

<b>Institution: University of Sussex</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b>  Radical poetics: transforming poetry culture in the UK and beyond
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  Keston Sutherland's work as a poet, editor, critic, theorist, reviewer and Director of the annual Sussex Poetry Festival (2009–) has contributed decisively to the regeneration and development of the literary <i>avant-garde</i> in the UK. Sutherland's work has played a transformative role in literary culture beyond the mainstream and has inspired numerous other poets to write in radical new styles. He is consistently singled out by reviewers and critics as the leading figure in the 'New British School', and the impact of his own poetry on international literary culture has been compared with that of T.S. Eliot.
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  Sutherland has been employed at Sussex since 2004, his first permanent academic appointment. He was made Reader in 2011 and became Professor of Poetics in 2013. Sutherland's poetry and criticism are known for their growth out of, and contribution to, critical theory and Marxism. He has argued influentially for a more philological account of the history of theory based on close reading of the transmission of concepts, genres and figures into and out of classic texts by Marx and others. <i>Stupefaction</i> [see Section 3, R1] aims to specify just how and where Marx's writing is 'literary', and all Sutherland's poetry since <i>Neocosis</i> (2005) has been an explicit intervention into the reception of critical theory and Marx in particular. 'Marx in Jargon' [R2] rereads the German text of <i>Das Kapital</i> against existing English translations, describing how satirical elements in the German have been elided in English. Marx's term for 'dead labour' was ' <i>Gallerte</i> ', and Sutherland provides the first philological account of this term – a gelatinous substance made from the boiling of miscellaneous parts of animals – in Marxist criticism. In doing so he restores to view the full complexity of Marx's satire against consumption. The article has been frequently cited and its account of satire and disgust in Marx has been widely confirmed, most recently in Sianne Ngai's, <i>Our Aesthetic Categories</i> (Harvard University Press 2012).  Sutherland's poetry incorporates and develops this philosophical, philological and literary critical research and is widely acknowledged to be a significant contribution in its own right to the field of critical theory and Marxism. Like 'Marx in Jargon', <i>Hot White Andy</i> [R3], <i>Stress Position</i> [R4], <i>The Stats on Infinity</i> [R5] and, in particular, <i>The Odes to TL61P</i> [R6] all make original theoretical arguments about life under capital. <i>The Odes to TL61P</i> is a suite of odes addressed to the product ordering code for a now-obsolete Hotpoint tumble dryer. It takes as one point of departure Marx's satirical remark that capital in circulation 'always preserves its original virginity'. <i>The Odes</i> is also a theatrical attempt to realise in poetic practice a Hegelian 'comprehension' of history by making a form compendious enough to bind together all of experience and its contradictions. Sutherland's poetry is saturated with research into literature, philosophy, theory and history, and the poetry makes new interpretations of basic theoretical concepts that are decisive in directing future research. <i>Radical Philosophy</i> 175 (September/October 2012) emphasises that Sutherland's poems are 'resolute interventions in the field of literary theory'. Adam Piette writes: 'A poem by Keston Sutherland is an event, as defined by Alain Badiou: "rare and instantaneous supplements to the situation, introducing the radically new and originating procedures of truth"'. J.H. Prynne describes <i>Hot White Andy</i> as the restoration of the very possibility of a socially efficacious poetry. Sutherland's poetry and criticism thus comprise a complex dialogue that establishes in highly original style the necessity of theory for poetry and the equal necessity of poetry for theory. Lauren

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Berlant cites his work in both modes as among the most challenging and inspiring now being written by any living theorist (*Textual Practice* 2013).

### 3. References to the research

- R1** Sutherland, K. (2011) *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms*. London/New York: Seagull Books.
- R2** Sutherland, K. (2008) 'Marx in jargon', *World Picture*, 1: [http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/World%20Picture/WP\\_1.1/KSutherland.pdf](http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/World%20Picture/WP_1.1/KSutherland.pdf)
- R3** Sutherland, K. (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2007, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2009, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2009) *Hot White Andy*. London: Barque Press.
- R4** Sutherland, K. (2009) *Stress Position*. London: Barque Press.
- R5** Sutherland, K. (2010) *The Stats on Infinity*. London: Crater Press.
- R6** Sutherland, K. (2013) *The Odes to TL61P*. London: Enitharmon Press.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

### 4. Details of the impact

The transformation of the literary field is difficult to demonstrate. But the reception of Sutherland's work has been singularly full of variations on and emphatic repetitions of the claim that he has transformed literary culture. Steven Critelli writes 'I know of no contemporary poet in the US (or the world) who has attempted to portray our cultural plight in so comprehensive and symphonic a style of writing. ... Yes, by this I mean to put Sutherland in the class of Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Bellow. ... *The Odes to TL61P* is "a leap forward that can only be compared to the way T.S. Eliot's poetry must have struck the eyes and ears of readers weaned on the Romantics and Victorians"' [see Section 5, C1]. John Wilkinson claims *Hot White Andy* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2007, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> eds. 2009) is 'the most remarkable poem in English published this century' [C2]. These are indications of esteem but also of impact: there is a virtual consensus among critics and reviewers that Sutherland's work has transformed poetry culture and inspired a proliferation of previously unimaginable new experiments in form and argument.

