From

The Collective Memory

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Chapter 4

SPACE AND THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The Group in Its Spatial Framework: The Influence of the Physical Surroundings

Auguste Comte remarked that mental equilibrium was, first and foremost, due to the fact that the physical objects of our daily contact change little or not at all, providing us with an image of permanence and stability. They give us a feeling of order and tranquility, like a silent and immobile society unconcerned with our own restlessness and changes of mood. In truth, much mental illness is accompanied by a breakdown of contact between thought and things, as it were, an inability to recognize familiar objects, so that the victim finds himself in a fluid and strange environment totally lacking familiar reference points. So true is it that our habitual images of the external world are inseparable from our self that this breakdown is not limited to the mentally ill. We ourselves may experience a similar period of uncertainty, as if we had left behind our whole personality, when we are obliged to move to novel surroundings and have not yet adapted to them.

More is involved than merely the discomfort accompanying a change of motor habits. Why does a person become attached to objects? Why does he wish that they would never change and could always keep him company? Let us leave aside for the moment any considerations of convenience or aesthetics. Our physical surroundings bear our and others' imprint. Our home - furniture and its arrangement, room decor - recalls family and friends whom we see frequently within this framework. If we live alone, that region of space permanently surrounding us reflects not merely what distinguishes us from everyone else. Our tastes and desires evidenced in the choice and arrangement of these objects are explained in large measure by the bonds attaching us to various groups. All we can say is that things are part of society. However, furniture, ornaments, pictures, utensils, and knick-knacks also “circulate” within the group: they are the topic of evaluations and comparisons, provide insights into new directions of fashion and taste, and recall for us older customs and social distinctions. In an antique shop the various eras and classes of a society come face to face in the scattered assortment of household belongings. One naturally wonders who would have owned such an armchair, tapestry, dishes, or other necessities. Simultaneously (it is basically the same thing), one thinks about the world recognizable in all this, as if the style of furniture, the manner of decor and arrangement, were some language to be interpreted. The picture a Balzac provides of a family lodging or the home of a miser, a Dickens gives of the study of a notary public, already suggests the social type or category of the humans who live in that framework. What is involved is no mere harmony and physical congruence between place and person. Rather, each object appropriately placed in the whole recalls a way of life common to many men. To analyze its various facets is like dissecting a thought compounded of the contributions of many groups.

Indeed, the forms of surrounding objects certainly possess such a significance. They do stand about us a mute and motionless society. While they do not speak, we nevertheless understand them because they have a meaning easily interpreted. And they are motionless only in appearance, for social preference and habits change; for example, when we grow tired of a piece of furniture or a room, the object itself seems to age. In truth, the impression of immobility does predominate for rather long periods, a fact explained both by the inert character of physical objects and by the relative stability of social groups. It would be an exaggeration to maintain that changes of location and major alterations in the furnishing demarcate stages of family history. However, the permanence and interior appearance of a home impose on the group a comforting image of its own continuity. Years of routine have flowed through a framework so uniform as

to make it difficult to distinguish one year after another. We doubt that so much time has passed and that we have changed so much. The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built. The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution. This image of surrounding objects shares their inertia. It is the group, not the isolated individual but the individual as a group member, that is subject in this manner to material nature and shares its fixity. Although one may think otherwise, the reason members of a group remain united, even after scattering and finding nothing in their new physical surroundings to recall the home they have left, is that they think of the old home and its layout. Even after the priests and nuns of Port-Royal were expelled, nothing was really affected so long as the buildings of the abbey stood and those who remembered them had not died.

Thus we understand why spatial images play so important a role in the collective memory. The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. No image of a blackboard can recall what was once written there. The board could not care less what has been written on it before, and new figures may be freely added. But place and group have each received the imprint of the other. Therefore every phase of the group can be translated into spatial terms, and its residence is but the juncture of all these terms. Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it.

Of course, extraordinary events are also fitted within this spatial framework, because they occasion in the group a more intense awareness of its past and present, the bonds attaching it to physical locale gaining greater clarity in the very moment of their destruction. But a truly major event always results in an alteration of the relationship of the group to place. The family as a group may change size owing to death or marriage, or it may change location as it grows richer or poorer or as the father is transferred or changes occupation. From then on, neither the group nor the collective memory remains the same, but neither have the physical surroundings.

The Stones of the City

The districts within a city and the homes within a district have as fixed a location as any tree, rock, hill, or field. Hence the urban group has no impression of change so long as streets and buildings remain the same. Few social formations are at once more stable and better guaranteed permanence. Paris and Rome, for example, have seemingly traversed the centuries without rupturing the continuity of life, despite wars, revolutions, and great crises. The nation may be prone to the most violent upheavals. The citizen goes out, reads the news, and mingles with groups discussing what has happened. The young must hurriedly defend the frontier. The government levies heavy taxes that must be paid. Some inhabitants attack others, and political struggle ensues that reverberates throughout the country. But all these troubles take place in a familiar setting that appears totally unaffected. Might it not be the contrast between the impassive stones and such disturbances that convinces people that, after all, nothing has been lost, for walls and homes remain standing? Rather, the inhabitants pay disproportionate attention to what I have called the material aspect of the city. The great majority may well be more sensitive to a certain street being torn up, or a certain building or home being razed, than to the gravest national, political, or religious events. That is why great upheavals may severely shake society without altering the appearance of the city. Their effects are blunted as they filter down to those people who are closer to the stones than to men - the shoemaker in his shop; the artisan at his bench; the merchant in his store; the people in the market; the walker strolling about the streets, idling at the wharf, or visiting the garden terraces; the children playing on the corner; the old man enjoying the sunny wall or sitting on a stone bench; the beggar squatting by a city landmark. Not only homes and walls persist through the

