Not everything is new in DIY: Home remodelling by amateurs as urban practice

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abstract

Self-organised forms of intervention in urban spaces are currently much debated in urban studies and the fields of architecture and urban design. The paper argues that the more conventional and long-standing remodelling of homes by amateurs in Europe and North-America is largely ignored in these debates. Tying in with the literature on vernacular builders in the Global North and South and recent user-centred accounts of architecture in the social sciences, I explore home remodelling from the sociological perspective of practice theory. Based on a case study of an on-going remodelling project of a single family house located in Darmstadt, Germany, I provide a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling with regard to three main characteristics of social practices as discussed by sociologists Theodore Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz: repetition, collectivity and socio-materiality. This allows us to grasp the multiple ways in which these activities extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. Ultimately, it is the fact that home remodelling projects in European and North-American cities are not merely explained by the rationale of cost saving which makes them potentially equally urban as the interventions discussed in the literature on DIY urbanism. If concepts such as agency and authorship in the debates about DIY urbanism are to be developed further, it is vital to deepen our understanding of the widespread everyday modifications, alterations and conversions of homes by amateurs and to explore the interlinkages that exist between these two fields of action.

Introduction

Self-organised forms of intervention in urban spaces have gained prominence in urban studies and the fields of architecture and urban design. These practices share an interest in public spaces as sites of encounter and appropriation, and they are very often characterised by a scarcity of resources. The low-budget

approach of most of these projects manifests itself in a creative engagement with the materiality of urban spaces, with practices of appropriation, re-use and makeover, often facilitated by the input of architects, planners, designers, and artists. Scholars have both embraced (Douglas and Hinkel, 2011; Crawford, 2012; Lehtovuori, 2012) as well as critically interrogated these forms of participatory, self-organised and often temporal interventions as new forms of (austerity) urbanism (Stickells, 2011; Grubbauer, 2013; Thorpe, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013).

In contrast, the more conventional remodelling of homes by amateurs is largely ignored in the literature on urban interventions. This literature is mostly concerned with projects that are both more public in nature and usually led by some members of the creative class, both of which seemingly qualifies them as essentially 'urban'. However, the self-organised remodelling of homes in European and North American countries is an established practice which has also become economically very significant over the past decades. Since the 1960s scholars from both architecture and the social sciences have been engaged with this phenomenon. They have challenged the distinction between 'high architecture' and vernacular practice (Upton, 1991) and shown how particularly residential buildings designed by architects change over time due to collective interventions and alterations across generations (Boudon, 1972; Brand, 1994; Scott, 2007). These practices of home remodelling are far from being merely economically motivated but rather culturally and symbolically loaded and rooted in everyday life (Rapoport, 1968; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Atkinson, 2006; Oliver, 2006 [1992]). However, what has been rarely discussed is whether and how these practices can be seen as genuinely *urban* in nature, the vernacular being associated with traditional, local and more rural forms of architecture.

This paper explores home remodelling as urban practice from the sociological perspective of practice theory. It ties in with the literature on vernacular builders and user-centred accounts of architecture in arguing that home remodelling projects beyond calculation and concerns for minimising costs are also fundamentally shaped by daily routines of dwelling, by cultural preferences, improvisation and learning through experience. To illustrate this argument I will draw on an exploratory case study of an on-going remodelling project of a single family house located in Darmstadt, Germany, which also serves as small guest house. My aim is to show – for the European context – that amateur home remodelling activities can be regarded as social practices that are potentially equally *urban* as those discussed in the literature on DIY urbanism. For this, a more in-depth consideration of the concept of social practices is needed than those provided in the existent literature on urban interventionist practices and the recent studies of the interface between buildings and theirs users in the social sciences (Strebel, 2011; Jacobs and Merriman, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2012). To

argue this point, I will provide a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling with regard to three main characteristics of social practices as discussed by sociologists Theodore Schatzki (1996; 2010) and Andreas Reckwitz (2002; 2008b): *repetition*, *collectivity* and *socio-materiality*. I will show how this kind of conceptualisation allows us to grasp the multiple ways in which these home remodelling practices extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. In conclusion, I will argue that it is the very fact that DIY-remodelling practices are *not* merely explained by the rationale of cost saving that also allows us to conceive them as urban practices.

The paper is structured in the following way: The first section provides an overview of the literature on home remodelling and discusses why it is largely ignored in the recent accounts of DIY urbanism. In the second part of the paper, the two strands of scholarship are discussed which I draw on to advance a conceptualisation of home remodelling as social practice, namely the long established field of vernacular studies and the more recent practice-centred approaches to architecture in the social sciences. Third, the case study is introduced and the processes of remodelling and challenges encountered by the homeowner are presented. The fourth section gives an interpretation of these activities from a praxeological perspective and in the conclusion I end with arguments for conceiving of these social practices of altering and remodelling of architecture as urban practices.

