

Creativity, participation and connectedness: An interview with David Gauntlett

Introductory note

This is a version of an interview which will appear in the book *Mashup Cultures*, edited by Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss, published by Springer Wien/New York early in 2010.

This online version is a little different to the version in the book. The book version begins with the most introductory section, 'The meaning of Web 2.0', and includes a section called 'Ethics and exploitation' (with questions posed by Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss and Stephen Harrington) which does not appear here. There is also a slightly different conclusion bit. These variations are all because we were asked to make the free online version a bit shorter or different than the published one.

Don't worry – sometimes the remix is better than the original! This version begins with the 'Making is connecting' section. Readers who would like a basic definition of Web 2.0 can obviously skip forwards to that bit. This version also includes an *extra* question and answer, on virtual worlds versus the real world.

Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss invited me to contribute to this book, and suggested an interview. In the spirit of 'Mashup Culture,' I invited people to send me questions via Twitter and Facebook. (So, it's not really a mashup, but at least it's questions coming together from different sources, and from people around the world. So it's actually another buzzword – crowdsourcing).

The questions arrived, of course, in a random order, from different places in Europe, the United States, and Australia. I have tried to sort them into a sequence of questions which makes some kind of sense. I have to apologise to the several people whose questions I haven't used. Typically these were excellent questions, but about issues or areas where I had no knowledge or little to say, apart from some admiration for the question and perhaps some speculation. Since readers don't really have any use for my admiring, speculative answers, I thought it was better to leave those out.

We begin with some questions about my 'making is connecting' project, followed by a definition and discussion of 'Web 2.0', and whether it is a useful or distinctive term. We then turn to implications for education, and academic public engagement.

MAKING IS CONNECTING

***Catherine Vise, by email:* Your ‘Making is Connecting’ work seems to be about a number of interesting things, like ‘everyday creativity’, Web 2.0, and social capital. It also seems to suggest a manifesto for making the world a better place. Can you give a simple summary of how this all fits together?**

David Gauntlett: *Making is Connecting* is a book which I’m writing (during 2009–2010), accompanied by a website that’s already open at www.makingisconnecting.org. The title came into being because, like other people, when discussing Web 2.0 and social media I was talking a lot about making, and about connecting, ‘making and connecting’ – as well as other words like sharing and collaboration and so on – but then it struck me that an ‘is’ in the middle summed up pretty well what I wanted to say. And that I wanted to make this discussion not just about digital media but about creativity in general. So ‘making is connecting’ because it is through the process of making that we (1) make new connections between our materials, creating new expressive things; (2) make connections with each other, by sharing what we’ve made and contributing to our relationships by sharing the meanings which we’ve created, individually or in collaboration; and (3) through making things, and sharing them with others, we feel a greater connection with the world, and more engaged with being more active in the environment rather than sitting back and watching.

So, it concerns some of the themes of Web 2.0, but it’s broader than that. In a sense it wonders whether the Wikipedia model of collaboration online, which people do not for reward but because they think it’s a good project, can be taken as a metaphor for people doing nice collaborative stuff in everyday life. The experience of Web 2.0 – especially Wikipedia and the non-profit ‘social innovation’ projects – can shift people’s perceptions of how to go about things, I think. The people I know who are enthusiastic about Web 2.0 are also enthusiastic about real-world community projects, and it’s not likely that that’s a coincidence.

So that connects with the literature on social capital – which is about the ways in which people feel connected with their communities, and whether they are motivated to make a positive difference – and indeed with the literature on happiness, and on loneliness. (See for example the Richard Layard book, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, 2006, and the book by John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, 2008).

This research shows that happiness comes from creative engagement, community, and social relationships. A sense of well-being comes from feeling that you are making a difference. In the disciplines of sociology or social policy, ‘happiness’ sounds like a rather fluffy measure, but actually, of course, people’s satisfaction with their own lives is crucially important. And so hopefully you can see how ‘making is connecting’ fits in there. Richard Layard says, ‘Prod any happy person and you will find a project’ – and he’s an economist who says this on the basis of data; it’s not a new-agey sentiment.

