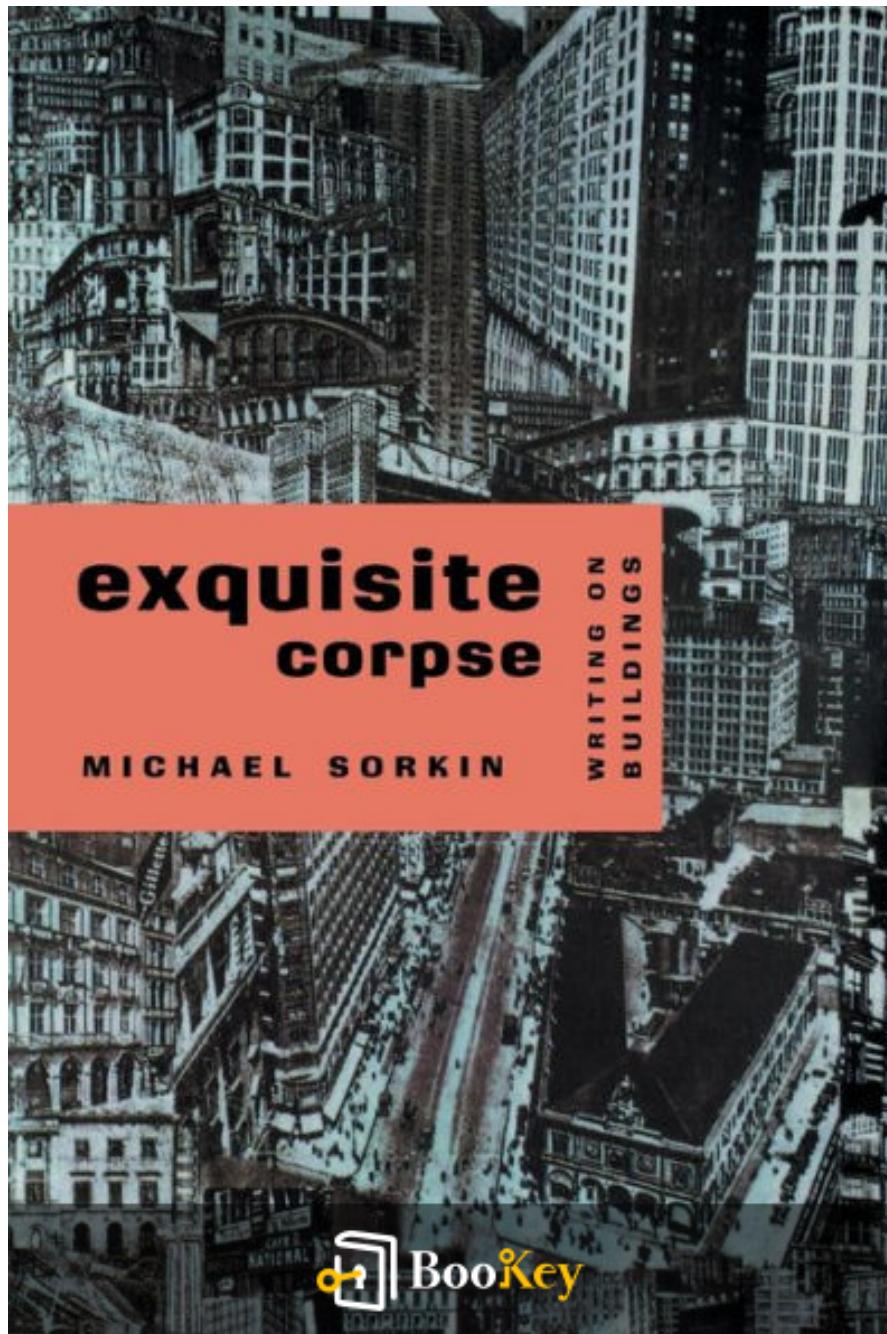


Exquisite Corpse PDF (Limited Copy)

Michael Sorkin



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Exquisite Corpse Summary

Rethinking Urban Design Through Collaboration and Complicity

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In "Exquisite Corpse," Michael Sorkin presents a compelling examination of urban development, drawing parallels between the chaotic assembly of cities and the collaborative nature of surrealist art. This concept builds on the idea that cities are not merely designed but are the result of various stakeholders, each contributing their own vision, much like artists adding their strokes to a collective canvas.