DIY home remodelling and the architectural profession

In what follows I shall focus on the type of home remodelling that we find in Western contexts by laypersons who act simultaneously as building owner, building contractor, 'site engineer', decision maker, and sometimes even as the craftsperson carrying out the actual work. As self-proclaimed experts in planning and design issues, they choose *not* to delegate these tasks to architectural professionals, although parts of the technical implementation and execution, or building inspection and the acceptance of the construction work can nonetheless (but must not necessarily) be carried out by professionals. Apart from purely functional and technical requirements (such as the laying of new pipes or the replacement of electric cables), also design aspects figure in the process, involving tasks that require creative decisions and solution strategies, however small they may be: selecting materials, choosing colours, deciding on a particular design element, specifying the position of entrances and passages, ceiling height, room layout, and so on. Alterations and conversions usually pertain to modifications of people's everyday environment – the home, or holiday home, the premises of the family business – and are taken up for a variety of reasons:

they include technical defects, lack of space, and unsatisfying living conditions which can lead to the desire to modify people's environment and reshape the way they live.

In the cities of Europe and North America large portions of the 20th century housing stock are subject to such forms of remodelling, refurbishment, upgrading and various kinds of alterations by the owners. The sites of these actions have been and continue to be often initially highly uniform neighbourhoods, such as the semi-detached houses of the British suburbs (Oliver et al., 1981) or working class neighbourhoods in German cities, both built between the two world wars, as well as post-war single-family home neighbourhoods, often in suburban locations. Society-wide processes of home remodelling began first to take place in the 1960s when working and middle class home owners enjoyed new levels of prosperity and pre-war houses did not meet the needs of the emerging post-war life style. The significant economic growth of the DIY sector in Europe and North America, however, started only in the 1980s with the establishment of specialised companies that catered to the needs of the self-builders (Roush, 1999). The market expanded continuously until the late 1990s, after which sales have been more or less stable and companies such as U.S. Home Depot or the German Bauhaus have been expanding internationally to make up for declining growth rates on domestic markets. At present, there is a whole industry of building supplies stores catering to home-owners, and assistance is provided through TV shows, guidebooks, specialised trade fairs, and online communities. The core markets of the DIY industry are found in North America and Europe, Germany being by far the strongest market in Europe, with the three largest German companies Obi, Bauhaus and Hornbach being also among the TOP 10 building supply companies in Europe (Dähne Verlag, 2013: 4). Various surveys suggest that the clients of the DIY industry while certainly a highly diverse group (Williams, 2004) are clearly not among the low-income segments of the population, rather on the contrary. Vannini and Taggart (2014) report for the case of the U.S. that the majority of those participating in self-building (about 2/3) come from social-economic indexes ABC, highly to relatively affluent groups. Similarly, a German survey of the income-levels of Bauhaus clients reveals that they are considerably above the average of the German population (VuMA, 2014). Historic accounts of DIY show that there have been times in which economic considerations and necessity prevailed in giving rise to DIY home maintenance and remodelling in Europe, such as the periods after WWI when DIY constituted a financial necessity for the impoverished working and middle-classes or during the period of reconstruction following WWII with its lack of skilled labour (Goldstein, 1998; Atkinson, 2006). The DIY remodelling of homes today is certainly in tune with the *zeitgeist* and not primarily explained by economic rationality. However,

viewing it merely as a mass-marketed phenomenon does not do it justice either, as Paul Atkinson (*ibid.*: 5f.) argues in pointing out how DIY activity has acted and continues to act as democratising agency in:

> giving people independence and self-reliance, freedom from professional help, encouraging the wider dissemination and adoption of modernist design principles, providing an opportunity to create more personal meaning in their own environments or self-identity, and opening up previously gendered or class-bound activities to all.

Most usefully, we should accept the inherent contractions that arise of the collapsing roles of amateur and professional as well as consumer and producer (Brown, 2008: 360) and keep the multiplicity and diversity of motifs that simultaneously enter contemporary DIY home remodelling activities in mind:

> Part self-expressive hobby, part ostentatious consumption and skill display, and part convenient utilization of handy money-saving skills DIY building and home-improvement symbolise and exercise knowledge capital, lifestyle choices, and autonomous control over possessions and their personalisation. (Vannini and Taggart, 2014: 271)

