

The City, Urban Planning and Architecture

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Abstract

Anarchist modes of ‘doing architecture’ may seem, at first, a seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy. How can something as regulated, controlled, planned and expensive to execute as the building of buildings possibly take place in an anarchist mode? Our attitude to architecture has developed alongside the professionalisation of the ‘building buildings’. The architecture where anarchist practices are most evident is the building of shelter. There is a complex history of people in Britain building their own homes, using ancient lore to enable them to own these homes. These stories serve to illustrate the alternative history of ‘building buildings’. Additionally, the more contemporary history of residents occupying their homes, resisting plans for ‘regeneration’, provides templates of anarchist practices existing in architecture. The 1970s are a key period when practices of resistance to architect’s hegemony emerged. Examples such as the Architects’ Revolutionary Council (ARC) tell the story of a rebellion of professionals against the profession. The development of a new anarchist vernacular of housing architecture, in particular, will not emerge, if: ‘...we insist that every last structure has got to be blessed by the magic of the architect’.

Introduction

This chapter will do two things: one is to introduce the reader to a body of anarchist theory within and related to architecture and building more generally. The second is to illustrate how people outside of the architectural professions have taken control of their built environments in ways that can be analysed through anarchist modes of thinking. The Franco-Swiss Modernist architect, and famed father of European Modernist, Le Corbusier, once stated: ‘Revolution or Architecture. Revolution can be avoided’¹ to mean that the improved environments that Modern architecture provided meant social revolution was unnecessary. I argue that a revolution in architecture and the architectural professions is required.

In order to introduce the reader to anarchist architectural theory I will look at key thinker Colin Ward, along with people such as John F. C. Turner. I will also address other anarchist theorists from the parallel disciplines of art and literary criticism, notably Sir Herbert Read. Ward and Read are for me exemplars of a very English, quietist² mode of anarchist theory and critique. They are also important in understanding the role of anarchist thought in the critique and revolution of artistic production in an anarchist mode.

Read and Ward’s quietist attitudes are also relevant to the second part of this chapter: The ‘accidental anarchism’ of people taking control of, and having a vested interest in, their built environments. It is necessary in this part of the chapter to look at the history of the radical architecture scene of the mid- to late-1970s in England. Specifically, I will concentrate on the formation of various groups of individuals during this period that either acted from within the profession, or more commonly were not members of the architectural cognoscenti. Examples such as the SOLON housing and architectural works co-operative,³ the co-operative housing groups created

¹ M. McLeod, “Architecture or Revolution”: Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change. *Art Journal*, 43:2, “Revising Modernist History: The Architecture of the 1920s and 1930s” (Summer, 1983), 132–147.

² Oxford Bibliographies (2013) “Quietism” (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396577/obo-9780195396577-0184.xml>). Accessed 16/04/2017.

³ J. Clelland, ‘SOLON: One alternative’ *Building Illustrated*, CI/SfB | 81 | (W6), *Architects’ Journal* (30 August 1978), 168: 35, 377–389.

to resist demolition in Liverpool⁴ and the Architects' Revolutionary Council (ARC).⁵ My clarification of the role the ARC played in this period gives me a body of evidence from which to construct a history of subversive, radical or anarchist architects and architecture in 1970s England. It brings together the threads of an argument and ideas that led to the establishment of radical architectural movements. The ARC's campaigns and projects, along with other examples to be cited, will provide a re-reading of the history of architecture in this period.

Architecture, with a capital A in this chapter, is taken to mean all aspects of the architectural process: legislation, planning regulations, building control and so on, as well as the material production of this process, the buildings themselves. Whilst Architect, with a capital A, refers to the professions of Architecture and all the professionals within this process, including but not limited to town planners, planning authorities, building inspectors, structural engineers, quantity surveyors and central and local government. The use of the lowercase 'a' indicates the practice of 'doing architecture' or 'building buildings' and the person of the architect. It is the Architectural professions and Architecture that are the subject of much of the criticisms of this piece as opposed to individuals or the planned process of building buildings. Architecture is rarely used in this way to have two definitions in English. The word Architecture has become synonymous with the profession and their outputs that the word 'builder' and 'building' has come to mean the process of producing structures for shelter and the carrying out of human functions. I am using the term architecture with this definition in mind, and defined for the reader as architecture with lowercase 'a', to try to rehabilitate the term and create a separation in our understanding of the word from the people and structures of the Architectural professions. In effect, I intend to reclaim the term architecture from the Architects, at the same time as reclaiming the practice of architecture from the profession of Architecture.

Anarchist Theory in Architecture

Anarchist thought as an alternative idea for the operation of society has primarily concentrated on the process of change, and the nature of any future anarchist society. This has naturally concentrated on the social and political structures and revolutions required to achieve these changes. Modern Architectural theory has largely ignored anarchist theories of the organisation of society as antithetical to the controlled and highly professionalised process of Architecture. There are however a number of exceptions to these generalisations from within architecture and cultural theory.