Sorkin critiques traditional architectural discourse, highlighting its often superficial focus on trends like "beach houses and Disneyland." He argues that such preoccupations dilute the deeper potential of architecture, steering it away from meaningful engagement with social and political contexts. By dissecting contemporary issues, he addresses controversies surrounding the development of New York City and reflects on the deconstructivist movement in Los Angeles, spotlighting both the achievements and shortcomings of prominent figures in the architectural field.

Throughout the chapters, Sorkin's sharp insights serve as a clarion call for a radical reimagining of architecture. He encourages architects, planners, and critics alike to embrace bold, experimental approaches that respond to the complexities of urban life. By intertwining the themes of culture, power dynamics, and the built environment, Sorkin invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of architecture and its role in shaping society. Ultimately,

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"Exquisite Corpse" presents a vision of urban spaces that transcend mere aesthetics, advocating for designs that foster community and enhance the human experience.

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About the author

Michael Sorkin (1948 - March 2020) was a significant figure in American architecture and urban design, widely recognized for his insightful critiques and extensive writings across various media. As the Principal of Michael Sorkin Studio in New York City, he championed innovative design projects that prioritized sustainability and green architecture. This commitment to ecological principles reflected a broader trend in architecture towards environmentally conscious practices in urban settings.

Sorkin's leadership at the Institute for Urban Design, a non-profit organization aimed at promoting discussions surrounding critical urban planning challenges, underscored his dedication to fostering a more thoughtful and engaged dialogue about the future of cities. Additionally, his influential roles as an educator at prestigious institutions like Yale and Harvard, as well as his position as a Distinguished Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in Urban Design at the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, highlighted his impact on a generation of architects and urban planners.

Throughout his career, Sorkin led design studios in diverse global locales facing profound urban issues, including Jerusalem, Johannesburg, and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. His work in these cities emphasized urbanism as a tool for social improvement, illustrating his belief in

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architecture's potential to address socio-economic disparities and enhance community resilience. Sorkin's legacy not only lies in his physical contributions to architecture but also in his profound influence on the discourse surrounding urban design and sustainable urban development.

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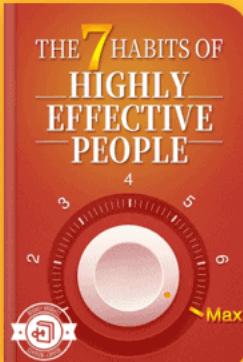
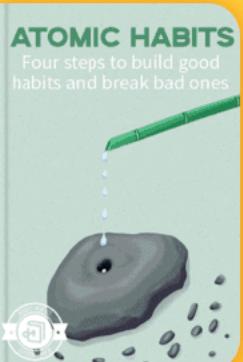
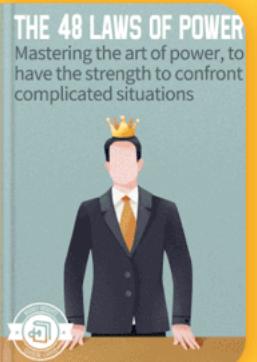
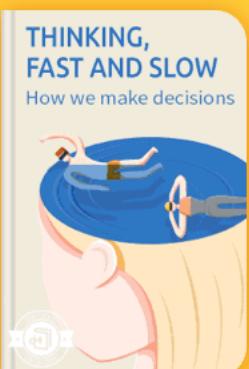
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Chapter 1 Summary: 1

Summary of Chapter 1: Philip Johnson: The Master Builder as a Self-Made Man

Overview of Philip Johnson

Philip Johnson emerges as a pivotal figure in the architectural landscape, epitomizing the elegance and cultural sophistication of what is often referred to as architecture's golden era. His extensive portfolio, which includes iconic buildings, alongside his opulent lifestyle, showcases his exceptional taste and leadership in shaping American architecture.

