

The Writing of the Disaster

L'écriture du désastre

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◆ The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; "I" am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other than I who passively become other. There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say: the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit. We are on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future: it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under the threat, all formulations which would imply the future—that which is yet to come—if the disaster were not that which does not come, that which has put a stop to every arrival. To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it.

The disaster is separate; that which is most separate.

When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it in the order of lived time, belongs to the disaster, the disaster has always

already withdrawn or dissuaded it; there is no future for the disaster, just as there is no time or space for its accomplishment.

♦ *He does not believe in the disaster. One cannot believe in it, whether one lives or dies. Commensurate with it there is no faith, and at the same time a sort of disinterest, detached from the disaster. Night; white, sleepless night—such is the disaster: the night lacking darkness, but brightened by no light.*

♦ The circle, uncurled along a straight line rigorously prolonged, reforms a circle eternally bereft of a center.

♦ “False” unity, the simulacrum of unity, compromises it better than any direct challenge, which, in any case, is impossible.

♦ Would writing be to become, in the book, legible for everyone, and indecipherable for oneself? (Hasn’t Jabès almost told us this?)

♦ If disaster means being separated from the star (if it means the decline which characterizes disorientation when the link with fortune from on high is cut), then it indicates a fall beneath disastrous necessity. Would law be the disaster? The supreme or extreme law, that is: the excessiveness of uncodifiable law—that to which we are destined without being party to it. The disaster is not our affair and has no regard for us; it is the heedless unlimited; it cannot be measured in terms of failure or as pure and simple loss.

Nothing suffices to the disaster; this means that just as it is foreign to the ruinous purity of destruction, so the idea of totality cannot delimit it. If all things were reached by it and destroyed—all gods and men returned to absence—and if nothing were substituted for everything, it would still be too much and too little. The disaster is not of capital importance. Perhaps it renders death vain. It does not superimpose itself upon dying’s scope for withdrawal, filling in the void. Dying sometimes gives us (wrongly, no doubt), not the feeling of abandoning ourselves to the disaster, but the feeling that if we were to die, we would escape it. Whence the illusion that

suicide liberates (but consciousness of the illusion does not dissipate it or allow us to avoid it). The disaster, whose blackness should be attenuated—through emphasis—exposes us to a certain idea of passivity. We are passive with respect to the disaster, but the disaster is perhaps passivity, and thus past, always past, even in the past, out of date.

♦ *The disaster takes care of everything.*

♦ The disaster: not thought gone mad; not even, perhaps, thought considered as the steady bearer of its madness.

♦ The disaster, depriving us of that refuge which is the thought of death, dissuading us from the catastrophic or the tragic, dissolving our interest in will and in all internal movement, does not allow us to entertain this question either: what have you done to gain knowledge of the disaster?

♦ The disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated—the immemorial, perhaps. To remember forgetfully: again, the outside.

♦ “Have you suffered for knowledge’s sake?” This is asked of us by Nietzsche, on the condition that we not misunderstand the word “suffering”: it means, not so much what we undergo, as that which goes under.¹ It denotes the *pas* [“not”] of the utterly passive, withdrawn from all sight, from all knowing. Unless it be the case that knowledge—because it is not knowledge of the disaster, but knowledge as disaster and knowledge disastrously—carries us, carries us off, deports us (whom it smites and nonetheless leaves untouched), straight to ignorance, and puts us face to face with ignorance of the unknown so that we forget, endlessly.

♦ The disaster: stress upon minutiae, sovereignty of the accidental. This causes us to acknowledge that forgetfulness is not negative or that the negative does not come after affirmation (affirmation negated), but exists in relation to the most ancient, to what would

seem to come from furthest back in time immemorial without ever having been given.

◆ It is true that, with respect to the disaster, one dies too late. But this does not dissuade us from dying; it invites us—escaping the time where it is always too late—to endure inopportune death, with no relation to anything save the disaster as return.

◆ Never disappointed, not for lack of disappointment, but because of disappointment's always being insufficient.

◆ I will not say that the disaster is absolute; on the contrary, it disorients the absolute. It comes and goes, errant disarray, and yet with the imperceptible but intense suddenness of the outside, as an irresistible or unforeseen resolve which would come to us from beyond the confines of decision.

◆ To read, to write, the way one lives under the surveillance of the disaster: exposed to the passivity that is outside passion. The heightening of forgetfulness.

It is not you who will speak; let the disaster speak in you, even if it be by your forgetfulness or silence.

◆ The disaster has already passed beyond danger, even when we are under the threat of ———. The mark of the disaster is that one is never at that mark except when one is under its threat and, being so, past danger.