We find some architects, designers, photographers and theorists fascinated by the results and impact of amateur home remodelling projects, both in positive and negative ways – a recent example being the discussion sparked by the blog 'Ugly Belgian Houses' of a Belgian amateur photographer, who has made a passion out of documenting bizarre Belgian residences that ignore any conventional aesthetic rules and role-models (e.g. Baus, 2013; Weisbrod, 2013). In general, the remodelling of homes by residents, however, has been of marginal interest to scholarship in the field of architecture which reflects the problematic relationship of the profession with the user (Hill, 2003; Rambow and Seifert, 2006; Brown, 2008). While the user is important to consider in the design process, the profession also depends on securing its monopoly on authoritative knowledge and making sure that only buildings and spaces produced by architects acquire the title of architecture (Cuff, 1992). Modernism understood and depicted users as passive and predictable, employing various tools of abstraction such as drawings, photography and architectural handbooks that served to 'normalise' the human body and the architectural experience (Ackerman, 2002; Imrie, 2003; Hill, 2003; Emmons and Mihalache, 2013). Nevertheless, we find important work of architects and architectural theorists who have drawn attention to the processual and open-ended nature of architecture ever since the debates on the politics of participation and user control of the 1960s. Examples include the work of Herman Hertzberger (1991), John Habraken and his colleagues of the *open building* community (Habraken, 1998; Kendall and Teicher, 1999) or scholars engaged in post-occupancy

research in the Anglo-Saxon context (van Voordt and van der Wegen, 2005). Since the late 1990s we can note more generally an interest to rethink concepts of authorship and agency within the discipline of architecture (Awan et al., 2011; Anderson, 2014; Till, 2014), much of it inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre. At the same time, we can see a reworking of the relation between architects and users through the renewed experimentation with participatory approaches, concepts such as co-production or design-build programs (Hill, 1998; Jones and Card, 2011; Jones et al., 2012), all of it also contributing to the current discourse on Do-it-yourself urbanism.

Many of these new approaches to agency are operating in the urban realm and are meant to contribute to enhancing public urban life, or indeed, as some argue to 'produce' urbanity (cf. Baier et al., 2013; Dell, 2013). Architects and designers certainly find new terrains of action in these new urban practices. While they are apparently 'acting outside of the profession' (Crawford, 2012: 84) they are simultaneously establishing new claims on authority which are reflected in the current shift of the architectural academy and the curricula of architectural schools towards an urban focus as Dana Cuff has observed (Cuff, 2014). Amateur home remodelling in the context of European cities is of no particular concern in these articulations of the discipline's 'urban desire' (*ibid.*: 95): it is not driven by any particular intellectual or political project, lacks the input of the creative class, is seemingly concerned only with private spaces – single-family homes often located in suburbs (the anti-urban par excellence) – and is never so crucial in securing livelihoods and survival as in the cases of self-help building in the cities of the South. However, my suggestion in this paper is that if the concepts of agency, authorship and self-made urbanism are to be developed further, it is vital to deepen our understanding of the widespread everyday modifications, alterations and conversions of homes by amateurs. Significant work beyond the discipline of architecture to support this claim is found in two fields of research which I will discuss in the following section: first, the field of vernacular studies and second, studies of architecture within the social sciences informed by sociological theories of practice.

Vernacular builders and architecture in everyday life

The first strand of scholarship which I wish to draw on is the multidisciplinary field of vernacular studies, made up by architectural historians, preservationists, anthropologists and geographers concerned with the actions of non-professionals in building or adapting their homes. Studies of vernacular architecture have traditionally been concerned with the pre-industrial and, particularly in Europe and North America, mostly rural building heritage. This has implied a focus on

the documentation and classification of *authentic* buildings 'that have to be studied and appreciated in their "pristine" state, and that accordingly need to be safeguarded from the onslaughts of modernisation and change' (Vellinga, 2006: 83). However, a number of scholars within the field have long called for more dynamic, integrative and future oriented approaches that do not reify the categories of vernacular and modern (AlSayyad and Bourdieur, 1989; Upton, 1993; Asquith and Vellinga, 2006b). One of the most important voices in this respect, architectural historian Dan Upton, has specifically criticised his colleagues within architectural history for limiting their scope of work by accepting 'in principle the design profession's account of architectural invention as a master narrative of the creation of the human landscape' (1991: 195) the result of which is the distinction between architecture as high culture and the vernacular as low (*ibid.*: 196). For Upton, the categories of high and low are historic and socially constructed and should constitute the topic of historical inquiry not the basis of analysis (*ibid.*: 197). In the face of ongoing processes of modernisation, economic globalisation and cultural hybridisation scholars such as Upton (1993), Glassie (2000) and Vellinga (2006) suggest to focus on the merging of modern and traditional rather than the reinforcement of the dichotomy between these two categories.