Imagination vs. Reality

Despite Johnson's significant achievements, he describes himself as more of a worker than a visionary. This humility contrasts sharply with his deep understanding of modern design principles. A recent exhibition celebrating his work reflects the admiration he garners from both peers and critics, hinting at a paradox where self-deprecation never undermines the acclaim he receives.

Career Highlights and Publicity

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Johnson is renowned for landmark projects such as the Glass House and the AT&T headquarters, which solidify his reputation at the apex of architectural thought. His style is heavily influenced by Mies van der Rohe, yet it is Johnson's adeptness with publicity that truly sets him apart. He smartly crafts the narrative around "post-modernism," utilizing historical references to create a brand identity that resonates strongly within the architectural community, often overshadowing the need for true innovation.

Critique of Contemporary Works

The chapter delves into critiques of Johnson's work, notably the AT&T building, which some analysts argue suffers from a lack of originality. Critics point out that his designs often resort to superficial embellishments, presenting an illusion of innovation while failing to engage meaningfully with their architectural context. This leaves a sense of dissatisfaction among those who seek depth in artistic expression, branding his creations as ultimately derivative.

Modern Architecture and Emerging Trends

In examining the current landscape of modern architecture, the chapter highlights a troubling tendency towards historical pastiche, where true innovation seems elusive. This brings forth a challenge for the architectural community to reconsider the value of original thought and to resist the

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impulse to merely recycle past styles for modern applications.

Conclusion

Ultimately, while Philip Johnson stands as a monumental figure in architecture, his methods and the nature of his success raise critical questions about the essence of originality and substance in contemporary design. The intertwining of personal branding with architectural merit invites skepticism about the trajectory of architecture as a genuine art form, hinting at a future where depth may be sacrificed for style.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Tom Wolfe's Critique of Modern Architecture

In "From Bauhaus to Our House," Tom Wolfe delivers a scathing critique of modern architecture, spotlighting notable figures such as Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn. He describes these architects as emblematic of a group that imposed an unappealing aesthetic upon America, often typified by their casual attire and elitist ideas. Wolfe argues that their philosophies, particularly those stemming from the Bauhaus school—famous for promoting functional design at the cost of traditional beauty—subverted the fundamental American values associated with individuality and craft. He claims that modern architecture's acceptance was not merely a consequence of the charm or cleverness of émigré architects seducing clients, but rather its practicality and economic efficiency suited the bureaucratic demands of the era.

However, even as Wolfe critiques the architects, he inadvertently adopts their view that architecture fundamentally shapes societal structures. This oversight leads him to overlook the multifaceted social and economic

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influences that facilitate the success of modern architecture. By focusing narrowly on architects like Walter Gropius as culprits for the aesthetic shortcomings of contemporary buildings, Wolfe avoids diving deeper into the complexities behind architecture's commercial viability.

Los Angeles and Architectural Identity

Expanding his discussion, Wolfe turns to the distinctive architectural identity of Los Angeles, highlighting a disconnect between its structures and the region's cultural fabric. He observes that LA's buildings often seek validation from outside observers, failing to arise organically from the local context. This analysis prompts a broader inquiry into how outsiders romanticize Los Angeles, seeing it through a simplistic lens that glosses over its intricate social realities.

Wolfe identifies several paradoxical themes within LA's architecture, including the tension between beauty and apathy, the relationship between madness and creative expression, and the overshadowing influence of the entertainment industry, particularly through institutions like Disney. Despite pockets of innovation, the architectural landscape of Los Angeles is characterized by a certain superficiality, leaving a complex city often reduced to clichés.

