# Extract from Chapter 1: 'Introduction'

[*The chapter opens with one or two stories about groups who have done some making and connecting, with a positive impact upon the world. I haven't selected which stories to use yet*].

[ . . . ]

## Making is connecting

This brings us to the title of the book: 'Making is connecting'. It's a perfectly simple phrase, of course, and I'm sure a cynic could say it is banal, or meaningless. But having spent some time thinking about people making things, and people connecting with others – making *and* connecting – I realised that it was meaningful, and more pleasing, to note that these are one and the same process: making *is* connecting.

I mean this in three principal ways:

- Making is connecting because you have to connect things together (materials, ideas, or both) to make something new;
- Making is connecting because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people;
- And making is connecting because through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments.

Of course, there will be objections and exceptions to each of these, which we will consider along the way. But that's my basic set of propositions.

# How did I get here?

I think it's helpful to know how someone came to be interested in their chosen subject; so I hope it makes sense to explain my own route into this arena. I'll try to keep it simple. I was trained as a sociologist, being interested in people and how they make meaning in their lives. I thought that the place of media in people's lives was under-researched or poorly understood, so went into that area, which is generally called the study of 'media audiences'. Then, as part of my effort to explore people's own understandings of the media and its messages in a different way, I started to develop creative and visual research methods. These were ways of doing research where I asked people to *make things* as part of the process. Through making things such as collage, videos, or drawings, research participants were drawn into the reflective process of thinking about something and making something about it, *before* getting to the point where I would ask them to talk about it. (This is as opposed to the more traditional qualitative method of expecting participants, in interviews or focus groups, to be able to speak instantly about the topic which the researcher is interested in). For example, I did a project which explored children's attitudes to the environment, and ecological issues, by asking groups of seven- to eleven-year-olds to make videos about 'the environment' (Gauntlett, 1997); a project which explored teenagers' relationships with celebrity culture by asking them to produce, and then talk about, drawings of celebrities (Gauntlett, 2005); and supervised a PhD student who explored young people's perceptions of their own identities, and the media's role in shaping their conceptions of self, by asking them to create identity collages that expressed 'how I see myself' and 'how I think other people see me' (Awan, 2008).

In each of these studies it was clear that thinking and making are aspects of the same process: nobody would do the 'thinking' part first, and plan exactly what they would make, and then launch into a purely mechanical act of producing the thing that they had imagined. Perhaps a minority of unusual individuals might work in that manner – but it seems unlikely that 'thinking' and 'making' could ever be wholly separated. Typically, people mess around with materials, select things, experimentally put parts together, rearrange, play, make surplus elements, throw bits away, and generally manipulate the thing in question until it approaches something that seems to communicate meanings in a satisfying manner. This rarely seems to be a matter of 'making what I thought at the start,' but rather a process of discovery and having ideas *through* the process of making.

I'd done some of these projects, then, and shared information about them online. (I'd also produced traditional academic publications, but it's the online stuff that has particular visibility – easy to find with Google; immediate access; illustrated with pictures or video). This led to me being emailed in late 2004 by Per Kristiansen, who at

the time was Director of Lego Serious Play, a consultancy process developed by Lego. Lego, as you will know, is the company based in Denmark which makes a construction system known to children around the world as a colourful toy, and to a smaller number of adult fans and some artists, again internationally, as a creative material. The company itself is also known to business people as a case-study of innovation, creative design processes, and customer service.

## The Lego connection

Lego Serious Play, and my research, had something obvious in common: we ran workshops where we hoped to gain new insights by inviting participants to go through a reflective process of *making* something, and then explaining it, as part of the process. But Lego Serious Play had something extra, and distinctive: the idea of using *metaphor*. Now, metaphors appear quite naturally in, say, videos and drawings, and are a common part of collage. But the clever thing Lego Serious Play did was to work *only* in metaphors. Metaphors were what you made. And because that's not necessarily what people would do if left to their own devices, they had also devised a brilliant 'skills building' process which introduced participants to building in metaphor in simple steps.