Two key thinkers that I will discuss initially are Colin Ward, a British architecture and anarchist theorist,⁶ and Herbert Read, British art historian, critic, philosopher and co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts.⁷ Both Ward and Read, within their differing disciplines, provide us with positions that demonstrate the validity of anarchist arguments as applied to the fields of creative production. Read's work will be important in articulating the relationship between humanity and the made environment, along Nicholas John Habraken's⁸ contributions in developing alternative modes of building dwellings from the 1960s onwards. Carissa Honeywell has written

⁴ T. Clay, 'The Liverpool Co-ops', *Architects' Journal*, 168:27 (5 July 1978), 37–38.

⁵ G. Mills and P. Maloney, 'ARC: its history and its present aims', *Building Design*, 297 (1976), 9.

⁶ Spatial Agency, "Colin Ward" (<http://www.spatialagency.net/database/colin.ward>). Accessed 29/03/2017.

⁷ Institute of Contemporary Arts, the "History" (<https://www.ica.art/about/history>), 2017. Accessed 29/03/2017.

⁸ N. J. Habraken, "Biography" (<http://www.habraken.com/html/biography.htm>). Accessed 04/06/2017.

on the work of Colin Ward placing him, and indeed Read, in their proper context as significant contributors to the development of anarchist thinking in Britain in the twentieth century.⁹ My focus, however, is on the relevance of Ward and Read's ideas as a critique of cultural production specifically, and architectural production in particular. Whilst Read did not write directly about architecture, his concern with art and design provides arguments that can be turned to a critique of modern practices Architecture.

Colin Ward

Ward wrote and lectured widely throughout his career on the relevance of anarchist ideas to the production of housing architecture. His texts such as *Tenants Take Over* (1974) and *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976) deal directly with examples of anarchist theory and anarchist action as they have been applied to, and manifested in, the building and maintenance of people's homes. In the case of people taking control of their own living conditions, for instance, by carrying out maintenance or rebuilding their own homes, their involvement is motivated by vested interests of protecting their homes from often misguided local or central government schemes of redevelopment. Indeed, I would argue that the vested interests, decried by some critics of Architecture¹⁰ are here a key motivator in people deciding to act in defending or improving their living conditions.

As Ward explores in his 1966 article 'Anarchism as a Theory of Organisation', the Architects' office has been a site of exploration of modes of anarchist organisation. He cites a report produced in 1962:

...for the Institute of British Architects under the title *The Architect and His Office*. The team which prepared this report found two different approaches to the design process, which gave rise to different ways of working and methods of organisation. One they categorised as centralised, which was characterised by autocratic forms of control, and the other they called dispersed, which promoted what they called "an informal atmosphere of free-flowing ideas." This is a very live issue among architects. Mr. W. D. Pile, who in an official capacity helped to sponsor the outstanding success of postwar British architecture, the school-building programme, specifies among the things he looks for in a member of the building team that: "He must have a belief in what I call the non-hierarchical organisation of the work. The work has got to be organised not on the star system, but on the repertory system. The team leader may often be junior to a team member. That will only be accepted if it is commonly accepted that primacy lies with the best idea and not with the senior man." And one of our greatest architects, Walter Gropius, proclaims what he calls the technique of "collaboration among men, which would release the creative instincts of the individual instead of smothering them. The essence of such technique should be to empha-

⁹ C. Honeywell, *A British anarchist tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (London: Continuum, 2011).

¹⁰ B. Anson, *I'll Fight You For It: Behind the struggle for Covent Garden* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 119.

size individual freedom of initiative, instead of authoritarian direction by a boss ... synchronizing individual effort by a continuous give and take of its members.¹¹

Here, quoted at length, we can see Ward is arguing that the Architectural profession, far from being a hierarchical organisation born, as so many professions in British society, of the British class system could in fact be a hot bed of anarchist organisation. This is not to suggest this is the current situation, but that Ward is arguing that architecture as an anarchist process is achievable. Indeed, he goes on to say:

I believe that the social ideas of anarchism: autonomous groups, spontaneous order, workers' control, the federative principle, add up to a coherent theory of social organisation which is a valid and realistic alternative to the authoritarian, hierarchical and institutional social philosophy which we see in application all around us.¹²

Certain examples, which will be addressed later in this chapter, provide a template for groups of architects/architecture professionals who wish to organise themselves along the lines of the anarcho-syndicalist¹³ modes described by Ward above.

