

Essential reads:

Pleasure, play and connection
in everyday creativity

by Clare Daněk

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Background

There has been a recent rise in interest in everyday creativity. This has ranged from people trying out new creative activities like sewing or baking during lockdowns to knowledge workers (that is, those using computers for their jobs) wanting to do something with their hands for a change.

I'm currently working on a PhD investigating the experience of learning amateur craft skills in open-access community making spaces. I'm interested in how we might go about learning to make a print or throw a pot – but I'm also interested, in a wider sense, in why amateur craft participation alongside others is important. In my work, I think about what it's like to try out new things and have a space to go to do this. I'm also fascinated by the experience of making, with all its triumphs and disasters.

I've chosen the following essential reads as they provide a useful, interwoven introduction for anyone interested in thinking about the various ways in which we can be creative, and how we connect when working alongside one another.

My Essential Reads

1. [Everyday Creativity - from Great Art and Culture for Everyone, to Great Arts and Culture by, with and for Everyone](#)

by 64 Million Artists (2016)

[64 Million Artists](#) is an organisation promoting the power and benefits of everyday creativity and the belief that everyone is creative. Every year, their [January Challenge](#) invites everyone, regardless of previous experience or perceived talent, to join in with a series of simple daily creative acts. In this report, they offer a useful list of conditions for everyday creativity to flourish, including:

- accessible space;
- the importance of process over product;
- having permission to try things out;
- opportunities for social interaction;
- and progression routes for people wanting to pursue an activity beyond the home, or a moment, or a series of classes.

They argue that everyday creativity needs to be valued and supported at civic and policy levels and via improved funding. They also call for democratisation of existing provision so skills can be shared and existing resources opened up to enable more people to engage in everyday creativity.

2. Making is Connecting (first chapter, second edition)

by David Gauntlett (2018)

The linked resource is the first chapter of a widely available book. It would be worth checking with your local library if you wish to read it in its entirety.

Gauntlett argues that making is connecting in three ways: that ideas and materials or resources are connected, that in the process of making we connect with others, and that in putting our creations into the world, we engage and connect with the wider world.

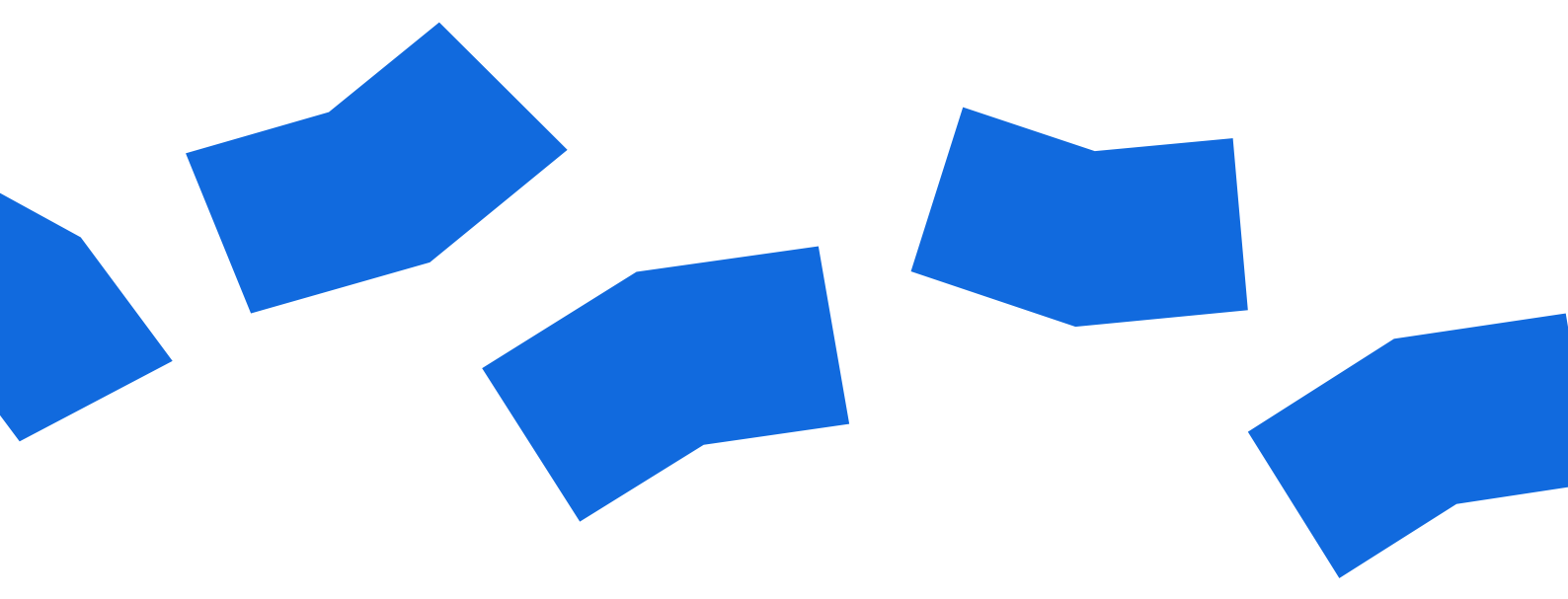
The book also offers an introduction to a series of key figures' thinking about the social world of making for, with, and alongside others. These include John Ruskin and William Morris, via Ivan Illich and Roszika Parker, through to contemporary users of makerspaces and online platforms.

