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Relational Understanding of Practices and Policies of  
Contemporary Non-speculative Housing in the UK  
[abstract only]**

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# Community Led Approaches to Housing: Towards a Relational Understanding of Practices and Policies of Contemporary Non-speculative Housing in the UK

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This paper critically examines a range of community led housing models currently gaining popularity in the UK and begins to sketch a theoretical framework for understanding this subset of housing production in its relational aspects.

The landscape of community led, non-speculative, approaches to housing development in the UK is becoming increasingly rich and is enjoying an unprecedented period of growth. This paper frames the emergence of community led housing in the UK as a product of the interaction between marginal, countering, practices, rooted in ecological thinking, and neoliberal policies, pushing for a withdrawal of the state and individual initiative.

Contemporary community led housing projects, including co-housing, housing coops, collective custom build and community land trusts, are discussed in the context of recent UK policies, bypassing the customary binaries of bottom up and top down, alternative and mainstream, production and consumption, left and right. Instead, this paper explores, as an instance of 'thirding',<sup>1</sup> the openings created by the interaction between the contrasting ideologies driving groups of people to seek alternative models of housing production and the neoliberal housing policies that appear to scaffold them. Understanding these openings as fluid spaces, where oscillations between confrontational antagonism, critique, cooperative agonism and co-production are acceptable, and even desirable, helps mitigate the risks of countering practices being swallowed up through processes of sub-culturalisation.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore making visible the network of actors<sup>3</sup> coalescing around specific projects, be it policies, people or other contingent constraints, strengthens the signal<sup>4</sup> of small, potentially minor, projects, amplifying their impact and making them, in turn, actors shaping other projects.

Drawing on Gibson-Graham<sup>5</sup>, a starting point for an open, relational, *weak* theoretical framework for understanding the production of community led housing is put forward, underpinned by the notions of otherness,<sup>6</sup> multiplicity and diverse economies<sup>7</sup>, while *thick* descriptions of specific projects frame them as contingent assemblages<sup>8</sup> and help articulate models of community led housing development adopted in the UK in terms this emerging theoretical framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*.

<sup>2</sup> Daskalaki and Mould, 'Beyond Urban Subcultures'.

<sup>3</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

<sup>4</sup> Ezio Manzini, 'Enabling Platforms for Creative Communities'.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson-Graham, 'Rethinking the Economy with Thick Description and Weak Theory'.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*.

<sup>7</sup> Gibson-Graham, 'The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It)'; Gibson-Graham, 'Diverse Economies'.

<sup>8</sup> McFarlane, 'Assemblage and Critical Urbanism'; McFarlane, 'The City as Assemblage: Dwelling and Urban Space'.

This paper builds directly on, dialogues with and extends findings from two completed research projects on Community Led Housing Development<sup>9</sup> and Collective Custom Build,<sup>10</sup> as well as on ongoing research and practice of community led housing<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Parvin et al., 'A Right To Build - The Next Mass-Housebuilding Industry'.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Brown, Cristina Cerulli, and Fionn Stevenson, *Motivating Collective Custom Build Report*.

<sup>11</sup> Cristina Cerulli, 'A Social Ecology of Collective "DIY" Approaches to Housing in UK'.