One especially crucial step went as follows. The Lego Serious Play facilitator would ask participants to build a particular animal. They would have a few minutes to do this. So far, so normal: you make, say, a giraffe in Lego by putting together Lego pieces, as best you can, so that they create a representation of a giraffe – yellow, four legs, long neck, eyes. Each individual in the group would make an animal, and then the group would attend to each person in turn and see what animal each of them had made. Some would probably be impressive, with clever moving features; some might be rather unconvincing. This didn't matter. The important bit actually came next, when the facilitator would say something like, 'OK, you've all made a great representation of an animal. But now I want you to spend just *two* minutes to change it, so that it represents how you feel on Friday afternoons'. They could equally say 'how you feel on Monday mornings,' or 'how you feel about' some other benign issue – since this was just practice. This stage was a crucial turning-point, where participants shifted from building on the literal plane (a construction that looks like an animal) to the metaphorical plane (a construction that represents an emotional feeling). This step typically came easily enough to participants, and then after that, they could readily be led into making metaphorical representations of their team relationships, their company and its relationships with other bodies, or their organisational strategy.

Because we had mutual interests, and I was impressed by the amount of thought that had gone into the clever Lego Serious Play process, a collaboration was born. I developed a version of Lego Serious Play as a tool for sociological research, which

enabled me to make some observations about how people think about their identities, and the place of media in thinking about self-identity (discussed in the book *Creative Explorations*, Gauntlett, 2007). Working with Lego Serious Play really clarified for me a number of things:

- The process of *making* something, in relation to a particular subject, drives people to think about it in a different way.
- Having *time*, to reflect on a particular question or issue, is a significant part of this.
- Using the *hands* is also an important dimension.
- Once a metaphorical object is created, the maker can '*take a step back*' and review the thing in terms of both the parts and the whole.
- More broadly, this is part of *visual thinking*.

Let's look at each of these five points in turn.

## Making and thinking

Making something about a particular subject drives people to think about it in a different way. This difference is basically a kind of rigour, depth or thoroughness. Now, of course, human beings are theoretically capable of thinking about any subject with rigour, depth or thoroughness *without* being engaged in an activity of making something. But I say 'theoretically capable' because, on the one hand, of course we *can*, and on the other hand, I believe we mostly *don't*. The task of making something provides motivation, discipline and focus.

For example, if I have a business, it would obviously be a good idea for me to sit down and really think about my business strategy. If we run a school, we would surely benefit from thinking thoroughly about how we deal with learners and how we hope to engage them with learning, and perhaps how we will know if any learning has taken place. If I am a human being (which, as it happens, I am), it might be sensible to think carefully about what I want to get out of life, and try to line up my activities so that they point towards these goals.

But if these examples are all things which we recognise as matters which we certainly 'should think about thoroughly,' it is almost equally certain that we won't really get round to it. There's always something else to *do* – even if that is just answering emails or watching television. Therefore, we have to shift the activity of thinking into being also an activity of doing, or it simply won't get done.

Furthermore, it's not easy to just 'think' without something concrete to work on. People write, or make a video, or website, about a topic not merely to share what they already

know, but as an exercise in *thinking about* what they know, reviewing it, and setting it down. To return to the examples above, people are endlessly capable of putting off thinking properly about their business, education, or lifestyle strategy; but, if you put them in a room and get them to engage in a hands-on process of making things to represent their feelings, interests and concerns (a process such as Lego Serious Play), and then to examine and interrogate these things and build solutions to the problems encountered, they will be compelled to engage in rigorous thinking which otherwise probably would not have taken place.

## Taking time

One dimension of this 'thinking through making' is that one necessarily has to spend *time* addressing a question or issue. This is really a corollary of the previous point: by setting ourselves a task so that we are actively thinking about a topic, we correspondingly block out a chunk of time to be doing so. Nevertheless, this temporal dimension is important. We might ask someone about their strategy for their business, their school, or their life, and they may or may not be able to give us an immediate coherent answer. However, if we ask them to engage in a process where they will think about a question, then make something (whilst, naturally, thinking), then consider and review the thing that they have made, this is a much longer stretch of thoughtfulness which will almost certainly lead to deeper thinking.