3. Common Ground - rewilding the garden

by Creative Lives (was Voluntary Arts) (2019)

This report offers a review of grassroots activity in under-resourced areas – the sort of activity generated from within communities. The Creative Lives team undertook a series of open conversations over two years with participants in voluntary arts activity across the UK. They found activity in every community but noted challenges specific to each local area.

The report concludes that people need spaces in which to connect and need their work to be recognised. Given these conditions, people and their communities flourish due to social connection, community identity and the enjoyment of participating, and this also has health and wellbeing benefits. However, the requisites for local creative cultural activity are under threat.



4. The Pleasure and Meaning of Making

by Ellen Dissanayake (1995)

This paper was developed from a speech Dissanayake made in 1995, in which they considered our motivation for making but also considered its inherent pleasures.

Dissanayake comes from an anthropological perspective, looking back to Homo sapiens as Homo faber (“man who makes”) and argues for playful approaches that focus on the experience of the making process rather than the finished product. Dissanayake argues that creative processes draw people together, “making ordinary life more than ordinary”.

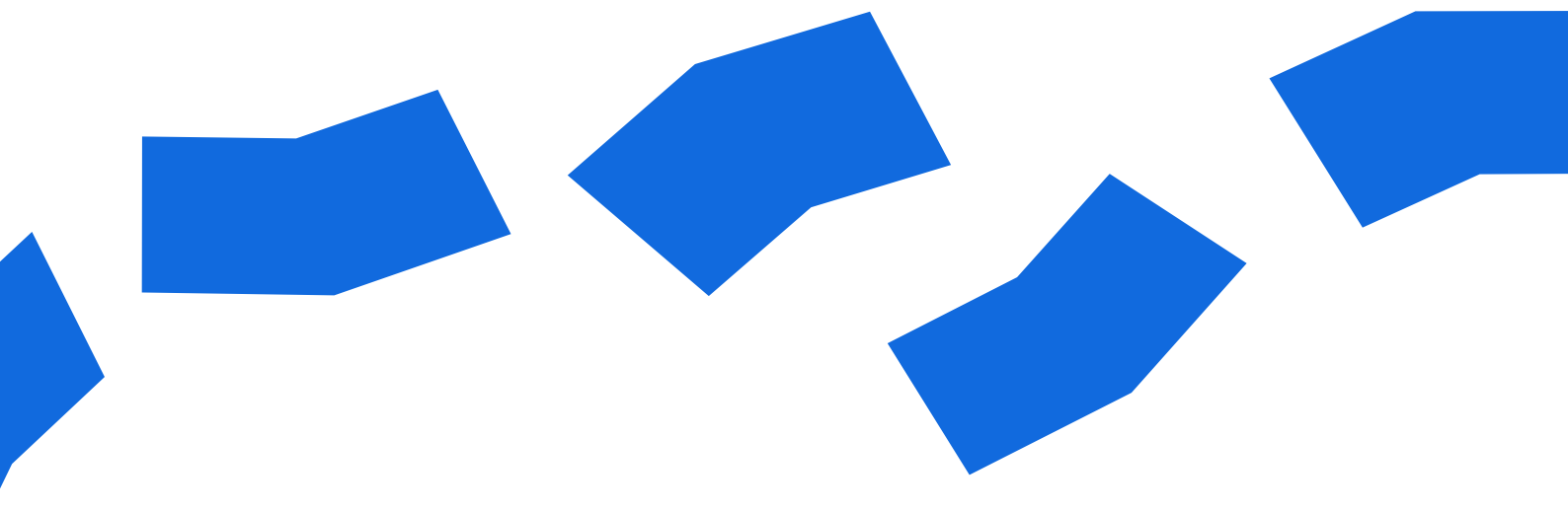
5. The sociomateriality of creativity in everyday life

by Lene Tanggaard (2012)

Tanggaard is one of a group of Danish scholars approaching creativity from a sociomaterial perspective – that is, considering how people, spaces and objects are entangled and in communication with, through and around each other.