◆ To think would be to name (to call) the disaster the way one reserves, in the back of one's mind, an unspoken thought.

I do not know how I arrived at this, but it may be that in so doing I struck upon the thought which leads one to keep one's distance from thought; for it gives that: distance. But to go to the end of thought (in the form of this thought of the end, of the edge): is this not possible only by changing to another thought? Whence this injunction: do not change your thought, repeat it, if you can.

◆ The disaster is the gift; it gives disaster: as if it took no account of being or not-being. It is not advent (which is proper to what comes to pass): it does not happen. And thus I cannot ever happen upon this thought, except without knowing, without appropriating any knowledge. Or again, is it the advent of what does not happen, of what would come without arriving, outside being, and as though by drifting away? The posthumous disaster?

◆ Not to think: that, without restraint, excessively, in the panicky flight of thought.

◆ *He said to himself: you shall not kill yourself, your suicide precedes you. Or: he dies inept at dying.*

◆ Limitless space where a sun would attest not to the day, but to the night delivered of stars, multiple night.

◆ *"Know what rhythm holds men."* (Archilochus.) Rhythm or language. Prometheus: *"In this rhythm, I am caught."* Changing configuration. What is rhythm? The danger of rhythm's enigma.

◆ *"Unless there should exist, in the mind of whoever dreamed up humans, nothing except an exact count of the pure rhythmical motifs of being, which are its recognizable signs."* (Mallarmé.)

◆ The disaster is not somber, it would liberate us from everything if it could just have a relation with someone; we would know it in light of language and at the twilight of a language with a *gai savoir*. But the disaster is unknown; it is the unknown name for that in thought itself which dissuades us from thinking of it, leaving us, but its proximity, alone. Alone, and thus exposed to the thought of the disaster which disrupts solitude and overflows every variety of thought, as the intense, silent and disastrous affirmation of the outside.

◆ A nonreligious repetition, neither mournful nor nostalgic, a return not desired. Wouldn't the disaster be, then, the repetition—

the affirmation—of the singularity of the extreme? The disaster or the unverifiable, the improper.

◆ There is no solitude if it does not disrupt solitude, the better to expose the solitary to the multiple outside.

◆ Immobile forgetfulness (memory of the immemorable): so would the disaster without desolation be de-scribed, in the passivity of a letting-go which does not renounce, does not announce anything if not the undue return. Perhaps we know the disaster by other, perhaps joyful names, reciting all words one by one, as if there could be for words an all.

◆ *The calm, the burn of the holocaust, the annihilation of noon—the calm of the disaster.*

◆ He is not excluded, but like someone who would no longer enter anywhere.

◆ Penetrated by passive gentleness, he has, thus, something like a presentiment—remembrance of the disaster which would be the gentlest want of foresight. We are not contemporaries of the disaster: that is its difference, and this difference is its fraternal threat. The disaster would be in addition, in excess, an excess which is marked only as impure loss.

◆ Inasmuch as the disaster is thought, it is nondisastrous thought, thought of the outside. We have no access to the outside, but the outside has always already touched us in the head, for it is the precipitous.

The disaster, that which disestablishes itself—disestablishment without destruction's penalty. The disaster comes back; it would always be the disaster after the disaster—a silent, harmless return whereby it dissimulates itself. Dissimulation, effect of disaster.

◆ *"But there is, in my view, no grandeur except in gentleness."* (S. W.)² I

will say rather: nothing extreme except through gentleness. Madness through excess of gentleness, gentle madness.

To think, to be effaced: the disaster of gentleness.

◆ *"There is no explosion except a book."* (Mallarmé.)

◆ The disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual.

◆ *It is dark disaster that brings the light.*

◆ The horror—the honor—of the name, which always threatens to become a title.³ In vain the movement of anonymity remonstrates with this supernumerary appellation—this fact of being identified, unified, fixed, arrested in the present. The commentator says (be it to criticize or to praise): this is what you are, what you think; and thus the thought of writing—the ever-dissuaded thought which disaster awaits—is made explicit in the name; it receives a title and is ennobled thereby; indeed, it is as if saved—and yet, given up. It is surrendered to praise or to criticism (these amount to the same): it is, in other words, promised to a life surpassing death, survival. Boneyard of names, heads never empty.

◆ The fragmentary promises not instability (the opposite of fixity) so much as disarray, confusion.