Throughout *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, Ward illustrates how anarchist modes of organisation can apply readily to doing architecture (lowercase 'a') and indeed the built environment more generally. As he says:

Anarchism—the political philosophy of a non-governmental society of autonomous communities—does not at first sight seem to address itself to the problems of the city at all. But there is in fact a stream of anarchist contributions to urban thought that stretches from Kropotkin to Murray Bookchin historically, and from John Turner to the International Situationists ideologically.¹⁴

The anarchist approach then might be taken as an example that can be employed to cities and architecture, and for the focus of this chapter, housing architecture, but has not been to any significant degree yet. Indeed, the examples cited by Ward in 1976 were confined to Latin American *barrios* and the slums of East London, and squatter occupations, as examples of anarchist modes of seizing control of land and property. It is not really until ten years later, in his book *When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing That Works* (1985), that Ward sets out numerous modes by which occupants can engage in dwelling practices that enable them to work outside of the normal modes of Architecture.

One of the most common and easily recognised modes is that of the co-operative. Similarly to definitions of syndicalism offered by Rudolph Rocker, the co-operative is a collective of autonomous individuals who come together to pool their abilities and labour to achieve an end, in this case building dwellings:

¹¹ C. Ward (1966) *Anarchism as a Theory of Organization*, 7. (<https://www.panarchy.org/ward/organization.1966.html>). Accessed 22/02/2017.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ M. Coates, 'To Hell with Architecture: An Architecture of Anarchism', *Anarchist Studies* 23:2 (2015), 47–67.

¹⁴ C. Ward (1976), *Op cit.* p. 87. *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976).

The argument for housing co-operatives is that it is a mode of tenure which changes the situation from one of dependence to one of independence, that it is one which, as the veteran co-operative advocate Harold Campbell put it years ago, “combines private enterprise and mutual aid in a unique form of social ownership which puts at a premium personal responsibility and individual initiative”.¹⁵

Importantly the co-operative model also addresses some questions around land tenure and the ultimate ownership of the dwellings when completed. The co-operative enables those who independently may not be able physically or financially to build their own homes to opt out of the status quo. The self-building or self-organised co-operative worker—self-build being a common mode of co-operative organisation in housing—therefore presents themselves as the seemingly logical result of an anarchist mode of doing architecture. The invention of the *Grand Designs* television programme in 1999 by *Channel 4* has created a version of the self-build project that is almost entirely divorced from this kind of working. *Grand Designs* tells the story of rich people building their own homes with the use of skilled craftspeople and, invariably, architects.¹⁶ However, the *Grand Designs* version of building one’s own home has become quite prevalent in British popular culture since the millennium. Ward’s work serves as a significant corrective to this mindset and provides us with myriad examples of people taking an anarchist approach to housing. Ward had some influence on the Architecture professionals of the period, primarily between the 1970s and 1990s. The 1996 book *Talking to Architects: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward*, for example, brings together lectures given to the profession at universities and Architectural conferences between 1976 and 1996.¹⁷ There is notable preponderance of lectures from 1990 onwards. This suggests that the relevance of Ward’s ideas were acknowledged as relevant then, twenty years ago and twenty years after first being published, as I argue they are relevant again now, forty years after first appearing.

Anarchism Is a Natural State of Being

Nicholas John Habraken sets out in his book *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing* (1967) the concept of the ‘natural relationship’. The ‘natural relationship’ is, at its purest, the expression of individuality and/or necessity that occurs in early human societies. As Habraken says:

It [the natural relationship] all started at a primitive stage when this relationship expressed itself directly in the action of man who by himself, without any help, built his protective environment.¹⁸

Clearly many degrees of separation now exist between the occupant and this direct expression of the ‘natural relationship’ in mass housing. It was the mass housing process in particular that Habraken was railing against in 1967; however, one can expand this idea to incorporate the wider

¹⁵ C. Ward, *When We Build Again: Let’s have housing that works!* (London: Pluto Press 1985), 89.

¹⁶ H. Hartman, “Is this the most influential house in a generation?” in *Architects’ Journal*, 2015 (<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/isthisthemostinfluentialhouse-inageneration/8677581.article>) Accessed 05/05/2017.

¹⁷ C. Ward, *Talking to Architects: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward* (London: Freedom Press, 1996).

¹⁸ N. J. Habraken, *Supports: An alternative to mass housing* (London: Urban International Press, 1999), 25.

dislocation of the general populace from the architectural professions and the products produced by them.

We need to deal with this concept of the ‘natural’ as used by Habraken and indeed as used by Herbert Read in his seminal essay *To Hell With Culture* (1941). Read refers to the natural as meaning something outside of the conventional organisation of society, more akin with anarchist modes of production and organisation. In *To Hell With Culture* he says:

If we follow this natural order in all the ways of our life, we shall not need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it. But how are we to attain this natural order of things, which is my particular concern in this essay? Obviously, we can’t make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can’t do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. [...] In other words, before we can make things naturally, we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I assume is what we will mean by democracy.¹⁹

By democracy and natural here I see it as evident that Read means anarcho-syndicalism, as Rudolph Rocker states,

Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain.²⁰

In such a society, more likely than the individual builder is a group of autonomous individuals working in a co-operative, ‘solidaric collaboration of the workers’. This serves as both an illustration of previous modes of architecture, as well as present and potentially future versions of house building.