Tanggaard’s premise in this paper is that creativity does not reside within individuals (i.e. the idea of the lone genius) but that instead, creativity is a shared everyday phenomenon and is how we continually “make the world”. They outline how humans and material tools are intrinsically linked in this process; and that the means of creation already in the world (materials, tools, institutions, practices, and the ways in which we already do things) all form starting points for creating new things.

Tanggaard describes how we constantly adjust and refine our experience as we navigate our way through the world, responding to what we encounter. They call for heightened awareness of our surroundings and context to bring this prior experience to bear when building new creative experiences and activities.

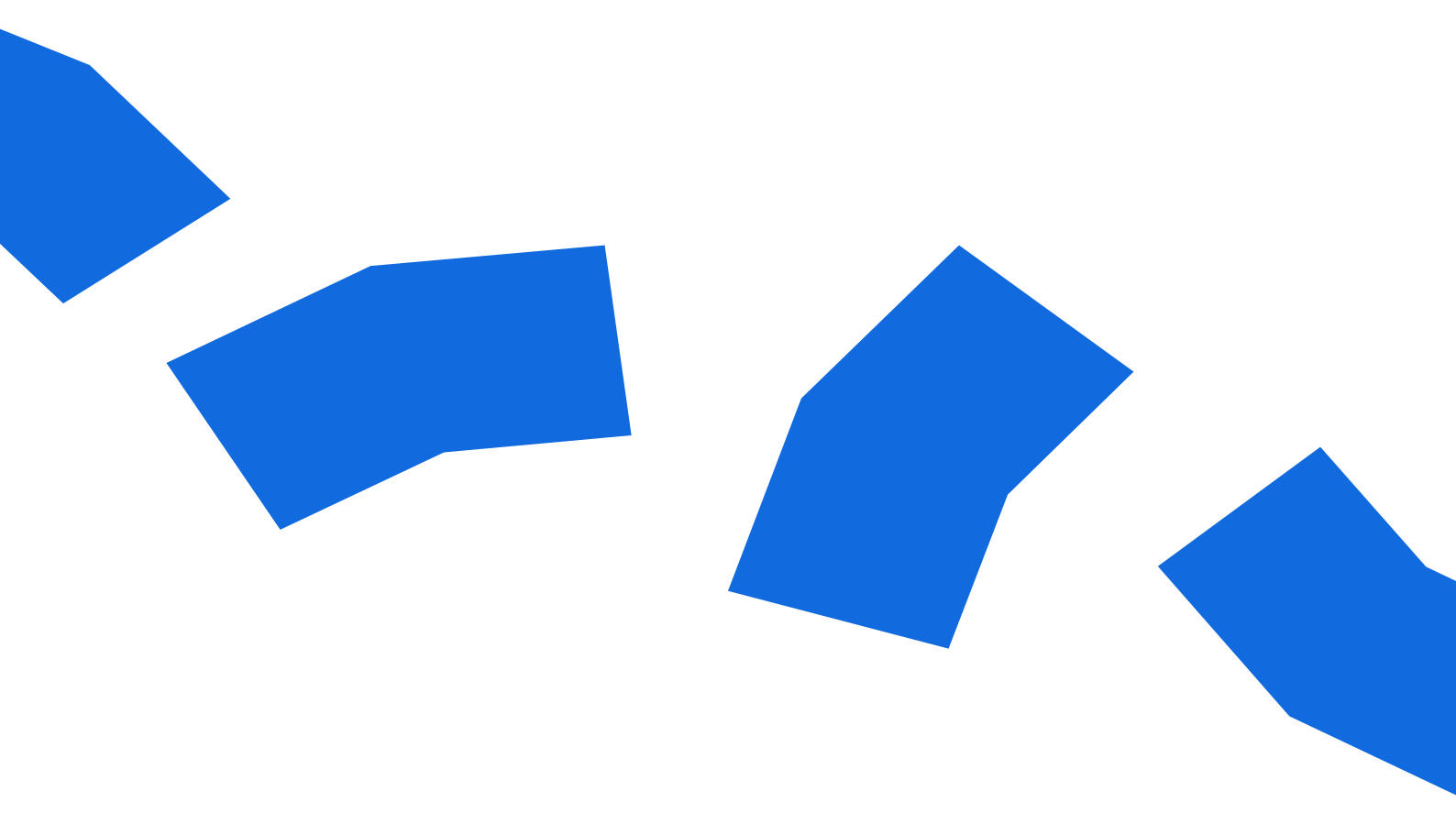


Summary

These sources share overlapping themes. There is both an interest in (everyday) creativity, and an understanding that engaging in creative acts offers routes to connection with others. These texts also foreground the belief that the process of creating is a more important part of the creative process than the end product. There is a recognition that permission to be creative is important, and with it, playful opportunities to make a mess or to fail.

