A consideration of "public space" should begin by defining terms. Contained within this pair of words are two ideas of the utmost importance—that of public-ness and that of space—and it is arguable that a failure to understand them has been responsible for many of the recent disasters in town planning, both in Europe and in America.

The public is to be contrasted with the private. In the private sphere a man is his own master, within the limits prescribed for him by morality and law. At the same time, and paradoxically, he is closely constrained by domestic circumstances. His projects, rhythm, time, and companionship reflect the immediate demands of intimacy and the obligations of family life. In public he may breathe more freely, but in private the needs of his spouse, parents, and children tie him by an overriding law.

The public is a sphere of broad and largely unplanned encounter. No individual is sovereign in this sphere, but each, on entering it, renounces the right to dictate the terms upon which he communes and conflicts with others. His projects are subject, not to the discipline of domestic affection, but to the vacillating opposition of adversaries and fools. His time and rhythm are to a great extent his
own, but they are also forced into a flexibility which they need not otherwise acquire. If a person is to advance in the public sphere it is either in opposition to others, or in agreement with them. The purpose of civil government is to ensure that agreement is the norm.

In *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel drew a contrast between family and civil society, arguing that each is necessary to the development of the individual, and that neither is complete until fully embodied in the impartial legislation of a state. In the family the ruling principle is piety: respect, love, and obedience towards the spirit of the hearth. My family exists only partly by my choice, and forms the immovable condition of my existence. The love that I owe to it stems, not from contract, but from the obligations of human gratitude. By contrast, civil society is the sphere of choice, and its ruling principle is contract or agreement—the faculty whereby we move peaceably among our fellows, making concessions, earning advantages, and agreeing on terms.

On the basis of that distinction, we may add further substance to the idea of the public. In entering the public sphere, the individual exchanges the security, inevitability, and obligation of family life for the uncertainty and fluidity of civil society. In this realm the individual cannot be sovereign, and he moves in a world resistant to his purposes. At the same time he enjoys a freedom that he cannot enjoy in private. The immovable obligations of the hearth are replaced by the wayward and transient obligations of contract, through which the individual secures the cooperation of strangers in the ends and means of his existence.

The public world can exist only if sustained by the assent of those who enter it, and by a prescriptive state strong enough to resolve conflicts. Civil society therefore requires both the state, which administers justice, and the virtue in the common citizen that makes government possible. People must abide by the norms of justice, and treat one another, in Kant's famous words, "not as means only, but also as ends." The most important sign that they are prepared to do this is their obedience to a code of manners. Good manners are the formalized expression of the ruling virtue of civil society—the virtue of "respect for persons," as agents able freely to bind themselves to strangers, despite, and because of, the fact that they owe no debt of gratitude or love. Another name for this virtue is "civility." Civility is the essential condition for the building of a public world.

In sketching the distinction between the private and the public I have used political concepts, for the distinction is to be under-
stood in political terms. What I have said is of course contentious, but I hope that it serves to suggest that the idea of the public is not only complex, but also essential to a full understanding of the human condition. Architecture, which draws in tangible forms the boundary between the private and the public, is therefore a major component of political order, which leaves indelible marks upon the civil society whose space it defines. It is, as Ruskin remarked in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the most political of the arts. In what follows I shall discuss the ways in which architecture both defines the space of human action, and also endows that space with a public character.

**Created space vs. natural space**

This brings me to the second term: "space." This does not refer to the physical dimension studied by the geometer, which exists everywhere and in unlimited quantities. Nor does it refer simply to the space perceived and understood by human beings through observation and movement—the "phenomenological space" of the psychologist and the philosopher. It refers rather to the perceived boundaries, created by human labor, which mark out the areas of our world. A space is made public by the nature of its boundary. It is a space into which anyone may enter, and from which anyone may depart, without the consent of strangers, and without any declaration—however tacit—of a justifying purpose. The boundary which creates a public space is both permeable and open to our public uses. A truly public architecture is one which attempts to record and symbolize the condition of civil life, by reminding us at every juncture of our freedom to engage in it. It is an architecture which possesses the virtue of civility. We must attempt, therefore, to understand the kind of boundary which such an architecture erects.

