



# On the Material

Stephen Collis

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Structured in three parts, *On the Material* is a meditation on language, geography, socio-economics and the body, moving from the glut of fossil-fuelled consumer excess to the materiality of a single book.

Composed almost entirely of quatrains (each page being comprised of four four-line stanzas) and written while travelling through North America in 2008, " $4 \times 4$ " navigates issues of space and movement in the global age. As economies crumble, ecosystems fail and peak oil approaches, Collis records the production of a disarticulation of social discourse that our consumer society has generated: "After all we made money out of matter here / Now condos shield us from the computer hum / Of on-line trading and wars ?ash on ?at screens / As  $4 \times 4$ s cool and ping mud covered in double garages."

In its bridging second section, "I Fought the Lyric and the Lyric Won," the desire to express wins out over the desire to possess. Beauty, contemplation and human communication seem to have abandoned the world, and their absence from the everyday has re-engaged the poet's struggle with language—has left a need to reinvent human discourse and its attendant relations.

The third section, "Gail's Books," is a sequence of poems in memory of Stephen Collis's sister, Gail Tulloch. A month after Gail's death from cancer in 2002, a ?re destroyed her house, removing every material reminder of her from the earth. All that remained was one book recovered from a pool of water in the ruins after the ?re. Dried in the air, this book, and those Collis had previously borrowed from his sister, become a way for the poet to read back into the elemental heart of absence and loss—the "material" of the books displacing, and in some way recovering, how language holds the materiality of the physical world.



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