

# POETRY IN PROTEST

STEPHEN COLLIS

## RESPONDER

“The department of homeland security  
is searching your Facebook and Twitter  
for these words.”

—[animalnewyork.com](http://animalnewyork.com)

We need control  
assistance toxic  
responder bombs  
all the gulag  
our avian homeland  
can muster—  
human management  
domestic tsunami centers  
dirty enforcement drills

You too, salmonella, your  
maritime poisoning office  
disaster outbreak of  
public ebola animal and  
recall assassination awareness  
uh-huh, responder  
drug flood baby did it

Then a plague of cops  
storm virus for  
authorities' earthquake  
administration—you know,  
public influenza mouth—

first food then flu—  
emergency tremor puppies  
our control responder, out

Nuf said nuclear and  
ok contamination domain  
small tornado pox  
like little hurricanes  
national bacteria exercises—  
mitigation attack!  
Health recovery detection!  
Security prevention outbreak!

And then it's all  
law center law again  
FMD CDC MDA H5N1 FDA  
you know, eh, responder, what?

I assembled this poem when the note about DHS search words was floating around Facebook in early 2012.<sup>1</sup> This was long before Edward Snowden and NSA leaks fanfare, but as activists we of course knew we were being monitored, and acted accordingly—which in this case amounted to a childish *fuck you*. People shared the poem on Facebook, and it was amusing to think of frustrated and confused cops possibly stumbling upon the poem as their searches lit up with the uber-hit. But was this activism? An act of protest?

I later read the poem at a benefit held to raise money for the legal fees of students arrested in Quebec under the draconian, anti-protest law 78 (which placed unrealistic restrictions on street demonstrations and led to thousands of arrests and extensive fines). It was a packed house, energized and electric, everyone feeling positive, dozens of poets reading. It was unquestionably a moment of solidarity—between the people in the room, and between us, there, and the students in Quebec.<sup>2</sup> But was this activism? Protest?

I've often thought of the poem as a capable means of thinking through political ideas and history. I've read poems at political rallies and demonstrations, yelling lines into a mic or bullhorn until my throat was raw. I've written poems for "causes," contributed them to collections opposing a variety of campaign-specific issues. Once, when a group I was organizing with in opposition to a Canadian mining company received a letter from the corporation's lawyers, threatening a libel suit, I began to render our statements in the poetic form. Maybe it "worked," to the extent that we weren't sued (though a lawyer did ask me for a copy of a poem after I read it at a rally)—or maybe the form of the poem made the politics of its contents invisible, to corporate eyes at least.

And yet at every turn I have of course been faced with the question: what possible political efficacy can a poem have? Obviously I have to concede, trying hard not to delude myself, not a great deal. At times I have over-burdened poetry with the responsibility of my political activism, asking too much of it. But when I am most active, in the streets and in the committee meeting, poetry has some breathing room, can pick its spots more carefully, carries less of a load. I want, here, to get down some thoughts on the relation between poetry and protest, poetry and revolutionary struggle, if only to clear my own head a little, and to keep my eyes on the prize: social transformation, through and through.

## 1.

We've been imagining the place of poetry *in* protest (a more interesting issue, to my mind, than the poetry *of* protest) for a very long time now. At least since the early twentieth century labour movement, where poetry seems to have been an integral part of how the movement functioned, socially as well as semiotically, both internally and externally.<sup>3</sup> This seems very different than nineteenth century insurrectionary movements, where a poet like Lamartine might wear the hats of bourgeois republican politician or left historian, but not that of poet, during the 1848 revolution—or where a poet like Rimbaud, dedicating himself to an aesthetic and personal revolution, might shoot enigmatically through the space of the Commune in 1871. By the early twentieth century, some poetries clearly moved closer to struggle.