The boundaries of the private are, in a sense, easier to define. They consist in shelter and protection, and in the intimate vigilance of inner walls. The inner walls of a house are the most important sign of the domestic life that takes place in it. The color scheme, pictures, and ornaments tell us how the occupant perceives the boundaries of the family. For some, these boundaries open into another, larger world. For others, they provide a mirror, which points always inward, to the security of home.

The boundaries of the public are more fluid and variable. Their purpose is not to bear the imprint of a single life, but to remain
open to all life that may legitimately claim their protection. For
the most part, a public space is confined by facades, external walls,
and railings. However, one should not forget that most important
of all public spaces, the church, mosque, or temple, in which an
interior is devoted to public use and made open and available to
all. In the church or mosque the roof is really the sky made close
to us, and the walls move out from the worshipper, signifying not
confinement, but the infinite vastness of God's creation. I shall be
concerned not with public buildings, but with the spaces defined
by their external walls. Hence I shall not comment on the use and
design of churches. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that my
remarks will be incomplete, and that I will have avoided one of the
most important problems which confronts the architect of public
space: the problem of the public interior. I shall consider only those
public spaces which are also “outside.” Furthermore, I shall refrain
from discussing either squares or open markets, although, as will
be seen, both are extremely pertinent to my theme. Instead I pro-
pose to concentrate on the street, as the most basic of public ex-
teriors.

The wild countryside may be open to unlimited human move-
ment, but it has no point of contact with the private world, no point
at which to announce its public purpose. It is “unbounded,” not
because it goes on forever, but because its perimeter has no mark.
Lacking a boundary, it lacks the character of public-ness, for it
lacks social stigma altogether. Nature is neither private nor public,
but merely beyond society.

Nevertheless, nature presents us with experiences that we cannot
forgo. We may stroll in it, and our movements are not in any obvious
way constricted by it; nor does it declare in all its features, “Private
Property, Keep Out.” We also long for nature, and are prepared to
go far in order to reach it. As a result, there has emerged a very
important idea of public space. According to this idea, which has
been extremely influential in modern planning, a public space is
primarily a substitute for nature. Under the baneful tutelage of
Ebeneezer Howard, Lewis Mumford, and Le Corbusier, the park
has become accepted as a paradigm; it is the area in the heart of
a city where the citizen can walk freely. Underlying this idea is a
peculiar view of civil association: Our primary civil need, it is sup-
posed, is to escape from the pressures of others, and in the park we
become free, by becoming free of others. We then commune effort-
lessly with the birds and the trees, refresh our weary faculties, and
rid our systems of the physical and moral poison of urban life.
The primacy of the street

In a distinguished and familiar book, Jane Jacobs has argued that the emphasis on parks displays a concealed hostility to the city and its works. The logical conclusion of this hostility—the tower block rising without neighbors out of a park without streets—was embraced by Le Corbusier, and preached to the world with an inflammatory rhetoric equal to that of Lenin and Hitler. The result lies everywhere about us—dead trodden wastes, crowned by concrete slums, places as unfriendly and dangerous as they are ugly, places, to put it succinctly, in which public life has been extinguished, and in which the partitions that secure what is private are no longer walls but barricades. I believe that the moral of Miss Jacob's treatise must be learned by every architect and planner. Cities do indeed need public spaces. It is not space, however, but public-ness that is the principal requirement. Space does not become public merely by ceasing to be private, or by being provided in quantities that no private purpose requires. Moreover, when there is no public space, private space too is threatened.

People can live without parks, but not without streets; they can live without greenery, but not without accessible windows and doors. The street is the most important of open public spaces, and the task of constructing a street is the most important that any planner may face. Anyone who has studied the ruins of Ephesus or Pergae will quickly appreciate the immense energy and skill that the Romans devoted to this task. One may naturally doubt that the civic virtues which inspired the glories of Roman architecture, and which produced such a harmony between the private and the public in all aspects of government and law, could either be renewed or widely appreciated in our equalizing age. But it is important to see that the classical vernacular styles which the Romans perfected, and which have lasted until recent times, were, by their good manners, the greatest single reason for the existence in our cities of genuine public space. Everywhere, in Europe and America, the pedestrian confronts Roman architecture, whose forms and details speak a public language that he understands. In studying this language we shall gain insight into our subject. Its first important aspect is the street, construed as an assembly of facades.