◆ Schleiermacher: By producing a work, I renounce the idea of my producing and formulating myself; I fulfill myself in something exterior and inscribe myself in the anonymous continuity of humanity—whence the relation between the work of art and the encounter with death: in both cases, we approach a perilous threshold, a crucial point where we are abruptly *turned back*. Likewise, Friedrich Schlegel on the aspiration to dissolve in death: "The human is every-

where the highest, even higher than the divine." The human movement is the one that goes right to the limit. Still, it is possible that, as soon as we write, and however little we write (the little is only too much), we know we are approaching the limit—the perilous threshold—the chance of being turned back.

For Novalis, the mind is not agitation, disquietude, but repose (the neutral point without any contradictions). It is weight, heaviness. For God is "an infinitely compact metal, the heaviest and most bodily of all beings." "The artist in immortality" must work at reaching the zero where soul and body become mutually insensitive. "Apathy" was Sade's term.

◆ Lassitude before words is also the desire for words separated from each other—with their power, which is meaning, broken, and their composition too, which is syntax or the system's continuity (provided the system be in some way complete in advance and the present a *fait accompli*). This lassitude, this desire is the madness which is never current, but the interval of unreason, the "he'll have gone mad by tomorrow"—madness which one mustn't use to elevate, or to deepen, or to lighten thought with it.

◆ Garrulous prose: a child's mere babble. And yet a man who drools, the idiot, the man of tears who restrains himself no longer, who lets himself go—he too is without words, bereft of power, but still he is closer to speech that flows and flows away than to writing which restrains itself, even if this be restraint beyond mastery. In this sense, there is no silence if not written: broken reserve, a deep cut in the possibility of any cut at all.

◆ Power in the broadest sense—capacity, ability—is like the power of the group leader: always related to domination. *Macht* is the means, the machine, the functioning of the possible. The delirious and desiring machine tries, in vain, to make disfunction function. In vain, for un-power is not delirious; it has always departed from the groove already, and is always already derailed; it belongs to the

outside. It does not suffice to say (in order to speak of un-power): power can be held provided it not be used. For such abstinence is the definition of divinity. Detachment is not sufficient, unless it senses that it is, in advance, a sign of the disaster. The disaster alone holds mastery at a distance. I wish (for example) for a psychoanalyst to whom a sign would come, from the disaster. Power over the imaginary provided that the imaginary be understood as that which evades power. Repetition as un-power.

◆ We constantly *need* to say (to think): that was quite something (something quite important) that happened to me. By which we mean at the same time: that couldn't possibly belong to the order of things which come to pass, or which are important, but is rather among the things which export and deport. Repetition.

◆ Among certain "primitive" peoples (those whose society knows no State), the chief must prove his dominion over words: silence is forbidden him. Yet it is not required that anyone listen to him. Indeed, no one pays attention to the chief's word, or rather all feign inattention; and he, in fact, says nothing, but repeats the celebration of the traditional norms of life. To what requirement of primitive society does this empty language, which emanates from the apparent locus of power, answer? The discourse of the chief is empty precisely because he is separated from power—it is the society itself which is the locus of power. The chief must move in the element of the word, which is to say, at the opposite pole from violence. The chief's obligation to speak—that constant flow of empty speech (not empty, but traditional, sheer transmission), which he *owes* to the tribe—is the infinite debt which effectively rules out speaking man's ever becoming a man of power.

◆ There is a question and yet no doubt; there is a question, but no desire for an answer; there is a question, and nothing that can be said, but just this nothing, to say. This is a query, a probe that surpasses the very possibility of questions.

◆ He who criticizes or thrusts the game away, has already entered into the game.

◆ How can anyone claim: "What you by no means know can by no means torment you?" I am not the center of what I know not, and torment has its own knowledge to cover my ignorance.

◆ Desire: let everything be more than everything, and still be all.

◆ There can be this point, at least, to writing: to wear out errors. Speaking propagates, disseminates them by fostering belief in some truth.

To read: not to write; to write what one is forbidden to read.

To write: to refuse to write—to write by way of this refusal. So it is that when he is asked for a few words, this alone suffices for a kind of exclusion to be decreed, as though he were being obliged to survive, to lend himself to life in order to continue dying.

To write—for lack of the wherewithal to do so.

◆ Inconsolable solitude. The motionless disaster which nevertheless approaches.

◆ How could there be a *duty* to live? The more serious question: the desire to die, too strong, it seems, to be satisfied with *my* death, and to be exhausted when I die, is, paradoxically, the desire that others might live without life's being for them an obligation. The desire to die absolves of the duty to live—that is, its effect is that one lives without any obligation (but not without responsibility, for responsibility is beyond life).

◆ Reading is anguish, and this is because any text, however important, or amusing, or interesting it may be (and the more engaging it seems to be), is empty—at bottom it doesn't exist; you have to cross an abyss, and if you do not jump, you do not comprehend.