We see that creativity is not exclusive to a few individuals or to rarefied spaces, but that it is within all of us, and that through connecting with others we are able to grow. For cultural practitioners, artists, academics and policymakers, this offers a useful invitation to consider the power and potential of informal or everyday creative activity. This might be for its own sake (the pleasure of making) or for all the ways in which it influences other aspects of our lives (for instance, social connection or improved mental health).

After all, considering how and why we engage in creative activities is not just crucial for helping us reflect on the process. It also allows us to examine how – in making things – we as individuals and as communities become more able to make, and remake, our worlds.



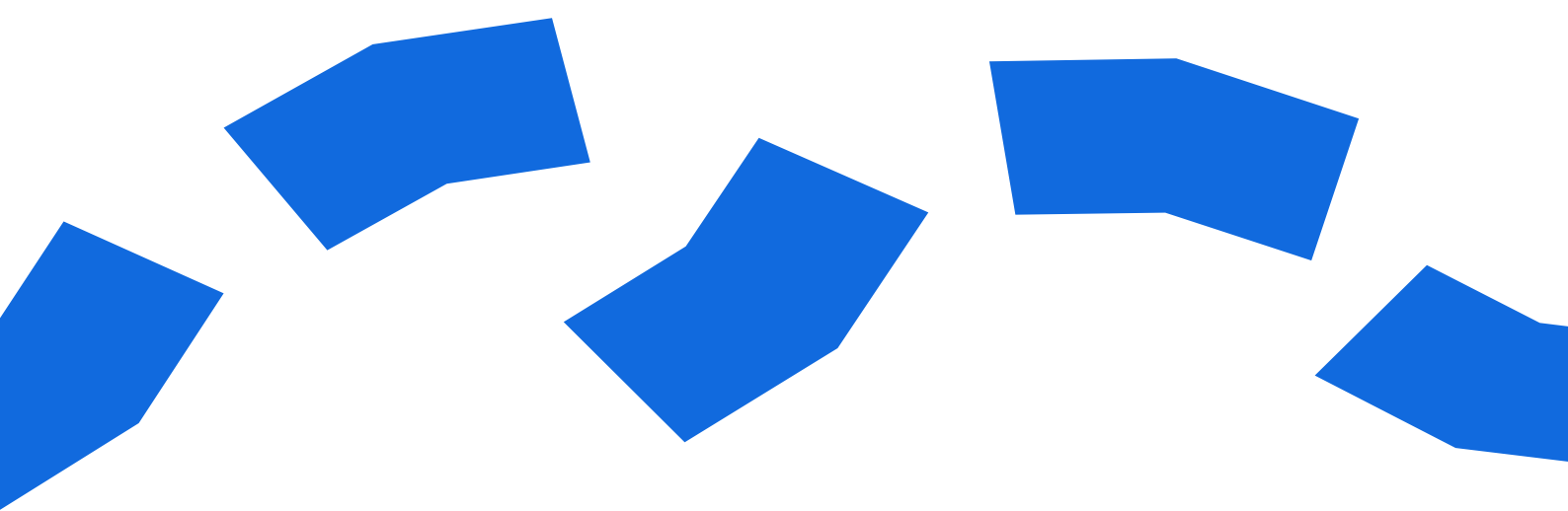
About the author

Clare Daněk is currently undertaking a PhD in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds. Her research uses an ethnographic approach to explore the experience of people learning amateur crafts in open-access community making spaces. Alongside this, she maintains a practice as a textile artist, where her work focuses predominantly on autobiographical experiences of day-to-day life.



Want to learn more about the value of everyday creativity?

Take a look at our recent [research digest](#), which summarises current evidence relating to the creative and cultural activities that people do at home or in their communities.



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