However, the professionalisation of architecture has created a gulf between itself, its products and the rest of society: this gulf seems almost unbridgeable. Read, and to a lesser extent Habraken, argue that this is two-way. It is not just the Architectural professions and those within them withholding all the power but the unwillingness of people who are not part of these professions to engage with architecture. This is an issue I will return to later in this chapter when discussing examples of non-Architects engaging with architecture.

The anarcho-syndicalist organisation of the process of doing architecture does, however, necessitate the replacement of the Architectural professions and the social stratum that they occupy with another mode of doing architecture.

‘Anarchist’ Architecture

I have entitled this section ‘Anarchist’ architecture as the examples here illustrated demonstrate the ways in which architecture has been carried out historically using forms of self-organisation and do not necessarily equal ‘anarchist’ however. I am arguing that these are anarcho-syndicalist, as defined above by Rocker, in nature even if not consciously anarchist in

¹⁹ H. Read, *To Hell with Culture* (London: Routledge, [1941] 2002), 14.

²⁰ D. Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970). (<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/daniel-guerin-anarchism-from-theory-to-practice>). Accessed 23/06/2015.

planning or execution. Anarchist modes of doing and organising can be reliably applied to these examples, so even though the people engaged in these practices of doing architecture would almost certainly not have considered themselves to be ‘anarchists’, we can analyse their actions from an anarchist position.

In order to understand the degree to which the building of buildings has been professionalised in Britain, we need to look back to an earlier state of affairs. The pre-industrial period supplies manifold examples of the way people used to house themselves independently of any architect or, in many cases, of any landowner. This mode of housing oneself has all but become extinct in industrialised and post-industrial societies. As Habraken said: ‘Man no longer houses himself: he is housed’.²¹ The processes of creating dwellings are now so well advanced that the dweller is not required until the very end of the process, to occupy and/or purchase the consumer object that the architectural process has created. Rather than housing themselves, people now expect to occupy a complete house and sometimes a lifestyle to boot. As Habraken says:

MH [mass housing] reduces the dwelling to a consumer article and the dweller to a consumer. For only in this way can it be expected that the consumer waits until he is offered a complete product. It need not surprise us if this approach proves wrong because individual human action forms part of the housing brief.²²

The One-Night House

The legend of the *ty unnos*, literally ‘one-night house’, in Wales, and many parts of the Celtic fringe of Ireland and Britain, notably Cornwall and the English West Country more generally, provide us with an ‘origin myth’ for the act of people housing themselves. The *ty unnos* is explored by Colin Ward in his book *Cotters and Squatters: Housing’s Hidden History* (2002): ‘The idea of the one-night house is woven into Welsh history, where it is seen as relating to the imposition of Norman land law’.²³

Ward brings together numerous other examples of the legend of the one-night house from many parts of the British Isles. As this legend has a noticeable preponderance on the Celtic fringe, the inference is therefore that the practice of the one-night house goes back beyond the Roman conquest of Britain into earlier Celtic or pre-Celtic societies. What seems evident from Ward’s considerable research, however, is that this was more than merely a legend that one-night houses were built and landlords, even in feudal England, complied with the historic lore of the land in regard to the right of tenancy that constructing a house in one night bestowed. This is not to suggest that these dwellings were universally accepted by locals or landowners. Quoting from David Jones, in *Rebecca’s Children: a study of rural society, crime and protest* Ward recounts:

They settled on land, under the old custom of *ty unnos*, whereby a person was entitled to the freehold of whatever shelter he or she could build in a night and of the land within a stone’s throw. Such encampments were not universally popular, for they cut across the rights of local farmers ... Their homesteads became the source of ‘ever-lasting quarrels’, and of innumerable court cases.²⁴

²¹ Habraken, *Supports*, 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ C. Ward, *Cotters and Squatters: Housing’s Hidden History* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2002), 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

It is important we reflect on these settlements with a clear historical perspective and not with rose-tinted spectacles for a simpler time. It is undoubtedly the case that now such settlements can often result in far more stringent legal challenges, and the idea of ‘wastes’ or ‘common land’ is almost entirely lost in our time.