A process which takes some time, and involves a creative task, also allows for the possibility that thoughts or ideas which are not immediately accessible to conscious thought will be given time to 'surface'. The question of unconscious or subconscious thoughts can seem like murky territory, but as I established in my discussion of this area in *Creative Explorations* (2007), the existence of unconscious or subconscious processing is not (merely) a Freudian kind of hypothesis, but is widely accepted by neuroscientists and psychologists as a straightforward empirical fact. It is also part of people's commonly reported experience. For instance, in his book *Creativity*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi had interviewed and studied 91 highly successful creative people, and found that they 'unanimously' agreed that problems should be allowed to 'simmer below the threshold of consciousness for a time' (1997: 98). Csikszentmihalyi found that 'most of the people in our sample' could clearly recall an '"Aha!" moment' when the solution to a problem crystallised in their minds, usually while they were doing something else entirely (p. 103-4). So, although these insights cannot be *forced* into the open, it follows that taking some time, and tinkering with objects and materials, might create an opportunity for such ideas to emerge.

## Hands on

The Lego Serious Play process makes much of what they call the ‘hands-on, minds-on’ engagement of picking things up and putting them together with your hands. There are more nerve-endings in the hands than anywhere else in the human body –which means that there are the strongest connections between hands and brain – and neuroscientists, from Penfield & Rasmussen (1950) onwards, have noticed the concentration of activity between mind and hand. Artists, designers and craftspeople report that there is a strong meaning to ‘thinking with the hands’ (see, for example, Welch (1997), Krasner (2000), Sobol (2001), Sennett (2008)). Tinkering and manipulating with the hands is often seen as a standard part of the creative process. Some educationalists have also noted the power of ‘hands on’ learning (see, for instance, Pedersen and McCurdy (1992), Christensen (1995), Cree (2003), Corpuz and Rebello (2007)). Nevertheless the importance of the hands remains difficult to ‘prove’ to those who assert that they can generate ideas just as well through abstract thought and language; and in a world which is increasingly digital, where the hands are clicking keys to change things on a screen, rather than manipulating real objects, the point remains rather a difficult one. (We will return to the split between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ creative activity at other points in the book.) But, since this is a list of personal observations and conclusions drawn from my work facilitating Lego Serious Play sessions – and having been a participant in some myself – I am definitely happy to assert my belief that there is real meaning to ‘thinking with the hands’ – you pick up some pieces, put them together, and meanings follow. There’s a kind of serendipity – but it’s not *really* chance, it’s your brain working – which means that very meaningful things usually come out of what begins as ‘idle’ making.

## Taking a step back

Once a thing has been created, its maker gets the opportunity to ‘take a step back’ and review it, reflect on it, and see what messages it appears to convey. These might be different from the intended meanings, but are often fruitful. For instance, in Lego Serious Play sessions, an individual might be focused on putting together a number of individual metaphors which communicate different aspects of the topic in hand. But when they have finished, they can take a step back and look at the whole thing that they have created. In the same way that a poem might be made of separate metaphorical elements, but also convey a metaphorical meaning when taken as a whole, so too a three-dimensional model might be made of individual metaphorical parts, but also add up to a broader meaning. Usually, ‘taking a step back’ leads the maker to give a smile or nod of recognition – noting that the overall model appeared to be generally positive, or

gloomy, or rigid, or messy, its creator would often admit, ‘well yes, I *am* like that’. Therefore being able to take a step back, to review what one has made, involves both surprise and familiarity.

## Visual thinking

Making a response to a question or issue in a visual form, rather than starting by speaking or writing about it, can help to sidestep some of the difficulties and readymade patterns that come with the use of language. By enabling a set of ideas to be presented together, ‘all in one go’, a visual creation can communicate a landscape of thought in a way that is not really possible in linear language, where we must necessarily put our thoughts into a particular order. As Rudolph Arnheim argued in his book *Visual Thinking* (1969), language forces us to put items into a linear string of words or sentences, and therefore tends to create the impression that one thing leads to another, or that there is an order of importance.

> Propositional language, which consists of linear chains of standardized units, has come about as a product of the intellect; but while language suits the needs of the intellect perfectly, it has a desperate time dealing with field processes, with images, with physical and social constellations, with the weather or a human personality, with works of art, poetry, and music.
>
> (Arnheim, 1986: 20–21)

This, then, is another feature of making things: it enables us to visualise ideas, concepts, or problems in an unfamiliar way, and therefore to think about them differently.

## Creative methods, and Web 2.0, as metaphors

That, then, is a summary of what I had learnt from my work with visual methods and Lego Serious Play: that making can lead to different kinds of thinking, that taking time and using the hands are important, and that working with the visual and being able to oversee the whole things that we have created, are all powerful aspects of the process. This book is not, of course, about visual methods for business consultancy, or creative research methods for social scientists. However it is informed by that work in a number of ways. We’ve just listed several of them, showing how making things is a powerful way of thinking about issues.