But “official verse culture”<sup>4</sup> never had much truck with the poetry of labour. And aesthetic radicalism too often split with and ascended to a pretended height above social radicalism. By the time we get to the 1960's, “official verse culture” could tentatively participate in struggles that were largely cultural, and thus achieve at once social and aesthetic credibility.

I do not mean to be dismissive of what poetry or social movements in the 1960's achieved. But I am interested here in the “cushioning effect” culture sometimes has in mediating social struggles. It provides some individuals (cultural producers) a way into struggle, yes. But it also simultaneously buffers them from some of the more visceral, immediate, and negative (negating) aspects of struggle, by providing a sort of placebo activism. Joshua Clover, in response to more recent concatenations of poetry and activism, puts this in very sharp terms:

I think that for a while now, many of us poets have been telling ourselves lies about the political force of poetry. Many of these we know by heart. Speaking truth to power. Finding the form which might both reveal and persuade. Preserving the space of critique. Preserving the feel of some undomesticated common zone. Giving voice to the voiceless. Laying bare the truth of the ineluctably immiserating mechanism in which we live. We have been aided in this set of justifications by that peculiar historical development known as capital-T Theory, and particularly by ideas based around the primacy of discourse and “the materiality of the signifier”—ideas which allow activities at the level of language to claim the same material force as a thrown brick. Both constitute the world.

But it's such bullshit, isn't it?<sup>5</sup>

It's “bullshit,” Clover contends (and I find myself largely persuaded here), because in order to achieve any sort of revolutionary social change “certain things will have to be actively destroyed on the side of capital ... and they will not be destroyed with language.”<sup>6</sup> The closer literature comes to revolutionary struggle, the more we see that it too often functions as a placebo that replaces revolutionary struggle with cultural and aesthetic revolution. Ultimately, by returning to Clover's comments (and his recent debate with Keston Sutherland), I'm going to argue for a more dialectical relationship between cultural or aesthetic “actions” and material actions in the street. But for now, in light of my own experiences as someone writing poetry and participating in protests and social movements—and with reference to the many noticeable recent interventions of poetry in the world of protest—I will allow the bifurcation of cultural placebo and material action to remain.

## 2.

It now seems almost impossible to have a social movement without a literary component—typically a website where poetry related to the issue in question is collected. The precedent was probably set by the “poets against the war” project, which began in 2003 as a somewhat grass-roots literary response to the Iraq War (with obvious roots in the prior generation's extensive poetic mediation of Vietnam War resistance).<sup>7</sup> Seemingly overnight, a website was produced and soon thousands of poems written, or read as being, “against the war” were archived there.

When the Occupy movement spread like wildfire across North America in the fall of 2011, it was accompanied by a host of web sites presented as collections of “occupy poetry”: The *occupypoetryproject.com*, *occupypoetry.org*, *occupypoetry.net*, and of course The *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*, to name only a few. Just as the horizontally organized and decentralized movement often produced more

than one Facebook page for a given city's encampment, so the proliferation of "occupy poetry" sites, duplicating variations of the same premise and project, isn't too surprising. These sites appear to sometimes collect the amateur writings of participating occupiers, but they just as often collect past publications of the famous dead, as well as providing publication opportunities for present day aspiring and "professional," CV-wielding, creative writers. With the participant-poets not always easy to identify, and often in the minority, the exact sense in which these poetry archives signal any kind of social "activism" is definitely called into question.

Consider the "about" pages at [occupy.org](http://occupy.org) and [occupypoetry.net](http://occupypoetry.net):

*OccuPoetry* collects and publishes poetry about economic justice/injustice, greed, protest, activism, and opportunity. *OccuPoetry* is an independent project inspired by the Occupy Movement. It is not a project of any one city's Occupy encampment. This is the space we choose to occupy. This is what we can give.

\*

*Occupy Poetry* is an independent literary anthology inspired by the Occupy Movement protests worldwide and publishes poetry about economic justice/injustice, greed, love and peace, protest, activism, and change.