So as I argue in *Making is Connecting*, through making things, online or offline, we make connections with others and increase our engagement with the world. And this creativity can be fostered to tackle social problems and global issues. It's kind of broad, ambitious and optimistic, obviously.

***Julie Borkin, via Facebook:* How can we assess that social network connections really enhance engagement? Put differently, is this essentially a Putnam-esque argument that connections are potentially productive and therefore 'real' engagement?**

David Gauntlett: Clearly having an online 'connection' in itself – such as adding a 'friend' on Facebook – doesn't mean much *per se*. Or even finding a new person to discuss work or opinions with, via email or an online network, is not what people would usually recognise as, say, 'civic engagement,' which typically means something like a helpful activity in the local community, or holding a real-life political debate. So it depends what you mean by 'engagement'.

In any case, it's obviously the case that if people are talking about a particular kind of engagement, such as participation in charity work, or with business, or political issues, or whatever, then they need to look at the impact on that specifically, and not confuse it with more superficial online links.

Having said that, although social connections should not be equated with or counted as civic participation – or anything else that they are not – we should not dismiss them either. A 20-year longitudinal study recently demonstrated that having just one additional 'happy friend' can increase an individual's personal happiness by nine per cent (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). If you want to process that information in government or social policy terms, happiness is highly correlated with both physical and mental health – therefore people with friends cost less to the state, in terms of health and social services.

***Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss, by email:* In 'The Make and Connect Agenda' [<http://www.theory.org.uk/david/makeandconnect.htm>] you suggest, amongst other things, 'Tools for Thinking' which strongly emphasize hands-on experiences in the creative and meaning making process. How and why did you become attracted by Lego pieces, which appear frequently in your work in this area? Is there something unique about making things physically, which means we cannot translate this to the digital realm?**

David Gauntlett: Well, it's not all about Lego! Although I have found Lego to be an especially accessible tool. People who are just hearing about my research using Lego, who haven't taken part in a workshop, sometimes say to me, 'Well, I wouldn't be able to do this,' or 'I wouldn't like it,' but my experience with many groups – women and men, all ages from teenagers to retired people, and from all backgrounds including unemployed people who left

school with no qualifications as well as rather reserved middle-class people – is that they all take to it quite happily after a couple of introductory exercises.

The point of that work, I should explain, was to get people building metaphors of their identities, in Lego. That project is covered in the book *Creative Explorations* (2007) and in various online presentations which you can see at www.artlab.org.uk/lego. More recently I've used it as a more general way of getting people to communicate ideas, often around the theme of a better society, the results of which you can see in some videos at www.theory.org.uk/video.

'Tools for thinking,' which you mention, could take a number of forms, of which a process using Lego would be just one. But you ask specifically about whether this is a 'hands on' process which is necessarily physical, in the real world, rather than digital.

That's an interesting question for me, because on the one hand, as you know I am very interested in digital media and especially the do-it-yourself opportunities for people to make and share things online. That kind of activity is basically people sitting at screens, clicking and typing. And at the same time I have been working with processes of self-expression, collaboration and communication which are very rich, and which have nothing to do with electronic media, and instead are based on the physical engagement with materials that you put together with your hands.

These are very much related, but different. I know from my own experience that doing things digitally does not distance you from the creative process – for instance I have made and designed all my own websites, and have used 'making a website' as a way of thinking about an issue or subject, which pretty much exactly matches the experience in other contexts where we make something as part of the process of thinking about it. So these types of experiences can be parallel, but clearly different.

I don't have a clear answer on this yet, but in the work I've done with people from Lego and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) around the question of how 'hands on' creativity and learning translates into the digital realm, the best answers tend to be hybrid experiences where you combine some screen-based activity with some other going-out, finding-out, experimenting kind of activity away from the screen.

