doi: 10.35757/KiS.2026.70.2.6

KULTURA i SPOŁECZEŃSTWO

POLSKA AKADEMIA NAUK
KOMITET SOCJOLOGII
INSTYTUT STUDIÓW POLITYCZNYCH

ISSN 0023-5172
e-ISSN 2300-195x

2026, nr 2 **NOWE WRAŻLIWOŚCI ANTROPOLOGII**

JACEK GĄDECKI, KATARZYNA HETMAŃCZYK, WOJCIECH KOWALIK
AGH University of Krakow

DIY PRACTICES AND NEW ANTHROPOLOGICAL SENSIBILITIES*

MAKING IS CONNECTING: ABOUT THE RESEARCH

When considered as an everyday, technical and often informal practice that exists on the border between work and leisure, DIY (do-it-yourself) offers a valuable entry point for reflections on new anthropological sensibilities. In light of current methodological and theoretical developments within the discipline, this practice can be grasped as a form of relationality and care. Careful examination of DIY reveals complex relationships between people, tools, materials and infrastructure that transcend classical anthropological categories. We

Correspondence addresses: jgadecki@agh.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1954-9605; khetmanczyk@agh.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8667-9541; wkowalik@agh.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-5674-9019

* The project "Making is Connecting. A study of the material and social worlds of DIY makers centered around makerspaces" was funded by the National Science Centre under the OPUS 23 competition number 2022/45/B/HS2/01554. The project was carried out between 2023 and 2026 by a research team led by Jacek Gądecki at AGH University of Krakow. The study employed a multi-method ethnographic design, to investigate the socio-material dimensions of amateur DIY and maker practices in Poland.

would like to emphasise from the outset that our focus in this text is on the everyday practice of DIY rather than on DIY as a broader cultural phenomenon.

In this most basic sense, DIY should be analysed as a more-than--human phenomenon — embedded in a relationship with things, but also with recovery, damage, non-obvious duration and a slow, deliberate pace. The growing interest in and attention to materiality in anthropology, which is increasingly strong in this discipline, makes it possible to view these practices as culturally significant ways of being-in-the-world, negotiating one's agency and dealing with reality in conditions of both uncertainty and scarcity. At the same time, DIY — as a form of embodied knowledge that transcends the boundaries of expert discourse — becomes an interesting starting point for reflections on the growing role of creativity and forms of coping with the self and the environment. The methodological reflexivity integral to new sensibilities also leads to questions about how to research and represent DIY practices. How do we narrate bodily, sensory experiences that are often ephemeral and not necessarily easy to verbalise?

The new sensibilities are not merely a broadening of the field of research or a revision of anthropology's founding myths. Following George W. Stocking Jr. (1989), romantic sensibility — conceived as an empathetic and passionate commitment to knowing the Other — has always accompanied the discipline. Today, however, this sensibility itself has become the subject of critical reflection and transformation. Importantly, our research also points to the need to revise the strongly romanticised figure of the *bricoleur* that naturally comes to mind when analysing this type of practice. While we show DIY to be a practice of care and relationality, we also highlight its important class dimension, revealed in the course of the research. This perspective provides a non-romanticised context for essential sensory and creative practices that remain accessible only to a few.

To conclude, in writing about DIY and new sensibilities, we refer to two important threads that organise the article: (1) DIY as an essentially intimate practice involving surprisingly many (non-human) actors, important as a practice of care (towards oneself and one's surroundings); and (2) the question of whether and to what extent

contemporary DIY, stripped of its frequent romanticism, is more than simply a consumer phenomenon strongly shaped by class.

In this text, we present the initial findings of an ongoing research project entitled "Making is Connecting". The project, as its title indicates, is situated within the body of research associated with the so-called "material turn". We draw on approaches situated at the intersection of anthropology, science and technology studies that emphasise the crucial importance of materiality, as well as things and tools, in shaping social relations and everyday practices. By framing DIY not just as a technical activity but as a complex socio-material practice, we examine who engages in DIY, how maker practices take place, and the spaces and conditions in which they are performed.

Because we were keen to ensure that maker practices did not become too fragmented, we narrowed the field of research to an area that could be identified with *amateur craft*. This also allowed us to distinguish DIY from both professional crafts and artistic activities. We were interested in everyday, often invisible creativity, whose essence lies in the process itself: in the human encounter with tools, materials, resistance, ideas and failure. Understanding DIY in this way allowed us to capture moments of improvisation, experimentation and innovation, often escaping the classic categories of work, art or hobby.