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Reflections on Architectural Criticism

In his critique of architectural criticism itself, Wolfe suggests that contemporary analyses often lack depth, reducing discourse to mere surface evaluations that resemble advertising rather than substantive critique. He references figures like Paul Goldberger, whose work at the New York Times exemplifies a trend toward architectural journalism that overlooks the significant societal and cultural implications of design.

Overall, Wolfe's examination of modern architecture, its key figures, and the critical landscape invites readers to reflect on the deeper cultural narratives that underlie built environments. His work urges a reconsideration of how architecture not only reflects but also actively shapes the world we inhabit.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 3

The White City

Overview

This chapter delves into an exhibition at the Jewish Museum that highlights the International Style of architecture in 1930s Israel, specifically focusing on its cultural and social ties to Labor Zionism and European modernism. The discussion illustrates how architectural movements reflect broader historical narratives, emphasizing their roles in shaping identity and community.

Key Points

The architecture during this period, often dubbed "Bauhaus" in Palestine, emerged from reformist socialist ideologies that prioritized concepts such as labor, hygiene, and a connection to nature. Jewish architects in Palestine like Arieh Sharon and Erich Mendelsohn embraced European modernist influences, significantly reshaping the architectural landscape. Notably, Mendelsohn's designs, particularly for the Hadassah Hospital, exemplified a harmonious blend of modernist aesthetics with respect for the local environment, demonstrating the sensitivity required in architectural practice within culturally rich contexts.

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Despite the term "International Style" being used to describe this architectural movement, the chapter critiques its implications. It argues that this label simplifies the multidimensional social significances of architecture, reducing them to mere stylistic choices while ignoring the underlying political and cultural elements. Furthermore, the chapter examines the colonial dynamics inherent in this architectural trend, noting its roots as a Western import in a predominantly Palestinian context.

Additionally, the architectural legacy of this era continues to resonate in contemporary discussions surrounding aesthetics and cultural tensions, balancing tradition with the demands of modernization.

Architectural Preservation & Critique

The chapter raises concerns about the preservation of modernist architecture, particularly as some contemporary stakeholders may advocate for redevelopment that overlooks the architectural significance of these structures. Such actions pose risks of erasing historical and cultural narratives, emphasizing the need to acknowledge the role architecture plays in societal frameworks. The misguided redevelopment can lead to a loss of connection to cultural heritage, disrupting the continuity of community identity often embedded in these buildings.

Contextual Reflections

In weaving a broader commentary, the chapter connects themes of cultural

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identity, architectural practice, and the enduring legacy of modernism to ongoing urban planning challenges. It underscores the necessity of a nuanced comprehension of architecture's impact on societies, urging current and future architects and planners to consider the intricate interplay between form, history, and cultural resonance.

Conclusion

In summary, the architectural developments in 1930s Palestine reflect a rich dialogue between modernist ideals and social reform. This chapter illuminates the complex interactions of identity, colonization, and resistance within architectural practice, revealing how the structures of this era continue to influence and provoke discussion in today's urban landscape.

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Chapter 4: 4

Chapter 4 Summary of "Exquisite Corpse" by Michael Sorkin

In this insightful chapter, Sorkin addresses the current state of architectural development in New York City, particularly focusing on the South Ferry site as it nears selection for a new developer. The impending decision echoes a controversial past involving the sale of the Coliseum, which yielded \$500 million for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) but resulted in an unremarkable 75-story building that many deem architecturally unattractive. Sorkin critiques this competitive bidding process for prioritizing developer profits over design quality, suggesting that there should be a distinct separation between architectural considerations and commercial interests to better serve public needs.

As he analyzes various proposals for South Ferry, Sorkin laments the conformist tendencies of recent designs, which often replicate outdated architectural styles instead of pushing for innovation. He particularly contrasts Architetonica's playful proposal with Jahn's more futuristic but hollow concept, noting that genuine engagement with New York's evolving urban identity is sorely lacking in recent work.