In discussing the relationship between architecture and ‘mere building’ and the move from one set of circumstances to the other meaning the ending of the one-night house, in this case in the Forest of Dean:

By the time of encroachments, when settlements were established and churches were needed, the art of architecture, as opposed to mere building, had been lost. Before the time there had been squatters; for forester believed he had the right to build so long as he got smoke going up the chimney before nightfall on the day that he built his cottage or cabin. If fortunate he stayed, if unlucky he was evicted.²⁵

1970s England

The 1970s was a period of radical politics provoked by political and economic decline and public resentment at central government’s inability to deal with these crises. It was also the period in which the boundaries of acceptability in society, pushed so hard in the 1960s, became accepted as the norm, generally speaking. By the mid-1970s this radical attitude had found expression in the architectural professions also. As Anne Karpf noted in October 1977:

Architects, recently, have abbreviated themselves. To the outsider, cryptic collections of capitals like SAG, NAM, ACA, ARC, AOA, AIC, suggest a secret uncrackable code. To the initiated, they—and other, more explicit titles—represent the plethora of architectural pressure groups, and are almost invariably associated with the strong vein of discontent which runs through the profession.²⁶

At the start of her article, Karpf makes reference to the Salaried Architects Group (SAG), New Architecture Movement (NAM), Association of Consultant Architects (ACA), Architects Revolutionary Council (ARC), Association of Official Architects (AOA) and Architects in Industry and Commerce (AIC). These are all associations set up in the economic downturn of the mid- to late-1970s in opposition to the architectural ruling classes, namely the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). There was a general sense in the 1970s that the powers that be were failing to address the problems created by what we would now refer to as ‘globalisation’. Britain had surrendered most of its major colonial possessions by 1978 and was reorienting itself from being a global empire to a middle-sized nation in a globalised economy. This inevitably difficult re-orientation, including joining, in 1973, and reaffirming, in 1975, its membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) had significant social repercussions. At least part of this manifested as a rejection of existing imperial orthodoxy, especially amongst the younger generation coming of age in the late 1970s.²⁷ The curious reaction to this failure of the old guard in Britain was a

²⁵ H. Phelps in *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁶ A. Karpf, ‘The Pressure Groups’, *Architects’ Journal*, 166:42 (19 October 1977), 728.

²⁷ D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1945–51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

reversion to Conservatism, with a capital 'C', with the landslide election of Margret Thatcher's Conservative government in May 1979.

In architectural circles in Britain the obvious manifestation of the small 'c' conservative imperial British orthodoxy was the RIBA. Some of the groups which emerged from this rebellion within architecture went on to work directly with residents in participatory practices of architecture, slum clearance and conservation.²⁸ A key point to make here, however, is that whilst most of the organisations listed by Karpf were set up to reform or replace the RIBA, the ARC questioned the very existence of the profession of architecture. The basis of their argument, and indeed mine, concerned the superior social status associated with the title of architect.

That the architect should work directly for and with 'The People' and not the powers that be, and that they should work for free,²⁹ fatally undermines the 'profession'. If one is working for free as architects, it is assumed, under existent social mores, that this cannot be one's profession. Therefore, one must concede that being 'an architect', as redefined as this term would then be, must be an extra role, a voluntary duty that former 'architects' perform for the community at large.

The skills of the architect/designer are not unique or rare. They can be taught and learnt. Evidence of creative problem solving, design and adaption can be seen in all human societies, many without any professions even resembling architecture.

The ARC

The Architects' Revolutionary Council (ARC) operated from the Architectural Association (AA) in London between 1974 and 1980. At first glance this may appear to be an isolated revolutionary moment that burst onto the scene during a period of uncertainty in architecture circles. This period is perhaps best defined by the 'RIBA crisis' of 1971–1972³⁰ and involved its dispute with salaried architects, and the attempts by various sectors of the profession to advance their agendas through the formation of pressure groups. The purpose of this section is both to briefly tell the story of the ARC in relation to its origins and to anarchist architectural theory.

The momentum to establish the ARC in 1974 came principally from former Greater London Council (GLC) planner and later lecturer at the AA, Brian Anson. His radicalisation stemmed from the evident frustration he felt from his involvement in the failed campaign to save the old working-class community of Covent Garden during the Covent Garden Campaign of 1968–1974. The Covent Garden Campaign, whilst successful in saving the physical fabric of Covent Garden, failed, in Anson's view, to achieve its principal aim, to preserve central London's last traditional working-class community. Anson blamed this failure on himself, the middle-class 'colonisers' and the working-class community themselves, saying in the very last lines of his 1981 retelling, *I'll Fight You For It: Behind the Struggle for Covent Garden*:

[The] Covent Garden [campaign] was a failure, not because the struggle was lost but because, paradoxically, it was never waged. Those who claim success in the area are apathetically wrong and it is significant that most of them are either middle-class

²⁸ A. Karpf, 'Pressure Groups', 730–732.

²⁹ G. Mills and P. Maloney, 'ARC'.

