I want to use Jacobs' wry insight and the message of that little piece of "folk wisdom" to chart a path through the enormous country formed by the topic "public life in the city: past, present, and future." I shall pay particular and focussed attention to the moral tensions and debates that, at least for the past several hundred years, and at least in North America and Northern Europe, have been the recurring companions of that public life.

Before I can meaningfully get to this matter of public life and moral tensions, however, I must lay some conceptual and definitional groundwork. I am going to propose that it is useful to conceive of the city as a settlement form that provides three different "kinds" of social psychological space: the private, the parochial, and the public realms of urban life.
The Three Realms Of Urban Life

My definitions of "private" and "parochial" realms are borrowed and adapted from Albert H. Hacker's work: my definition of the public realm is more clearly my own. Following Hacker, then, I will define the private realm as characterized by ties of intimacy among primary group members who are located within houses and personal networks, and the parochial realm as characterized by a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located within "communities."

The public realm, in contrast, is defined as non-private sectors of urban areas in which individuals in co-presence tend to be personally unknown or only categorically known to one another. That is, while it is not quite secret, it is nonetheless fair to say that the private realm is the world of the household and intimate network; the parochial realm is the world of the neighborhood, workplace, or acquaintance network; and the public realm is the world of the street.

Using these definitions, then, and conceiving of the city as a collection of social psychological spaces, we can see that the city differs from other sorts of settlement forms (for example, the tribe, the village, the small town) in at least two important and highly interrelated respects.

First, the city is characterized by a diversity of social psychological spaces. In the city, one can often locate the equivalents of the tribe, the village, the small town. That is, tribes, villages, and small towns consist primarily of the social psychological realms of the private and the parochial. The city, in contrast, contains private and parochial realms but is not limited to them.

Second, the city, in addition to possessing private and parochial realms, is a characteristic that it shares with other settlement forms, generates a unique kind of social psychological space: the public realm. This realm, as we can infer from the way it is defined, is made up of the public places or spaces in a city that tend to be inhabited—and I understand "tend to be inhabited"—by persons who are strangers to one another or who "know" one another only in terms of occupational or other non-personal identity categories (for example, bus conductor-customer). In short, cities have public places that, because of their stranger-tailed and personal character, are simply unlike, in a social psychological sense, the public or communal areas of other settlement forms.

All of this leads me to a final definition. When I speak of the "public life" of cities my referent is quite restricted. I am not talking, for example, about economic and political life broadly conceived, but are referring only to the interaction, to the sociality or sociality, which may, of course, be of an economic or political character) that occurs within the public realm.

Now, if we accept these distinctions, if we grant their utility as working analytic tools, it becomes possible—though granted, in only a very rough sort of way—to sort among cities, or among city areas, in terms of the patterns formed by the relations among the three realms.

For example, one might note that a crucial difference between pedestrian-scale cities, such as San Francisco, and automobile-oriented cities, such as Houston or Phoenix, is that the former have robust public realms, the latter, less well developed ones. Similarly, one could argue that in pairs of many American cities, the private realm flourishes but the world of the parochial realm, the world of "commonality among acquaintances and neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks located with 'communities,' " is truncated. Manifested as neighborhood community, the parochial realm is radically attenuated.

As another example, Donald Olsen's argument in The City as a Work of Art that nineteenth century London was far more "domestic" than were Vienna and Paris in the same period can be translated as saying that in these latter cities, for whatever reason, the private realm took up a smaller portion of the "life space" of its inhabitants than it did in London.

Or, as a last example, one can contrast the worlds of varying segments of the population of, say, eighteenth century London, by noting that elite females were heavily restricted to the private realm, while working and lower class men and women, and middle and upper class males (such as Samuel Johnson) spent a great deal of time in the parochial and public realms.

The Pre-Industrial City and its Transformation: The Strengthening of the Private and Parochial Realms

What I want to do now is review a major historic shift in the relations among these realms that occurred in the cities of Europe, particularly Northern Europe during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, and then discuss the moral debates that this shift made possible. As an aside, I'll just note that while the shift can be observed to a degree in the cities of North America, their births primarily in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries makes them better exemplars of the outcome of the shift than of the shift itself.