In addition, in this book, we take creative research methods, and Web 2.0, as *metaphors* for how broader things should be done. So, if we think about creative research methods, in the normal literal sense, they are about getting people to make things, so that they

themselves, and researchers, might be better able to understand their feelings about a particular issue. But if we think about creative research methods in a *metaphorical* sense, they can be about people using 'tools for thinking' to generate creative solutions to social issues and global challenges, such as how to live well as a community, or how to tackle or adapt to climate change.

We can think about Web 2.0 in a similar way. In the non-metaphorical sense, Web 2.0 is about harnessing the collective abilities of the members of an online network, to make an especially powerful resource or service. But we can also think of it as a metaphor, for any collective activity which is enabled by people's passions and becomes something greater than the sum of its parts.

At this point we should probably pause to clarify what 'Web 2.0' means. I normally explain it using a Powerpoint slide showing gardens and an allotment, that I made using Lego (fig. 1). In the first decade or so of the Web's existence (from the 1990s to the early to mid 2000s), websites tended to be like separate gardens. So for example the NASA website was one garden, and my Theory.org.uk website was another garden, and a little-known poet had made her own poetry website, which was another garden. You could visit them, and each of them might be complex plots of creative and beautiful content, but basically they were separate, with a fence between each one. There's nothing *wrong* with this model, as such; it works perfectly well as a platform for all kinds of individuals, groups, or organisations, big and small, to make stuff available online. But this model is what we might now call 'Web 1.0'. By contrast, 'Web 2.0' is like a collective allotment. Instead of individuals tending their own gardens, they come together to work collaboratively in a shared space.

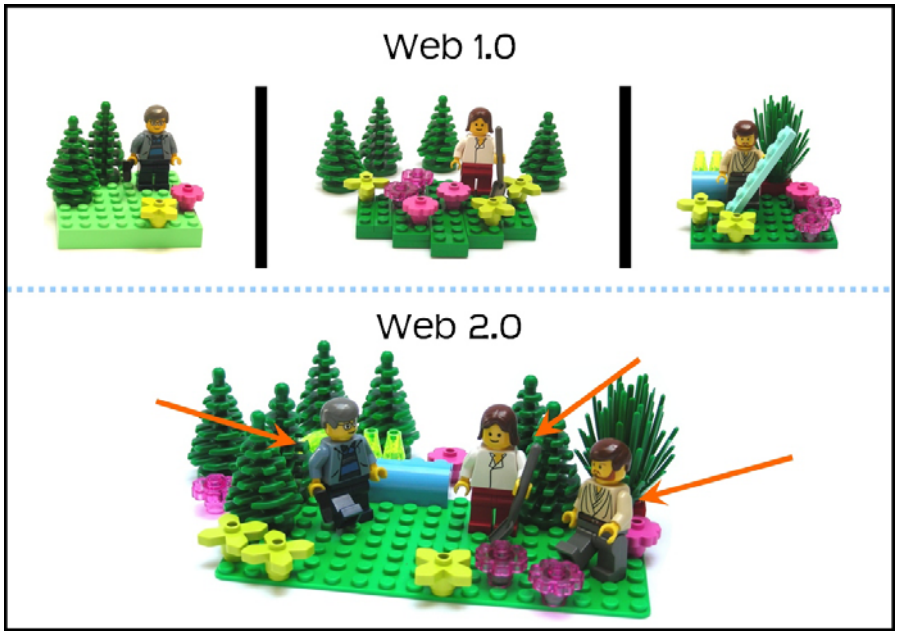


*Fig. 1: Web 1.0 as separate gardens, Web 2.0 as an allotment*

This is actually what Tim Berners-Lee had meant his World Wide Web to be like, when he invented it in 1990. He imagined that browsing the Web would be a matter of writing and editing, not just searching and reading. The first years of the Web, then, were an aberration, and it has only more recently blossomed in the way its creator intended. As an illustration of this, I clearly remember that when I read about this read/write model in Berners-Lee's book, *Weaving the Web*, when it was published in 1999, it seemed like a nice idea, but naïve, and bonkers. How could it possibly work?! I didn't want to spend hours crafting my lovely webpages only for some visitor to come along and mess them up. But of course, my problem – shared with almost everybody else at the time – was that I had not learned to recognise the power of the network. We still thought of everybody 'out there' as basically 'audience'.