***Joanne Ball, via email:* It has been said that the virtual world Second Life represents the future of online communication. What do you think?**

David Gauntlett: Oh I'm pleased to be asked this, as I recently arrived at a kind of personal revelation, which was that it would be OK to admit that I don't like Second Life at all, and to confidently assert that it is *not* the future of online communication. This seems quite liberating, as for the past few years a lot of people have been going on about Second Life, and acting like it was an amazing vision of the future; whilst I really didn't like it, and found it unappealing in a range of ways – the most rational of which was that it just seemed like a really inefficient way of doing things. Having to steer an avatar through virtual space seemed

much less convenient than the pretty instant, Google-enabled way of zipping around online information, and communicating, which we have got used to on the two-dimensional Web. And the Web is *incredibly* diverse, whereas the world of Second Life is pretty much all rather similar-looking, and with broadly similar ways of doing things, albeit with diverse people in there. So compared with the regular World Wide Web, it seemed to be a backwards step, but dressed up in unlovely – but supposedly fancy – 3D graphics.

For some time I felt I couldn't really say this, because there were so many Second Life enthusiasts and I thought I must be somehow missing something. But I am pleased to have realised that my instinct might be right after all, and a perfectly valid point of view!

I was helped in this when I read a blog post by my friend Dougald Hine, originally posted on 27 April 2009 (though I didn't see it until recently), entitled 'How not to predict the future (or why Second Life is like video calling)'. In it he notes how bad we generally are at predicting the future of technology. He gives the example of the mobile phone industry, which anticipated that video calling would be in huge demand, but it turned out that nobody especially wanted it; whilst text messaging, initially regarded as an insignificant bonus feature, became extremely popular. The simpler technology was of more relevance to people as a social tool. The more recent parallel, he says, is with Second Life and Twitter: 'Again, people's demand for high-tech, highly immersive substitutes for face-to-face experience was massively exaggerated – while the real story turns out to be the social power of stripped down, simple bits of communication that weave in and out of [offline life]'.

The interesting thing nowadays seems to be how we interconnect online and offline life, and use online tools to have a real-world impact. That's why my preferred metaphor for positive future activity is not Second Life, but is guerrilla gardening – people coming together, creatively working and getting their hands a bit dirty, to collaborate on doing something nice that everyone can appreciate.

Govinda Dickman, via Facebook: If making is connecting, does that mean that breaking is disconnecting? Is connexion always positive/creative; is disconnexion always negative/destructive?

Culture, for instance, is a cybernetic system that “connects” agents within its network, but in doing so it also inevitably: (a) reduces the possibilities of those connections to the language of the network itself: we do not dream our own dreams, we dream the dreams of our cultures; and (b) arguably disconnects both the agents and the network that links them from their true context. Culture, which is connection, which is making, arguably alienates us from the reality of our reality, both inner (psychological) and outer (ontological).

David Gauntlett: That's an interesting question – if connecting is seen as basically 'good', does that mean that disconnecting is 'bad'? My immediate answer is no: although social connections are largely good for people, it doesn't follow that disconnecting is a negative thing, on an individual level. In his book *Solitude*, for instance, psychiatrist Anthony Storr

(1989) offers a powerful hymn to the creative benefits of being on your own, thinking your own thoughts. He highlights the fact that many of our most noted philosophers and writers have been fundamentally solitary beings.

At a broader, more social level, however – and perhaps aside from the ‘creative geniuses’ that Storr’s account leans towards – mass disconnection would not be a good thing. The evidence shows that society benefits, very considerably, from having people who feel connected with others as individuals, and with the notion of their ‘communities’ more generally. When creativity is part of that connectedness and participation, I think that makes for an even more positive proposition, leading to greater general life satisfaction (happiness) and consequently less depression, less crime, and better physical and mental health.

Govinda also asks if ‘breaking is disconnecting,’ and of course, taking things apart can be part of a very creative process, so that question is easy: breaking is fine.