centuries, but also that whole portion of the group in continuous contact with them, its life merged with things. This part of the group is just not interested in what is happening outside its own narrow circle and beyond its immediate horizon. The passivity that the group sees in this portion of itself that remains unconcerned about the passions, hopes, and fears of the outside world reinforces that impression arising from the immobility of things. The same is true for disturbances in smaller groups based on blood, friendship, or love when death, disagreements, or the play of passion and interest intervene. Under the shock of such troubles, we walk the streets and we are surprised to find life going on about us as if nothing had happened. Joyful faces appear at windows, peasants converse at the crossroads, buyers and sellers stand on shop steps, while we, our family, our friends, experience the hurricane of catastrophe. We, and those whom we hold dear, constitute only a few units in this multitude. Doubtless any one of these people I meet, taken aside and put back into his own family or group of friends, would be capable of sympathizing with me as I described to him my troubles and concerns. But people, be they in a crowd or scattered about in mutual avoidance of one another, are caught up in the current of the street and resemble so many material particles, which, packed together or in movement, obey laws of inert nature. Their apparent insensitivity is wrongly condemned by us as something like nature's indifference, for even as it insults us, it momentarily calms and steadies us.

The best way of understanding the influence the physical environment of the city exerts on groups that have slowly adapted to it is to observe certain areas of a modern metropolis: for example, the older districts, or the relatively isolated sections that form little self-enclosed worlds where the inhabitants live very near their work, or even the streets and boulevards in the newer parts of the city peopled primarily by workers, where a great deal of human traffic occurs between lodging and street and neighborhood relationships multiply. But it is in the smaller cities lying outside the mainstream of modern life, or in Oriental cities (where life is still regulated with a tempo such as our cities had one or two centuries ago), that local traditions are most stable. There the urban group really constitutes (as it does elsewhere only in part) a social body with subdivisions and a structure reproducing the physical configuration of the city enclosing it. The differentiation of a city arises from a diversity of functions and customs. Whereas the group evolves, the external appearance of the city changes more slowly. Habits related to a specific physical setting resist the forces tending to change them. This resistance best indicates to what extent the collective memory of these groups is based on spatial images. Cities are indeed transformed in the course of history. Entire districts may be left in ruins following siege, occupation, and sacking by an invading army. Great fires lay waste whole areas. Old homes deteriorate. Streets once inhabited by the rich change appearance as they are taken over by the poor. Public works and new roads require much demolition and construction as one plan is superimposed on another. Suburbs growing on the outskirts are annexed. The center of the city shifts. Although older districts, encircled by newer and taller buildings, seem to perpetuate the life of former times, they convey only an image of decay, and were their former inhabitants to return, it is doubtful that they would even recognize them.

Were the relationship between streets, homes, and groups inhabiting them wholly accidental and of short duration, then men might tear down their homes, district, and city, only to rebuild another on the same site according to a different set of plans. But even if stones are movable, relationships established between stones and men are not so easily altered. When a group has lived a long time in a place adapted to its habits, its thoughts as well as its movements are in turn ordered by the succession of images from these external objects.

Now suppose these houses and streets are demolished or their appearance and layout are altered. The stones and other materials will not object, but the groups will. This resistance, if not in the stones themselves, at least arises out of their long-standing relationships with these groups. Of course, this arrangement was work of an earlier group, and what one group has done may be undone by another. But the design made by the original people was embodied in a material structure. The force of local tradition comes forth from this physical object, which serves as its image.

This shows the extent to which a whole aspect of the group imitates the passivity of inert matter.

Implacement and Displacement: The Adherence of the Group to Its Location

This resistance can emanate only from a group. There is no mistaking this point. Urban changes - the demolition of a home, for example - inevitably affect the habits of a few people, perplexing and troubling them. The blind man gropes for his favorite spot to await passers-by, while the stroller misses the avenue of trees where he went for a breath of fresh air and is saddened by the loss of this picturesque setting. Any inhabitant for whom these old walls, rundown homes, and obscure passageways create a little universe, who has many remembrances fastened to these images now obliterated forever, feels a whole part of himself dying with these things and regrets they could not last at least for his lifetime. Such individual sorrow and malaise is without effect, for it does not affect the collectivity. In contrast, a group does not stop with a mere display of its unhappiness, a momentary burst of indignation and protest. It resists with all the force of its traditions, which have effect. It searches out and partially succeeds in recovering its former equilibrium amid novel circumstances. It endeavors to hold firm or reshape itself in a district or on a street that is no longer ready-made for it but was once its own. For a long time old aristocratic families and long standing urban patriarchs did not willingly abandon the districts where they had resided from time immemorial. Despite their growing isolation, they refused to move into the new neighborhoods of the wealthy, with their broader streets, nearby parks, open spaces, modernistic style, and activity. The poor also resist, often aggressively, their dislocation and, even in submission, leave behind a good deal of themselves. Behind the new facade, and on the outskirts of avenues lined with the recently built homes of the wealthy, the public life of the common people in the past takes shelter in the malls, alleys, and lanes, only to recede gradually - hence those little islands out of the past that we are surprised to find in the midst of fairly modern districts. In totally remodeled districts, contrary to our expectations, we find that houses of entertainment, small theaters, unofficial money-changers and secondhand stores curiously reappear after a time. This is especially true of certain crafts, small businesses, and similar types of activity that are old-fashioned and no longer suited to the modern city. These activities are driven by an impulse acquired in the past and would quickly die if removed from their traditional locations. Certain small businesses are well patronized because, from time immemorial, they have been located at a site that marks them for public attention. There are old hotels, dating from the time of stagecoaches, that continue to be used simply because they are in a memorable location. All these routines and remnants from the past require some sort of collective automatism for their explanation, an enduring rigidity in the thought of certain relationships of businessman and customer. These groups adapt slowly, and m many circumstances demonstrate an extraordinary capacity not to adapt. They long ago designed their boundaries and defined their reactions in relation to a specific configuration of the physical environment. The walls against which they have built their shops, the material framework enclosing them, and the roofs sheltering them have become integral parts of the group. To lose their location in the pocket of a certain street, or in the shadow of some wall or church, would be to lose the support of the tradition that recommends them and gives them their unique reason for existence. Hence we can understand why the remains of demolished buildings or roads persist for a long time, be it only the traditional name of a street or locale or the signboard of a store.

