



Chantal Neveu

A  
Spectacular  
Influence

Translated by Nathanaël

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

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and Chantal Neveu, 2010

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As many heads without necks sprouted up /  
and arms wandered naked, bereft of shoulders,  
/ and eyes roamed alone, impoverished  
of foreheads [in] the divided meadows of  
Aphrodite... For I have already become a boy  
and a girl / and a bush and a bird [for they]  
grew apart to be many from one.

EMPEDOCLES TR. BRAD INWOOD

We are only the others.

HENRI LABORIT

Back from Greece

Voice of a man  
without a face

The equivalence of sufferings

Concrete like fragmented rock deposited  
in a room. Concrete like a marble head  
alongside a decapitated body. Incongruity  
of broken displaced stone, my skull,  
separated from my body, I don't move.

I do nothing.

The nothing, unseizable thing, unseizable granite pebble in the middle of a room.

Headless body, fifty-one bodies, heads torn off by shells, fifty-one Albanians, their fifty-one jaws, exploded.

“You cannot have the bodies now; come back later.”

There are no more jaws, they have no throats, there are dead bodies, flesh on bones. There are bodies of mythic men, Aphrodite’s bodies, with or without a head, flesh of limestone, granite. There is the thought of men who sculpted magnificent bodies. Magnificent as a pleonasm. A phantasm.

Missing is the thought of the men who invented gods. Missing are the heads, in marble, limbs, shoulders, noses, abdomens. Missing are fifty-one Albanians, even if the fifty-one bodies are returned headless.

I looked at the marble bodies, I invent the

thinking of the men who invented gods. I hear the word “Albanian,” I invent men, living, mortal. I hear “fifty-one,” I see a mass of men, all of humanity, thinking heads and bodies. I hear “the jaw torn off,” I see the violence, bloody. And I hear “by shells,” men think war, men move shells.

Shells explode on the radio.

The dead bodies will be moved. Stone has been moved, cut. The bodies will be kept. Will we dare look at them? The heads separated from the bodies, the fallen bodies, the bodies of dead men, separated from the bodies of women, alive. The women will no longer lie down alongside the men, not in sleep or in love. They will be deposited, perhaps, in the tombs. The women, the men?

Marble women were being deposited alongside the dead bodies of mortals in the tombs of the Cyclades. Violin-women, arms crossed over their rounded bellies. Long throats, armless over their striped

bellies. The women of flesh, standing over the tombs, the stomachs, the throats, will remain, separated.

Throats slit, stomachs disemboweled, fetuses and viscera hanging from the walls, one hundred and thirty-six Algerians, male, female, dead, massacred. I don't hear the cries, cannot invent what the men think who disembowel stomachs.

Between my head and my body, I have no more throat, I don't hear the scream I want to scream. Is it the sound of a violin? No. A cello. Does death still exist?

It is not cut stone, it is not an Aphrodite head, nor the dismembered body of Dionysus, nor the decapitated body of Zeus, the large torso above the folds of the drape. A numbered assassination, the massacre of death.

The beauty of the marble bodies, the grace in the traits of the pink stone. I looked at what is missing between the limbs, the

bodies, between the bodies and the heads,  
I looked at the masks, the bronze helmets.  
I don't know what there is between the  
flesh of the stomach, the helmed head at  
war, what there is between the head, the  
torso. The flesh on the bone of the skull  
beneath the helmet is not stone, the blood  
in the hair is not marble lines. There  
isn't just the neck, the nape. The throat,  
a matter I don't know. I am with what is  
missing and with what is not. I don't have  
a shield. I am naked in my pants.

I do not move any more, I am in a tomb.

My head, detached from my body, my  
body, dead wood, am not lying down, I  
sit, my arms hanging, my body the chair  
I am on, I am a head on a chair and I keep  
watch.

I see a cat pass, dead not dead, I sleep, am  
not dead. Because my body a chair, I could  
defenestrate, pull on the chair.

Concrete sounds, no nuance. Everything

is equal, continuous noises, spiralled rumble, it could be a motor, metallic noises, stridences alternating with spaces of silence. The sound of a detonation, a silence, immense, time in suspension. The noise, the cry, the silence or the sound of the detonation, a silence, which is more incongruous? Life takes up again. Sheets appear from above, women have thrown sheets, the bodies are being covered, down below. Are they already dead? Still living?

My head, facing a head with its skull open, flesh hanging. I remove the white worms from the greenish flesh. The face on the skull is looking at me, its eyes are looking at me, don't see me. I look at its eyes, the worms move above its brow. With tweezers, I remove the living worms, I throw them, one by one, on the ground. I don't hear the sound of the maggots, the ground, soft, my chair falls, I can't see the face any more.

The bronze, the strings, it is not my voice, the head covered with a sheet, the suffering deafens me. Marasmus.

I am not credible. I say I am a head, a chair, the sound of the cello, the wind, the nothing that I do, this that I suffer, this that I invent. What there is between the sheet and the sound of the voice, the dance without my chair moving. Love. Space separates my chair from your body.

Your body covered with a sheet, you are not dead. Aphrodite is a sound, you are an ensemble. My head at the centre of your belly, you tilt back on my chair. You scream. I think the wind while throwing the dead wood outside.

I hear screaming again.

Your throat above your body, the cello, your round belly, arms crossed, your flesh similar to limestone, the cat passes, looks at you. The gods exist only because we invent them.

Living, mortal, I am fifty-one, whole, decapitated.

I move about in the noise I hear.