But we should also consider the argument in the second part of his question – the idea that connectedness means that we are removed from our ‘true context,’ and that ‘our own dreams’ are replaced by ‘the dreams of our cultures’. This seems like a significant concern, but I think it rests on a kind of notion of individual specialness which you can take too far. We exist in a social and cultural context, and this shapes everything we think and do, to some extent. This *is* our ‘true context’. Social and cultural context is inescapable, and so the idea of a ‘pure’ vision, untainted by culture, doesn’t really work. I’m sure we all want people to ‘think freely,’ and to be imaginative rather than just trying to fit within social norms. But I don’t believe that being part of a social conversation means that one’s own creativity, or ideas, are necessarily limited.

Individuals who want to dream their own dream on top of a mountain are very welcome to do so, of course, but if we’re thinking about the vitality of a community, then obviously, it relies on people having connections, and inspiring each other.

THE MEANING OF WEB 2.0

Maria Barrett, by email: Can you give us a simple, one line definition of Web 2.0?

David Gauntlett: That’s a good place to start. Here’s my attempt at a single sentence definition: ‘Web 2.0 is about the Web enabling everyday users to share their ideas and creativity, and collaborate, on easy-to-use online platforms which become better the more people are using them’.

Now I’ll take several more sentences, to explain it. For a slightly longer explanation of Web 2.0, I tend to say that the former way of doing things – which we might retrospectively label the ‘1.0’ approach – was as though each individual who contributed to the Web was making their own individual garden. Each of these gardens might be lovely, and full of good things, but they were *separate*, with a big fence between each garden and the next one. Visitors could look at the garden, and make comments, but that was the extent of the interaction.

Web 2.0, meanwhile, is more like a shared allotment. Anyone can come along with their spade and their seeds, plant new things, change what's there, and do what they like in the space. Because it's a communal space, it is likely to be 'policed' by other contributors, who will (generally) want to keep it nice – so I am not describing a wholly anarchic picture. Visitors who don't want to actively participate, of course, can just look at it, or just make comments.

That is a description of how Wikipedia works – Wikipedia being the archetypal example of Web 2.0 collaboration in action. It also more-or-less describes Flickr, YouTube, EBay, Facebook, and other such Web 2.0 applications, although of course the details of what you can and can't change, in each one, will vary.

I should mention, incidentally, that the '1.0' model is not necessarily a *terrible* way of doing things. My own website, Theory.org.uk – and the other ones I've made – are generally like that, where I just want to 'broadcast' some of my own material, and get responses back. And, since my sites are entirely handmade by me, they are limited by my own technical abilities, and I don't have the skills to create a very Web 2.0-enabled site – although, actually, these days there are some handy online Wiki tools where you can just manage a Wiki that's already set up on someone else's server.

So, with some things, I'm a bit old-fashioned, and I want to retain control over how my stuff is presented (although, of course, people can take and change and remix it if they want). On the other hand, Theory.org.uk was originally a site with resources about particular thinkers, such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Anthony Giddens, Theodor Adorno, and others. Several years ago, I realised that it was pointless to have me tending my own little Michel Foucault 'garden,' when there was a community of expertise doing something much better on the communal Michel Foucault 'allotment' in Wikipedia, so I gave up on that area and added a page advising users to go to Wikipedia instead. There are certain things, though, like the Theory.org.uk Trading Cards, and Lego models of social theorists, which would have no place on Wikipedia and are still in some quirky corner of my site.

Returning to the one-sentence definition, in my formulation I deliberately highlighted the role of ideas, creativity, and collaboration; and I said they should be 'easy-to-use online platforms' for 'everyday users' because we are talking about stuff which is not necessarily new for the very technically-minded. The point about Web 2.0 as a recent phenomenon is that suddenly there are nice, simple tools which most Web users would feel comfortable with. That's what has emerged in the past few years. It runs on the same old Web, the one invented by Tim Berners-Lee almost 20 years ago, but it took time before some clever people, with the common touch, could design some friendly interfaces. And things like the growth of broadband have also helped. YouTube on a dial-up modem is pretty pointless.

