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Distant Echoes of the Paralysed Poetic

An Introduction to the Poetry of Keston Sutherland

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for Anita

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ABSTRACT

Distant Echoes of the Paralysed Poetic:
An Introduction to the Poetry of Keston Sutherland

Keston Sutherland says of his own poems that they, 'are not so difficult to understand as they are difficult to accept'. This thesis aims to dispel the myth that Sutherland is a difficult poet, both in terms of understanding and acceptance. It begins with a sketch of two traditions in British poetry since 1945, "The Mainstream" and "The Parallel Tradition", illustrated by analysis of poems by Philip Larkin, Basil Bunting, Edwin Morgan, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and J.H. Prynne. A critical biography traces Sutherland's evolution from his at times cerebral and abrasive earlier works, where the poetic seems distant, to the justified prose blocks that characterise his latter work, where at least the possibility of the poetic seems to have returned. All against a backdrop of the broader trends in British poetry and the political situation in the UK from 1999 onwards. The second half of this thesis then proposes that the prose of Samuel Beckett is the principal stylistic model for this poetry, and investigates two concepts, drawn from his own lectures: "odes" and "affect storms". He identifies the ode as a uniquely effective form for writing innovative social satire. Sutherland's *The Odes to TL61P* (2013) is measured against Wordsworth's demands on the ode to create unfamiliar sensations and discover new modes of thought in order to subvert hierarchical social relations, commodity fetishism, and the banality of public discourse. The thesis culminates in an analysis of his use of a psychoanalytic concept, known as an "affect storm", as a metaphor for the incomprehensible elements of contemporary poetry and his creation of a language capable of giving voice to the inexpressible in his latest poem *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020). Though various, what much of his poetry has in common is a reluctance to let the lyric voice sing. First, Sutherland forces himself to register the cacophony of modern discourse, before, on rare unguarded occasions, when the clamour dies down, distant echoes of the paralysed poetic can be heard.

Keywords: affect storms, avant-garde, Cambridge School, commodity fetishism, Global Financial Crisis, "Hot White Andy", Iraq War 2003, J.H. Prynne, justified prose blocks, Marxism, Samuel Beckett, *Scherzos Benjyosos*, the ode, *The Odes to TL61P*, trauma, William Wordsworth

1. INTRODUCTION

Keston Sutherland recalls the sensation of writing his first poem, when he was sixteen, as ‘physically transformative’ (Sutherland 2019). He recalls ‘...thinking that [his] body somehow had been transformed by this experience of trying to summon within [him] the pressure adequate to express [an] intense desire’ (Sutherland 2019). In an introductory article for *The New Yorker*, Nicolas Niarchos describes witnessing a similar transformation with his own eyes: ‘first, Sutherland stands in front of a wall, wearing a gray T-shirt. He shuffles about and looks at the floor as he introduces his work...’ before exploding into life:

> When he begins to read the poem itself...the awkwardness dissipates: he alternates between frenzied splurges of words, unpunctuated by line breaks–or even, it seems, breathing– and quiet, careful moments of rumination. By the end, he is rocking forward and back, index and middle fingers swirling in tune to the beat of his words. (Niarchos 2016)

The complexity of Sutherland’s poetry is rendered more comprehensible in this way. The poetry seems to yields its secrets more readily to viewing a performance than reading a volume. There are many of these powerful performances available online, including a *relatively* famous reading of “Hot White Andy” at Miami University in 2007.[1] The irony would not be lost on Sutherland that around 17,000 views on *YouTub*e is less than 0.000002% of those of a song about a baby shark.[2] These performances, then, might be the key to accessing this notoriously difficult poetry. Yet Sutherland would surely dispute at least two of the propositions of this statement. Firstly, regarding difficulty, he believes that his poems ‘...are not so difficult to understand...as they are difficult to accept’ (Sutherland 2013). They are intentionally uncomfortable, dizzying, and nauseating at times. Secondly, he would be resistant to the notion that poetry might have hidden locks that require the right set of keys or contain answers like a cryptic crossword. Norman MacCaig renounced his “apocalyptic”

[1] See performance at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWMTted_5tA
[2] The video “Baby Shark Dance” has been viewed over 10.8 billion times to date.

phase when a friend returned a book of his poems and asked him, 'when are you publishing the answers?' (Nicholson 1989: 33).[3] The idea that it might be possible to write to the poet for an answer key is also the object of derision, for different reasons, in issue 6 of *Quid* (a journal of poetics and literary criticism published by Sutherland's Barque Press). There is a large crossword grid on the front cover and the editorial invites readers '...to complete [it] and send it back...' using '...the clues... ...scattered throughout the issue...' for a chance to win '...a copy of *Vipers in the Storm* by Keith Rosencranz...' (a self-aggrandising memoir of a Gulf War fighter pilot, replete with foreword by Dick Cheney) (Sutherland 2000: 1).[4] In case any doubt remained about the sincerity of the invitation, the following issue, *Quid 7a*, laments that '[n]o reader was courageous enough to send his answers to the puzzle in which QUID 6 was decked out, *as if you didn't know them*' (Sutherland 2001: 1). This example is illustrative of Sutherland's playful diffidence to ideas of difficulty and neatly packaged epiphanic moments. The majority of criticism of his work is apparently deaf to its effervescent sense of humour. Fiona Sampson, in *Beyond the Lyric: A Map of Contemporary British Poetry*, calls him an '[a]ngry not-so-young [man]...' and proposes that linguistic play must have its limits, 'it has to retain certain configurations of grammar and vocabulary in order to *be* language rather than the oral nonsense linguists call lallation' (Sampson 2012: 269-271). Sutherland's is a poetry of play and deliberately rejects these limits for both theoretical and poetical reasons.

What, then, should an introduction to the poetry of Keston Sutherland look like, if his poetry, his notion of what poetry should be, is so playfully resistant to clarification and exegesis? Fortunately, there is no shortage of poetical analysis written by Sutherland himself

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[3] Norman MacCaig was born in Edinburgh in 1910, where he worked as a school teacher from 1934 to 1967. His poetry was initially influenced by the New Apocalypse movement, a surreal rejection of the political realism of the 1930s. MacCaig would come to reject this surrealism, deciding that '...poems which are wantonly or carelessly obscure (not difficult) are bad art and bad manners' (MacCaig 1976: 85).

[4] Dick Cheney is an American politician who oversaw the invasion of Iraq, known as Operation Desert Storm, during the first Gulf War in the early nineties. He was also responsible for shaping George Bush Jr.'s approach to the "War on Terror" in the aftermath of 9/11.

from which to take inspiration. He asks himself, '...what should be done with...' "For Grace After a Party" by Frank O'Hara, and suggests that his essay might '...move us a little closer to it' (Sutherland 2010: 121). Closeness might well provide the best approach to an understanding of Sutherland's own poetry too. However, this approach comes with a warning:

> The trope of reading as microscopy too often proposes as its end and limit, in effect, the poem simply be shifted from one category into another, say from spontaneity into factitiousness, from impact into contrivance, from improvisation into composition, or from presumptively straight, as an uninquiring reader might assume, into masqueradeingly or openly queer. (Sutherland 2010: 121)

The scope of this study will not be to shift Sutherland's poetry from one category into another, from incomprehensibility into clarity, from obscurity into lucidity, or from exploded syntax and fluctuating registers into a reconstructed totality. Rather, by spending time with Sutherland, his correspondence, critical prose, interviews, lectures, videos, recordings, and crucially, the poetry itself, it should be possible to move a little closer to his work.

This study is divided into two principal sections. The first section will provide the context necessary to introduce some of Keston Sutherland's longer and most recent work. It will begin with a brief illustration of some key trends in British poetry since the end of the Second World War, before moving on to provide an overview of the development of Sutherland's career and his evolution as a poet. The second section will begin by proposing the prose of Samuel Beckett as the principal stylistic model for the poetry of Keston Sutherland. It will then focus on two key concepts about contemporary poetry, inspired by Sutherland's own theoretical work, and trace their presence in his poems. The former focuses on *The Odes to TL61P* (2013) and explores to what extent Sutherland is inspired by William Wordsworth's ideas about the ode as a form. He asks, in a 2017 lecture about genre, how one might write an ode which is devoted to an object so derided that it generates a feeling which is so confusing that no appropriate language exists to express it? (Sutherland 2017). This

thesis proposes that *The Odes to TL61P* might well be an attempt at an answer to this question. The latter, instead, takes his comment that the definition of a psychological condition known as an "affect storm", characterised by impulsive action and extreme somatic breakdowns, might be 'one of the most accurately representative descriptions of contemporary poetry that [he has] stumbled across' and seeks to trace its features in *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020) (Sutherland 2017). Though deliberately eclectic, the poetic analysis in all of these sections reveals a common thread that runs through the poetry of Keston Sutherland. In order that he might release that "physically transformative" poetic voice, first he must dismantle the detritus of modern discourse. No matter how distorted and unintelligible his poems might be, there remains the possibility of hearing a 'distant echo of the paralysed poetic' in them. (Sutherland 2015).

Many companions and anthologies and much literary criticism has been published on British poetry since 1945. One thing that all of them make clear is that postwar poetry, and its institutions, are characterised by a series of acrimonious oppositions and factious disagreements. It is not difficult to discern on which side of the establishment/alternative divide Keston Sutherland falls. Recent scholarship positions him in a tradition that can be traced from Pound's modernism, to "The British Poetry Revival" in the 1970s (in many ways seen as a revival of that high modernism of the 1920s itself), and especially to J.H. Prynne and the so-called "Cambridge School".[5] This division is also apparent from the different modes of publication and distribution that the poets of the period choose to adopt. On the one hand, there are more famous poets who publish books for wider circulation in high street bookshops with well-known publishers such as Faber & Faber, Picador, or Carcanet. On the

[5] J.H. Prynne was born in 1936 and studied and worked at the University of Cambridge for the majority of his life, retiring from his posts as librarian and Reader in English Poetry at Gonville and Caius College in 2016. Synonymous with difficulty and obscurity, Prynne attracts a small, yet fervent, coterie of admirers. His work incorporates innumerous fields of technical discourse and resists a singular, unifying poetic voice. He is often associated with both the Modernist tradition and the "open field" poetics of Charles Olson, as Alex Latter suggests, there is '...an obscurantist tradition traceable from [Ezra] Pound through Olson to Prynne' (Latter 2015: 51). It is Keston Sutherland's belief that J.H. Prynne is, 'the greatest poet in the English language since Wordsworth' (Sutherland 2016: 64).

other hand, there are poets who self-publish small runs of chapbooks, or in little magazines, for a more selective type of poetry reader. Sutherland clearly belongs to the latter, not least because his own Barque Press is responsible for these types of publication. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and *The Odes to TL61P* and *Poetic Works: 1999-2015* were both published by Enitharmon who specialise in art books and literary special editions. The choice of publisher does not necessarily define the poetry, though it might say something about a particular poet's intended audience or addressee. Indeed, Sutherland makes a distinction between readers and consumers in a letter to Chris Hamilton-Emery: 'Naturally as a bookseller you have to be concerned with consumers, but I imagine most poets...are more interested in readers, even to the no doubt partly pathological extent that they'd prefer three readers to a hundred consumers' (Sutherland 2008).[6] Sutherland believes that the intended audience, not the medium, should shape the poetry.

So, what shape does this poetry have? Some of its features include: an emphasis on the role of the reader to make their own connections, a self-mocking parody of its own idiom, often drawn from a vast range of discourse types, and a polyphonic poetic voice. These are all features that appear in Sutherland's work. The section, "Trends in British Poetry 1945-Present" seeks to demonstrate that the poetry of Keston Sutherland belongs to a much wider tradition, avant-garde or otherwise, and that it is not obstinately and capriciously obtuse. In such a short space it would be impossible to thoroughly describe the state of poetry in a period which verges on eighty years. However, the handful of poets used to illustrate the trends discussed are intended to help to make sense of Sutherland. Philip Larkin is presented as something of an antagonist, while Basil Bunting, Edwin Morgan, and Linton Kwesi Johnson all represent alternative approaches to versification and metre which no doubt

[6] Chris Hamilton-Emery is a poet and is also the founder of Salt Publishing, an independent literary press based in Cromer, in the UK.

influenced Sutherland's own poetic craft, but it is undoubtedly J.H. Prynne who plays the role of *il miglior fabbro*. As Sutherland says himself:

> I have a very intimate friendship with J.H. Prynne. I think the term 'mentor' really doesn't do justice to the kind of generosity with which he nourishes the thinking and writing of those students who grow close to him at Cambridge. (Sutherland 2015)

An awareness of J.H. Prynne, and the poets responsible for *The English Intelligencer*, is clearly vital in order to achieve a clear understanding of Sutherland's work. Thus, this part concludes with an analysis of "Sketch for a Financial Theory of Self" from Prynne's 1968 volume *Kitchen Poems*. Many of the disruptive strategies and discordant discourses present in that poem begin to explain some of Sutherland's own poetic practice.

Indeed, it was while attending Cambridge University in the 1990s, and meeting Prynne, that Keston Sutherland's passion for poetry appears to have ignited. He describes being surrounded by 'formidable poets' and wanting nothing more than to join them in 'a culture of gift exchange' (Sutherland 2013). Evidently, this desire resulted in the foundation of Barque Press, and the little magazine *Quid*, with Andrea Brady in 1995. These publications provided Sutherland with a space in which to experiment with techniques he would later find more meaningful uses for. He joined the University of Sussex in 2004 where he now holds the position of Professor of Poetics. His critical work is focused on, but not limited to, Karl Marx, J.H. Prynne, William Wordsworth, Samuel Beckett and emergent British and American poetry. As a poet he has consistently published since 1999 with varying degrees of critical attention, the height of which was likely his selection in the "New British Poetry" edition of Chicago Review in 2007. Two moments of global crisis define two distinct phases in Sutherland's mature poetic practice. The period from *Antifreeze* (2002) to *Hot White Andy* (2007) is overshadowed by the September 11 attacks and the consequent 2003 Iraq War in their aftermath. Sutherland himself identifies what he suggests is a split poetical subjectivity in poetry from the time, which is characterised by, 'an aggressively interiorised

pathos' on the one hand and, 'extremely aggressive polemic outward' on the other (Sutherland 2015). Although he was speaking primarily about contemporary poets Danny Hayward and Verity Spott, his own poetry is also characterised by the same split poetical subject he notices in others. The result is an almost schizophrenic juxtaposition of internal with global trauma. Prior to the publication of *The Odes to TL61P*, as John Wilkinson also notes, this modality seems overly self-conscious.[7] However, with *The Odes to TL61P*, Sutherland begins to channel this dialectic energy into the dense prose blocks that have become his preferred form. As he admits, in a 2015 lecture called, "Blocks: Form since the Crash", the Global Financial Crisis has a significant influence on the second phase. Not only did it radically reshape society, inducing a period of austerity in the United Kingdom and across Europe, but it also influenced public discourse. People were suddenly expected to become experts on the idiosyncratic mechanisms of things like subprime mortgages and fraudulent underwriting practices. The most obvious imprint of the socio-historical moment on Sutherland's writing is the financial jargon and unwieldy syntactic structures that litter the pages of his later volumes. Finally, more than in previous poems, *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020) allows moments of lyric intimacy to penetrate the self-mutilating prose, perhaps marking a new phase in Sutherland's evolution, though it would be much too early to say.

The second section begins by stating that the closest literary precedent for this elusive and estranging poetry might actually be the prose of Samuel Beckett. Keston Sutherland is explicit about this. In a lecture about form and contemporary British poetry, he says: 'If we're to look for literary precedents for this form of compression [in] poetry...the really great literary ancestor of this is not any poet that I know, but Samuel Beckett' (Sutherland 2016). Some of the features that the two have in common are, the immediate invalidation of the

[7] John Wilkinson is Professor of English at The University of Chicago with a professional background in mental health services in the UK. He describes himself as 'a poet and a student of poetics' and is a contemporary of Keston Sutherland. Eric Falci describes the poetics of this group as relying on, '...a kind of radical negativity, a constant overturning of expected patterns of language and customary literary habits' (Falci 2015: 220). Like Sutherland, Wilkinson's poetry attempts at all costs to resist being '...an ideologically bankrupt and easily consumable literary product' (Falci 2015: 220).

affirmations they make, absurd repetitions, incessant word play, the predominance of questions over answers, and a process of whittling down and voiding the text of meaning at all costs. The dense prose blocks, employed by Sutherland more recently, even visually resemble the way some of Beckett's novels such as *Watt, Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable* appear on the page. Moments later, in the same lecture, Sutherland suggests that Beckett is '...anti-form, if form is considered to be order, he spoke of having come to feel the need for a disordered form, a broken form' (Sutherland 2016). The theoretical sections that follow are rooted in this same belief, that form, ordered and symmetrical metrical forms to be precise, is an inadequate vessel for expressing the chaos which is known as existence or being.

Sutherland asks how one might write an ode devoted to something so overlooked that it might stimulate a sensation resistant to expression in language. The unrepresentable nature of certain emotional states is a common factor in both sections of the second half of this thesis. *The Odes to TL61P* uses a combination of satire and embarrassing intimacy, alongside disruptive formal strategies, in order to estrange the reader and force them to challenge their prejudices and preconceptions. The 2017 lecture, entitled "Affect Storms", attempts to explain unrepresentable mental states using a term from the field of psychoanalysis. He uses the concept of the "affect storm" as a metaphor for some of the more incomprehensible features of contemporary poetry. It does help to shed light on many moments of syntactic disintegration and the cyclical feedback loops, where words and phrasal fragments are repeated and gradually altered, in poems like *Scherzos Benjyosos*. Though these poems can be demonstrated to be engagements with different aspects of Sutherland's critical thinking, what they both have in common, aside from some formal characteristics, is the sincere desire to transform human experience and social relations. Reading *The Odes to TL61P* is often uncomfortable, it is savagely satirical, and frequently it is the reader who is the object of the satire. The poem's transformative power derives from this antagonism. Sutherland constantly

forces the reader to ask questions about their own roles in the social injustices, exploitation and violence the poem contains, while at the same time being invasively honest about memories of sexual experiences from his childhood. The poet does not ask anything of the reader he is not willing to perform himself. *Scherzos Benjyosos*, while not lacking in moments of antagonism and audience targeted satire, elicits perhaps a higher degree of empathy too.

Perhaps it is too early to say whether or not this poetry warrants thesis length critical attention. After all, Sutherland's principal mode of publication, in self-published little magazines or limited edition chapbooks, would suggest that critical attention is the last thing that he would want. However, at least from 2013 onwards, there does seem to be an effort to reach a larger audience. In an interview with Natalie Ferris, at the time of the launch of *The Odes to TL61P*, he says: 'I've wanted for a while now to risk venturing out into a potentially uncomprehending or even hostile public space...' (Sutherland 2013). It is true that this poetry can be frustratingly cerebral at times, especially towards the beginning of his career. Yet, despite all of Sutherland's efforts to confront, challenge, and resist the subsumed lyrical forms that proliferate British literature in 2022, something lyrical, guttural, and kinetic does often burst forth. The scope of this thesis is not to make a case for the inclusion of Keston Sutherland into the canon of contemporary poets worthy of academic attention. This, limited, introduction will offer a personal response to the poetry within the socio-political context in which it was written, paying particular attention to the clues Sutherland has left in the theoretical work produced parallel to its composition. Through close examination, and the expenditure of time, this thesis is intended to identify and amplify the distant echoes and make them resonate as loudly as might be possible.

2. CONTEXT: BRITISH POETRY SINCE 1945

2.1 Trends in British Poetry 1945-Present

Even a cursory survey of the academic companions and introductions to the spectrum of poetry written in Britain since 1945 reveals a myriad of ways of classifying and presenting the fate of lyric poetry in an age increasingly indifferent to it. In *The Cambridge Introduction to British Poetry, 1945-2010*, Eric Falci sketches a chronological picture of the period, as much as is possible, and traces the evolution from the conflicted postwar decades, decades marked by hope but also by a sense of the United Kingdom's lost global significance, up to the present period of continuous crisis. He highlights key events, stressing the importance of context throughout his study. As he asserts in the final chapter: '...poems are linguistic and cultural artefacts that comprise unique perspectives on the granularities of their moment' (Falci 2015: 229). In addition to context, another recurring touchstone in Falci's narrative is the litany of infamous arguments that have erupted amongst poets and critics alike. In the introduction to *The New Poetry* in 1962, Al Alvarez provocatively stated that 'the machinery of modern English poetry seems to have been controlled by a series of negative feed-backs' (Alvarez 1966: 24).[8] It is a statement that has become emblematic of a series of oppositions within the poetic community since the close of the Second World War. *The New Poetry* itself is often presented as a response to Robert Conquest's 1956 anthology *New Lines* which featured a long list of poets associated with "The Movement", including Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, and Donald Davie.

"The Movement" has become a useful synonym for insularity, detached irony, and a rejection of the Modernism of Pound and Eliot; antagonism to it still shapes narratives about

[8] Al Alvarez was born in London in 1929, he won a scholarship to Oxford University in 1949, and became poetry editor of the *Observer* in 1956. In this role he brought stellar names like John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, and Robert Lowell into the consciousness of the British public.

British Poetry today. As with the classification of all literary movements, "The Movement" is an imprecise vessel for the variety of poetry it contains. However, the caricature of it at least presented the movements which followed it with something to rage against, to define themselves negatively in comparison with. David Malcolm separates the characterisation of this group of poets by the editors of *The Spectator* on the one hand from, '...focus exclusively on the poems included in the *New Lines* anthology' on the other (Görtschacher-Malcolm 2021: 216). J.D. Scott writes in *The Spectator* that, 'The Movement, as well as being anti-phoney, is anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in the world which doesn't look, anyway, as if it's going to be changed much by a couple of handfuls of young English writers' (Scott 1954: 22). The "series of negative feedbacks" seem more aimed at generalising statements like these rather than at the poetry and poets themselves. Many of the poetry movements that this thesis will outline in the following pages take aim at this distillation of "The Movement", at its perceived Middle England value system, its comforting ironic distance, and its lack of belief in the power of poetry to make a difference to the world.

Peter Barry's 2006 study *Poetry Wars* immortalises Eric Mottram's tumultuous tenure as editor of *Poetry Review* during the 1970s.[9] Mottram represented a group who are immortalised as radicals who infiltrated the establishment and published a group of poets loosely referred to as "The British Poetry Revival". The term was first used in the underground magazine *Poetmeat*, and was adopted for a 1974 Polytechnic of Central London poetry conference and also by Mottram himself as the title of his own keynote speech at the conference (Sheppard 2000: 35). That the emergent movement of experimental poetry in the

[9] Eric Mottram was born in 1924 and died in 1995 in London. He was a teacher and a poet who was an advocate for modern American literature, teaching English and American Literature at King's College London in the early sixties and co-founding the Institute of US Studies at London University. His personal connections with some of the stellar US poets such as Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams would influence his style. As Daniel Weston highlights, 'the cut-up and collage techniques of Black Mountain and Beat experimenters' became stylistic models for the "British Poetry Revival" in the sixties and seventies (Weston 2021: 101). Inspired by Modernism, the "Revival" sought to apply US experimentation to British landscapes and cityscapes.

1960s and 1970s was referred to as a “revival” carries the implication that poetry in that period was in need of resuscitation, or that in the preceding decades British poetry had died in some sense. The idea of a “revival” also has a specific referent, in Mottram’s view the poets he championed were reviving an international modernist tradition that had been rejected by “The Movement” poets of the 1950s. In an “Editor’s Note” published in *Poetry Review, 66:1* he makes this point explicitly: ‘We now have a major poetry scene in this country, the first since the 1930s’ (Barry 2006: 196). On the other side of the argument, at The Poetry Society headquarters, were the “Committee for the Reform of The Poetry Society" who accused Mottram and his followers of cynical elitism and they sought to ‘rid the Society of those who have found a refuge in cliquism, who, without a wide enough audience with whom to connect, turn inwards, writing in the main for themselves’ (Barry 2006: 199). Mottram sketches the following caricature of the type of poetry acceptable to the committee in his “The British Poetry Revival, 1960-1975” essay:

> ...criteria for acceptable establishment poetry required that it be easily teachable; its form so nearly a transparent vehicle that it can be read rapidly without interference. A poem must be reviewable reassuringly in the posh papers and journals and contain some kind of utilitarian reference which is not too disturbing. It should have an easily paraphrasable meaning. (Mottram 1995: 29)

These two contrasting interpretations of difficulty in poetry set a precedent that still very much informs contemporary debates about the topic. For the “Reform Committee” difficulty is synonymous with enigma, it is the secret code of a shadowy cabal, whereas for Mottram transparency of form and an ‘easily paraphrasable meaning’ represents the transformation of poetry into an easily consumable product, ‘like a double scotch or a cigarette’ (Mottram 1995: 18). This period was marked by such acrimony that it is either amnesia or editorial redaction that causes Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion to say less than a decade later that

in the 1960s and 70s 'very little seemed to be happening' and to describe the period as 'a spell of lethargy' (Morrison-Motion 1982: 11).[10]

The bad blood, the heterogenous factions and the contested interpretations of difficulty all re-emerge around the turn of the millennium. In two anthologies, published just three years apart, the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid is described in radically different terms.[11] Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford suggest that his later poetry is 'biblioholically demanding' and that his challenging aesthetic is the exception rather than rule (Armitage-Crawford 1998: xx).[12] Whereas, for Keith Tuma, MacDiarmid is 'arguably [modernism's] most important early-century poet', proving that Scotland 'was home to a poetry conscious of international modernism' (Tuma 2001: xxii). Direct hostility is concealed in Armitage and Crawford's introduction, and the insistence on a 'community of democratic voices' is reminiscent of the rhetoric of Tony Blair's New Labour (Armitage-Crawford 1998: xxviii). The message is clear, diverse voices are welcome, necessary even, provided that they support the shared ideals and goals of the editors. Though never explicitly stated, there is a perceptible suspicion of poetry which is 'a bit like an exam' and 'most immediately addressed [to], a public-school-educated Oxbridge coterie audience' whereas poets who 'wrote subtle, accessible and surprising poetry, communicating more directly with a wider public' are celebrated in the name of democratic inclusivity (Armitage-Crawford 1998: xx). Tuma's suspicions, on the other hand, are reserved for such '*a priori* judgements concerning "accessibility" [which] have been particularly hard on varieties of modernist poetry in England, for complex reasons often having little to do with the poetry itself' (Tuma 2001:

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[10] Andrew Motion was Poet Laureate in the UK from 1999-2009. He has published a biography of Philip Larkin called *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*. His author's statement for the British Council expresses the following desire, 'I want my writing to be as clear as water. No ornate language; very few obvious tricks' (Motion 2002). These three details indicate that Motion belongs to the institutional, perhaps conservative, faction of British poets operative since the war.

[11] Hugh MacDiarmid, born Christopher Murray Grieve, is often considered the driving force behind the "Scottish Renaissance" (a literary movement which was a kind of Scottish modernism). Fiercely political, he championed indigenous Scots literature, often using Scots language in his poetry.

[12] Like Motion before him, Simon Armitage is currently Poet Laureate in the UK. He has published poetry since 1992, the majority of which with Faber & Faber, including translations of the canonical English works *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and *The Death of King Arthur*.

xx). Don Paterson is not nearly as coy as Armitage and Crawford, overtly accusing Tuma of 'Postmodern revisionism' (though he mistitles Tuma's anthology) and proposes his own 2004 anthology, *New British Poetry* co-edited with Charles Simic, as an alternative which contains a 'set of British poets who still sell books to a general – i.e., non-practicing and non-academic – readership' (Paterson-Simic 2004: xxv).[13] Paterson's portrayal of these sinister "Postmoderns" ticks all the boxes, '...they have gone to great lengths to present themselves as a distinct tribe...' via '...the systematic denigration of those unlike themselves...', '...their work is incomprehensible...' and '...besides the captive audience of their students, the Postmoderns only have other Postmoderns as their readers' (Paterson-Simic 2004: xxviii-xxix).

The arguments sketched in the previous paragraphs reveal a series of recurring themes that give some definition to the period. The perceived difficulty of the form of a poem is seen as either deliberate exclusionism or the inheritance of the Modernist project commenced by TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams in the first half of the last century. As a consequence of this perceived accessibility, readership can be sorted into two groups, either a wide and untrained mass of stocking filler hunters or as an exclusive clique of sinister librarians. This binary division is crystallised in many pieces of criticism about the period as an opposition between "mainstream poetry" and "experimental poetry". As reductive a system as it undoubtedly is, implying as it does that "mainstream poetry" might never be experimental, or that "experimental poetry" might never have a wide readership, this crude partition is referred to with surprising frequency.

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[13] Don Paterson was included as one of the "New Generation Poets" identified by Peter Forbes for *Poetry Review* in 1994. Eric Falci describes some of the features of the poetry of these "New Gen" poets as, 'short to medium-sized lyrics voiced by clear and consistent speakers that unfold in traditional meters or in loose free verse. There is a preponderance of eclectic character sketches, quirky anecdotes, and ironic self-portraits, many of which are clever, accessible, pleasurably light, and sometimes gently shocking' (Falci 2015: 185). In short, "New Gen" poets, and Don Paterson, represent the antithesis of Keston Sutherland's conception of poetry as will become apparent as this study unfolds.

Andrew Duncan gives this opposition a spatial dimension: '[d]islike has a topology. The virulent hostility between the mainstream and the avant-garde derives from competing systems of esteem' (Duncan 2005: 33).[14] In *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry,* not only is Duncan's periphery a reference to radicalism in the literally peripheral geographic locations of the north of Ireland and the Highlands, but distance is also a metaphor in relation to the self 'which exists in multiple spaces' (Duncan 2005: 33). The poet might be closer or farther, in terms of self-identification, from a particular concentration of people, a centre which is not necessarily Westminster, the Arts Council, Faber & Faber, The Poetry Society or the BBC, but might also be any number of local nuclei across the country. That "British" is a fractious adjective is perhaps best illustrated by Seamus Heaney's frequently cited response to being included in Morrison and Motion's *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*:

Don't be surprised if I demur, be advised
My passport's green.
No glass of ours was ever raised
to toast The Queen.