Jane Jacobs has persuasively argued that the emphasis on parks, and the neglect of streets, is a product of a planning mentality. In

---

order to grasp the problem, the planner divides human life into isolated functions. He then proceeds to "decontaminate" these functions, to isolate them one from the other, and to assign areas to each. The house, the street, the park, the industrial precinct—each becomes (in Le Corbusier's revealing word) a "machine," for the satisfaction of some human use. Here you eat, there you shop, here you take exercise, there you rest. The result, however, is chaos. The individual retreats into that lonely apartment in the tower block which, being surrounded by no public world with which to contrast its inner isolation, cannot achieve the true security of private life. The private and the public are alike objective forms of moral order, but in this "decontaminated" world there can be no objective order. All is subjectivity, the isolated and unjustified "I want," built upon itself in a thousand repetitions.

By contrast, Miss Jacobs tellingly describes the true life of the street—the diversity of functions and the tacit cooperation which people spontaneously achieve when doors and windows bring them into constant contact. The street has eyes which guard it, tongues which instruct it, hands which help it; it is a busy sphere of human understanding, whose perimeters are also the points of entry into private worlds. Naturally, there are good streets and bad streets, peaceful streets and violent streets. And the mere existence of a street can hardly suffice to guarantee the good behavior and social cooperation of its residents. Nevertheless, it is surely reasonable to suppose that, insofar as architecture has any role to play in supporting the social life of those who live with it, the street of congenial facades must inevitably offer more basic nourishment than the block of dead corridors.

**Planning for spontaneity**

It is not difficult to see the parallel between Miss Jacobs's criticism of urban planning, and the modern criticisms of socialist planning—and it is worth emphasizing the common utopian inspiration that caused socialism and modern architecture to be, for a while, confused. F.A. Hayek (who is, I think, the most thoroughgoing critic of the planned economy) argues in roughly the following way: The business of producing and distributing what is necessary for survival is a collective task, and can be successfully accomplished

---

only with the help of collective knowledge. This knowledge is not theoretical but practical; it consists in a myriad of responses and skills that, in motivating people to their own projects, secure also the advantage of society as a whole. The "tacit knowledge" of individuals is a social affair. It is stored, so to speak, in the spontaneous institutions of civil society, and in no institution more effectively than in that of the market. The participant in a free market is prompted spontaneously to act in a manner that secures the efficient transfer of goods. The tacit knowledge contained in this social institution could never be translated into a rational plan, for a plan must inevitably destroy the knowledge that it is meant to embody, by destroying the conditions for its exercise. The true failure of the planned economy is therefore epistemological: The plan pretends to a knowledge which it cannot embody, and which indeed cannot exist except in the concrete form of social practice.

It is not difficult to recognize in Hayek's description of the market a further embellishment of the Hegelian idea of society. Civil society is a sphere of spontaneous cooperation under contract. Contract here includes the multitude of hardly observable niceties of tacit agreement, whereby business is conducted between strangers. According to Hayek, this aspect of civil society depends upon a store of tacit knowledge which it also creates. And what is true of the market might be true of civil society generally. If that were so, then we could see Miss Jacobs's criticism of the "decontaminated" plan as reflecting a philosophy of the "public." The public order depends upon a complex pattern of practical knowledge. The attempt to embody this knowledge in a plan is doomed to failure, for the plan is epistemologically incompetent. The tacit knowledge upon which social order depends is lost, just so soon as that social order is broken down into disaggregated functions, and presented as a theoretical problem. Jacobs's critique then becomes, like Hayek's, a special case of the conservative critique of utopianism—the critique which originated in Burke's defense of "prejudice," and which culminated in theories of politics and economics which have at last gained common currency.

