

photomontages from a German edition of *Collage City* in which Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation is juxtaposed with the Uffizi in Florence. Rowe elevates the Uffizi as an example of a right-thinking "public" disposition of urban space, and the Unité as the wrong, "savage" solution.⁹ The Uffizi was one of Rowe's favorite "set pieces"—a composite of superblock and street. Yet Le Corbusier persists. Today his diagram of the Unité d'Habitation still poses perhaps the ultimate question concerning the modern city: well ensconced in a commodious private dwelling, with plumbing, electricity, telecommunications, and automotive transport channeled in and facilitating movement across vast distances, what function does the street serve for the modern city dweller? Before these modern conveniences were invented, city dwellers, whether cooking or bathing or going to the theater, had to pass through the space of the street.¹⁰ Or did they? Certainly not in every society. Where street making is concerned, this may be another case of urban design (and Rowe in particular) taking a "context" that came to fruition in one historical period (the bourgeois Paris of Haussmann) and universalizing it. We have yet to grapple with how, in Le Corbusier's scheme and in much of modern life, streets are of little importance except as ways to go elsewhere.

Urban Design II: Fabric Fixations

In the later phases of urban design, after the 1960s, when the latent critique of the Modernist city was joined by a more wholesale Post-modern critique of Modern architecture, the attempt to maintain the forms of Modern architecture within the shapes of the premodern city gave way to a greater focus on a fuller reconstitution of the "fabric" of the city as a field of contextual reference. At Cornell this meant more focus on the "figure-ground gestalt."¹¹ In taking Nolli's 1748 map of Rome as their Rosetta stone, Rowe and his disciples conveniently left out the historical circumstance that Nolli's figure-ground drawings' first function was to identify the figurative profile of the Vatican's holdings following a period of rapid growth in papal power and thus to establish the church's purview over the city. Because public space, as a concept and legal fact, was then virtually nonexistent, inferring that the Nolli map (or later Sitte's diagrams) established the historical ground for a formal distinction between public and private space was intellectually bogus.