The evident shift of urban growth to the Global South over the past decades and the fact that the vast majority of population in the cities of the Global South is living in various forms of informal settlements has also spurred attempts to conceptualise slums as the new vernacular (Rapoport, 1988; Peattie, 1992; Kellett and Napier, 1995; Kellett, 2005). Architect and anthropologist Peter Kellett, for instance, notes with reference to his work on informal settlements in Latin America how these settlements 'may well appear disordered, chaotic and unplanned [...] [but] do in fact respond to purposeful decisions and actions which are based on culturally constructed images of what dwellings and settlements should be like' (2005: 23). Central to this are the meanings of 'home' and the 'imagined futures' (Holston, 1991) that self-help builders aspire to, all of which asks for culturally grounded approaches to complement political-economic analyses (AlSayyad, 1993). Klaufus (2000), for instance, shows how residents of informal settlements in Ecuador use form, style and materials as markers of social distinction. While local buildings traditions do play a role in this, they are complemented by global cultural products and imported architectural design sourced through transnational migrant networks (Klaufus, 2012).

The crucial aspect of these debates about the vernacular in the Global North and South for the study of home remodelling by amateurs is that most of the authors mentioned above arrive at the following conclusion: it is the process in which knowledge about building traditions, techniques, and values is transferred that is

ultimately of more interest than the categorisation, classification, documentation of the built objects by themselves (Oliver, 1989; Upton, 1993). The authenticity of a building on the grounds of its age and structure is no longer the decisive criteria for the vernacular which allows very well to understand home remodelling as practice in which vernacular and modern building are merged. However, the suggested focus on the processes 'of the transmission, interpretation, negotiation and adaptation of vernacular knowledge, skills and experience' (Asquith and Vellinga, 2006a: 7) does obviously pose methodological challenges, especially for architectural theorists, historians and practitioners, and we need to turn to sociological concepts to develop that focus further.

The second strand of scholarship, which I consequently wish to draw on to conceptualise practices of home remodelling, is found in the social sciences, particularly in human geography, where practice approaches to architecture have considerably gained in visibility over the past decade (Lees, 2001; Jacobs, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose et al., 2010, Strebel, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2012). The work of geographer Jane M. Jacobs is particularly influential. Practice approaches have also entered the field of building sciences with scholars exploring, for instance, user practices in domestic retrofits that aim at reducing energy and emissions (Bartiaux et al., 2014; Gram-Hanssen, 2014; Judson and Maller, 2014). These studies share a focus 'on the more-than representational or performative aspects of architecture' (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011: 218); they explore how architecture is lived in, appropriated, sensed and interacted with in everyday life following sociological theories of social practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki et al., 2001; Latour, 2005).

Among these practice-centred examinations of architecture we find a number of studies focusing on forms of building use and maintenance work that re-make the fabric of the building (Edensor, 2011; Jacobs and Cairns, 2011; Strebel, 2011). Strebel's analysis of maintenance practices of concierges in a multi-storey housing estate in Glasgow is insightful in pointing towards the difference between merely finding practices *in* buildings and examining 'housing and architecture as sites of continuous *building work*' (Strebel, 2011: 259, emphasis added). Strebel argues that the housing estate as a

> living building [...] is performed in and through the successive scenes of interruptions, troubles and disturbances that concierges continually encounter and the ways they solve these problems in order to keep the building going. (*ibid.*)

This aspect of (ad hoc) problem solving as part of building work is equally fundamental for the remodelling of homes by amateurs as social practice, as we will see in the discussion of the case study. While the concierge is a special case in his/her professional dedication to a particular building, practices of dwelling

will almost inevitably entail some building work as Jane Jacobs and Peter Merriman note:

> Inhabitants and users are necessarily everyday designers, or at least re-designers: intervening in the fabric of a building (knocking a door though here, changing a window there, wallpapering everywhere) or re-programming its planned for activities (using a study as a bedroom, a dining room as a lounge, a former factory as an art gallery, a window to suicide by). (2011: 216)

Strebel, Jacobs and many of the above cited studies draw on Actor-Network-Theory for conceptualising the interaction of human and nonhuman actors based on Bruno Latour's 'flat ontology' (2005). Strebel, for instance, argues explicitly in favour of 'a more symmetrical understanding of "building work"', criticising that in many culture-centred studies of the use of architecture 'from the outset, people and what they do are considered as being separate from the building' (2011: 248). But when do we speak of practices? Does any action performed by the concierge high-rise in the course of his maintenance work already constitute a social practice? This doesn't become quite clear from Strebel's account neither do we find an answer to this in Jacobs and Merriman's above cited comprehensive overview of practice approaches to architecture (2011). From the latter it seems that virtually anything that people *do* in, around and with buildings can be understood as practice: living, sleeping, working, owning or visiting a building, maintaining or cleaning, driving past, skateboarding as well as 'free-running' around a building are all referred to as practices by Jacobs and Merriman (*ibid.*: 213).

