and modes of address that hail the reader into their systems; there is no detached 'outside' to the house of their text from which to gaze in — especially when 'in the household, windows are mercurial' (13). Mercurial forms tend to volatile and rapid transformation: the windows of Perry's house are by no means objective and fixed transparencies, nor frames through which to glimpse the inner workings of a household, habitat or social unit. Although many of the poems exist, typically, in a rectangular block, their ragged right margins forego any total sense of fixity or containment. Corporeal features easily morph into architectural ones, or are told to: 'just evolve your muscles / into a small door' (12). That 'just' makes it seem so easy. How do we make spaces, thresholds, architectural scaffolds with the blood and muscle of our bodies?

Through that 'small door' we, the reader, are asked to make of the body a hold space or nest of intimacies with other creatures: 'tangle ants in your hair' (12). If that imperative feels scratchy and abject, we're starting to get at the visceral abstraction of Perry's poetics. I want to suggest that Perry's is a specifically *weird* ecology (full of sinuous twists and turns), whose excessive and highly textural imagery represents a form of abstraction that asks us to sense every instance of relation to the broader 'house' of ecology itself. Ngai notes that across many 'theoretical traditions', 'the abstract is defined as the concrete's opposite' and becomes 'associated with the noncorporeal and unparticularized'.<sup>iv</sup> Perry's *Unspeakable Patterns* dissolves the binary of abstract/concrete by making viscerally specific and present the moment of abstraction as one of moveable and vivid parts, using a poetics of startling clarity and cut to render that moment concrete, *felt in the flesh*. This move is an ecopoetic one, but in its entangled organology, distinct from a holistic poetics of Nature's interdependent totality.

Unparticularized and holistic depictions of lifeforms (which see the biosphere or the body as a whole, which is ontologically more than the sum of its parts) are *abstractions*. That is, '[s]ay the whole is the biosphere and say the part, which we very much imagine as a component because of the holism, is a polar bear. Never mind, they will go extinct and another lifeform will simply have to evolve to take their place'.<sup>v</sup> Timothy Morton proposes 'subscendence' as

an alternative to this ecological holism: this is a mode of thinking where 'the whole is always *less than the sum of its parts*', and so there can be room for dynamic futurity, for 'surprise and novelty in the world'.<sup>vi</sup> Subscendence recognises the intrinsic being and value of life-forms, even as they are irrevocably enmeshed with others. The pamphlet offers a poethics of abstraction through synecdoche: in lieu of this person or that animal, this river or that meadow, we have parts and bits of sensation which gesture towards (w)holes. This is a form of enmeshment: parts connect through clustering lexical and musical associations, through bodily humours, pores, membranes and fluctuations.

As Perry writes from 'in the household',

with

each mood shift, rehearsal becomes its own  
 infrastructure, these glow-in-the-dark bones a  
 pretty after-thought. this is what it means to be  
 sick of useless souvenirs: an opal kidney, the  
 ancestral ear. the blue light which remains. forms  
 of empathy left rotting in the mud. it is said that we  
 write outwards from the stomach, as if it was part  
 of the forgotten labour of digestion. but these  
 punctured vowels are way too intimate; vestigial  
 lyric re-emitting cardiographic neon (13)

Here, we don't have wholes so much as sensory detritus, 'mood shift', occasional viscera, abstracted systems. To rehearse is to practice, to simulate the actual event: you can rehearse opera, you can rehearse surgery. The act of preparing this way 'becomes its own / infrastructure' of organisation and facility. Perhaps the iterative nature of these poems (similar in form and length, in sequence) is a rehearsal for the house's construction: the practice of feeling within synchronic and internal patterns. In a synaesthetic flip, 'punctured vowels' align (through the parallel gesture of semi-colon) with the measured glow of neon. The dactylic stresses of 'a' in 'ancestral' and trochaic 'o' in 'opal' create little punctures, openings. The jellied, fleshy density of what is elsewhere described as 'gummy human /

language' (9) — a kind of grotesque whole — is here perforated by speech sounds. Vestigial consists of a very small remnant of something once greater or more noticeable. A vestigial lyric perhaps once had a promised wholeness of voice, that fulcrum of the lyric I, now abstracted in blurry re-emissions of 'cardiographic neon'. By synecdoche, we can extrapolate that this vestigial lyric is a way of measuring the heart's activity; a medium for registering the beat and twang at the *heart of our* vascular systems. This passage is an x-ray from within the house, with 'glow-in-the-dark bones' and the opalescence of organs. What happens to affect when it undergoes the visceral abstraction of lyric x-ray, spliced between such an organology of technology (infrastructure, cardiography, language) and human parts (bones, kidneys, ears, stomach)? Perry writes of 'forms / of empathy left rotting in the mud', a phrase that echoes — especially with 'the blue light which remains' (sapphires are often blue) — T. S. Eliot's [Four Quartets](#) (1941): 'Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle-tree'. Eliot's image of the axle-tree, a beam of wood or iron that connects the opposite wheels of a carriage, is a distinctively mechanical one. That it is 'bedded' suggests geological deposit; this instantiation of human industry is already becoming fossil matter, clotted with mud and vegetal, mineral forms. What does it mean for 'empathy' — a deeply ecological affect — to be left to rot, presumably wasted?