The research took the form of multi-site ethnography of makerspaces. Traditional interviews were deemed insufficient, so visual and sensory methods were used to reveal socio-material relationships and the agency of materials. These methods allowed us to collect a wealth of valuable and diverse data: from quantitative data collected in screening surveys (conducted among a group of over 200 potential respondents recruited for the project) to diverse qualitative data: classic in-depth interviews (IDIs — 21 participants), photographs, "object-oriented interviews" (Rowsell 2011), digitally recorded think-aloud protocols, and video recordings from DIY sessions. Recruitment for the qualitative study was based on four criteria: gender (reflecting the structure of the survey responses); level of advancement (from beginners to professional amateurs); type of DIY (including woodwork, furniture renovation, leatherwork, sewing and model-making); and workshop facilities (users of creative spaces and people with their own permanent or temporary workshops).

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents is significant for the interpretation of our findings. The survey revealed a clear overrepresentation of individuals with higher education and stable employment, most of whom can be described as members of the urban middle class. A large proportion of respondents declared moderate or beginner levels of skill, indicating that their engagement in DIY was not rooted in long-term craft traditions or professional trajectories, but rather emerged as a relatively recent, self-directed form of leisure and self-development. This combination of cultural capital, economic stability and limited prior experience is not incidental: it points to a specific configuration of DIY as a practice made possible by access to time, space and resources, and shapes both its meanings and its systemic embeddedness.

We adopted a qualitative research approach that allowed participants to document their activities at their own pace and in their own context. The Field Notes application became an important medium for the field research, enabling a more dispersed, flexible and participatory research model. Qualitative analysis also played a key role in the project. Interviews and DIY sessions were recorded and automatically transcribed (MS Teams, Field Notes) before being analysed in MAXQDA. The coding was abductive in nature, combining categories derived from the research questions with those emerging from the empirical material. This abductive approach allowed for a balance between analytical discipline and the flexibility necessary to study the complex and socially rooted phenomenon of DIY. The codebook was organised around four analytical areas: practices; everyday life; learning and knowledge transfer; and social relations and culture.

ON THE NEED FOR NEW SENSIBILITIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSIGNIFICANT

As part of the so-called "new sensibilities" in anthropology, the focus of research is increasingly shifting away from grand narratives and macro--structures towards micro-practices, everyday rituals, and relations with the material world. This is not so much an abandonment of questions about power or economics as an attempt to capture their operation in

previously marginalised spheres: the body, touch, the work of the hands, and attentiveness to things.

Anthropologists such as Tim Ingold (2011, 2013), Kathleen Stewart (2007) and Sarah Pink (2009) point out that meanings do not "wait" for us in a ready-made form, but are produced in the course of action — in movement, in relationship with a tool, or in tenderness towards objects. In this sense, DIY — as a practice embedded in concrete materiality, rhythm and improvisation — becomes a privileged site for tracing how contemporary forms of life are negotiated, lived and redefined at the level of experience.

When embarking on this research, we began with a fundamental question: why do people so passionately devote their free time to activities that, viewed from the outside, could be considered demanding manual work? What makes so many people invest their time, energy and resources in seemingly insignificant activities, such as sanding wood, soldering circuits or building a shelf out of reclaimed wood? These questions lead us towards a broader reflection on leisure as a space not only for rest but also for the construction of meaning — a sphere that allows people to go beyond the realm of necessity.

Kenneth Roberts (2011) proposes that leisure be viewed not through the prism of the most spectacular or socially visible activities, but precisely through what is marginal, small, and often unnoticed — that is, the "small forms" of leisure, which include DIY. Paradoxically, these unspectacular activities offer the greatest margin of freedom to those who practise them. Their social "insignificance" makes them a space for experiencing and experimenting, but also for redefining oneself. It is in this sense that DIY is not an escape from work, but rather the creation of one's own alternative rituals of everyday life — practices that, despite their lack of explicit effects or "productivity" in the classical sense, become existentially meaningful. This apparent aimlessness proves, in fact, to be deeply meaningful. As Roberts notes, the choices made in the realm of leisure are small compared to those of married life, work or education, but precisely because of this, they can be freer and less determined by structure. Such was the case with our respondents, who — in workshop spaces, home basements, garages and makerspaces — revealed the autotelic quality of DIY: doing "for the sake of doing", not necessarily focused on a clear utilitarian purpose,

but charged with meaning. From this perspective, DIY becomes a lens through which three important aspects of contemporary social life can be observed.