Groups Without an Apparent Spatial Basis: Legal, Economic, and Religious Groups

The groups we have discussed up to this point are connected naturally to a certain place because spatial proximity has created social relationships between members. Hence a family or household can be externally defined as a set of persons living in the same house or apartment - as the census puts it, “under the

same lock and key." The inhabitants of a town or district form a small society because they are together in the same area. It goes without saying that this is not the only condition necessary for the existence of such groups, although it is an obvious and essential one. Indeed, this condition is less important for the vast majority of social formations, which tend to detach people from space by emphasizing characteristics other than residence. The bonds of kinship encompass more than merely living under the same roof, and urban society is something more than a mass of individuals living alongside one another. Legal relationships are based on individuals having rights and being able to contract obligations independently of their physical location (at least in the Western world). Economic groups are based on positions in production, not space, on the diversity of occupations, types of remuneration, and distribution of goods. Economically speaking, people are defined and compared on characteristics of person and not place. This is even more true for religious groups. They establish invisible bonds between their members and emphasize the inner man. Each of these groups is superimposed on localized groups. Indeed they subdivide the latter according to rules that take no account of spatial configuration. Therefore; the fact that men live in the same place and remember its image never suffices for the discovery and recollection of the group to which they belong.

Nonetheless, in briefly reviewing the most important collective formations that are different from the localized groups previously studied, we see that it is difficult to describe them if we avoid all spatial imagery. That difficulty increases as one goes further into the past. We may say that legal groups can be defined by their members' rights and obligations. But we know that the serf was formerly bound to the soil, that the only way for him to escape servitude was to join an urban community. A man's legal condition, then, was a result of where he lived, country or city. Moreover, the legal system governing the land varied and the city charters did not grant the same privileges. The Middle Ages, it is said, was a particularistic age. There were many regimes, each associated with a specific locale, so that to know a man's habitation was tantamount, for others and himself, to knowing his legal status. The functioning of justice and the tax system in premodern times cannot even be described without detailed knowledge of the territorial subdivisions. Each province (in England, each county) and each city had its own timehonored legal system and particular customs. In England the royal tribunals gradually supplanted the courts of the manor, while in France, after the Revolution, every citizen was made equal before the law and for tax purposes. We have our present uniformity because the various regions of the country no longer represent so many distinct legal systems. Making the laws uniform, however, could not by itself standardize the varying conditions of the land or situations of the individual. Law must in its applications disregard local circumstances. But collective thought is bound to these very circumstances and thus finds the law irrelevant. Hence the countryside still attributes some legal significance to different spatial situations. In the mind of a rural commissioner or village mayor, meadows, fields, woods, farms, homes, all evoke property rights, sales contracts, easements, mortgages, leases, land patterns - that is, a whole series of legal actions and situations that a simple image of this land as it appears to a stranger would not contain, but that are superimposed on it in the legal memory of the peasant group. These remembrances are connected with different parts of the land. They mutually reinforce one another because the parcels of land to which they relate are side by side. These remembrances are preserved in group thought because they are founded on the land, because the image of the land endures outside them and may be recaptured at any moment.

Indeed every transaction and commitment in the countryside involves land. But in the city, law covers other matters using other material frameworks. Here also the notary public or auctioneer, in handling a person's interests or effecting for him a transfer of rights, has as a normal consideration the material things. Once the client has left his office or the auction is completed, these objects may leave the area and never be seen again. Yet the notary will recall the real estate he has sold, settled in dowry, or bequeathed. The auctioneer will remember an exceptional price bid at the sale of a certain piece of furniture or work of art that he will never see again, as both belong to

types of objects that he thinks about and sees continually in his work.

It is different for service transactions and bank or stock exchange operations. A worker's labor, a clerk's skills, a doctor's medical concerns, a lawyer's legal aid, are not objects which occupy a definite and stable spatial location. We never situate credits and debts, or the values of titles or copyrights, in a place. This is the world of money and financial transaction, where specific objects, bought and sold, are unimportant and what matters is the capacity to acquire or dispose of anything. Nevertheless, services are rendered and tasks are executed, and their value for the purchaser depends on their being performed in a specific office or factory. A union secretary or labor mediator passing by a factory or picturing its location has an image that is only a part of a more extensive spatial framework comprising every factory whose workers and management concern him. This framework enables him to remember various kinds of wage contracts, conflicts over them, as well as all the laws, rules, and customs (local or occupational) that define the situation and the respective rights of workers and employers. Financial and banking activities are placed within a spatial framework of the institutions where we must go to sign papers and withdraw or deposit funds. Of course, the picture of a bank recalls only a few specific activities or, rather, a sequence of vaguely understood procedures. But this is all that ordinarily occupies that type of memory that barely extends into the past. Notary public, mayor, auctioneer, union secretary, and labor mediator have been selected as examples because their memory has to acquire the greatest scope and clarity for legal relationships and actions connected with their occupations. They represent the focus of a memory that is itself collective, extending over every group concerned with that particular legal matter. Showing that this memory, for those who best embody it, is based on an image of a certain place proves that the same is true for all members. Various objects and their spatial arrangement have a meaning related to the rights and obligations connected with them, and group members are enclosed within a distinct world of legal relationships formed in the past but continually present to them. Similar reasoning applies to many other types of groups. For example, we no more need to visit the country to learn that a farm is both a place of habitation and work than we need to walk the streets of an ancient city and read signs saying “Tanners Street” or “Goldsmiths Street” to recall a time when occupations were grouped by location. In modern society, home and place of work are clearly separate. The equipment and men performing the tasks are brought together daily in the factories, offices, and shops. Clearly such small economic groupings are formed on a spatial basis. Similarly, in large cities districts are distinguished by the predominance of a certain occupation or industry or by varying degrees of poverty or wealth. These social variations are obvious to the casual observer, and almost every part of the urban landscape bears the imprint of one social class or another.

