Foreword

The Assembled Enclosure

A recent rereading of the Kenneth Agnew (1968) essay titled “Assembled Enclosure” was timely in relation to the multiplicity of ideas and thoughts prompted by the essays included in this new book. In the essay, Agnew described the ever-changing role of the wall in contemporary interior design. He described how changing technologies were now ensuring that this plane now had to undertake new duties such as heating and servicing, responsibilities that went far beyond its traditional function of enclosing and delineating a room. In his writing, Agnew’s tone exposed his anxieties around this development, unsure if this was a positive moment in the changes to the obligations of the wall, or if something had been irreparably lost. It struck me that in the years since its publication, the wall that Agnew described was really a metaphor for the discipline of the interior: a subject that was evolving and had started to undertake new roles and responsibilities since the start of the Twentieth Century. At the time the interior was emerging as a distinct and divergent profession, questioning the traditional associations with other built environment practices such as architecture and shifting into its own conspicuous territories and activities. It was a time that signaled the emergence of the interior in its nascent form, a space and a discipline that was at a decisive moment in its development as a full formed and critically expansive field of practice, research and education.

Almost forty years later the question of the role of the interior, much like the wall, is still prevalent, yet the tone of the discourse is different. Now, the discourses around this subject are robust, expansive and confident in their remit, prevalent in all spheres of its practice, its cultures of research and education. It is a field of thinking and work that can comfortably accommodate and sustain the claims of many spatially related disciplines, their ideas, thoughts and discourses, all around space, its use and its futures. I think it is fair to say that the uncodified status of the Interior affords it this availability, an ability to be the recipient of a multiplicity of varying thoughts. I think it is fair to say that the presence of the interior and its central role in so many aspects all aspect of daily life ensures its convenience and accessibility for all kinds of exploration, both cerebral and also corporeal. It is a subject that welcomes the development of an expedient critical substance, because it is always open to definition, propagating a culture and a knowledge base that is expansive and one that is essentially fluid. In other words the definition and cultures of practice, research and education in the subject are yet to be unequivocally consolidated and explicitly systematized: a condition that prompts a permanent situation for the speculation on its beginnings, endings, its use and its substance.

In this context the impression of the assembled enclosure encapsulates an important point; one far more significant than the wall plane and its function in making space as Agnew saw it. Instead, the assembled
enclosure is now an image, a description and representation of the prominence and emergence of the interior, its role and the status of the discipline in the early twenty first century. The assembled enclosure now describes an unconfined arrangement of ideas, systems, objects, and elements: environments that are or can be positioned in or around a particularized or expanded field of activities. The essays in this book exemplify the assembled enclosure and thus the new interior. They range from the limitless to the confined, mobile to the static, they contain ritualized, gestural site-specific and terrain-vagues. Anthropologies of the urban interior feature heavily. The essays contain, as one describes, an archipelago of relationships. I enjoyed reading the essays in the book, a publication that has been intelligently curated and expertly edited by Luciano Crespi, a role that must have been similar to directing a particularly complex movie, and all of its constituent parts. I read this book up close and at a distance, viewed it at a glance and slowly, read it in a variety of environments, from trains to airports, to streets to my home. It felt right in all of these surroundings, and made me reflect upon the setting in which I was located. It made some of them appear new, as if was seeing and experiencing many of them for the first time.

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REFERENCES