(Heaney 1983: x)

Hostility towards a collective notion of British identity is certainly not limited to Heaney's Northern Ireland, MacDiarmid's Scotland and Thomas' Wales, and concentrating on local movements is another popular method of approaching the period. Movements such as the Liverpool poets and the Medway poets, or the Cumbria painted in Basil Bunting's *Briggflats*, the Derbyshire in Alan Fisher's *City*, or the Midlands in Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* undermine the notion of a singular "British" poetry. In the preface to *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry*, Alan Robinson also identifies the rejection of the idea of Britishness but expands the idea of poetries defined by marginalised identities beyond the

[14] Andrew Duncan has written extensively about contemporary poetry from the nineties onwards. His publications include *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry*, *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*, and *A Poetry Boom 1990-2010*. He was a student of J.H. Prynne at the University of Cambridge.

geographic to include class, gender, ethnicity, education, and sexuality. He suggests that an increasing identity-based consciousness became a mode of 'opposition to the Establishment's marginalisation of "the Other"' which manifested itself as 'increasing self-consciousness in stylistic matters, evident in both technical experimentation and in ethical introspection about the pragmatic role of the writer's artful "representations" in the social construction of the self' (Robinson 1998: ix). For Robinson there are clearly parallels between new poetic forms and emergent politicised identity groups. Though, in Duncan's view, however tempting it was to map 'traditional:radical in poetry [as] right:left in politics', these straightforward oppositions did not adequately represent the reality of contemporary poetic production. In fact, Duncan suggests that 'innovative poetry was consigned to the unreviewed and undistributed small press world, to thrive in calm hostility' as a consequence of the dominance of Thatcherism in the 1980s (Duncan 2005: 8).

Decisions about publishing, about how the gap between poet and reader might be bridged, is another tempting distinction for categorising the period. Again, critics tend to sort the poets into two groups: those who publish on their own terms in little magazines, in mimeographed or photocopied chapbooks, in opposition to those who have literary agents and belong to establishment publishing houses. Wolfgang Görtschacher cites Neil Astley's reference to a "Big Six", in a term that echoes the tribalism of football punditry, which includes 'Bloodaxe Books, Jonathan Cape, Carcanet, Chatto & Windus, Faber & Faber, and Picador' (Görtschacher-Malcolm 2021: 61). In overly simplistic terms the avant-garde is traditionally associated with small-scale publication and the mainstream with the "Big Six". However, this parallel vision of two separate worlds does not adequately account for the complexity of poetry publishing since the war. How would one explain the publication of *Poems* by J.H. Prynne, who is perhaps more famous for his avoidance of mainstream

publication than he is for his poetry, by Bloodaxe for example?[15] The decision to publish on a small-scale clearly has something less superficial at stake. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Prynne talks about the motivation behind *The English Intelligencer*: '[Robert Crozier] wanted to find a way to develop this active interchange of energy of new composition and of new ideas that was not hemmed in by traditional publications of the old-fashioned heavyweight commercial kind' (Prynne 2016: 190).[16] The decision to publish in this way, far from being the exclusive and reclusive actions of a cultish elite, might actually represent the open embrace of a poetic community (albeit a small one). Alex Latter argues that the poets associated with "The British Poetry Revival" had a propensity for little magazines that was in part influenced by their "High Modernist" forefathers and illustrates it with two key examples. Firstly, with an excerpt from Prynne's letter to Peter Riley in 1967 published in *The English Intelligencer*, '..it's as if, for example, Wyndham Lewis had never written a line, as if *BLAST* now had to be done all over again' (Prynne 1967: x) and secondly, Ezra Pound's advice to Robert Creeley that he should think of a literary magazine as 'a center [sic] around which, "not a box within which"' (Creeley 1989: 506).[17] These pieces of correspondence not only demonstrate the importance of the communities which gather around small literary magazines, but also dials into a tradition inherited from pre-war modernism to publish in little magazines, such as *The Dial* or *BLAST*. According to Adam McKible, in the 1920s '[l]ittle magazines seemed to pop up daily, racing to print the latest unorthodox ideas or revolutionary platforms' (McKible 2016: 3). Almost one hundred years later in 2017, it is not without literary precedent therefore that Keston Sutherland says in a lecture about contemporary poetry that:

[15] Bloodaxe began life as an underground press, but as is so often the case, it has become one of the institutional poetry publishers in the UK and is supported by funding from Arts Council England.

[16] *The English Intelligencer* was a magazine that circulated correspondence and poetry amongst poets and academics, often with connections to the University of Cambridge, on a closed mailing list from 1966 to 1968. For a detailed account see: Alex Latter. 2015. *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer: On the Poetics of Community.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

[17] *BLAST* was a literary magazine, primarily written and illustrated by Wyndham Lewis, with a provocative manifesto, also containing poetry by Ezra Pound. Two issues were published, one in 1914 and the other in 1915.

> We need...some kind of account of singular intensities which are achieved not at a far distance from social groups, and away from others, away from some kind of flatpack concept of the public, but in the middle of a group. (Sutherland 2017)

It goes without saying that without a receptive community, poetry would be consigned to forgotten dusty manuscript boxes forever. However, a distinction might be discerned from defining who the intended audience might be. Signing a book deal with a publisher like Faber & Faber is a statement of intent. The poet announces their desire to reach as wide a readership as possible (though it is a given that poetry readerships are already a somewhat niche market). The little magazine targets an even more specific readership, often united by identity or geography, or more importantly a shared set of poetic principals.

This overview of British poetry since 1945 has introduced some personal, social, institutional and ideological differences which provide a rudimentary frame of reference to assist with mapping the period. However, it has thus far neglected the most important aspect - the poetry itself. In the introduction to their mammoth six-hundred page Blackwell companion, Wolfgang Görtschacher and David Malcolm emphasise precisely this point: 'the best and fullest engagement with poetry is an engagement, above all, with individual poems' (Görtschacher-Malcolm 2021: 3). This engagement, in their opinion, should be a comprehensive analysis of 'the formal properties of a piece of verse' (Görtschacher-Malcolm 2021: 3). The factional nature of poetry in the UK, already alluded to, can be traced even at the level of form. In *Poetry Wars*, Peter Barry attempts to sketch some of the formal properties of "The British Poetry Revival" in order to provide a flavour of what was considered so controversial about the poetry being published by Mottram in *Poetry Review* during his editorship in the 1970s. He adopts, and expands upon, two distinct taxonomies identified by Ken Edwards in his 2010 essay "The Two Poetries": "The Mainstream" and "The Parallel Tradition". The following description draws upon both Barry's and Edwards' work. Poetry of "The Mainstream" follows a coherent sequential structure, building towards

an epiphanic punch line, which is often the autobiographical reflection of a singular identifiable voice, expressed in the classical metrical forms inherited from the British poetic tradition. Whereas structure in poems from "The Parallel Tradition" is spatial and the reader is relied upon to draw connections between various elements of the poem in different directions. The poem is constantly undermined via the parody of its own language, language which is often drawn from a wide range of discourse, such as scientific and technical jargon, bureaucratic small-print and arcane legalese, and is characterised by a dramatic switching of these registers drawing attention to the materiality of the language it is constructed from. Standard hierarchies of syntactical relation are frequently abandoned or rearranged and punctuation is used inventively. The singular identifiable voice is rejected in favour of a polyphonic chorus of hybrid subjectivities. While it is true that for every poem that exhibits some of these features there will be as many, if not more, exceptions on both sides of the divide. However, these sketches of a mainstream tradition and a parallel one at least provide an entry point, from a formal perspective, into two distinct styles that were emergent during the 1970s. These styles still inform two very different approaches to writing poetry even today.

The remainder of this initial chapter will provide detailed analysis of some individual poems in order to illustrate some of these trends and formal properties, and the influence they have on each other, outlined so far. The scope of this chapter is to provide some beacons, which it is hoped will light the way to a better understanding of the sometimes disconcerting and incomprehensible, yet always exhilarating poetry of Keston Sutherland. Just as *The Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp is in a direct, perhaps confrontational, relationship with the classical tradition of visual art, Sutherland's poetry is a product of the long history of verse in the English language. In *Explaining Postmodernism* Stephen Hicks feels compelled to spell out Duchamp's awareness of tradition:

Duchamp of course knew the history of art. He knew what had been achieved–how over the centuries art had been a powerful vehicle that called upon the highest development of the human creative vision and demanded exciting technical skill; and he knew that art had an awesome power to exalt the senses, the intellects, and the passions of those who experience it. Duchamp reflected on the history of art and decided to make a statement. (Hicks 2004: 196).

In much the same way, it is important to emphasise Sutherand's own awareness of the history of poetry – he too has demonstrably reflected on that history and made his own decisions. The references to other poets that follow, and the defence of Duchamp just referenced, attest to the fact that Sutherland is not alone in his approach to poetry or artistic expression: his poetics has precedence.

The Less Deceived by Philip Larkin is often held up as the example of the sense of diminished importance, nostalgia and discontentment in postwar Britain *par excellence*. Eric Falci suggests that Larkin's poetry, '...displays the less attractive aspects of a little-England postwar mindset', specifically, '...a kind of seething disappointment that registers as sour misanthropy or resigned fear' (Falci 2015: 19). He cites the two miserable lines that bookend both of the stanzas in "Wants" as an expression of this mindset, 'Beyond all this, the wish to be alone'; 'Beneath it all desire of oblivion runs' (Larkin 1988: 52). Though these lines present Larkin at his most misanthropic, it is the first poem in the 1955 collection that reveals the most about the process of expression itself. "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" displays many of the features identified by both Barry and Edwards as "traditional". There is a coherent persona recounting a reflection which moves from a specific object (a photo album) to an epiphanic meditation (that the past is an unattainable idyll). The poem is formally harmonious, it is structured in three acts, each composed of three stanzas, and broadly chimes to the tune of an ABBAB rhyme scheme. At times prosaically descriptive, value is placed, above all, on fidelity of representation. The longing look at photography is testament to this, 'But o, photography! as no art is, | Faithful and disappointing!' (Larkin 1955: 9). Yet maybe there is an art as faithful and disappointing as photography is: Larkin's

own poetry. In the poem photography is lauded for its lack of embellishment, it '…records | Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds, | And will not censor blemishes…' (Larkin 1955: 9). While it may be true that photography is to some extent a "faithful" representation, the idea that it "faithfully" captures the essential nature of its object is highly-contestable. In Part One of *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes initially lends support to Larkin's claim, '...the Photograph always carries its referent with itself...', and in Part Two he doubles down, '…in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*' (Barthes 1980: 5; 76). For Barthes the photograph is unquestionably authentic in this sense. However, the photograph as testament remains uncomplicated for as long as it does not represent '...the body and face of a beloved person' (Barthes 1980: 107). Even though the photograph '...*authenticates* the existence of a certain being… [Barthes] want[s] to discover that being in the photograph completely...in its essence...beyond simple resemblance' (Barthes 1980: 107). There is some essential quality that a person transmits with a look or an expression, that Barthes calls their "air", that a photograph only very rarely manages to capture. The photograph often masks as much as it reveals; it might represent a face, warts and all, but a peculiar angle or an errant shadow could potentially misrepresent that face to a person who cherishes it. If this type of distortion can happen in photography, then the notion of authentic representation in writing is seriously undermined. Unadorned description is no guarantee of realistic representation. For Barthes, a photograph is at least a guarantee that something has existed, writing can give no such guarantees: 'No writing can give me this certainty. It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself' (Barthes 1980: 85).

The unreliable nature of language points to the second quality of photography so admired in this poem, that it is "disappointing". Larkin's poetry aspires to be faithful, but it ends up disappointing this aspiration, it is disappointing on its own terms. There is an ironic tension at play in this poem, as in so much of Larkin's poetry. On the one hand it places value on faithfulness to the object which has been recreated in a work of art, that it '...will not

censor blemishes...', yet on the other its jocular metre and regular rhyme scheme does in fact censor some of the poem's own blemishes (Larkin 1955: 9). The speaker jealously and hungrily devouring the images in the young lady's photograph album might seem more than just '...faintly disturbing...' were the presentation not dressed up in the familiar melody of iambic pentameter and end rhymes. The objectifying gaze of the narrator, whose '...swivel eye hungers from pose to pose...', is sweetened somewhat by the pleasing rhyme which appears three lines later, '...or lifting a heavy-headed rose...' (Larkin 1955: 9). In a rhyming poem, the final word of a line creates an expectation that will find its fulfilment at a later point in the stanza. This pattern, of setting expectations and fulfilling them, generates small moments of satisfaction throughout and gives the poem a sense of harmony, making it seem as reliable as a kept promise. For this reason, the tone of this poem is in contrast with the conclusions it draws, it disappoints the standards it sets for itself. That the photograph authenticates the fact that the young lady really existed as an even younger lady, 'In every sense empirically true!', only makes the bittersweet mourning of the observer more acute, 'you | Contract my heart by looking out of date' (Larkin 1955: 9). The unattainable young lady, who in many ways symbolises the past, is all the more desirable because of her unattainability, held by the past '[u]nvariably lovely there' (Larkin 1955: 9). The narrator both celebrates and grieves the nature of the past, ever more perfect, ever more untouchable, with paradoxical reverence and disappointment which characterises much of Larkin's poetry. Whereas the photographer faithfully records, the poet can merely, '...yowl across | The gap from eye to page' (Larkin 1955: 9). If this is true, the final irony is that "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" does not take the form of a yowl, but rather Larkin's glibly liliting observation that though people may fade, memories remain, especially those captured in his own verse.

This preceding analysis of "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" is by no means a claim that rhyme in poetry is *passé* or that rhyme always distracts from the message

of a poem, rather it is intended to illustrate just one of the uses of rhyme in poetry since 1945. In contrast to what Larkin himself refers to as 'playing off the natural rhythms and word-order of speech against the artificialities of rhyme and metre', is a poem like *Briggflatts* by Basil Bunting (Larkin 1983: 171). Mark Rudman cites *Briggflatts* as an example of how '...rhythm [draws] its sound from the world's body' and how Bunting's '...rhymes have been dictated by the materials...' (Rudman 1990: 154-5). Rhyme, alongside other formal properties of a poem, is not just an artificial feature which helps to distinguish it from prose, but can carry meaning itself. The sound of a word might communicate as much as its denotation or connotation does. Indeed, Bunting, in his essay "The Poet's Point of View", echoes this sentiment exactly:

> Poetry, like music, is to be heard. It deals in sound – long sounds and short sounds, heavy beats and light beats, the tone relations of vowels, the relations of consonants to one another which are like instrumental colour in music. (Bunting 1966: 50)

Far from being artificial, 'words...shovelled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of rhyme-sound' as Ezra Pound states it, sound can also be the object of poetry itself (Pound 1918: 3). The second stanza of Part One of *Briggflatts* commences, 'A mason times his mallet, to a lark's twitter...' (Bunting 1966: 11). The mason, an artisanal analogue for the poet, takes his cue from the lark's birdsong. These are the lines that Rudman uses as evidence of the poet drawing sound from the world, they are a mediation on process, an *ars poetica* of sorts. The mason listens first to the lark 'while the marble rests' before laying 'his rule | at a letter's edge' (Bunting 1966: 11). It is not a preordained metrical pattern that dictates the rhythm of *Briggflatts*, but a metre for the poem is discovered by paying careful attention to the chorus of spring. The parallel drawn between mason and poet implies that death might be a consequence of the act of writing. Experience is entombed within the written word:

> Words!
> Pens are too light.

Take a chisel to write.
Every birth a crime,
Every sentence life.

(Bunting 1966: 15)

Although the narrator seems haunted by the thought that the act of composition, the translation of lived experience into writing, might also trigger the beginning of decomposition, ‘In the grave’s slot | he lies. We rot’, the sonic layers of Part One render the memory very much alive (Bunting 1966: 11). Music infuses much of the opening to *Briggflatts*, from the natural rhythms of the bull dancing tiptoe to the lyric of the river ‘...Rawthey’s madrigal...’ and ‘...a lark’s twitter...’ to human harmonics ‘...laying the tune frankly on the air...’ and ‘Gentle generous voices [woven] | over bare night...’ (Bunting 1966: 11; 14-15). The sounds heard by the two young lovers, though the ear may err, are described:

Under sacks on the stone
two children lie,
hear the horse stale,
the mason whistle,
harness mutter to shaft,
fellow to axle squeak,
rut thud the rim,
crushed grit.

(Bunting 1966: 13)

However, there must be more than onomatopoeic adjectives, such as “squeak” and “thud”, if *Briggflatts* is to be considered a musical piece of verse. The expanded ebook, with two versions recorded by the poet, allows the reader to take Bunting at his word: that *Briggflatts* was intended to be heard. The following lines are especially striking when read by Bunting himself:

Decay thrusts the blade,
wheat stands in excrement
trembling. Rawthey trembles.
Tongue stumbles, ears err
for fear of spring.

(Bunting 1966: 12)

The alliterative quality of the voiced alveolar flap [ɾ], especially audible in Bunting's reading, rolls through the stanza much like the Rawthey rolls through the Cumbrian countryside. There are ten rolled "r" sounds in just five short lines. The tongue is repeatedly forced by the phonemes that compose the words to stumble against the alveolar ridge. There is internal rhyme, "ear" and "fear", and half rhyme, "trembles" and "stumbles", assonance, "ears err", and consonance "for fear". Sounds are repeated like the notes in a scale, rooting the stanza in a particular key.

The contrast between Bunting and Larkin serves to illustrate two very different trends in the application of metre in British poetry since 1945. On the one hand, Larkin attempted to wittily drape everyday speech over the rigid structures of iambic pentameter and regular rhyme schemes. On the other, Bunting took inspiration from an older tradition of alliterative verse, and allowed the sounds of the world to dictate the metre of his poetry, not the other way around.[18] This musical approach to form might also be considered a consequence of Bunting's relationship with Ezra Pound. Among numerous other references to musical composition in his 1918 treaty "The Art of Poetry", Pound claims that '[t]here is...in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base' (Pound 1918: 6-7). That residue of sound began to grow in variety as a number of poets experimented with a wide range of musical influences and metrical possibilities. The belief that form is as important a carrier of meaning as content is central to many poets writing since the Second World War. It is this branch of British poetry which is most relevant to the poetry of Keston Sutherland, and therefore the rest of the examples in this section will be drawn from poets who, to some degree, share this belief.

In addition to being an excellent example of an alternative approach to metre in poetry, *Briggflatts* also exemplifies a peripheral regional identity. Andrew Duncan draws

[18] For more detail on Basil Bunting's literary influences see: Anthony Suter. 1971. "Time and the Literary Past in the Poetry of Basil Bunting." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 510–26.

attention to the significance of rocks and stones as representative of a North and South divide: ‘This asset is marked as regional because there are no mountains in South-East England; the antithesis of soft and hard, so often applied to oppose South and North, was bound to overflow and occupy clay versus rock’ (Duncan 2005: 145). Beyond the geological symbolism, *Briggflatts* also represents the influence of non-standard English on the poetic voice. The epigraph reads, ‘The spuggies are fledged’, translated from ‘[t]he Northumbrian tongue...’ in a note on the text as ‘little sparrows’ (Bunting 1966: 10, 44). Despite the splashes of dialect throughout the poem, as Donald Davie points out, ‘dialect words like “spuggies”...are infrequent grace-notes, the poem is not written in dialect but in standard British English...’ (Davie 1989: 41). However, Bunting does present a challenge to a centralised conception of language, where the centre represents authority and power, and his subtle deployment of linguistic features from the North East and his pronunciation on the recording present an alternative, locally inflected identity as a counterpoint to the central hegemony. This is the thrust of Stefan Hawlin’s essay “Bunting’s Northumbrian Tongue: Against the Monument of the Centre” where he concludes that: ‘[Bunting] composes in the language he naturally spoke, not dialect, but not “the koiné we are all taught to use now”. To do otherwise would have betrayed the relation of language to community and living speech’ (Hawlin 1995: 113).

Many other poets have also composed in the languages they naturally spoke and they too reinforced the connection between language and community, living speech and also emergent minority identities. For a period in the 1960s and 1970s, Scottish poet Edwin Morgan, experimented with “concrete” and “sound” poetry.[19] However, as Greg Thomas points out, Morgan’s experiments were unique because they ‘always [evoked] specific speech patterns and sound-worlds, often Scottish ones’ (Thomas 2019: 148). His use of Scots dialect

[19] Concrete poetry typically involved a sort of image made out of printed type and varying typography whereas sound poetry privileged the phonetic aspects of language over semantic ones.

and Gaelic place-names mark the construction and performance of a uniquely Scottish identity. “Canedolia: an off-concrete Scotch fantasia”, first published in *The Second Life*, has a call-and-response structure, where standard English is calling and Scots and Gaelic place-names are responding: ‘*what is it like there?* | och it’s freuchie, it’s faifley, it’s wamphray, it’s frandy, it’s sliddery’ (Morgan 2020: 19). Freuchie is a village in Fife, Faifley an estate in the town of Clydebank, Wamphray is a parish in Dumfries and Galloway, Frandy an alternative name for the Glendevon reservoir, and Sliddery a hamlet on the Isle of Arran. These localities are heralded by that familiar Scots exclamation “och”. There is a playful repurposing of Scottish toponyms as Morgan exploits the resemblance of the “-y” (and “-ie”) endings to standard English adjectives; the names seem like they could be appropropriate responses to the question: “what is it like there?” (“Sliddery” brings a treacherous muddy incline to mind thanks to its similarity to the words “slippery” and “slide”, for example.) Thomas suggests that this grouping is dictated by ‘formal or emotive association’ much in the way that other practitioners of sound poetry were interested primarily by the noises that words make (Thomas 2019: 149). However, the fact that the place names point to real geographical locations is politically significant for Thomas:

> ...the poem’s noisiness encases specific evocations of space and place, as in the word “Canedolia” itself, a mangled version of “Caledonia”, the Roman term for the unconquerable northern half of Britannia. Bearing in mind this allusion, the Celtic place-names perhaps become subtly triumphant markers of Scotland’s historic resistance to empire. (Thomas 2019: 149)

The peculiar idiolect of the poet has the potential to make the most intensely political statements. Bunting’s “Northumbrian tongue” carries an anti-centric view of language, Morgan’s use of dialect and Celtic place-names embodies the postcolonial conversation about the relationship between Scotland and the English language.

The bonds of language to community, and of its role in the construction of identity, are nowhere more evident than in the poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson. The “dub” poet,

sometimes known also as LKJ, is synonymous with a distinctly British-Jamaican voice, which has become symbolic of resistance to oppression. Building upon Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a process which takes place *within* representation, Dilek Sarikaya argues that 'Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry is committed to constructing a collective black identity' (Sarikaya 2011: 163). Indeed, this commitment is stated boldly in many of LKJ's poems. "Yout Rebels", first published in *Dread, Beat and Blood* in 1975, opens with the announcement that 'a bran new breed of blacks | have now emerged' (Johnson 1975: 21). Beyond mere statement, however, LKJ's linguistic choices reinforce the intention of constructing a collective black British identity. The last stanza of "Yout Rebels" illustrates this:

young blood
yout rebels
new shapes
shapin
new patterns
creatin new links
linkin
blood risin surely
carvin a new path,
movin fahwood to freedom.

(Johnson 1975: 21)

The 'new shapes' and 'new patterns' woven by the poet create a space in which minority voices might find themselves expressed. These "new shapes" and "patterns" might be a reference to the short two and three syllable lines of the poem itself. Nothing is static in this poetry, the standard nouns "shapes" and "links" are immediately followed by the verbal nouns "shapin" and "linkin" as fixed objects are transformed into active processes. Six of the twenty-words are gerunds, all of which have lost their gs. The th-stopping, like in"yout", and the g-dropping, like in "creatin", are graphical approximations of the sounds of Jamaican English - forward has been transliterated as "fahwood" for example. Traditional iambic rhythms are set bouncing by the syllable-timed nature of Johnson's Creole verse.

Not only does language have the ring of authenticity in Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry, it is also rooted in place and time. Much as for Bunting and Morgan, place-names provide concrete loci for Linton Kwesi Johnson. "Five Nights of Bleeding" is a geographically specific poem sketching a map of London in the 1970s. The majority of the events take place in Brixton, where streets are named, 'RAILTON ROAD', and pubs and clubs are named too, 'SHEPHERD'S', 'THE RAINBOW', and 'THE TELEGRAPH' (Johnson 1975: 16-17). Geographer Edward Relph defines "place" as 'those fragments of human environments where meanings, activities and a specific landscape are all implicated and enfolded by each other' (Relph 1993: 37). "Shepherd's" refers to the Railton Road Methodist church and community centre named after Guyana-born Gavton Shepherd, who devoted much of his life to supporting Black teenagers in Britain (Mason 2011). The fact that the community centre is referred to by his name already demonstrates the living nature of place; the place is synonymous with the man who brought it to life for the young people who spent their time there. These place-names, which are the setting for a period of infighting and police brutality in the Caribbean community in the early-seventies, become meaningful and take on almost mythical status in the way that certain Mediterranean islands do in classical literature. The '[w]ar amongs' the rebels' unfolds across several specific landscapes over five nights before finally '[v]engeance walk thru de doors' at The Telegraph on Brixton Hill (Johnson 1975: 16-17). The poem nominates places (street names, restaurants, and sound clash venues) which all fit Relph's definition, they are specific landscapes that were host to a series of events that ultimately gave historical significance to them. These places become local institutions, far more than just restaurants and pubs they satisfy multiple needs and become sites for sharing a common set of cultural practices, such as language, food, music, housekeeping tips, bureaucracy hacks, legal advice, and childcare to name only a few of their functions. However, the definition also fits "Five Nights of Bleeding", the poem itself might be considered a "place". It too is a vessel for shared common cultural practices, the events are

recorded in a familiar tongue, injustices are memorialised, and its audience might very well recognise themselves within the verse and feel at home within the poetry. Finally, as the maxim goes, nothing unites a community quicker than a common enemy. The poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson has a cast of villains who perform that role: 'di Special Patrol', 'di riot squad', 'tree policemen, | di hole a dem carrying batan', 'wicked men sitting in the seats of judgement', 'Maggi Tatcha', and even 'Inglan' itself (Johnson 2006). The resolve to remain united, the territorial lines of "us" and "them" are nowhere more evidently drawn than in "It Dread inna Inglan":

far no mattah wat dey say
come wat may,
we are here to stay
inna Inglan

(Johnson 1981: 14)

Fear and solidarity are matted together in the word "Dread", which is a pun referencing both dreadlocks and awe-inducing apprehension. The second person plural pronoun on the third line forces the reader to make a choice. Either it is an "inclusive *we*" and the reader identifies with the oppressed group, who rallied around George Lindo, wrongfully charged with robbery in 1978, or it is an "exclusive *we*" and they identify with "dem", the oppressors, the other. Identities are formed by a series of such decisions and Linton Kwesi Johnson frequently requires the reader to make them. It is a poetry of strong identity and a poetry that forges strong identities.

The strength of identity in the poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson provides a stark point of contrast with the final poet under consideration in this section. Whereas LKJ has crystallised "poetic identity", like a diamond, so that it functions as a razor sharp weapon of self-defence, for J.H. Prynne "poetic identity" represents creative constriction. In a rare interview for "The Art of Poetry" feature of *The Paris Review*, Prynne and his interviewers,

Jeff Dolven and Joshua Kotin, discuss a poetry reading they have just attended. Prynne laments:

> I want a poet to break out of his or her poetic identity, to establish a whole new set of possibilities for the reader and for him- or herself. To hear poems that must have been written by a poet is to find them trapped in the poetic habits from which they originate. (Prynne 2016)

Indeed, the inability to identify a singularly recognisable and coherent poetic voice somewhat characterises Prynne's poetry. In their critical introduction *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne*, N.H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge suggest that the coexistence of the recognisably poetic alongside the 'disconcertingly unpoetic' are introduced '...through a process of intercutting, or repeated interruption, so that no single voice, and apparently no line of sense, is allowed to last for too long' (Reeve-Kerridge 1995: 1). A possible reason for this disruption and self-sabotage might be explained as a resistance to being trapped in poetic habits, as a bursting forth from the limits of identity. For Reeve and Kerridge the writing 'seems to be breaking out of the institutional space allotted to poetry and literature in late-capitalist culture', though there is an argument to be made that the writing is also breaking out of the intimate space allotted to traditionally poetic thought by the poet themselves (Reeve-Kerridge 1995: 1). They show his resistance to the artificial opposition set up between the sentimental domain of poetry and literature, and the dispassionate and empirical sphere of science and technology, suggesting that this resistance manifests itself as a virtuosic switching between vastly varied linguistic realms. Prynne's rejection of the compartmentalisation of experience into artificial categories, like "arts" and "sciences", is shown to be built upon a critique of 'the ways in which capitalism commodifies knowledge and makes discourses instrumental in the operation of power-structures' (Reeve-Kerridge 1995: 4). It is not poetry that can be easily packaged, like scotch or tobacco, it is not poetry that distils and strips identity into a neat final product that might find a prefabricated consumer base of those who identify with it.

An alternative to this construction of identity, which privileges an intimate and singular voice, is performed and posited in "Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self" from *Kitchen Poems* first published in 1968. As Eric Falci suggests, in Prynne's poetry, 'the subject, [is] no longer a site of plentitude or knowledge, nor a locus of modernist fracture, nor a postmodern hollow, but rather a wavering and unstable effect of the structures of late capitalism' (Falci 2015: 106-7). The first stanza establishes two fundamental tenets for this "financial theory of self" which take the form of two interwoven motifs - silk and the stars. Language itself, the act of naming both concrete objects and abstract concepts, is associated with these motifs. Astronomers estimate that most of the stars visible to the naked eye are about four-thousand light years away from earth, and as a consequence the 'celestial routine' appears as it was four-thousand years ago (Prynne 1968: 19). So when Prynne says, 'The name is the sidereal display, it | is what we *know* we cannot now have', words themselves are drawn into a parallel relationship with these signals of light transmitted to earth several millennia in the past. The adjective, "sidereal", is not only an example of this because it refers literally to light-years, 'of a period of time: determined or measured with reference to the apparent passage of the stars across the sky', but also because it too carries a residue of the past in both its Latin (*sīdereus*) and Middle French (-al suffix) etymological origins (OED Online 2021). Like stars, language can be echo of that which it renders visible or knowable across a temporal distance. This conceit raises questions about the ability of language to effectively represent that which it attempts to signify, and as a consequence it also challenges the capacity of poetry to contain a coherent expression of self. Theodor Adorno says of Samuel Beckett's characters in *Endgame* that, 'all subject matter appears to be the sign of an inner sphere, but the inner sphere of which it would be a sign no longer exists, and the signs do not point to anything else' (Adorno 1991: 251). Just like the stars in Prynne's poem, they are supposedly signified but they no longer exist, they are testament to their non-existence: 'The last light is the name it carries | it is this binds us to our unbroken trust' (Prynne 2015:

19). Jessica Maynard reads this blind faith in traces of that which no longer exists as faintly farcical: 'Our trust, then, is founded on the illumination of doomed stars, and is, for that reason "absurd"' (Maynard 2013: 44). This might be true for Samuel Beckett, whose plays and novels are always populated by absurdly comical casts, however in this poem Prynne's objective is not laughter. This absurdity is an invitation to be attentive to the 'trickery' inherent in language, and especially to the 'tricks we | trust, which | we choose' (Prynne 2015: 20).