Many of Hayek's disciples have been tempted by his argument to conclude that it is better to have no planning whatsoever, and to consign our destiny to a regimen of "spontaneous" social interaction. This conclusion is, I believe, dangerous. The conditions of

---

"spontaneous order" belong to an age when populations were small, immobile, uninstructed, and, above all, bound by a moral order that contained their ambitions within the limits of peaceful coexistence. These conditions no longer prevail. We must now apply our minds to the question of survival, and, although it is surely the height of folly to tamper with those natural institutions which the Hayekians defend, it is also equally foolish to consign our future entirely to their operation. A conscious effort must be made so as to defend a "spontaneous order" that can no longer defend itself. To think that our plans will inevitably destroy that order is to imagine that they must inevitably overreach their epistemological competence.

But this need not be so. Consider the skill of cycling. To know how to ride a bicycle is to possess a piece of practical knowledge which resides in the will and readiness of the body, and could not be acquired merely by studying the theory of the bicycle. At the same time, someone who studies the theory may learn to design a better bicycle—one that leads to the acquisition of better and more efficient skills. Thus practical and theoretical knowledge may coexist about a single theme, the second providing part of the foundation of the first.

Likewise there may be plans which attempt neither to displace practical knowledge, nor to make it explicit, but simply to understand and improve the conditions from which it grows. Indeed, there have been successful premeditations in which human ingenuity attempted to supplement the spontaneous order of social existence by providing more propitious circumstances for its exercise. No better example exists than the detailed plans exhibited by the streets of Ephesus and Pergae—plans motivated by the desire to provide a fitting background to civil life. What is required, I believe, is not the abolition of planning, but the abolition of the "planning mentality" which sees every problem in terms of a set of disaggregated tasks.

Our "alienated" cities

This "planning mentality" is deficient, not only for the reasons offered by Miss Jacobs, but for another, and perhaps deeper, reason. It sees the human world in terms of a clear dichotomy between ends and means. The "rational" plan is the one which involves the right choice of means to given ends. And the ends themselves are specified in functional terms. We need light, air, food, exercise. To
each of these functions is assigned a mechanism for its fulfillment. This way of thinking causes the city itself to be divided up into ends and means. There are parks, theaters, churches, restaurants, in which our common purposes are accomplished. These, therefore, are the true public spaces, to which we proceed and in which we find our fulfillment. If the park has become so important in modern planning it is because of a libertarian idea of human ends. Ends must not be imposed on people. On the contrary, people must be free to discover them for themselves. The park, unlike the church, does not bear the imprint of any particular set of values. It is a place to which all may go and seek, in recreation, the peculiar satisfaction that they covet. The park is essentially "open to our uses," providing the background to every individual aim. In short, it is not so much a public space as an open arena, in which the modern individualist may roam freely, pursuing his private satisfactions. It is a place of "outdoor privacy"—or rather "subjectivity." since to call this privacy is once again to presuppose the constraints of an objective order.

Both the libertarian morality, and the underlying conception of rationality, serve to devalue the street. The street is seen essentially as a means, a conduit through which we proceed, either to other means (such as the place of work) or to our true ends, in park or theater or home. The most important feature of a street becomes its quality as a conduit. Does it permit easy, rapid circulation? The result of attempting to answer that question in the affirmative can be seen in acres of American cities—deserts stormed by squads of motor cars, in which the desire for easy circulation has, paradoxically, so increased the distances between every human objective as to confine people for hours on end in the forced privacy of a motor car. This solution was in fact recommended by Le Corbusier. The Real Presence of the Ville Radieuse is downtown Los Angeles.

It is the mark of rational beings that the ends of their conduct cannot be divorced from the means. Ends and means interpenetrate, and each rational activity can be seen, now as the one, now as the other. There are, of course, activities that are no more than means, and can be seen in no other way. These used to be called "drudgery," although deference to Marx requires us to use the expression "alienated labor." The correct "restoration of man to himself" is not the replacement of work by leisure, but the provision of better work—work which is not merely a means, but also an end. Such work, which treats the laborer as an end, has the virtue of civility. Similarly, the correct way to plan a street is not as a means of access
to other things, but as an end in itself—a place that can be enjoyed for its own sake. The diversifying and mingling of functions that Miss Jacobs recommends may indeed form a part of this enterprise. Far more important, however, is the provision of a human boundary—walls and facades that lend themselves to human purposes, and can be perceived immediately in human terms. The classical idiom is devoted to the perfection of civil boundaries. It is an idiom of facades, junctures, and progressions. It defines space effectively, precisely because it is in itself something more than space, something more than the abstract language of geometry.

