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The bag. (For Mme. Gatard)

Omnia mea mecum porto. Translation from classical Latin into present-day English: All that I wrote during the past 18 months, and all that I published during the same period, I keep in a bag that I always carry with me. The bag is therefore a space wherein the traces of my thoughts, wishes and fancies accumulate as I travel through Europe in search of my destiny and destination. The other day Mme. Gatard, (a friend with an intuition), asked me to write about it. The following night somebody broke into my car which was parked in front of my Hotel, Rue des Beaux-Arts. When I came down next morning I saw that the car had been burglered, and that nothing of its contents was missing (not even the typewriter and the camera), except for the bag containing my writing. This was a case of objectified amnesia: part of my past had been physically amputated. Chrono-ectomy. I felt emptied and alliviated. In order to quiet my conscience my wife insisted that we go and speak to the police about it. The bag was there, apparently untouched, with all the papers in perfect order. It had been found rue de Seine at 2 o'clock in the morning. The burglar has left it there, because he found it to be of no value. A very severe literary criticism. Fact is more fanciful than fancy. I had promised Mme. Gatard the previous day that I would write this essay, but now I am obliged to do it for even more stronger reasons. I shall however avoid to establish a causal link between Mme. Gatard's suggestion and the burglary, because I know that "post hoc ergo propter hoc" is a logical pitfall. Let the link between the two events hover mysteriously over the following considerations, just as mysteriously as all the other links which make a unity out of every human project.

The bag contains various files of different colors. It is a yellow leather bag closed with a zipper. One file contains my correspondence from June '72 up to the present. It is a very thick file, and the papers in it are ordered chronologically. There are copies of my own letters with or without reply from the receivers, and letters that I received without having replied to them. There is a file called "unpublished papers". It contains about 30 short essays on various subjects, ranging from art criticism to descriptions of scenes and events around me. Several of these papers have been sent to magazines, others were not shown to anybody. These papers are written in Portuguese, German or English. The copy of the present paper will go into that file the moment it is finished. The file does not obey any order. There is a file called "published papers". It contains about 10 short essays that were published in Brazil or Europe during the last 18 months, and the copies were taken out of the file just mentioned. Therefore this file is an appendix to the other. The papers are ordered chronologically according to the

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date of publication. There is a file called "La Force du Quotidien" which contains the copy of a manuscript for a book that will be published in Paris this December. It contains about 15 essays describing some of the things that surround us. There is a file called "Ça existe, la Nature?", which contains about 8 essays which are being sent to my editor to form a new book. It is a sort of modified continuation of the first one. There is a file which contains lectures I gave or intended to give while in Europe. It contains about 15 copies which deal mostly about communcological subjets. A further file is called "New York" and it contains sketches for a paper I intend to read at the Museum of Modern Art January next year. There is a file called "Rio" which contains copies of about 20 manuscripts which are to be published by my Rio editor early next year. There is a file called "Testimony" which contains about 100 pages of an autobiography which I began to write and which gets as far as 1955, but which I have now stopped writing. It is written in both Portuguese and German. And there is a file called "Documentos" which contains papers that show "who I am", (fiscal documents, University documents, contracts from editors, attestations and so forth). Finally there is a big a torn file called "Bienal", which contains all the documents and correspondence concerning the XIIth Bienal of São Paulo.

Now that I come to think of it the bag obeys a very interesting structure. Had the burgler kept the bag and read its contents he would have ~~known~~ "known me". The problem this poses is: what sort of "me" would he have known and how would he "know" me? Let us go a little bit into details to answer this question. Not because I am interesting, but because historiographers, archaeologists, paleontologists and so forth are in a situation which is similar to my burglers's.