A cardinal characteristic of the preindustrial city—wherever located—is the fact that a significant portion of its social life occurs in the public realm. That is, social life and public life overlap in the preindustrial city to a degree unmatched by any other city form. I don't know whether this arrangement was supported by cultural values instilling the moral superiority of being "out and about" in the public realm, but even in the absence of such sup-
port, our urban ancestors didn’t have much choice in the matter. Like their tribal and village counterparts who lived in “commu-
nities” whether they wanted to or not, presidencial city
-dwellers, given the technology available to them, lived in the
public realm out of necessity. Let me provide a few examples
of why this was so.

With a largely illiterate population, and lacking a technology
for the broadcasting of pictorial messages, if news were to circu-
late in the presidencial city, it had to do so by moving among
co-present human beings via the spoken word. A single person
communicating to many others simultaneously proved, of
-course, more efficient than one-to-one communication; thus the
very widespread institution of the town crier. To find an audi-
ence, the town crier went into the city’s public realm; to hear the
news, announcement, and pronouncements, the city’s populace
did likewise. Similarly, without telephones or telegraphs and,
again, with a largely illiterate population, most personal mes-
-sages had to be delivered personally. To communicate to anyone
outside of one’s own household, one had to leave that household
and walk through the public realm until one reached the home
or workplace of the message’s recipient.

Note that I said walk. Elites, who represented a very small
portion of the total population, could afford litters or horse-
drawn conveyances that allowed them to encase themselves in
cocoon of privacy and thus isolate themselves from the public
realm—just as modern affluent Westerners do by means of their
-private automobiles. But most people, in moving from one place
to another in the city, had to walk and they had to be both in
-and of the public realm when they did so.

Not only the movement of messages required one’s presence
in the public realm, for everyone but elites (all of whom had ser-
-vants and some of whom had quite advanced plumbing systems)
the securing of water and the disposal of garbage and body
wastes did so as well. The necessity to be in the public realm was
true for a myriad of other activities: shopping, political action,
entertainment, religious devotion, and so forth.

Add to this the fact that again, excepting some elites in some
places, private space was crowded, even by the standards of the
time. For many people, to be in the public realm was to be warm
instead of cold, cool instead of hot. It was to breathe air; howev-
er, had, less fresh than the air of one’s private quarters. It was to
move into space, however teeming with people, less cramped
than home. In sum, the presidencial city was overwhelmingly
characterized by the dominance of public life.

However, as that complex of events and conditions and phe-
nomena and actions and choices we choose to encapsulate by the
term “Industrial Revolution” began to unfold, new possibilities
for enlarging and strengthening the city’s private and parochial
realms emerged.

Two characteristics of late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twen-
tieth century cities were especially relevant: innovations in forms
of transport allowed these cities to be much larger in area than
their presidencial ancestors, and innovations in construction
and communication technologies allowed these cities to exclude
many more activities than had cities of the past. To put it briefly,
these two characteristics—enlargement and enclosure—together
made possible the separation of workplace from residence, made
possible the development of highly specialized and large
work places (e.g., factory districts), made possible the develop-
ment of homogenous and large areas of residence (e.g., working-
-class neighborhoods), made possible the siting of much
round-of-life activity within the place of residence or neighbor-
hood, and, eventually, with the introduction and widespread per-
sonal ownership of the automobile, made it possible for an
individual to connect pieces of widely dispersed space without
the necessity of actually being, in any socially meaningful sense,
in the intervening spaces.

It truly became possible for large numbers of late eighteenth,
nineteenth, and twentieth century city people, as it had not been
possible for presidencial city people, to spend significant por-
tions of their lives entirely in the private and/or parochial
realm. As this possibility emerged, so did debates about where
city people ought to be—debates, to go back to my opening
comments, about getting people “off the street,” about whether
only fools’ “names and faces are seen in public places.”

Domestic Intimacy, Community, and Urbanity: The Assault on the Public Realm

During the past few hundred years, the debate over the morality
of life in one or another of the realms of city life has pitted the
private and parochial realms—the worlds of domestic intimacy
and community—against the public realm—the world, we might
say, of urbanity.

Neither the origin nor the terms of the debate have come
from celebrators of the public realm. Instead, there has been an
assault on the public realm by those who define the private and
parochial realms as morally superior. To oversimplify just a bit,
home and neighborhood have united to oppose street.5

Let me try to give you some of the flavor of this assault on
the public realm by describing briefly three of its numerous
themes, three themes that seem to appear, by the way, regardless
of when or where one looks “un tidy” and “unsanitid” presence,
discriminately and inappropiately mixing, and irresponsible or
even sacrilegious frivolity.