³⁰ RIBA, 'Rank and file dissent: the RIBA crisis 1971–72', *Royal Institute of British Architects' Journal*, 84:2 (1975), 10–16.

outsiders or recent colonisers of Covent Garden. ... They could never understand the dream that lay in the heart of a Sam Driscoll or a John Thomey. ... But Covent Garden was also my personal failure. ... But the greatest tragedy of all is that the old community have *allowed* themselves to be defeated like lambs to the slaughter. Oppressed for so long in the centre of London, they have lost the will to fight for their land and culture.³¹

The Covent Garden campaign served for many of those architecture students and staff at the AA whom Anson involved in it, as a springboard for the establishment of the ARC.

This campaign to prevent the Greater London Council's planned scorched earth policy of demolition and rebuild allied the last truly working-class community in central London with the middle-class theatre crowd of the area. Needless to say, the two groups had differing aims but an overlapping purpose, to stop the GLC plan. As Anson would put it they were 'united in only one thing—hatred of the brutal redevelopment scheme the Greater London Council was threatening in the area'.³²

Anson became involved when he joined the planning team at the Greater London Council in August 1966 and was set to work with five others planning the redevelopment of Covent Garden for the departure of the market. Anson recounts how he 'began formulating ideas of a concept which I called 'Immediate Environment Improvement', and that 'the consortium should have fired me there and then because, banal though my own words appear to me now, they contained within them the full spirit of my revolt four years later'.³³

Anson's revolt was catastrophic for the Greater London Council; he took vast quantities of copied documents and knowledge of the intricacies of the plan with him to the people of Covent Garden. His knowledge was then put to use in the working-class community's campaign to save their area, with the founding of the Covent Garden Community Association in 1971.

The overall conclusion that Anson reached regarding the working-class campaign to save Covent Garden was that it was a failure. In the post-mortem carried out towards the end of his book, he says: 'Whether we would have got support for the Community struggle had the theatre fraternity no vested interests in Covent Garden is a debatable point'.³⁴

However, I would argue that the vested interests here referred to by Anson are the reason people are moved to act. It was vested interests that mobilised the working-class community of Covent Garden. What Anson is, in fact, referring to is the ultimate outcome of the campaign. The public inquiry, somewhat predictably, sided with the Greater London Council at its conclusion in mid-1972; however in 1973 the Secretary of State for the Environment intervened and the Greater London Council scheme was finally destroyed. The physical fabric of Covent Garden had been retained but its working-class community was to be thoroughly killed off by the following ten years of gentrification.

³¹ B. Anson, *I'll Fight You For It*, 264.

³² *Ibid.*, xiii.

³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

Foundation

The ARC emerged during a period of social and economic upheaval, not unlike the current economic and social situation. The ARC's approach, contrary to some elements of the Architectural profession in 1970s England, was to try and reinvent the practice of architecture. In some instances, during this period the long-ignored users of Architecture, those outside of the profession, also attempted to make their voices heard.

Various ARC acts—their disruption of the RIBA 1976 Hull conference; their posters asking, 'If crime doesn't pay ... Where do architects get all their money?'; and their reworking the RIBA acronym to mean the 'Royal Institute of Bullshitting Aristocrats'—give us a good sense of the level of animosity held by this group towards the architectural establishment.

Referring to the early years of the Covent Garden struggle, Anson says, these were:

the crucial years, when the protest movement had a choice of directions and, in my opinion took the wrong one: to work for reform within the system instead of developing a revolutionary struggle against it.³⁵

For radical Marxist revolutionaries such as Anson and the ARC, the peoples' lack of willingness to revolt openly led to the perpetuation of the status quo and existent power structures.

The ARC was, rather predictably, dubbed 'the enfant terrible of the radical architecture groups' noted for its belief that 'creative architecture should be available to all people in society, regardless of their economic circumstances', and it is 'committed to revolutionary changes within the architectural establishment'.³⁶

Manifesto

The ARC manifesto was published in numerous places and in various languages over the year or so after their dramatic 1974 press conference at the AA: In early 1974 a group of radical architectural students operating under the guise of the 'Architects' Revolutionary Council' (ARC) announced their presence to the world, staging a dramatic press conference and publishing an inflammatory manifesto. Calling for the destruction of the RIBA and the establishment of 'an international movement towards community architecture', the ARC emerged from the AA's Intermediate Unit 1, tutored by the charismatic Brian Anson.³⁷

The manifesto made a number of claims for the future of the ARC and by extension the architectural profession itself. Key amongst these were the calls for members of professions, both qualified and students, to 'join the new international movement and through solidarity help to bring about the architectural revolution'.³⁸ The call to solidarity is significant as the ARC was targeting the power structures of Architecture—primarily the RIBA. This is also evident from earlier sections of the manifesto that, rather than targeting individual practitioners of architecture, focussed on Architecture as a profession and a social stratum in need, not of mere reform, but of

³⁵ Ibid., 21.

³⁶ A. Karpf, 'Pressure Groups', 730–731.