Firstly, DIY helps us understand the meaning of well-being in contemporary culture. DIY practices are activities undertaken of one's own free will, based on bodily engagement, rhythm and focus, sometimes in the company of others; they benefit the mental and physical health of DIYers. They are more than just relaxation: they are a form of care for oneself and one's relationship with the material world. In this sense, they are part of the concept of "serious leisure" (Stebbins 2007) — practices that require commitment but also allow a sense of agency and meaning to be regained in a world that often offers only acceleration and abstraction.

Secondly, DIY is not an alternative to consumption, but rather a particular variant of it. Amateur making does not necessarily imply opposition to the market, but can become a way of negotiating it — through a conscious choice of tools, materials and technologies. The expenditure incurred in this sphere, although voluntary, becomes an important element of the experience economy (Featherstone 1987), in which value is measured not only by the functionality of the product, but also by the meaning attached to its production.

Thirdly and ultimately, issues of identity remain most relevant; leisure becomes a space of freedom in which one can "try oneself out" in different roles, create alternative narratives about oneself, and belong to communities that are not imposed by the social structure but result from choice and practice. The transition from amateur to so-called *professional-amateur*, or pro-am (Leadbeater & Miller 2004), and the gradual development of competence and commitment, can be read as a process of identity formation rooted not so much in occupation as in practice, relationships and materiality.[1]

In these meanings, DIY is not just a technique, but a way of being-in--the-world, although we wish to emphasise — shattering the somewhat

[1] The question of becoming pro-am is one of the fundamental themes we are developing in the "Making is Connecting" project. This will be reflected in the forthcoming comprehensive study (Gądecki 2026).

romantic vision of amateur craftsmanship — that it is definitely not accessible to everyone. It is a micro-practice that, although seemingly marginal, can become a key to understanding the deeper transformations of contemporary forms of life: the shift towards materiality and care and attentiveness, and the redefinition of work and consumption. It is in this "being insignificant" that the new sensibilities of anthropology are revealed — directed towards the everyday, the repetitive and the unheroic, but precisely due to this the most primal and human.

DIY AS A PRACTICE OF CARE AND RELATIONALITY

One of the most intriguing aspects of DIY, as only revealed by the fieldwork conducted as part of this project, is its deeply intimate, bodily and localised nature. We had already adopted the perspective of an anthropology of materiality (Dant 1999; Klekot 2020; Krajewski 2010) before embarking on the research, assuming that DIY is not an isolated activity of the individual, but rather something that "happens" within a dense network of relationships: with objects, with space, and with other people. However, we initially wanted to focus exclusively on creative-workshop spaces (Gądecki & Piziak 2021). Thus, the research area we originally intended to cover took the form of more or less institutionalised activity spaces, such as *makerspaces*, men's sheds or repair workshops.

Meanwhile, as the recruitment phase showed, there was something isolated and private about many of these activities. DIY practices, as we observed with great interest, often take place in basements, garages, home workshops, and improvised workspaces. It is there, away from the eyes of others, that DIY reveals itself as a deeply existential experience — embedded in the body, rhythm, materiality and relationships. It could therefore be said that the subsequent analyses of the video recordings of the participants' workshops and DIY sessions revealed increasingly clearly the intimate and personal nature of DIY. This would have been difficult to identify through an analysis of makerspaces, which tend to focus on collaborative knowledge exchange or resource sharing.

This also entailed an interesting theoretical and methodological reconfiguration of the project: while we had originally adopted

a networked perspective in the analysis of practices[2] close to Theodore Schatzki's approach (1996, 2002), the need to look at DIY from a different point of view became increasingly evident during the fieldwork. A change of perspective was crucial in order to better capture the personal and even intimate logic of the activities undertaken by our male and female interviewees. Thus, Andreas Reckwitz's theory of practice became more and more convincing: focused on emotions, embodied knowledge, and repetition — precisely the dimensions that proved to be crucial in the activities of the DIYers we studied (Reckwitz 2002).

The interviews conducted with people who engage in DIY confirm that such activity is regarded precisely as a particular kind of attitude — as an ethic of engagement, diligence, and the experience of being-in-the-world. Six clear themes emerge in our participants' statements: proficiency; self-improvement; respect for resources;[3] a therapeutic dimension; knowledge transfer; and relationship building. In our interviewees' stories, DIY was not just about working with materials, but was a ritual rooted in everyday life, a space for rest, regeneration and silence. It was not about making money or even about the end result, but about the process itself:

> "Going back to your DIY activities, what is more important to you? The work, or the actual outcome of what you do?"
> *The work itself, I guess, because how would you judge it by the outcome? Well… it would turn out to be just an awful lot of wasted time and money. But it's not wasted, because the very activity itself gives me satisfaction. Later on I'll put the*

[2] In Schatzki's perspective, practices are embedded in larger socio-material systems; they do not exist as separate activities, but as fragments of larger orders. A workshop — whether home-based or shared — is not just a physical space, but a network of relationships in which tools, materials, people and technologies co-evolve. It is a place where the social intertwines with the material, where spatial order interacts with the rhythm of action. For a long time, this approach has been very helpful, especially in the study of makerspaces as potential "third places", offering an alternative to the formal and domestic spaces of everyday life. However, in the current project — focused on practices happening *outside of* these institutional structures — the need for a different kind of research sensibility began to emerge.