In contrast, in the following discussion I wish to adopt an understanding of social practices which bears on Theodore Schatzki's social ontology according to which 'materiality helps compose sociality and social phenomena' through 'nexuses of practices and material arrangements' (Schatzki, 2010: 123). While the material arrangements in Schatzki's conceptualisation resemble the networks of actor-network theory, practices as conceived by Schatzki have no equivalent in actor-network theory. As a result, actor-network theory is, as Schatzki argues, 'unable to study relations between practices and material arrangements' (2010: 135). However, this is exactly my interest is in this study on home remodelling projects as urban practices. Drawing on Schatzki, I take 'practice' to be a concept that redefines the relationship between the cultural and the social. In this understanding, social practice is the proper site of the social, defined as 'routinised types of behaviour necessarily dependent on a knowing-*how,* and held together by practical understanding', according to Reckwitz (2008a: 111, original emphasis). The following in-depth analysis of a case of home remodelling will illustrate this conception, foregrounding the importance of practical, implicit and routinised knowledges in dealing with unexpected challenges and difficulties.

Learning and the unpredictability of things

I will draw on an exploratory case study conducted in 2010-2011 to illustrate my arguments. For more than two years I regularly took accommodation in a small hotel in Darmstadt, Germany, run by the owner Mr Müller[1] for over twenty years. The study takes up observations made during my regular stays in the hotel, uses data from an extended interview with the owner and also refers to several on-site inspections of the house together with the owner. Additional background information was obtained in regular talks with Mr Müller over the years concerning his past accomplishments and future plans to remodel and refurbish the house.[2]

The case as such is ordinary: it is a guest house located at the city's suburbs in a mixed residential area with single family houses and social housing estates from different historical phases in the twentieth century. Mr Müller purchased the single family house in 1990 as a family residence, and the structure has continually been altered and extended ever since. The family's domicile is located on the ground floor, both upper floors contain six apartments in all, available for rent to hotel guests.

The remodelling work started with Mr Müller's initial step to register as a hotel operator and obtain the administrative authorization for running an accommodation business. This procedure was quite a challenge in terms of persistence and assertiveness, as Mr Müller describes during the interview:

> Well, like I said, I was running a fairly large restaurant at the time therefore it seemed obvious to be moving towards the hotel business. So I got on the nerves of those guys at the building inspection office and the regulatory agency long enough to get a hotel license. I eventually succeeded because some 40, 80 – almost 100 m² of additional residential space was created in the process [...] I guess ... Darmstadt's officials, at least some of them, have now probably more regrets than

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1   Name changed.

2   Remarks on methodology: An episodic interview with a high proportion of narrative elements was chosen to grant access to the experiential world of the layperson and his implicit stock of practical knowledge. The extended interview of 2,5 hours was embedded in an open, self-reflexive approach to the field, and flanked by the development of a grounded theory. Also, it proved crucial that the interview was conducted in situ. This allowed the interviewee to describe the processes close to, within and on the objects themselves. Talking about renovation experiences in the case of Mr Müller implied the reactivation of past actions, which had a very physical component: for instance, when the interviewee picked up objects, touched surfaces or re-enacted bodily movements. During our interview Mr Müller frequently and vividly described the drilling, hammering or removing of plaster by using the corresponding gestures. The interview on the spot allowed for the change of location within the house, and for on-site inspections of the objects in question.

hair on their heads for granting me permission, but still they did, so that's that, it's done and dusted, I am not going to back-paddle now; and what my children want to make of it in the future is up to them.

During the last two decades the structure was extensively renovated and altered: It started with the conversion of the loft and the upper floor into apartments available for renting, complete with bathrooms and kitchenettes. Meanwhile parts of the interior fittings had to be replaced again, a terrace was laid on the upper floor and the building façade facing the garden got wood-panelled; just recently the roof was given a new tiling and insulation. The different renovation phases were financed stage by stage: When to take which building measures partly depended on technical demands, but also to a large degree on the interests, preferences and passions of the owner, who describes himself as a person 'with a grass-green heart' since energy-efficient design principles are of paramount importance to him. Having no higher education grade or vocational training of any kind, Mr Müller – born in 1942 – was not trained as a structural engineer but aspires to expand his knowledge and skills on building techniques. He describes himself to be a person who likes to 'juggle as many balls as possible', and he is dreaming of enrolling as senior citizen student at university to take courses in green building and sustainable construction.