The chapter takes a critical turn as Sorkin reflects on the Portman Hotel,

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designed by Ehud Portman, when he visits the Marriott Marquis. He highlights the hotel's disconnection from its vibrant Times Square environment, characterizing it as a generic monolith that neglects local culture and context. This commentary extends to Donald Trump's proposed "Television City," which Sorkin derides as an absurd venture that prioritizes profit over authentic urban engagement, showcasing a troubling trend where commercial branding overshadows meaningful urbanism.

Sorkin also acknowledges the legacy of Paul Rudolph, a once-celebrated architect whose work is now underappreciated in contemporary architectural discourse. He argues that today's architectural climate often favors marketability and celebrity status over authentic creative expression. In contrast, John Hejduk's contributions stand out; his philosophical approach to architecture emphasizes narrative and metaphor, advocating for designs that resonate with the community rather than succumbing to commercialization.

Further, Sorkin explores the intricate relationship between an architect's name and their perceived status within the profession. By comparing various notable figures such as Robert Stern and James Stewart Polshek, he illustrates how branding influences the valuation of architectural work. The chapter also touches on the overshadowing of architectural authorship by celebrity culture, exemplified by figures like golfer Jack Nicklaus.

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In conclusion, Sorkin's narrative paints a stark picture of an architectural landscape increasingly driven by commercialism and branding, often at the expense of genuine design and community engagement. He calls for a return to the core values of architecture—emphasizing integrity and meaningful contributions that reflect and enhance the spaces they inhabit. This chapter serves as a potent reminder of the need for thoughtful architecture that aligns closely with the cultural and historical fabric of the cities it serves.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5

Summary of Chapter 5 from "Exquisite Corpse" by Michael Sorkin

In Chapter 5, Michael Sorkin delves into the complex relationship between architecture, technology, and the human experience of home, grounding his discussion in Le Corbusier's influential idea of the house as a "machine à habiter," or a machine for living. This concept encapsulates an ongoing tension: while technology has the potential to enhance comfort and personal expression, it can also foster alienation and uniformity, posing challenges to the intimate experience of home.

Sorkin highlights the dichotomy of the home as both a personal refuge and an institutional structure. Homes should ideally be welcoming spaces that reflect individuality, yet they often embody broader societal values and relationships. This duality invites a continuous examination of whether modern dwellings should integrate technological advancements or resist them to preserve human connection.

Building on this, Sorkin reflects on Le Corbusier's architectural philosophy, noting how his early works prioritized productivity and rationality through structural clarity. However, these designs often lack a sense of warmth and humanity, showcasing the potential downsides of modernist ideals. This

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criticism is further amplified by a cultural backlash against contemporary design, where nostalgia for traditional homes emerges in response to the perceived failings of modern aesthetics. As society increasingly embraces corporate and technological influences in architecture, the yearning for spaces that prioritize individuality grows stronger.

Sorkin thoroughly examines the dual roles of technology in architecture, arguing that it acts as both a liberating force and a restrictive one. He presents three essential narratives that shape contemporary housing: the notion of the home as a factory for citizens, an appliance for living, and a personal retreat. Each narrative contributes to a multifaceted understanding of modern dwellings, intertwining aspirations and realities.

The chapter also addresses how homes have become sites for commodification and social engineering, highlighting the impact of economic factors and complex social agendas on residential spaces. This exploration reveals how modern housing often reflects a blend of utopian designs and dystopian outcomes, leaving many individuals disconnected from the true essence of home.

Echoing sentiments from the 1960s counterculture, Sorkin discusses alternative housing movements that challenge consumerism and advocate for simplicity and ecological sensitivity. These efforts aim to redefine the concept of home, critiquing the technological framework of mainstream

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society and expressing a vision that values individuality and sustainability.

In summary, Sorkin calls for a critical awareness of architecture's power as a potential site of resistance against the pervasive influence of consumer culture. He emphasizes the importance of preserving individual expression in the face of growing homogenization. Ultimately, the chapter invites readers to reflect on how built environments shape and reflect personal and collective identities in our rapidly evolving world.