Finally, my one-sentence definition says that the platforms 'become better the more people are using them', which is the point made by Tim O'Reilly, who coined the term 'Web 2.0', that these are sites which *embrace* their network of users, and consequently become richer as more and more people contribute to them. (See O'Reilly, 2006a, for a good account of this).

There are other brief definitions of Web 2.0, of course. In a blog post entitled, 'Web 2.0 Compact Definition: Trying Again,' Tim O'Reilly (2006b) himself suggests this definition:

'Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them. (This is what I've elsewhere called "harnessing collective intelligence")'.

Frankly, I prefer mine. To me, Web 2.0 is all about everyday users being able to share, create, and collaborate. Characterising it as a 'business revolution in the computer industry' seems to rather surprisingly miss the most exciting points.

Maria Barrett, by email: Is Web 2.0 simply communicating and connecting – by which I mean, haven't we always had this?

David Gauntlett: Obviously, humankind has indeed enjoyed creating, connecting, and collaborating, for several thousand years. The thing that is new is that people who didn't previously know each other, spread around the world, who would never have met, can come together online because of a shared interest, or a friend of a friend of a friend, and discuss, create, or plan things instantaneously – things which otherwise would have been impossible, or very slow and difficult to organise.

And incidentally, the people don't *have* to be spread all over the world, of course. I live in Walthamstow, a town on the edge of London, and if I contribute to the Wikipedia page about Walthamstow, I am collaborating with people who probably mostly live within one or two miles of me, but I still would most likely never have had any interaction with them in my physical life.

Jason Hartford, via Facebook: What is the point – the technology, or the reaction to it?

David Gauntlett: The 'point' of Web 2.0, and what makes it interesting, is not the technology, but what people do with it. I wouldn't call this a 'reaction' as such, as this seems to situate users as an audience for technological innovation. The point is that people take up these tools and use them in inventive ways. So it's not technology, or a reaction to technology, but an everyday creative use of tools which, ideally, are enabling kinds of tools which mean that people can communicate, create, and collaborate in new ways.

More cautious critics would point out that the creative individuals do not own the online tools themselves – instead these tend to be profit-oriented companies who can choose to enable or not enable different kinds of activity, and in some cases may make claims over the material produced. It's important to remember these cautionary points, and we'll come onto these issues in a later question.

Steven Green, by email: Is Web 2.0, social networks, and the related discussion about creativity and collaboration, really new? Those of us in the 1980's in interest groups on PRESTEL and BBs were doing something very similar – limited by the technology but still creating bodies of knowledge and a communicating community. Then we did the same on CompuServe before the broadcast nature of the early World Wide Web made us take a step backwards. Surely now we are just re-inventing?

David Gauntlett: Well, yes, some of those early networks did have some of those features, and brought people together to work on projects of shared interest, and so on. I'm not especially concerned with whether Web 2.0 is something new or not on a technical level. Indeed, from the very start, Tim Berners-Lee intended the Web to be a place where people would collaborate and share ideas and information – to be 'writers' as well as 'readers', or 'producers' as well as 'audience'.

So, I'm not interested in making any claims about newness, but as I said above, the important thing is accessibility and reach. Nowadays we have easy-to-use online tools which enable people to communicate and collaborate without them needing much technical know-how. And it's sufficiently popular, so that they can find other people who share their interests, no matter what those interests are.

Fifteen years ago, that was not really the case – then, you did need technical skills. Around that time, I started making a site in HTML using Notepad, the very basic text editor that comes in Windows, and a free graphics program and a free FTP program, so this was very cheap and, if you're reasonably familiar with computers, quite easy – I'm a sociologist, not a trained programmer. But my point is that you had to go 'behind the scenes' of the web browser, which would be off-putting to many users.

Ten years ago, you could make your own individual 'garden'-type site within your browser using an online tool such as GeoCities, and it was rather clunky, but ok.