Sutherland's impact is especially significant on practicing poets. The poet Kent Johnson singled him out as the leading poet of the 'New British School', describing his influence as reinvigorating literary culture in the UK [C3]. Sutherland's work has influenced the writing and performance practice of both emerging and established poets, including Justin Katko, Josh Stanley, Marianne Morris, Simon Jarvis, J.H. Prynne. This has prompted *The New Statesman* to joke that he 'commands an army of acolytes' [C4]. A survey presented in the introduction to the anthology of young British poets, *Better than Language* (2011), found that the majority of younger poets represented in the anthology claim that Sutherland has been the most significant influence on their work [C5].

Sutherland's impact also extends both beyond the academy and the professional poetic environment to impact on the poetry-reading public. David Wheatley in *The Guardian* cited Sutherland's 'high-voltage postmodernism', next to Carol Ann Duffy and Geoffrey Hill, as a development that defines 'the public life of poetry today' [C6]. *The White Review* credits Sutherland with prompting 'a major reconsideration of the field of contemporary poetry in Britain today' [C7]. Sutherland was one of two poets singled out by Giles Foden as the most promising of the decade so far in *The Guardian* – 'Noughties so far: the book' (Wednesday 2 January 2008). Sutherland's books of poetry sold 3,578 copies from 2008 to July 2013, in a market where 'most single-author collections published by the independent and commercial sectors today sell fewer than a thousand' (Arts Council report *Mapping Contemporary Poetry* 2010), and his work has been frequently anthologised, most recently in *Dear World and Everyone In It* (Bloodaxe 2013). Translations of his poetry have appeared in Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, German and Greek. His work is the

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subject of numerous discussions and blogs online across the world [C8]. Significant, too, have been the performances of his poetry – readings which themselves contribute to the public appreciation and understanding of his work. A performance of *Hot White Andy* had been viewed on YouTube by 10,818 people by July 2013, and all his readings online attract around 1,000 viewers within weeks of being uploaded. He has been invited to read at numerous literary festivals and universities, including the most popular festival in the UK – StAnza – and the Paris Poetry Biennale, where he represented the UK two years running. He has given reading tours with his translators in Germany, Finland and the Czech Republic.

Sutherland's poetry has affected the curricula of universities. It is taught at many universities in the US and the UK (e.g. Berkeley, Chicago, Sheffield, Cambridge, and London). A draft of *The Odes to TL61P* was the subject of the prize-winning undergraduate dissertation in English at the University of Chicago in 2012. In 2008, the examiner's report for the Cambridge Tripos paper 'Literature post-1970' stated that the two authors on whose work the greatest number of essays had been written by students in their final exams were Salman Rushdie (prose) and Keston Sutherland (poetry).

It has also had an impact on the experimental poetry scene: Sutherland is the editor of *Barque Press* and has published more than 40 books of poetry, helping to bring into existence a new culture of poetic experiment and dialogue. Since joining Sussex he has brought more than 100 poets to read on campus and at Brighton's Nightingale Theatre. Consequently, Sussex is now recognised as a thriving centre for cutting-edge poetry. BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme singled out Sutherland and Sussex in 'A guide to the artistic underground' in 2008 as the most exciting 'scene' for experimental poetry in the UK [C9].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Critelli, S. (2012) 'Keston Sutherland, the next great one', *Against Interpretation*, 9 June, <http://rockcru.wordpress.com/2012/06/09/keston-sutherland-the-next-great-one/>
- C2** Wilkinson, J. (2008) 'Mandarin ducks and chee-chee chokes', *Jacket*, 35, <http://jacketmagazine.com/35/r-sutherland-rb-wilkinson.shtml>
- C3** Johnson, K. (2009) 'The new British school', *Digital Emunction*, <http://www.digitalemunction.com/2009/10/07/the-new-british-school/>
- C4** *New Statesman*, 1 April 2010
- C5** Review of Goode, C. ed. (2010) Introduction to *Better Than Language* (an anthology of young British poets in which Sutherland is named as the most influential poet on the practice of younger writers).
- C5** Review of *Poetry and Privacy* by John Redmond, *The Guardian*, Friday 21 June. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/21/poetry-privacy-john-redmond-review>
- C7** Interview with Sutherland in *The White Review* 7, 2013. <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-keston-sutherland/>
- C8** Abbott, M. (2013) 'The poetry of destroyed experience', *3AM Magazine*. <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/the-poetry-of-destroyed-experience/>
- C9** 'A guide to the artistic underground', BBC Radio 4 'Today' website, Monday 29 December 2008.