"Sketch for a Financial Theory of Self" is not short of its own trickery, rich as it is with financial puns: 'trust', 'account', 'margin', 'city', 'value', 'bond and contract and interest', 'coin', 'vault', and 'return' (Prynne 2015: 19-20). Reeve and Kerridge suggest that puns, in Prynne, play a vital role in '...the collapsing of elevated ideas…' and that '[w]hen the two meanings combined in the pun conjure up two enormously different scales, the pun's integrity becomes all the more mischievous and mockingly simple' (Reeve-Kerridge 1995: 14-15). The word "trust" is repeated seven times and understanding this pun is clearly fundamental to a wider understanding of this poem. It can mean '[f]irm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something' but also '[a] legal arrangement whereby assets, property, etc., are put in the possession of a trustee or trustees to be held or administered for the benefit of another' (OED Online 2021). The secondary, financial, definition lurks threateningly beneath the former more generic one, though its discovery is certainly aided by the title of the poem. Prynne uses these puns to urge his readers to reassess the language of everyday transactions and to scrutinise it for traces of capitalist structures. Maynard also observes the role of trust as a linchpin for all the diverse systems represented in the poem: 'It is trust, or a cultural undertaking to take certain things on faith, that drives all these systems (a word, a banknote, a social ritual is taken to denote a certain value)' (Maynard 2013: 43). The fourth stanza makes this explicit:

4. The name of that is of course money, and
the absurd trust in value is the pattern of
bond and contract and interest–just where
the names are exactly equivalent to the trust
given to them.

(Prynne 2015: 19)

The formation of communities, currency, culture and language, are all systems that are worth exactly as much as the amount of faith put into them. Even the construction of self is interpolated by consumerism, building identity is a process of identifying with external objects, making choices and believing in those choices: 'we give the name of our selves to our needs. | We want what we are' (Prynne 2015: 20). In a consumerist society, self is a collage woven from our desires and caprices. Not only do we want what we are but we *are* what we want.

The second motif is silk. It also contains two vastly different scales, representing both the macrohistorical (the Silk Road) and the microbiological (the production of protein fibres by silkworms). Combining two opposing scales is a common technique evident in Prynne's poetry, a combination often contained within a single word, as evidenced previously by Reeve and Kerridge's analysis of the importance of puns. In "On Lyric Poetry and Society", Theodor Adorno argues that: '...immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem to the status of something universal by making manifest something not distorted, not grasped, not yet subsumed' (Adorno 1991: 38). The idea is repeated throughout the essay, later suggesting that certain privileged poets 'grasp the universal through immersion in the self' (Adorno 1991: 45). Self is a unique expression of "what has taken individual form", it is not concerned with psychology, or explicit social critique, it represents an 'idiosyncratic opposition' to the dominant structures of society (Adorno 1991: 40). The atomic particularity of self contains a universe which has not yet been corrupted by 'the domination of human beings by commodities'. This conception of self is dramatically played out in this poem. It begins, '[t]he qualities as they continue are the silk under the hand' (Prynne 2015: 19).

“Quality” designates ‘[a] personal attribute, a trait, a feature of a person's character’ when used as a noun, but ‘a degree of excellence’ when used as an adjective (OED Online 2007). The former definition is harmonious with individual form and idiosyncrasy, whereas the latter speaks of the effect of those attributes and traits when considered in their totality. In the poem these “qualities” are silk; silk becomes a metaphor for self in this way. The individual strands, produced by silkworms, are spun into a precious and lustrous whole; the singular is elevated to the universal. In this way, silk also functions as a marker of the arbitrary manner in which products, and even individuals, are assigned value. Why do fibres produced by certain insect larvae generate so much value? The poem provides an answer: ‘...silk is a random but | by tradition a costly gift. Quality is habit’ (Prynne 2015: 20). Tradition and habit establish the value of products, of people, and of cultures. This poem demands a critical reassessment of this inherited set of cultural assumptions about self and about poetry itself too. The poem performs this reassessment by breaking with tradition. Maynard makes the case for a dramatic tension between the looseness implied by “sketch” in the title and the systematic numbering system which orders each stanza (Maynard 2013: 43). However, it is not only the numbered stanzas that give this poem its idiosyncratic peculiarity. The third stanza makes reference to ‘...the pure margin | which *are* the trust we | deserve’ (Prynne 2015: 19). “Margin” emphatically carries both a financial and poetical meaning. Poetically speaking, Prynne throws doubt on any conception of the *purity* of the margin by deploying varying lengths of indentation as the beginnings of his lines. The numbers are in line with the title, the first line of each stanza begins about four spaces after the numbers, but the rest of the lines just one, and in stanzas three, four, and five there are two different large indentations employed, one just before the centre of the page and the other begins from the centre itself. Indeed, the line which refers to ‘pure margin’ begins from the centre of the page (Prynne 2015: 19). This unusual use of layout is resistant to the inherited forms of the lyric poem, imbuing the poem with its own uniquely individual form. However, the white space is also a

reminder of the unstable external pressures applied upon language and expression by the social structures which shape and instrumentalise it.

It is not by accident that J.H. Prynne is the final poet under consideration in this initial section. Keston Sutherland submitted his PhD thesis, "J.H. Prynne and Philology", at the University of Cambridge in 2004. At Cambridge, Sutherland had the opportunity to grow close to Prynne, as he says in an interview for online innovative poetry journal Blackfold Manifold:

> For us it was a friendship from the start, and from the start the friendship was invaluable to me. A friendship. It felt like we just walked straight out of the pages of Plato's *Symposium* into the catastrophe of capital, and it still sometimes feels like that right now. We're still and always will be very close. (Sutherland 2015)

Influence, for Sutherland, is not a matter of inheritance and he is suspicious of the term "mentor", describing Prynne's role in his own development as a poet as: 'extraordinary, inexhaustibly generous encouragement to conceive poetry...' making '...it possible to feel and to believe that poetry really could be the most important thing I could do' (Sutherland 2015). The reference to *Symposium*, that touchstone of dialogic discussion, brings *The English Intelligencer* back into focus: '...an active interchange of energy of new composition and of new ideas' (Prynne 2016: 190). Any investigation of the influence of J.H. Prynne on the poetry of Keston Sutherland must be conducted in this spirit. While it would be impossible to deny the importance of Prynne as a model for Sutherland, it would also be reductive to depict the relationship as master and disciple. The following section will sketch the evolution of Sutherland's poetics against the backdrop of the trends in British Poetry considered in this preliminary section.

2.2 Poet-Scholar: Keston Sutherland, a Critical Biography

Born in Bristol in 1976, Keston Sutherland, perhaps surprisingly, '...grew up in a house with very few books...' and came to poetry '...fairly late in life, about sixteen...' (Sutherland 2019). Although the desire to '...materialis[e] an infatuation with someone who lived in the same dreary cul-de-sac...' resulted in '...inscribing words on pieces of paper...[and]...plagiarising lyrics from love songs...at around twelve or thirteen...' (Sutherland 2019). No matter how disfigured his poetry can seem at times, it is vital to always keep Sutherland's belief that '[a]ll of [his] poems are love poems' in mind (Sutherland 2019). As hinted at in previous sections, Sutherland grew close to J.H. Prynne (his doctoral thesis was entitled "J.H. Prynne and Philology") at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he completed a BA in 1997 and a PhD in 2014 spending a year at Harvard as the Joseph Hodges Choate Fellow in between.[20] This relationship with the elder poet clearly had a significant impact on the development of the younger, as he reveals in an interview with John Tamplin: '[Prynne] has made me the gift over the years of a number of very instructive, generous, and powerfully insightful letters about my poetry, from which I've benefited indescribably and for which I'll forever be grateful' (Sutherland 2015). The University of Cambridge was the setting for many significant relationships for Sutherland; during his time as a student he founded Barque Press, together with Andrea Brady, in 1995:[21]

> It was a very exciting moment in Cambridge, and I remember feeling intoxicated, surrounded by so many dizzyingly difficult and formidable poets. I wanted nothing more than to levitate into their ranks. I thought that by starting this, I was joining a culture of gift exchange, a culture of militant samizdat exclusion from the circuits of mainstream publication. (Sutherland 2013)

[20] The Joseph Hodges Choate Fellow is a scholarship at Harvard University awarded to a student from the University of Cambridge, allowing them to study in their Graduate School of Arts and Sciences for one year.

[21] Andrea Brady is an active American poet. She founded Barque Press with Keston Sutherland in 1995. She is now Professor of Poetry at Queen Mary, University of London where she curates "The Archive of the Now", a large digital database of performances by experimental poets: https://www.archiveofthenow.org/

Its website describes the press as ‘a publisher of non-conformist poetry’, publishing ‘over 40 chapbooks and six perfect bound books’, and listing J.H. Prynne, Chris Goode, Peter Manson, John Wilkinson, and Sutherland and Brady themselves, amongst its authors (Barque Press). The press was also responsible for *Quid*, ‘an occasional journal of poetics, criticism, invective, and investigation. Made to the least exacting standards and distributed in a flurry of necessity and relevance: name = cost = image’ (Barque Press). His friendship with Prynne, launching Barque Press with Brady, and his editorship of the little magazine *Quid*, are all signs that Keston Sutherland might in some way belong to “the parallel tradition” outlined earlier in reference to independent work by Peter Barry and Ken Edwards.

As an academic, Sutherland has worked at the University of Sussex since 2004, regularly teaching courses on lyric poetry, writing poetry, Samuel Beckett, and Marxism and creative writing. He has published articles and given lectures on a diverse range of poets, including John Donne, Alexander Pope, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Walt Whitman, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ezra Pound, Frank O’Hara, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, John Wilkinson, Chris Goode, Chris Emery, Sean Bonney, Andrea Brady, Verity Spott, and, of course, J.H. Prynne.[22] His critical interests include Georg Willhelm Friedrich Hegel, Theodor Adorno, and Karl Marx, the latter an omnipresent spectre in both his poetry and his research. However, poetry and criticism are not two hermetically sealed categories and Sutherland traces their interrelation in his numerous studies on Karl Marx. His essay “Marx in Jargon” emphasises the inseparability of Marx’s literary style and his political critique:

> ...Marx was not simply the theorist of capital and of social existence under capital, but also the author of an immensely daring and complicated *satire on social existence under capital*...in which risks and failures of style are arguments in themselves, irreducible to theoretical propositions (Sutherland 2011: 36)

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[22] Unsurprisingly, this list includes many poets Sutherland would also consider close personal friends. There is Andrea Brady, Verity Spott who runs the open-mic poetry night at The Black Dove pub in Brighton where Sutherland frequently performs, and Sean Bonney with whom he shared a stage in 2011 at the Rich Mix arts centre in East London.

The arguments in "Marx in Jargon" provide an illuminating perspective on the satirical elements of Keston Sutherland's poetry. There is also a parallel, in that Sutherland's own critique of the pressures applied by capital on the poetic subject is also irreducible to theory. The two spheres in which he is active, writing poetry and writing criticism, his roles as poet and as academic, are mutually beneficial. His poems are as much shaped by his criticism as his criticism is shaped by his poems and so on. These two spheres become more intrinsically connected as the years advance. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relative success Sutherland has enjoyed in the United States. In 2013 he was appointed Holloway Poetry Fellow, at the University of California, Berkeley, which involved a residency to teach a semester-long creative writing workshop, and two years later as the Bain-Swiggett Professor of Poetry at Princeton. These lectureships in poetry were not only academic career opportunities but also gave Sutherland a platform to perform his poetry for a transatlantic audience removed from some of the parochial prejudices outlined in the first section of this study.

On precisely one of these occasions John Wilkinson introduces Sutherland, before a lecture at the University of Chicago, as 'a Marxist poetic critic: ...a poetic critic of Marx and a Marxist critic of poetry...' (Sutherland 2016). A presentation of Sutherland's poetry that neglected to illustrate its deeply felt political imperatives would fall well short of the mark. Indeed, in an interview with Natalie Ferris, for *The White Review* in 2013, Sutherland's tone verges on that of the radical political manifesto, declaring: '[i]t remains, nonetheless, the horizon of my poetry to attempt to express with the maximum conceivable and liveable pressure an absolutely imperative need for the comprehensive revolutionary transformation of human experience and relations' (Sutherland 2013). This sentiment echoes the link drawn in the previous section between Theodor Adorno and J.H. Prynne, that is: '...immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem to the status of something universal by making manifest something not distorted, not grasped, not yet subsumed' (Adorno 1991: 38).

Any universal political influence that Sutherland's poetry has the potential to exert might be evident on an intimate, interpersonal level. Later in the same interview, returning to the theme, he charges capital with 'adulterat[ing] all of our relations with each other, even the most intimate' expressing the subsequent desire: 'I want to turn those relations inside out and aggressively, beautifully, passionately and frantically find the most copious account I can make of how we can live together in a more profoundly generous way' (Sutherland 2013). Politics in this poetry is unavoidable. It is both the external pressures turned inside out and found as exploded fragments throughout the poems and also the profound desire that the poems might affect change, that they might create a 'vibrant communist public culture' (Sutherland 2013). Therefore, the following overview of the evolution of Sutherland's poetry necessarily incorporates some illustration of the local and global political moments which have shaped the society in which it was written. The study, in general, will also put some of these declarations to the test. Is Sutherland successful on these terms?

In his review of *Poetical Works 1999-2005*, Julian Murphet identifies three phases in the evolution of the poetry contained within the volume: 'the Cambridge years', 'a transition period', and 'a shift into block writing' (Murphet 2020). It is a broad overview that provides a convenient framework for presenting the span of Keston Sutherland's poetic production. The two collections published since the release of *Poetical Works* in 2015, *Whither Russia* (2017) and *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020), might represent a fourth phase. However, these phases require a little more critical definition. Some of the standout characteristics of this poetry, at different stages of its germination during all of these phases, are defined in the "British Poetry Issue" of *Chicago Review* by Sam Ladkin, Robin Purves, Simon Jarvis, and Matt Ffytche (2007). The first characteristic, which almost leaps off the page, is a '...self-administered warping...' (Ladkin-Purves 2007: 12) or the sensation that '[t]he poem is mutilating itself...' (Jarvis 2007: 143). This effect is produced by an innovative use of syntax, at times almost asyntactic, atypical indentation patterns and line breaks, and a deliberate

resistance to the regular application of canonical metres (although they do make appearances).

The alternating line breaks in *Mincemeat Seesaw* (1999) interlock, appearing on the page like the gears in a piece of industrial machinery or the ridges formed by the movement of the continental plates. In the eighth poem of "Fit B", the Alps are in fact the setting. They appear, covertly, in a scrap of "Descriptive Sketches Taken During a Pedestrian Tour in the Alps" by William Wordsworth (italicised in the subsequent quotation):

a secular upward trend in vapid glee
                    as *flowers their idle sweets exhale*, relays
love to the fathomed packhorse so-and-so,
                    the bees drowse out, investment peaks and suds
(Sutherland 2015: 68)

These lines not only contain an allusion to Romanticism, but the metre itself is regular, "poetic" even. Lines three and four are made of five perfect iambic feet, for example. However, this regularity does not last for long and, as Jarvis demonstrates, the last line of the poem is an unwieldy fifteen stress '...spanner [in] the works...' (Jarvis 2007: 140): 'as you see fit to lunge at it, timing a gag in the dark' (Sutherland, 2015: 68). Jarvis presents two clear arguments, (a) if you take the trouble to break something you demonstrate how much it means to you, and (b) metre built on a pattern of predictability might have a sedative effect on the alertness of the reader (Jarvis 2007: 140-141). He argues that one of the motivations of Wordsworth and Coleridge for breaking with traditional metre was precisely to keep the reader on their toes, and that Sutherland is doing the same. The irregular shifts in the metre demand careful attention. Take the first lines of the first poem in "Fit C": 'That day the rays through cloud racks broke | in and in time their careless proof' (Sutherland 2015: 75). Both lines would appear to run smoothly, they are made of four iambic feet, yet the line break conspires to impede the flow of the verse. The enjambment has split the phrasal verb, "break

in”, across two lines. The unusual phrase, “in and in”, is carbuncular unless one takes the trouble to reunite the first of the two prepositions with its verb at the end of the previous line. Semantic sense has been subjugated to the demands of the metrical pattern.

Sutherland’s use of line breaks, especially in the first and second phases of his evolution, has a paradoxical double effect. In one sense they accelerate the poem in a flurry of short and immediate bursts:

I will make it all fit
when I ran
out able and alarmed, battered

(Sutherland 2015: 75)

The lines have the immediacy and energy of the present moment, the line breaks creating micro-moments of suspense that urge the reader on. In another sense, they decelerate the pace of the poem, making it always necessary to look backwards to be sure that the first word of a line does not in fact belong to the previous line like it does in the example above. “When I ran” makes sense semantically and nudges the reading onwards, “out able and” does not make sense in isolation and requires some retroactive problem solving: “When I ran | out”. This effect is not always so clean cut and sometimes the first word after a line break belongs to both lines, as line nine of this poem declares: ‘I have it both ways’ (Sutherland 2015: 75). There is an example of this ambiguity in the tenth poem of “Fit B”: ‘but would I lie | down to this end’ (Sutherland 2015: 70). Two readings are simultaneously possible, there could be two fragments as the line break would suggest, “would I lie?” followed by “down to this end”, or as the unified interrogative, “would I lie down to this end?” In this way both variations of the verb, lying and lying down, are held together in an uneasy balance. As is so often the case with avant-garde art, there is more to the title of this poem, “Mincemeat Seesaw”, than first meets the eye. The seesaw, a long plank supported on a pivot, not only suggests an uneasy balance but also the rapid changes which characterise the rhythm of this

poetry. It is also a compound of both the present tense, "see", and the past tense, "saw" reflecting both the present urgency and retrospective reflection which are bound up simultaneously throughout the collection: '...I can see | to it to see saw fear, desire' (Sutherland 2015: 68).

This unstable amalgamation of present and past brings the second characteristic into focus, what Jarvis calls, '...violent shifts of register' (Jarvis 2007: 139). The eighth poem of "Fit B" is again a fertile example. The direct allusion to Wordsworth on the second line, and plausibly to the poem "Mayakovsky" by Frank O'Hara on the twelfth ('...the fist in your heart...'), are residues from the past cut together abruptly with that most modern of linguistic registers, financial jargon (Sutherland 2015: 68). At this early stage, in 1999, the phrases are limited to two or three relatively straightforward words and concepts, 'upward trend', 'investment peaks', and 'trended variables' (Sutherland 2015: 68). The discourse of finance will come to shape much of Sutherland's poetic practice, just as it will come to shape society in a material way. What purpose do both of these anti-aesthetic, anti-lyrical, "self-mutilating" characteristics serve? Ladkin and Purves suggest that this '...necessary obscurity of poetic language...' in Sutherland's poetry, '...derives from Adorno, who argues that forms of communicative discourse that help to sustain structures of unequal exchange must be dismantled and rearranged in ways not assimilable to the interests of consumer capitalism' (Adorno 1991: 12). In other words, poetry which is committed to a critique of consumer capitalism must be written in language that cannot be readily appropriated by consumer capitalists. Advertising slogans are an example of this type of appropriation. A blatant example is the 2009 Levi's television advertisement which repurposes the opening of "America" by Walt Whitman, playing an audio clip of a performance of the poem in the background (quite literally what is believed to be a wax recording of Whitman speaking himself).[23] In contrast, it is a bit of a stretch to imagine lines from "Mincemeat Seesaw" read

[23] The advert can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdW1CjbCNxw

seductively over an edgy McDonald's advert for instance. Although poetic language is not always so brazenly appropriated, there are other indirect ways in which poetry might support the structures of consumer capitalism. The irony that Wordsworth's celebration of the 'deeper quietness' of the promontory at Briers Brow in *The Prelude* has done more to raise the volume of tourists to Lake Windermere than any advertising executive might dare to dream possible, represents a more typical example of how poetic language is assimilated (Wordsworth 1979: 144). Keston Sutherland deliberately sabotages his moments of intimate lyric beauty, of which there are plenty, in order to guard against their distortion, expropriation, and subsumption by the structures they were written in antipathy to.

During a seminar about form, delivered at New York University in 2007, Sutherland sketches a phenomena in contemporary British poetry from around 2003 which he tentatively proposes might be a response to the invasion of Iraq and the so-called "war on terror". While it would be next to impossible to know precisely, the number of people who marched through London on 15 February 2003, on a day of global protest, is often quoted as being 'around a million' (BBC News 2003). Sutherland suggests it was two million. He notes that of the poets in his circle, all were involved in the anti-war movement to a greater or lesser extent. The phenomena which emerges in the immediate aftermath of the protests, and of the invasion itself, is described as:

> ...a kind of split poetical subject...characterised by, on the one hand an aggressively interiorised pathos, so a subject which squared up to histories of individual unhappiness and trauma by ruthlessly examining personal histories of failure, sadness, and loss, and disaster etc. and which then at the same time...projected similarly aggressively a kind of satirically overextended, extremely aggressive polemic outward against UK and American foreign policy. (Sutherland 2015)

The poetical subject contains both an intensely interior individuality and an aggressively polemic relationship with the exterior world. These two contradictory scales and energies are violently intercut in much of the poetry during the immediate aftermath of the "war on terror". This conflict evolves in Sutherland's own production, about which he is explicit in a

2015 interview, '[i]t is not just knocking two objects against each other, privacy and the world: they are the same, there is an intrinsic conflict' (Sutherland 2015). This "intrinsic conflict", between personal and geopolitical trauma, can be traced in Sutherland's own production from around 2001 onwards.

Originally published as the editorial, "Edit Chant" in *Quid 8i and 8ii*, "Ejector Vacua Axle" is a response to the attack on the World Trade centre on September 11. It certainly fits the description, "extremely aggressive polemic outward against UK and American foreign policy". Directly manipulating text from a report written by the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security in 1997, which recommends automated passenger profiling in airports, Sutherland meditates that in a post-9/11 world, 'we are all now | the small minority about whom we do not | know enough and who merit additional | attention' (Sutherland 2015: 124). This coldly "objective", bureaucratic euphemism sits alongside echoes of rhetorical bombast in the poem, '...defend this way | of life...' and 'this is a war on terror', and gruesome, corporeal images, '[f]oam flourishing out the mouth...', 'gluey teeth sprout...', '...sliced-open plasticine eyeball', 'glad severed hands leap about', and 'ripped heads off' (Sutherland 2015: 122-124). A clear causality is implied between these contrasting registers, the analytical language of a report or 'rubble-mouthed' presidential magniloquence are implicated as directly responsible for the severed hands and ripped-off heads, they are words which '[dispatch] a blow-kiss to | the proposed exit wound' (Sutherland 2015: 122, 123). This proposes a dilemma for a poet: if language can be '...lubricated into a kind of hate-crime pathos', how might language, specifically the language of poetry, guard itself against becoming 'a kind of hate-crime pathos' of its own? (Sutherland 2015: 126). "Ejector Vacua Axle" presents this catch-22 towards its close:

                    This is the requirement
to live as a conscript to indifference,
throwing violent words against their own edges
wrappers, twisted bogus in intense felt

sorrow over that obligation.

(Sutherland 2015: 126)

The phrase "conscript to indifference" describes a condition in which many in the Global North might find themselves, compelled to tacitly endorse "their way of life" (stocked supermarket shelves, or a stress free airport experience on the way to an annual summer holiday perhaps), while maintaining a necessary and an, at most, indifferent pity for those disadvantaged people who make their way of life even possible. What options does a conscientious objector to indifference have? Perhaps, 'throwing violent words against their own edges[?]' (Sutherland 2015: 126) This is an apt description of "Ejector Vacua Axle" itself, with its "violent shifts in register" grinding against one another. The juxtapositions serve to illustrate the covert barbarity of official discourse. However, the poem recognises its own limits. Words are "wrappers", brightly coloured twists of plastic and aluminium packaging, embellishment for the meanings they contain. They can be manipulated to understate the violence of a system that maintains high standards of comfort commensurate with high levels of suffering in other places. Yet they can also be manipulated to express an 'intense felt sorrow' about the inescapable nature of such a system (Sutherland 2015: 126). What is this poem if not an expression of intensely felt sorrow, albeit an intensely felt sorrow which is savagely satirised, about the violence that would inevitably follow the September 11 attacks? The poem powerfully leads the way into this paradox but perhaps struggles to lead the way out.

"Ejector Vacua Axle" does not so much split poetic subjectivity as reject it entirely. By 2004, Sutherland brings this outward-facing political vitriol into contact with a more private description of personal suffering. The invasion of Iraq appears to have had a lasting impact on Sutherland, as he says: '...the war in Iraq was to me profoundly traumatic and it happened to coincide with a period when I was severely depressed and barely hanging on to life' (Sutherland 2019). For Sutherland, the war in Iraq represents an intersection of the

personal and the global. This war, and specifically some of the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, become touchstones for almost all the volumes of poetry he came to write, *Neutrality* (2004), *Neocosis* (2005), *Hot White Andy* (2007), and *Stress Position* (2009) in particular. The hyperviolently satirical "Song of the Wanking Iraqi", published in *Neutrality*, draws a parallel between the consumption of pornography and a perceived hunger, from the West, for the type of gratuitous images of sexual torture like those which emerged from the prison in Abu Ghraib, just west of Baghdad. The title, besides its immediately provocative impact (poems are not supposed to be called things like this, poems are not supposed to be about things like this), is also clearly a reference to the infamous photograph of Private Lynndie England pointing at a naked prisoner who has been forced to masturbate in front of her. Mary Ann Tétreault suggests that this and other photographs, depicting pornographic torture, are a product of the US necessity to reassert global dominance post-9/11 (Tétreault 2006: 33). In her view, their pornographic nature epitomises "the politics of the gaze", objectifying that which it falls upon, '...enhanced by its inversion of conventional gender expectations: the man is the captive of the woman' (Tétreault 2006: 39). Sutherland takes this argument a step further, the photographs are not just examples of objectification for him but of "desubjectification": 'these individuals are fantastically hollowed out, annihilated and denied the possibility of really existing as human beings' (Sutherland 2019). The relationship between observer and victim is therefore sadistic, to a degree that he describes as 'beyond intoxicating and beyond explicit' (Sutherland 2019). "Song of the Wanking Iraqi" is in some sense an attempt to render the intoxicating and explicit experience inherent in looking at the photographs from Abu Ghraib in poetry while simultaneously satirising the impulse to commodify these souvenirs of atrocity.

The poem opens in a pornographically violent tenor, 'Bust those sluts anal thrashing', picking up where the title leaves off (Sutherland 2015: 167). Jon Clay thinks that the '...arguably misogynistic [vocabulary] adds a further affect of shock to the shock and

violence already composing this poem, resonating with and intensifying it' (Clay 2010: 174). The poem aims to be as violent as the subject matter from which it is drawn, incriminating the reader in its violence in the process. This obscene language is presented as part of a collage alongside a press interview by one of the perpetrators, General Janis Karpinski, and specific references to the investigation into the treatment of detainees in Abu Ghraib by Major General Antonio Taguba. Karpinki's assertion in a 2003 interview for *The Tampa Bay Times* that 'living conditions now are better in prison than at home...[a]t one point we were concerned they wouldn't want to leave' (Martin 2005) reappears barely altered in "Song of the Wanking Iraqi", '...ask General Karpinski | the conditions inside are better than at home' (Sutherland 2015: 167). Specific details of the interrogation or torture techniques employed by the 372nd Military Police Company reported in the official investigation, including '[b]reaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees' and '[s]odomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick', appear towards the climax of the poem (Taguba 2004: 17):

> …the chemical light is
> snapped the phosphoric liquid is dropped
> to the lees into him but he prefers the
> broom handle it can go all night like
> capital itself in the grip of the cupidity
> of the 372nd Military Police Company.
>
> (Sutherland 2015: 168)

Just as with "Ejector Vacua Axle", bureaucratic euphemism, technical reporting, and the explicitly corporeal are held together in an uneasy triumvirate. The "found" fragments are presented together in a new context, as something new, in a mode similar to Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines" period.[24] The parallel with visual art fits because the spectacle ('...they put on a | good show…') of Abu Ghraib is itself presented in the poem as a

[24] Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines" consisted of the incorporation of everyday objects into his paintings, collapsing the distinction between art and everyday life.

conceptual art installation. The correct temperature for the cell is pondered in the following terms, '...would it be better | from a conceptual art perspective to turn it | up or down...' (Sutherland 2015: 167-8). Satire in this poem is achieved through the juxtaposition of bathetically discordant ideas and images. In the previous instance, framing the freezing conditions of the prison as the parameters of abstract art produces a genuinely chilling effect. Another example is the following, '...the army is the tongue you stick out' (Sutherland 2015: 167). Sticking out one's tongue is both titillating and taunting, a juvenile symbol of disgust or contempt, and nothing could be further from the '...egregious acts and grave breaches of international law...' the 800th Military Police Brigade were found guilty of (Taguba 2010: 50). The disconcerting juxtapositions are not limited to ideas and images, they are extended to the registers too. The phosphoric liquid is described as being dropped into the prisoner '...to the lees...' (Sutherland 2015: 168). The figurative expression, which denotes finishing something to the last drop, appears in the *King James Bible*, *Macbeth*, "Lamia" by John Keats, and "Ulysses" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, finds itself used to describe literally the last drops of a copper-activated zinc sulfide being emptied into the anal cavity of an Iraqi victim (OED Online 2021). The beauty of poetry and the horror of torture collide in this disturbing turn of phrase. Tennyson used the expression as a metaphor for Ulysses' thirst for life, '...I will drink | Life to the lees...' (Tennyson 2004: 88), whereas Sutherland uses it as a symbol that life has been drained of all humanity. "Song of the Wanking Iraqi" effectively brings together the intimate and the global political, using the aforementioned techniques, to create a piece of extreme satire. However, this combination is still somewhat theoretical; the poem, as John Wilkinson claims, is '...a little too self-conscious...' (Wilkinson 2008). At this stage in Sutherland's evolution, the concepts and the thinking behind the poems perhaps tend to overshadow the poetry itself.