The remodelling of Mr Müller's house over the past two decades is clearly not to be understood as a linear process. On the contrary, the project was replete with imponderabilities and fraught with hurdles: from licensing to financing to finding experienced tradesmen and dealing with mistakes along the way. The process as a whole, and each phase of the renovation in itself, was always open to changes in strategy and compromises, dependent on both the engagement with other parties involved, i.e. city officials, craftspersons, neighbours, and the handling of things, i.e. materials, the fabric of the building, their qualities and defects. Other studies on self-building and home remodelling confirm this picture:

With existing structures, the 'unpredictability of things' during a renovation process is distinctly higher than with a new building. Many a surprising discovery is only made by *doing things*, by intervening in the structure and 'getting it done'. It is not until the existing structure is demolished that the layers beneath are brought to light; only then hidden structures and materials become visible, and the spatial impact of a new room layout cannot be experienced before the wall is actually torn down. Erecting, installing and applying new material also has unpredictable aspects – the effect of a colour will only show by applying it to an object, and the functionality of technical features manifests itself during the installation process. It is at these points when plans are changed and replacements or readjustments are made. All this is even more relevant in cases

such as the one described here, where an already existing house was bought and then remodelled with only rudimentary plans at hand because the date of construction lies so far back. Dealing with all these challenges, surprises, and failures means that alteration processes are clearly also learning processes, as Mr Müller's descriptions suggest:

> You see, I had already self-built a house in 1964/65 together with my father and I quite enjoyed the experience, and I've learnt a few lessons seeing the mistakes my father had made, I tried to transfer the experience while building this rather large 150-seat restaurant in 1976, 'cause I always had a huge interest in constructing and engineering, that's probably why I do a lot of thinking about building materials and regulations and all sorts of things all the time, and so you acquire just more and more knowledge. I understand a tiny bit about [...] dew points, I know how to calculate it, where it's gotta be measured, for instance outside here. I know a thing or two about windows and what is absolutely essential. At the time I installed the windows 17 or 18 years ago they were considerably better than required by the standards, well, and nowadays I'd take windows that are triple glazed. [...] So you see, you slowly start to build up knowledge over time, and with the things I don't know I can always ring up [my friend] Albrecht and he'll be telling me how it's done.

As evident in the description above, the behaviour and activities of the layperson in the context of remodelling architecture can neither be described as rule-governed or norm-following, nor can the operations be explained in terms of rational decision-making. The practical knowledge expressed in these types of behaviour is used to distinguish between suitable, good and unsuitable practices, and cannot be separated from the acting individual, hence it cannot be represented as a static inventory or 'explicated' as a set of propositions (Reckwitz, 2008a: 117). Practical knowledge is not *knowing that* but *knowing how,* and thus it is 'only in the *act of dealing with* problems, in the way things are used and procedures are applied that [this type of knowledge] "is brought into action"'(Hörning, 2001: 28, original emphasis). Applied to the practice of DIY-remodelling, this implies that the key to success is not so much being in possession of technical expertise, but rather that the person carrying out the task has developed a 'practical sense' of how to possibly obtain this expertise and actually implement it in practice; it is about counterbalancing the lack of expertise and acquiring the appropriate know-how, or, as Mr Müller puts it: 'So, I've just been genning up on this.' The crucial point is thus not the knowledge a layperson *has* or *possesses*, but rather how they put to *use and apply* this knowledge which is brought into action by dealing with unexpected challenges and difficulties. While self-builders certainly do anticipate and design their actions, setting strategic goals, however, does not *precede* the action; it is situationally embedded in the circumstances governing the action, that is, it is part of the 'informal logic of action' in Reckwitz' terms (2008a: 126).

Mr Müller benefits from a practical sense he has developed through previous experience at the time when he and his father built a house in the 1960s. His father had, in turn, 'learned a lot' from Mr Müller's grandfather, who ran a small painting business. On the other hand, Mr Müller has established a network of friends and advisors to consult over the years. His longstanding friend Albrecht is an architect who – if necessary – draws up plans, and another friend, who works for the building contractor Hoch-Tief, recommended craftspersons and provided Mr Müller with the professional *Hilti* drill driver that has been his most reliable tool for over twenty years. Then there are local craftsmen and experts with whom he has made good experience in the past, such as the owner of a nearby sawmill, and even hotel guests who are often trained structural engineers and technicians working at the Technical University in Darmstadt located in the vicinity. Other suggestions and input that Mr Müller has picked up in the past cannot be assigned to specific individuals, but result from accidental encounters with things and places, from solutions seen elsewhere, and bits and pieces of information accumulated over time:

> I've seen this somewhere, I can't remember where, and I certainly didn't want to tack a roof batten in the space between the rafters and come with heraklith boards from beneath, and plaster filling, and white paint. This is nonsense, it's just too much work. I must have seen this kind of timber shuttering by pieces somewhere, I don't recall, it was years and years ago, stored in my mind and suddenly it was there, and then I found this sawmill that sold me these boards. The wood is untreated down to the present day, *yep*.

