

Gauntlett, David. 2018.

*Making is Connecting: The Social Power of Creativity, from Craft and Knitting to Digital everything.*

Cambridge: Polity Press.

ISBN: 978-1-5095-1347-5

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“The beating heart of creativity lies in the *process* of making rather than in the *product* of that making” (195)

IN *MAKING IS CONNECTING*, DAVID Gauntlett offers a DIY ethos, focused not on what is made but the inherent value of the making. Gauntlett is a British sociologist and media theorist, currently serving as Professor of Creative Innovation and Leadership, Canada Research Chair at Ryerson University, Toronto. While not a theologian, his work offers plenty of generative insights for missiology and ecclesiology.

Gauntlett begins with a definition of creativity not as original work or paradigm-shifting, but as the every-day. Creativity is

essential to being human, offering a sense of potency, expression and agency through meaningful engagement with the world. This philosophy is outworked in conversation with digital technologies, which are argued to amplify making, given the internet is global and searchable.

In eleven chapters, Gauntlett provides accessible and critical engagement. He moves easily between the philosophy of craft, sociology of happiness and contemporary culture. Hence social media services are a heightened form of John Ruskin's positive vision of the hand-made, and silly cat memes are a celebration of uninhibited life and freedom. YouTube videos are outworking of Williams Morris's understanding of the value of making things. A creative project, whether knitting, making music or a home video, demonstrates Richard Layard's research into the vital role of shared connectivity in human happiness. Drawing in Ivan Illich, learning ought to provide tools that enable an individual to invest in the world by making, rather than conforming to existing templates.

At the same time, Gauntlett engages the challenges posed by social media, including the rise of trolling, the sexism of the entertainment industry and the monopoly power of digital companies like Google and Facebook. He provides carefully considered responses to a range of critiques. The bad and the good are different issues that require different solutions. Accusing free platforms of being an exploitation of labour makes a category mistake, equating creative social acts with economic activity. While digital monopolies do drain money from the creative economy, this invites the creation of different systems for sharing online creativity. Throughout these ethical discussions, Gauntlett develops his argument that making is connecting.

*Making is Connecting* is not only philosophical, sociological and ethical. It is also practical. Gauntlett argues for the development of platforms for creativity. He provides examples from around the world, including his practice with industry groups. Three show the potential of social innovation across the globe. Imagination Chapters pop-up in libraries and community centres as learning spaces that foster creative play. Design for Change,

which empowers school children in over forty-four countries to create thousands of stories of change. Skateistan, which began in Afghanistan, provides opportunities for girls to learn to skate in order to empower individuals and bring social change.

These are inspiring stories. Nevertheless, why should a review of *Making is Connecting* be of value to readers of *Ecclesial Futures*? While there is one mention of Jesus and the use of one (controversial) Catholic thinker in Ivan Illich, this is a secular book. However, a considered reading might suggest that the shift from a “sit back and be told” culture to a “making and doing” culture should be of considerable interest to those invested in participating in the *missio Dei* through the local church.

First, ecclesologically it is possible to theorise much of what happens in local church ecclesial practices as a making. Worship as the work of the people can be helpfully understood as the “making and doing” of participation in God’s work in the world. Books like *Spiritual Leadership in the Missional Church: A Systems Approach to Leadership as Cultivation* by Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert (Cambridge: Grove, 2019), offer a “making and doing” approach, using spiritual practices and open systems theory to guide the praxis of missional leadership.

Second, the formation of the *imago Dei*. While God is not a factor in *Making is Connecting*, the notion of God as maker is a recurring theme in Scripture. In *God the Worker*, Robert Banks (1992) explores the activity of God as revealed in biblical images from everyday work. Chapter headings cluster around God as a maker, specifically as composer, metalworker, potter, garment maker and wine grower. Turning from the First Testament to the early Church, tentmaking was essential to the apostolic ministry of the Apostle Paul, while in Acts 9, Dorcas makes clothes for widows and the result is a new community of faith. Mission as making, in ways that enhance social connection, can be read in relation to theologies of Trinity.

Third, culturally, Gauntlett provides a way to think ethically about social media. There is potentially a public missiology in the sociality of being human. Humans have the drive to make. This

making connects people with self and others. If we understand humans as makers, not consumers, then humans have agency and voice. This provides a creative way to respond to the individualizing and economically dehumanizing pressures of neo-liberalism. It allows the internet to be a making space which can amplify makers. In contrast to the elitism of broadcast modes used by television and inherited media, new media allow the making of a mark on the world. This does not happen through a “readymade platter of mass-market identities” but through “a homemade, slow-cooked, highly diverse feast of meaningful engagement” (269). This is not an individualised call, given that making is connecting.

While there is much to applaud, I have three quibbles, one major, and two minor. *Making as Connecting* includes the ideas of women, for example Rozsika Parker, Betsey Greer, Amanda Palmer and Victoria Hesketh. However, the major intellectual dialogue partners—John Ruskin, William Morris, Richard Layard, Robert Putnam and Ivan Illich—are male. How might the trajectories of social connection and the definitions of creativity change if the major intellectual thinkers were all female? The minor quibbles were the lack of a bibliography and the font used for the page numbers, which was decidedly hard to read.

Overall, *Making is Connecting* is an accessible, enjoyable and provocative read. It opens up trajectories that provoke further thinking on missiology as a “process of making” and church as a participation in the *missio Dei* rather than a “product” to be sold.