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The theme of "unboly" and "unwashed" presence asserts that the public realm is the home of "the wrong kind of people"—however "wrong kind of people" may be defined. Eighteenth century London's defenders of domesticity warned women to stay at home in part because the streets were filled with men, but even more importantly, because they teemed with the contaminating presence of the "lower orders" of both sexes. In nineteenth and twentieth century New York, "proper" men and women were encouraged to stay out of the public realm because of the disgusting ethnic character of its denizens.

The theme of indiscriminate and inappropriately mixing assets that, in the public realm, various types or categories of women whom a deity, or nature, or tradition, or whatever, had intended to remain forever separate are allowed—God help us—to mingle. Critics of the newly emerging cafes and cabarets pointed with disgust to the fact that they allowed virtuous women to be in the same room with women of "easy virtue." Worse, these public institutions—as did movie theatres and dance halls—actually or potentially brought together men and women, persons of the working, middle and upper classes, blacks and whites, Southerners and Northerners.

The theme of irresponsibility or even sacrilegious frivolity complains that in the public realm the unquestioned virtues of sobriety, industry, rationality, diligence, are not only challenged, they are discarded. Two examples from criticisms of public realm institutions will, I hope, suffice to make the point.

Describing the vision of the masquerade held by its critics, Terry Castle writes

At the classic eighteenth-century masquerade...a distinctly ungentled liberty was the goal: liberty from every social, erotic, and psychological constraint. In this search after perfect freedom—a state of intoxication, ecstasy, and free-floating sexual pleasure—the eighteenth century masquerade demonstrated its kinship, however distant, with those rituals of possession and collective frenzy found in traditional societies....Eccstatic rituals transport their participants into another world, in which time and space are magically altered. In its most fervent stages, the masquerade held a similarly labile and consolative power. With its scenes of maniac, impetuous play, the masquerade often seemed to contemporaries to induce a kind of hallucinatory state; a collective illness.8

Writing about critics of Coney Island, John Kasson sounds a similar refrain:

The response of James Gibbons Huneker (to Coney Island) is especially interesting. What disturbed Huneker...was precisely the surrender of reason, even of repression that Coney encouraged. From this perspective, Coney's strip-teaser entertainments and fantastic architecture were not harmless pleasures but evidence of cultural delirium. Unreality is as greedily craved by the mob as alcohol by the dionysianics; indeed, the jumbled nightmares of a morphine-caterer are actually realized by Luna Park.

In articulating these opinions, Huneker was not merely victimizing idiosyncratic foils, but expressing concerns frequently advanced by the leading behavioral scientists of the period. According to the dominant school of American psychiatry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the gentil virtues of sobriety, diligence, thrift, and self-mastery, safeguarded not only family and society but sanity itself. By encouraging sensuous self-abandon, then, Coney Island in a very real sense promoted lunacy.

If you will review in your mind recent media discussions of such matters as homelessness, the wisdom or foolishness of locating "upscale" establishments in "downscale" areas or the "unseemly" behavior of youthful audiences at rock concerts, you will find that these themes are still very much with us. The world of domestic intimacy and community challenge the world of urbanity just as much today as they did in eighteenth century England or nineteenth century New York.

Prospects For the Public Realm

The vital question, in making assessments about the state of public life today and predictions about public life tomorrow is this: to what extent can we say that the champions of domestic intimacy and community have won the debate they themselves engendered and framed?

We don't know the answer to this question and answering it must surely be very high on our research agenda. My very tentative guess is that while the enemies of the public realm have not yet registered a definitive win, they are currently far ahead, particularly in North America, but in some parts of Europe as well. I offer two kinds of evidence to suggest that this is so: the character of the residential built environment, especially in North America, and an emerging form in the built environment of public places in North America and Europe.
Residential Areas and the Public Realm

I want to make three points about the scale and design of residential areas and public life.

First, to the degree that the urban landscape is being shaped by large-scale housing developments—and in the United States this is certainly the case—larger and larger portions of that landscape seem to contain little, if any, public realm at all. Claims of a central city Renaissance and the enthusiasm of some urban planners notwithstanding, the dominant urban settlement experience in the United States is suburban and seems likely to remain so.

The suburban landscape is the frame from which and, possibly, the peripheral realms over the public. Once the requisite parks and playgrounds (for supervised neighborhood-centered recreation), community halls (for sedate neighborhood gatherings), and malls (for controlled consumerism) are in place, suburban developers/designers have shown no interest in building in a public realm—in creating locales that would contribute to a lively public life or encourage public sociability. In Britain, Milton Keynes, can stand as the epitome of planning exclusively for private lifestyles and, to a lesser degree, peripheral interests.