An image that is often taken to allude to a collage-like modernist fragmentation, '[g]arlic and sapphires in the mud' is also a pooling of sensory intensities with metabolic legacies. How will they 'clot' and by extension rot or endure 'in the mud' together? Does this strange image effect a burden of textual interpretation, in effect clotting the text, sticking you to its viscous tenderness? The work of parsing these lines is also a work of digestion: look how dense my prose gets to write of it, trying to process. Perhaps this is a melancholic, perceptively futile process, 'what it means to be / sick of useless souvenirs', things we carry which are synecdochical representations of the thing itself, the place we have been or wish to, a charm for recollection — an Eiffel Tower figurine for Paris, a word like 'dinosaurs' (15) for the Cretaceous period. Perry draws us back to the metabolic question of writing via bodily humours, with reference to the stomach tacitly evoking the theory of melancholia: where black bile, the dense and binding Earth element, spills over into the stomach and intestines. The pathologies of black bile are typically manifest as excess and deficiency at once, where according to one Greek Medicine site, [\[n\]ormal black bile is a sediment of blood'](#). To write

outwards from the stomach is to write from that clotting, to be reminded of the pangs and twist of digestion, the bloat of 'forgotten labour'. *Unspeakable Patterns* carries such clots, but also traces viscera of a more sanguine humour: that of the heart and its vascular systems. '[S]ee all the red residue?' (11) the speaker demands in parenthesis — a heartbeat or breath — evoking the bloody colours of muscle, vascularity and spleen. Red is a word folded inside residue. Colour itself is a layer, a trace, a supplement that adds or fills in a blank.

As we see above, in addition to the paratactical (discrete and adjacent) features of Perry's poetry, there are also hypotactic lines that contribute to a general condition of *arrangement* akin to a weaving, a tangled circuitry, a tapestry. Setting up hypotactic lines with unexpected junctures or conclusions — 'don't assume that something is true just because / *feelings*' (17) — allows Perry to counter presumed systems of truth, hierarchies of being or distinctions between objects, materials and bodies (human and more-than). This offers forms of relation premised on abstract hospitality and exchange: 'the glass has something / to give. like permission' (17). The glass, otherwise mentioned as 'façade' in this poem, is not just a face or surface but in its personified form, is imbued with 'something / to give' (17), inviting us to speculate on the poem itself as a kind of glass. Is there something we must break to get through to its intricate filigrees, its synaptic, digestive and circulatory rhythms?

Meanwhile, the poems of *Unspeakable Patterns* are rife with gaps, ellipses, white space and parenthesis that keep things shifting, conditional and unexpected: one clause opens where you might not suppose it, folds another. Perry's second-person, iterative style is a way of bringing us, viscerally, into an emergent and ongoing ecological present: a place where 'you probably don't know why you suddenly think of / monarch butterflies while shopping' (8). The speaker doesn't fall back onto ecological clichés of enchantment, but enchantment *happens* in the gaps and cuts between articulations: the noetic ('suddenly think'), the lifeform/entity ('monarch butterflies') and spatiotemporal verb form ('while shopping'). This creates a kind of nervous poetics, trembling as glass does on the brink of shattering. Like [Sylvia Legris or Will Alexander](#), poets who work with specialised vocabularies in incremental, associative and entangled ways, this is a vascular imaginary premised on both the *weaving* of meaning and its glasshouse refraction in the ecologies (*oikos*) of text: 'as if the / mirror kept a portion of each reflection. as if the / word *mirror* carried a part of the mirror

