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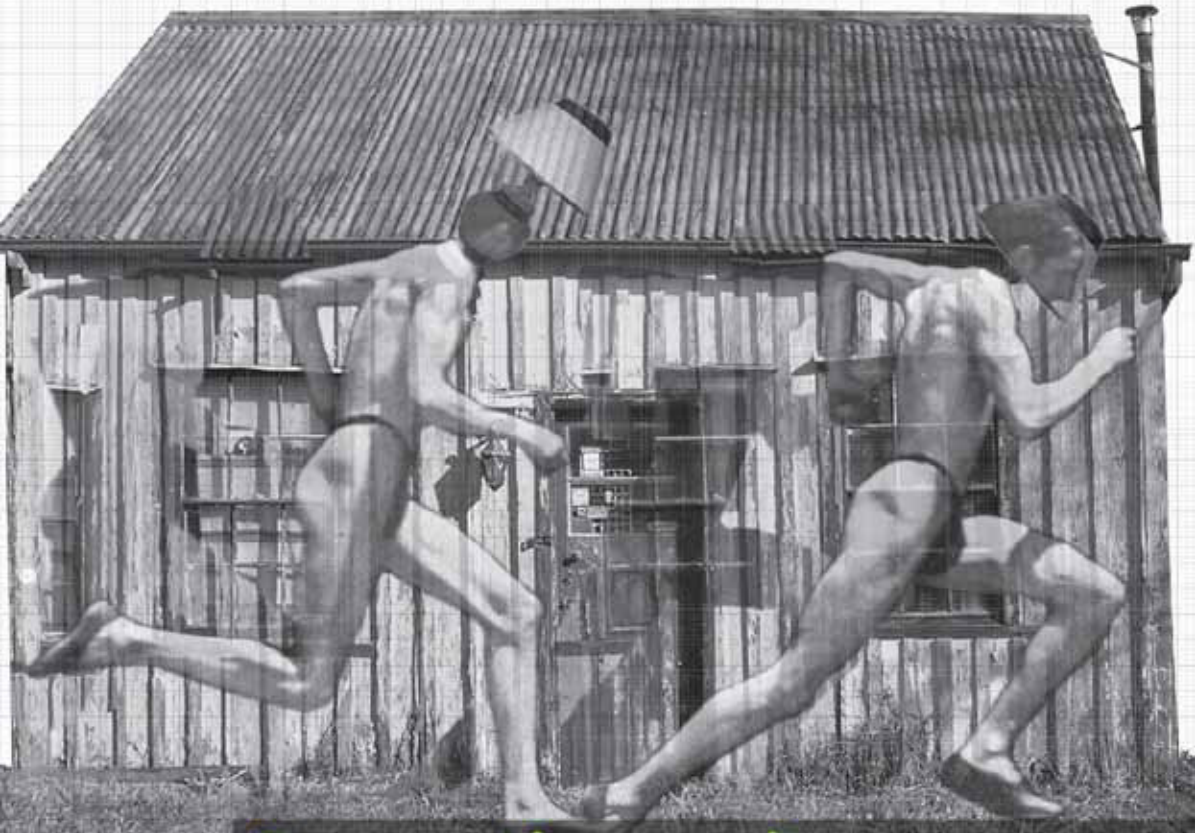

Occupation: ruin, repudiation, revolution

constructed space conceptualized

Edited by Lynn Churchill and Dianne Smith

OCCUPATION: RUIN, REPUDIATION, REVOLUTION

Plate 1 'I took bread and cheese and slipped out the door' (Kerouac 1970, 157). 2014

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Edited by
Lynn Churchill and Dianne Smith
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Foreword: Against the Interior

Charles Rice

Over the last decade, academic studies of the interior have increased substantially. No longer can the claim for the interior's marginal status (especially with respect to the domestic) be sustained. If anything, the interior has become central in historical and theoretical scholarship in design, architecture, and visual and material culture. This recent prominence has something to do with the interior's encompassing nature, with the idea that it can be detected as the binding agent between subjects, objects and situations, as more and more scholarship works through the cultural problematics of relation and immersion. If these are the two most prominent contexts for understanding contemporary experience (how do we find identity in relation; how is our sensorium extended through immersion?) then the interior acts as a reference for understanding how these questions are involved with a sense of encapsulation, of enclosure, that is, with a sense of location and locatability.