Similarly, religions are rooted in the land, not merely because men and groups must live on land but because the community of believers distributes its richest ideas and images throughout space. There are the holy places and other spots that evoke religious remembrances, as well as the profane sites inhabited by enemies of God, which may even be cursed and where eyes and ears must be closed. Nowadays, in an old church or convent, we inattentively walk on flagstones marking the location of tombs and don't even try to decipher the inscriptions engraved in the stones on the sanctuary floor or walls. Such inscriptions were continually before the eyes of those who worshipped in this church or belonged to this convent. The space that surrounded the faithful was permeated with religious meaning by means of funeral stones, as well as altars, statues, and pictures of the saints. We fashion a well-nigh inaccurate conception of the way their memory arranged remembrances of ceremonies and prayers, of all the actions and thoughts that make up the devout life, if we are ignorant of the fact that each found its place in a specific location.

The Insertion of the Collective Memory into Space

Thus, every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures: since our

impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings. It is to space - the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination - that we must turn our attention. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear.

While it might be conceded that every group and every kind of collective activity is linked to a specific place, or segment of space, it could be argued that this fact alone is quite insufficient to explain how the image of a place conjures up thoughts about an activity of the group associated with that place. While each mental picture does have a framework, there is no strict and necessary relationship between the two; the framework cannot evoke the picture. Such an objection would be valid if the term "space" referred solely to physical space-that is, the totality of forms and colors as we perceive them about us. But is that how we originally experience space? Is that normally how we perceive the external milieu? It is difficult to know just what space would be like for a genuinely isolated man who had never belonged to any society. Let us speculate as to what conditions are necessary if we are to perceive only the physical and sensory qualities of things. We must divest objects of many relationships that intrude into our thought and correspond to a like number of different viewpoints. That is, we must dissociate ourselves from any group that establishes certain relationships between objects and considers them from given viewpoints. Moreover, we would succeed in doing so only by adopting the attitude of another group, perhaps that of physicists if we claim to focus our attention on certain abstract properties of matter, or that of artists if we concentrate on line and shading of figures and landscapes. Back on the riverbank, at the park entrance, or amid the activity of the street after a visit to an art gallery, we still feel that impulse from the society of painters, as we view things not as they really are but as they appear to one trying only to reproduce an image of them. Actually, nothing is less natural. Of course, remembrances of interest to other groups cannot find a place to be preserved in the space of the scientist or painter, since it is constructed by the very elimination of all other spaces. But this does not prove that these other spaces are less real than those of the scientist or painter.

Legal Space and the Memory of Laws

Legal space is not an empty milieu merely symbolizing a still undefined possible world of legal relationships among men. Were it so, there would be no way a given part of it could evoke one specific relationship rather than another. Consider the law of property, which is basic to all legal thought and is a possible model and starting point for defining every other obligation. It results from society's having adopted an enduring attitude toward a certain piece of land or a physical object. Whereas land is fixed and physical objects, if not fixed, retain their properties and appearance, so that in both cases identity through time is assured, human beings may change location as well as inclination, capacity, or effort. An individual or several individuals acquire property rights only when their society grants the existence of a permanent relationship between them and an object, one as immediate as the object itself. Such a convention does violence to reality, for individuals are constantly changing. Any principle invoked as a basis for property rights gains value only if the collective memory steps in to guarantee its application. Suppose I were the first person to occupy or clear a certain piece of land, or that a certain possession is the result of my own labor. If we can't go back to the past, and if there is a dispute about the original situation that could undermine my claims, how would I verify the original state of affairs unless the group preserved a remembrance of it? But the memory guaranteeing the permanence of such a situation is itself based on the permanence of space, or at least on the permanence of the attitude adopted by the group toward this part of space. Things, and the signs and symbols that society attaches to them, that are always in its thoughts as it focuses on the external world, must be considered together as a totality. These signs are not external to things, related only artificially and arbitrarily to them. The Magna Carta, drawn up following the conquest of England, registered on paper not the division of

lands but the power exercised on it by the various barons to whom it was distributed. Similarly, in the case of a land registry or other legal certificate recalling the existence of some property right, society not only establishes a relationship between the image of a place and a document but considers that place as already linked to that person who has posted or fenced it, resided there continually, or cultivated it for his own benefit. Everything of this type can be called legal space - a permanent space (at least within certain time limits) allowing the collective memory at any moment to recover the remembrance of legal rights at issue there.

Thought concerning the rights of persons over things considers not only the relationship between man and things but also man himself as permanent and unchanging. Of course, in a peasant community, the rights evoked in a notary public's office or before a judicial tribunal clearly relate to specific persons. But thought, insofar as it focuses on the legal aspect of facts, preserves the person only in his relevant characteristic as holder of a recognized or disputed right, as owner, usufructuary donatory, heir, and so forth. Whereas a person normally changes from one moment to another, as a legal entity he never does. Law talks much about “will”-for example, about the will of the parties concerned - but this term refers only to intentions resulting from the legal character of the person, deemed the same for every person with this legal character and unchanging as long as the legal situation remains unchanged. This tendency to disregard individual characteristics when considering a person as having rights explains two fictions consistent with the legal mentality. When a person dies leaving a natural heir, it is said that “death lays hold of life” - that is, everything continues as if there had been no interruption in the exercise of rights but a continuity between the persons of the heir and the deceased owner. Again, several individuals joined together to acquire and manage possessions are assumed to form a group having a legal personality that is unchanging so long as the contract of association remains, even when every original member has left and been replaced by someone else. Hence persons endure because things do, and legal proceedings concerning a will may carry on for many years, with a definitive judgment reached only after the allotted years for a human life have passed. The memory of the legal society will never be at fault so long as the goods themselves remain.