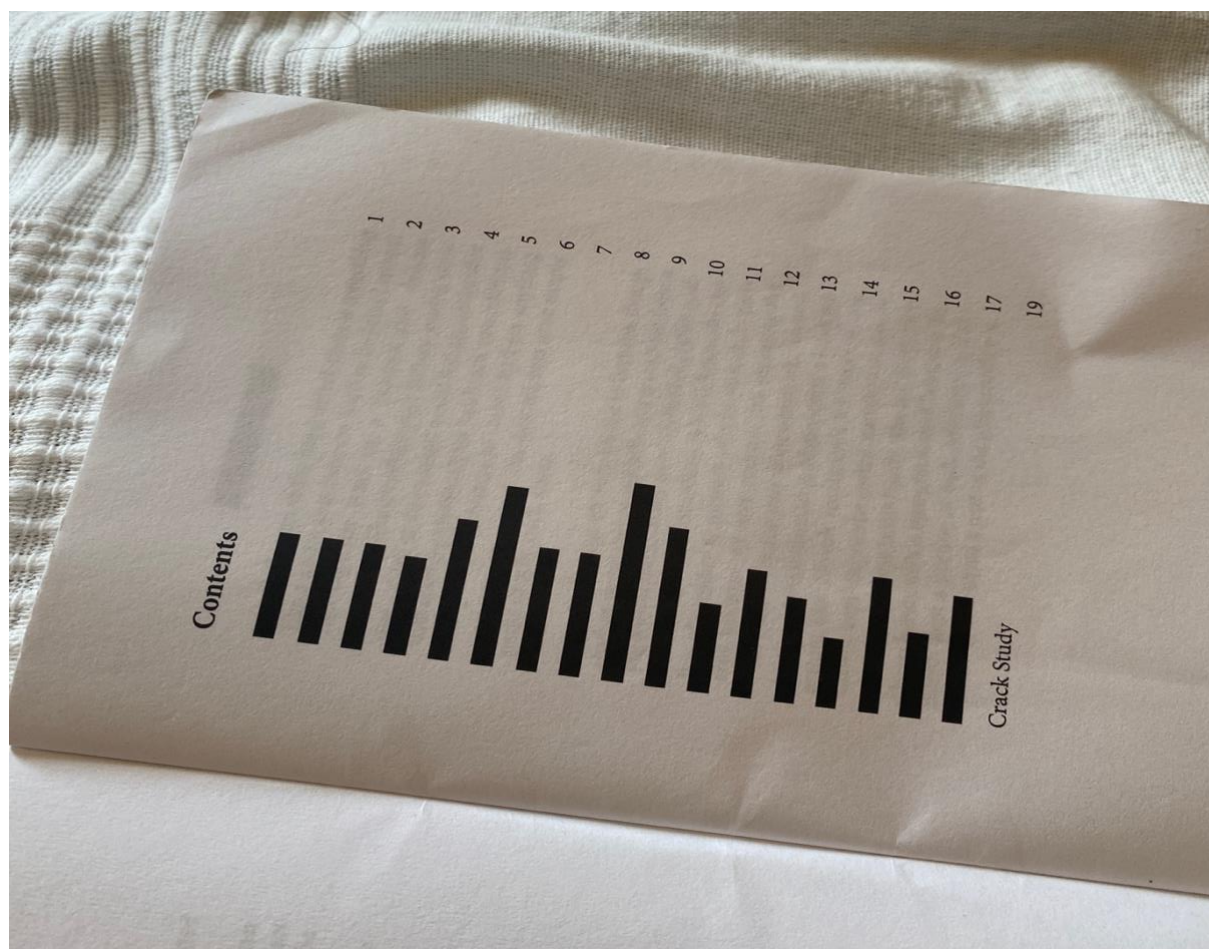
within it' (1). As if words carried material shards of their referents, and poems were pieces of houses — rooms and doors and places to hold you.

One of the pamphlet's first poems offers a meta poetic statement or moment of *mise en abyme* that reflects abysally the whole pamphlet and how we might read it:

let's talk about excess for a minute. the  
question is not *what*, but *when* to interpret.  
imagine the household as uninterrupted  
sequence. a project we might call 'the ultimate  
guide to sharpening'. (4)

Any self (readerly or writerly) within this work is woven into the abstraction of many material relations. We might here think of Catherine Clément's notion of *syncope*: 'an absence of the self' or "cerebral eclipse" that occurs in some moment of bodily-cognitive faint — where 'time falters' — a kind of swoon from which to come back is to realise 'it is the real world that suddenly looks strange'.<sup>vii</sup> Syncope can result from excess: we might swoon when drunk, during orgasm or from inhaling great quantities of smoke or pollen. We might encounter syncope during a musical passion or in the throes and turns of exercise or dance. Perry's semiotic and formal agility on the page is always teasing towards syncope in the field of 'excess'. This priority of time over subject, 'when' over 'what' indicates a poetics whose reading is based on energy, movement, turn and encounter over empirical deliberation. To close read *Unspeakable Patterns* is to weave oneself into the temporal pulse and entanglement of its 'household'. To read this book without interruption, to have written it as such, is to surrender to a 'sharpening' of pattern (a refinement of meaning), to have whittled the edges into self-complete systems. Holism? What actually happens in the work's excess is the veer, syncope and coil by occasion — the attention to parts. This house is encased in nervous systems. The vascular imaginaries of *Unspeakable Patterns* coagulate in a magical, emergent, reciprocal and synaptic poetics, 'a kissing / configuration' (8) of intimate lifeforms and their specialised modes of communication.