In both cases the invisible editors distance their web projects from the actual, material encampments: they are "inspired by" the movement, but not necessarily *in* the movement. *OccuPoetry* even identifies the "space" of its occupation as specifically virtual and literary. The editor(s) of *Occupy Poetry* go on to add detail to their sense of the role of poetry in social transformation:

Global civil society is being threatened by a system based on power and not on human values and the goal of this project is to rise through poems, verse and sayings the power of people. Day after day modern financial systems represses basic freedoms and consistently favors the greed of the few over the needs of the many. This power finances wars, food and pharmaceutical monopolies, it sponsors dictatorial regimes across the globe, destroying environments, manipulating and censoring information flow and transparency. Protesting through poetry peacefully spread the word of a better life and change.

I'm not trying to be mean-spirited, but the idea of "rising through poems," in the context identified here—one of extensive, structural, material inequalities and systemic oppression and exploitation by the united forces of state and capital—is of course a little naïve. The sense of what poetry might do—"spread the word" and demonstrate the "power of the people"—decidedly falls within the predictable spectrum of "bullshit" Clover identifies above.

However, not all web-based poetry projects intersecting with social movements do so in such ham-fisted fashion. An excellent example is *Fermaille*,<sup>8</sup> a web and print poetry journal that evolved alongside the Quebec Student movement in 2011 and 12 (it is formally associated with several student unions at L'Université du Québec à Montréal). *Fermaille*'s "À propos" (about) page describes its project in the following terms:

*Fermaille est une plateforme de création et d'échange ayant pour but de réunir les forces d'inventivité à l'échelle du Québec. L'équipe espère donner naissance à un projet collectif en limitant l'isolement des individus et des mouvements de mobilisation et en facilitant la circulation des idées.*

*[Fermaille is a platform for creating and sharing with the aim to bring together creative forces across Quebec. The team hopes to give birth to a collective project by reducing the isolation of individuals and mobilizing movements and facilitating the flow of ideas.]<sup>9</sup>*

There are no unrealistic claims for the power of poetry here: the focus is on the website as a platform for "facilitating" collectivity and "the flow of ideas," not on poetry as a means of protest. More significantly, images on the site show activists marching in heavily policed street protests, carrying poetry pamphlets and a large red banner with "Fermaille" printed on it. What becomes clear is that—whatever *Fermaille*'s literary and cultural aspirations—it is also an affinity group: a means of organizing a group of activists whose solidarity is based on a shared literary project. The poetry isn't the protest—but the protesters are poets, and carry their poetry into the streets with them.

Perhaps the closest we can come to the complete erasure of any sort of line between poetry and protest is to be found in the Egyptian experience. Early in the 2011 Tahrir Square uprising, Arabic and Islamic studies scholar Elliot Colla posted an essay on *Jadaliyya* entitled "The Poetry of Revolt,"<sup>10</sup> from which I will quote at length:

The slogans the protesters are chanting are couplets—and they are as loud as they are sharp. The diwan of this revolt began to be written as soon as Ben Ali fled Tunis, in pithy lines like "Yâ Mubârak! Yâ Mubârak! Is-Sa'ûdiyya fi-ntizârak!" ("Mubarak, O Mubarak, Saudi Arabia awaits!"). In the streets themselves, there are scores of other verses, ranging from the caustic "Shurtat Masr, yâ shurtat Masr, intû ba'aytû kilâb al-'asr" ("Egypt's Police, Egypt's Police, You've become nothing but Palace dogs"), to the defiant "Idrab idrab yâ Habib, mahma tadrab mish hansîb!" (Hit us, beat us, O Habib [al-Adly, now-former Minister of the Interior], hit all you want—we're not going to leave!). This last couplet is particularly clever, since it plays on the old Egyptian colloquial saying, "Darb al-habib zayy akl al-zabîb" (The beloved's fist is as sweet as raisins). This poetry is not an ornament to the uprising—it is its soundtrack and also composes a significant part of the action itself.