Property rights, however, are exercised not only over land or specific objects. In modern society liquid wealth has greatly increased and (far from remaining stationary in location or form) circulates continuously outside our notice. Everything boils down to commitments contracted between lenders or creditors and borrowers or debtors. But the object of the contract occupies no fixed location, for it pertains to money or debts - that is, abstract signs. Moreover, other obligations may have no reference to things at all but give one party rights over the services, acts, or even the absence of such of the other party. Again, where only persons are in a relationship and goods are no longer at issue, space would seem to be left out of the picture. Nevertheless, every contract, even if possessions are not involved, places two parties in a situation deemed unchanging so long as the contract remains valid. Here we have a fiction introduced by society, which considers the parties bound together once the clauses of the contract are settled on. But it is impossible that the stability of individuals and the permanence of their reciprocal attitudes would not be expressed in a material form nor take shape in space. At all times each party must know where to find the other as well as the boundaries of their powers with regard to the other. The most extreme form of a person's power over another is the law that once gave one possession of slaves. In truth, a slave was only a person reduced to the state of a thing. There was no contract between master and slave, and property law treated the latter like any other possession. Slaves nonetheless were still men and, unlike things, could injure their master's rights by claiming free status on the basis of false documents, running away, or committing suicide. That is why the slave had a legal status, though it conferred only obligations and no rights. In ancient homes, slaves' quarters were separated from the master's, where they might enter only when ordered. Such a separation of space into two parts was enough to perpetuate in the minds of master and slave the image of the former's unlimited rights over the latter. Far from his master's sight, the slave could forget his servile condition, but on entering

the master's area he once again became aware of being a slave. It was as if crossing that threshold transported him into a region of space where the very remembrances of his subjection to the master were preserved.

Neither slavery - or, for that matter, serfdom - nor the different estates of noble, commoner, and so forth are still with us. We now accept only those obligations we ourselves have contracted. Nevertheless, consider a worker or clerk summoned into his employer's office or about a debtor entering a commercial house or bank from which he had borrowed and to which he now comes, not to pay off his debt, but to secure an extension or even to borrow more. Perhaps they too have forgotten the service or money they owe. If they do recall them, and if they suddenly find themselves in a subordinate situation, it is because the residence or usual location of the employer or creditor represents for them an active zone, a focal point radiating the rights and powers of one free within limits to affect their person. The circumstances and meaning of the contract they have signed seems to be reconstituted and evoked anew in their memory as they enter this zone or approach this focal point. Of course, these instances are exceptional. A person may well be in a position of both superiority and subordination to another. Thus, Mr. Smith, a commoner, may have a gentleman of the gentry as a debtor, but not dare to claim what is rightfully his. What is essential is that every contract specify either the place where it must be executed or the residence of each party, so that the creditor knows where he can reach the debtor and the debtor knows the source of the instructions he receives. Moreover, these zones, in which one person feels himself master, another subordinate, really come down to some localized area - for example, the place each party lives or the boundaries of the factory - so that as soon as a person enters the factory or place of business he feels the pressure of the rights that another has over him. Occasionally this pressure extends even further, and the insolvent debtor, subject to bodily seizure, may not even dare go out on the streets.

At this point, however, law and breach of the law are involved, not merely a contract between two individuals. Ordinarily we think about our obligations regarding public order only when we do, or are tempted to, violate them. Then there is hardly any part of space occupied by the society that has made those laws where we do not feel ill at ease, as if we fear to incur repression or censure. But even when we are within the law, legal thought is still there, extended over the ground. The ancients never separated their picture of the city from the remembrance of its laws. Even today, when we travel from our own country to a foreign one, we have a very distinct feeling of passing from one legal zone into another, for the line separating them is physically marked on the ground.

Economic Space

Economic life relates man and material goods, but in a different way from the exercise of property rights or the making of contracts pertaining to things. We leave the world of law to enter the world of value. Although both of these worlds differ greatly from the physical world, we may very well be further removed from the latter when we evaluate objects than when we determine in accord with our fellow men the extent and limits of our rights over parts of the material world.

However, we talk about prices, not values, because prices, after all, are what we work with. Prices are attached to things like so many labels, for there is no relationship between an object's physical appearance and its price. It would be otherwise if the price a person paid, or were ready to pay, for a thing answered his desire or need for it. Likewise, it would be so if the price he asked measured his pain and sacrifice either for giving up this possession or for working to replace it. If either condition were the case, there would be no point in speaking of an economic memory; each person would evaluate objects with regard to his momentary needs and his actual feeling of pain in producing or being deprived of them. But such is not the case. Instead, we know that people evaluate objects - the satisfactions they bring as well as the effort and work they represent - according to their price; and prices are set up outside ourselves, in our economic group. Now, to so assign a price to an object, a person must

somehow have reference to the reigning opinions of his group regarding its utility and the amount of work it requires. But this opinion, in its present state, is primarily explained by its prior state, today's price by yesterday's. Economic life, therefore, is based on the memory of previous prices and, at the very least, of the last price. Buyers and sellers - that is, group members-refer to them. But these remembrances are superimposed on the immediate objects by a series of social decrees. Now, then, can the mere appearance and spatial position of these objects suffice to evoke such remembrances? Prices are numbers representing measures. Whereas numbers corresponding to physical properties are, in a certain sense, in the objects (since they can be rediscovered by observation and measurement), here in the economic world material objects acquire a value only from the moment a price is assigned them. This price has, therefore, no relationship with the object's appearance or physical properties. How could the image of the object possibly evoke the remembrance of its price - that is, a sum of money - if the object is represented to us as it appears in physical space and hence separated from all connection with group life?