Abstraction is what happens when excess goes too far, when we are drawn into its densest blank, an exchange between the dull and pointed: 'there is transaction between a sharp edge and its / easy dulling' (9). As we see here, the dialectic of sharp and dull plays out as one of materiality and meaning/metaphor. If Perry is here talking of their own poems, might we say that like Rob Halpern's poetic 'accompaniment to pornography', which 'tries to undo representationally' the 'simultaneous exploitation *and* eroticization [of the soldier's body] for national symbolic ends', Perry's multidimensional wordplay unravels systems of ecological holism (encapsulated in the central figure of the house) by 'countering its abstraction with ... more abstraction'?<sup>viii</sup> This is figured as 'transaction': an instance of exchange or transference of input message, a kind of *driving through*<sup>ix</sup> which Ngai herself dramatises with ellipsis. And how are we to navigate such transaction when the rooms of the house (the titles of the poems) are redacted, reduced to black rectangles which offer withholding corridors in lieu of plaques or signposts? Do such blanks sharpen semiotic possibility (reduced to a quantifiable density or intensity), or do they offer a dense, opaque surface from which meaning cannot be penetrated?



All but one of the pamphlet's 19 poem titles is redacted (and the only available title, 'Crack Study', offers itself as a crack edition, a kind of trojan horse or a fake — who knows what viral or excess strains it carries). 'Crack Study' features the phrase: '&&sweethearts / drop like oblongs,, like a pasty mass / of english landlords' (21). Any authority, ownership (is a title the landlord of the poem, and how would you persuade its surrender?) or totalising meaning a title might convey is erased and refused, and we have instead the intensities of shape. These black oblongs together form something viscerally abstract, viscous: 'a pasty mass' encasing edible, poetic fillings. These 'sweethearts', the sweet little knots of double ampersand, are like candy you drop on your tongue to recite the poem and experience the fizz and dissolve of substance, form: the materialised conglomerations of the interval, conjunction. To turn the contents page sideways, you get a kind of sonogram or bar graph: language transmutes into data's variant pulse and flux. The whole pamphlet is concerned with 'configuration': with the ever-moving arrangement of parts or elements within clusters and entangled forms, never reduced to an obvious whole; expressed through kaleidoscopic variations of prosody. While 'the body' might be a common theme of lyric (the body of work, the speaking body), Perry goes *into* the body's organology (and its entanglement with other lifeforms and objects) to explore subscendent possibilities for re-composition.

The body is not reified or essentialised but rather is subject to metabolic processes, cuts and turns. The 'you' of these poems, ever shifting, is at once a form of hailing and refusal of presence: 'maybe you can't fully bite / into the day's slippery flesh with your gummy human / language' (9). Language, the configuration of meaning, is often a visceral process of tactile exchange. Metabolic processes of eating, digesting and expelling are discursive matters of time and substance: the day has flesh just as language is 'gummy'; the relation of these substances is a problem. We can't fully pierce or absorb, 'fully bite' down the full meaning. There is something of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914) in this articulation, only Perry makes greater use of the second-person pronoun in a way that is ambiguously singular/plural, whereas Stein speaks from more of an abstracted place of negation without this direct summons — '[t]here are more places not empty. They see cover'.<sup>x</sup> As we might ask of Stein, how do non-empty places 'see cover', we might ask of Perry, what happens when you try to make a 'gummy human / language' take bites of time, when time is a 'slippery flesh'? That Perry's poetry has this carnivorous, erotic element of vore is part of the



pamphlet's mobius-like, metabolic knotting and turning between things and times in linguistic self-devouring. Everything sticks, coagulates, slips, is processed, resisted, cut, 'replicated'; 'occluding', 'reflecting', 'fossilizing' and 'grinding' by desire and semiotic force (9). The sheer proliferation of such verbs of transmutation and transformation performs the pamphlet's (the house's) metabolic inclination.

