

This is the *original* (but deleted) beginning of the book *Making is Connecting: The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*, by David Gauntlett. The book was published by Polity Press in 2011.

David Gauntlett notes: The book was finished, and this opening was one of the last parts that I wrote. I was quite pleased with it, but a friend read the whole manuscript, and said mostly nice things, but he really didn't like this beginning, which he said meant that the whole thing took too long to get going. Much better, he said, to start with the bit that actually just tells you what the book is about.

This seemed a bit disappointing, but I was mindful of the fact that you should cut things that get in the way, and that an author is often a poor judge of their own stuff, and it's the bits you like best yourself that might be least appealing to others. So I got rid of it.

Now, in February 2014, I was thinking about William Morris and Martin Creed, and remembered that *Making is Connecting* had once had a beginning section that featured William Morris and Martin Creed. So now I'm putting it online here, just for you, dear Reader. Hope you like it.

For other stuff, videos, links and more – including the final version of chapter 1 as it appears in the book – see: www.makingisconnecting.org.

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1. Introduction

Clip-clop *klang*. Clip-clop *klang*.

Sunlight streams down between tall, slender trees. The crisp spring air bites excitingly at his throat. Brown earth below, purple and white crocuses, tree trunks seeming light blue with yellow and pea-green foliage at the top. New life.

Clip-clop *klang*. Clip-clop *klang*.

Here he is, coming down the track towards us: a nine year old boy on a borrowed horse, sunbeams catching his mop of brown hair. That *klang* sends squirrels running, but he loves to trot round the forest wearing his shiny toy armour.

It is April, 1843, and this is William Morris. This beautiful wood is Epping Forest, which slices an ancient finger from the town of Epping, in Essex, twelve miles down to Walthamstow, in East London, where, as it happens, I will be living, and writing most of this book, 167 years later.

The horse rests as the boy breathes the damp fern mist. He casually notes changes in nesting birds and unusual lichens. In his dreams are bold medieval knights and

magnificent fairies. He has already established a love of thirteenth and fourteenth century art and architecture, which will last throughout his life¹.

Why are we meeting him here? What can the story of this romantic young naturalist have to do with what you probably, quite reasonably, assumed would be a book about technological connections and internet-based creativity?

Fast forward 40 years. William Morris is now the successful and widely admired designer of fine interior décor for England's upper and middle classes. The success came quickly, some time ago, but now William is troubled, and cannot help loathing his clients. He takes great pride in his work, and he is glad to play a role in holding back the tide of shoddy, carelessly manufactured alternatives. But commercial success does not give him pleasure, and was never really the goal. Morris had sought to challenge Victorian philistinism and the soulless, grinding nature of industrial production by making beautiful things in the careful, pleasurable, hands-on manner of his medieval heroes². But privileged Victorians have eagerly embraced his fine embroideries, stained glass, and furnishings, and have failed to perceive it as a political attack on the source of their wealth. Even when he is directly rude to them, he finds himself cherished as a kind of arty eccentric³.

Morris sought to challenge a whole way of life on the level of material culture – the *things* of everyday existence – but this message, it seemed, was not only invisible to his audience, but ironically its vehicle had become sought-after as something rather lovely. In a lecture to the Trades Guild of Learning, in 1877, he declared: 'I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few'⁴. For some years this feeling produced in Morris only fury and depression, although later he would come to see a solution, and be filled with fire once more.

Fast forward again: to the present day. The artist Martin Creed is sitting on the floor of his publishers, in London, filled with anxiety. Like William Morris, he is a driven man, who likes to make things. But he is never quite sure why. Like Morris, he has become successful and admired. Part of him wanted this, but it was never really the point. Now he is agreeing some final touches to a book, *Martin Creed Works*, which shows everything he's ever made – well, everything he's ever made and numbered, a sequence which starts with 'Work No. 3', which is a yellow painting, and goes up to 'Work No. 1020', which was a theatre show including ballet, talk, and music. Creed began with number 3, rather than 1, as he didn't want to be too emphatic. He describes it as a 'fade in'. He can't help wondering: does this book mean he is now fading out?