[3] As MacKinnon and Derickson note, resilience-oriented practices often emerge as adaptive responses to systemic crisis, shifting the burden of coping onto individuals and communities while leaving underlying political-economic structures intact (MacKinnon & Derickson 2013). Read in this light, DIY practices of care and slowing down may operate not outside regimes of acceleration and individualisation, but within them, offering forms of everyday repair and stabilisation rather than collective transformation.

> *object on a shelf somewhere, or it'll be taken apart, or maybe it'll turn out to be useless? Whatever,* […] *It's all about having fun.* [3_IDI]

This understanding of DIY resonates with Richard Sennett's conception of craftsmanship as an ethical and embodied commitment to doing things well for their own sake, grounded in repetition, attentiveness and dialogue with material resistance (Sennett 2008). It is clear from the respondents' statements that for many, DIY is a chance to pause, to be "alone with themselves", an escape from everyday stress, and at the same time a form of meditation through action — a form of stress relief and a break from demanding paid work. DIY therefore has a psychological role in helping to balance life:

> *Yes, it's a form of detachment from this day-to-day work, especially at the beginning when I was working really hard, spending 60% of my time on foreign business travel. You know, the top three Japanese trading corporations… it was really such an intense period, but very well paid, very cool work, contacts with great companies and people. I paid off the loan for my house thanks to that work, but it was mentally and physically exhausting, so this was, you know, a break from all of that.* [20_IDI]

At the same time, the intimacy and singularity of DIY allow the whole multiplicity of actors and meanings involved in the practice to be revealed. It is not just about working with objects, but also about a relational choreography in which actors and things interact in greater or lesser harmony. The body brings gestural memory, rhythm and muscle tension. The materials — most often wood, metal or fabric — offer resistance that not only has to be overcome, but also negotiated with. Tools mediate, transform and strengthen, but they also teach — like the hammer, which over time becomes an extension of the hand. And finally, space: whether it be a cramped workshop in a block of flats or a large garage, it affects the pace, scope and manner of the activity (Carr & Gibson 2016). It is therefore not just about the production of objects, but about the process of creating situations — micro-scenes in which people and things intertwine in creative action.

DIY is a practice in which four fundamental elements — body, material, tool and place — are brought together. The hand works with the wood, but also listens to its resistance. The tool — file, planer, sandpaper — not only performs a function, but enters into a relationship

with the user's body, becoming a part of its rhythm. The material is not passive — it resists, yields, crumbles or flexes. The place — even if it is only a part of a kitchen table on which the 3D printer operates — becomes a space of ritual, a temporary "temple of concentration".

Fig. 1

THEORETICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK:
HETEROGENEOUS ACTORS IN DIY PRACTICES

This tension — between the individual, intimate practice and its social embedding — is perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the DIY we are analysing. Reckwitz's framing of practice as a complex configuration of body, emotion, knowledge and materiality captures this dimension particularly well. It provides the tools to analyse not only *what* people do, but also *how* and *why* – and *how they feel while doing it*. Tim Ingold (2011, 2013) argues that academic attempts to capture craft often lose its key aspects: sensory dimensions, processuality and spontaneity. Although the artefact — the end result — is easy enough to describe, it does not lie at the core of the practice. What matters are the processes, both material and bodily-mental, that bring this artefact to life.

In the contexts of intimacy and relationality, two themes that are gaining importance in contemporary anthropology are also worth noting. Such

research is paying ever more attention to the sensory aspects of cognition and action, transcending the classical oppositions between mind and body, theory and practice, and thinking and doing. Where craft is concerned, the shift in emphasis from visual perception, dominant in the Western tradition, to other sensory modalities — especially haptics, or tactile and bodily cognition — is proving particularly interesting (see: Pallasmaa 2009). As Trevor H. J. Marchand (2022) notes, in craft work the act of imagining is not limited to the visualisation of the intended object or action in the mind's eye, but involves multisensory forms of imagination, closely linked to the properties and qualities of the matter with which the craftsperson works.