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Chapter 6 Summary: 6

Summary of Chapter 6: Exquisite Corpse

Chapter 6, titled "Exquisite Corpse," explores the intricate relationship between architecture, urban environments, and social issues within modern settings.

The Garden in the Machine

The chapter begins by examining the Ford Foundation's building in New York, characterized as a unique blend of a greenhouse and a panopticon—a surveillance structure designed to observe and control. This architectural choice reflects the foundation's charitable mission to promote peace, democracy, and education within a meticulously controlled environment that mimics nature. However, the juxtaposition of this serene garden against the chaotic urban backdrop raises critical questions about the genuine intentions behind such developments and their implications for the surrounding community.

Minimums

The narrative then shifts to the evolving urban landscape, highlighting a

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growing dichotomy between high-tech minimalism and the stark realities of marginalized living conditions. The imagery of streets populated by joggers paints a picture of a sanitized, consumer-oriented ideal, while favelas—impoverished communities with inadequate infrastructure—stand in stark contrast. This contrast serves to reflect on the ethics of establishing architectural minimums, calling into question the glorification of deprivation rather than addressing the systemic issues that contribute to it.

Architectural Responses and Influences

The chapter further discusses various architects and movements that aim to reinterpret the spatial experiences of urban environments by intertwining personal and social dimensions. It explores how architectural design can respond to and reflect cultural narratives, drawing connections to surrealism and ecology. Notable examples include the works of architects Diller and Scofidio, who create innovative spaces that successfully balance technical precision with enriched experiential aspects, elevating the user experience.

Cultural and Social Commentary

A critique of the commodification of urban space follows, emphasizing the often superficial relationship between architecture and consumer culture. The chapter challenges the notion of aesthetics in architecture, advocating for a design philosophy that prioritizes social purpose. It explores the

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symbolism of skyscrapers as dual entities representing both power and community identity, engaging with the complex dynamics of urbanization.

Historical and Theoretical Contexts

Historical influences on modern architectural practices are examined, with discussions on urbanism, modernity, and the evolving role of skyscrapers. The works of seminal figures like Le Corbusier are invoked to illustrate the implications of modernist thought in shaping urban planning and design paradigms, highlighting how past ideologies continue to resonate in contemporary contexts.

Conclusion

In wrapping up, the chapter encapsulates the tension that exists between lofty architectural ideals and their real-world manifestations within socio-political frameworks. It urges a reconsideration of how architecture can reclaim agency, advocating for a focus on human values amid the challenges posed by advancing technology and economic constraints. Overall, "Exquisite Corpse" prompts readers to reflect on the potential for architecture to transcend mere functionality and aesthetics, ultimately seeking a deeper social relevance.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7

Chapter 7 Summary:

In 1976, artist Gordon Matta-Clark ignited controversy with an exhibition at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, where he utilized a rifle to shatter the remaining windows of housing projects displayed, which were already marred by broken panes. This act of destruction incited public outrage and drew the ire of the institute's director, Peter Eisenman, who subsequently suppressed Matta-Clark's work. Later, a retrospective of Matta-Clark's contributions coincided with a "Deconstructivism" exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). While both shed light on the fragility of architectural forms, Matta-Clark's work aimed to critique the very nature of architectural production rather than simply embracing instability as a form.

Amid this backdrop, Mark Wigley, tasked with creating a cohesive narrative for the MOMA exhibition, introduced the term "deconstructivism." His approach, however, faced criticism for its historical inadequacies and for promoting a superficial understanding of form that detached architecture from its socio-political implications—elements central to Matta-Clark's more significant critique of architectural practices. Wigley's interpretation risked reducing Matta-Clark's radical disruptions to mere provocations,

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overlooking how those acts spurred necessary societal conversations around architecture's role.