Understanding the interior as this reference is historically and philosophically useful. In modernity, the interior emerged to compensate for, but also to problematize, a sense of experience as connection, as longevity, as cultural grounding, a sense which had been all but obliterated through modernity's social and technological upheavals. In this history we can pinpoint a double moment of encapsulation staged at London's Great Exhibition of 1851. In Joseph Paxton's enormous glasshouse, the Crystal Palace, the world's goods were brought together in one place. The orderly conduct accompanying their visual consumption set the scene for a domesticated approach to commodities. Its counterpart was Henry Roberts' Model Houses for Four Families, which literally fabricated the form and conduct of the nuclear family. In these two structures of encapsulation, public and private could be organized and traversed, making the modern world in its metropolitan form governable.

Perhaps we are now too comfortable with what the interior has given to culture by way of our ability to fabricate experience within its confines, and to extend that fabrication through the construction of new (always interior) worlds.

The present collection of essays is, then, discomfiting. Rather than celebrating or extending the interior's recent prominence in scholarship, the essays take their point of departure from three key words which suggest a kind of dismantling of the interior's importance at the precise moment of its prominence. The condition of occupation, what might be thought to be a fundamental basis for understanding the interior's encapsulating quality, is met with ruin, repudiation and revolution, hardly very encouraging departure points. Or are they? These keywords suggest precisely what makes the interior so compelling as a context for research: its simultaneous ubiquity, as we have established, as well as its constant dissimulation. While we recognize its encapsulating presence, what is the interior in actuality? A kind of confrontation needs to be staged in order to get at this question.

How do you consciously push against the interior's ubiquity? By repudiating it. How do you break down its supposed unity, whether as artefact or conceptual condition? By accounting for it as ruin. How do you overcome the stasis that accompanies the interior's ubiquity? You mount a revolution.

What results from these questions is a refreshing sense of the elusive, especially at this point in scholarship on the interior, when there seems to be so much certainty about what it is. But more particularly, these keywords allow the essays to stage various strategic encounters with artefacts, designers, and concepts, even as the interior remains elusive. In the end, it is as a kind of rubric for such studies that the interior's value emerges, not as thing in itself, nor even as the dominant context for understanding relation and immersion, but as the always elusive target of work toward dismantling certainties.

Charles Rice is Professor of Architectural History and Theory, and Head of the School of Art and Design History at Kingston University London. He is author of *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (2007), and co-editor of *The Journal of Architecture*.

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This book was seeded by ideas encapsulated in papers presented at the 2012 IDEA (Interior Design Interior Architecture Educators Association) Symposium: Interior: a State of Becoming, Perth Western Australia.

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Introduction: What?

Lynn Churchill and Dianne Smith

> *What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? – it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies.*
>
> *We wheeled back through the sultry old light of Algiers, back on the ferry, back toward the mud-splashed, crabbed old ships across the river, back on Canal, and out; on a two lane highway to Baton Rouge in purple darkness; swung west there, crossed the Mississippi at a place called Port Allen. …*
>
> *With the radio on to a mystery program, and as I looked out the window and saw a sign that said USE COOPER'S PAINT and I said, 'Okay, I will'. we rolled across the hoodwink night of Louisiana plains – Lawtell, Eunice, Kinder, and De Quincy, western rickety towns becoming bayou-like as we reached the Sabine. In Old Opelousas I went into a grocery store to buy bread and cheese while Dean saw to gas and oil. It was just a shack; I could hear the family eating supper in the back. I waited a minute; they went on talking. I took bread and cheese and slipped out the door. We had barely enough money to make Frisco. Meanwhile Dean took a carton of cigarettes from the gas station and we were stocked for the voyage – gas, oil, cigarettes and food. Crooks don't know. He pointed the car straight down the road. (Kerouac1970, 156–7)*

The intent of this book is to disturb the complexity of human occupation, to embrace a diverse range of vantage points – conceptual, theoretical and pragmatic – and to reveal something of the more intangible underlying realities. The hope is to broaden the discussion. What Jack Kerouac's prose evokes is the illusory and sensuous nature of human occupation, that at any particular moment, we occupy a montage of multiple points or places simultaneously. These places are generated by us and/or maybe already exist within each of us. Instantaneously, our thoughts and our emotions draw us from the immediate physical location to places beyond it temporarily and spatially; and the associated feelings may be integral to the point of origin or disconnected, and sometimes, disquieting. As Berleant (1992) described, we are at the centre of the world that we experience. Perhaps this explains why the experience of others in the same place and time will invariably differ from our own.