Energy depends on what the system is fed; input and output are interdependent. This invites a conditional poetics — 'always act *as if*' — whose premise is speculative rather than fixed or conclusive, subject to fantasy, 'errors' and 'resonances' (11). *Unspeakable Patterns* does not offer the holistic and totalising doom of apocalypse, but an energetic, anthropocene poetics of juncture and split, of perforation and permeability, where 'everything is erratic' (8). This makes room for us to incorporate specificities of trauma and ecological encounter at the level of internal changes within our own bodies; it does not dramatise a grand, epochal narrative of the anthropocene but rather shows up the contradictions and tensions of any abstraction of *species being*. Being or becoming-animal, in Donna Haraway's sense,<sup>xi</sup> is a delicate and visceral process of myriad lifeforms folded and 'clotting' inside you (11). A 'kissing / configuration' (8) is one of entities touching by desire or greeting; ephemeral or held in the temporal suspension of the kiss, its beckoning syncope. Meaning in *Unspeakable Patterns* is playful, repeating, refractive and self-replicating; a poetics of 'echo' and 'xerox' (11, 23), taking cuts from other texts in sly gatherings of 'little baskets', where a quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* folds elliptically into a discourse on insects 'and / enterprises of great pith [...]' (11 — ellipsis in original). The blanks, ellipsis and cuts form textual aporia of the body's synaptic metabolism and the lively, if also haunted, materials of ecology's *House*. In lieu of an idealised, holistic model of ecology as self-regulated, interdependent systems, Perry feels into the errors, surges and multiple possibilities of a complex circuitry of affects and actors. Elsewhere I call such an ecopoetics of dream logic the work of [hypercritique](#). A poetics of resistance, granularity, archival detritus, affective rub: from 'gritty little relic' to 'glitter cell' of 'unexpected surface', 'the abrasion of grief' (2-4).

One obvious substance of archival detritus is oil: made of fossilised organic matter, any number of dead plants, vegetables, animals. As blood is carried through vascular systems, oil is carried through pipelines but also permeates our bodies in the foods we eat, air we

breathe, products consumed. If '[o]il', in [Adam Dickinson's words](#), 'is a form of writing' that can be traced in one's 'blood, urine and shit', then oil and other mineral or biochemical phenomena is at once a technology, a substance and a mode of articulated language — read in the abstractions of data transformed into poetic viscera. I think of a stanza from Katy Lewis Hood's latest pamphlet, *Bugbear*: 'the endorphins have not arrived to excite the sentence / it is not possible to pronounce the phthalates at this time / the line is not a fine mesh to catch droplets in'.<sup>xii</sup> What does it mean for a poem to await its own hormonal interactions, chemical confections? The speaker's factual mode of expression transforms that loss or failure into bathos: if poetry is to act as some kind of bag or receptacle, here it is failing to 'catch droplets'. Delectably, in reading, I wonder about those droplets: residues of meaning or affect that overflow, escape. The paradox of 'it is not possible to pronounce the phthalates at this time' (in that the speaker would presumably need to pronounce 'phthalates' in repeating this line) forces a gap between the time of writing and reciting, a lyric instantaneity or speech act which places words again firmly in the mouth. A word like 'phthalates' is here figured as difficult, it clots, sticks in the line. What would bring it to life, the sentence? I hear the word dolphin in 'endorphins' and wonder about the coagulation of lifeform and hormone, something coming along the horizon or failing to arrive, a splash or thrash, a swoon of time. What petrochemical interference would interrupt or block it?

As Dickinson uses poetry to tell the stories of petrochemicals inside his body, Perry is also concerned with a broken, glitching memoir of the more-than-human as a kind of collective and collecting plasma that oozes through the pamphlet. Playfully, their speaker asserts that 'autobiographies are, by nature, plastiglomerate' (8). Plastiglomerate is a portmanteau term for a stone whose combination of organic debris and sedimentary grains is held together by hardened molten plastic. While plastic is often conceptualised as lightweight and disposable, plastiglomerate marks a more permanent, anthropogenic trace in the Earth's geological archive. Samples of plastiglomerate have been described as resembling 'both toxic waste and sculpture';<sup>xiii</sup> they have an incidental (the accidental form of metabolic waste) as well as intentional, sculpted quality — resonant with Perry's lively combination of found text and parataxis, their multiple configurations which bely any attempt at reducing being to a single image.

Does proliferation contribute to abstraction through its work of excess? Perry explores, 'through a series of baroque micro-epilogues' (6) the assumptions of a discourse, moving through arabesques of multiple registers in a way that occludes and at speed, confuses. Just as nothing can be certain when a study might rely on corporately outsourced data (5), *Unspeakable Patterns* is interested in the value-laden image clusters that convey or betray processes. The discourse of physics contains military metaphors — '*military* transformation' and '*civilian* transformation' are words for crystal structures (5) — and you sense the speaker wants to shake things up: 'let's say we get sick collectively, heave our bodies through / the day [...] hyperlapse. telecine judder. [...] / pacing is a form of movement / without purpose' (5). A hyperlapse is a moving time-lapse where the camera is moved over considerable distances between shots, often showing cities or walking figures across a longer time distance in sublime or epic aesthetic mode. Reading Perry's poems, I start to imagine a hyperlapse of everyone getting sick collectively, imbibing polluted air or viral particles, everything collapsing in the gap between images while something else remains steady in relative motion (just look around you, it's already happening). This is not an ecopoetry of witness but of transmutation and weird collectivity, in solidarity with all scales from buzzy atoms ('you too could exist as a form of energy / inside a jar') to paid study participants (5). Telecine is the process of turning film into video in post-production. The highly imagistic, proliferating mode of Perry's poems occasionally shares this sense of transposition, but this work is more interested in the cut or discrepancy, in parapraxis, than the smoothing of motion or interpretation itself. The 'judder' or 'wobble' (5). The movement without apparent purpose which we can't step back and narrativize as psychoanalytic free association or surrealism, because the speaker has already anticipated this: 'cool story bro, but we've heard it all before / from Freud' (3). Any attempts to *apply critique* are energy flows through the house already: part of its poetic configuration.