The chapter broadens its scope to examine Philip Johnson's controversial history, particularly his flirtation with fascist ideologies during the 1930s. Johnson's shifting allegiances within the architectural realm raise critical discussions regarding accountability for historical affiliations, drawing parallels with notorious figures like Kurt Waldheim and Herbert von Karajan.

The narrative then shifts to Emilio Ambasz, whose architectural vision resonates with themes of tranquility and harmony through nature. His designs highlight a minimalist aesthetic that seamlessly integrates function and beauty, aspiring to create paradisiacal environments. Ambasz's work reflects a deep connection to the landscape and a nostalgic view of childhood, presenting architecture as a medium for holistic living.

Next, Richard Rogers' Lloyd's building comes under scrutiny, noted for its innovative design that embraces functionalist ideals. Yet, it also illustrates the tension between modernist principles and the evolving expectations of clients. In acknowledging this duality, Rogers' architecture encapsulates the struggle inherent in contemporary design—balancing tradition with modernity.

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The chapter concludes by celebrating George Ranalli, whose architectural work highlights the fusion of domestic living practices with cultural context. Ranalli's designs exhibit meticulous craftsmanship and foster an intimate relationship with the urban environment, embodying a modernist vision that is deeply sensitive to social and ecological factors.

Overall, this chapter reflects on the evolution of architectural thought, examining the complex interrelations between design, historical context, and the enduring dialogue with society and culture, ultimately advocating for a more profound understanding of architecture's role in shaping human experiences.

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Chapter 8: 8

339 POST ROCK PROPTER ROCK: A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HIMMELBLAU

1968: The Turning Point

The cultural landscape of 1968, characterized by political upheaval and revolutionary artistic expressions, serves as a backdrop for the rise of Coop Himmelblau in the field of architecture. This new movement emphasizes the idea that architecture should go beyond mere functionality, heralding a shift towards a more experimental and rebellious aesthetic.

Architectural Manifestos

Coop Himmelblau's foundational belief centers on the notion that "architecture is not accommodating." They champion a visceral and sensory approach to design, favoring an experience-driven perspective over traditional architectural norms. Influenced by the dynamic world of rock music, they see architecture as a living form of expression, resonating similarly to music and prioritizing feelings over logic.

Artistic Influences

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The juxtaposition of musical influences—The Beatles' whimsical optimism alongside The Rolling Stones' raw realism—fragments the identity of Himmelblau's architectural approaches. Their projects oscillate between imaginative forms and confrontational designs, allowing them to explore complex themes of tension and organic shapes in their practice.

Early Projects

In their initial forays, Himmelblau's creations, such as the "Hard Space," showcase their interest in psychically charged environments that evoke strong emotional and sensory responses from users. The concept of a "house with wings" exemplifies their visionary ambition, instilling an idea of spaces that are dynamic and transformative.

The Evolution of Themes

As time progressed, Himmelblau's designs transitioned to include more rigorous structural experimentation. Their urban projects not only break from conventional designs but also narrate a story of transformation and serendipitous interactions within the metropolitan landscape.

The Role of Technology

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Technological advancements played a pivotal role in Himmelblau's evolution, allowing them to explore innovative materials and construction methods. This integration marks a significant shift in how architecture engages with the environment and enhances the user experience.

Return to the City

The urban environment transforms into a fertile ground for experimentation, echoing Himmelblau's view of architecture as an ongoing dialogue with its surroundings. Their designs respond to the complexities of city life, reflecting societal needs and aspirations.

The Late '70s and Beyond

Moving into the late 1970s, Himmelblau intensifies their critique of architectural conventions. They embrace raw and disruptive designs that not only mark a departure from past practices but also seek to engender social change through their architecture.

Final Manifestations

Their architectural identity manifests through intricate shapes and interactive spaces, resulting in projects that challenge traditional conventions and encourage engagement. Himmelblau's transformation highlights their

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dedication to creating provocative, compelling, and transformative designs.

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