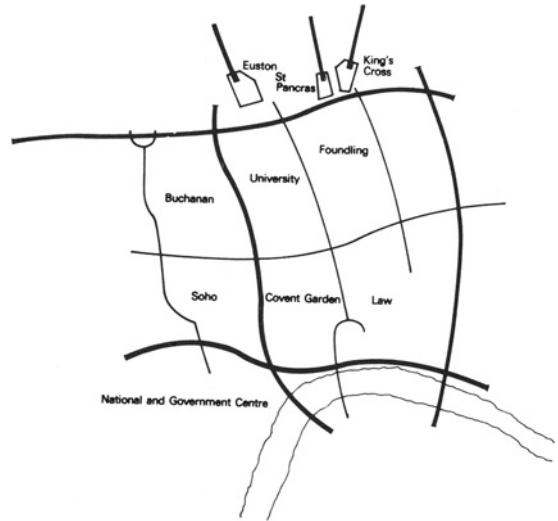


what point could we regard a larger area as a traffic-free room surrounded by external traffic routes?

In all this the attempt has been simply to give a demonstration of procedure. The full repercussions of the questions are not obvious. They are highly complicated. But the factual aspect of the study establishes a better position from which to understand the nature of the complication and the limits of historical assumptions. What is left is something that can be built upon and needed decisions are brought back to the problem of the built form of an urban area not merely of a building. Here, the choice of the built form is critical in a number of ways, not least as a means of securing a new unity of conception.

Take for instance the question of the size of the road net. Professor Buchanan has looked at this from another angle (Ministry of Transport, 1963). Looking at cities in relation to traffic, he saw that most of them are built up from a collection of localities. He called these 'environmental areas'. These areas are recognisable working units. They are areas in which a pattern of related uses holds together: local housing, shopping, schools, etc., would be one obvious example. These areas are recognisable in Manhattan just as clearly as they are in London. They form, in Professor Buchanan's terms, 'the rooms of a town'. They need to be served by roads but they are destroyed when roads penetrate and subdivide them. His solution was to try to recognise and define these working areas and to place the net of roads in the cracks between them. By estimating the amount of traffic that might be generated by the buildings in such areas, Professor Buchanan was able to suggest some possible sizes for the networks. He had in fact by this procedure redefined the grid of a town in terms of modern traffic.

Here then is a proposition for a framework within which we can test out some possible arrangements of the built form. Professor Buchanan selected St Marylebone as one of his test areas. This happens to adjoin the main London University site (already defined as a precinct in the London Plan) and this in turn is contiguous with the area around the Foundling Estate which has been used in some Cambridge studies of the built form (Fig. 8.9). All three areas are approximately equal in size. The Foundling area (bounded on the north and south by Euston Road and Theobalds Road, and on the west and east by Woburn Place and Grays Inn Road), is about 3700 ft from north to south and 2000 ft wide. It developed a cohesion of its own. How did this happen?



**FIGURE 8.9**  
Environmental areas and road networks as suggested by Buchanan.

This in turn can be related back to the main line of argument. In 1787 the whole of this area consisted of open fields: there were no controlling features. A plan of 1790 divides the land into building plots by its network of streets and squares. The subsequent history, so well traced by Olsen (1964), shows the development and elaboration within this pattern. By 1900 the area could have been described by the language that Mrs Jacobs applies to Greenwich Village. The intellectuals were there: so were the working Londoners: so were the Italians around their hospital in Queen Square. There were handsome houses; tenements and mews; hotels and boarding houses. The area had its own Underground station and its own shopping area along Marchmont Street. It served a complex community.

By 1960 the balance within the original pattern had radically altered. Fast moving traffic using the small scale grid of streets had subdivided the area. Site by site residential development at a zoned density of 136 people to the acre produces only one answer: tall blocks of flats. Redevelopment of sites for offices created taller and thicker buildings. The hospitals, which needed to expand, were hemmed in by surrounding development. The pattern congealed.

In this situation only a new framework can open up a free development. And if Professor Buchanan's surrounding road net is accepted as a basis for the development of the environmental area, the problem