The prosody of the revolt suggests that there is more at stake in these couplet-slogans than the creation and distillation of a purely semantic meaning. For one thing, the act of singing and shouting with large groups of fellow citizens has created a certain and palpable sense of community that had not existed before. And the knowledge that one belongs to a movement bound by a positive collective ethos is powerful in its own right—especially in the face of a regime that has always sought to morally denigrate all political opposition. Likewise, the act of singing invective that satirizes feared public figures has an immediate impact that cannot be explained in terms of language, for learning to laugh at one's oppressor is a key part of unlearning fear. Indeed, witnesses to the revolt have consistently commented that in the early hours of the revolt—when invective was most ascendant—protesters began to lose their fear.<sup>11</sup>

Here's my point: the poetry chanted in the Egyptian demonstrations is still doing something different than (though a component of), say, the march or rally itself, the confrontations with police, or the occupation of civic space and the concomitant experimentation in social reproduction conducted there. It is involved in *facilitating* marching, confronting, and occupying—providing a *galvanizing* and affective element which increases solidarity, commitment, and a sense of social power. However much poetry is more than “an adornment to the uprising,” however much it forms “a significant part of the action itself,” it still does so in specifically affective and symbolic ways—helping to create “a certain and palpable sense of community,” a sense of belonging, and the “unlearning” of fear. Poetry is not—cannot take the place of—material actions in material streets. But it can, in certain instances, help facilitate those actions.

### 3.

Two of the most capable thinkers about poetry and social struggle that I know of—Joshua Clover and Keston Sutherland—recently engaged in an email debate, prompted by the posting of a talk in which Sutherland called for a renewed Marxist poetry.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent email exchange covers a range of issues, from the relation between capitalism and the labouring subject to that between poetry and revolution. Their comments are complex and finely nuanced, but I read them as articulating—both in their moments of convergence and divergence—the real matter of poetry's place in protest.

Much of the exchange centres around the question of where one approaches both poetry and political struggle from: from within the material contradictions of an immiserating and proletarianizing daily life (Clover's position), or via some speculative and life-affirming force occupying a hypothetical space within or outside the machinery which devours daily life in the process of valorization (Sutherland's position). Sutherland offers that the “gift” poetry can bring to

struggle is “to unlock my potential for practical resistance, for active critique, for solidarity in action”—“a gift of feeling and thinking that helps—for sure only virtually or in fantastical articulations in the first instance—to abolish and tear down the social relations that trap the labouring subject.”

Clover, for his part, accuses Sutherland of supporting “an Adornian vision which allows that intellectuals might dirty their hands only with ink,” whereas “My own sense is that struggle proceeds via the negative, though the negation of material conditions.” In part, Clover is focusing on Sutherland’s language and the spatial conceptions it embeds: if poetry is a “gift” to the struggling subject, it must logically come from some place outside the subject, or at least (and more importantly) outside the struggle. “We do not bring revolutionary poetry to the struggle,” Clover concludes, “Revolutionary poetry arises from struggle; it is the gift that struggle brings *us*.”

Sutherland’s response: “I don’t ... conclude that any attempt to think intimately about the life of the subject and to reckon with its specific extinction within the capital-relation must fall back on a detachable idea of species-being that materialism overrules.” Such thinking and “speculation” occurs “within practical struggle,” a notion he locates in Marx’s “refusal to give up speculative thinking about the subject, about life, about experience and its nature” in *Capital*.<sup>13</sup> Sutherland continues:

If we want [poetry] to have the force that you hope it will get from being forged in practical struggle, we had better not wait for the furnaces to be opened, but we ought to get on with looking for it right now.