The publication of "Hot White Andy" and "Roger Ailes" in the "British Poetry Issue" of *Chicago Review* in 2007, alongside the poetry of Andrea Brady, Peter Manson, and Chris

Goode, marks a pivotal moment in Sutherland's career. Not only does it represent critical acknowledgement but also illustrates his position within a wider community of contemporary poetry in the UK. More significantly, the poems themselves also represent the culmination of about a decade's worth of influence and experimentation; they mark the end of an early period of "juvenilia" as it were. Sutherland begins to write longer, more spacious poetry which is often directly in dialogue with particular political events. Julian Murphet acclaims "Hot White Andy" as an epochal poem suggesting that 'the world feels larger after [it], both in the extrinsic sense of the planetary political economy assailed by the poem, and in the immanent sense of an extensification of poetic *worldiless* itself' (Murphet 2020). "Violent shifts of register" remain the dominant mode of expression, in fact there are more registers and the shifts are more intensely violent. Sutherland's poetic world is now fully inhabited by a bizarre cast of real and fictional personae. One of the stars is the eponymous "Hot White Andy" himself, Andy Cheng, a random Chinese businessman, presumably the product of a Google search, who is the love object of the poem. This choice encapsulates the complex balance between "aggressively interiorised pathos" and "aggressive polemic outward" previously cited. As John Wilkinson suggests, '...the complex mutual buttressing of the Western capitalist and nominally communist Chinese economies is enacted in the sexual relationship with Cheng...' (Wilkinson 2008). A geopolitical macroeconomic critique is chanelled through deeply private erotic desire:

> WANT HOT ANDY CHENG?
> Want the enormous tragedy of the dream?
> Last night I
> of you very hard and
> real I have put my fingers
> on you and your fa
> ce if you were
> here Russ Cheng
>
> (Sutherland 2015: 214)

The opening question brings to mind a sleazy neon sign targetted at a Western sex tourist, "WANT HOT ANDY CHENG?" which jars with the tender, broken lines that follow. The spaces might represent breaths, they are left to the imagination, what is the missing word, what did the speaker "...of you... last night"? Dream perhaps? The discordance continues, the lyrical "I" is bombarded by a torrent of unusual and disparate proper nouns.

WLa-15 types *to* Tungsten electrodes Aaron Zhong,
feazing that throat into fire / under its
hot life the rope light thrashes in its suds, [is] *Your* chichi news noose
/ Dr. Unicef Cheng budget slasher movie hype on *Late Review*
I keep dreaming about you every single night last
night I you making love Stan, I didn't know him then
it hurts, and I disappear but the nights stick.
Abner Jon Louima Burge Cheng.
→ Ab … *etc.*

(Sutherland 2015: 213)

'I keep dreaming about you every single night...' at least sounds like what lyric poetry might be expected to sound like, but the reader has to work hard to clear the debris surrounding it in order to make it out. "Wla-15 types" are tungsten electrodes necessary for gas welding, there are more than forty profiles for "Aaron Zhong" on Linkedin (some based in China, others throughout the world), and who is Stan? John Wilkinson has helpfully identified Abner Louima, a thirty-three-year-old Haitian immigrant beaten and tortured by New York City police officers, and Jon Burge, a Chicago police detective accused of using a cattle prod against prisoners, hearing "night stick", that ubiquitous symbol of police brutality, in the phrase "nights stick" (Wilkinson 2008). Perhaps the most brutal line is '→ Ab … *etc.*' the *et cetera* pointing to all the unspecified miscarriages of justice that will surely follow the ones merely hinted at in "Hot White Andy" (Sutherland 2015: 213). These external portrayals of trauma, if simply listing perpetrators and victims can even been described as such, sit alongside expressions of interiorised trauma: 'I didn't know him then | it hurts, *I* disappear but the nights stick' (Sutherland 2015: 213). In an age where, thanks to the internet, the public is bombarded with almost limitless, multimodal examples of traumatic injustices,

personal trauma can no longer be the privileged site of pain in poetry. By embedding the very search engine necessary to process the abundance of proper nouns referenced in “Hot White Andy” in the poem itself, Sutherland reaches beyond the printed page, coercing the reader into reenacting the conditions of the poem. It asks “is it egotistical to feel pain in a world where unthinkable pain is omnipresent?” In a 2007 performance in Miami, currently available on YouTube, he even interrupts himself, after reading the web address in full, ‘http://lion.chadwyck.com/’ (Sutherland 2015: 215), to recommend the site as a means of comprehending some of the poem’s more obtuse allusions (Sutherland 2007). The site is now, in 2022, called ProQuest, an online search engine, which still very much fulfils the function it was intended to when Sutherland wrote this poem. This might be what Murphet is referring to when he says that “Hot White Andy” was ‘...an extensification of poetic worldliness itself’ (Murphet 2020). Sutherland has transformed the lyric poem as a place of refuge from the onslaught of information and misinformation in the exterior world into a performance and reproduction of that onslaught.

Information and misinformation are at the heart of the second poem published in the “British Poetry Issue” of *Chicago Review*, “Roger Ailes”. Just like “Hot White Andy”, the poem has its unlikely cast of curiosities: Roger Ailes, who was CEO of Fox News, Albert Wohlstetter, political scientist and nuclear strategist during the Cold War, John Hogan, CEO of Clear Channel Radio, Allah, Aristotle, Socrates, and just plain Sergio (a recurrent character throughout *Neocosis*). Principally, it is a parody of the twenty-four hour news cycle, represented by the protagonist, Roger Ailes. Matt Ffytche interprets the first line, ‘[o]ur money is where your mouth is’ (Sutherland 2015: 191) as a suggestion ‘that we are now paying for the privilege of being lied to’ (Sutherland 2015: 146). It is certainly true that there is no singular authoritative voice in the poem and all the traditional hallmarks of credibility, statistics, citing experts, specificity, all work to undermine each other. Take the following lines: ‘a word with you | sit spitroasted eclectically by 17.16 and 39.74 both, | thinking, they

should be metaphors for the limits of compassion | and of its downturn' (Sutherland 2015: 193). Both numbers return plausible results on a search engine, but it is initially difficult to specify what they refer to. Statistics were confounding enough when they originated from a single authoritative source, as Darrell Huff outlines in his bestselling book *How to Lie with Statistics*: '[i]f you can't prove what you want to prove, demonstrate something else and pretend they are the same thing. In the daze that follows the collision of statistics with the human mind, hardly anyone will notice the difference' (Huff 2010: 74). Statistics can be stupefying, especially when they not only collide with the inexpert human mind but with an endless stream of alternative statistics too. It causes a chain reaction of dazzlement. "Roger Ailes" mimics the rolling news cycles of network television and infinitely scrollable social media platforms by bombarding the reader with apparently referentless numerical information: '261', '8 | cents to 3 | 3.07' '17.16 and 39.74', '29.96 - 47.76', '98%', '18.18', '0.1 | percent rise', and 'Exchange%2' (Sutherland 2015: 193-8). According to Ffytche the first experience of the poem, '...as a tissue of potentially referential phrasal fragments and informational blips...', functions as a sort of mirror of '...our own dumb relation to a hucksterish newsworld...' (Sutherland 2015: 147). Later, however, he acknowledges that the poem is far more coherent than it first appears. With the right approach, '...putting the poem in reverse, paying attention, grabbing hold of the fragments as they skip by, ferreting out references', some sort of cohesion and meaning might be discerned (Ffytche 2007). Indeed, a press release on the Fox News website from 2007, announcing the decision by Clear Channel Communication Inc. to use FOX News Radio '...to be the primary source of national news...', parts of which are quoted verbatim in "Roger Ailes" by Keston Sutherland, proves to be the source of many of the fragments littered throughout this poem (Associated Press 2015). Ailes himself is delighted that '[t]his deal positions FOX News to become a significant player in the radio industry…' and Hogan thinks that the '...breadth of this relationship...[is]...great for listeners...' (Associated Press 2015). 29.96 and 47.76 are in fact $29.96 and $47.76 forming

the 52-week trading range of shares in Clear Channel, and 17.16 and 39.74 are the same parameters for News Corp (Associated Press 2015). Not only is this poem a piece of circus mirror satire, but it is also a lesson on how to read reality, specifically a reality mediated through hyperbolic sensationalism, more attentively.

Stress Position (2009) marks a transition in Sutherland's work. It incorporates the self-mutilating syntax, a poetic subjectivity split between interiorised pathos and aggressive polemic, a hyperintesification of satire, a reliance on search engines and the expectation that the reader will work to provide context, an ever expanding and absurd *dramatis personae*, and a preoccupation with the war in Iraq, but it is also home to the first experiments with justified prose blocks that will come to define much of his poetry from *The Odes to TL61P* (2013) onwards. The title is a pun comprised of the task of the poet, who must decide where to put the stress in a line or a phrase, and also a torture technique whereby a '...prisoner is forced to maintain painful physical positions, such as forced standing, and awkward sitting or suspension of the body from a chain or other implement, for long periods of time' (Physicians for Human Rights et al. 2007: 9). It was a technique that was reportedly authorised in Guantànamo Bay and Abu Ghraib by the CIA (Physicians for Human Rights et al. 2007: 9). As ever with Sutherland's poetry there is an attempt to use the form to imitate the conditions of its content. Reading *Stress Position* is itself a test of physical endurance. Before a reading of the first draft in Cork in 2008, Sutherland warns the audience that 'I wanted to evoke in you all the sensation of being kind of drenched in a meaningless, abstract bombast' and that his performance would be like playing 'abstract battleships with my own body parts', he also appears unsure as to how to read it (Sutherland 2008). This tentative introduction is revealing. The poem is intended to be both endured and in some way, for the person who gives it voice at least, physically uncomfortable. In the first part, "Stress Position I: The Question", numbered body parts, in capital letters, perforate the hyperactive heptameter, and seem like instructions to adopt new stress positions: 'Right of the stem, honed to unclassified backfill,

scantily held | in tight by later eliminated fingers, GUTS 6 static' (Sutherland 2015: 235). The list is comprehensive, 'FRONT 8', 'SEX 6', 'CONE-FACE 4', 'LEG 8', 'FRONT 1', 'TEETH', 'LUNG 6', 'LUNG 4' and so on (Sutherland 2015: 235). Sutherland's live performance seems to confirm this hypothesis, touching the body parts as he barks their names, writhing and contorting his body as the poem reaches its climax. Much like "Song of the Wanking Iraqi", *Stress Position* wants to communicate that torture, and passively observing torture, is "desubjectifying" for all parties concerned. The subject literally disintegrates in this poem, almost comically so. In a fictional Baghdad branch of McDonald's, the speaker's leg falls off: '...my left leg elected to jump | and tossed itself off of the hip, landing in ketchup and straws by the bathroom' (Sutherland 2015: 241). In this poem, body parts are as expendable as the condiments and single-use drinking utensils in fast food restaurants; in a society that condones stress positions as an interrogation technique human beings might also be considered single-use, consumable objects.

From its second line the systematic consumption of human beings is a recurring image. In other words, cannibalism is central to a wider understanding of *Stress Position*. Nods to cannibalistic acts occur throughout: 'general Vampire'; 'vampire bats'; 'rented piranhas'; '[a]t my back I heard my comrades plot to eat each other'; 'I fashion the hole in the foot into | a man I will call Dot, not a person yet but a multiple | in glaring silhouette of whom it thrills me most to eat'; 'a platter of moaning faces'; 'we'll drink the carnage neat'; 'fleshpot products of unknown origin piously recycled back into the diet chain'; 'the riveting other cheek is detained in the gastrointestinal tract'; 'you can't put teeth-marks in a quasi-shin' (Sutherland 2015: 234; 237; 240; 241; 248; 250; 255; 256; 268). Though this list of references to cannibalism in *Stress Position* might seem contextless and disorientating, it is not so dissimilar from the mode Sutherland has adopted to present them in the poem. Some are explicit, vampires (which reoccur more than the two times just cited) or comrades plotting to eat one another for example. Others are more cryptic, 'we'll drink the carnage';

etymologically "carnage" contains several senses including flesh-meat, from the Latin *carnāticum*, and slaughter, 'carcasses collectively: a heap of dead bodies' and the 'Flesh that is given to dogs after the Chace' (OED Online 2021). Drinking it, if that were possible, might be figuratively considered an act of cannibalism. This metaphor is an essential element of the essay "Marx in Jargon", first published in *World Picture 1* (2008), at approximately the same time as the composition of *Stress Position*, and later in *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms* (2011). Vampires make a reappearance in a quotation from "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte": '[t]he bourgeois order...has become a vampire that sucks blood from [peasants'] hearts and brains and casts them into the alchemist's cauldron of capital' (Marx 1934: 109). Sutherland argues that mistranslations of the German word *Gallerte*, which appears in *Das Kapital*, miss 'Marx's satire on wage labour as the fundamental savagery leading to compulsory everyday cannibalism' (Sutherland 2011: 49). He shows that in both significant English translations of Marx, those of Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, and Ben Fowkes, *Gallerte* is transformed into the abstract noun "congelation". His interpretation is that this word depicts human labour 'frozen in commodities' implying therefore that it 'can be transformed back into its original fluid condition' (Sutherland 2011: 39; 41). He reveals that *Gallerte* is in fact a gluey, gelatinous substance produced from the industrial process of boiling animal carcasses and used as a nutritionless addition to a meal. Sutherland insists that paying attention to the satirical nature of Marx's writing, to his literary style, enables the reader to discover concepts in all of their metaphorical complexity. The figure of the bourgeois consumer is the subject of the satire, perhaps unaware of the human misery his commodities are the product of:

> Its fetish-character may prevent the bourgeois consumer from seeing in *Gallerte* the brains, muscles, nerves and hands themselves; that is, the substance of the paradigmatic commodity may be undifferentiable back into its component human origins by any act of perception, however conscientious... (Sutherland 2011: 48)

Stress Position is both a representation of the deconstructed, "desubjectified", body, with limbs and organs strewn randomly across its lines, and also a refusal to be constructed into any sort of comprehensible totality. Sutherland's poetry satirises the bourgeois consumer of poetry. It refuses to be an undifferentiated commodity, unified by rhythmic regularity or harmonious tone. It is not a cathartic pressure valve, or an imaginative space in which to practise contrived sympathy for 'Ali Whoever' (Sutherland 2015: 234). It is 'stresses [that] rise | in a pyramid of lyric ash', it is 'the irreversibility canto' (Sutherland 2015: 234; 268). The second of these phrases chimes with the concept explored in "Marx in Jargon". Human labour, and sacrifice, cannot be recuperated through warm, sympathetic representation in a poem. Reformulating Alexander Pope, in the final stanza, Sutherland is unequivocal about this,: '...to err is human, to forgive | beyond the reach of art' (Sutherland 2015: 270). Fundamentally, *Stress Position* is about the oblivious complicity of the passive observer in the atrocities enacted in their name and a refusal by the poet to make this message in any way easy to consume.

Stress Position is an example of Sutherland at his most polemically Marxist. Reading the poem in tandem with "Marx on Jargon" is advisable, both works shed light on one another. It is also an example of Keston Sutherland operating as poet-scholar; his critical thinking transforms his poetry which in turn transforms his critical thinking and so on. *Stress Position* is not the apex of his Marxism, but perhaps it is the most polemic expression of it. As Sutherland himself says in a 2015 interview: '[t]he energy I used to get from being angry about poetic careers or theories I don't believe in I now get from finding things to love. But then I am now a much more serious Marxist' (Sutherland 2015). What would a more serious yet less angry Marxist sound like? In "Blocks: Form Since the Crash", he identifies a shift in his own practice, and in the practice of his contemporaries, from a Leninist critique of imperialism towards a careful rereading of *Das Kapital* in search of concepts, latent in the text, necessary for a critique of the complexities of social mediation, by capital, closer to

home (Sutherland 2015). For Lenin the inevitable consequence of capitalism is colonial invasion. In “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism”, he cites Cecil Rhodes talking about the Boer War as an example of this tendency: ‘...we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines...if you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists’ (Lenin 1963: 59).[25] This critique is echoed by many of the contemporary dissenting voices against the war in Iraq. Take Noam Chomsky’s *Hegemony and Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* as an example: ‘It had long been anticipated that one of Washington’s goals in Iraq was to obtain military bases right in the heart of the oil-producing regions, as reported at the war’s end’ (Chomsky 2003: 108). This position became the clichéd take on the conflict, the “war on terror” was in fact an imperialist war for oil. Sutherland claims that the response to this in poetry was to represent ‘grotesquely imagined scenes of pain’, both intimately personal and geopolitically global, that, however, neglected the middle ground, ‘evacuated’ it even (Sutherland 2015). In other words, the poetry tended to reflect two polarised spheres of experience, deeply felt personal trauma, loss or abuse for example, or torture and atrocity comitted on a global scale, leaving more local and proximate questions untouched. He associates a move away from this polarisation with the Global Financial Crisis of 2007 and 2008, and more specifically with the election of the 2010 Coalition Government in the UK and their programme of “austerity”: ‘once this government had been elected, a different kind of Marxism was required, not so exclusively focused on imperialism’ (Sutherland 2015). The question that launches the seminar for The Organism for Poetic Research, in New York in 2013, asks whether it is merely a coincidence that around 2010, poetry that physically fills the page, in blocks of justified prose, starts to proliferate. Is this dense prose-poetry an attempt to fill the hollowed out middle ground?

[25] Cecil Rhodes, born in 1853 and died in 1902, began as a mining entrepreneur and before becoming an influential politician in the south of Africa. He was a firm believer in imperialism and the colonial project; he founded the British ruled southern African territory of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

These reflections on trends in contemporary poetry in general provide immense insight into Sutherland's own evolution as a poet. By 2013, in *The Odes to TL61P*, "blocks" are one of the predominant modes in his poetic practice, but they can be found as early as 2008, in *Stress Position*. The prose blocks appear at the end of "Stress Position II: The Workings", they are numbered and appear to correspond to the numbered dots separating the septets which precede them. On the page, at least, they function like prosaic footnotes or addenda to the verse. This is in contrast to *The Odes to TL61P*, where it is the verse that fights for space against the blocks. In a performance of the second part of *Stress Position* in Cork in 2009, Sutherland opts to read the prose blocks intercut with the corresponding verse, perhaps preempting the structure of much of the poetry he would go on to write. Some of the first sensations these blocks inspire are, aptly enough for a poem about torture techiniques in Abu Ghraib, claustrophobia, imprisonment, and disorientation. The text graphically represents claustrophobia, consuming as much space on the page as is possible. The discrepancy between the performance recorded online and the published version of the poem leaves the chronology, both of the events reported and the order in which they should be read, disorientingly open to interpretation. Midway through the first of the prose blocks, the notion of linear direction comes under heavy satirical attack, '...*down* in | this work may signify *in* or *back*, taken seriously, *down* must never again signify *in* or *back*...' (Sutherland 2015: 257). What is stated is immediately negated. The prepositions, which might have helped to situate the poem in a particular place, are undermined. A concrete perception of space is denied in this poem. A line that seems like instructions for male and female positions in a line dancing routine are sabotaged by a flurry of footnotes. Three words are interrupted five times, '...(LOD)[2],[3] me[4]n'[5]s rig[6]ght' (Sutherland 2015: 257).[26] Moreover, the footnotes themselves are self-referential, and the poem begins to spiral out of control in a sort of textual feedback loop

[26] These references appear as endnotes to section "4" of the justified prose at the end of "Stress Position".

of incoherent phonemes. A concrete perception of time is also denied, take the following section as an example:

4
____________________ *with a carrot for my mother.* The end. Epilogue. So it was this evening we begin with the end. What was the end? The end must be first of all what you are in. Introduction. Then when in the end you are a person trying. Introduction. So it was that when in the end you are a person trying to love, it must be by choice. But it must be by a choice you refused to make long enough ago. The end. That is, not by one you only just now refused to make, such as to know what that meant. Then what that meant must be going on to the end, The end.

(Sutherland 2015: 261)

Even in these ten short lines it is possible to perceive the stifling visual effect the hard right margin has. It is hardly inviting to look at. The insistence on words which relate to beginning and ending, introduction and epilogue, raises more questions than answers. Should this prose section "4" be read before or after the verse section "4" printed seven pages previously? Does it even matter? The poem itself even asks, somewhat goadingly, '[w]hat was the end?' (Sutherland 2015: 261). Nothing is final in these ten lines, which is ironic considering the fact that the phrase "the end" is repeated nine times. Every affirmation is subject to further clarification or negation. On the fourth line of the extract, 'you are a person trying', but by the fifth and sixth, 'you are a person | trying to love' (Sutherland 2015: 261). At times, while reading *Stress Position*, it feels like there is no way out or like it will never end. This sensation only increases with the longer poems written in this style, *The Odes to TL61P* and *Scherzos Benjosos*. One explanation might be that there is a certain element of mimesis involved, as previously suggested, the poem is designed to recreate the disorientating and arduous conditions it aspires to represent, stress positions perhaps.

In what seems an unlikely match, two volumes of Sutherland's poetry were published by Enitharmon Press in 2013 and in 2015. Unlikely because Enitharmon Press is a relatively

large publishing house, in comparison with Barque Press at least, that specialises in artists' books and special editions. At a publicity event, to launch *The Odes to TL61P*, at Cafe Oto in Dalston in 2013, Sutherland himself acknowledges this odd coupling:

> I'm actually really pleased with this object, which is just exactly as...to me at least, with my propensity of my skin naturally to crawl...it makes it really kind of crawl a lap round my mind and back again, it's really quite...I dunno...tell me what you think of this cover if you speak to me after, I think it's weird. (Sutherland 2013)

On the one hand he seems pleased with the book, although maybe he is more pleased about the completion of a project which has consumed him for three years (also mentioned in the introduction to the reading), yet on the other he seems uncomfortable with it as an object. This discomfort is noticeable in the unusually inarticulate discourse and ellipsis in the transcript reported above, but it is especially palpable on the recording.[27] However, the decision did allow Sutherland to reach a wider audience with *The Odes to TL61P* and to collect, edit, publish, and memorialise his work to date in *Poetical Works: 1999-2015*. It is not the case that Sutherland does not want his poetry to occupy the cultural ground of poets like Heaney, Armitage, or Larkin, but rather that occupying that cultural ground must not interfere with the composition of the poetry in any way. He even sent both "Hot White Andy" and *Stress Position* to Faber:

> They rejected _HWA_ [sic] with a printed postcard with some generic message on it, not their sort of thing thank you, and they never responded to _SP_ [sic] (which bothered me, I admit, because I was hoping to get together a little collection of rejection postcards from them). (Sutherland 2008)

A publication on this scale garners attention from the broadsheets and solicits reviews in literary journals. In truth, much of the high profile content about Sutherland on the internet orbits the publication of the two Enitharmon books. Some examples include the 2013 interview for *White Review* with Natalie Ferris (who incidentally worked for Enitharmon at the time), the review of *Poetical Works* in *Chicago Review* by Julian Murphet, and a profile

[27] Listen here: https://www.archiveofthenow.org/authors/?i=90&f=1771#1771

in *The New Yorker* by Nicholas Niarchos in 2016. This public attention may just be incidental. Sutherland seems to remain firmly committed to the spirit of *The English Intelligencer*, previously mentioned, '...an active interchange of energy...' (Prynne 2016: 190). The channel, be it little magazine or mid-sized publishing house, is much less important than the impulse to make "gifts": '"As a poet myself", I want people to feel something really deeply when I write poems. I want to make a gift to anyone, which is a gift first of all of love, of passion, of desire, even of pain, of any number of experiences...' (Sutherland 2015).

The second part of this study consists of two detailed sections dedicated to two of Sutherland's longer volumes, *The Odes to TL61P* and *Scherzos Benjyosos*. The former is informed by Sutherland's research on "blocks" as an emergent form in contemporary British poetry, whereas the latter by the psychoanalytic concept of the "affect storm". However, it would be remiss to omit at least some preliminary analysis from this critical biography as they represent two of his more major works. Both will be placed within an appropriate historical context and also within the context of Sutherland's career in this chapter, while thorough critical analysis will emerge in part two.

If the "war on terror" was the largest socio-historical influence on the first part of Keston Sutherland's career, then the Global Financial Crash in 2008 was the largest on the second. Its repercussions can be traced in all of his poetry from 2008 onwards. There are financial scraps, some already highlighted, in "Mincemeat Seesaw*"* (1999), "Roger Ailes" (2005), "The Food at Alcove One" (2005), "Hot White Andy" (2007), but by "The Proxy Inhumanity of Forklifts" (2010), *The Odes to TL61P* (2013), and "Jenkins, Moore and Bird" (2015) money is the main course. Sutherland's production from 2010 to present might be best split into two categories, an initial response to the financial conditions responsible for "austerity" on a social level, and later an attempt to grapple with the psychological impact of these measures on a personal level. Two specific phenomena are especially pertinent to the first of these categories: (a) the change in public discourse, in the UK, as a consequence of

the Global Financial Crash and (b) the abolition of state funded financial aid for university students which culminated in the student protests on 10 November 2010. In "Blocks: Form Since the Crash", Sutherland compares public discourse before and after the crash. He characterises the period prior as 'stupefyingly simplistic...[and]...embodied in the figure of George W. Bush...', suggesting that poets asked themselves, 'how could it not be transparent for everybody watching that what was happening was the carving open of a new imperial market for American corporations?' (Sutherland 2015). This simplicity is in stark contrast to the new forms of complexity that the financial crash introduced into the daily lives of the general public:

> On television you had esteemed nobel prize-winning economists, as you do still today, like Joseph Stiglitz, [who] seems to be on the BBC news virtually every other day, in the UK, explaining in complex detail the histories of these swapping mechanisms, explaining the histories of subprime mortgages, trying to explain the ins and outs of the financial crash and its ideology and its consequences. (Sutherland 2015)

As a result, according to Sutherland, poetry that was serious about a deep engagement with the social relations that were being mediated by these abstract financial systems responded by matching the complexity of public discourse with its own poetic complexities.

The Odes to TL61P is a prime example of this tendency. Section "1.2" of "Ode to TL61P 3" is poetry by algorithm. Fifty-seven different expressions of distaste are paired with a list of fifty-seven finance sector job titles. The list builds towards an exasperated crescendo employing the following formula: adjective + noun + preposition + job title. Take the first five as an illustration:

Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Job Title
giddy	detestation	of	senior liquidity managers
strong	aversion	to	strategy consultants
deep	disgust	at	lead auditors
growing	impatience	with	industry relations directors
spasmodic	shrinking	from	financial modellers

(Sutherland 2013: 38-40)

Presenting the lines as a table really helps to illustrate the algorithmic regularity of the phrases. The repetitive format seems to be a satirical representation of the repetitive tasks that many undertake in the modern office environment, such as data entry, clearing an email inbox, or writing copy to satisfy inhouse style guides. The peculiarly paired adjective-noun phrases reflect the challenge of criticising something so difficult to understand. The details of the crash are removed from the everyday lived experience of those most negatively affected by them. Abstract financial mechanisms are much harder to condemn, in poetry or otherwise, than the abuses of power witnessed in Abu Ghraib for instance. The juxtaposition of these unusual denunciations with job titles that have become so ubiquitous in newspapers and on television, that many do not necessarily understand, provokes a process of re-estrangement. The eighth is an example of this: '...psychedelic distrust of branch compliance officers...' (Sutherland 2013: 39). "Psychedelic distrust" is immediately striking as a combination of words, what could be psychedelic about distrust? Drug-induced paranoia perhaps? Distrust of reality? It demands an imaginative response. Whereas it is much easier to ignore "branch compliance officer" as just another euphemism for an arbitrary middle management position. However, there are questions to be asked about this combination of words too. A branch of what? In compliance with what? Officer has military connotations. What type of people do

these job titles disguise? The Global Financial Crisis is often spoken about in abstract terms, as if it were the inevitable outcome of computer models malfunctioning. It was, in fact, the result of human action and inaction, as the "The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report" concludes: '[t]he captains of finance and the public stewards of our financial system ignored warnings and failed to question, understand, and manage evolving risks within a system essential to the well-being of the American public' (The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission 2011). Taken in isolation these juxtapositions emphasise the ineffectiveness of mild disgruntlement with the captains of finance. There is a bathetic quality to many of the descriptions of anger, 'iffy qualms with quant developers' for example (Sutherland 2013: 39). It is faintly ridiculous to be angry about an abstract concept one does not truly understand. However, the cumulative effect is explosive. The onslaught drives the reader to reconsider everything they may have been taking for granted. Polite criticism is not an adequate response: '...irremediable | illness of disposition toward regulatory affairs | consultants getting social housing down to the last | unfuckable man means that you don't really want | the communism you say you want. For only something | has to change and fast...' (Sutherland 2013: 40). Direct action to an indirect problem.

In this poem, direct action is represented by the student protests on 10 November 2010. On May 12 of the same year, 'the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed the first full coalition government in Britain since 1945' (Wintour 2010). By 9 December, the Clegg-Cameron coalition had passed legislation which allowed universities to triple tuition fees to an upper limit of £9,000 (Press Association 2010). This legislation came after Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, had previously signed a National Union of Students pledge to abolish them altogether which reads: 'I pledge to vote against any increase in fees in the next parliament and to pressure the government to introduce a fairer alternative' (National Union of Students 2010). A month before the legislation was passed a protest had been organised by the NUS, called "Fund Our Future: Stop Education Cuts", on 10

November, culminating in students occupying Millbank Tower, Conservative Party campaign headquarters at the time: ‘Angry students set fires, smashed windows, fought riot police and forced their way on to the roof of a building in Westminster on Wednesday, as a union-organised protest against the forthcoming rise in university tuition fees turned violent’ (Cook-Stothard 2010). A section of “Ode to TL61P 5” entitled 10/11/10 narrates the movements of the day from the perspective of a protester and ponders the optics of violence in an age where everyone is armed with pocket-sized video cameras: ‘...you film them and they film you, synergy by right’ (Sutherland 2013: 64). Ownership of the right image or footage, and the channels through which to disseminate them, is also ownership of the narrative. The protests were presented as the violent actions of those who wish to damage society, not of those who wish to protect it via right to education: ‘A cop with a freshly bandaged face is the punctum of the coverage; her wide eyes make fear emblematic, glint on film intensely’ (Sutherland 2013: 65). Essayistic in tone, “Ode to TL61P 2” begins by speculating on the motivations for police containment tactics during a more general, anti-austerity protest on 26 March 2011. The tactics, which are merely alluded to, are otherwise known as “kettling”. “Kettling” is the process of protestors being corralled together, surrounded, and detained, possibly for hours, by riot police. The second ode refers to, ‘...a painstakingly slow containment operation still in progress when the news coverage ends for the night...’, and ‘...a bunch of pampered socialist Islamophiles compressed into a cameo of the herd...’ (Sutherland 2013: 21-22). However, as Sutherland acknowledges himself in “Blocks: Form Since the Crash”, perhaps the most material example of “kettling” in *The Odes to TL61P* are the blocks of dense justified prose themselves:

> The iconic shapes that began to emerge were the shapes that were produced on the street by what I think is also here in the United States called kettling, police kettles, which is this fairly historically recent tactic, at least in the UK, of containment, so-called, of pressing bodies into these spaces and keeping them there for deliberately, extremely frustratingly over-extended periods of time...there is obviously a kind of superficial visual resemblance then between the shapes produced on the street by police tactics and kettling, at this point, and these blocks. (Sutherland 2016)

On the surface at least, a compelling parallel can be seen. The block on the page functions as a visual pun for the blocking in on the street. "Kettles" are designed to be claustrophobic and frustrating and parts of *The Odes to TL61P* produce a sensation of entrapment and disorientation not too dissimilar from the phenomenon they are a response to. Ironically, it is not the parts of the odes which directly address the student protests that most powerfully illustrate the experience of being part of them, but rather the denser, more alienating passages which incorporate a range of disparate topics. A full analysis of this poem will form the basis of section 3.2 "Odes to Obsolescence".