Configuration is another term for gestalt (form, shape): a term from psychology meaning an organised whole that is more than the sum of its parts. But the configuration of Perry's house cannot be reduced to a static and essentialised whole (happiness? harmony?): their house is of many shifting rooms; the pamphlet's 'configuration' is conditional on the mutualism of touch, on 'kissing' (8). All of the poems with redacted titles begin with ':', as if in a score of music or web address: the mark of an entrance, threshold of a score, located introduction or

opening. I want to think of this colon as the site mark (tattoo?) of a bodily repertoire (let's not forget the double meaning of colon as the main part of the large intestine) and also a door. Colon also comes via Latin from the Greek *kōlon* meaning *limb* and *clause*: colon is then a corporeal grammar, a part requiring conjunction, flow. Metabolic poetics in *Unspeakable Patterns* is a question of how we process, digest and expel the house, as the speaker relays the instructions of someone called 'Susan': "eat the household" (11). As in the three-dimensional relationship between atoms in a molecule, defined by the bonds between them (configuration in chemistry), the configurations we might trace in Perry's poems are subject to the incidental 'when' (4) of a reading. Sometimes meaning is the movement of a block (redaction) or dislocation, such as the 'clotting' of 'ERROR404 — a room full of people' (11). A 404 error is a page or file not found error, where the server connects but cannot find your request. What happens when 'a room full of people' is the thing not-found, showing up, presumably as an empty signifier? Such tricks of (hyper)textual *trompe l'oeil* keep us weaving through the pamphlet's labyrinthine and membranous turns and (re)turns, its presences and absences, temporal jumps within lyric's simultaneous, clotting *nowness*.

What if these colonic nodes were also sites of affective transfer, even haunting? In an article on 'Inarticulacy and Resistance' in the work of Maggie O'Sullivan, [Perry has written](#) of the colon as 'performing the grammatical function of preceding an expansion, definition or description [...] drawing an explicit connection between a mode of inarticulacy [...] and mourning understood as a set of tasks to be completed'. What kinds of mourning haunt the house of ecology's unspeakable patterns? The unspeakable of Perry's title gestures to this 'inarticulacy' identified in O'Sullivan's work, something of a trauma beyond language that nevertheless leaves its 'pith', 'slime' and '[tender / mother membrane]' (10, 11) in language. Perhaps [staying with the trouble](#), in Donna Haraway's sense of the phrase, means digesting it: metabolising grief's 'red noise' into a kind of gasp and song '[lymph pop] slosh and / glops' (10), whose onomatopoeic excess is — if not cathartic release or therapeutic process — then a dance, circuitry or turn towards the surge of a possible syncope, through which the patterns of the world are grasped anew.

Going deep into abstraction, the immersive noise of 'dark ambient metallic drones & resonances' (11), do we find meaning's 'dispersal', 'rupture' (12) or tantalising proximity?

Towards the end of the pamphlet, the speaker asks 'perhaps i am also called 'house'?' (25). In identifying themselves house, the speaker tentatively implies that the pamphlet consists of *their* unspeakable patterns, as a lyric nodal point or dispersed intensity. The iambic rhythms of otherwise speech are disrupted by lush and kinetic, trochaic lines — 'drop like oblongs' and 'gushing atom 'feelies'' (21) — and enjambment which offers itself as content's overflow in changing register: 'you / may not offer as proof of efficiency your / continuous state of matter' (14). There is something inhuman or coldly administrative in that previous expression, almost like the voice of an A.I. scolding us for our lyric assumptions around energy, 'efficiency', existence. Here I am reminded of a short story by Lucy Wood, ['Notes from the House Spirits'](#), told from a collective first-person: the microscopic creatures of multiplicity, myth and endurance, the house spirits. Telling the story of the house from the point of view of the house's spirits, we see an estranged version of human life through time, told by matters of dust, waste and glimmers of intimacy. A comparative example can be found in Bernadette Mayer's delightful ['Conversation with the Tsatsawassa House'](#): a dialogue staged between the speaker and her former home, where the house says cryptic and enticing things like 'The sex life of houses isn't known to humans, nor will it ever be'. What kinds of exchange or transaction are possible when we look at a house through the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia? Perhaps we should think of those 'dark ambient metallic' sounds as occurring not in the sky but deep in the pipework, the belly of the house, the grumble of our own stomachs as we whet our readerly appetites.

