

David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, 232 pages

Nicolas Thély

---

**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/715>

DOI: 10.4000/inmedia.715

ISSN: 2259-4728

**Publisher**

Center for Research on the English-Speaking World (CREW)

**Electronic reference**

Nicolas Thély, « David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* », *InMedia* [Online], 4 | 2013, Online since 12 November 2013, connection on 10 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/715> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.715>

---

This text was automatically generated on 10 December 2020.

© InMedia

---

David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, 232 pages

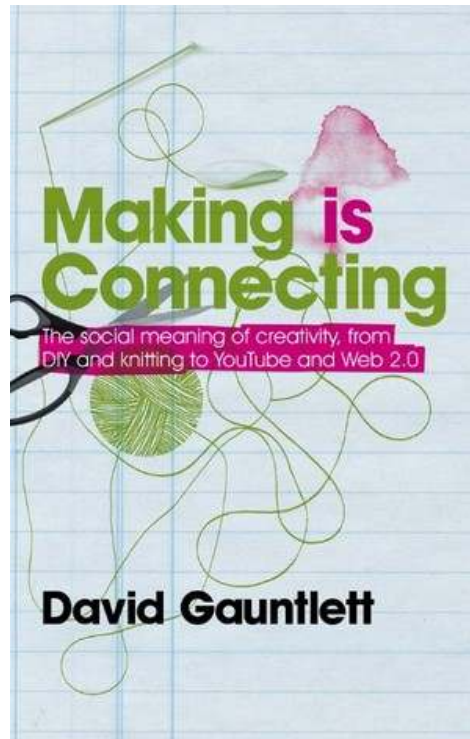
Nicolas Thély

---

REFERENCES

David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, 232 pages

- 1 Creativity contributes to favoring social links. This is the thesis of a new essay by David Gauntlett. Without distinguishing between major arts and minor arts, between amateur and professional practices, the sociologist is interested in “every day arts,” the ones that appear on the Internet and which concern the handmade and the Do It Yourself.
- 2 The concept of creativity is central to the research of David Gauntlett who, since 2006, has been Professor of Media and Communications at the University of Westminster. Creativity even affects his own research methods. Indeed, David Gauntlett uses a very original model of inquiry that assigns a key role to Lego bricks, these colored bricks usually available for children to develop their imagination. David Gauntlett explains why in his previous book *Creative Explorations: New approaches to identities and audiences* (2007).
- 3 While this may seem surprising or eccentric, one can nevertheless understand why: it is worth remembering that the Lego brick and the digital brick were invented at the same period in the late 1940s. Both bricks have become generational standards because they have structured the imagination of people who explore today's digital practices: the Lego brick is also an important artistic pattern in the repertoire of visual forms of contemporary art and mass culture, particularly apt to represent the pixel.
- 4 For David Gauntlett, the Lego brick has real experimental virtues in the conduct of research: it helps reveal situations, express and develop scenarios and inner uses for the non-physical or virtual network world 2.0. This is how, while he was engaged in holding seminars on creative visual research, the thesis of his new book, *Making is Connecting*, suddenly dawned on him. He illustrates this well in the first pages of his essay through four visuals showing how the three major operations of creativity (making, sharing, and collaboration) are now almost contemporaneous. Thanks to the Web protocols 2.0 which encode know-how, the burdensomeness of traditional channels of cooperation in the world of creativity has become a thing of the past.
- 5 But the revealing power of this method does not exclude the usual scientific work. Therefore, the challenge of David Gauntlett's new book is to seek the theoretical and intellectual filiations of this new performative statement (making is connecting) that has been operational since the advent of Web 2.0. The world described by David Gauntlett is that of all creative practices that revitalize themselves thanks to the Internet and which somehow form the common basis of digital culture. Three examples are Wikipedia (knowledge), Ravelry (knitting), Kiva (microfinance). For the sociologist the archetype of this new regime of creativity is YouTube because it concentrates three key principles: *a framework for participation, being agnostic about content, and fostering community*.