In other words, what primes the pump? What lights the fire? What gets the struggle started? Not poetry, surely—but poetry as the sort of “gift” to struggle that Sutherland imagines can perhaps find revolutionary fires already burning and be the bellows that blows on their coals. So if the age-old question is—*how to get people into the streets?*—poetry isn’t the answer, but it participates in processes that might be the answer—processes of class composition, the slow building of solidarity, the opening of affective registers that escape the capital-relation and open vistas of other possibilities, other structures of feeling, the remediation of experiences of struggle which *build into* processes of radicalization and solidarity.

Clover is rigid, but his rigidity is forged not through theoretical purity, but rather, through the experience of the streets. “Struggle,” he contends, “is the looking. That’s the inquiry”—“Against *speculation*, I will offer *radicalization*”—“Poetry is the radicalizing of whatever is discovered or it is nothing.” His exhortations are always urgent, always about the need not to reflect, but to act. “We haven’t a lot



of time to fuck about. So let us negate the negation while we still can”— “Let’s go make revolution; poetry will come”— “*Hic rhodus, hic salta.*”

In the end, the differences between the two are partially semantic. As Sutherland notes,

Perhaps we are just using the word ‘struggle’ differently. If the word names the whole of life under capital, then of course there can be nowhere else, and poetry will be there alone. I was using the word to mean scenes, moments and extended periods of conscious, active resistance and fightback against the oppressions of capital and its police. Poetry does not come only from those scenes and moments.

If we conceive of struggle as “scenes” and “moments” of “active resistance,” then I find myself siding with his notion of the speculative space and affective “gift” poetry can, in part, provide. However, if we see struggle as on-going, daily—a continuous process of communization as a resistance to a continuous process of proletarianization—then I am with Clover (as Sutherland admits he has to be too, in this conception of struggle): poetry can only arise from the struggle; it is indeed the gift struggle brings us. Struggle is clearly both these things: there are moments of open confrontation and moments of recoil, recharge, movement building; there are street actions and there are meetings, reading groups and poetry readings, picnics, book fairs. And yet all of this is the struggle broadly conceived, as daily life, with many of the same bodies present at both street action and poetry reading. We must avoid over-emphasizing the discreteness of these “moments”—otherwise we face the danger of falling into the habits of the “hobbyist,” weekend warriors, poets mesmerised by our ink-stained hands. Because culture does cushion, as much as it can catalyze.

“Facing sides of the same phenomenon,” as Clover notes, indeed. And yet, when viewed from one particular angle, these positions again diverge. And this takes us back to the “bullshit” I cited Clover dismissing earlier. As I put this in another recent essay:

One question which remains important to ask and ultimately answer: to what ends are poetry’s social practices directed? If the answer—the too easy, and often-assumed answer—is “to raise consciousness,” “inform,” and so motivate and “empower,” then poetry is in trouble. These are tasks performed (undoubtedly better) by other media, and the focus on the task of communicating urgent content tends to drive poets towards autonomy and unreadability in search of intellectual complexity and an escape from such instrumentalization.

However, just as often and probably more significantly the endgame of a change oriented poetry is not conversion but solidarity, not information but social formation. Poetry—whether committed or autonomous—can build affinity and social coherence through the aesthetically mediated and shared experience of critique, oppositionality, and alterity.<sup>14</sup>