It's an honour, to have a book like this, with over 600 pages of colour plates charting work over 20 years. But Creed is not comfortable looking back, and having 'the works' assembled in this way. He says the process has been 'like trying to refold a map after a long journey – it is softened and crumpled and torn, and I could not fold it back into its original shape'⁵. Sometimes recreating transitory works and photographing them, for

the pages of his book, has taken much longer than it had done to make the work in the first place.

His anxiety about the process has – after some argument with the publisher – been projected onto the spine of the book itself⁶. You might expect it to say ‘Martin Creed Works’. It does not. It says, in large red text: ‘I fear this book’. It then explains: ‘I don’t think I want to make a book of my work. I am scared to look at what I have done in case I don’t like it, and I’m scared to show it to others in case they don’t like it’. It does also say: ‘Martin Creed’. This nervous declaration is not false modesty, nor arty pretention. Creed knows he wants to make things, but the world already contains lots of things, so each one has to justify its existence. In an earlier interview, stuck for an explanation of himself, he eventually suggests:

I think it’s all to do with wanting to communicate. I mean, I think I want to make things because I want to communicate with people, because I want to be loved, because I want to express myself... I find it very difficult to think about what people will think of the work or bring to it. It’s because of people that I make the work, because I’m sure it’s got something to do with other people, with wanting to communicate and wanting to say hello.⁷

I’ve never met Martin Creed. But I love Martin Creed and his work, even when he makes objects or installations which don’t seem inherently lovable, because you can detect him in there, maybe in a bit of a dark place, but reaching out to make a connection. One of his most moving works, I think, is Work No. 203, which consists of the words ‘EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT’, written in white neon across a crumbling portico in east London. On the one hand, the sentiment expresses its own negative, suggesting that everything is perhaps *not* going to be all right. There is loneliness, and sadness. But on the other hand, there is a feeling of shared understanding, and it does, after all, say that everything is going to be all right. A complex set of feelings are evoked, then, but a connection has been made.

And if we then fly out of the window and look down on people going about their everyday lives: there is Marika, writing on her blog, responding to a question posted by Stepan in Moscow. There are Lakshmi, Kevin and Alice, knitting and drinking coffee in a café; they met via Ravelry, the online social network for knitters, and have become good friends. Alice and Lakshmi discovered that they also have a keen interest in contemporary literature, and will be going on later to record the second of a series of podcasts in which they discuss new books. The first one has just been downloaded by the 1,000th listener, so they are having a cake to celebrate.

Out on the street, Anthony is on Twitter via his phone, arranging to meet some people he feels he knows, but has never met before, next week at MakerFaire – a huge festival of amateur DIY craft and technology projects. In a moment, he will be meeting Imran, who is going to show him how to screen-print his own T-shirts. In return, Anthony is

helping Imran to play the guitar. They arranged this on swapaskill.com, a website for people who want to exchange skills. Anthony's friend Kate has been invited to come along too. She likes the idea of the T-shirt printing/guitar playing exchange and is making a short video about it, to share with her friends on YouTube.

Making is connecting

This bustle of creative and social activity brings us to the title of the book: 'Making is connecting'. It's a perfectly simple phrase, of course. 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 may consider along the way. But that's my basic set of propositions.

Three reasons why I wanted to write this book

This book came about because of a number of things I had been thinking about, which I hope are worth listing briefly here.

[Continues, as in the published book].

**For other material, videos, links and more – and the full Chapter 1 as it appears
in the published book – see: www.makingisconnecting.org**

NOTES

¹ The biographical information here comes from E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1977).

² See Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 248–254.

³ Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 250.

⁴ William Morris, 'The Lesser Arts' [1877], in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, edited by Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 253.

⁵ Martin Creed, 'Foreword', in *Martin Creed Works* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), p. vi.

⁶ This section about Martin Creed includes authentic details and quotes, although the precise scene – with him sitting on the floor of his publisher – is imagined. My description of his feelings about the work, and the book, is a summary of what he has said in interviews and indeed in the book itself. However I don't know whether the text on the spine was really the subject of an argument with the publisher – that bit is made up.

⁷ From the Martin Creed interview in *Illuminations*, eds, *Art Now: Interviews with Modern Artists* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 97–101.