At the heart of Web 2.0 is the idea that online sites and services become more powerful the more that they *embrace* this network of potential collaborators. Rather than just seeing the internet as a broadcast channel, which brings an audience to a website (the '1.0' model), Web 2.0 invites users in to play. Sites such as Flickr, YouTube, EBay, Facebook, Craigslist, and Wikipedia, only exist and have value because people use and contribute to them, and they are clearly *better* the more people are using and contributing to them. This is the essence of Web 2.0. The man who coined the term, Tim O'Reilly, has drawn up four levels of 'Web 2.0-ness' to illustrate this (O'Reilly, 2006). In this hierarchy, a 'level three' application could 'only exist on the net, and draws its essential power from the network and the connections it makes possible between people or applications', whereas a 'level zero' application is the kind of thing that you could distribute on a CD without losing anything. (Levels one and two are mid-points in between).

So now we can return to the idea of Web 2.0 as a metaphor. In the books *We Think* by Charles Leadbeater (2008), and *Here Comes Everybody* by Clay Shirky (2008), both authors discuss the example of Wikipedia, noting the impressive way in which it has brought together enthusiasts and experts, online, to collaboratively produce a vast encyclopedia which simply would not exist without their millions of contributions. These contributions, of course, are given freely, and without any reward (apart, of course, from the warm glow of participation, and the very minor recognition of having your username listed somewhere in an article's history logs). Both authors then go on to wonder whether the Wikipedia model of encyclopedia-making can be translated across to… well, everything else. So, in these cases, Wikipedia becomes a metaphor for highly participatory and industrious collaboration. But actually, they're not really thinking of 'everything else' – it's 'everything else *online*'. Wikipedia becomes a model of highly participatory and industrious *online* collaboration. Now, Leadbeater and Shirky are both highly intelligent and imaginative writers, and their books are well worth reading. Perhaps they understand the limits of a sensible argument better than I. But it seems to me that the really powerful metaphorical leap would be to go from Web 2.0 to real life –

the social world and all its complexities, not just from Wikipedia to other internet services. (I expect Charles Leadbeater is doing some of this, implicitly if not explicitly, in some of his other work, such as his ideas on education reform – see www.charlesleadbeater.net).

So, in this book we will be taking the message of making, sharing, and collaboration, which has become familiar to the people who enthuse about Web 2.0, and seeing if it works in a broader context – in relation to both offline and online activities – and with bigger issues – real social problems rather than virtual online socialising.

## The implications of 'making is connecting'

The assertion that 'making is connecting' can be broken down into a set of further, constituent points. These will all be explored as we go through the book:

- People want to make the world their own;
- People want to make their mark on the world;
- People want to be social, and (therefore) people want to make connections;
- Creativity is channelled through tools, enabling us to make things;
- We get more value from making things if we can share them with others;
- Collaborating with others contributes to happiness and well-being;
- Old ways of doing things are connected with a 'sit back and be told' culture;
- We are seeing a shift towards a 'making and doing' culture (which rejects the elements of 'sit back and be told').

Let's flesh out each of these a little.

### *People want to make the world their own*

This doesn't mean that people want to *dominate* the world – just to customise it according to their own tastes and preferences, and to communicate something about themselves. We use our hands, or our creativity in other ways, to make meanings; and we use objects, which we invest with meanings, to represent ourselves.

For example, people modify their clothing, their mobile phones, or their laptops, with additional bits and bobs to make them more 'individual'. People who work in office cubicles understandably like to make this bland space more distinctive – to make it *their* space – by adding pictures and mementoes. And on social networking websites, such as Facebook, users typically spend some time adding information and decoration to make more personal and expressive representations of their self-identity, for others to see.

In an article entitled ‘Imaging the Intangible’, Tony Whincup (2004) discusses the ways in which people use objects, invested with meaning, to both communicate and remember elements of personal life which would otherwise not be visible. I’ve discussed this previously in *Creative Explorations* (2007, pages 139–142), so I won’t repeat it all here; but briefly: Whincup argues that we keep and display pictures and objects in order to give material existence to those memories and feelings which they are associated with. This helps to make ‘real’ something which otherwise would only be in our minds – or, to be more specific, our memories, which are not entirely reliable. As Wincup puts it:

> Memory, a slippery and fragile thing, is constantly open to subtraction and addition. Inevitably, people have searched for strategies through which to restore the memory of these otherwise tenuous and transitory life events and socially agreed values.
>
> (Whincup, 2004: 80).