Let us first classify the files from the point of view of message. They belong to three classes. (1) Dialogue between myself and my others, (Correspondence). (2) Discourse which I emit in the direction of others, (manuscripts and lectures). (3) Discourse of others of which I am the object, (documentation). From the first class the burgler would have learned about the structure of my human contact with others: what united me with some others, what others I do not admit, and what others do not admit me. From the second class he would have learned about my "interiority": what "information" I hold and how I communicate it to the "public". He would have known, that is, my "position" and my "political commitment" in the broadest sense of that term. From the third class he would have known how the "establishment" sees me. What mask I have and what role is ascribed to me by the "public". He would have learned a great deal about me, but

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all of it would have been problematic for various reasons. The two most important reasons of doubt would be as follows: (1) He would have to check the authenticity of the papers and (2) he would have to check the authenticity of the information contained in the papers. In fact, he would have to engage himself to "close reading" of both the texts and the context of the papers.

Let us now classify the papers contained in the files from the point of view of content of the message. This is a difficult task but may result in three classes. (1) Factual information. (Documents, some of the essays and lectures, some parts of letters). (2) Analysis of facts and reflection about them. (Most of the essays and lectures, some parts of letters). (3) Emotional and ethical articulations. (Overtly all the letters, covertly all the essays and letters.) From the first class the burglar would have learned about my "objective being-in-the-world". From the second class about the way I distance myself from my "objective being-in-the-world". From the third class about my "subjective-being-in-the-world", and about the "subjective-being-in-the world" of some of my others. Therefore he would have been able to draw some conclusions about the objective and inter-subjective situation in which we all are. But he would have had to be very careful about this. First because there would be the danger of a jump of the sort "pars pro toto". And second because there is always the possibility of factual error, of insincerity on the part of myself and my others, and of false interpretation. His job would have been one of decodification and de-ideologisation.

Let us now classify the papers according to the structure in which they are ordered. Here again we find three classes. (1) Chronological structure, (2) structure according to content of message, (3) accidental structure. The burglar would have learned from this something about the structure of "memories" in general, and specifically about human memory structure. No doubt the bag is part of my memory, a limited part both as far as time and as far as stored information is concerned. The chronological structure part is similar to memories of the type "geological formation" and "botanical formation". The content structure part is similar to memories of the type "library" and "computer". The accidental structure part is similar to memories of the type "genetic information". The burglar could have made deep reflexion on Monod's problem of "Accident and Necessity" in a different context. It is a pity that in the bag the formal type of structure, (like alphabetic ordering), is missing. But this lack could have revealed something about my "forma mentis" to the burglar. In short: the bag is a true hunting place for the structuralist's research into the events of the world.

Lastly let us classify the papers according to their situation as

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far as the bag itself is concerned. We may find that there are two classes. (1) Paper which are in the bag because I want to remember them, and (2) Papers which are in the bag because I want to remember through them something which is not in the bag. The letters, and most of the essays and documents belong to the first class. The file "Testimony" and some of the other essays belong to the second class. So that the burglar could have studied my memory in two dimensions: what is present in memory, and what is being recalled to memory in order to become present. However, the situation is even more complex. Some of the papers in the bag are kept there to be used in the future, (like the file marked "New York" and the manuscripts to be published). So that the burglar, by studying my memory, would have learned something about my projects for the future. The most confusing fact, however, is this: the present manuscript will also go into the bag, and it is about the bag, and now is becoming to be even about itself, so that it will reflect the bag and itself within the file I am going to put it in, (marked "unpublished papers"). But this manuscript the burglar could not have studied, because he himself is in it after not having read the papers in the bag. I think this shows how confusing and complex it is to carry one's past with oneself wherever one is going.

Wherever I go, I carry it with me. So does everybody. Only in my case my bag is a little bit more visible than it is with most people. It allows me to speculate about it the way I do in this paper. If I am not mistaken, it was Unamuno who once made the following distinction between professors of philosophy and philosophers: the professors keep the books of philosophy in front of them and read them. The philosophers keep them in a bag and carry them on their back. Mme. Gataud provoked me to take the bag off my shoulders and become a professor in Unamuno's sense of the term. Only in this case my bag does not contain only "books of philosophy", but other papers of a more doubtful nature as well. The problem is this: can we through away our bags, (or have them stolen from us), so that we become free for the future? Or are the bags linked to us in such a way that they always return, rue de Seine, at two o'clock in the morning? So that we must advance toward the future carrying them along with us? In other words: are they a dead or a living burden? I believe this is an important question, and it is good that my bag should contain it from now on.