A spectre haunting the Clover/Sutherland discussion is that old one about what sort of “act” a poem is—that ghost that raises its head when Clover references Adorno and those “intellectuals [who] might dirty their hands only with ink.” Poetry *isn't* the sort of action the “bullshit” we so often convince ourselves of suggests it might be. It's not a paving stone thrown at the police. And it's not even a “consciousness raising” device or means of “informing” and thus winning over “the public.” But it can be one of the modalities of social formation. It is not “outreach,” but it is—“inreach”—part of the internal psycho-social functioning of a dynamic movement. Sometimes “inreach” and “outreach” merge—as when it is the street itself that forges certain social bonds via the intensity of collective experiences of oppression and resistance (the “moment” or “event” that forges new consciousness). Sometimes poetry is also part of this merger—as the example of the Tahrir Square protests suggests. But “inreach”—movement building, which is embodied in a diverse array of social practices and experiences, encompassing potentially both street actions and the “gift of feeling and thinking” that occurs through the collective elaboration of social solidarity—*is above all about social reproduction*. This so often “feminized” work of reproduction (did you eat? Sleep? Sing a song? Share a story? A poem? Talk long into the night about matters of the deepest concern?) gets lost in the heroic and perhaps deeply masculine stances taken by both Clover and Sutherland, as they tend to focus on the singular act of poetic or political intervention. Thus I would argue—if not absolutely contra Clover and Sutherland, certainly between the lines of their debate—that poetry is not so much productive (of revolution) as it is potentially *reproductive* (of the revolutionary subject).<sup>15</sup> Poetry can and so often does pose radical revisions of subjectivity and allows us to imagine forms of agency that so often seem impossible under current conditions.

#### 4.

No, poetry isn't the revolution. It's the gift revolution gives us. Love and solidarity. The will to continue the struggle, to rise above (or “unlearn”) fear and alienation. And it is a gift that, in a sort of feedback loop, gives something back to the revolution—because it can *steel us* for the streets, for the continuing struggle. Poetry can be one aspect (along with a host of other affective and speculative practices) of what reproduces us as revolutionary subjects, as committed anti-capitalists. Can be. One aspect. Just don't lean on it too heavily or exclusively (lean on your comrades, lean, the other way, into the line of cops).

Which takes me back to a last personal anecdote. During the early weeks of the Occupy movement, in October 2011, Occupy Oakland became one of the inspiring torchbearers of the entire movement. In those early weeks, here in Vancouver, we were in the streets almost every day. Everything and anything seemed possible. Somehow, in that euphoria and surprise—that there were so many of us, that the media and the public seemed to have halted and held its breath, fascinated—it did seem, naively, like the revolution was here. Maybe, though, we needed that naiveté—maybe we should have hung on to it a little longer, pushed further and with more abandon. I don't know.

Along with daily marches and committee meetings, I wrote a blog about those daily events and the ideas the movement was stirring up. In the early hours of October 25 the Occupy Oakland camp was raided and violently evicted by the OPD. In Vancouver we watched on livestream, anxious. It was clear to us that this same sort of raid—something similar at least—could happen here. We felt intensely for our comrades in Oakland. And we felt defiant, emboldened as much as we could feel a new fear in our guts (yes, that's the state, that's what it does to its opponents). That morning, instead of a blog about the events, I wrote a poem. It was a gift given by struggle. But it was also intended as a gift back to struggle. We weren't done yet. The struggle was only beginning. Here, in Vancouver—out there, in Oakland and a thousand other places—the struggle had to keep going. Struggle provided a moment in which the best thing I could hurl was some words. The next day, it would be something more material.

#### POEM FOR OAKLAND

October 26 2011

Dear menacing force  
Smoke-eyed with your  
Tear gas canisters  
Beanbag shotguns shells  
And bullets—rubber  
And otherwise—know this:  
Crowd dispersal  
Is just a phase in  
Crowd formation—  
Wherever you cut  
A swath through this  
Living mass you  
Will find it has  
Formed again on  
Other streets moving  
Back into whatever

Space you've just vacated  
And we will occupy  
Once again.

Know this too:  
In Oakland and New York  
Vancouver and Toronto  
We have learned  
From our brothers and sisters  
In Tahrir Square  
The Puerta del Sol  
And everywhere else  
We've learned to say  
ENOUGH  
And stare down  
Riot cops and soldiers—  
It will take more  
Than a simple show of force  
More than smoke mirrors  
Concussions and noise  
To chase us off now—  
We are not satisfied  
With a single skirmish  
We are not satisfied  
With one day of rage  
We are in love  
With this WE  
We are becoming  
And we are coming  
Oakland  
We are coming  
New York  
And we have each others' backs