Of course, cultural symbolic orders, values and patterns of interpretation also play a significant role in home remodelling processes. They are, however, seldom explicated but instead take effect as 'perceptions of what is appropriate, right and plausible' (Hörning, 2001: 23). People's taste preferences and the kind of housing they are seeking form part of a socially shared 'cultural repertoire of meaning and interpretation' (*ibid.*: 20) – the way people present themselves to the outside world, how they live, what they perceive to be appropriate to their social status, etc. Likes or dislikes are always influenced by the cultural symbolic order, yet the cultural is expressed in the ways of *doing* things, it thus literally feeds back into social practices. In the case of Mr Müller, cultural norms and aesthetic role models were challenged by the sense of the homeowner for practical and cost-saving solutions. Mr Müller installed metal scaffolding which is used on construction sites on three facades of his house on a permanent basis. The scaffolding functions as plant gantry and provides easy access to the façade for maintenance work. The ready-made character of the design solution prompted the neighbour to protest against it. He felt offended and didn't want to put up with the unconventional exterior appearance of the house next to his. As he could not make a legal issue out of it, he eventually had to settle with it but the

conflict extended over years and had lasting effects on the relations between the two neighbours.

Home remodelling as social practice

It is one thing to demonstrate the significance of practical knowledge for DIY-remodelling processes by non-specialists. It is another to answer the question whether these processes can be defined as a type of social practice. There are three aspects of social practice, which are at first sight incompatible with this:

First, there is the imperative of repetition and routine: not every act already qualifies as practice. Practical understanding evolves in repeating acts, and it is only through *repetition* that routinised types of everyday practice develop whose meanings are socially shared. Yet remodelling one's home or shop premises is something 'out of the ordinary', an *extra*-ordinary event characterised by its non-repetitiveness rather than day-to-day routine. And although remodelling can sometimes come to be 'normal/the norm' (as in Mr Müller's case) and extend over a long time, the objects and building materials dealt with, and thus the problem-solving strategies, could be regarded as different on each occasion. Second, social practices are typically characterised by some degree of *collectivity*: For a practice to qualify as 'social' it does not necessarily presuppose intersubjective or interactive structures in the traditional sense (cf. Reckwitz, 2008a: 117). A necessary condition, however, is collectivity, i.e. the requirement that the practice be socially shared, socially understood and expected (Hörning, 2001: 112) which in turn is predicated on the repetitivity of similar acts performed by different people (Schmidt and Volbers, 2011). As to the DIY-remodelling of architecture, it seems not immediately apparent why it should be analysed as a collective phenomenon. Home reconstructions and alterations are singular interventions, unique in character, highly individual and extremely diverse in nature. Thirdly, artefacts play a central role in practice theory. Prompting repetitions, artefacts motivate social practices in a variety of ways. Following Reckwitz, a social practice is basically a skilful bodily performance linked to a meaningful way of handling and using *things* (2008a: 113). Structural alterations and refurbishments, however, imply that precisely the essence of those things is at issue: they get to be replaced, renewed, and rebuilt. Here, the habitual 'dealing with things' is cancelled and the *scripts,* which regulate their handling, are put out of force since the artefacts themselves are being transformed.

To resolve the above issues and argue for a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling as social practice, I want to put forward the proposal that action strategies in the context of DIY-remodelling – i.e. action-planning, decision-

making, problem-solving – should be treated as part of the behavioural routines and cultural patterns of interpretation regulating the use of architecture in everyday life (which precede processes of change and alteration). There is much to indicate that the remodelling of architecture by laypersons can be considered as a form of 'acting differently [from usual]' (German: *Andershandeln* in Hörning's parlance, 2001: 19), defined as the fundamental ability to opt for alternatives and bring about changes in social practice when faced with newness, irregularities and unexpected occurrences. It is in the process of remodelling itself that routinised forms of behaviour and ways of interpretation are put to the test; they are reflected, reassessed and updated by *doing things*, viz. through problem-focused, practical action. Or, put more simply: amateurs will inevitably fall back on the experiences made in and with these structures, materials and objects over time when they decide (for whatever reasons) to remodel and alter built structures that form part of their everyday live. Confronted with the need to change *something*, amateurs always determine their strategies in view of the material objects in the surrounding space, and they articulate and clarify interests, needs, deficits, and scrutinise circumstances relative to the extent to which architecture and objects help or hinder everyday activities.

As a consequence, the remodelling of architecture is not conceivable without recourse to pre-existing routines of dealing with and handling things or objects, even if these objects cease to exist in the process. This is reflected in the interview with Mr Müller, when he explains how earlier experiences and practical dealings with objects (the shower tray, the taps) constituted an underlying motive for action and justified improvements and alterations.

> Well, we did it that way, I mean I would've always done it that way, no matter if the flats were rented out or used for commercial purposes in the end – I would have done the baths in exactly this same way: no shower tray but with a downward slope instead, because I served in the armed forces for 4 years and I really got to appreciate the advantages of cleaning showers with a scrubbing brush and clear the dirty water into a floor gully. No more kneeling or bending and no need to clean the odd rounded corners with a cloth, you just handle the job more elegantly.