Five years ago, blogs had suddenly become common, and the other tools were becoming better-known and easier to use. But something that has been technically possible for twenty or more years, has only really come of age, and become mainstream, in the past five years or so. It's Web 2.0 as a social phenomenon, not as a technological achievement, which is the interesting thing.

EDUCATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

Julian McDougall (JulianMcDougall) on Twitter: Does treating 'prosumer' creations as worthy of academic study necessarily lead to a 'relativist' approach to media studies?

David Gauntlett: On the one hand, it would obviously be wrong to believe that only industry-produced media is 'proper' media, and worthy of study. But if by 'relativist' you mean that we forget all quality judgements and just assume that all media is of equal quality, then I'd

say no, because we can still make intelligent judgements – but they would be based on the quality of the artefact rather than who produced it.

So, if media studies becomes more agnostic about whether ‘media’ is something produced by the BBC, or by Sarah in her bedroom, I’d say that’s a good thing, because that’s how media-making and media-sharing is going.

Alice Bell (alicebell) on Twitter: Chris Anderson recently suggested that doing media will become more of a hobby than a job. What do you think?

David Gauntlett: To be fair, he didn’t quite say this as a prediction. It’s worth looking at the original quote, where, answering a question about the future of journalism, Chris Anderson said:

“In the past, the media was a full-time job. But maybe the media is going to be a part time job. Maybe media won’t be a job at all, but will instead be a hobby. There is no law that says that industries have to remain at any given size. Once there were blacksmiths and there were steel workers, but things change. The question is not should journalists have jobs. The question is can people get the information they want, the way they want it? The marketplace will sort this out. If we continue to add value to the Internet we’ll find a way to make money. But not everything we do has to make money”. (Anderson, 2009)

I think really it will be a mix of things, won’t it? There are some professionally-created media experiences which are very distinctive and which people are clearly still very happy to pay for. Think of going to see an amazing film at the cinema, or a brilliant BBC drama. I don’t think there’s any sign that we want to actually *swap* these things for a funny six-minute YouTube video. But it’s not a matter of one or the other. There’s no reason at all why we wouldn’t be big fans of both kinds of experience. Some things, such as professional and investigative news-gathering, documentary making, or feature films, take a lot of time and work, by large teams of people, and these may be joined by homemade versions, but it’s not necessary to assume that free homemade things will *replace* the glossy, professional media.

Anderson’s view that everything could be free, meanwhile, has the obvious problem that someone’s always paying somewhere, and often in his examples it is advertisers. But the idea that there’s enough advertising money to go around, to support all this stuff, seems highly unlikely. I’m not an economist, but I’m sure it doesn’t add up.

Mark Squire (markcsquire) on Twitter [sent in three parts]: Is there not a danger of eLearning producing a generation of surface-skimming dilettantes? This contrasts with the sustained engagement demanded by traditional text-based learning. The appearance, texture, heft & smell of a book provide ‘handles’ through which the student latches onto the contents.

David Gauntlett: Well, I like books too, although I'm not sure that it's logical to say that because some of us love the physicality of books, then students are necessarily drawn to them too. To answer the question, there is certainly a positive *potential* in the fact that students have access to a great range of sources on any subject. It compares very favourably with my experience as a student, where you got at best a handful of books from the library, whatever you could get your hands on, and you couldn't really verify their content using other sources, and had to patch together an essay.

The downside of today's situation, of course, is that students are often not very good at finding or assessing good-quality sources, and also yes, perhaps they don't engage so much with single texts in depth. So this, then, is a challenge for educators: we need to help students to get better at these things. At my university, we stress a combination of reading proper theoretical texts in depth, alongside gathering relevant and intriguing material online. Getting students to read books, or longer texts in any format, is the more challenging one, certainly. But to 'blame' the internet for the fact that some people don't use it with an academic level of care would not be justified, of course.

