

Problems with rooms and corridors

A problem with the 'rooms and corridors' analogy is that it only recognises two possible types of space – polarised between the corridor, emphasising circulation (usually connoting an impersonal, transient space), and the room for occupancy (usually connoting safety, comfort, ownership, identity). While these may reflect the extreme of the motorway and the precinct, this leaves no place for the traditional mixed function urban street which serves both as a circulation artery and as an urban 'place' in its own right. Under Buchanan's clinical division, these varied urban activities – social, political, commercial and ceremonial – would all be shunted aside into the 'urban rooms', while the main streets would become bare corridors reserved for circulation.

Buchanan's prescription may be quite appropriate for private motor traffic, but it leads to a separation of roads intended for use by public transport (the distributors) and those expected to be used by pedestrians (access roads). The megastructure of *Traffic in Towns*' Fitzrovia case study (Plate 1 in Chapter 1) is a particularly stark example – where the buses are separated from the pedestrian deck by up to two escalator flights¹⁰ – but the basic problem of spatial separation still applies in more mundane examples of 'prairie planning' up and down the country.

This kind of road hierarchy might once have represented an ideal system for urban road management – indeed, it still represents a possible idealised system for the distribution of motor traffic. But it no longer represents what is today considered an idealised system for urban street management, suitable for catering for a diversity of urban uses and transport modes.

Diagnosis

Buchanan subdivided distributors into primary, district and local distributors, which, together with access roads, gives a simple system of four types of road. But these four types seem too few and too narrow to reflect the rich diversity of actual road and street types existing on the ground.

On closer inspection, the reason why there is a lack of fit between the idealised classification and the reality is not just because there is a small number of types, nor because these types are narrowly defined in terms of a single function. It would be quite possible to have a workable if limited classification that simply divided all streets into wide versus narrow, or public versus private, or 'streets' versus 'squares'. Each of these examples only considers one theme as a basis for classification (e.g. width), and within that theme presents only a choice of two categories. Yet, these cases would still serve for their own particular purposes.