Objects are therefore ‘charged’ with the ‘safekeeping’ of memories, and therefore take on the same ‘priceless’ value as the memories themselves. The story that is told by people’s personal objects, customised things, and pictures, is usually a positive and aspirational one, helping people to sustain an ‘“advantageous” sense of self’ (Whincup, 2004: 81). Whincup argues that this is not really in order to show off to others. Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) would suggest that people’s displays of visual material – along with everything else they present to the world – are part of a staged construction intended to give a particular (usually positive) impression to an external audience. But Whincup seems to disagree, arguing that these displays are primarily about creating a stable sense of self-identity for *oneself*. We review our own stuff, and gain comfort from the consistencies and patterns which we can observe in ‘the concrete expressions of our experiences’. Whincup says that people seek to assemble ‘coherent and satisfying’ combinations of items, ‘with the emphasis upon a particular sense of unity’ (p. 81). This claim was firmly supported by my Lego identity study, in which participants clearly sought to present unified and balanced models to represent themselves, which they worked on with quiet intensity until they were satisfied.

### *People want to make their mark on the world*

The previous point was that people want to make the world their own, at a broadly inward-looking, individual level – simply to feel better *in themselves*. The external-facing corollary of this is our next point: that people want to make their mark – they would like to have some kind of impact on the world. This doesn’t necessarily mean winning a Nobel Prize, or becoming Prime Minister. We can see people’s desire to make a mark on the world on a much more everyday level. As colleagues and managers, teachers and mentors, group or union organisers, people try to help others and are

remembered for this contribution. People love and educate their children, and on a more material level, make meals, clothes and toys for them.

On blogs and websites, people publish words and pictures and hope for a reaction from the 'outside world'. Graffitti artists, whilst less universally respected, are also people wanting to make their mark, physically, on the streets. Going further, we should note that 'making your mark' isn't always wholesome apple-pie stuff, but is also the aim of propagandists, bigots and terrorists. But the point remains, that people want to make their mark, in all kinds of ways. So, we like to customise environments so that we feel better within ourselves, and also because we like to share our creativity with others.

### *People want to be social, and (therefore) people want to make connections*

The assertion that 'people want to be social' seems banal, and it might even strike you as incorrect: the desire to go to parties, or chat to strangers, is far from being consistently strong across the population. However, having social ties which are important to you is not the same as being a 'social animal'. People do tend to have, or seek, a close and intimate relationship with a partner, and do tend to have family ties which, in spite of some ups and downs, are important to them. Having friends is important to most people. There is strong evidence for all of this. The economist Richard Layard, whose study of happiness we will return to in chapter xx, cites a range of data, based on very large-scale surveys, which show that people's reported levels of happiness are higher when they are in close relationships (married or cohabiting) and when they have friends and community whom they can trust and rely on (Layard, 2005: 62–71).

It follows from this desire to be social, that people will generally value the opportunity to make new connections, or to make stronger connections with people we already know. We can see both of these interests driving the popularity of online social networks. On the one hand these sites enable people to make links with strangers who share their particular interests, and on the other hand the sites are used to strengthen bonds with people they already know. Indeed, the latter is the most common activity (Jayson, 2009). People seek to make connections in other ways too, through everyday social activity, interest groups, and creative activities which we will discuss in later chapters.

### *Creativity is channelled through tools, enabling us to make things*

Creativity is often talked about as a general Good Thing, and something to be encouraged, which of course is fine, but can turn 'creativity' into something of an abstraction. In practice, creativity isn't really like that. It is heavily integrated in the world of tools and objects. If someone was to announce that they were going to be

'creative' now, and then just sat in their chair, you would be surprised. Creativity takes place through action, through manipulating materials – whether wood, brick, plastic, ink and paper, a musical instrument, or words and images on a screen. Even the thought experiments to do with creativity, such as asking someone to name as many uses as they can think of for a paperclip, are associated with objects (in this case, the paperclip). Creativity, then, does not just 'happen', but is typically channelled through particular materials, and takes place in a particular context – a field of expectation or prior activity which the new production is informed by, and engages with. Making something, whether as a response to the existing field or produced in complete ignorance of it, can be a source of personal pleasure, and does not necessarily depend on showing it to anyone else. But, moving on to the next point, it is often a further – and perhaps greater – pleasure when others can engage with our creative output.

