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A Turn to Comprehensibility: Competence

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DIG is a turn to comprehension and
consequence and away from ignorance
and consumption. The ignorance I
have in mind is the unavoidable
kind—how does your temper affect
your colour work? Yes, you push,
touch, and slide, but why does that
work? What makes the screen sensitive
to touch and motion? Where are your
movements summons pictures, music,
and text from? Yes, from chips. But
how does a chip work? And I'm just
scratching the surface of these
impenetrable and unintelligible structures.

Of course, there are the benefits of the
opaque and concealed structures, the
case of calling up my favorite music,
of getting the news, of contacting my
friends, The iPhone is a source
of rich, diverse, and uncannily
terrestrial pleasures. They're easy to enjoy and
hard to resist. That kind of
enjoyment is consumption.

Are there objects, other than 'phones, that
produce music? Consider my fellow
instrumentalist, the violin maker Mark
Hellinger. His major raw material is
wood. He knows, when it comes from,
and
Geometrical species, at that age, what grain,
He shapes it mostly by hand, glues the
pieces together, varnishes the thing,
strings it. When the violin
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he looks at the finished violin, he
understands it all the way down,
and he sees a monument to his
competence.
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 prevailed structures and
rules commodities of the technological
culture there is still an engaging
and enlightening world.

Still, 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
me with great sorrow, and not just me, I'm sure, it's the fact that the
vices 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
homesteading movement, the new
communism, ... all of them are
dedicated to recovering within their
compass a measure of understanding
and skill. But politically they
count for very little. They don't
converge & cooperate to take on
the deeply flawed mainstream
culture.

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