### Notes

1. My source: <http://animalnewyork.com/2012/the-department-of-homeland-security-is-searching-your-facebook-and-twitter-for-these-words/>.
2. Around this same time a number of us were organizing solidarity “casseroles” in Vancouver—marches which led to a number of tense stand-offs with police, and several violent arrests.
3. I base this largely on the work of Cary Nelson. See, for instance, *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (Routledge, 2003).
4. I'm using the term in a more general sense than Charles Bernstein, or the literary avant-garde, typically does.
5. Clover interviewed by Ian Beattie, May 9 2012: <http://maisonneuve.org/article/2012/05/9/interview-joshua-clover/>.

6. The latter comments comes from a dialogue with Keston Sutherland, to which I will turn in some detail below. See <http://theclaudiusapp.com/5-clover-sutherland.html>.
7. See <http://poetsagainstthewar.org/>. Jeff Derksen offers a good discussion of PAW in *Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics* (Talon Books, 2009).
8. It's a little obscure, but Fermaille may mean a "buckle" or "clasp"—possibly also an "agreement" or an "accord, or even an "engagement." The website is <http://fermaille.com>.
9. My translation.
10. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/506/>.
11. Another excellent example is a video showing a young Egyptian woman chanting a poem directly in the face of stoic and heavily armed police at a barricade. Each verse is repeated by the amassed crowd, who urgently and even gleefully chant "security forces are the curs of the state!" A video of the recitation can be found here: <http://enlightenmentward.wordpress.com/2011/02/02/poetry-as-an-instrument-of-revolution/>.
12. Video of the talk was originally posted on the Militant Poetics blog, May 28 2013, and is included as a preface to the Clover/Sutherland debate, "Always Totalize: Poetry and Revolution," *The Claudius App V* (August 2013).
13. David Harvey argues something similar in discussing Marx's materialism. "How, then," Harvey asks, "can the human imagination, made so much of in *Capital*, range freely enough outside of the existing material and institutional conditions (e.g. those set by capitalism) to even conceptualize what the socialist alternative might look like?" Harvey's answer is that it is "the very existence of contradictions" in capitalism that "holds out the possibility for creative maneuver." Furthermore, "[a]ll capitalist ventures ... are speculative": "Giving free rein to the imagination is fundamental to the perpetuation of capitalism and it is within this space that an alternative socialist imaginary can grow." See *Spaces of Hope* (University of California Press, 2000), 203-205. I'm a little less certain about the second part of this—the focus on the capitalist imaginary—because truly most of those toiling under capitalism are not allowed or ever asked to give "free rein to their imaginations" (as Clover and Sutherland's discussion of the "extinction" of the subject makes abundantly clear). Nevertheless, the first part of Harvey's response—about the space opened by contradiction—is closer to the truth perhaps, and certainly in line with, for instance, Clover's invocation of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's comments, which he cites in one of his responses to Sutherland, to the effect that the contradiction opened by exchange—between use and exchange values—enables a certain imaginary, "in the human mind," where the dual nature of the commodity is entertained, and the mystery of the fetish puzzled out.
14. Notes on the Death of the Avant-garde. *Zone Magazine*. September 2013.
15. I have Sylvia Federici's work in mind here, for its radically feminist reading of reproductive labour in books such as *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004), and for her recent call to end the separation "between political activism and the reproduction of daily life" ("Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," in *The*

*Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State* (Levellers Press, 2013), ed. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, 52).

16. This poem was included in *Dispatches from the Occupation: a History Of Change* (Talon Books, 2012).

STEPHEN COLLIS's books include *Anarchive* (2005), *The Commons* (2008), *On the Material* (2010), and *To the Barricades* (2013). He has also written two books of criticism, including *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good* (2007). His collection of essays on the Occupy movement, *Dispatches from the Occupation* (2012), comes out of his activist experiences and is a philosophical meditation on activist tactics, social movements, and change.