

**CHANTAL MAILLARD**

**FROM KILLING PLATO**

**TRANSLATED BY YVETTE SIEGERT**

The event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us...It is what must be understood, willed, and represented in that which occurs.

Only the free man, therefore, can comprehend all violence in a single act of violence, and every mortal event *in a single Event* which no longer makes room for the accident...

Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*  
(tr. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale)

# 1

A man gets run over.

At this very moment.

Right now.

A man gets run over.

There is flesh burst open, there are guts—  
liquids oozing from truck and body,  
machines mingling their essence  
with the asphalt: a strange conjunction  
of metal and tissue, an ideogram  
of hardness and its opposite.

The man's body has been fractured at the waist  
and he looks like an actor bowing at his curtain call.  
No one was there for the opening act, but no matter:  
what is important is the now,  
this very moment,  
and the chipped whitewashed wall  
strewing the scene with confetti.

I turn the corner. Quicken my pace. It's getting late,  
and I haven't had lunch yet.

## 2

Should I add that the wind howled  
after the colliding door  
like a feral dog?

I will not.

Do not ask me about the wind:  
I do not know if there was any.  
And even if there had been,  
it wouldn't be relevant.

I just ran into an old friend. He wants my advice on  
some poems he's been writing.

### 3

His face is gaunt, and the gaze in his great  
blue eye as he turns to the sky is almost obscene—  
while his other eye has been blinded  
by a pigeon, which stamped it with guano,  
like an envelope sealed with wax.

He has given the book a strange title: *Killing Plato*.

## 4

And what about emotions?

Should there be any?

Is it poetry when a line uses clinical  
terms to describe what is taking place?

But what exactly is *taking place*?

It's about a woman who has been knocked over by the force of a sound,

## 5

I do not know if that was his daughter.  
The dead man was gripping a girl's hand,  
or maybe it was the girl  
who had taken hold of the man's hand—  
which is so rigid now, so cold and stiff.  
They will come to cut off his fingers, one by one.  
Amputating his hand might be simpler,  
but just imagine a girl running away  
with a bloodied hand  
clutching her own!  
They will show up with surgical  
instruments to dislodge it, and she will  
be transfixed as she observes  
the puddle of blood and urine  
spreading to her feet—  
thinking it's too bad  
she didn't wear her rain boots,  
thinking that puddles are not  
always made by the rain.

the sound of an idea as it vibrates and turns into a missile.

## 6

Across the street at the corner,  
a black stocking is falling from  
a window located just  
above the movie theatre.  
A silk stocking (or maybe nylon)—  
falling, black as dismissal,  
onto a poster announcing  
*Death of a Salesman.*

The sound slams the woman against the front of a house. This is what  
his book is about. The poems are variations on this image.

## 7

The crowd's numbers are rising.  
No, not like the tide. More  
like dreams in which the dreamer  
wants to know what is being kept from him.  
Rising from holes, from the alleys,  
from the transparency of the windows,  
from the plot, the argument  
complicating the story,  
they occupy the crevices, the cracks in the rooftiles—  
they cross from the ledges  
and flow down from the drainpipes,  
they expand in every direction, and  
as they scatter, they complicate,  
add and overlap, and probe from the inside  
what can't be reached from the outside—  
a giant vampire body trying  
to know it's alive for a while  
to know it's alive for a while longer,  
to know it's alive beyond the page  
asking it to rise—dense, fluid, compact—  
and to plot its defense as  
the investigation proceeds into  
ways of knowing without suffering,  
ways of seeing without being seen.

I told him I didn't understand why he called it *Killing Plato*.