Precisely because prices result from social opinions dependent on group thought and not from the physical properties of objects, the place where these opinions concerning the value of things are formed and where the remembrances of prices are transmitted is able to serve as the basis of the economic memory, instead of the space occupied by the objects. In other words, in collective thought certain parts of space are differentiated from all others to serve as the ordinary gathering places of groups whose function is to recall for themselves and other groups the prices of various products. The remembrances of exchange activities and the value of objects - that is, the whole content of memory of the economic group - is normally evoked within the spatial framework made up of these places.

Simiand once spoke of a shepherd in the mountains who, having given a traveler a bowl of milk, did not know what price to charge him and so inquired: “What would you have been charged in the city?” Likewise, peasants who sell eggs and butter determine their price by the price at the last market. Such remembrance, first and foremost, refers to a period very near in time, as do almost all remembrances stemming from the market or economic opinion. Indeed, if the aspects of production ascribable to technique (with which I am not at present concerned) are left aside, the conditions of buying and selling, prices, and wages will be found to undergo continued fluctuation. In no sphere do the latest remembrances more quickly and completely banish earlier ones. Of course, the rhythm of economic life may vary. When manufacturing procedures changed very slowly in the times of the guilds and small industry, buyers and sellers experienced long periods of price stability and were subjected to only very mild fluctuations. But the situation changed when the technology and needs were transformed simultaneously, in a competitive economic system enlarged to the borders of the nation and beyond. The price system, much more complex than before, experiences severe fluctuations, which spread from one region or industry to another. In having to continually readjust to the new conditions of equilibrium, buyers and sellers forget older habits, intentions, and experiences. Merely consider those periods of rapid inflation, when money plummets in value as prices uninterruptedly increase, and we must fix a new standard of values in mind from one day to the next, even from morning to evening. Such drastic differences can also be observed, at a given moment or within a given period, between distinct spheres of economic life. Peasants go to the market or the city once in a long while, so they may well imagine that prices have not changed since their last transactions. They live on their remembrance of past prices. This is not the case in those milieus where contacts between merchant and customer are more frequent. In particular, among those circles of wholesalers and retailers who buy not solely to satisfy their own consumption needs or sell not merely to dispose of products, but who buy and sell as “middlemen” between consumers and producers, the economic memory must take account of and fix the most recent relationships and prices. This is even more true of stock exchanges, where prices of securities change not only from day to day but from hour to hour during a session, since all the forces altering the opinions of buyers and seller are immediately felt and since the only way of guessing or predicting what prices will

be is to buy at the latest quotation. As one moves away from these circles of most intense exchange activity, the economic memory slows down, bases itself on an older past, and falls behind the present. It is the merchants who give it new impetus and force renewal.

Merchants, then, teach and remind their customers of current prices. Buyers as such participate in the life and memory of the economic group only on entering merchant social circles or when recalling to mind previous contacts. Enclosed within the family and separated from currents of exchange as they are, is there any other way they could know the value of goods and evaluate in monetary terms what they use? Let us take a closer look at these merchant groups, which, as I have stated, make up the most active part of economic society, since within them values are generated and conserved. Congregated in stands at the marketplace or set side by side on a city's commercial streets, merchants might at first seem opposed to one another rather than joined together by a sort of common consciousness. Their relationships are with customers. As sellers, they dissociate themselves from neighboring merchants, whom as competitors they pretend to ignore or who simply sell another kind of goods. Even though lacking direct communication, they are all agents of a single collective function. They bear a similar mentality, evince typical aptitudes, and obey a common occupational ethics. Although competitors, they sense their solidarity when it is a matter of maintaining price levels and passing them on to the customer. Most important of all, they are all linked to wholesaler groups and, through them, to both the commercial stock exchanges and to banking circles and big business, that part of economic society where most information is concentrated, which immediately reflects the repercussions from commercial dealings and has the most effective role in the determination of prices. The latter is the regulatory organ through which all the merchants are linked to one another, since the sales of each merchant affect its reactions and, in turn, obey its impulses. Thus, retail merchants represent the contours and limits of an economic society whose center and heart are the stock exchange and banking circles, while contact between these poles is maintained by traveling salesmen, brokers, and advertising and information agents.

The customer-consumer is not included in this whole set of activities. The merchant's counter is like a screen that prevents the customer's peering into those areas where prices are formulated. This is more than mere metaphor. We shall see that the merchant group is thus spatially immobilized and fixed in given places to wait on the customer, because only then can he fulfill his function in economic society. Now let us look at things from the customer's point of view. As stated, customers can learn to evaluate consumer goods only if merchants let them know the prices. Hence they must come to the merchant, for it is a necessary condition of exchange that the customer know where he can find him. (At least, this is generally the case, although we must remember the peddler who does selling door to door-an exception that only proves the rule, as we shall see.) Merchants therefore wait in their shops for customers.

Not only the merchant but at the same time the merchandise awaits customers. This statement constitutes not two expressions of the same fact but two distinct facts that must be considered simultaneously because each of them, as well as their relationship, enters into the economic representation of space. In effect, because the merchandise waits - that is, stays in the same place - the merchant is forced to wait - that is, to stick by a fixed price (at least for the duration of a single sale). The customer is actually encouraged to make a purchase on the basis of this condition, because he gets the impression of paying for the object at its own price, as if the price resulted from the very nature of the object, rather than at a price determined by a complex play of continually changing evaluations. Of course, this impression is an illusion because the price is attached to the thing just as a price tag is to a specific article, for it is constantly changing while the object is not. Even though a customer may bargain, seemingly taking account of whatever is fictitious in the determination of price, in reality he remains convinced there is a true price corresponding to the thing's value. The merchant is either concealing this true price and the customer is trying to make him acknowledge it, or the merchant is stating the true

price and the customer is trying to make him forget it. The merchant endeavors to persuade the buyer that the object is being sold at its own price and to avoid giving the idea that the price comes from outside and is not in the object. But he manages to establish, only gradually, a fixed price for an object by offering it at the same price over some varying length of time.

