

Albert Borgmann

A Turn to Comprehension & Competence

6/21/12 DIY is a turn to comprehension and competence and away from ignorance and consumption. The ignorance I have in mind is <sup>of</sup> the unavoidable kind — how does your computer ~~and~~ ~~the~~ iPhone work? Yes, you push, touch, and slide. But why does that work? What makes the screen sensitive to touch and motion? Where do your movements summon pictures, music, and text from? Yes, from chips. But how does a chip work? And I'm just

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scratching the surface of these impenetrable and unintelligible structures.

Of course, there are the benefits of the opaque and concealed structures, the ease of calling up my favorite music, of getting the news, of contacting my friends. ~~It's sheer and unceasing~~ → The iPhone is a source of ~~rich~~ ~~of~~ ~~diverse~~ ~~and~~ ~~uncumbered~~ <sup>of endless</sup> pleasures. They're easy to enjoy and hard to resist. That kind of enjoyment is consumption.

Are there objects, other than iPhones, that

produce music? Consider my fellow  
 Missonian, the violin maker Mark  
 Hellingger. His major raw material is  
 wood. He knows <sup>its origin, its</sup> ~~where it comes from,~~  
~~what species,~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~what age,~~ ~~what~~ <sup>a</sup> grain.  
 He shapes it mostly by hand, glues the  
 pieces together, varnishes the thing,  
 strings it. When ~~the violin~~  
 he looks at the finished violin, he  
 understands it all the way down,  
 and he sees a monument to his  
 competence.

6/25/12

Whether anything like a comprehension  
 of the entire world is possible today,  
 I'm not sure; and anyone's competence

has to be limited. And yet we can  
 be sure that the circumscribed comprehen-  
 sion and competence of DIY are  
 immensely valuable - they circumscribe  
 the good life in a culture of ignorance  
 and consumption. More than that,  
 they reveal that underneath and  
 amidst the forbidding structures and  
 slick commodities of the technological  
 culture there is ~~still~~ an engaging  
 and ennobling world.

Still ~~the~~ its limits cast a shadow  
 on DIY. If it's so beneficial, is  
 it enough that you and I and  
 she and he each lives in their own  
 little wholesome world? What fills

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me with great sorrow, and not just  
me, I'm sure, is the fact that the  
victims of DIY are found in so many  
little worlds, and yet they fail to  
have a collective effect on the  
world at large that nationally and  
globally is dominated by the forces  
of commodification and its vaguely  
sensed consequences of growing  
incomprehension & incompetence.

Consider these movements: Voluntary  
simplicity, farmers markets, the  
hospice movement, the new  
urbanism, ... All of them are  
devoted to recovering within their

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compass a measure of understanding  
and skill. But politically they  
count for very little. They don't  
converge & cooperate to take on  
~~the~~ the deeply flawed mainstream  
culture.

~~So~~

So that has to be next - recognizing  
the diaspora of ~~the~~ good people and of  
the good life, joining together,  
and making a difference in  
electoral politics.