◆ Wittgenstein's "mysticism," aside from his faith in unity, must come from his believing that one can *show* when one cannot *speak*.

But without language, nothing can be shown. And to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it. Writing (or Telling, as distinct from anything written or told) precedes every phenomenon, every manifestation or show: all appearing.

◆ Not to write—what a long way there is to go before arriving at that point, and it is never sure; it is never either a recompense or a punishment. One must just write, in uncertainty and in necessity. Not writing is among the effects of writing; it is something like a sign of passivity, a means of expression at grief's disposal. How many efforts are required in order not to write—in order that, writing, I not write, in spite of everything. And finally I cease writing, in an ultimate moment of concession—not in despair, but as if this were the un hoped for: the favor the disaster grants. Unsatisfied and unsatisfiable desire, yet by no means negative. There is nothing negative in "not to write"; it is intensity without mastery, without sovereignty, the obsessiveness of the utterly passive.

◆ To fail without fail: this is a sign of passivity.

◆ To want to write: what an absurdity. Writing is the decay of the will, just as it is the loss of power, and the fall of the regular fall of the beat, the disaster again.

◆ Not to write: negligence, carelessness do not suffice; the intensity of a desire beyond sovereignty, perhaps—a relation of submersion with the outside, passivity which permits one to keep in the disaster's fellowship.

He devotes all his energy to not writing, so that, writing, he should write out of failure, in failure's intensity.

◆ Unmanifest anguish. Were you in anguish, you wouldn't be.

◆ The disaster is what one cannot welcome except as the imminence that gratifies, the wait for un-power.

◆ May words cease to be arms; means of action, means of salvation. Let us count, rather, on disarray.

When to write, or not to write makes no difference, then writing changes—whether it happens or not; it is the writing of the disaster.

- ◆ Let us not entrust ourselves to failure. That would only be to indulge nostalgia for success.
- ◆ Beyond seriousness there is play, but beyond play, and seeking that which out-plays (the way the disaster describes), there is the gratuitous, from which no escape. It is what by chance befalls, and I fall beneath it, having always fallen already.
- Days and nights go by in silence. Such is the word.
- ◆ Detached from everything, including detachment.
- ◆ One of the ruses of the self: to sacrifice the empirical self the better to preserve a transcendental or formal I; to annihilate oneself in order to save one's soul (or knowledge, including un-knowledge).
- ◆ Not writing should not refer back to some "not wanting to write," nor—although this is more ambiguous—to an "I cannot write," which in fact still indicates, in a nostalgic way, the relation of an I to power, in the form of power's loss. But not writing without any reference to power: this supposes that one go by way of writing.
- ◆ Where is there the least power? In speech, or in writing? When I live, or when I die? Or again, when dying doesn't let me die?
- ◆ Is it an ethical concern that distances you from power? Power links, un-power detaches. Sometimes un-power is sustained by the intensity of the undesirable.
- ◆ Bereft of certitude, he does not doubt; he hasn't that support.
- ◆ The thought of the disaster, if it does not extinguish thought, makes us insouciant with regard to the results this thought itself can have in our life; it dismisses all ideas of failure and success; it re-

places ordinary silence—where speech lacks—with a separate silence, set apart, where it is the other who, keeping still, announces himself.

- ◆ Withdrawal and not expansion. Such would be art, in the manner of the God of Isaac Louria, who creates solely by excluding himself.
- ◆ Writing is evidently without importance, it is not important to write. It is from this point that the relation to writing is decided.
- ◆ The question concerning the disaster is a part of the disaster: it is not an interrogation, but a prayer, an entreaty, a call for help. The disaster appeals to the disaster that the idea of salvation, of redemption might not yet be affirmed, and might, drifting debris, sustain fear.

The disaster: inopportune.

- ◆ It is the other who exposes me to "unity," causing me to believe in an irreplaceable singularity, for I feel I must not fail him; and at the same time he withdraws me from what would make me unique: I am not indispensable; in me anyone at all is called by the other—anyone at all as the one who owes him aid. The un-unique, always the substitute. The other is, for his part too, always other, lending himself, however, to unity; he is neither this one nor that one, and nonetheless it is to him alone that, each time, I owe everything, including the loss of myself.

The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine, and because of it I am no longer myself.

- ◆ "Be patient." A simple motto, very demanding. Patience has already withdrawn me not only from the will in me, but from my power to be patient: if I *can* be patient, then patience has not worn out in me that me to which I cling for self-preservation. Patience opens me entirely, all the way to a passivity which is the *pas* ["not"] in the utterly passive, and which has therefore abandoned the level of life where *passive* would simply be the opposite of *active*. In this