

Fulcrum

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do it yourself.

g.smith

The British home is not a site for radical intervention. As Adolf Loos pithily remarked:

'the work of art is revolutionary, the house is conservative.'

Too often, the architect will attempt to rudely intrude into the ideological sanctuary of the home, and impress upon it his unwanted art. These attempts are generally so patronising toward the DIY attitude of the British homemaker that it has them showing the architect the door and reaching for the leaded windows.

Might now not be a good time to reconsider the quintessentially British tradition of DIY? To champion it as a home-grown alternative, or addition, to the prevailing trend of importing a self-build culture? Although at first glance self-build might seem a world apart from the Albertan architect imposing his will on the ignorant people, it is really just the latest effort to introduce art into the making of the home. Even if it is an art rooted in a pretty commendably anarchistic ideology.

The argument for promoting self-build is, in part, in reaction to statistics that show it taking up a much smaller share of the market in the United Kingdom than it does in our western European neighbours. But would the statistics be so similar if they took into account every Do-It-Yourself extension, ad hoc attic, reconfigured garage and pop-up potting shed? After all, how many more people have put together a greenhouse than a Walter Segal bungalow?

Architects practicing on the fringe of the 60s counter-culture frequently toyed with participatory homemaking: Lucien Kroll, Gaetano Pesce, and even Frei Otto with his Ökohaus. By contrast, the work of their DIY successors (like Lacaton and Vassal) was for many years considered a scurrilous, sub-architectural activity.

One of the very few recent British architects to recognise the importance of DIY culture are FAT. Their Mancunian housing project, Islington

Square, provided an opportunity to 'position personal taste and owner adaptation as vital components of new housing' (in the words of Charles Holland). By doing so, they gave great importance to the subsequent life of the building, raising the uncelebrated activities of the home improver up to a par with the more conventional components of architectural style. They enfranchised the residents with a voice, and the ability to apply a DIY attitude to more than just their own homes, but also their neighbourhood.

DIY can be used as a tool for the creation of house extensions, or for whole communities. Institutions like Hackspace, FabLab and the Men's Shed movement show how a shared culture of DIY-making can be the foundation for creating an amenity with both practical and social value. These, and places like these, are founded on the belief that the act of making leads us onto a path of greater inquiry into the world around us. That making needn't be the preserve of the craftsman, but an accessible tool for everyone to change and adapt the architectures in their lives.

In *Unto This Last* Ruskin proposes that a building's ornament comes not from applied decoration, but from the enjoyment of the craftsman who built it. Whilst his elitist notion of 'craft' is problematic, not having the universality of DIY, the underlying proposition is radical. We might go as far to interpret it as a call for an ornament of DIY: a suggestion that there is a beauty in the joyful self-expression of the home improver that is unattainable by the architect alone. After all, DIY does not feature heavily in the National Building Specifications (although nor do beauty or enjoyment for that matter).

In amongst the calls to increase the reach of self-build culture, I wish to make this complimentary manifesto. To provide an architecture that facilitates adaptation, and raises the agency of the resident to a level of equality with the architect and builder. Let's design 'homes' with enough humility to embrace the idea of 'improvement.'

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together apart.

s.bose

Let's be clear. Participation is not autonomy. Participation predicates a relationship of power and permission. It implies that someone else sets the rules, and then allows you to participate. This extends to the selection of who can and cannot participate; though the intentions may be, to use an often abused word, 'democratic', this does not ensure any kind of parity or evenness in contribution or representation.

The freedom postulated by participation is partial, and available only to those with the necessary means, by which I mean the availability of resources (including time and free will, as well as money). It is not emancipation. Indeed despite rhetoric around community building, participation — such as may be demonstrated in special interest or neighbourhood planning groups — are subject to private agendas. Indeed a 'community' unifies around certain common interests, but does so implicitly to the exclusion of other, less common (but perhaps no less valid) interests.

Participation, as it occurs in most architectural practice, is marginal — certainly in the UK. Again, this is not necessarily reflective of a lack of intention. Public projects (that is to say, those instigated by local councils, or affecting any area of 'public realm') are subject to endless rounds of local consultation. To varying extents, stakeholders are invited to participate in the outcome of state-backed developments. Inevitably, this is a painful process; people are cynical of the illusory extent of participation, and 'consultation-fatigue' is one of those sickening but undeniable phrases to have emerged out of the phenomenon of cursory gestures towards 'inclusion'. Only those with the means can participate in such voluntary, even if ultimately productive, conflict. Those with the least ability to participate are often the weakest or least visible members of society.

Within the fields of architecture, planning and spatial practice, the majority of practitioners advocating participation and community-building align themselves to the political left; in

such a framework it is hard to imagine productive conflict. The enthusiasm around participatory practices in architecture, such as collective custom build, bounces around people of a similar social and intellectual milieu.

Who will set the rules of participation so that the most disenfranchised among us can participate — and why would they want to?

Colin Ward's significant text outlining the anarchist approach to housing describes a network of "autonomous free associations that work for the satisfaction of human needs". Indeed, quoting his own translation of Italian architect and planner Giancarlo de Carlo, he describes a predicament from 1948 that still sounds familiar today: "The social organs of today, capitalism and the state, are able to do nothing to resolve this desperate crisis [in housing]. New materials, new constructional process, are of no avail as long as the principles of privilege and authority prevail."

But is an anarchist devolution of authority a position that we'd like to advocate? My earliest experience of self-build communities were informal settlements in Calcutta, where I grew up. The very blood of the city, slum dwellers and street squatters, organise bodies of support founded on common ethnicities or trades. They shelter and support each other, regardless of their contribution to the city's economic and social life. Thus participation on a community level takes place in the absence of a welfare state; here, the paradigm allows the state to retract. Writing on 'dweller control' (rather than on participation) John FC Turner states: "the common debate is between 'the conventional left which despises capitalism, and the conventional right which abhors personal dependency upon state institutions. I agree with both, so that nobody committed to either side can agree with me.'" The problem of transposing a self-organised culture to one of entrenched welfare capitalism is a most radical act, far more than imposing the architect's will.

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