ACADEMIC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

***Anthony Sternberg, by email:* In an article in *Times Higher Education* recently you argued that academics should be communicating their research more directly with the public. What would that mean, and don't we need the traditional machinery of academic journals and peer review to sort out the work of good quality?**

David Gauntlett: That article was responding to an Arts and Humanities Research Council report, and argued that arts and humanities researchers often need to express more clearly *why* they do what they do, and should become more innovative and engaged with social and environmental issues, rather than, say, just writing rather derivative reflections on some creative cultural artefact which had been previously produced by someone else. And it made the point that these people put *vast* amounts of time and effort into their work, but then seem unconcerned about getting it out into the world, and are happy for it to be stuck in an academic journal where it will typically be read by a very small number of people.

The Web in general, and easy-to-use Web 2.0 tools in particular, make it pretty easy for academics to disseminate their work and ideas in an accessible way to anyone who might be interested, and I think they've got a responsibility to do so. This is something I'm rather passionate about.

The questioner asks don't we need academic journals and peer review to ensure quality. Well, what I'm suggesting is that researchers should still publish books and articles, and we can expect that they would continue to be judged on the quality of those traditional outputs, but also that they should do things such as YouTube videos, podcasts, and imaginative websites with interesting ways of presenting information. These are also likely to be judged by their

peers, and other interested parties, and be rated and linked to online – which is also a form of ‘peer review’. It’s more informal, but may also be more open and responsible, than the official system, where selected academics get to boost their mates, or shoot down ideas they don’t like, from behind the curtain of anonymous reviewing.

In the past, there was a distribution problem for many academics who wanted to get their work out in the world, but since the Web has emphatically fixed that one, I can’t really see or understand why many academics aren’t using the full range of tools at their disposal. Some say ‘I’m too busy writing my journal articles, I haven’t got time to do that *as well*,’ but that would seem to embody a reckless disregard for communicating with people.

Academic communication can therefore be seen as an ethical issue: do researchers think it is reasonable to keep their material buried in academic journals, or are they willing to spend some of their time engaging with interested people, and trying to communicate and discuss their work? The Web has changed the way in which we do so many things – this is just one instance. It’s always leading to new questions, as well as opportunities, so it’s a very stimulating time to be thinking about all these interconnected, interdisciplinary issues.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Chris (2009), quoted in *Spiegel Online*, ‘Chris Anderson on the Economics of “Free”’: “Maybe Media Will Be a Hobby Rather than a Job”, 28 July 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,638172,00.html>

Cacioppo, John T., & Patrick, William (2008), *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, New York: W. W. Norton.

Fowler, James H., & Christakis, Nicholas A. (2008), ‘Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network: longitudinal analysis over 20 years in the Framingham Heart Study’, *BMJ* 2008;337:a2338, http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/dec04_2/a2338

Gauntlett, David (2007), *Creative Explorations: New approaches to identities and audiences*, London: Routledge.

Layard, Richard (2005), *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, London: Penguin.

Layard, Richard, & Dunn, Judy (2009), *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age*, London: Penguin.

O’Reilly, Tim (2006a), ‘Levels of the Game: The Hierarchy of Web 2.0 Applications’, 17 July 2006, <http://radar.oreilly.com/2006/07/levels-of-the-game-the-hierarc.html>

O’Reilly, Tim (2006b), ‘Web 2.0 Compact Definition: Trying Again’, 10 December 2006, <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2006/12/web-20-compact.html>

Storr, Anthony (1989), *Solitude*, London: Flamingo.

David Gauntlett is Professor of Media and Communications at the School of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster, UK. His teaching and research is in the area of media and identities, and the everyday creative use of digital media. He is the author of several books, including *Moving Experiences* (1995, 2005), *Web Studies* (2000, 2004), *Media, Gender and Identity* (2002, 2008), and *Creative Explorations* (2007), which was shortlisted for the *Times Higher* Young Academic Author of the Year Award. He produces the popular website about media and identities, Theory.org.uk.

For further information see www.theory.org.uk/david