London and the classical vernacular

By “classical” I mean the pattern-book vernacular which we have inherited directly from eighteenth-century building, and indirectly from Rome. The purpose of the pattern book was to solve the problems of the wall: what size and shape of aperture, what divisions, mouldings and string courses, what architraves, porticoes, and keystones. The idea was simple: The builder adopted a repeatable vocabulary of recognizable forms, each with an established visual meaning. He was thereby able to fit houses, shops and factories neatly together, so as to soothe the eye of the pedestrian, and retain a reassuring human vigilance in the street. Now, the most important part of every building is the facade, since this is the part which everyone may see. The classical idiom generates facades in conformity with the elementary rules of politeness. The resulting street invariably has the character of a public space, in which people are encouraged to linger at will, for it has the character of civility.

The classical idiom does not so much impose unity, as make diversity agreeable. The London street in which I live contains houses of every shape and size, arranged behind facades that stand politely beside one another. The porticoes are identical, as are the window frames—each being cobbled together from standard parts. No house obtrudes into the path of the pedestrian, but each meets the pavement with obvious signs of welcome. The windows, crowned by moulded architraves, have that kind of half-smiling look which permits you to glance into them; the flight of steps softens the approach to the door, and provides a useful area of neutral ground between the public and the private; the portico shelters the visitor, and also

4 See A. Trystan Edwards, Good and Bad Manners in Architecture (London: Philip Allen, 1924), especially chap. 1, “Civic Values.”
alerts him to the proportions of the interior hall. The walls fall into the areas protected by heavy iron railings. These railings provide pleasant knobs which people clutch as they stand in conversation, and upon which children hang in play. At the corner of the block stands a house without an area; here the wall joins the pavement through a lightly moulded skirting, which protects the stucco and creates an agreeable fugue of parallel lines. The English are not given to sitting on doorsteps, or to standing about. Nevertheless, their movements in this street have a markedly leisurely quality, and when, as on the occasion of Prince Charles's marriage, we gathered together for a party, the orderly windows and the porticoes seemed to provide protection, and endowed our comings and goings with a naturalness that they could hardly have acquired in a park, or in any other place that was not so agreeably overlooked by accessible entrances.

Around me are many such streets, built on the edge of Kensington Park. My walks take me, not into the park—although let me not disparage it—but into these streets, which have so inexhaustible a fascination for a Londoner. It is not so much the human life and human opportunities that are attractive—although these are present in abundance. It is the architecture, which retains a human presence around all who walk before its walls. These vital and vivid boundaries create a vital and vivid space. The politeness of the style—the refusal to outrage or to defy—reminds one constantly of the ideal condition of society, in which people seek not to confront but to cooperate, and in which conversation takes the place of command. Walls, which divide space, also create it. And it is the discipline of the wall which is the pride of the classical vernacular. We linger where walls invite us, and hurry where they exclude us. Plate glass facades leave us over-exposed to observation from those behind them. Blank concrete screens seal us off from whatever they contain. A street must avoid all such extremes. It must provide us with walls that are pierced, and openings that are civil and friendly.

North Kensington was not planned—or at least it was planned only in the most rudimentary fashion. Beyond Kensington Park there are few public spaces in the modern planner's sense of the term—only long strings of streets like mine, clustered around Ladbroke Grove and Portobello Road, some with large communal gardens, some devoid of vegetation altogether. Yet this part of London is eminently public. It has lent itself to every form of human industry, both commerce and manufacture. It has also lent itself to
human leisure. At the moment of writing, it is invaded by the annual carnival. Blacks from all the London Boroughs ride through the streets in colorful floats, and fill the air with the sound of steel bands. These streets are frequented in equal measure by the aimless and the purposeful, for they are bounded by surfaces that concede the validity of civil life. The classical wall, which is humanly proportioned, safe, gregarious, and quietly vigilant, constantly reminds the pedestrian that he is not alone, that he is in a world of human encounter, and that he must match the good manners of the wall which confines and guides him.