- 6 In the controversy that animates the debate on the meaning and usage of these platforms, users (people) are generally apprehended through the figure of the amateur. In 2007, Andrew Keen severely condemned amateurish practices in his book *The Cult of the Amateur (How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy)* because, according to him, the amateur's activities are compromising the knowledge economy and technical and management skills. In France, this new culture was instead defended by sociologist Patrice Flichy in his latest book *Le Sacre de l'amateur, Sociologie des passions ordinaires à l'ère numérique (The Consecration of the Amateur)*. For Flichy, the contemporary web has become the kingdom of amateurs, he calls them "quidam" (an everyman of sorts).
- 7 David Gauntlett avoids this major semantic pitfall by placing at the center of this debate the creativity of millions of Internet users, he seeks to understand how creativity that eludes the industry helps to create social links and to produce another flow of knowledge and expertise. In this essay, the reader will find neither real case studies nor portraits of people who could serve as examples or models. The sociologist has chosen to deliver a very academic text in which he examines the potential theoretical filiations of digital creativity and ideological boundaries too.
- 8 At first, David Gauntlett goes back to the late 19th century when tensions arose again between art and craft under the pressure of societal changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. He presents the background and philosophy of the two major figures of the Arts and Crafts movement: John Ruskin, painter and poet, who argued that "the thought and the craft of making, the mental and the physical, were united in the same process" (np); and William Morris, textile designer, furniture designer and editor, who thought "The best artist was a workman still, the humblest workman was an artist". David Gauntlett finds in these attitudes the values of DIY's ethical culture, the passion for craft industry and neglected practices, the pleasure of making something for someone else: "DIY is, therefore, part of the original Arts and Crafts message – but processed through American optimism, and communicated in a cheerful and unpretentious way."
- 9 Secondly, David Gauntlett examines the values that could explain why people are longing for social relationships through creativity. Succinctly looking at current research about happiness, the sociologist sees happiness as a determining factor. But the reader should not interpret happiness as a metaphysical value that might ethically condition the thoughts and actions of Web 2.0 users. Readers must conceive happiness as pleasure, satisfaction. David Gauntlett also regrets that studies on social capital provide little evidence to think about creativity as a factor for social linking. Approaching very briefly the founding theories of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, David Gauntlett focuses on the analysis of Robert Putnam for whom social capital is based on the network of knowledge. These analyses might have brought sense to the discussion, accusing television in particular of destroying any social links, yet they are often at odds with the arisal of social media.
- 10 Thirdly, David Gauntlett turns to the track of Ivan Illich who embodies the figure of the one who has been able to envisage a very open-minded productivity and the question of the transmission of knowledge. Taking up the concepts of "tools" and "conviviality" developed by Illich, David Gauntlett makes the link with the new culture taking shape at the beginning of the 1970s when computers were designed as open devices. Today, the Apple company seems to have closed this field with its digital tablet. If David

Gauntlett praises the development of services that allow people to be creative and build relationships, he is not fooled by the twilight zones around such a way of living. To deposit personal data and ensure content for these platforms, means exposing oneself to Internet algorithmic speculations.

- 11 *Making is Connecting* is a deceptively cheerful book. If the purpose of the book is to discuss creativity, the reader will quickly understand how David Gauntlett measures the epistemological gap between the digital world and the theoretical tools devised in a non-digital culture. But for those interested in the proliferation of Fablabs and the rise of DIY culture, this book provides an original and constructive discussion. It echoes the question of emancipation as formulated in the 1980s by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. The word “emancipation” means the blurring of boundaries between those who act and those who watch, between individuals and members of a collective body: the rebuilding “here and now” of the sharing of space and time, of work and leisure. Gauntlett’s study thus contributes to the debate about the invention and recognition of people’s emancipation, a fundamental concept of humanism and for modern and contemporary democracies.

---

AUTHOR

NICOLAS THÉLY

Université de Haute Bretagne, Rennes 2