***We get more value from making things if we can share them with others***

The context of the creative activity may affect what goes *into* the work, as mentioned above, with previously-made things potentially providing foundations and inspiration. But the context is especially important as the field into which the new work is *presented*. It is here that the particular contribution can be considered and evaluated, and which may provide the platform from which this act of creativity can be shared with others. Some writers on creativity, such as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, even suggest that creativity is a phenomenon which *only* occurs in a social context and cannot be understood, or even recognised, in isolation (see for example Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). But I do not want to set a high bar on creativity here, or be considering only innovative new developments in relatively elite forms such as architecture, engineering or music. We are more concerned here with activities like baking a cake, making a toy, writing a thought, or presenting a contribution to YouTube, Flickr or Facebook. At this level of everyday creativity, we are not so concerned with staking a claim to great external value or originality, but are just happy to have been able to share something with friends, family or community.

Orientation to an audience adds to the meaningfulness of the things we make, and also means that quality is likely to be increased. For instance, the clarity or style of aYouTube video I am making might receive a push when I imagine an audience looking at it; and thinking about my son playing with a toy will drive me to make it as well as I can for him (whilst also fighting perfectionism by remembering that its quirks and faults are what make it special and individual). What I say on Twitter is (hopefully) calibrated to be informative and entertaining for the people who follow me. And similarly, while writing this book I am continually trying to imagine how much the reader might want me to say on each topic, trying to make it interesting, and to provide meaningful examples, whilst striking a balance between being concise and being longwinded. So

the *anticipated* audience has an impact on the work before the actual audience ever meets it.

### *Collaborating with others contributes to happiness and well-being*

Sharing the things we have made, and working with others, is not simply pleasant and rewarding on an individual level. As researchers on happiness and 'social capital' have shown – as we will see in chapter three – these kinds of activities contribute to the social good and a happier society. [*You can read more about this in the extract from Chapter 3 available at www.makingisconnecting.org*].

### *Old ways of doing things are connected with a 'sit back and be told' culture*

Since the historical point at which education became institutionalised in a system of schools, learning was a process that was directed by a teacher, whose task it would be to transfer nuggets of knowledge into young people's minds. It was not always this formulaic, of course, and some teachers have always sought to inspire their students to produce their own perspectives on art, poetry, or science. Nevertheless, and in spite of some innovative pedagogical thinking in the 1960s and 70s, school education has tended to settle around a model where a body of knowledge is input into students, who are tested on their grasp of it at a later point.

In the UK, this became especially embedded through the introduction of a National Curriculum (from 1988), with tests for children aged 7, 11, and 14, as well as the qualifications examined at 16 and advanced levels up to age 18, intended to record student performance across the country and therefore to enable the production school 'league tables'. Teachers would therefore support their students best by preparing them for tests and stuffing them full of the 'right' answers. The limitations of this approach to learning were, thankfully, not lost on teachers, journalists, and others (even though conservative newspapers seemed to both be delighted that 'standards' could finally be monitored and compared, but also appalled by the falling 'standards' which seemed to accompany the introduction of these tests and tables). Indeed, at the time of writing, head teachers are (unusually) leading a rebellion against the tests. Therefore there are some signs that the 'sit back and be told' culture in schools might be breaking down, and some exciting new ideas for learning based around students generating knowledge for themselves, by experimenting and questioning, seem to be catching on (see Claxton, 2008).

Meanwhile, the twentieth century was emphatically the era of 'sit back and be told' media: especially in the second half of that century, leisure time became about staying in, not going out, and remaining pretty much in the same spot for long chunks of time, looking at a screen. This isn't a gloomy view, it's facts: in 2008, Americans watched on

average over four and a half hours of televison per day, much as they had done for several decades (www.nielsen.com). In the UK, it's just under four hours per day (www.barb.co.uk). This is, of course, a lot, and since it's an average, for everybody watching less than this, there's other people watching more.