By attending to the inner 'parts' of the house through such poetic devices, with gummy and dense images, prosodic flips, enjambment, ellipsis and parenthesis, Perry portrays an oozing quantum space of ecological relation whose lyric subjectivity is a vascular system: at once the recipient of energy and nourishment and its conductor, the synaptic pulse; the thing that gives and receives. Perry's previous work has delved into intersections of gender, infrastructure, voltage and financial systems, animality and flesh: see *Meat • Volt • Interruption* (Oystercatcher, 2015) and *Of Parasites and Proximities* (Contraband, 2017). This latest sequence is a teeming study of presence, absence, void and plenum, liveliness and extinction. Perry explores this at the material level of language, asking: how to swerve between or even explode a category? How to problematise that vision-hungry Enlightenment self which drives the discourse on what exists, how and why? There is a

question on what it means to describe something in a poem, 'how to explain water to fish' (16) carrying tacitly the question of *why would you? How to let fish explain water?* The way certain poems lap between long and short lines in variable breath seems to mimic the possibility of that fluid or hooking language of 'the bleaks, / the flukes' (16) — i.e., the small, silvery shoaling carp and the parasitic flatworm. Spreading outward or burrowing inward. If 'an anxiety of / punctilious men' are 'vigorously wiping' names away 'with their goddamn lexicon' (16), you can bet this project is a summoning from the organs of the house a possible, vibratory speech (many of the phrases in *Unspeakable Patterns* are more like speech acts, or fragments of conversation, utterance, quotation, sometimes italicised or placed in direct speech marks) for ecological intimacy and plenitude, not premised on lexicons of erasure.

Metaphor itself, as a relation between vehicle and tenor, can dissect, acting as a kind of 'extractive tool for grasping the obscure', as [Daisy Lafarge aptly puts it](#). The sheer excess of *Unspeakable Patterns* refuses the easy correspondence of vehicle and tenor: rather, as per Ngai's argument for Halpern, Perry goes deeper into a visceral abstraction whose excesses counter the violent forms of abstraction that reduce organic or ecological phenomena and affect to closed or totalising systems. They put the liveliness back into language:

an eager void will wear its emptiness  
openly, an  
oceanic legacy of vowels that  
lack the dark in their bright  
silvery ideas, as if  
to curate a version of self as meat sliced  
across muscle fibres;  
bite radius as preferred unit of distance.  
what is unsaid is  
an unnavigable surface. (16)

Once again, prosopopoeia or personification plays a role in bringing to life the agencies of what we might otherwise deem static, passive or even 'void'. We might look for instances of 'eager void' throughout as signifiers of contextual emptiness or aporia, where meaning

stammers on the inarticulate, but at that space of the unspeakable is also an eagerness, a hunger for more. Earlier in the pamphlet, Perry writes of 'a vortex scenario / of doors and other forms of admission' (3). What kind of openings are these 'other forms' and who will be allowed to pass through their selectively permeable membranes? The difference between 'vortex scenario' and actual vortex, presumably, is in the staging of scenario: these poems in some sense rehearse that whirling possibility of a point where something disappears, goes extinct, swallowed in the house for good. Returning to the above passage, to say something 'lack[s] the dark' is litotes for saying brightness, a way of expressing light/knowledge/wisdom without claiming the affirmative beam of authority. The ideas that belong to these 'vowels', 'bright / silvery' as they are, seem like the aforementioned 'bleaks' (16): those shoaling fish who are themselves ideas (from the Greek, *to see*). In *Unspeakable Patterns*, words become fish and other creatures, other agents. And from this the poem cuts to an image of curated self 'as meat sliced / across muscle fibres': that enjambment the ghost slant line (/) of an immanent slice (the slice exists between the lines, striating bundles of self as meat). Muscles are used for moving and stretching, and so it is a self fibrously caught in the fleshwork of motion. We could say these poems are a constant, material rehearsal of the question or possibility (conditional clauses abound in this pamphlet) of what it means to be in relation, at all sorts of scales and levels. Of what it means to even speak. The *unspeakable*, its quality of the 'unsaid', is a place that is free from the chop and dissection of metaphors and totalised identities: it is 'an unnavigable surface', as we often say of a waterway, or sea.