³⁷ E. Bottoms, 'If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council', *Architecture*, 5 (Winter 2007/08), 14–19.

³⁸ G. Mills and P. Maloney, 'ARC'.

annihilation. Their aim to destroy the pedestal upon which the RIBA sat, supported by the capitalist mode of production and the moneyed classes, is dealt with explicitly in the first paragraph of the manifesto:

the ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment who believe that we should cease working only for a rich powerful minority or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Central and Local Governments and offer our skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture.³⁹

This places the ARC politically less in the revolutionary Marxist camp, and more in the anarcho-syndicalist camp of temporary syndicates formed for the purposes of solving specific problems or meeting specific needs.⁴⁰

At Work

Whilst the subversive qualities of the ARC have been noted, what is less well known is the work the members of the ARC did with various community groups. Much of the ARC's work was documented at the time in newspapers and comment pieces in the architectural and mainstream press. The projects with which they became involved were invariably via the invitation of the local groups concerned.

In such projects the relationship between the architect or skilled architectural worker and the residents and/or occupants was part of the transgressive work of the ARC. As such this provides a rich seam of study to help contextualise the current fights within the architectural profession.

Bridgtown

Brian Anson considered the ARC's involvement with residents of Bridgtown (a former mining village, now part of Cannock, Staffordshire⁴¹) in its successful campaign to defy planners' attempts to demolish the whole area for industrial uses, to be more significant than its 'RIBA-baiting' activities. Quoted by Anne Karpf in 1977, Anson said: 'In Bridgetown [sic], we've got closer to the people and it's logical that we spend more time at the grass roots'.⁴² Bridgtown is notably now a largely residential area with much of its industry having declined and the sites have been cleared and replaced with housing.

The Bridgtown project was successful in that the Bridgtown Residents Action Group (BRAG) with the assistance of the ARC was able to resist the local authorities' plans for the area. Through protests, public meetings, lobbying of politicians and production of 'propaganda' including leaflets and cartoons (often drawn by Louis Hellman of the *Architects' Journal*⁴³), BRAG and the ARC were able to successfully reverse the decisions taken by the local authority. However,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ C. Ward, *A very short introduction to anarchism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ A. Karpf, 'Pressure Groups', 730.

⁴² Ibid., 731.

⁴³ L. Hellman, 'Louis Hellman's stories', *Architects' Journal* (<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/louis-hellman/317.contributor>). Accessed 27/08/2017.

this campaign was not without its difficulties in terms of the ARC's relationship with BRAG, as a letter from Brian Anson to BRAG dated December 1977 reveals. The relationship began well in May 1977 as the ARC was welcomed by BRAG. However by December 1977, relations had deteriorated to such a degree that Anson was moved to write one of his long, part manifesto, part treatise letters to BRAG. Regarding a Bridgtown public meeting at which the ARC spoke, Anson wrote:

We showed slides of our work in other areas of the country. We offered you a manifesto as a platform for your renewed struggle and this unanimously accepted. We wrote you a song. Most important we tackled the problem of the stalemate into which you'd got yourselves, by suggesting that you break off all planning relationships with the Council, on the basis that no community can negotiate it's [sic] own extermination. This was fully accepted and was done.⁴⁴

Anson here expresses his frustration with the apparent success of the divide and rule tactics of the powers that be. The residents' action group was better motivated to defend itself than the group Anson had worked with at Covent Garden. However, the motivating factor here was, once again, vested interests. The villagers of Bridgtown were seeking to defend their way of life as well as their village and were thus motivated to engage in alternative ways of doing architecture.

Later in the letter Anson appears to express concern about the lack of radicalism on the part of the residents' group. His reference to the ARC writing BRAG a 'song' and attempting to engage them in other acts of active resistance received lukewarm support from the residents. Thus the ARC's attempts to reveal to the residents of Bridgtown the inevitable inequality of the planning process, biased then as now towards money and expertise, were unsuccessful. As with other projects, the ARC engaged with the local community who had initially called on their help but who were not interested in the revolutionary ideals that came with them.

This is the essential contradiction at the heart of the revolutionary groups working with the wider populace. The appetite for wholesale change and revolution amongst the general public is apparently minimal. The desire for such change is limited to particular circumstances and particular vested interests. This may seem self-serving or short sighted to the internationally minded revolutionary, but it is the motivating factor in the daily lives of the individual. It is therefore perhaps more the ARC's failures that we can learn from. Their failure to motivate the people of Bridgtown and numerous other ARC projects (Ealing, Colne Valley, and pre-ARC Covent Garden), to outright resistance or to revolution highlights the contradictions of revolutionary practices inside and outside of architecture. The ARC's failures can be seen as a key example of the difficulties of achieving revolution, Marxist or anarchist, within architecture. The architectural profession has become so removed from everyday life, even in the context of housing architecture, that most people would not immediately consider it to be central to their day-to-day experiences. This could not, however, be further from the truth as Habraken, referenced above, argued in 1962. A pertinent question would therefore be: can a practice that results in such a permanent presence as Architecture ever be revolutionised? The practice of Architecture as we know it is so reliant on the status quo and on money, power structures, authorities, governments and particular models of professionalism that perhaps only its wholesale destruction (as advocated by the ARC) can