Anyone buying furniture, clothing, or even merchandise for immediate use may well imagine that it keeps its value, as measured by the price paid the merchant, the entire time it is used. Such a belief would often be in error, for were he to resell the item, either immediately or later on, or have to replace it, he would find that its price had changed. The buyer lives on old remembrances. The remembrances of the merchant regarding prices are more recent because, selling to many people, he disposes of and must reorder articles more quickly than any buyer might repurchase any item from him. Nevertheless, he is in the same position in relation to his wholesaler as the customer is to him. Hence retail prices change more slowly than wholesale prices. This, then, is the retailer's role: he must stabilize prices enough to allow customers to make purchases. His role is only a particular application of a function fulfilled by the whole society. Although everything is continually changing, society must persuade its members that it is not changing, at least in certain aspects over a given period. Likewise, the society of merchants must persuade customers that prices are not changing, at least during the time necessary for them to make a decision. It succeeds only on the condition that it stabilize and fix itself in certain places to await customers. In other words, prices can be fixed in the memory of buyers and even sellers only if they simultaneously think about the places where goods are sold as well as the goods. The economic group cannot extend its memory sufficiently, or project its remembrances of price into a distant enough past, unless it endures-that is, remains unchanged in the same locations. Members re-establish the world of values, for which these places serve as a continuous framework, by resituating themselves, in fact or in thought, at the locations.

Religious Space

Religious groups may recall certain remembrances on viewing specific locations, buildings, or objects. This should be no surprise, for the basic separation between the sacred and the profane made by such groups is realized materially in space. The believer entering a church, cemetery, or other consecration place knows he will recover a mental state he has experienced many times. Together with fellow believers he will re-establish, in addition to their visible community, a common thought and remembrance formed and maintained there through the ages. Of course, many of the faithful live virtuously in the secular world, in occupations unrelated to religion and amid social milieus with quite different purposes, and never forget to relate to God as much as possible of their thought and action. Religion permeated the ancient city, and in very old societies - China, for example - hardly any area escaped the influence of supernatural forces. The size and number of spaces consecrated to religion or habitually occupied by religious communities declines, however, as the major activities of social life are separated from the grip of religion. “For the saint all is saintly,” and no place is so profane that a Christian cannot evoke God there. The faithful nevertheless experience a need to congregate periodically in buildings and at sites consecrated to holiness. Entering a church does not suffice to recall to us in a detailed and precise manner our relationships with the group holding similar beliefs. But we find ourselves in that mental disposition common to the faithful when gathered in a place of worship - something that has to do not with events as such but with a certain uniform bent of thought and sensibility. This certainly provides the most important basis and content of the religious collective memory. There is no doubt of its preservation at consecrated areas, for as soon as we return to such areas, we recover it.

We may even imagine that the group memory endures much like the buildings presumed to house it and that a single current of religious thoughts has uninterruptedly flowed beneath the roofs of such holy places. Certainly the church is empty at times, doors locked and walls sealing in only lifeless objects. The group is dispersed at such moments, but it endures and remains

what it has been; when the group comes together again, there would be no reason to assume it has changed or had even ceased to exist so long as the faithful could pass by the church, view it from afar, or hear the bells, so long as they could hold in mind or readily evoke the image of their congregating together and the ceremonies they have participated in behind these walls. But, on the other hand, how can they be sure that their religious feelings have not changed and remain today what they were yesterday, that past and present remain indistinguishable in those feelings, unless the very permanence of physical location carries that guarantee? A religious group, more than any other, needs the support of some object, of some enduring part of reality, because it claims to be unchanging while every other institution and custom is being modified, when ideas and experiences are being transformed; whereas other groups are satisfied to persuade members that rules and arrangements remain the same during some limited period, the religious group cannot acknowledge that it differs now from what it was in the beginning or that it will change in the future. Since the world of thought and feeling fails to provide the requisite stability, it must guarantee its equilibrium through physical things and in given areas of space.

The church is not merely a place where the faithful congregate, an enclosure protected from the influences of the profane. First, its interior appearance distinguishes it from every other gathering place or center of collective life. Its arrangement reflects devotional needs and is inspired by the traditions and thoughts of the religious group. The layout of the church, because its various parts are prepared for different kinds of worshipers and because the essential sacraments and principle forms of devotion are especially suited to particular locations, demands of members a certain physical distribution and bodily posture as it deeply engraves in their minds images that become fixed and immutable as the rituals, prayers, and dogmas. Religious practices unquestionably require that certain areas of a church be separate from the rest. Group thought needs such focal points for its attention - places to project, as it were, a major portion of its substance. Also, the priests are knowledged in the traditions, so that every detail of interior arrangement has meaning and corresponds to a particular orientation of religious thought, whereas the masses of faithful usually gain but an impression of mystery from these material images. Hence, in ancient temples - in Jerusalem, for example - not all the faithful were admitted into the most sacred areas, the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. A church is like a book whose printed characters are understandable only to the very few. As the group attends services and receives instruction within such buildings, its thoughts are profoundly shaped by these physical objects. Finding images of God, apostles, and saints everywhere, surrounded by lights, ornaments, and ecclesiastical vestments, the faithful picture the sacred beings, heaven, and the transcendental truths of dogma in such a framework. Hence religion is expressed in symbolic forms that unfold and cohere in space. This condition alone guarantees its continued existence. That is why the altars of the ancient gods must be overturned, and their temples destroyed, if remembrances of a more primitive worship are to be obliterated from the memory of men. Scattered and distant from their sanctuaries, the faithful lament their condition and feel their god has abandoned them, whereas each time a new church is raised, the religious group feels that it grows and grows stronger.