The vascular and metabolic imaginaries of *Unspeakable Patterns of the House* represent in form and content, circuits of coexistence and (un)digest between human, animal, mineral and elemental bodies. Where metaphor might cut up the self as slabs of meat, Perry prefers the myriad possibilities of metonymy: where 'muscle fibres' (16) might stand in for the whole body's mechanical system of chemical signals; where 'meat', 'mass', 'pulp' and 'mulch' are associative gestures towards the hyperbolic, hyperobjective densities and multiple distributions of the anthropocene — from fossil fuel pollution to the industrial meat industry. Playing the twangs of entanglement alongside, or folded in, the conceit of the *oikos* or 'house', Perry's vascular imaginary holds the visceral conditions for ecological hospitality: at once the 'delicate spider folds' of a web that might entrap you, and the 'tender mother membrane' (10) of one that would safely hold you. We can't be sure what lifeform 'you', 'I',

or 'we' are at any one time. What if the 'preferred unit of distance' (16) was the possible length an insect could bite, its red welts of flesh pierced the way a sentence looks, the prosody of a poem measured by music and stress? The red thread of mammalian lifeblood and the red line of many inarticulate traumas flows, entangles, severs. We can't take our house for granted; it is a stammering that maintains its presence: 'are you sufficiently smearing your home / with ghosts + obscurities? are you. are you. / spilling over? how does the house not hold / you? you are lamellae fizzing FAX ME' (14). This meta-statement on the pamphlet itself, smeared as it is with 'ghosts + obscurities', visceral abstractions of the body's 'junk science' (27), serves to impart a kind of hysteria or hyperbole within the lyric act of address or summons. What seems like a line lifted from advertising or public health copy, 'are you sufficiently' is then glitched and repeated in its own enjambed acts of 'spilling over' where the 'house' of the poem could barely hold it. Perhaps in approaching this pamphlet, we really are 'lamellae': a thin layer or membrane, a plate of tissue; tender and vulnerable, a selectively permeable fold, 'fizzing' with alertness and proximate dissolve.

As a speech act, 'FAX ME' is a request to be sent something or contacted (think of the imperative, quaintly anachronistic slogans stamped on [Love Heart](#) candy) but it also works as a stated desire to be copied, to be transmitted: surely the self-replicating work of lyric. Put a Love Heart sweet on your tongue and it will fizz then melt. The message is absorbed in the body as another abstraction, a unit of calories or sugar hit. And so the abstraction into which we are dissolve and woven, reading *Unspeakable Patterns of the House*, is an organology of the psyche, the body, technology, the quantum realm and chloroplast, the habitat and the life-forms within it. Against totalising figurations of the anthropocene as a reified epoch, defined by humankind's geologic agency — something to be read and traced through mineral future-histories — this is a counterpoetics of ecology's droning undersong, an affective beckoning ('five cents for your / psychoanalysis' (15)), a way of voicing the 'unspeakable' with the wispy tendrils of this organic lyric architecture, its susurrations or fricative stammer of multiple, proliferating and dense event. We are not taught to 'know' the tenor of metaphor, not to claim a name for 'the blank' (13), but rather to absorb and metabolise what teems in relation. To feel viscerally into the inherent polyphony and plastiglomerate matters of many agents and abstracted entities: the multivocal discourse of life and death in the anthropocene.



**Maria Sledmere** is currently a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Strathclyde and Tutor at the University of Glasgow and Beyond Form Creative Writing. She is editor-in-chief of SPAM Press and a member of the art and ecology collective, A+E. In 2021, *The Palace of Humming Trees*, a multimedia exhibition with Katie O'Grady and Jack O'Flynn, was shown at French Street Studios. With Rhian Williams, Maria co-edited an anthology, *the weird folds: everyday poems from the anthropocene* (Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2020). Her debut collection, *The Luna Erratum*, is out now with Dostoyevsky Wannabe, and a recent book-length poem, *String Feeling*, was published by Erotoplasty Editions, in addition to a forthcoming pamphlet, *Sans Soleil*, written with fred spoliar and published by Face Press/Mermaid Motel.



<sup>i</sup> Eleanor Perry, *Unspeakable Patterns of the House* (Norwich: salò press, 2020), 13. Subsequent citations of *Unspeakable Patterns of the House* appear as in-text parentheticals throughout this article.

<sup>ii</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge and London, Belknap Press, 2020), 174.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ecology* is from the ancient Greek word *oikos*, meaning household or home.

<sup>iv</sup> Ngai, 175.

<sup>v</sup> Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017), 105.

<sup>vi</sup> Morton, 101, 102.

<sup>vii</sup> Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. by Sally O'Discroll and Deirdre M. Mahoney (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>viii</sup> Ngai, 187 (ellipsis in original).

<sup>ix</sup> Transaction comes from the Latin *transactio(n-)*, from *transigere* or 'drive through'.

<sup>x</sup> Gertrude Stein, 'Tender Buttons [Objects]', [poets.org](https://poets.org) [Accessed 11.9.21].

<sup>xi</sup> See Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>xii</sup> Katy Lewis Hood, *Bugbear* (London: Veer, 2021), np.

<sup>xiii</sup> Valentine, Ben, '[Plastiglomerate, the Anthropocene's New Stone](#)', *Hyperallergic*, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015. [Accessed 11.9.21].