Second, even where the public realm exists (as in sections of older, high-density cities), the location and arrangement of housing areas and, increasingly, of work sites preclude many persons from encountering it as a normal part of their round of life. Automobile usage is both cause and consequence of the scale and location of much post-war housing and, of late, office complexes, particularly in North America. As such, automobile usage has been transformed into automobile dependence. For many North Americans, the normal round of life consists of moving from one suburban park-like neighborhood, via private automobile, to one's suburban office park and back again. Only once a consumer demands force one to enter the public realm and then, only in its most sanitized and highly controlled form: the suburban enclosed shopping mall.

Third, even those who favor the pleasures of public life, may find them inconvenient or dangerous to pursue. In his book Steppin' Out, Lewis Erenberg describes the lively nightclub "scene" that flourished in New York City in the 1910s and 1920s. Drinking was an important element in the scene, of course, but more crucial elements seemed to have involved the pleasures of public sociability, including brief encounters with strangers, many of whom were unlike oneself in class, ethnicity and lifestyle. The vitality, indeed, the very existence, of this scene was importantly linked to the fact that the New Yorkers who participated in it did not rely on private automobiles for transport. When they went home, they walked or rode a trolley or other public conveyance.

In contrast, the situation of the urbanite living within the dispersed settlement pattern of the North American post-war city seems almost designed to preclude participation in such a scene. Limited public transport, the scale of housing tracts and thus the distances between a nighttime district and home, and, most crucially, the very high-speed highway systems which link the various parts of the metropolitan make public sociability involving drinking a very dangerous pleasure, indeed.

The Design of Public Places and the Public Realm

My second point of evidence that the champions of democratic intensity and community are well advised in the defense of the phenomenon that Mark Francis might call the "undemocratic street," that Mike Brill has described as "bourgeois boulevard," and that I have called the "counter-local." That is, many recently created public and semi-public spaces seem designed specifically to appeal to persons like this correspondent, to the San Francisco Chronicle:

"A precious letter writer is quite correct when he says, "We must find alternatives to the endless proliferation of automobiles." Unfortunately, the only way this will ever happen is by reduc- ing the incalculable (they say) tendency toward increasing popula- tion in the area. I, for one, despise riding on public transit, even BART, because I am forced to be in the midst of strangers whose behavior I cannot predict nor control. When public transit runs from my door to my destination (or within a block of it), provides me with a private, lockable compartment, is there when I want it, and costs no more than driving, I will use it. Until that magic day we must accommodate the automobile or travel like cattle. I prefer the auto, thank you."

From Covent Garden to Ghiroldelli Square: from the newly built hotels in New York's Times Square area, whose lobbies are on the second or third floor, to the Galleria, spreading up in every metropolitan center, from the widely acclaimed new "downtown" of San Diego to the Downtown Plaza area of Sacramento's K Street Mall; from Utrecht's shopping mall to Milton Keynes' covered city center, we are creating purportedly public spaces that are only marginally in the public realm.

These creations proclaim loudly that criticisms of the public realm are valid but the problems pointed to by critics have been solved. The solution has been achieved by ensuring—that through design and through the action of security guards should design prove insufficient—that such spaces will not be "contaminated" by the presence of the "unhygienic" and the "untidy," will not be scenes of indiscriminate and inappropriate mixing, and will not allow irresponsible, and certainly not sacrilegious, frivolity.

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But this is mere speculation, and the question at issue is too important for that. “To know if, and the extent to which, champions of domestic intimacy and community may be said to have won the debate over the morality of public space—won it, not only in the hearts and minds of contemporary urbanites, but in the physical structure of our urban areas as well—we need serious research—a lot of it. Assuming all is not lost, we also need to discover whether it is possible to design public places that are truly in the public realm, and to design them in such a way that even persons like our correspondent to the San Francisco Chronicle will be enticed to enter and convinced to stay.”

Notes
4. The argument that the public spaces of pre-industrial cities constitute the public, rather than—as might be imagined—the parochial realm, is developed in detail in my book, A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space (New York: Basic Books, 1973). In bare bones form, the argument is that the population of pre-industrial cities was too large, too heterogeneous, and too mobile for high levels of personal knowing to develop among their citizens.