But every religion also has a history. Rather, there is a religious memory composed of traditions going back to events, often very far in the past, that occurred in definite locations. It may well be difficult to evoke the event if we do not think about the place itself. Yet in most cases, we are acquainted with this place not because we have seen it but because we know that it exists and could be seen. At any rate, its existence is guaranteed by the testimony of witnesses. That is why there is a religious geography or topography. The Crusaders, arriving at Jerusalem to retake possession of the holy places, were not satisfied to seek out the places where the principal events of the Gospels were traditionally situated. Very often they localized, more or less arbitrarily, various details from the life of Christ or the early Christian Church, guided only by unreliable vestiges and, in their absence, by momentary inspiration. As many pilgrims came to pray at these places, new traditions were elaborated. Today it is difficult to distinguish those remembrances of places going back to the early centuries of the Christian era from

everything the religious imagination has since added. Of course, all these localizations are accepted on faith, for none had been warranted by a tradition of sufficient antiquity and continuity.

Moreover, several traditions were attached to the same place at one time. For example, we know that more than one of these remembrances obviously erred in locating the Mount of Olives and that Mount Zion was shifted from one district to another. We know that certain remembrances have attracted others or, conversely, been divided up - the repentance of Peter, for example, being separated from the denial and fixed at another location. If the Church and the faithful tolerate these variations and contradictions, is this not evidence that the religious memory needs to imagine places in order to evoke the events connected with them? Of course, not every believer can make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and contemplate with his own eyes the holy places. But it is enough to picture them and know they continue to exist, and about the latter they have no doubts. Moreover (leaving aside the role that the belief in holy places has played in the history of Christianity as well as other religions), there is something exceptional about religious space: God being present everywhere, every area is capable of participating in the sacred character of these privileged sites where He once manifested Himself. The faithful need only wish collectively to commemorate at a given site some act or personal aspect of God, in order that such remembrances become connected with this location, enabling the remembrances themselves to be recovered. As we have seen, any church building can function in this way. The crucifixion not only occurred on Golgotha but also occurs whenever we adore the cross, and Jesus not only shared communion with his disciples in the Cenacle but does so wherever Mass is celebrated and the faithful receive the Eucharist. Other examples could include the chapels consecrated to the Virgin, apostles, and saints, as well as the many places with their ancient relics, healing springs, or tomb sites where miracles occurred. Of course, commemorated places are more numerous in Jerusalem, Palestine, and Galilee: a whole evangelic history is written on their soil. These regions are doubly consecrated, not only by the will and faith of succeeding generations of pilgrims but also because here, in the time of Christ, it is believed that one could have seen all that is recounted in the holy books. However, since the invisible and eternal meaning of these facts is of primary importance, any place may serve so long as the same attitude is adopted - that is, so long as the cross and sanctuaries so prominent in the historical theater of the Gospels have been reproduced in a material form. Thus arose the devotion of the "stations of the cross," as if the believer, by re-enacting far from Jerusalem the episodes of the Via Dolorosa, would be in a position to relive inwardly, just as pilgrims do, the successive episodes of the Passion of our Lord. In any case, the end pursued is always the same. The religious society must persuade itself that it has not changed, even when everything about it is in transformation. It succeeds only by recovering places or by reconstructing about itself an image (at least a symbolic one) of those places in which it originated. Since places participate in the stability of material things themselves, some similar procedure is a primary condition of memory itself: the collective thought of the group of believers has the best chance of immobilizing itself and enduring when it concentrates on places, sealing itself within their confines and molding its character to theirs.

Summary

Summarizing our discussion, we may say that most groups - not merely those resulting from the physical distribution of members within the boundaries of a city, house, or apartment, but many other types also - engrave their form in some way upon the soil and retrieve their collective remembrances within the spatial framework thus defined. In other words, there are as many ways of representing space as there are groups. We may focus our attention on the limits of ownership, such as the rights associated with various parts of the land, and distinguish between locations occupied by master and slave, lord and vassal, noble and commoner, creditor and debtor, as active and passive zones respectively, from which radiate and on which rights are given or removed from a person. We may consider the locations of economic goods, goods that acquire a value only when offered for sale in the marketplace or shop - that is, at the boundary

separating the economic group of sellers from their customers. Here again, one part of space is differentiated from the rest - namely, where the most active part of society interested in goods ordinarily resides and leaves its imprint. Finally, we may be most sensitive to that separation between sacred and profane places that is paramount in the religious consciousness. For there are certain areas of space that the faithful have chosen, “forbidden” to anyone else, where they find both shelter and support for their traditions. Hence each group cuts up space in order to compose, either definitively or in accordance with a set method, a fixed framework within which to enclose and retrieve its remembrances.

Now let us close our eyes and, turning within ourselves, go back along the course of time to the furthest point at which our thought still holds clear remembrances of scenes and people. Never do we go outside space. We find ourselves not within an indeterminate space but rather in areas we know or might very easily localize, since they still belong to our present material milieu. I have made great efforts to erase that spatial context, in order to hold alone to the feelings I then experienced and the thought I then entertained. Feelings and reflections, like all other events, have to be resituated in some place where I have resided or passed by and which is still in existence. Let us endeavor to go back further. When we reach that period when we are unable to represent places to ourselves, even in a confused manner, we have arrived at the regions of our past inaccessible to memory. That we remember only by transporting ourselves outside space is therefore incorrect. Indeed, quite the contrary, it is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present. But that's how memory is defined. Space alone is stable enough to endure without growing old or losing any of its parts.