⁴⁴ B. Anson, *Letter to Bridgtown Residents' Action Group from Brian Anson*, December 1977. ARC archive, Peter Maloney.

address the need for an architecture of the people. As Peter Maloney said in a recent interview with the author ‘Bridgtown was what Brian saw as what architecture should be, and architects should be doing it for free. There were little successes but the ultimate was build something’.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The examples here give us a series of stories and paths from which we can draw together a number of strands illustrating the development of anarchist ideas and modes of working in architecture in the twentieth century. These anarchist practices are, using a term attributed to Colin Ward, as those of an ‘unconscious anarchist’.⁴⁶ The key group referenced in this chapter, the ARC, would not even have described themselves as anarchist. Anson, as its most significant member, was ideologically firmly in the Revolutionary Marxist camp, and therefore the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism are perhaps closer to the ARC and its other members. The groups that the ARC worked for, and with, fall more fully into the category of unconsciously anarchist. From Covent Garden to Cannock, they were motivated by vested interests, not pure political ideology, Marxist or anarchist. Their desire was to save their homes, and their wider community, from destruction. Their desire to self-organise, to engage in anarchist practices, was therefore motivated by a more ‘natural’ desire to protect their homes. The wider work of the housing co-operative, the self-builder, the groups who seized control of their built environment for the greater good, can all be described as unconsciously anarchist acts. Some people such as Ward and Read were more explicit in their anarchism whilst also recognising the lack of anarchist motivation or ideology in the general populace. Ward particularly looked for ‘seeds under the snow’⁴⁷ in the behaviours of people who spoke to him of unconscious anarchism.

When attempts were made by the profession of Architecture and the Architect, however revolutionary, to radicalise the populace politically, they invariably failed. This mismatch is between the politically and ideologically motivated Architect (or architect, lowercase ‘a’) and the personally and emotionally motivated people. Ultimately however if the field of Architecture is to become one in which anarchist modes of doing and organising can develop, it is up to the profession to surrender its power and control over the process. Continuing the process of building buildings (architecture) does not require the profession (Architecture) to exist. The ‘secrets’ of Architecture, which are established and defended by the profession at large, are what maintains the Architect’s social status. It is this social and professional status that Architecture exists to defend.

It is important here to differentiate between the idea of a profession as a group of skills, expertise or as ‘a job well done’, and a profession as a means of accruing and retaining power, wealth and status. This distinction is perhaps a difficult one to draw as the two have become almost entirely synonymous in our society. One can understand, with only a vague appreciation of anthropological concepts, how in early human civilisations an individual with a particular skill, useful to the ‘clan’, would have been feted, and given social status because of this.

⁴⁵ P. Maloney, in conversation with the author, Bloomsbury, London, 15 May 2013.

⁴⁶ D. Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris* to Colin Ward (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 365.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

This however remains the mode by which professions continue to manifest and accrue power and influence today, albeit in a more a complex, multifaceted, technological society where more professions exist and different skills are needed. Bison hunters are less in evidence than web designers for obvious reasons. It does not follow that the possession of a certain skill has to convey special status: the now unimportant skill of hunting bison means the bison hunter no longer has high social status, as their skills are no longer of use to our society. Architects however are still largely of use. If, rather than seeing the status of the architect as an inevitable consequence of the use-value of the skills, we decoupled the skill from the social status, we could truly democratise the skill set of the architect.

This need not mean the diminishing of those skills but their dissemination. A suitable analogy would be writing. Now, almost everyone in the Global North has been educated to a level where they can read and write fluently. Thus the scribe as a profession has ceased to exist. So might it be with the architect. If all people were taught (or more accurately retaught) how to design and build there would be no more need for architects, they would merely cease to be.

A counter argument to this might be that buildings have become so technically complex that people who are not architects, or one of the manifold professions associated with building, cannot build or design them in this day and age. Then the question has to be 'are these the types of buildings we want and need?' If we have created an architecture so complex that only architects can design or understand it, then whom does this benefit the most? Us, or the Architect? Who is this Architecture for? Us, or the Architect as a social class?

If we want Architecture to lose its mystique, its elevated social status, its elite focus, and be made by the people for the people, then Architects and Architecture must cease to be, and be replaced by architects and architecture. This is not a radical reinvention, as much as a return to first principles of building for need and use, not speculation and profit.

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