All of Sutherland's most recent work has specific, real world events fixed in its crosshairs. What follows is a somewhat reductive summary which nevertheless places Sutherland's poetry in its proper historical context. "Jenkins, Moore and Bird" (2015) expresses fears about biotechnology, tax evasion, and the roles of a trio of famous Rogers, "Sinking Feeling" (2017), published in both *Whither Russia* (2017) and *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020), faces the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, "Instincts on Trump University" (2017) confronts "post-truth" politics, and *Scherzos Benjyosos* (2020) assesses the impact of the psychological trauma caused as a result of austerity.[28] In Sutherland's production, this period is characterised by the "block" with intermittent moments of respite in the form of line breaks. This historical period is characterised by continuous crisis and the intensity of Sutherland's poetry is a response to the intensity of the global political landscape by which it is informed. All the poems published after 2015 have explicit references to world events. In "Sinking Feeling", recurring figures of drowned bodies are submerged in the density of the disorientating text. Sutherland cites single episodes from the Mediterranean refugee crisis: 'Since evading | shipwreck to be mauled with water cannon at the | border of Bakondi's

[28] The Rogers in "Jenkins, Moore, and Bird" are Roger Jenkins, a financier at Barclays and former athlete, Roger Bird, a finance director and former general secretary for Ukip suspended 2014, and finally, Roger Moore, the second actor to play James Bond.

Hungary is not for you' (Sutherland 2017: 11). This line makes reference to clashes between people seeking asylum in Europe and Hungarian riot police at a border crossing in September 2015 (Lyman-Bienvenu 2015). Later reference is made to a boat capsizing in the Aegean Sea off the coast of the Greek island, Farmakonisi, also in September 2015. The poem is held together by a dreamlike logic, multiple recurrent symbols and images give merely the illusion of meaningfulness. The speaker of this poem is drowning too: 'I am drowning' (Sutherland 2017: 13). However, the limits in both directions are not the surface of the ocean and the seabed, but childhood and adolescent memories at one extreme, and the possibility of meaning at the other. In fact, the tragedy in Farmakonisi is only phantasmically present in the imagination of the speaking voice as '...the | pathetic fallacy such as a cloud in the shape of | Farmakonisi or the Syrian bodies washed up near | there...' (Sutherland 2017: 14). On an intimate level, the speaker is drowning in memories from the past and a desire for meaning. However, this intimacy is intersected by a global political crisis. The self-consciousness of "Song of the Wanking Iraqi" has disappeared and these seemingly incompatible elements of Sutherland's poetry impactfully unite to demonstrate the overwhelming challenges of maintaining a compassionate subjectivity in an increasingly compassionless epoch.

"Instincts on Trump University" refers to the former US President's real estate training program. In advertising for Trump University, Donald Trump claimed that he could turn anyone into a successful real estate investor (Cohan 2013) but, in 2005, 'the New York State Department of Education (SED) notified Donald Trump individually, Sexton, and Trump University that they were violating the New York Education Law by using the word "university" when it was not actually chartered as one' (Halperin 2016). One target of the poem's hyper-aggressive satire is the commodification of education taken to its extreme conclusion. The poem also includes references to "Executive Order 13769", known by its critics as the "Muslim Ban": 'A total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States. That it has come to this is your fault, you who know how to read this' (Sutherland

2017: 38-39). The second line is damning, implying as it does a causality between employment driven educational objectives and inhospitable immigration policy, implicating the reader in the process. As Lindesy Appell says in her review of *Whiter Russia*:

> The accusation, which comes near its end, that "this is your fault," compels a rereading of the entire collection, as the shifting "you" of the piece moves away from Trump and seems to stand still for a moment, fixing its gaze on a reader who has quite possibly positioned themself as a distant, intellectualizing [sic] observer of the recurring violence and injustice appearing throughout the book. (Appell 2018)

It is, to some degree, satire about the failures of satire. As has already been demonstrated, this accusatory conclusion, this provocation to action, is a recurrent feature of Sutherland's poetry. Lines like, 'This is the requirement | to live as a conscript to indifference' (Sutherland 2015*:* 126) from "Ejector Vacua Axle" or '...you don't really want | the communism you say you want. For only something | has to change and fast...' (Sutherland 2015: 40) from *The Odes to TL61P* for instance. The shifting of the second person pronoun, as Appell has identified in her review, breaks the fourth wall. These poems are not designed to reflect reality but to actively reshape it.

There is, however, a counterpoint to all this political intensity. The commencement of the chapter made reference to Sutherland's belief that all of his poems were love poems. He says: 'All of my poems are love poems. That thought may be hard to justify, depending on the sensibility of their reader; but to me they're all love poems. If they're not love poems, I throw them away' (Sutherland 2019). Although it may indeed be hard at times to justify this claim, one interpretation might be that Sutherland's dedication to transform human experience and social relations is itself an act of love. He describes being shocked at finding himself crying at a reading he gave of "Sinking Feeling" in New York City in 2015, attributing it to:

> ...something about speaking aloud before strangers a kind of apparently prosaic, consciously artificial, consciously virtually fictional writing which nonetheless is for me an acutely painful, distant echo of the paralyzed poetic, and in which verse is allowed to erupt, occasionally, at certain points of irony or

pressure, but never enough to assert its autonomy as a fluency of lines—that suddenly feels to me very sad. (Sutherland 2015)

In "Scherzo 4" of *Scherzos Benjyosos*, there is a moment that is more transparently a love poem, a moment in which verse does erupt, in which the poetic no longer feels paralyzed. The following quotation is long, but it bears reading in full:

> You are the most beautiful person I have seen, the most beautiful thing I have touched. I watch you and I think to myself you are so beautiful, that simply being here to share this definitely finite piece of existence with you, even with everything that is going, is about as much beauty as I can take, or more beauty than I can take, more than I could ever get through, and though it is enough simply to be here with you, and in your presence, without knowing or caring about anything, but only knowing that what you are to me is more than I could ever be to myself, I can't resist the other thought, too, that I have learned something, and that now I know, despite even now having no idea how to stop wanting to destroy myself, that being with you, and being able to feel in every part of myself that you are there, and being here for no imaginable greater purpose than to love you, the way I truly do, is also how to justify my life.
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 68-69)

The second person pronoun, in this instance, is addressed to Sutherland's three-year-old son and the "everything that is going on" refers to the Covid-19 pandemic. In an interview with Jasmine Thorne, on Instagram, he reveals that he had taken his son to some fields in Sussex during the lockdown:

> ...[he] had just been pent up in the house, going kind of crazy, very very hyperactive, just like bouncing off the walls, and then he just ran off into the fields and it just felt suddenly, just watching him was this very emotional overwhelming experience for me, seeing him explode out into this unconfined space, and seeing him rejoicing in contact with the emptiness and with the boundlessness of it all... (Sutherland 2020)

The emotion, both in the passage referenced from "Scherzo 4" and this description of its germ, is in notable contrast with most of the poetry considered so far. Sutherland is exhilarated by watching his son rejoicing in the emptiness (not spiritually but literally) and

boundlessness of an open field, whereas the tone of his poetry is usually dominated by mourning the sense of entrapment the saturated nature of modern experience provokes. The digital age fills experience with content but not without limits and consequences. Finally, in this latest volume, an intimately pure lyrical voice bursts forth from the "violent shifts in register" and unrelenting satire. The unadulterated joy of a child in nature, and the love of a father for his son, is expressed in unusually straightforward language:

> You hadn't
> seen grass for a long time, for days, and when you ran off into the grass that was thick, dark, and swept up off the earth by the breeze, you began screaming the word grass, really ecstatically, over and over again, *grass, grass*, and running in wild circles through it and catching at it with your fingers.
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 68)

And, '...being | here for no imaginable greater purpose than to love you, | the way I truly do...' (Sutherland 2020*:* 69). These expressions of boundless love (all Sutherland's poems are love poems) are only possible because of the "self-mutilating", politically committed, rhythmically experimental, intensely justified prose blocks that preceded it. Poetry emerges from the ruins of the context that surrounds it.

3. THE POETRY AND POETICS OF KESTON SUTHERLAND

3.1 Invalidated as Uttered

It is tempting to view this deliberately disconcerting and incoherent poetry as a one-off, as some sort of rare beast. It would be easy to view Keston Sutherland as one of the heads of the Cerberus which is known as the "Cambridge School"; a ringer in J.H. Prynne of Gonville and Caius' band of merry men. However, its literary heritage extends far beyond the walls of a library at the University of Cambridge and the pages of *The English Intelligencer*. The linguistic play, affirmations immediately negated and vice versa, minimal reformulations, and stuttering syntactical breakdowns belong not so much to the British poetic tradition but rather to a practitioner of Irish prose and drama. If literary genealogy can help to explain where the style of a work, or movement, of literature comes from, then Keston Sutherland tells us openly that Samuel Beckett is his forebear and exactly how he has influenced his poetics: 'If we're to look for literary precedents for this form of compression [in] poetry...the really great literary ancestor of this is not any poet that I know, but Samuel Beckett' (Sutherland 2016). In a lecture about Beckett's short story, "Ping", Sutherland contends that '...something called meaning...', in a literary sense, was not one of the primary objectives in Beckett's writing (Sutherland 2019). 'These texts are voids for meaning,' says Sutherland, 'they are registration devices for tracking the ways in which the mind flickers and fluctuates in its anxiety to find meaning but they are not themselves in any straightforward or obvious way meaningful' (Sutherland 2019). Not only is this an imaginative conception of what Beckett's prose does, but it also functions perfectly as a description of Sutherland's own poetry. His poems too, are diffident to meaning and seek to register the fluctuations of an anxious mind. This section will seek to demonstrate that the most influential stylistic model for Sutherland is in fact Samuel Beckett.

Sutherland begins his lecture on “Ping” with the following quotation from Arthur Schopenhauer:

> The actual life of a thought lasts only until it reaches the borderline of words; there it petrifies and is henceforth dead, but indestructible, like the fossilized animals and plants of the prehistoric world. Its momentary actual life can also be compared to that of a crystal in the moment of its crystallization. For as soon as our thinking has found words it is no longer profound or serious in the deepest sense. Where it begins to exist for others it ceases to live in us, as the child separates itself from the mother when it embarks on its own existence. (Schopenhauer 2015: 54)

This is a deliberately devastating assessment of the failure of language to adequately carry meaning or to be a vessel for signification. If this is truly the case, then what should be done with the thoughts we have? If it is not possible to commit a thought onto the page without killing it, then what are the consequences for writing and for literature? Sutherland suggests that Beckett found this ‘...intellectual justification of unhappiness - the greatest ever written...’ both hilarious and true (Beckett 2009: 33). The idea that language is the threshold of thought, and that there might be something inherently amusing about this idea, is fundamental to Beckett’s style. The failure of language to faithfully express thought manifests itself in Beckett’s writing, says Sutherland, as:

> ...a history of whittling down and exhausting and paring away and voiding, or else it’s being done live in front of your eyes in the text, and that’s being done really in every single particle of the text, every single word, every punctuation mark, every single bit of grammar, every single syntagm. (Sutherland 2019)

Either Beckett has already whittled down, exhausted, or voided his texts, or the texts themselves are performances of whittling down, exhausting and voiding. Famously, the unnamable protagonist of *The Unnamable* ends the novel saying: ‘...you must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on’ (Beckett 1958: 407). The character is suffering a sort of paralysis but must go on anyway, just as its author is paralysed by the absurd notion of committing these very thoughts into language, but Beckett’s texts happen anyway, word by word, something is happening. The unnamable protagonist describes a technique that, in some sense,

characterises Beckett's work: '...affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered...' (Beckett 1958: 285). Sutherland spots this same pattern in the opening of "Ping". It begins: 'All known all white...' (Beckett 1967: 69). Everything there is to know is known already, yet at the same time nothing is known, everything is white. This is a typically Beckettian beginning, a beginning that does not really begin at all. It announces that it should not really have begun at all, that it is not supposed to exist as language at all. Just as in the final scherzo of Sutherland's *Scherzos Benjyosos*, the poetic subject announces that: 'Everything I am about to say | is not meant to be in words, that's the whole point' (Sutherland 2020: 69).

"Scherzo 2" of *Scherzos Benjyosos* begins, or not as the case may be, in much the same fashion: 'I'm listening. Just stop' (Sutherland 2020: 39). What might be the voice of a therapist, though nothing definitively confirms this in the poem, invites someone to speak, "I'm listening", before sadistically shutting them down before they can even begin, "Just stop". Speech seems futile: 'I'm listening and I can't help you...' (Sutherland 2020: 39). Just as in "Ping", fragments and phrases reoccur in slightly altered formulations throughout this scherzo. The first five words are reversed just twenty lines later: 'As, just stop. Go ahead' (Sutherland 2020: 39). Stopping and invitations to continue interrupt the text intermittently: 'Don't stop, I'm still listening; Yes. Go on; Hope is pegged to going on regardless' (Sutherland 2020: 41-42). A convincing parallel can be drawn between these interrupted beginnings and minimal reformulations in *Scherzos Benjyosos* and similar techniques that can be identified throughout the prose of Samuel Beckett.

Sutherland also emphasises the rhythmicality of "Ping", he compares it to a musical score which contains multiple possibilities for a potential performance. He says of its first line that: 'The segmentation is loud, you can hear the difficulty of hitching one word to the next, that difficulty heard in the silent space between words is as much the music of the text as the words themselves are' (Sutherland 2019). *Scherzos Benjyosos* too is a segmented text, and presents a certain difficulty in choosing how to "hitch" the words to one another. There

are internal rhymes, repetitions, and punctuation as possible indicators as to how the following lines from "Scherzo 2" might be read, but there are also errant capital letters and sudden line breaks that cast doubt over these indications:

> Lid,
> id scriptor, soft abode, pleasure's node, licking that Unhinged door, Bearing in mind This night that I stare at Licking that Face to be kind, it's torn too, to work, born To be torn Licking that Points to you.
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 56)

The line breaks, commas, full-stops, capital letters, and spaces between the words present the reader with options; they represent opportunities to breathe. But for how long? How much of a gap should be left between "Lid," and "id"? The line break suggests that it should perhaps be longer than the standard pause after a comma, but the rhyme almost demands that "id" immediately follow "Lid," without skipping a beat. The answer is always that there must be no answer. This poetry exists between a multitude of options and decisions. Half way through the third line, "This" is unexpectedly capitalised. How should the preceding word, "mind", be hitched to this, "This"? Should the line be read, "bearing in mind This night" or "bearing in mind [pause] This night..."? The reader is forced to make a series of split-second decisions that determine the rhythm of the poem. Sutherland suggests having:

> ...a go at reading ["Ping"] aloud yourself, maybe even try to record it and then listen back to yourself doing it...because what you will detect, probably in your own voice, are spontaneous eruptions of something like feeling, sentiment, desire, wishfulness, affectation in other words. The text despite itself, and despite yourself when you read it, does seem somehow resitingly to push back against the extinction of its own expression. (Sutherland 2019)

This is also good advice for reading Sutherland's poetry. On his Soundcloud profile, there is a recording of Sutherland reading "Ping" and the first scherzo of *Scherzos Benjyosos* both uploaded in 2019, which also happens to be the year he delivered this lecture on Beckett's

style.[29] The recordings are not dissimilar. Surprising moments of feeling occur in both, despite both authors' resistance to a stable idiom.

Keston Sutherland describes the rare polysyllables amongst Beckett's mostly monosyllabic lexical choices as the closest thing to narrative events that happen in "Ping" (Sutherland 2019). He cites the word "body" in the first line, hardly a mouthful itself, as disruptive to the sequence of pairs of monosyllabic words that Beckett had established prior to it: 'All known all white all bare white *body* fixed one yard legs joined like sewn' (Beckett 1967: 69).[30] This is another of Sutherland's stylistic features that might be attributed to Beckett. Whereas Beckett might throw in a two or three syllable word to break the thumping of his monosyllabic metronome, Sutherland often turns to jargon, scraps of literary citation, and foreign words to create his own versions of these lexical events; lexical events that often happen outside of the text on search engines or in the Oxford English Dictionary. The Beckettian therapy session at the beginning of "Scherzo 2" is disrupted by the German word, *verscherzt*: '...your fruit's *verscherzt*' (Sutherland 2020: 39). In English it means to forfeit, specifically to risk losing something due to your own behaviour; your fruit is at risk of being forfeited, whatever that might mean. It also contains a graphemic fragment of the Italian word *scherzo* too - *verscherzt*. This visual pun (the pronunciation of both words is significantly different: *schér-zo* and *fɛɐ̯ˈʃɛrtst*) is not incidental. The relationship between the two words in Italian and German presents even more interconnection. The infinitive, *verscherzen* in German, translates into Italian as *giocarsi*, meaning to risk losing something. It contains the notion of play, gambling in effect, which is also contained in the word *scherzo*. This type of word play is typical of Sutherland's poetry and the more time and research the reader does,

[29] Recordings of Keston Sutherland reading "Ping" by Samuel Beckett and "Scherzo 1" from *Scherzos Benjyosos* are available here:
https://soundcloud.com/keston-sutherland/samuel-becketts-ping?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
https://soundcloud.com/keston-sutherland/moral-support-section-i-am?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
[30] My italics.

the more discoveries of this sort are there to be made. For example, '...your fruit's *verscherzt*' (Sutherland 2020: 39) could be a reference to the following lines from "Die Worte des Wahns" ("Words of Madness") by Friedrich von Schiller: 'Verscherzt ist dem Menschen des Lebens Frucht, | So lang er die Schatten zu haschen sucht' (The fruit of life is wasted on man, | For as long as he seeks to catch shadows) (Schiller 1879: 333). This allusion is plausible, though nothing in *Scherzos Benjyosos* confirms it in any concrete way. Nevertheless, Schiller is also responsible for another devastating assessment of the failure of language to be meaningful. Experience is wasted on those who only seek its dilution into words, into imperfect representations of experience. It is the experience of the poem, the experience of making such discoveries, the material rhythms of its metre, that is privileged in the poetry of Keston Sutherland.

Enough parallels exist to make a compelling case that the principal stylistic model for the poetry of Keston Sutherland is the prose of Samuel Beckett. *The Unnamable* begins: 'Where now? Who now? When now?' (Beckett 1958: 285). Usually an author would be expected to provide the answers to these questions. In a traditional novel, take *Robinson Crusoe* for example*,* Daniel Defoe does answer these questions in the first paragraph; where now?: 'the city of York'; who now?: 'I was called *Robinson Kreutznaer*'; and finally, when now?: 'the year 1632' (Defoe 2001: 5). In *The Unnamable*, the narrator remains in the dark. Indeed, questions are privileged over answers in Beckett's prose, though not unironically so. These three questions are immediately followed by the single word, 'Unquestioning' (Beckett 1958: 285). Nothing like meaning must be allowed to take hold, to ossify or paralyse this text. Beckett is at pains to prevent the reader from providing any answers to these questions. They are questions asked unquestioningly. The beginning of "Scherzo 1" bears an uncanny resemblance to the beginning of *The Unnamable*. Knowledge, in any concrete form, is immediately undermined by a barrage of paranoid questions: '...as we know, saying how, why, when, why her, what now, | how much, where to now, where are you, does it work, |

where the fuck are you...' (Sutherland 2020: 28). Not only do these questions function as a disruptive strategy, they also build the rhythm of the poem incrementally. The first three questions are a single syllable, '...how, why, when...', the following three contain two syllables, '...why her, what now, how much...', then three, '...where to now, where are you, does it work…', and the final question, five, 'where the fuck are you…' (Sutherland 2020: 28). There is a hierarchy of priority at play in the poetry of Keston Sutherland. The musicality, and rhythmic qualities, of the language he chooses is more important than the semantic sense it might convey in any straightforward sense.

To conclude his lecture on form, specifically poetic form under the shadow of the financial crisis, Sutherland draws parallels between the prose of Samuel Beckett and the "dense prose blocks" that characterise, to his mind, contemporary poetry in the UK since 2007. He says:

> [This poetry] takes inspiration chiefly...from Samuel Beckett. [Beckett's] novel *Watt*, above all other texts, is one in which there is this mad compression, and a kind of horrifying...delirious parody of the procedures of a kind of Cartesian rationalism. [There is a] madly overloaded page space in which there is this compression of things happening, which feels like it is losing you all the time, it is a uniform of continuous motion, you don't know where you are, form is constantly abolishing itself, you don't know what's happening, too much is happening and too little is happening at once, you're going round in circles...it's masterful in its competent management of very overextended sentences. (Sutherland 2015)

These features certainly help to summarise some of the stylistic properties of Sutherland's own poetry. It is madly compressed onto the page, it is horrifying and amusingly parodic in equal measure, it feels as if nothing is happening and as if everything is happening all at once, and its circular motion and impossibly long sentences are confounding. This summary might function as a crude checklist of features in his latest poem, *Scherzos Benjoyos* for instance. The poem is madly compressed into dense prose blocks. It is a horrifyingly honest depiction of its protagonist Benjy's, '...banally traumatic British childhood...', while also being a grotesque parody of the idiom of trauma (Noel-Tod 2021). Its narrative is a void,

nothing seems to be actually happening, yet its temporal scope spans recollections of childhood right up to a tender moment of fatherhood. Its imagery reoccurs, in slightly modulated fashion, across all four *scherzi* creating a sensation of movement and stasis. The sharp blade of grass in "Scherzo 2", which '...sliced into the taut skin you hate between the thumb and | proximal crease of the index finger of the little sibling | who, nicked, cried a bit...' is transformed into a liberating mantra, '...you began screaming the word grass, | really ecstatically, over and over again, *grass grass*...' in "Scherzo 4" (Sutherland 2020: 49; 68). The individual symbol, the single blade of grass, becomes a field, just as individual words, through their repetition and reformulation in the poem, become part of the wider texture of the poetry. Its sentences too are impossibly overextended. The first full stop in "Scherzo 1" occurs half way down the fifth page of compact prose. It is ironic that the chief inspiration for Sutherland's poetry should be a master of prose, but it is undoubtedly the case. It is not Pound, Eliot, Williams or Stein, but Beckett whose shadow looms large over Sutherland's style.

3.2 Odes to Obsolescence

First some definitions. What is an ode? According to *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* an ode is: 'an elaborately formal lyric poem, often in the form of a ceremonious address to a person or abstract entity, always serious and elevated in tone' (Baldick 1990: 117). Two forms are often identified, the Pindaric ode, reintroduced into English by Abraham Cowley in 1656, which is a looser irregular ode, and the Horatian ode formed of more regular, homostrophic stanzas (Baldick 1990: 117). Keston Sutherland suggests that William Wordsworth's interest in this particular form was due to its unconstrained nature, an 'irregularly constructed strophic lyric poem' that granted him 'formal freedom of expression' (Sutherland 2017). Second definition. What is TL61P? TL61P is the serial number of the door hinge of a now defunct Hotpoint washer dryer. The combination of these definitions hints at a preliminary explanation of the title, *The Odes to TL61P*. They are a series of five irregularly constructed and elaborate strophic lyric celebrations of the serial number of the door hinge of a discontinued Hotpoint washer dryer. They are a satirical celebration of obsolescence and a critique of culture as commodity.

What draws Keston Sutherland to the ode in particular? In a 2017 lecture about genre, Sutherland reads "Immortality Ode" as a subversion of the form by Wordsworth. He begins by sketching Wordsworth's condemnation of "poetic diction", in an appendix to the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*", which he defines as a dilution of passionate language, 'wrested from its proper use', void of the original 'animating passion', and manifested as 'a mechanical adoption of...figures of speech' (Wordsworth-Coleridge 2013: 365-370). In other words, according to Wordsworth, many of his contemporaries were writing nothing more than clichéd venerations of members of the royal family or their own aristocratic patrons in language that was full of dead metaphors and hollow rhetoric, often in the form of the ode. There is a neo-classical precedent and the ode could be considered an apt vessel of

veneration; Pindar's odes were sung to celebrate victorious athletes or military victories in Ancient Greece for instance (Baldick, 1990: 117). Sutherland suggests that Wordsworth's decision to reinhabit the ode was driven by an imperative to:

> ...mount a full on attack on the insipidity, the emptiness, the absurdity of the conventional inhabitation of this form, the sycophantic reproduction of idiotic forms of windy poetic diction designed for no other purpose than to flatter an audience who didn't care about poetry whatsoever. (Sutherland 2017)

How exactly did Wordsworth intend to reinvigorate the ode? In the lecture, Sutherland draws attention to Wordsworth's belief, expressed in a letter to John Wilson dated 7 June 1802, that a poem: '...ought to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure and permanent...' (Wordsworth 1974: 106). The poet has a duty to inspire new emotions in their reader, not merely to celebrate state power in sycophantic verbose verse. According to Sutherland, Wordsworth subverts this corrupted version of the ode partly through his choices of what might rightly be celebrated - characters on the fringes of society, the leech gatherer in "Resolution and Independence" or the eponymous "Idiot Boy" for example.

According to Sutherland, The apotheosis of Wordsworth's subversive impulse is his "Great Ode". The lecture concludes that Wordsworth's contention that a newborn baby might be the 'best Philosopher' fulfils his imperative that a poem "ought to" produce entirely new emotions in its audience, citing Coleridge's dismay as evidence: 'What does all this mean? In what sense is a child of that age a philosopher? In what sense does he read the "eternal deep?"' (Coleridge 2014: 317). It was one thing to provoke and offend people who were already hostile to Wordsworth's poetry, but quite another to attract Coleridge's criticism. As Sutherland says:

> ...it really had to be for Wordsworth the test of the truth of his poetry, and a test of the truth of his conception of poetry, that Coleridge in particular should be offended by it...if even that person can be made to confront his most deep and stubborn prejudices about what is valuable in the world then something really has moved. (Sutherland 2017)

The ode then, for Sutherland, represents the most potent form of poetry for confronting deeply held intellectual prejudices. Beyond the obvious didactic objectives of the lecture, in his role as Professor of Poetics, it almost seems as if Sutherland is publicly accepting a direct challenge from Wordsworth. Poetry ought to alchemically produce new compositions of emotion and subvert pre-established structures of power. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" ends:

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
>
> (Wordsworth 1994: 590)

It was by celebrating the marginalised, the trivialised, the despised, the most overlooked things, in the convention of the ode, something such as "the meanest flower that blows", says Sutherland, that Wordsworth managed to reinhabit this corrupted form (Sutherland 2017). The lecture ends:

> You have to find, this is the test says Wordsworth, an object which nobody else apparently will care about, and which by convention will be treated as garbage, and have in response to that object a feeling which is too deep to be outwardly expressed and for which you feel a feeling which is so confusing that you have no right language to express it. How do you write an ode which does that? (Sutherland 2017)

An attempt at an answer to that final question might very well be traced in the numerous odes that Sutherland himself has written: "A Pow Ode" (2000), "Slits in Three Odes" (2002), "Ode: What You Do" (2003), "Ode to Squid" (2004), "Dildo Ode" (2004), and finally, *The Odes to TL61P* (2013). What could be more marginal, trivial, despised and overlooked than the serial number for the replacement door hinge of an obsolete Hotpoint washer dryer or even the abundant cephalopod? This section will measure some of Sutherland's odes against Wordsworth's demands on the power of poetry to forge new sensations and to discover new

modes of thought in order to subvert hierarchical social relations and the flattened out discourses of contemporary public life.

Sutherland's argument relies upon a perceived antagonism between Wordsworth's experimental poetic practice and the mechanical application of "poetic diction", as he calls it, by many of his contemporaries. Sutherland fosters a similar antagonism for mainstream poetic practice in the twenty-first century. Andrew Motion, poet laureate from 1999 to 2009, falls foul of Sutherland's ire in his lecture on the ode. He cites the poem "Birthday Rap", written to celebrate Prince William's twenty-first birthday, as an example of the kind of servile platitudinous praise poetry that the ode has become (Motion 2003). In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth laments that '...men ambitious of the fame of Poets...applied [figures of speech] to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever' (Wordsworth-Coleridge 2013: 365-370). Motion's *The Customs House* is full of poetry about the first and second world wars. Motion was born afterwards in 1952. The collection, "Laurels and Donkeys" contains poems about the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the trenches, Siegfried Sassoon, the Korean memorial at Hiroshima, and Harry Patch (who was, for a short period before his death, acknowledged as the last surviving soldier of the First World War). No doubt, history is a perfectly acceptable topic for poetry, yet it might also be true that Motion '...is desirous of producing the same effect...' as a poet like Sassoon himself '...without having the same animating passion...' as him (Motion 2012: 366). Stated plainly, Sassoon had lived experience of the trenches in the Somme, Motion does not. His poems resemble the war monuments in the great European capitals, both celebrating and concealing the fallen they memorialise. Take the following description of a falling missile from "An Equal Voice" as an example:

A soft siffle, high in the air like a distant lark,
or the note of a penny whistle, faint and falling.
But then, with a spiral, pulsing flutter, it grew
to a hissing whirr, landing with ferocious blasts,

followed by the whine of fragments that cut
into the trees, driving white scars into their trunks
and filling the air with torn shreds of foliage.

(Motion 2012: 5)

Opening with a "soft" sibilant "siffle", moving on to the "faint and falling" consonance and an onomatopoeic "whine", the sound effects do not relent. It sounds almost as if Motion, and the reader, were there. It turns out, however, that they are not even Motion's words at all, as he reveals to *The Guardian*: 'This is a "found" poem, a stitching together of the voices of shellshocked people. Their words have been taken from a variety of sources, from the first world war to the present, and are presented in the poem in roughly chronological order' (Motion 2009). The issue is not necessarily that the poem is a collage of other people's words, Sutherland himself is certainly no stranger to lifting chunks of text and dropping them into unfamiliar contexts, but rather the gap between the figures of speech (sibilance, consonance, onomatopoeia) and the subject matter they are intended to convey. The sound effects give more an impression of the cartoonish whistle and pop of a firework than the devastating annihilation of a trench mortar. The lyrical voice is distant, there is "no natural connection" with the "animating passion" of the experience the poem is supposed to represent. It yearns to be transparent, through its insistently conversational tone, but war is anything but transparent.