Marshall McLuhan's famous statement that 'the medium is the message' can be taken in various ways, but fundamentally it points to the way in which the arrival of a medium, such as television, in our lives, can affect the way we live – not really because of the content of the messages it carries, but from the generally less noticed ways in which it causes us to rearrange our affairs. It's a very good insight. Media 'effects', when we are talking about media *content*, are notoriously hard to measure, generally inconsequential, and mixed up with other influences. But the overall 'effect' of the introduction of television – assuming the broadcasters have some reasonably enjoyable or informative programmes – is clearly *massive* in terms of how people spend their lives. Four hours of viewing, as an *average*, and *every day*, is an astonishing transformation in how human beings spend time, compared with the pre-television era.

This point is usually made by people who don't like television and think that it is full of rubbish. I don't (necessarily) think that at all: I could happily spend four hours a day watching programmes that I judged to be good quality, from today's TV schedules, if I felt that I had the time. So I don't mean to sound elitist, and 'if I felt that I had the time' might sound snobbish, but with a young son, a wife, work, sleep, and other things to do, I just don't have that time, but that's not connected to an evaluation of TV content: I just *don't have* four hours. Of course, that view is a consequence of my prioritising of possible activities, and so, yes, television is pushed down the list because it is not a very creative or sociable way to spend time. There's no making or connecting there. And so we are returned to the theme of this book.

### *We are seeing a shift towards a 'making and doing' culture*

More optimistically, we can see a growing engagement with a 'making and doing' culture, which rejects the passivity of the 'sit back' model and seeks opportunities for creativity, social connections, and personal growth. Guy Claxton's discussion of education, *What's the Point of School* (2008), highlights ways in which some teachers are beginning to reject the 'sit back and be told' school culture described above, and instead are setting their students challenges which are much more about 'making and doing'. Students are encouraged to work together to ask questions, explore different strategies of investigation, and create their own solutions. This approach is open about the fact that learning is an ongoing process that everyone is engaged in – teachers themselves might show that they are engaged in a learning project, such as starting to keep bees, or learn a musical instrument. Rather than displaying laminated examples of the 'best answer' on the walls, these classrooms show works in progress, experiments,

even things that had gone wrong. They encourage a 'hands on' approach to learning, and a spirit of enquiry and questioning.

In the case of the media, there is obviously the shift towards internet-based interactivity, which has had a genuine impact on the way that people spend time and on the ways in which they can connect with each other. [*Some statistics to be added*]. The popularity of 'Web 2.0' is especially significant here, as easy-to-use online tools which enable people to learn about, and from, each other, and to collaborate and share resources, has made a real difference to what people do with, and can get from, their electronic media.

The *range* of collaborative things that people do online is extraordinary. Academics, to some extent, have tended to focus on the more 'serious' uses, such as political activism, and the ubiquitous Wikipedia. But of course there are online communities about absolutely everything.

A prospective PhD student emailed me recently, and said that he was interested in how the internet can connect people with politics[1]. 'Did you know,' he said, 'more people visit *knitting* websites than politics websites!' This was clearly meant to be a Bad Thing, a depressing sign of the ditsy kind of world we live in. I was unlikely to warm to his point, however, since the crafty people online are especially enterprising, and have cleverly designed websites and social networks. And in particular, I didn't like his emphasis since, only the day before, my wife had joined an *amazing* knitting network called Ravelry. This site (www.ravelry.com) offers users a Projects section where you can show what you're working on, an inventory of your materials in Stash, a Notebook, and all kinds of other nice features. It is good on the practical side, helping users to share knitting patterns, tips, and ideas, and just as effective on the social side, enabling communication amongst like-minded people, who provide each other with mutual support and inspiration. (Therefore, one is bound to think, rather than asking why online knitting is bigger than online politics, we should perhaps be asking why the politics sites can't be more like the knitting ones, enabling people to record their personal projects, make connections and form collaborations).

Elsewhere, community projects, craft clubs, and public art activities, are growing in popularity as people come to recognise the value of making and connecting in the real world. [*Continues…*]

[ . . . ]

**For other material, videos, links and more, see: www.makingisconnecting.org**

[1] This incident was also covered in my blog post, 'Knitting and politics' (12 March 2009, linked to at www.makingisconnecting.org). The post gained more replies than I was used to – passions run deep in knitting, as in politics.