

1.4 • Elements of the street.

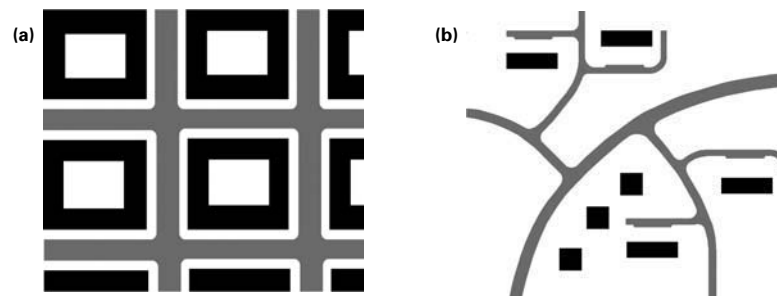
'appendages off a freeway ramp'.¹¹ At the scale of urban streets and blocks, modern road systems also turned pockets of the urban fabric 'inside out', inverting streetspace as the focus of public space.

Tripp prefaced his comments on how streets should be redesigned with the telling phrase 'from the traffic point of view'. With hindsight, this point of view seems to have been built into much of urban planning policy in the second half of the twentieth century, often appearing to have priority above all others. And as a central plank of Modernist policy it was adopted enthusiastically by engineers, architects and planners alike. The circulation system has always formed the 'backbone' of settlements; but traditionally it was streets that performed this spinal role. In contrast, Modernism filleted the city – stripped the spine and ribs out from the urban flesh, and set up the road network as a separate system.

The disassembly of the street

The urban street had traditionally united three physical roles: that of circulation route, that of public space, and that of built frontage. These three elements may be loosely equated with the linear concern of the transport engineer (the street as a one-dimensional 'link' in the traffic network), the planar concern of the planner (streetspace as land use) and the three-dimensional concern of the architect or urban designer (Figure 1.4).

However, the revolutionary rhetoric of Modernism passed a death sentence on the street. Modernism set up a new urban model that liberated the forms of roads and buildings from each other. Rather than being locked together in street grids, the Modernist model allowed roads to follow their own fluid linear geometry, while buildings could be expressed as sculpted three-dimensional forms set in flowing space (Figure 1.5).¹² Each



1.5 • Traditional versus modern layouts. (a) Fit of roads and buildings. (b) Roads and buildings follow their own dedicated forms.