

Do-It-Yourself Home Improvement

Practice at the Nexus of Consumption and Production

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Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

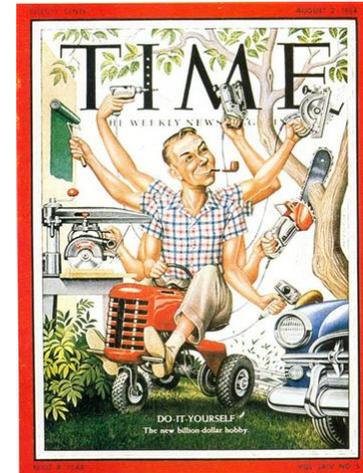
Thoughts about consumption and production

- Accounts of liquid modernity (e.g., Bauman) and the rise of consumer society provide insight into the great significance of consumption and shopping in everyday life.
- Such accounts, however, do very little to help us understand what people actually do with the commodities they buy.
- Barnett et al. (2011) suggest that while **consumption** (as shopping) is important, we should not lose sight of what goes on past the shop counter.
- These purchases make possible an important cluster of **productive** human actions involving practical skills and abilities, innovative thinking, creativity, emotions, conversations and 'teamwork'.
- In this paper, using a New Zealand study of DIY home improvement, we want to illustrate how in many everyday practices, consumption and production **combine** in what Ritzer (2009) terms prosumption.

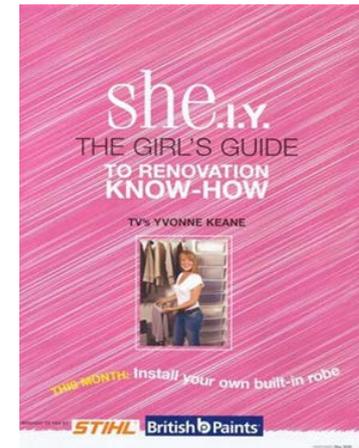


What is DIY?

- DIY stands for 'do-it-yourself' home improvement
- It occurs when homeowners decorate, alter, build, maintain or repair any part of their home themselves.
- DIY projects: simple, one-off repairs through to major structural alterations requiring technical information, building consents, design advice and/or a large investment by homeowners in tools and materials.
- It is a global phenomenon: big in New Zealand, but also the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe, and emerging in Japan and China.
- Gendered in interesting ways



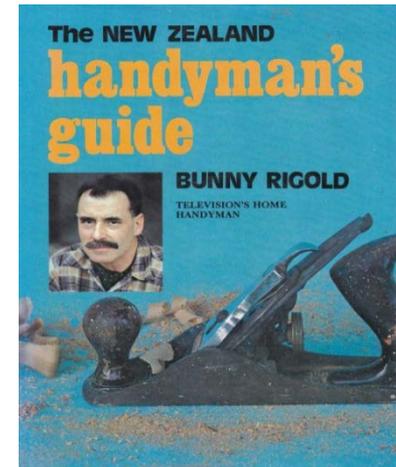
Mid 1950s – USA



2000's –
NZ/OZ

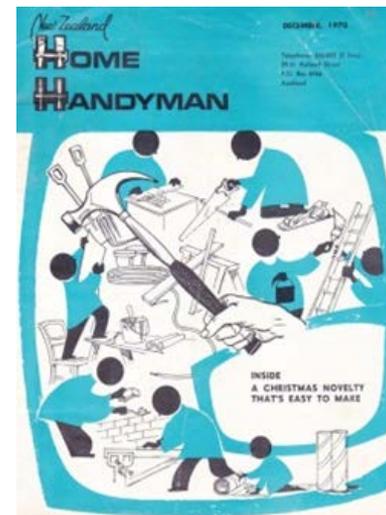
DIY: Disparate international literature

- **Economics:** Economic determinants of the decision to do DIY
- **History:** Historical accounts of DIY movement in different contexts (usually with a strong gender perspective); DIY and “suburban husbanding” (Gelber, 1999)
- **Property/Housing Studies:** Policy work: Home improvement loans and the state of the housing stock
- **Retail Studies/Marketing:** Purchasing decisions, consumer behaviour and market research, particularly tools and equipment
- **Social Science:** The division of domestic labour, homemaking, gender identities, material culture and consumption, leisure and the meaning of house and home: but interestingly little reflection on questions of the links between consumption and **production**.



DIY in New Zealand

- A well-established set of cultural practices.
- Often linked to NZ's high level of home ownership and domestic property as investment.
- Became widespread in the post war era (associated with suburbanisation).
- Today the culture is reinforced by advertisers e.g., "DIY: its in our DNA".
- NZ\$1 billion spent per year on tools and materials.
- Big box retailers now dominate the DIY shopping landscape. (Bunnings, for example, employing over 3000 staff)



Our study of DIY home improvement

- NZ homeowner interviews (n=27) with house/shed tour, observations & participation
- Key informant interviews with retail industry participants (n=15)
- Analysis of ads, media and DIY manuals & mags
- DIY from the perspective of both day-to-day practice and globalised political economy



DIY as consumption and production

Consumption

- Consumption as shopping is an inescapable aspect of DIY (e.g., you **need** drills, nails, wallpaper, lifestyle magazines etc.).
- **Tools:** purchased, inherited, borrowed, gifted: Respondents owned or aspired to own a variety of DIY tools – some had very large collections.
- **Materials:** extensive range of materials purchased ranging from “raw” product (timber) through to those packaged especially for DIY enthusiasts; and sometimes sourced by foraging in second hand outlets.
- **Ideas:** drawn from internet, magazines, reality TV, advertisements: these sources created a discourse of style and appropriateness and the things needed to achieve them.

Production

- While our research participants certainly engaged in the world as consumers, they also took the role and identity of 'producers' which involved the following:
- Helping hands: enrolling family and friends not resident at the house – reciprocity, inter-generational family support and cohesion
- Informal professional help: getting family or friends with building skills to help – “mates rates”
- The “working bee”: a one-off social event designed to entertain and get things done
- DIY/professional mix: various combinations of contribution – sometimes to meet regulatory requirements

What's Produced?

- **Interior decoration** – the most frequently conducted DIY activity: impressing visitors and keeping up with fashion
- **Repair and maintenance** – fixing not adding
- **Built form** – major projects such as bathroom or kitchen conversions, room re-configuration
- **Gardens and landscapes**
- Participants are producing their social and materials worlds, while simultaneously 'building' and maintaining their **identities**.

Conclusions

- The product of DIY practice is the DIYed home: a socially and physically constructed place which is personalised, adapted, displayed and to be enjoyed.
- While shopping is a crucially important part of DIY, it is much more than this.
- Each DIY project is an act of prosumption at the centre of an extensive social world (Becker, 1982) comprising: householders, tools, materials, ideas, families, friends, DIY stores and their employees, popular and technical media, advertisements etc.