In Sutherland's view, Wordsworth tried to move away from the trappings of "poetic diction" by dedicating his odes to the marginalised, the trivialised, the despised, the most overlooked things. In the twenty-first century there are no shortage of odes to the unlikely detritus of modern life; there is "Ode to a Clothes Peg" by Simon Armitage or "Ode to Autocorrect" by Martha Silano to name just two examples. However, it is not enough to just celebrate a clothes peg, or autocorrect; the response to these trivial objects (or software functions) should, instead, provoke a new and confusing emotion for which no preformed or existing language exists to express it. Armitage uses the clothes peg to ignite a parallel

meditation on domesticity and Keats's terminal voyage to Rome. The pegged bedsheets, billowing in the wind, undergo a metamorphosis as they become the sails of the Maria Crowther sailing brig in the imagination of the poet.[31] Poetry transforms the everyday, the banal, the mundane, into something eternal. The alchemical power of poetic language can take the humble clothes peg and elevate it to a symbol of the memory of John Keats. The poem finishes emphatically: 'The wide afternoon skies were pinned with clouds | the colour and shape of death masks and shrouds' (Armitage 2019). These two decasyllabic lines and their rhyming couplet represent the climax of one poet's memorial to another. However, the choice of the death mask as an image is intriguing. Death masks, mementos cast in wax, both venerate and disguise the deceased (much like the war memorials previously mentioned). They are uncanny likenesses of the original. An argument might be made that "Ode to a Clothes Peg" itself bears an uncanny likeness to Keats's great odes. At best it is an effective tribute to the great Romantic poet. At worst, it uses all the conventions, but has none of the intensity of its predecessor. Crucially, according to Wordsworth's demands, it does not '...rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure and permanent...' as an ode ought (Wordsworth 1974: 106). The emotions in Armitage's poem, and the verse they are rendered in, are all easily recognisable.

The above criticism of Andrew Motion and Simon Armitage, both inarguably better known than Keston Sutherland, is not intended as a cheap shot. There is clearly a market for their poetry and they both have flourishing literary careers that attest to their popularity. They do, however, function as antagonists to Sutherland's poetic project, at least in his imagination. Just as he identifies poets laureate Thomas Warton and Henry James Pye as purveyors of "poetic diction" in contrast to William Wordsworth, he too takes arms against the poets laureate of his own epoch, Armitage and Motion.[32] Their poetry serves as a counterpoint to

[31] Keats sailed to Naples in 1820 to treat his tuberculosis in a sailing brig called *Maria Crowther*.
[32] Thomas Warton was poet laureate from 1785-1790, and was succeeded by Henry James Pye who served from 1790-1813.

his own. In his efforts to avoid "poetic diction", Keston Sutherland ends up hopping between registers, discourse types and technical jargons. In "Dildo Ode", a sex toy finds itself the unlikely object of an ode. The poem is composed of stark contrasts; hot and cold, holes and convexities, being empty and being full, scientific specificity and Hindu iconography, consumption and disposal, sense and nonsense. Keeping track of these antonyms as the poem proceeds is a useful strategy to avoid being consumed by its syntactic violence and relentless ambiguity. Its opening lines are impossibly cryptic, 'Eat them a snow roast' (Sutherland 2015: 174). Who are they? Are we being invited to eat them or to eat a snow roast *for* them? Two extremes of temperature, reflected in the oxymoron "snow roast", reoccur toward the end of the poem too: 'the name *burns* | a hole | full of suspirable | blood into its *gelid* tag...' (Sutherland 2015: 176). The phrase "a hole" is repeated three times, and other figurative holes abound, 'yoni' (a Sanskrit word that connotes the female organ), 'NTE5' (a broadband socket), 'pozi-cross head' (a type of screw head) (Sutherland 2015: 175-176). These voids are filled too, not least by the dildo to which the ode is addressed. The "yoni" is paired with a "lingam" (a phallic Hindu symbol), and an ear is filled with Otex (a brand of ear drops). Finding these threads activates the reader to make sense of the apparent nonsense. It is an example of Sutherland's belief, via his interpretation of Wordsworth, that a poem ought to "rectify" the sensibilities of the reader giving them "new compositions of feeling". The reader has an active role to play in creating something meaningful out of the poem, creating a new composition out of the fragmented text on the page.

The notion that a poem should create for itself an appropriate audience reoccurs in much of Sutherland's academic work. He opens a 2009 lecture on *The Waste Land* citing Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as quoted by Wordsworth in a letter to Lady Beaumont: 'every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished' (Wordsworth 1974: 145). Claims of Modernism's impossibility and unreadability are met with the steadfast rebuttal: 'Great literature in our own period of

history has likewise had to force its readership into existence' (Sutherland 2009). The reader of Sutherland's poetry ought to be mobilised into doing something to the poem. They are prevented from letting their ears be filled passively with familiar verse forms like so many soothing medicinal drops gently squeezed from an applicator nozzle. Though the demands are put upon the reader, the recurrence of this argument discloses equally as much about the sensibilities of the poet. In trying to avoid recognisable poetic language, Sutherland finds himself frenetically oscillating between a vast array of discourse types. Lexically speaking, "Dildo Ode" is full of obscure jargonistic terminology from a range of fields: Physics ('atmolysis'), Medicine ('glycosuria'; 'otex'), Anatomy ('ileum'), Technology ('NTE5'), Construction ('pozi-head cross zinc') (Sutherland 2015: 174-176). These terms put the onus on the reader to look them up. However, it would be a stretch to argue that requiring the reader to reach for the OED Online every five words is the same as "forcing a readership into existence". Indeed, it sounds very much like Simon Armitage, Robert Crawford, and Don Paterson's caricatures of experimental poetry from the first chapter of this study; that it is "biblioholically demanding" and it is only read by a "captive audience" composed of the poet's own postgraduate students.

Not taken in isolation, but rather the ensemble effect of these disorientating features is what might provoke "new compositions of feeling". The variety of registers, for example: witty turns of phrase such as 'Hesitate to contact us', an amusing refiguration of an email nicety, or the word play in 'Hire them by the broker's dozen' clash against syntactically dysfunctional ones like the first line, 'Eat them a snow roast the atmolysis dead | pretty a new way' (Sutherland 2015: 174-176). The poem incorporates the superabundance of discourse types that modern life bombards us with: email platitudes, scientific jargon, advertising slogans, product codes, and adolescent slang. This variety draws attention to the linguistic overload which defines the present era, thanks in part to the predominance of the internet, and the impact that this linguistic overload has had on experience. Two experiences of

Sutherland's poetry are possible, a painstakingly attentive reading, from the page, where every word would be better served by a hyperlink, or Sutherland's explosive performances which animate and emphasise the satirical switches in register and tone. Both are necessary to truly arrive at an understanding of what is happening in this poetry. The intensity of the poem stems from its existence between these two spheres, the cerebral and the kinetic. The jargon and the register switches cognitively disorientate the reader, whereas the momentum of the lines, taken in their totality, is immediate and impactful. In this sense, "Dildo Ode" seems to fulfil Sutherland's paraphrase of Wordsworth's demand that a poem ought to create 'a feeling which is too deep to be outwardly expressed...a feeling which is so confusing that [there is] no right language to express it' (Sutherland 2017). The sensation produced by the poem, in both of its iterations, is profound, yet it deliberately prevents the formulation of a coherent idiom to contain the emotion it expresses.

Nevertheless, the above analysis risks neglecting the intensely satirical and humorous nature of this poem. Its hyperbole verges on the ridiculous. Poetry itself is likened to an explicitly phallic sex toy. The reader, 'you', is transformed into 'a hole | sensitive and nervous' (Sutherland 2015: 174). The notion that poetry might have some sort of philosophical value, filling the void as it were, is undermined by Sutherland's literal (almost schoolboy) interpretation of that phrase. As previously illustrated, the poem is full of holes being filled. At first glance, it is a bawdy parody of the poetry volume as self-help book or spiritual guide. However, the object of its ridicule and scorn is more profound: the commodity, including poetry itself, as a quick substitute for self-realisation and self-fulfilment. As has been illustrated in the previous chapter, the chaos of shifting registers and syntactic violence sometimes relents and the poetic voice turns rapidly on the reader in deadpan accusation. Towards the end of "Dildo Ode", at the end of a heavily indented line, the following three word imperative appears: 'own your life' (Sutherland 2015: 177). The

white space might be taken for a moment of clarity, an intake of breath, before the poem recommences haranguing its audience. Climax and the climax of the poem converge:

raptorial total orgasm and living riotous joy
at kicking the faked edge of a life in
commodity-sepia to hell and knowing it
is a dream only in the crassest last fantasies.

(Sutherland 2015: 177)

These lines describe an almost sexual enjoyment at the thought of rising up against the limits of modern consumer society, while at the same time harbouring an awareness of the futility of fantasising about such significant change. The poem illustrates the limitations of poetry to meaningfully expose the superficiality of consumerism. The image, "a life in commodity-sepia", represents an attack on nostalgia, the past packaged in dreamlike reddish-brown as an aspirational utopia. Yet, Sutherland has chosen his image carefully; nostalgia obscures like a cloud of cuttlefish ink just like consumer capitalists package our idealised versions of the past to sell back to us. It is for this reason that Sutherland is so sceptical of "riotously joyful" nostalgic poetic forms. His abrasive technique, and it sometimes verges on crass, at least protects his poetry from becoming "verse in commodity-sepia" - blissful in its ignorance, ignorant in its bliss.

Any serious study of commodity fetishism in the poetry of Keston Sutherland requires a proportionally serious engagement with *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx. The allure of the commodity is famously interrogated in Part 1, Section 4 of *Das Kapital*: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing,' begins Marx, '[b]ut its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (Marx 2004: 163). Commodity fetishism, then, would seem to have something to do with the imaginative abstraction, or ritual worship, of the banal and everyday objects that abound in society. The commodity, for Marx, amounts to the transformation of natural resources into something "useful" by differing degrees of human labour. He illustrates this

with the example of wood, a raw material, which is subsequently transformed into a table by the skilled artisan. The problem arises, for Marx, when these commodities are brought into relation and exchanged; the "exchange values" of commodities do not always accurately reflect the 'expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, and sense organs' (Marx 2004: 164). The labour that produced the commodity is seen as an inherent property of the commodity itself: '...the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things' (Marx 2004: 164). Already, this rudimentary introduction, presents itself as a useful theoretical framework for an analysis of the commodity in Sutherland's poetry, and of the poem as commodity. The commodity disguises the labour that produced it, it is transformed into a 'social hieroglyphic' (Marx 2004: 166). By the same token, the poem as commodity disguises something, transforms something into a 'social hieroglyphic', suppresses the human labour and social relations that condition its composition (Marx 2004: 166). A plausible explanation for the indecipherability of Sutherland's poetry is that, in this way, it will be resistant to transformation. Its raw materials, emotions, sensations and words, resist misappropriation into something "useful", such as poems for birthdays, poems for weddings, poems for funerals. In other words, poetry which is defined by its function not by its animating passion. The value of Sutherland's poetry is 'branded on its forehead', it is painfully conscious of the raw materials of which it is composed, its wide range of discourse types and arcane lexical choices, laboriously brought into relation by the effort of a skilled artisan, the poet.

It would be a useful theoretical framework, that is, were it not for Sutherland's own analysis of Part 1, Section 4 of *Das Kapital*. In "Marx in Jargon" he is at pains to ensure that the satire of Marx is not lost. He cites Laura Mulvey, a British feminist film theorist, who says that:

> ...the value of a commodity resides in the labor power of its producer. If this labor power could ever inscribe itself on the commodity it produces, if it could leave a tangible mark of the time and skill taken in production, there would be no problem. (Mulvey 1993: 8)

He responds witheringly, ‘Are we meant to conclude that the bourgeois consumer is a fetishist because labour power fails to inscribe itself indexically on its object?’ (Sutherland 2011: 56). Almost as if printing “the child who made this was paid 7 rupees” on a football would somehow magically transform the impoverished working conditions of the children who make them. The thrust of his argument seems to be that ignoring the satire in Marx also means ignoring the fact that satire must always be at someone’s expense. In Mulvey’s analysis, deciphering the hieroglyphics, identifying the hidden labour power contained within a commodity, in a sanitised process of theoretical interpretation is an end in itself. However, according to Sutherland, it is precisely this kind of sanitised, rational and theoretical thought processes of the bourgeoisie that is the object of Marx’s satire. Sutherland suggests that Marx playfully leads his bourgeois reader up a blind alley: ‘The festish-character of commodities described by Marx is truly an intellectual dead end. It does cramp the reader into a gesture of abstract repentance that cannot be other than sanctimonious’ (Sutherland 2011: 74). Marx’s satire turns on its reader for their complicity, for their futile theorising, for their token declarations of guilt. There are many moments in Sutherland’s poetry when he also seems to turn on his reader. The poet breaks the fourth wall, using the second-person singular pronoun “you”, to implicate the reader in the social critique he has performed on several occasions across the course of his career. In lieu of a dedication, *The Odes to TL61P* commences, ‘Wake up my fellow citizens and middle class and go look in the mirror’ (Sutherland 2013: 5). Not only does he back his reader into an impossible corner, he also finds himself backed into it (since Sutherland is exactly the sort of person who would read Sutherland’s poetry). The poems are full of these stalemates. Section 1.3 of “Ode 4” begins with the following wry double-bind:

It's the 1960s. You ask to see the manager, only to be told, gradually, patiently, in innumerable stages, that you are the manager, and then asked, all at once, would you like the person who is complaining to be ejected since it is you? (Sutherland 2013: 60)

The object of this satire is not just middle managers and faceless bureaucrats, it is, even more significantly, the readers of avant-garde poetry. As previously discussed, *Whither Russia* has its own moment of *volte-face*: 'That it has come to this is your fault, you who know how to read this' (Sutherland 2017: 38-39). The diligent reader, dutifully reaching for the OED every third word, plotting their course through the treacherous undulations of this verse, suddenly finds themselves as the butt of its joke. This is not to say that *The Odes to TL61P* is an intellectual prank, indeed it is unnervingly sincere and intimate at times, but rather that the reader neglects their culpability at their peril. Sutherland is attempting to "rectify men's feelings" not manoeuvre complacent abstractions in a three-dimensional theoretical slide puzzle. He says as much of *Das Kapital*:

Any interpretation of Marx that forgets the *dramatis persona* of the bourgeois reader, who is of course living and real, that passes over him in silence, or conjures some elaborate theoretical periphrasis to take his place, is a complacent misinterpretation to the full extent that it discounts the expense of Marx's satire. (Sutherland 2011: 75)

Equally, any interpretation of *The Odes to TL61P* that forgets the *dramatis persona* of the left-leaning reader of poetry, interested in things like student protests, is a complacent misinterpretation of Sutherland's satire.

It is no coincidence that the word "integument" appears both on the first page of *The Odes to TL61P* and in Part 1, Section 4 of *Das Kapital*. Integument, which fundamentally means skin, is more specifically defined as: 'The natural covering or investment of the body, or of some part or organ, of an animal or plant; a skin, shell, husk, rind etc.' (OED Online 2019). The word choice is mimetic, hiding, as it does, its own meaning beneath its obscurity. Marx uses the word figuratively to render the idea of the commodity as a covering of the

human labour that went into its production. Sutherland adds his own layer of obtusity by dedicating five celebratory odes to a now defunct serial number for a replacement washing machine door hinge. The code number is not only a mask for the spare part but also disguises elements of late consumer capitalism such as the planned obsolescence of domestic products. The absurdity of the poem's premise, an elaborate strophic lyric celebration of a serial number, brings questions about throwaway culture into sharp focus. Why is this replacement door hinge no longer available? Is it because people are not in the habit of repairing their electro-domestic goods anymore or that Hotpoint, or a third party, might profit from the scarcity of this spare part? The dramatic tension signalled by the title, the discordance of an ode with a code, is played out throughout the poem. A quick internet search returns results for numerous spare parts websites, all with neatly indexed lists, tutorial videos and customer reviews, that might prompt more curious minds to wonder where all this zinc coated steel and polypropylene resin comes from or ends up. The additional irony is that an internet search for "TL61P" also returns results for a copy of Keston Sutherland's poetry volume, or at least the commodity that his poetry becomes in book form, listed on its own online outlet with its own customer reviews and delivery options. In Britain in 2022, poetry and washing machine door hinges appear to exist on the same plane. They both exist to fulfil immediate needs that are just a click away. However, the first page of *The Odes to TL61P* announces its disruptive intentions immediately: 'the very integument to be burst asunder' (Sutherland 2013: 7). The poem is not just a hollow centre covered in a reflective rind, with directions to external sources like the OED or spare parts websites, but also an attempt to burst its husk asunder.

The impenetrable exterior of this poem, its obtuse language and irregularity, represents a sort of linguistic integument. However, moments of recognisable versification burst this unintelligibility asunder. At first glance, Part 2 of the second ode seems like more of the same dense, justified and deliberately dissonant prose that begins the first. Yet, sooner

or later, any reader would be hard pushed not to notice a regular rhyme scheme and familiar metre emerging. The first lines are printed as follows:

> As sure as any air must spread the cost of any breathing head thrilled out to cold perfection released from its protection to keep our estimates so rough that each can lean in close enough...
>
> (Sutherland 2013: 23)

However, when they are written with metrical scansion and line breaks after the rhymes:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
As sure | as a | ny air | must spread
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
The cost | of a | ny breath | ing head
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Thrilled out | to cold | per fec | tion
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Re leased | from its | pro tec | tion
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
To keep | our es | ti mates | so rough
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
That each | can lean | in close | e nough...

(Sutherland 2013: 23)

it is easy to see, almost perfect, iambic tetrameter just lurking beneath the surface. The regular rhythms of this section, the upbeat movement and flow of the shorter tetrameter, are disconcerting in the context of a poem like *The Odes to TL61P*. By the second ode, it is safe to assume that no elements of the poem are exempt from parody. The jocular metre jars against the seriousness of the content. It tempts the reader into a false sense of security. In the following passage Sutherland takes aim at the metre he has temporarily adopted:

> Januzi UKHL 5 will keep the flagging law alive cement forever wet in dreams of Tigris' disembouging streams of bonded revenue and dust shored up with picturesque disgust by poets mindfully concussed...
>
> (Sutherland 2013: 24)

"Januzi UKHL 5" refers to an appeal following a rejected asylum case between a Kosovan citizen and the UK Secretary of State for the Home Department heard before the House of

Lords in 2006. The appeal was dismissed on the grounds that Mr Januzi could safely relocate to the Pristina region of Kosovo ("Januzi v Secretary of State for the Home Department" 2006). The Tigris "disembouges" through Iraq and presumably the "streams of bonded revenue" represent an increased flow of US profits due to the war in 2003. These two cryptic references to wars, both involving the UK, are by no means undiscoverable. Nevertheless, the neat stress pattern and perfect end rhymes do not immediately suggest criticism of denied asylum applications from citizens of countries the UK has had a direct role in destabilising. Lines like, 'Januzi UKHL 5 | will keep the flagging law alive' might just be an example of the 'picturesque disgust' Sutherland is so withering about (Sutherland 2013: 24). It is clearly critical about the outcome of the case, disgusted even, but at the same time it is vivid and pleasing to listen to.

The metrical diversity of *The Odes to TL61P*, which does include some masterful iambic tetrameter, is testament to the great exertions Sutherland has made not to be a 'mindfully concussed' poet (Sutherland 2013: 24). In a footnote to his essay "Wrong Poetry", Sutherland compares Hegel's assertion that knowledge tends to 'recount conventional ideas as if they were established and familiar truths' to Ezra Pound's satirical poem "Fratres Minores" (Hegel 1977: 35). Sutherland's "mindfully concussed poets" are reminiscent of Pound's younger brothers:

With minds still hovering above their testicles
Certain poets here and in France
Still sigh over established and natural fact
Long since fully discussed by Ovid.

(Pound 2001: 78)

What all three have in common is an inherent distrust for established truths. Sutherland paraphrases Hegel's observation that knowledge, 'is usually in the first instance more preoccupied with "recounting" its contents in irresistible style than it is in making any sort of strenuous effort' (Sutherland 2011: 92). Radical thinking requires serious engagement with a

concept, whereas knowledge, in the sense intended by Hegel in the quotation above, is often associated with an identification of the familiar. It is intriguing that Sutherland's interpretation of Hegel would associate knowledge as a repetition of identifiable facts with 'irresistible style' (Sutherland 2011: 92). In both *The Odes to TL61P* and "Fratres Minores" there is suspicion of language, especially verse, that is too alluring or too recognisable. For Sutherland this language is 'picturesque disgust by poets mindfully concussed' (Sutherland 2013: 24), for Pound 'They howl. They complain in delicate and exhausted metres...' (Pound 2001*:* 78). "Making it new" is not merely a question of novelty or originality, of avoiding the staple metrical forms of Anglophone poetry to be different at all costs, but rather an attempt to liberate language of its irresistibility, to set it to work on the strenuous activity of radical thinking.

The techniques discussed thus far, the oscillation between metrical patterns and backing the reader into a corner, are designed to deliberately alienate and disorientate them as the poem progresses. They force the reader to make sense of the language they are presented with for themselves and to engage in an active process of thought. It is a technique perhaps adopted from Bertolt Brecht.[33] However, while much of Keston Sutherland's earlier work might have been content to provoke this type of reaction, by this stage in his career he is demanding more of himself. As he says in a 2015 interview for *Blackbox Manifold*:

> I still want culture to be revitalizing, electrifying and to shock me awake, but I don't think it can be pretended any longer that most people are simply sleepwalking through their lives and that we need to be slapped around with a more material signifier to achieve modes or levels of attention that would at last be revolutionary. (Sutherland 2015)

This "more material signifier" might be the chunks of unintelligible prose or appalling juxtapositions of war crimes with sexually explicit, misogynist language such as in "Song of the Wanking Iraqi", elements designed to shock the reader awake. Why *The Odes to TL61P*

[33] Brechtian alienation involved distancing techniques which prevented the audience from having an emotional engagement with the drama. These techniques often involved actors breaking character or emphasising the artificiality of the setting.

represents such a radical leap forward is that it also incorporates genuine moments of vulnerability. These take the form of hitherto undisclosed sexual confessions. He tells Natasha Hoare, that in *The Odes* he ‘tried to do something that was very risky’:

> I tried to describe in explicit and perfectly legible language all of my sexual experiences as a child, and in some cases to put into words, for the very first time, memories of events which felt to me as though they had somehow been obscurely fundamental in forming my sexual personality. (Sutherland 2019)

The candid descriptions of childish fumbling are as disturbing as they are a refreshing break from the incessant syntactical breakdowns. If “you” is for accusation, then “I” is for confession. Someone, presumably Sutherland (if the interview is to be believed) admits that he: ‘...put Christian in my | mouth, under the blanket, played with him as if gargling. | I didn’t know what to do, so it felt better, authentically | childish’ (Sutherland 2013: 45). These lines seem to have all the elements that these intimate confessions are marked by; a yearning for authenticity, the sincerity of childhood experiences, and a hint at the Christian tradition of confession. For Wordsworth, a baby was “the best philosopher”, and for Sutherland too, the “authentically childish” nature of his dirty secrets become a source of liberating possibility. They also provide the poem with genuine moments of dramatic tension and occasions for empathy. He reveals that Christian wants to keep the transgression a secret, and that although he agrees, he feels that it was somehow, ‘...melancholy that such a simple act of | pleasure between people still roughly equal at that age | should need to be made into a source of fear, when all | we had to fear was other people’ (Sutherland 2013: 45). His confession, in this ode, feels like a liberation from that fear. Transforming these secrets into language gives *The Odes to TL61P* its lyric intensity. He is clearly no longer afraid of other people, quite the opposite, as he says, tongue half in cheek, ‘I wanted | everybody to get something out of my mouth. What | comes from it now is this ode...’ (Sutherland 2013: 45). This confession also contains a moment of metawriting about its own genesis:

> I stare at the white screen wanting to know what comes of it next, or later; and whether I am living or dead depends on you, and when you read it; it depends on who you are, like tides on the moon, blood on the measured heart.
>
> (Sutherland 2013: 45)

The elements of doubt and humility in the poet's tone, his uncertainty about how the poem will be received, rearrange the hierarchical power structure that can exist between author and reader. These confessional elements are fundamental, not only because they represent yet another "violent shift of register", but more importantly because they expose a certain amount of authentic vulnerability.

There is, however, a Marxist dimension to even the most seemingly intimate passages of *The Odes to TL61P*. As previously cited in the "Context" section, Sutherland states that: 'the horizon of my poetry [is] to attempt to express with the maximum conceivable and liveable pressure an absolutely imperative need for the comprehensive revolutionary transformation of human experience and relations' (Sutherland 2013). This "revolutionary transformation of human experience and relations" might be read in the confessional moments of the ode. In the fifth ode, after another episode shrouded in shame and secrecy, with a boy called David, has emerged, Sutherland begins to reflect on the nature of exchange, sexual and otherwise:

> I swapped stickers with him, and went on to exchange my motorbike for Christian's tank, an agreement which my father unhappily replied was a sort of extortion from infancy, but which made me sexually delight in having given away more than I had got back, for the delight was secret;
>
> (Sutherland 2013: 64)

On the surface, a difference between two perceptions of value are described. The father believes that the monetary value of the motorbike is higher than the monetary value of the tank. Whereas for the poetic subject, the discrepancy in the exchange is precisely what gives it its value - delight. The father is disappointed because the protagonist has come away from the deal with a toy bearing a lesser exchange-value. However, as Marx illustrates in Part 1 of *Das Kapital*: ‘This relation changes constantly with time and place. Hence exchange-value appears to be something accidental and purely relative’ (Marx 2004: 126). Therefore, the value of the toys, under a Marxist lens, is not fixed but rather subject to the socio-historical context in which they are exchanged. There is nothing intrinsically more valuable about the motorbike than the tank; the difference is in the eye of the credit card holder. Sutherland subverts the logic of exchange-value by delighting, sexually, in giving more away than he gets back. This dynamic is not limited to these lines, but forms one of the pillars of his poetics. Poetry is, in this sense, giving away more than you get back and these confessional interludes are where this belief is most fervently exposed.

For all that, it would be a gross fallacy to suggest that confession bears an uncomplicated relation to truth. Jo Gill asks, ‘[i]s there an element of choice or is confession coerced in some specific and individual or general and social way?’ (Gill 2006: 1). Gill’s book demonstrates that history provides many examples of the institutional coercion of confession, from the pre-Reformation Christian Church to Abu Ghraib (Gill 2006: 5; 180). Michel Foucault describes confession as:

> ...a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile. (Foucault 2008: 61-2)

In the confessional moments of *The Odes to TL61P*, the poetic subject is also the subject of the poem, in the presence of a reader who is free to judge or empathise as they see fit. This

power relationship is explicit, in both senses of the word, throughout the odes. Here is another example from the fifth ode:

> In the summer when the snow was gone under the mud I went there with David and ended up agreeing to be the one who was fucked so long as I did not have to be the one who would fuck back, and put myself on my hand and knees with my pants down, in front of him, facing away; I felt myself become a hole, I now think I emerged as a hole for him; I now emerge as a hole for you.
>
> (Sutherland 2013: 63)

As it transpires, the memory is only of an agreement between the poetic subject and David, because they are interrupted by their mothers. The boy in the memory is willing to be completely subservient, he literally feels himself being transformed into a hole, and in the act of revealing the poet undergoes the same transformation. This act of confession empties the poetic subject, not only of the burden of secrecy, but utterly, and leaves him staring at a white screen at the mercy of the reader, though 'it depends on who you are' (Sutherland 2013: 45). Confession in this poem is not just a matter of authenticity, but of radically transforming the relations between poet and reader. In "Dildo Ode", it was the reader who became a hole, '...sensitive and nervous the pleasure of sharing' (Sutherland 2015: 174), whereas in *The Odes to TL61P* it is the poet, 'I now emerge as a | hole for you' (Sutherland 2013: 45).

The Odes to TL61P is composed of two conflicting energies, it is both cerebral and kinetic, savagely satirical and candidly confessional. This conflict gives the poem its power. The antagonism to contemporary forms of "poetic diction", the resistance to "delicate and exhausted metres", the satire of the reader, are in stark contrast to the often humiliating, lyrical confessions that emerge periodically in the poem. The former permits the latter to function, and vice versa. It is this delicate balance, between transgression and vulnerability, that the self-consciousness of his work before the publication of this volume is overcome. Sutherland accepted a challenge from Wordsworth, which admittedly he put into his mouth;

how do you write an ode that provokes a response that is so destabilising that your reader might have no right language to express it? Which makes this analysis challenging to produce. What has been possible is an elucidation of some of theoretical and literary works that inform Sutherland's poetic practice, specifically regarding the ode, primarily Wordsworth and Marx, and a commentary on how the techniques he employs are designed to be both a satire of poetry as commodity and at the same time an ardent gift to the generously disposed reader.

3.3 Affect Storms

In a lecture, from 2017, on his Vimeo channel, Keston Sutherland traces references to "affect storms" in a range of psychoanalytic papers, piecing together a concept intended to shed light on some of the more incomprehensible passages of contemporary British poetry. The lecture begins by referencing the distinction between "neurotic" works of art and "psychotic" ones drawn by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze-Guattari 2004). They suggest that any truly revolutionary innovation in culture is always to some extent psychotic in nature. Although a useful distinction, Sutherland is clear that mythologising the mentally ill is profoundly problematic. Therefore, despite the metaphorical potency of this distinction, he proposes the "affect storm" as an alternative category to Deleuze and Guattari's "psychotic", and considers its consequences for aesthetic theory and poetic subjectivity.

The working definition of "affect storm", arrived at towards the end of the lecture, is 'an explosive unbinding, the involuntary, irresistible, self-shattering loss of control caused by the cracking-up of the binding that keeps together emotion and psychic energy so that both spin-out wildly in directions that feel alien and threatening' (Sutherland 2017). This definition then prompts the question: what happens to the poetic subject after this self-shattering, exponential loss of control? Sutherland suggests that it is necessary to transform this primal psychic energy into some sort of mental order, to transform the unrepresentable into the represented, adopting Kenneth Issacs' phrase for this process: "disassembling the storm" (Issacs 1990: 261).[34] In Sutherland's final rendering it is vital that both "explosive unbinding" and "disassembling the storm" happen at once. The relationship between dialectical energies, such as disorder and order, spontaneity and technique, the formless and the formal, is in Sutherland's view what provides the contemporary poetry he

[34] Kenneth Issacs was a US psychoanalytic-psychologist who graduated from the University of Chicago.

values with its intensity. This section will attempt to answer the question: to what extent does the concept of the "affect storm", and the preliminary distinction between "neurotic" and "psychotic" works of art, help to elucidate the most incomprehensible passages of Sutherland's own poetry?