> You might have noticed that all the taps in the house are wall-mounted. While we were in the process of constructing the restaurant in 1975/76, my father had to go to hospital in Marburg for a week to get surgery due to a rupture. When I visited him there I had to use the bathroom, and washing my hands I noticed that the tap was wall-mounted and plumbed-in – which was a very unusual thing at the time. And since I was sick and tired of these annoying taps that come from underneath the sink, and all the lime deposit for which you need a toothbrush and chalk to get it cleaned, I decided on that very day that from now on the taps in my own house shall be wall-mounted as well. And this is how I'm still doing it in the small apartment my wife bought herself, although she keeps telling me that I have lost it [...] simply drill through the sink and get it done, she says. But I keep telling her that she'll have to put up with the filth and the mould forever if I don't [...]

As to the first issue of *repetition* and routine, we can therefore contend that while remodelling projects face different problems and extend over different periods of time, the nature of the learning processes involved is comparable: they will always require obtaining appropriate know-how and sourcing expertise, they will entail coping with the unexpected, and they will pose the challenge of solving problems with limited financial resources. Also, the second condition of *collectivity* is resolved when linking remodelling practices back to behavioural routines and cultural patterns of everyday life. These practices of dwelling, working etc. are necessarily collective and socially shared within a specified cultural context. Only the collective character allows gaining help and assistance, sourcing information from informal networks and using advice from various sources. Finally, the third issue of the transformation of *artefacts* through which established ways of 'dealing with things' are called into question, can also be answered by conceiving the remodelling of architecture as bound up with pre-existing socio-material practices. The practical experience and action Mr Müller refers to in order to explain his decisions during the remodelling process need not necessarily be connected with the object to be modified. In Mr Müller's case, the decisive factor for installing tiled frameless shower bases in his house was his experience of having to scrub shower rooms during the years he served in the army. It is thus the accumulated, practical knowledge acquired through multi-locational practices of dwelling, working, but also through personal hygiene, maintenance or cleaning activities that allows the amateur to act and opt for alternatives in the process of remodelling.

Conclusion

As the case study and the literature review indicate, it seems reasonable to correlate action strategies in processes of self-organised alterations of built structures with the everyday routines and practices of living, working, celebrating, family cohabitation, etc. in and around the house's architecture. Thus, preferences and skills in dealing with and re/designing architecture spring from real life everyday routines and practices. These routines and practices ultimately generate the practical experiences, which amateurs need when they decide to remodel and alter built structures that form part of their everyday live and, most importantly, when they learn 'how to do things themselves'. These practical experiences are intrinsically connected to the materiality of things, objects, and structures that make up architecture in everyday life. It is the self-organised form of DIY-remodelling projects that challenges the way 'how things are normally done' in the amateur's everyday routines. It provides the amateur with the opportunity to put routinised forms of behaviour and implicit ways of interpretation to the test and it has the potential to bring about changes in social

practice because of the newness of each situation, the irregularities and unexpected occurrences.

The potentially urban nature of the DIY-remodelling practices discussed in this paper come to the fore when thinking about the multiple ways in which these practices extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. First, experiences made elsewhere shape the practical skills, the improvisation and the decisions necessary in the process of home remodelling by amateurs under conditions of financial constraints. Place-specific solutions and building traditions are likely to be merged with prefabricated, mass-produced and imported products. Second, the lack of formal education and technical expertise makes DIY-remodelling projects almost by definition networked and collective endeavours, something which is very much in contrast to the connotation of DIY as individualistic, self-reliant, and self-sufficient as noted by Vannini and Taggart (2014: 271). Obtaining help and support is usually bound up with social interaction, reciprocal relationships and the building of informal networks, all of which is contributing to urban social life. Third, people's taste preferences and perceptions of what they perceive to be appropriate, reasonable or apt in a given situation are influenced by cultural norms and values. These are socially shared in a given cultural context but rarely explicated or reflected upon. As cultural dispositions are inscribed into the social practices of home remodelling, those practises equally contribute to re-shaping norms and values. Finally, alterations of the outer appearance of the houses as well as functions and densities impact on urban spaces and – over time and collectively – on urban quarters at large. Ultimately, it is the very fact that DIY-remodelling practices are *not* merely explained by the rationale of cost saving and – in the context of Western European cities – are not on principal survival strategies that also defines their contribution to the urban: these are practices that extend beyond the single project, they create networks, span time and generations, and they give people choices to make in personalising their project (Brown, 2008). In consequence, there is no fundamental difference between the DIY home remodelling practices of amateurs and the practices of urban intervention discussed in the debates on DIY urbanism other than that the first is confined to private homes and the latter focused on shared urban spaces. A particular challenge for future research is to explore the interlinkages that exist between these two fields of action and practice in the European city.

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