Kerouac's mid-twentieth century drug-infused account of his 1947 road trip across America contrasts dramatically to that of the contemporary world, where technologies have extended our ability to morph in different ways – that is, to extend and destabilize the boundary or periphery of our physical occupancy. As the following narrative potently depicts:

> *I get driving directions and check for traffic using Google's real-time data. Don't take the 405 at this time of day. Clicking on the little orange person, I am taken out of my world of stereoscopic vision to one constituted by nine camera eyes and stitched together to form a panoramic digital bubble that lets me see streets, interiors, and even oceans 360 degrees horizontally and 290 degrees vertically, I start to see differently, as if I am flying above the world, zooming in and zooming out at will, in a multi-perspectival digital bubble. What does it mean that this panning and zooming has become (almost) natural, that it has become how I see and experience the world, or how I want to see and experience my world? (Presner, Shepard and Kawano 2014, 24)*

What the more recent, less poetic driving in Los Angeles narrative describes is the experience of numerous simultaneous realities made possible by increasingly widespread access to information technologies. Thanks to our ubiquitous devices, many of us live our lives sliding between physical and virtual realities, exercising a multitude of exponential extensions to our physical limitations. Expanded by our devices, everyday occupation has become a constellation of experiences and connections: slippages between here and anywhere, unrestricted, non-linear.

For many of us who live the more privileged life, this dynamic matrix of realities is the new normal. However, what occurs in societies with less access to technologies? Does the woman washing her clothes at the well in the Indian village think of her past life or project into the future, whether it is about dinner for her family, sharing stories with friends while in the fields, or how she would like to be in Delhi or return to her youth? Here again, occupation is composed of the past, present and future – physically by the pump with washing in hand, but emotionally or intellectually elsewhere.

What of the young boy with severe brain injury resulting from being king-hit[1] outside the local hotel? Now, (with the help of his carer), his life takes place in a motorized, technologically advanced chair and a responsive 'smart-unit'. With a simple slight movement of the boy's head, the unit automatically opens and the lights, air conditioning, blinds and other internal devices respond to his coming home. What could be an extremely limited occupancy has been transformed by the unit's array of sophisticated technologies which serve to extend his body's limitations. We can interpret that the boy's dependence on technology is a complex integration with his sense of self.

We become the culmination of these experiences. When Wittgenstein describes the child in the box or under a draped sheet, for whom the 'cubby' has become a house – in this moment and this space, the house is real. Wittgenstein states: 'thereupon it is interpreted as a house in every detail … He quite forgets that it is a chest; for him it actually is a house … . Then would it not also be correct to say he sees it as a house?'(1967, 206). The physical world has transformed through imagination and experience to be a particular place which the child occupies.

These stories of the child, the boy, the woman, the driver and Kerouac amplify the state of occupancy within any tangible setting that may be challenged, overridden, or manipulated by realities not only from within or outside the body but also by the body's capacity to project across space and time. By observing examples from the extremities of human occupation, we come to understand how the everyday plays out.

The following chapters within *Occupation: ruin, repudiation, revolution* probe extreme and diverse constructions of human occupation. This introductory chapter situates the book's precepts and challenges the reader to consider occupation in terms of the relationship between the interior of the body, the body itself, and the exterior world. You are asked to consider whether you can occupy, comfortably or authentically, the implications of any or all of the vantage points raised? Here, we draw on the work of Merleau-Ponty to introduce occupation as experience, of Sigmund Freud to theorize the complex synergetic interplay between the internal and external worlds, and of Acconci, Orlan and Stelarc to locate one's body within the ambit of others across space, time and command.

Each vantage point teases the fixed views of occupation and sets the scene for the author's conceptualization of occupation, infused with notions of ruin, repudiation, and or revolution.

OCCUPATION AS EXPERIENCE

Phenomenology seeks to understand (and explain) how 'experience is lived and felt' (Tomkins 2013, 262). Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposes that we experience the everyday places, things and events in terms of what they mean for us personally (52). Our surroundings offer opportunities that mould our experiences – and therefore, who we are. Inanimate things are just that; however, depending on how a person occupies a space, these elements become things – a handle is a handle when the particular object is used in that way. 'For a person whose hands are paralyzed or amputated, though, or for the person who, having never encountered a doorknob before, does not know to twist it, this knob is not a handle, and the door may very well be experienced as intrusive … '. (Bredlau 2010, 418).

The details of occupation are largely unrecognized: we simply exist. The person and the environment that he/she senses are a continuum, as Merleau-Ponty (1962), Berleant (1992) and others have discussed. For example, Berleant states that we do not just aesthetically experience the world; we engage with it through a 'multisensorial phenomenal involvement with the environment, place or object, which is immediate … ' and which differs every time we engage with the situation (Berleant 1992, 28). It is of interest that until the experience is interrupted in some way, such that we become conscious of the insertion or invasion, and in association, our degree of vulnerability or power, it is just taken for granted. Ideas, illusions, objects, places, people or collectives can all potentially transform the taken-for-granted world into a site of negotiation and reflection. For example, ' … the touch of a stranger who barely brushes against me can be experienced as invasive while the deep embrace of a friend is respectful … '. (Bredlau 2010, 412).