What might "neurotic" or "psychotic" poetry look like? Sutherland's "Affect Storms" lecture offers a couple of sketches that provide an initial answer to this question. His own example of "neurotic" poetry is Philip Larkin's progenital philippic, "This Be The Verse". Sutherland suggests that it is "neurotic" not only on the level of sentiment but also, '...at the level of technique: the neat little quatrains, the rhymes that are satisfied to be glibly despairing and ironic' (Sutherland 2017). Larkin's poem is deployed rhetorically as a counterpoint to an example of a potentially more "psychotic" poem, "Gideon" by Verity Spott which he describes as '...a fully exploded text' (Sutherland 2017). A rudimentary system for sorting poetry into these two categories emerges. Does the poetry under consideration pass a quick "psychotic" eye or ear test? Is the poem arranged in neat, symmetrical stanzas (quatrains or otherwise) that begin at the left margin and break at a metrically determined point or is the text fragmented and splattered across the page, unshackled from the left margin? Is it possible to quickly identify a traditional metrical rhythm or rhyme scheme or are there no real clues as to how to read the poetry aloud at all?

Flick through *High Windows,* the volume which contains "This Be The Verse", and it is easy to notice that several of the other poems contained within are indeed written in "neat little" quatrains too, "The Trees", "High Windows", "How Distant", "Money", and "Cut Grass", all sharing a recognisable rhyme scheme, ABBA or ABAB. Compare that with the opening of Sutherland's "Hot White Andy":

Lavrov and the Stock Wizard levitate over to
the blackened dogmatic catwalk and you eat them. Now swap
buy for *eat*, then *fuck* for *buy*, then *ruminate* for *fuck*,
phlegmophrenic, want to go to the windfarm,

Your • kids menu lips swinging in the Cathex-Wizz monoplex;
Your • face lifting triple its age in Wuhan die-cut peel lids;
ng pick *Your* out the reregulated loner PAT to to screw white
chocolate to the bone. The tension in an unsprung
r trap co
→ The tension in an unsprung trap.
ck QUANT unpruned wing: sdeigne of JOCK
of how I together grateful anyway I was
Its sacked glass, *Punto*

(Sutherland 2015: 213)

The text of the poem looks as if the poet has left an unfinished draft open on his laptop, and it has been sabotaged, the pagination altered and diacritics dropped randomly throughout the text. It is not immediately obvious as to how this poem should be read aloud; how should '•' or '→' be voiced, if they should even be voiced at all? There are recordings of Sutherland performing the poem online, which do provide some clues, but the text itself does not offer any explicit instructions.[35] The relationship between the apparently illegible text and its live performance is of particular interest to John Wilkinson:

> The way this text *looks* with its slashes and square brackets and arrows and bullet points and capitals and italics, does not resemble a familiar reading script; it's reminiscent of an avant-garde musical score, the kind of score more likely to be framed on a gallery wall than placed under the nose of a jobbing musician. But this score produces a terrifically exciting reading, a reading which on the three occasions I have seen it performed, has threatened to disarticulate the reading poet into a demented puppet. The puppet of text. The puppet of babble on simultaneously-broadcasting channels. (Wilkinson 2008)

In Wilkinson's view, not only does the text of the poem look like an explosion of syntactical fragments and glyphs, but it also produces a disarticulating, dementing effect on its reader. At the level of technique, it is the effect produced on the reader by the two distinct styles of poetry that might help distinguish the former as "neurotic" and the latter as "psychotic". Larkin's quatrains fulfil expectations, they are satisfying, the rhyme scheme is conclusive and unifying whereas the disordered explosion of Sutherland's verse is frustrating, or even

[35] Meshworks. "Keston Sutherland - Hot White Andy - Part A - 1/4." Video. *YouTube*, September 14, 2007. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWMTted_5tA.

dementing as Wilkison has suggested. The sensations that the texts provoke in the reader might help in their classification as either "neurotic" or "psychotic".

What is it specifically about writing in a formally recognisable style, within an established genre, that makes Larkin's poetry "neurotic"? Because it is neat and organised? Are neatness and organisation symptoms of "neurosis"? Is Sutherland's poetry "psychotic" because it appears on the page in an apparently disorganised way? Although it is true that disorganisation, including linguistic disorganisation, is a common symptom of many psychotic disorders, the difference between "neurosis" and "psychosis" must offer more metaphorical division otherwise the terms "organised" and "disorganised" would have been sufficient (American Psychiatric Association 2003). In her study, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney suggested that '...a child may not be permitted to grow according to his individual needs [because] the people in [his] environment are too wrapped up in their own neuroses to be able to love the child, or even conceive of him as the particular individual he is...' (Horney 1950: 18). Or, as Larkin has it, '[t]hey fuck you up, your mum and dad' (Larkin 1974: 30). Horney goes on to suggest that these negative influences, such as overprotectiveness, irritability, overindulgence or whatever they might be, manifest themselves as "basic anxiety" and a sense of alienation from self. In response, children fulfil these needs that they have not been provided with and create a sense of self in their imaginations: 'Gradually and unconsciously, the imagination sets to work and creates in his mind an *idealized image* of himself' (Horney 1950: 22). This conflict between a subject's "real self" and "idealized self" as a predominant characteristic of neurosis is pertinent to both the subject matter of Philip Larkin's poetry and also to its form. Colin Falck identifies a related conflict between the ideal and the real in *The Whitsun Weddings.* He suggests that "Essential Beauty" and "Sunny Prestatyn" are two poems which are both about advertising things as more perfect than they actually are in reality. For example, the girl on the Sunny Prestatyn poster is 'too good for this life' (Falck 1975: 404). While the billboards in

"Essential Beauty" advertise, among other things, a romanticised pub full of wholesome 'white-clothed' tennis amateurs yet reveal nothing of the boy 'puking his heart out in the Gents' (Larkin 1984: 41). Falck, quoting Larkin, suggests that throughout the collection: 'there is a sense of "our live imperfect eyes | That stare beyond this world"' (Falck 1975: 404). Perhaps what Larkin sees when he stares beyond the imperfect world is the perfect representation of its imperfection in his verse. His perfect snapshots are in stark contrast with the imperfect world they attempt to reproduce.

The narrative of "Sunny Prestatyn" recounts a loss of innocence; the virginal girl on the poster 'Kneeling up on the sand | In tautened white satin' becomes '...snaggle-toothed and boss-eyed' with 'Huge tits and a fissured crotch' before finally being replaced by an appeal to '*Fight Cancer*' (Larkin 1964: 34). The girl stands for an unattainable version of an innocent past who is effaced by schoolboy graffiti and, finally, the harsh realities of terminal illness. The picture perfect postcard of a sunny seaside town is unlikely to represent the reality of what really existed on the Welsh north coast in the 1960s. Larkin's weary disappointment with the age in which he lives is heightened by its contrast with his conception of an idealised past. The more perfect the image, the more acute the disappointment. At least thematically, this analysis would seem to chime with Karen Horney's definition of "neurosis".

Perhaps, even more strikingly, the form of the poem itself could be described as neurotic. The ugly and disappointing direction of culture presented in the poem is at odds with the cheerful (even self-satisfied) nature of its metre and rhyme scheme. There is a dissonance between the disillusioned message and the jocular trimeter of limerick and adolescent end-rhymes: 'Between her legs held scrawls | That set her fairly astride | A tuberous cock and balls' (Larkin 1964: 41). The playfulness of the melody jars somewhat with the sentiment of the poem. Writing within a traditional form, or to satisfy a rigid rhyme scheme, demands that the poet in some way force meaning into the idealised container of the genre in which he is writing. The slightly cumbersome syntax, 'Between her legs held

scrawls', instead of a perhaps more natural, 'Between her legs [was scrawled]', is an example of the form dictating linguistic choices to the poet, in this case to allow for the perfect rhyme of 'scrawls' with 'balls' (Larkin 1964: 41). Larkin's poems may be viewed as perfected images of a far from perfect world and this internal conflict best mirrors Horney's definition of neurosis and makes a convincing case for classifying Larkin's poetry as "neurotic". Reality, in all of its chaotic hypocrisy, is unable to live up to the idealised world of poetry.

One of the key distinctions between clinical "neurosis" and "psychosis" is that "psychosis" represents a loss of contact with reality, not merely a conflict between reality and an idealised version of it, but a catastrophic disconnection from it (National Institute of Mental Health 2021). The National Institute of Mental Health, in the United States, explains that: 'Symptoms of psychosis include delusions (false beliefs) and hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others do not see or hear). Other symptoms include incoherent or nonsense speech, and behaviour that is inappropriate for the situation' (National Institute of Mental Health: 2021). These symptoms could function as a crude checklist of features in Keston Sutherland's more recent poems. His syntactic vandalism renders the ideas in his poetry almost incomprehensible at times. The poems progress in a provocatively incoherent and seemingly disorganised manner. There are vivid, often violent images that explode unexpectedly during the more prosaic passages, almost as if the poet were unable to restrain them. In the first section of his most recent poem, *Scherzos Benjyosos,* there is a passage which uses the register of an everyday apology. It begins 'I am sorry that I woke you up', continues with the requisite excuses, 'I thought it would not hurt to disturb you,' denials, 'I didn't know it was me,' and minimisation tactics, '...because it was just music,' before being abruptly interrupted by the following explosive image: 'incapable of opening my mouth without a gulf stream of spicules of amethyst and safety pins tied down in ribbon flurrying out to spite you' (Sutherland 2020: 30). Ordinary speech is shattered by the image of minute violet particles of precious rock and what could be charity ribbons ('safety pins tied down in

ribbon') streaming out of the speaker's mouth with the force of an oceanic current to upset the object of the apology. With some imaginative effort it is possible to interpret this image as a visual metaphor for venting one's spleen. The surreal images almost inappropriately collide with the more quotidian style that precedes them; the subject is unable to restrain the sharp spiteful stream of socially inappropriate invective that bursts from their mouth.

However, it would be a mischaracterisation to suggest that the poetry is merely dialogic, that everyday registers collide against surreal imagery giving the poetry its momentum - the polyvocality of Sutherland's poetry is far more complex than that. In fact, while closely reading *Scherzos Benjyosos*, it is often incredibly difficult to answer one of the stock questions in the poetry critic's arsenal: "who is speaking?" Psychiatric definitions might again offer some assistance. According to the *American Psychiatric Association*, schizophrenia can manifest itself as auditory hallucinations, 'usually experienced as voices, whether familiar or unfamiliar, that are perceived as distinct from the individual's own thoughts' (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The spectre of schizophrenia does appear to be intentional in the poem. During a question and answer session, following an online reading for *Conversations on Capitalist Crisis Poetry,* Sutherland reveals that the title should intentionally provoke an association between "schizo" and "scherzo":

> I suppose I intended a kind of, not quite pun, but a conscious, a provocative mimesis of a mishearing in the title of this book, so that it might be possible to hear "schizoid" or you know "schizoid related phenomena" rattling about somewhere in the reference to "scherzos". (Sutherland 2021)

A compelling argument could be made to suggest that the poetic voice in *Scherzos Benjyosos* has something schizophrenic about it. "Scherzo 1" opens with an unnamed first person narrator speaking from an ordinary location: 'I am sitting writing this in a bar...' (Sutherland 2020: 27). The language is direct, syntactically coherent, and easy enough to follow. In the fifth line the straightforward coherence of this voice is disrupted when it self-consciously refers back to its own origin: '...where, in effect, the origin of this voice is deposited...'

(Sutherland 2020: 27). The narrating voice is transformed into the echo of a memory. Even this relatively simple slip into metanarrative introduces a polyvocality that will crescendo as the poem progresses. The written voice documents another voice which belongs to the moment which is being recalled. Memory can often function in this way, a once familiar voice might resurface in a new and unfamiliar context. Later, on the ninth line, an unkind interior voice, which explicitly does not belong to the person who is writing "this" is introduced, '...this time it is proprietor of the Gathering Zone'; 'this time' suggests that there might be other interior voices that say unkind things on other occasions (Sutherland 2020: 27). A much less coherent passage ensues, including a confusing reflection on the mortality of the unkind voice, some surreal imagery, a flurry of questions, and a reference to a 2009 Swine Flu pandemic in Saxony. On line forty-two there is a response to the unkind voice, 'I said back to her, people live, do their best...' implying that some of the incoherent fragments that precede this response were uttered by the unkind voice, although it would be difficult to identify precisely which (Sutherland 2020: 28). There are certainly lines which seem like they could belong to the unkind voice, but at times they seem ventriloquised by the unnamed narrator: 'forever going on about how she is done with being told what to do and how to live her life and what to eat for tea and where to be in the afternoon' (Sutherland 2020: 27). The tone is that of a moody adolescent. At no point does the poem take the form of a direct conversation between two clearly defined interlocutors. The boundaries between subject and object, interior and exterior, are deliberately ambiguous: '...I was carving a scoop of our common head out, the one we already share...' (Sutherland 2020: 28). All of the voices seem trapped and overlapping. The effect of layering a cacophony of voices, which seem to have no clearly defined character, produces a disorientating polylogue which resembles an auditory hallucination. The voices are spontaneous and invasive, just like 'the loud hateful music [which] was blasted out everywhere' and they seem to torment the speaker (Sutherland 2020: 29). The tormented speaker, struggling to articulate themselves, undermined and

derided by a crowd of unkind voices is to some extent inspired by Shakespeare, as Sutherland reveals:

> I think often of the scene towards the end of *Midsummer Night's Dream* where, you know, Bottom and the so-called "Rude Mechanicals" are performing this play for royalty and there the super articulate king is making his mocking and undermining observations throughout the play, so there's kind of a split level sort of vocality going on there. There's the surface level kind of bumbling, trying to get through the spectacle in what is a hapless style and then there's underneath, this commentary running throughout and that structure for me...it's there often in this poem. (Sutherland 2021)

Scherzos Benjyosos is not strictly dialogic, rather the voice which is 'sitting writing this in a bar' haplessly tries to bumble through the poem, sabotaged by a multitude of cruel, ironic (Oberonic) voices throughout (Sutherland 2020: 27).

The schizophrenic nature of voice at the level of content is enhanced by a schizophrenic approach to form. After three and a half pages of dense justified prose blocks the poem bursts into song half way down the fourth page. The six unrhymed tercets break the claustrophobia of the overture, a gesture which comes as a relief or a 'considerate breath of mind' (Sutherland 2020: 28). Even visually the eye is given a rest, the stupefying denseness gives way to some reassuring enjambment (finally it looks like a poem). Sutherland is explicit about this:

> Insofar as they have a design at all, which was certainly very bare and provisional when I was writing, I intended a kind of moment of schizoid rupture so that the whole phenomenology of the poems would be of being cut off and finding oneself in a separate region, suddenly, of experience. (Sutherland 2021)

This reassuring section of traditional verse does transport the reader into a separate region of experience, the region of the intimate love lyric. The stalling, inhibited, polyvocal prose blocks are replaced by a fluent, exposed, singular lyricism that is characterised by a yearning for intimacy, for something that is vital, whole, and momentary: 'It's so rare to be touched with any meaning that the instant | Doesn't do away with soon as memory is ready...' (Sutherland 2020: 30). The sense of yearning is heightened because these six tercets have

been preceded by a recreation of the experience of the instant being done away with when it is transformed into memory in a tormented psyche. Structurally there is an analogue for this effect in classical music. *Scherzos Benjyosos* is on some level in improbable dialogue with Frédéric Chopin's four scherzos: 'There is a kind of rough formal analogy in these four scherzos with the four standalone scherzos by Chopin' (Sutherland 2021). "Scherzo 1" in *Scherzos Benjyosos* does indeed have structural similarities with *Scherzo Op. 20 in B minor* by Chopin. Both composed of three parts, the more uniform lyrical material in the middle is compressed between two shocking and dramatic sections in an ABA pattern. In Chopin the middle section is a musical quotation of a Polish Christmas carol called "Lulajże Jezuniu", which is also tonally nostalgic and is thought to represent his yearning for Poland which had been invaded by Russia at the time of the composition of his first scherzo. As Jim Samson describes in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*:

> In the first section texture (determined by values independent of precise pitch content – register, density, articulation, dynamics) plays the dominant role. The powerful energy of these opening paragraphs is generated largely by rhythmically driven figuration in a context where melodic and harmonic information is minimal. As that energy is dissipated, however, motivic definition begins to take precedence over figuration, and the subtle transition between the two is entirely characteristic of Chopin. Then, in the second section (bar 69), the opening material is transformed in such a way that texture and motive make room for voice-leading and harmony as the chief means of achieving the goal-directed momentum of the music. As so often in Chopin, the borderlines between figuration, melody and harmony have been purposefully blurred. (Samson 1994: 108)

This quotation could also function as a rough description of how the structure creates momentum and meaning in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. In the first section of "Scherzo 1" it is texture, not defined by content or by voices which have hardened into recognisable characters, that plays the dominant role. The first three pages feel as if they should be read with momentum or the whole poem risks breaking down. That energy is then dissipated in a middle section where a harmonic and lyrical voice emerges. It is not the individual details that give these pieces of art their intensity, but rather the dramatic momentum which drives them. The individual keystrokes in Chopin do not often converge to create an articulate

melodic phrase, just as the lines in *Scherzos Benjyosos* do not converge to yield an instantly recognisable meaning. However, they are both bursting with dynamic energy (*presto con fuoco*) and driven by an element of contrast at their hearts.

No matter how compelling it might be to draw parallels between psychosis and the schizophrenic nature of voice in Keston Sutherland's poetry, as he himself is keenly aware, reducing debilitating mental illnesses to neat aesthetic categories is, at best, inappropriate and insensitive. For this reason, Sutherland ultimately rejects Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a subversive psychotic culture and tries to elaborate another concept, the "affect storm". What follows is only a condensed summary of the argument, however, the ideas raised provide some illumination to accompany the often murky journey through *Scherzos Benjyosos*. The first reference to "affect" is evidenced in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud's paper, "On the Physical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication" (1892). They suggest that traumatic events which took place in the distant past continue to operate intensely when there has not been a 'sufficient energetic reaction to the event that provokes an affect' (Breuer-Freud 1950: 8). They specify that, '...if the reaction is suppressed, the affect remains attached to the memory' (Breuer -Freud 1950: 8). Traumatic memories can lay dormant and potentially resurface and cause disruption, with all their initial energetic impact, at an unspecified time in the future. Sutherland then turns to examples from the mid-twentieth century and lesser-known psychoanalytic figures. There is Ernst Kris who refers to 'a storm of affect' (Kris 1940: 314-341), Margaret Schoenberger Mahler who notices an 'affectomotor storm-rage' in young infants deprived of the mother's breast (Mahler 1952: 286-305), and Andrew Peto who suggests that when self-awareness is lost: 'The control of the central, optimally adapted ego ceases to operate and even a well-integrated ego becomes transiently the passive victim of an uncontrollable mood or affect storm' (Peto 1967: 36-51). What these three examples have in common is the loss of control, the affect attached to a memory, or a series of memories, overwhelms the subject and they are unable to function. At this stage the

“affect storm” is still something passive, something that happens *to* the living subject. Crucially, for Sutherland, if this concept is going to be useful as an aesthetic category then an attempt at control is vital: ‘If we can do it deliberately, then it can be made into art’ (Sutherland 2017)

According to Henry Krystal there is a distinction between “psychic trauma” and “affect storms”, ‘in that they threaten to, but do not, in fact, overwhelm the individual’s integrative and executive functions’ (Krystal 1978: 81-116). For Krystal, the “affect storm” is something like approaching a threshold and stepping back. The interaction between control and loss of control is further crystallised in Kenneth S. Issacs’ observations of a female patient in her early thirties:

> She was able first to observe the series of minute steps in potentiation of affects in which her antipathy and discomfort with an affect evoked an affective reaction to her initial affective reaction; then, in rapid sequence, how she reacted affectively with increasing intensity, step by step, until she reached an affect storm (the point at which potentiation becomes self-sustaining), sometimes ending in a state of panic. Because she was able to observe potentiation within herself, she could observe the formation of the (storm) symptom. Furthermore, because she understood the process, she could disassemble the storm. (Issacs 1990: 261)

The fact that the patient is able to observe the steps in the potentiation of an “affect storm”, also gives her the opportunity to impose some control over it. Here the metaphor gains potency as an aesthetic principle, setting up a dialectic between an “affect storm” and “disassembling the storm”, between the loss of control and its recovery, between explosive spontaneity and a rational mastery of technique.

According to Howard B. Levine, observation, the ability to create links between events and emotional states, to form structures, and create narratives which help organise the mind have a vital protective function for the psyche. In the final stages of the lecture, Keston Sutherland makes reference to Levine’s paper, “The Colourless Canvas: Representation, Therapeutic Action and the Creation of Mind,” which describes the clinical process of therapists and patients collaborating within the dyad to transform unrepresentable mental

states, experienced at moments of emotional crisis, into representable symbols and some sort of narrative coherence. Levine also provides another definition of the term “affect storm”: ‘This is the provenance of affect storms, impulsive action, blind and peremptory discharge phenomena, extreme states of psychic deadness and stasis, somatic breakdowns, rigid pathological organizations, severe negative therapeutic reactions, perversions, addictions, destructive unconscious guilt, etc.’ (Levine 2012: 614-615). Sutherland suggests that this might also be ‘one of the most accurately representative descriptions of contemporary poetry that [he has] stumbled across’ (Sutherland 2017). If *Scherzos Benjyosos* can be thought of as the performance of, or a written trace of, an “affect storm”, then the role of the reader might be to “disassemble” it. The reader might transform its most incomprehensible and unrepresentable features into something coherent, providing symbolic meaning and linking together the narrative fragments (at the very least to derive some meaning for themselves). In a clinical context, Levine describes this process as ‘analogous to that of weaving a patch to repair the unity of a torn fabric’ (Levine 2012: 614). Without suggesting that any sort of singular unity might be given to *Scherzos Benjyosos* - the poem seems actively hostile to unity and is, in part, about the impossibility of unity - it will be an interesting critical experiment to read the poem in light of the ideas raised in the “Affect Storm” lecture nonetheless.

“Scherzo 3” opens on the eponymous Benjy’s birthday. His parents have organised a surprise party for him at which they have decided that he must run head first into a wall of presents and collapse on the other side making a spectacle of himself in front of all his friends. Fun on paper, but requiring Benjy to be the protagonist of his own social humiliation is potentially a source of trauma. The shy shame of a timid little boy being forced into the centre of attention. If the unwanted spotlight were not enough, a paradoxical parental scolding is thrown into the bargain: ‘It’s a surprise, don’t spoil it’ (Sutherland 2020: 49). If it is genuinely a surprise then why are they telling him exactly what they expect to happen?

How can he be expected not to spoil the surprise if it remains a surprise to him? Additionally, nothing spoils something quite as effectively as saying "don't spoil it". It all seems innocuous enough, however what makes this episode particularly traumatic is that at no point is Benjy given the opportunity to react. As previously stated, Breuer and Freud suggest that if a reaction is suppressed then the affective power of the event remains attached to the memory. Suppression is encoded into the poem as the absence of Benjy's voice: 'There is a figure who can't speak but is constantly spoken for instead' (Sutherland 2021). The second-person singular pronoun robs Benjy of his agency, it denies him the possibility of having an appropriate energetic reaction to the absurd spectacle he is expected to perform:

> Today is your birthday, Benjy, and your mother and I have built a wall of presents, up to the ceiling, that transversally bisects the front room from corner to corner, and when you go running in all your friends will be waiting for you on the other side, to clap as you headbutt your way out, and the presents collapse, and you can open them after.
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 49)

Not only are they telling him what he is going to do, but as "Scherzo 3" progresses, a collage of memories pertaining to Benjy begins to unfurl, though they are never told from his point of view. The intimate details of his memories are revealed to the reader on his behalf by a voice that, at least at the beginning, seems to be that of his father. As a reader *you* cannot help but feel addressed in some way by the second-person singular pronoun. A sense of empathy for Benjy is constructed in "Scherzo 3" in this way, the poem forces the reader to experience the profound sense of frustration, voicelessness, and impotence that Benjy must feel by the insistence on addressing a "you", whoever that might be, incessantly throughout the poem. Benjy is the passive victim of this "scherzo": '*somebody* has to be the object, the passive, the chair leg, the replacement chair leg' (Sutherland 2020: 53). The origin of his trauma can be traced back to the suppression of his voice. The memories recorded in "Scherzo 3" are

charged with the affective energy that might otherwise have been discharged had Benjy been given the opportunity to speak.

The fragmented memories, decontextualised scraps of other literary works, and strange, often disgusting imagery work together to create a texture and a sense of crescendo as "Scherzo 3" unfolds. Language in this poem seems to deliberately impede communication, in the standard sense of the transmission of a message to be deciphered, and instead builds towards a climax. Music again provides a helpful parallel. Listeners tend not to individuate the constituent notes of a composition, considering them in their singularity, but rather are swept away in the rhythms, the polyphony, and the larger textural arcs of the music. Indeed, Keston Sutherland describes the influence of music on the composition of *Scherzos Benjyosos* in the following manner:

> I suppose I try to create in language sensations, and sort of idiomatic sweeps, metrical and quasi-sub-metrical pressures which have about them a kind of cadence or a kind of shape or contour which can't be grasped in hearing as sense-making in the ordinary way in which we might expect from poems. (Sutherland 2021)

The tempo of "Scherzo 3" is tempestuous, its rhythm erratic, its predominant keys are paranoia and despair.[36] The sensation that Sutherland has rendered in the language of "Scherzo 3", when read in its entirety, is of a well-adapted ego disintegrating, of a psyche losing control of itself as it approaches the threshold of sanity. The pressure builds, trapped within the dense blocks of prose, with no release valve.

Many of the features cited in Howard B. Levine's definition of "affect storms" can in fact be identified within this scherzo. Benjy is betrayed by his body and unwillingly reveals the inner shame of having sliced the flap of skin between his index finger and thumb with a blade of grass, which is in turn mimicked by a younger sibling: 'Confirmation of this will be carried in triumph back to Whitelands in the un-form of an unobscuarable myoclonus'

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[36] Scherzo No. 3, Op. 39 by Frédéric Chopin is in C# minor which is often associated with despair and lamentation. This is an idea supported by Christian Schubert in "Ideas Towards an Aesthetic of Music".

(Sutherland 2020: 50). Levine identifies "impulsive action" and "destructive unconscious guilt" as two key symptoms of "affect storms". Myoclonus is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as an: 'involuntary, jerky contraction of one or more muscles, occurring singly or in a series' (OED Online 2018). Benjy's 'unobscuarable myoclonus' is an example of an involuntary action caused by shame and guilt. The lexical choice of an obscure medical term, "myoclonus", is telling, as obscure terminology so often is in Sutherland's poetry. Firstly, there is a therapeutic connotation, a word learned on the psychiatrist's sofa perhaps. Then, there is the irony of veiling a visibly obvious (unobscurable) contraction of the muscles (myoclonus) in arcane language, disguising the image from even the most erudite readers. However, the intensity of the desire to suppress a guilty secret often correlates directly with how quickly it comes to the surface. The unconscious guilt of children is often written all over their faces. It is common practice to read Keston Sutherland's poetry with several search engines open in multiple tabs, among which the Oxford English Dictionary is indispensable. A word like "myoclonus" is a red flag in a Sutherland poem, it screams "look me up immediately". By choosing an enigmatic word like "myoclonus" Sutherland entices the reader into taking the extra steps necessary to discover what it really means. The idea that suppressed guilt will always resurface is reinforced by this lexical wager. The bloodied blade of grass persistently resurfaces, Benjy is unable to bury 'that secret blade' because 'the departed returns' throughout the scherzos (Sutherland 2020: 50, 56). Finally, it is possible to hear a suggestion of "cyclone" (the most extreme form of storm) within the word "myoclonus". Both denote violent and confused movement, one is a meterological phenomena, the other localised in the muscles. The violence of a cyclone is experienced in the intimate space of the psyche, as a *my-clone* in *Scherzos Benjyosos.* Sutherland confirms that a meteorological analogy is intended to some extent in an interview for BOMB Magazine with Robert Crawford: 'I think at points [*Scherzos Benjyosos* is] a book that is, or that has

gone, mad; and most of the narrative...is obscenely disjointed. A "whirlwind of images" would be putting it very politely indeed' (Sutherland 2021).

Two more of Levine's definitions (which are after all some of the most accurately representative descriptions of contemporary poetry that Sutherland has ever stumbled across) appear in "Scherzo 3". "Perversion" and "extreme states of psychic deadness" are uncomfortably intertwined in a passage mocking Benjy for wallowing in a state of detached apathy. A hectoring voice paints an extreme parody of him, in ever-increasing graphic detail, as being sexually aroused by "the void":

> you're human, the void turns you on, you have always wanted to fuck the void, you have always wanted to make the void come the hardest, you have always wanted the void to tell everyone that you are the best, you have always wanted the void to lean in very close and whisper in you ear, loud enough for everyone to hear, Benjy, you are the best I ever had...
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 52-53)

The repetitive refrain, "you have always wanted", echoes like the cruel jibes of a bully unceremoniously exposing Benjy's most intimate secrets in front of his classmates. The perversity of self-pity is strikingly captured in the tone of a playground insult. "The void" (absolute emptiness) and lust (overwhelming desire) create a dynamic of sexual friction as they rub paradoxically against one another. This moment provides an example of the self-sustaining, potentiating aspect of an "affect storm". Not only is Benjy trapped in a psychically dead state, he desires nothing else; the more psychically dead he is, the more acute his physical gratification. Superficially, it seems that he is locked into an exponentially expanding vicious circle, that he has completely lost control. However, this is undermined by the fact that it is precisely what he most wants. The very nature of perversity is that the transgression is, to some degree, deliberately desired. This notion brings the crucial dialectic

energy of *Scherzos Benjyosos* into focus: losing control with control, or simulating an "affect storm" in order to disassemble it.

As mentioned previously, what makes "affect storms" aesthetically interesting for Sutherland is the attempt to control the uncontrollable, to reiterate: 'If we can do it deliberately, then it can be made into art' (Sutherland 2017). This must be true, otherwise poetry could just be purely random, disassociated, and nonsensical words printed on the page. The poetics which informs *Scherzos Benjyosos* might be thought of as an attempt to answer the following question: "Is it possible to represent the catastrophic unbinding of a well-adapted psyche in a language which also demonstrates a mastery of technique?" This question is best answered in "Scherzo 2". At first glance, it seems to be the most disordered, fragmentary and chaotic of all four of the scherzos. A contradictory voice begins, like a Beckettian therapist, already briefly analysed in section 3.1, with a series of short affirmations and immediate negations: 'I'm listening. Just stop' or 'I'm listening but I can't help you...' (Sutherland 2020: 39). The voice invites communication even though it seems to suggest that communication is impossible. The sentences are uncommonly short ('Truncage, truncature') as they grasp for some sort of logical structure ('What shapes?') (Sutherland 2020: 39). A series of numbers perforate "Scherzo 2", offering the illusion of structure, but they transpire to be disorientating traps for the reader:

> whether you would sooner breathe or die. The utility model discloses (4) four angle junction of an inflatable life, (4), of inflatable unit have cross vest of defending oneself, life vest distribution a plurality of inflatable unit (3), cross (3), have four blow vent (13), stretch into adjacent four respectively inflatable unit (4)...
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 46)

The section is something like a sadistic pamphlet of Ikea instructions for a life vest. The number four is repeated *ad nauseum* until it loses all sense or meaning. The numerical

sequence is tantalisingly representative of organisation, but does in fact dizzyingly disorganise the progression of the narrative.

Despite the apparent chaos, the comforting rhythms of traditional versification can be heard in “Scherzo 2”. Hidden in about ten lines of justified prose are eight lines of rhymed iambic-heptameter. For example, just as in the second ode of *The Odes to TL61P*, the following is audible just below the surface of lines 83-86 of *Scherzos Benjyosos*:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
A sim | ple *mod* | *us pon* | *ens* in | ference | to Ub | er’s slaves,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
in the | brain con | gealing | like a | soup of | flooded graves.
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
The time | is near | when I | go back | to stack | ing up | your shelves,
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
in en | vy of | the e | gos bu | sy sha | cking up | with selves.

(Sutherland 2020: 41)

Except for the second, which falls one syllable short, the lines are all fourteen syllables long. The rhyme scheme in these four lines is insistently regular, AABB, and all four final syllables are identical: “-ves”. The rhymes create association, linking concepts together, in this instance slavery (slaves) and death (graves) are cast in a teleology whereby the former inexorably leads to the latter. This shrouded stanza is inhabited by the lowest echelons of the service class, such as Uber drivers and shelf stackers. The insistence on the final syllable, “-ves”, mimics the often meaningless repetitive tasks they might perform: ferrying people around a city or placing products to neatly adorn the aisles of a supermarket. Sutherland acknowledges that the scherzos are ‘also poems about class and poverty’ (Sutherland 2021). Benjy himself ‘shows up as a zero hours delivery driver in an automated message’ in “Scherzo 3”: ‘Your driver is called Benjy, they’ve just picked up your order’ (Sutherland 2020: 55). The simple *modus ponens* (a logical argument built on inference) of the first line is that a system that condones corporate slavery is immoral and therefore: ‘poor people are better than rich people’ (Sutherland 2020: 55). However, the criticism goes beyond generic

social critique or questions of morality by actually dramatising the psychological consequences of poverty. These gig workers are the protagonists of an impoverished region of experience. In his analysis of the destruction of experience in *The Odes to TL61P*, Matthew Abbott cites the following passage from Giorgio Agamben's *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*: 'It is [the] non-translatability into experience that now makes everyday existence intolerable – as never before – rather than an alleged poor quality of life or its meaninglessness compared with the past' (Agamben 1993: 14). Abbott draws a distinction between "experience" as living through events registering them in the memory and "experience" 'from which it is possible to learn and perhaps gain wisdom' (Abbott 2013). In his interpretation, Agamben believes that the banality of modern life cannot be translated into meaningful experience in the latter sense. In *Scherzos Benjyosos*, the second line seems to contain this same sense of non-translatability. The apparently logical and evident notion that zero hours contracts are tantamount to a form of modern slavery, congeals in the brain 'like a soup of flooded graves' (Sutherland 2020: 41). The experience of injustice is not translatable into outrage and action, but instead coagulates (irreversibly) into a terminal apathy. The impoverishment of individual subjectivity necessarily has negative consequences for lyric poetry (poetry traditionally characterised by extreme, personal experience). The rarity of traditional poetic forms throughout *Scherzos Benjyosos* reflects this impoverishment, suggesting that it is a direct consequence of poverty. Curiously, a section which explicitly addresses poverty is expressed in recognisable, rhymed iambic-heptameter. It is either bitterly ironic, the dreary, fluorescently lit reality of stacking shelves cast in the 'loud and bold' epic fourteeners of Chapman's Homer, or it offers a glimmer of hope, a chink of light in the anti-poetic onslaught. (Keats 2007: 12). The sensation of claustrophobia and entrapment represented by the dense prose blocks momentarily relents and the music of poetry is allowed to burst free. That such tight metrical poetry can exist even amidst the psychological ruins of

a poem like *Scherzos Benjyosos* makes a promise that the possibility of poetry is still possible.

Up to this point, this analysis has focussed on parallels between *Scherzos Benjyosos* and clinical definitions of "affect storms", as well as Sutherland's attempt to render these aspects as masterfully as possible in poetic language, but it has not yet directly dealt with how this tempestuous disorder might be transformed, by the reader, into something coherent and meaningful. In "The Colourless Canvas", Levine describes a final concept that might lend itself to this process. He suggests that an analyst might be able to assist the traumatised subject to move 'from unrepresented to represented mental states' (Levine 2012: 617). This movement is illustrated by the case study of a four-year-old child called Thomas carried out by Botella and Botella in 2005. Levine reports that, 'Thomas's behaviour in the analysis consisted of disjointed actions rather than organized play or words [such as] passionately smell[ing] glue...nor repeatedly vocali[sing] growling noises' (Levine 2012: 616). At the end of a session he would be unable to leave the office. His exasperated and frightened psychoanalyst (experiencing a sort of nightmare of his own), realising that the child was unreachable via ordinary channels of communication, spontaneously mimicked the growling and asked him whether he was afraid of the wolf (Botella-Botella, 2005: 32). Thomas responded by signalling for the therapist to stop, but the intervention also succeeded in creating the conditions for him to leave the session. Levine suggests that the analyst is acting as an 'intersubjective "double"', by proposing the figure of the wolf, he is modelling the mechanism of representation utilised by well-adapted psyches to cope with overwhelming sensations of anxiety (Levine 2012: 617). Together with the analyst, *intersubjectively*, Thomas is able to seek relief from 'sensorial overload', transforming his inchoate, unrepresentable terror into a knowable, representable mental state (Levine 2012: 619).

In many ways the movement from unrepresented to represented mental states is the same movement that takes place in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. Just prior to the aforementioned

section of rhymed iambic-heptameter, there is a potential reference to the Botellas' patient, Thomas: 'Jack is having some kind of seizure and a fuckload of glue is being suctioned out of his nose...' (Sutherland 2020: 41). Some PVA glue, which had been intended for use by primary school children to complete crafts ('to do pictures'), as part of the early stages of the formation of their identities ('*Bildung*' - the German tradition of self-cultivation), has been stolen and a septum-corroding amount of it has been snorted by Jack (Sutherland 2020: 41). The glue brings the concept of "binding", both psychic and physical, back into focus. Jack has not used the glue to create a representation of himself in images like the other children, he has ingested large quantities of it and discharges 'that fat white stupid glue everywhere' instead (Sutherland 2020: 41). He is undergoing an explosive unbinding (a binding agent is literally and uncontrollably dripping out of his nose) and is not able to translate this experience into any intelligible symbols, he is 'stuck for a code, saying, what do you say[?]' (Sutherland 2020: 41). This episode takes place amidst the 'Spiraloid dischoherence' of "Scherzo 2" (74). By "Scherzo 4", the lyrical "I" has managed to break free from the bounds of the dense prose blocks, no longer 'boxed into the abyss' (Sutherland 2020: 75), but: 'On a brittle eminence, | Adolescenter logic | Start its sore ascent, lyric | Take remediable flight' (Sutherland 2020: 67). The final scherzo has been flipped on its head, mirroring the tonal shift in "Scherzo No. 4 in E major, Op. 54," by Chopin, and the prose blocks are now wedged between the lightly skipping tercets. A delicate new balance has been struck, the lyric tentatively emerges in its fledgling form. Optimism that poetry might now be possible, after so many lines of unpoetic ugliness, starts to creep into the final part of *Scherzos Benjyosos*. The poetic voice finally takes shape, it finds a form which can contain it, it has discovered boundaries and bindings: 'Me, like water in a jar' (Sutherland 2020: 67). The poem had first to overcome the impossibility of poetry, of communication even, before poetry and meaningfulness could emerge as possible. 'At that intact window I | Opened on to nothing left. | Now I can jump out of it' (Sutherland 2020: 67). The intact, figuratively tangible

windows opened onto nothingness represent the vision of unrepresentable mental states presented in the first three scherzos. Only now is it possible to jump out of them and into the lyrical optimism represented by the fourth scherzo. As the work reaches its climax, the last lines of "Song: Sweetest Love, I Do Not Go" by John Donne appear and make this optimism explicit. The promise of enduring love shared between two parting lovers, resilient even in the face of death, more constant than the sun, is transformed by Sutherland into a promise between poet and poetry itself: 'They who one another keep | Alive, n'er parted be' (Donne 2000: 98-99). The conceit, extended across all four scherzos, is the conviction that 'poetry will survive | On cracks, deep, true, crisp and flat', despite the poet's own best attempts to demonstrate otherwise (Sutherland 2020: 76).

How does this transformation happen? Just as the interpersonal relationship between patient and analyst in the clinical example of Thomas catalyses the transformation of inchoate terror into the knowable and represented figure of a wolf, the reader can have a critical role to play in the sense-making game at play in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. The poem concludes on a note of gratitude: '...And please also know | That you did more to repair | Than kill us...' (Sutherland 2020: 77). The ambiguous second-person singular pronoun is not the despotic "you will enjoy your humiliating birthday treat, Benjy" of "Scherzo 2", but the whispered "you" of an intimate post-coital confession. "You" is already ambiguous *per se* in English, in that it is the pronoun for both the singular and plural second-person, and Sutherland renders it schizophrenically so in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. In "Scherzo 4" "you" could plausibly be the love object that has been introduced ('You are the most beautiful person I have seen...') (Sutherland 2020: 68), a previous iteration of the narrative voice (In the end I don't know what | Else to overwrite you with | But this...') (75), or any or all of the cast of named phantoms inhabiting the poem. It is equally plausible that "you" is an address to the reader. At times, reading *Scherzos Benjyosos* requires extreme reserves of resilience, and the grateful revelation, 'please also know | That you did more to repair | Than kill us...' feels like a thank

you for enduring to the end of the poem (Sutherland 2020: 77). In many ways, having lived through its trauma, and by reconciling its dissonance, the reader repairs the shattered verses of the poem, giving them form, finding their music, in spite of ‘A self that never will sing | That did sing’ (Sutherland 2020: 71). Readers have the power to reanimate the dead by giving voice to the words on the page: ‘...even a dead mouth can be softly prised open to disclose a perfectly living mouth that has been going on talking all this time’ (Sutherland 2020: 71). The amalgamation of voices, those confined within the poem, voices that ‘hover around the threshold of the vocalisable’, the sub-vocal, and the voice of the reader enables a sort of alchemical reaction to take place (Sutherland 2021). This choral effect plunges the reader into an intersubjective relationship with the poem: ‘Your sound will turn out to be | Hid in every other sound, | Not even mine. Listen out’ (Sutherland 2020: 63). Here, the traditional poet-reader dynamic has been inverted, it is “not even” the “sound” of the narrative voice encoded into the poem, but “your sound” hidden in “every other sound”. If the reader can learn to “listen out” properly, they can learn to discover their own sound within the poetry, to give it sense, to interpret its meaning.

In “Discourse in the Novel”, the final essay in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin conceives of the construction of meaning as a dialogic process: ‘The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, orientated toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction’ (Bakhtin 2010: 280). The anticipation of a response shapes an utterance. What I think you think might alter what I think or say. Or, in Bakhtin’s words: ‘[d]iscourse lives beyond itself, in a living impulse...toward the object’ (Bakhtin 2010: 292). This notion has had all sorts of implications for poetic discourse, it implies that an imagined reader could significantly shape a work of art. This is precisely how meaning might be constructed in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. Traces of anticipated responses are embedded into the composition of the poem, poet and reader are vitally interconnected in a state of intersubjectivity. The solidarity that this elicits is an indication of

the curative role the reader might play. Sutherland has produced a masterful rendition of an "affect storm" which can be disassembled when it is read with an appropriate level of contemplation and empathy.

Though this analysis just scratches the surface, the concepts that are sketched in Keston Sutherland's "Affect Storms" lecture provide some insight into what is happening in *Scherzos Benjyosos*. Convincing parallels can be found between the conceptual framework of the lecture and elements of the poetry. Although the distinction between "neurotic" and "psychotic" works of art functions at first as a superficial sorting device, and even though its metaphors are thematically consistent, Sutherland's poetry is self-evidently different from the poetry of Philip Larkin. So much so that its commitment to difference may in fact be off-putting for many readers who read poetry with radically different expectations. It is the intrinsic conflict at the heart of the "affect storm" that makes it such a potent concept, and such a compelling way to approach *Scherzos Benjyosos*. It renders the paradox at the core of the poem visible - a catastrophic loss of control captured in a masterfully controlled poetic discourse. This type of tension, between spontaneity and design, order and disorder, does have literary precedence. In his speech accepting the "1960 National Book Award for Poetry", Robert Lowell identifies:[37]

> Two poetries [which] are now competing, a cooked and a raw. The cooked, marvelously expert, often seems laboriously concocted to be tasted and digested by a graduate seminar. The raw, huge blood-dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience are dished up for midnight listeners. (Lowell 1960)

Scherzos Benjyosos, to a certain extent, is both cooked and raw. The concept of the "affect storm" allows for this contradictory state to exist ("explosive unbinding" and "disassembling the storm") and is also harmonious with the psychological subject matter of the poem. Furthermore, the reader, perhaps alienated by the insistent, confrontational strangeness of the

[37] Robert Lowell was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1917 and died in 1977 aged 60. He was an American poet known for intense confessional poetry, unafraid of sharing intimate family moments and his psychological struggles.

poem, is given some guidance. The poem is oriented toward an empathetic listener. As demonstrated by Levine, both the power of observation and the ability to create narratives have a vital role in protecting the psyche. The reader is invited to try to make sense of the psychically fraught poetry they are presented with, to provide some structure or narrative shape themselves.

A pair of prominent interviews that accompanied the publication of *Scherzos Benjyosos*, both of which this section has drawn upon, accentuate an analogy with music. The "improbable" dialogue with the four scherzi by Chopin, as Sutherland himself puts it, provides a rough schema which certainly helps to orient the reader. This relationship functions much in the way that Homer's *Odyssey* is a loose blueprint for Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is helpful to think about the versification in this poem as bearing a resemblance to the larger textural movements of classical music. There is also certainly influence from the glitchy world of alternative electronic music. Jeremy Noel-Tod summarises the poem in his review for the *Times Literary Supplement* as a '...synaesthetic onslaught reminiscent of the masochistic extremes of electronic music' (Noel-Tod 2021). He cites the following passage as an example:

> Think a slow, quacking sensation, like a kind of double-dip *verlängerter Selbstmord*, or calamitously dusting an asbestos shoehorn with a colander of icing sugar, every one of whose holes has been plugged up with the makeshift of an anaesthetized sleeping wasp...
>
> (Sutherland 2020: 51)

Approaching an analysis from either of these musical perspectives helps to indicate how metre operates in the poem. The psychological and musical metaphors that have been identified provide some preliminary indications as to what might be done with this confounding verse. As horrified as one imagines Sutherland would be at any suggestion that the poetry could be translated into a logical explanation of what it might mean, the concepts

discussed so far do help to bring the poem and the reader closer together. The “Affect Storms” lecture rejects the “avant-garde” in its Modernist, military sense, those who lead the way on behalf of the vast, ignorant masses, as perhaps Ezra Pound might have used the term. Instead, Sutherland is at pains to emphasise the importance of the people this poetry is for:

> This kind of poetry is poetry which tries to be singularly illegible, complicated, explosive, perhaps unreadable in its first utterance, but in the middle of people, among people, for people, as a gift to people, and absolutely against, and in strong antipathy to the idea that the poet is out on a limb, at a far cultural distance, dragging the rest of idiotic mankind behind him or her. (Sutherland 2017)

It is in this spirit that this analysis has attempted to demonstrate that this is not elusive, elitist poetry for postgraduates to clinically dissect but rather an intimate expression of psychic pain, at times intensely lyrical and unnervingly personal, which yearns to be understood by as many people as possible.

4. CONCLUSION

In *Waiting for Godot*, when Vladimir tramples on Lucky's hat to put 'an end to his thinking', relief flows from the stage, through the performers, and into the auditorium (Beckett 2012: 38). In the introduction of this thesis, one of the stated objectives was to move closer to the poetry of Keston Sutherland. Perhaps, by the conclusion, the reader might be relieved, like Didi and Gogo, that some distance from its relentless intensity is on the horizon. The reference to Lucky's speech is not incidental. It is a useful analogy for Sutherland's poetry. Lucky is Pozzo's slave, he has been physically restrained and conditioned to obey his master's every command. His existence has been compressed into absolute utility for another. Though, as the irony of his name suggests, this certainty is something like good fortune when compared to the interminable wait of Vladimir and Estragon. What would such a derided creature have to say if he were to open his mouth? What language would be necessary to translate his experience into words? The result is the famous torrent of dense, incoherent, cyclical and upsetting argumentation that gathers pace as it builds towards an anticlimax and his being silenced. The phonological and morphological aspects of language are privileged over semantic and pragmatic ones. If a sound, or rhythm, pleases Lucky he returns to it. His speech is characterised by repetition with minimal modulations; phrases are repeated intermittently, 'it is established beyond all doubt', there are strings of rhyming words, 'Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham', and even single syllabic units, 'quaquaquaqua' (Beckett 2012: 36-37). This description of Lucky's speech also fits Sutherland's poetry. The modern poetic subject might be thought of as a figure somewhat like Lucky, squeezed and crushed by the demands of wage labour and the exponential impoverishment of modern discourse. Compressed between these limitations something resembling Lucky's tirade bursts forth, something like *The Odes to TL61P* or *Scherzos Benjyosos*.

Sutherland reads an antipathy towards form in Beckett through his Marxist spectacles. Marx, says Sutherland, believed that the form of labour and the content of labour were irreconcilable (Sutherland 2016). The actions of the worker cannot be translated directly into language. Doing so would be, 'distillation into the abstract...the power of levelling, of flattening, of dehumanising' ("Blocks"). He says that in Beckett too, the compression of content into form manifests itself as, 'pressure exerted against a body' ("Blocks"). There are numerous examples from across Beckett's dramatic work of pressure exerted against bodies, Winnie in *Happy Days* buried up to her neck in sand, Nell and Nagg stuffed into two ashbins in *Endgame*, and perhaps most dramatically the harness required for a performance of Mouth in *Not I*. The language that bursts out of all of these characters, like steam escaping a pressure cooker, is the result of some sort of physical compression. Their outbursts are resistant to traditional linguistic forms, especially in the case of Mouth in *Not I,* who seems to try to liberate herself with a piercing, yet ineffectual, scream. It is Sutherland's contention in this lecture that the dense, justified prose blocks that characterise the contemporary British poetry he is so interested in, are to some extent a response to the compression of experience as a result of the current period of continuous crisis.

It strikes me that the poetry of Keston Sutherland is likely to raise some valid questions about its selection as the topic of an academic thesis. For example, surely it is too soon to decide whether it warrants critical attention. Its detractors say that it is wilfully obtuse and pretentious, to the point of elitism. Don Paterson, published poet and professor at the University of St Andrews, certainly thinks so:

> ...their emotional palette is so meagrely provided, it leaves them capable of nothing more than a monotone angst, an effete and etiolated aestheticism, and a kind of joyless wordplay that somehow passes, in their country, for wit. Their claim to serious political engagement is wholly incompatible with their clear disregard of such tediously practical matters as exclusivity of register and reader-constituency. (Paterson-Simic 2004: xxxii).

This is from the introduction to *New British Poetry*, where he seems to spend an awful lot of time criticising “Postmoderns” (whatever that means), in the withering and self-assured tone present in the citation, and much less time actually defining the poets his anthology is championing. Which is ironic, considering the fact that he introduces these “Postmoderns” accusing them of the ‘denigration of those unlike themselves’, despite the fact that denigration sets the tone for the entirety of his introduction (Paterson-Simic: xxviii). It is plausible that Paterson has Sutherland in mind, it is almost certain that he intends J.H. Prynne: ‘The Norwich phone book or a set of log tables would serve them as well as their Prynne, in whom they seem able to detect as many shades of mindblowing confusion as Buddhists do the absolute’ (Paterson 2004). Nevertheless, beneath the hectoring, the question is perfectly legitimate: does the incomprehensibility of this type of poetry reduce its readership, and therefore its potential impact?

Robert Archambeau puts the question more delicately: ‘...what ought we to make of a school of poetry that has a strong public concern, but no appreciable public presence?’ (Archambeau 2013: 64). A potentially convincing counter-argument hinges on different definitions of elitism. There are those who think, like Paterson, that “elitist poetry” is so deliberately incomprehensible that it alienates almost everyone misfortunate enough to flick through its slim volumes, making them feel intellectually inadequate and the subject of ridicule. He suggests that it is written by a shadowy cult of library-dwelling evil geniuses, laughing down upon the ignorant masses from their ivory towers. However, another interpretation could be that elitism is the dominance of society by a limited number of privileged members wielding political or economical influence over it. The Cambridge School poets may have glittering academic CVs, but it is laughable to suggest that they hold the keys to power. In this sense, they are self-avowedly anti-elitist. As Archambeau points out, the role of this poetry is:

> ...to challenge the kinds of language that are used in public persuasion by providing a counter-example in the form of a very different kind of language. It is, in a sense, an implicit critique of all forms of linguistic instrumentalization. Ideally, it will resist incorporation into any part of the political or economic system—incorporation as product, as ideology, as entertainment property. (Archambeau 2013: 67)

The argument goes that this poetry is anti-elitist because it is inherently resistant to instrumentalisation by an elite who might otherwise use literary texts as part of a subterfuge means of domination. Paterson summarises the divide thus, 'the Mainstream insist on a talented minority, and a democracy of readership; the Postmoderns of an elite readership, and a democracy of talent' (Paterson-Simic 2004: xxxiii). Whereas, Archambeau uses W.H. Auden's terms, '[p]rivate faces in public places [versus] public faces in private places' (Archambeau 2013: 64). On the one hand, as presented in these distillations, there are poets who write to share their innermost sensations with as wide an audience as possible, on the other, there are poets who write to have as powerful an impact as possible on a narrower, more carefully selected audience.

While this debate, compelling as it is irresolvable, has much to say about poetic movements, aesthetic theory and grand political statements, it neglects what actually happens in the poems themselves. The problem is, that trying to sort poetry into two convenient categories runs against the very nature of poetic expression. Since when has poetry, any poetry, been about trying to make things convenient? This thesis has been guilty of sketching two traditions too, using the terms "The Mainstream" and "The Parallel Tradition", and these categories no doubt help to manage the expectations of the reader. However, I fear, this categorisation, the mainstream/avant-garde binary, has more to say about the poetry industry in the UK than it does about poetry itself. Not unlike so-called "Mainstream" poets, Sutherland desires to share his innermost sensations with as wide an audience as possible too. As he says to Natalie Ferris in 2013, on the eve of the publication of *The Odes to TL61P*:

> ...I’ve wanted for a while now to risk venturing out into a potentially uncomprehending or even hostile public space, quite without imperious or supercilious designs on anybody’s intelligence, without thinking that I am a standard bearer for more advanced tendencies, and to reach out to people who may have no sense of what to make of this work, and to learn from them myself. (Sutherland 2013)

He may belong to a peer group famous for its hermetism, but *The Odes to TL61P* (published by Enitharmon no less) appears to be a work with more public intent, more open to the world. What risk does he run? Certainly there is the risk of critical derision, but perhaps more significantly the risk is that his readership will simply not be able to see the rare moments of lyrical beauty past the dense edifice of incomprehensibility which suffocates them. What poet does not run risks when they publish their work? All artists, to some extent, must create favourable conditions for the reception of their message. In classical rhetoric, this process took place in what was called the *exordium*. The opening of classical oration, ‘had a triple function to perform: *reddere auditores benevolos, attentos, dociles* as the Latins put it’, to render the audience receptive and attentive (Donnelly 1912: 204). If the objective is to inspire agreement or empathy in the reader, or to persuade them, then this might involve getting the audience on board. In poetry, this could be achieved by citing commonplace beliefs or doxas (often before dismantling them at a later stage in the discourse), or using a familiar idiom or metrical pattern. However, if the objective is none of these things, but rather to inspire in the reader a sense of disorientation which might lead to radical introspection and generosity of action, then the rhetorical techniques might understandably be different. Sutherland does not want a compliant readership, he wants to confront them, he wants to ‘to break down the forms of social paralysis and injustice, as well as of self-interested mastery and of exploitation, which under capital adulterate all of our relations with each other, even the most intimate’ (Sutherland 2013). Poet/reader might well be considered one of the most intimate relations to which he refers. When he talks of risk, he talks of breaking down this paralysed

relationship in order that it might be rebuilt on more profoundly collective and generous grounds. Not elitism, on the contrary, immense vulnerability.

Whether or not Keston Sutherland fulfils these radical ambitions, is a question I can only answer as an individual reader. At times the poetry is so frustrating that one wants to launch the volume across the room. The first few lines of "Mincemeat Seesaw", which is the poem with the earliest date in *Poetical Works: 1999-2015*, already contain enough unusual vocabulary and syntactic anomalies to encourage the reader to close the book immediately:

To evade cinereous ice which cut
    back repro were they set
up for retraversing as
    if incomparably or mute her
skips a beat, recall it were the attached
    remit-plaudition to faded
trust to appear refreshed...

(Sutherland 2015: 47)

What does "cinerous" mean, or "repro", or "remit-plaudition"? It is impossibly difficult to pin the adverb, "incomparably", to one of the verbs that precede it; does it modify "evade", "cut back", or "set up"? Confusion reigns supreme. At other times, the odyssey across the internet is intellectually amusing. Glancing in my "downloads" folder after reading one of Sutherland's poems raises a wry smile. There are .pdfs of the minutes of legal hearings in the House of Lords alongside washer dryer instruction manuals, the report of a US Army inquiry into prisoner abuse in Iraq alongside the LinkedIn profiles of Chinese businessmen, clinical psychiatric case studies alongside Fox News press releases, *Das Kapital* alongside sheet music for Chopin. The bibliography of this thesis provides a flavour of the eclectic nature of the background reading necessary to create an illuminating context around these poems. If the reader is willing to put in the research, the process of reading these poems with the requisite attention is thoroughly educational. However, this description makes them seem like dry didactic exercises, not a radical reconception of human relations, 'in honour of and in the

brilliant light of the power of poetry'; wry smiles and '[t]he fundamental transformation of human life' would seem incompatible (Sutherland 2013).

Even so, the more of Sutherland's poetry one reads, the more performances one hears or sees, the more strategies one develops for understanding or appreciating it. The poems do not rely on repetitive hooks and melody lines like pop music, but explore longer phonic arcs like in jazz or classical composition. It requires patience to discover them, but they are there. The poems are frequently laugh out loud funny; just listen to the recording of *The Odes to TL61P* being read at Cafe Oto, in Dalston, London on 14 May 2013 to hear a live audience response.[38] Certainly from "Hot White Andy" onwards, a compelling poetic voice also begins to emerge. This emergence seems to coincide with Sutherland discovering the right balance between the accusatorial second person pronoun and the confessional first; the right balance between "you are to blame" and "so am I". It seems fitting to turn to the last section of his most recently published poem, *Scherzos Benjyosos*. It begins:

It is really good to see
You looking so well at last.
Come here so I can hold you

Up to the light that I have
Kept for when you are ready
To use it. I have been gone

Too, but we are both here now
And there is no reason why
We can't stay here if we like

It here and hold on to each
Other.

(Sutherland 2020: 72)

At first glance it reads like a love lyric; two lovers reunited after a period of separation in an embrace. The poetic subject, "I", is happy to see the object of his affections, "you", after so much time - "at last". They have been away from one another, but now both seem to be in a

[38] A recording of this performance can be heard here:
https://www.archiveofthenow.org/authors/?i=90&f=1771#1771

place where they can stay together. Not only is this a romantic expression of the emotion of a lovers' reunion, it might also be interpreted as a reunion between poet and reader. The poet has been gone, a recognisable poetic voice often deliberately lacking, and the reader too, by the end of their journey through, not only *Scherzos Benjyosos* but all of Sutherland's poetical works, is ready to be held up under the light. These lines provoke a feeling of gratitude for the acknowledgement that it has indeed taken a lot of preparation, stamina, and resilience to arrive at this point, to be ready to be held up under the light of Sutherland's poetry, and also that the poet admits that they have been absent too. The frustration was justified after all. The problems have been mutual. As a reader, this moment feels something like an embrace.

The title of this thesis makes reference to Sutherland's admission that during a performance in New York, he unexpectedly started to weep as he felt an 'acutely painful, distant echo of the paralyzed poetic...in which verse is allowed to erupt, occasionally, at certain points of irony or pressure, but never enough to assert its autonomy as a fluency of lines...' (Sutherland 2015). What have been distant echoes for the majority of his work, at the end of *Scherzos Benjyosos* seem suddenly to assert a certain "autonomy as a fluency of lines". The poetic appears to have been dramatically revitalised. The final stanza of the poem hints at this too: 'Still alive, hear | Love echo. Even here, like | Laughter, any second now' (Sutherland 2020: 77). The poetic has survived all the violent shifts in register, monstrous abuses of syntax, intensely disgusted satire, and disregard for metrical regularity. It is still here. Its possibility has survived Sutherland's mutilations. The echoes are no longer in the distance, they are on the verge of resounding around the room like a liberating howl of laughter. Whether *Scherzos Benjyosos* marks a new phase in Sutherland's poetic production remains to be seen, however it does feel like it has liberated him from his lyrical paralysis for the time being.

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