Motor and haptic imagination plays a key role in the planning and execution of manual activities. The DIYer may, for example, make assumptions about how an object will interact with the body — how it will be held, worn or used, and how it will feel in the hands or against the skin. Such imaginings are not purely abstract, but embedded in somatic and sensory experience, as well as in culturally conditioned patterns of action. Hapticity here becomes not only a tool for cognition, but also a means of creative thinking and problem solving — a source of embodied knowledge that supports and stimulates other ways of knowing and understanding the material world.

This approach dovetails perfectly with the concept of *hedonising technologies* proposed by Rachel Maines (2009), who describes technologies, hobbies and leisure practices as sources of pleasure arising precisely from their apparent inefficiency, labour-intensity or physical discomfort. Unlike industrial technologies, which are geared towards maximising productivity, hedonising technologies offer experiences that are intense and require focus and full engagement — and thus enable disconnection from everyday concerns (Maines 2009: 36). These kinds of practices — such as sewing, woodworking or leatherworking — can be tedious and time-consuming, but this is what becomes the source of satisfaction. "The harder, the better". This principle not only does not discourage craftspeople, it is often at the core of motivation. Difficulty here means a challenge that draws you in and allows you to become deeply immersed in the practice, while excluding superficiality and distraction.

The relationship between tool and craftsperson is not so much functional as affective-dialogical in these contexts. A chisel or an old plane that requires constant sharpening, or a hand lathe whose operation

requires the coordination of multiple senses and muscular strength, are examples of tools that do not merely *allow* a task to be done but rather *demand* a certain kind of engagement. Technology thereby becomes a co-creator of experience rather than its passive carrier. Artisans, like "archaizers" (Maines 2009: 22), deliberately choose older, more difficult techniques, for example hand sewing leather instead of machine sewing, or the reconstruction of older techniques. This is not because they are more efficient, but because their demanding nature enables a deeper relationship with the material and the tool:

> *The more expensive ones* [tools] *are not necessarily better, but the quality really matters. I have some tools that are handmade, because one third of leatherwork is done with a knife… There are knives that are handmade by the guys, you know, from the previous workshop. Here are the punches for making holes in the leather* [points at a box]*, and in this box I have some more versatile tools, pliers, hammers, rulers…* [4_IDI]

This unproductive attachment to uncomfortable forms of work underpins hedonising technologies — forms of technical activity that give pleasure precisely through their intensity, resistance and bodily engagement.

From this perspective, *thinking with tools* (Marchand 2022) gains an additional dimension: not only cognitive or practical, but also aesthetic and affective. Tools and techniques cease to be neutral means to an end and become active participants in the creative process. It is worth emphasising here that the suffix "-izer" in Maines' analysis functions as *an indirect noun*, indicating the causality of the technologies themselves and not just of the users; it is the technology that *hedonises*, that encourages pleasure, concentration and the ritualisation of gestures. The do-it-yourselfer, working with a chisel, wood or leather, not only performs actions, but also submits to a kind of dramaturgy of material and tool that dictates the action's rhythm, pace and form.

FROM THE LÉVI-STRAUSSIAN BRICOLEUR TO THE CAPITALIST BRICOLEUR: DIY AS A CONSUMPTION-CONDITIONED PRACTICE

Many scholars and commentators see an almost revolutionary potential in the dynamics of the aforementioned transformations in

DIY. In this romantic vision, the activity appears as an act of resistance against global capitalism, as a return to casualness, localness, autonomy and personal responsibility for production. Modern and accessible technologies, such as 3D printing or robotics, enable people to produce on their own terms, democratising access to knowledge, tools and innovation. DIY is portrayed as a force capable of overcoming the crises of supply chains, the limitations of market systems or the anonymity of mass production, becoming a response to the deeply human need for personalisation and self-realisation. This romantic-critical paradigm, particularly present in the analyses of authors such as Glenn Anderson (2007), Dale Dougherty (2012) or Eric von Hippel (2005) but also present in our earlier research (Gądecki & Piziak 2021), assumes that the maker movement is more than a hobby — that it is a philosophy of production alternative to industrial hegemony. Hackerspaces and fablabs are shown as sites of experimentation not only with technology, but also with alternative economic models, collaboration and even power structures. Creative activism ("maketivism") or open innovation are carriers of ideas of social transformation, redefining the roles of consumer and producer.

However, in the light of the fieldwork, this romantic-critical image needs to be revised. Alongside the emancipatory and revolutionary idea, another perspective — more pragmatic and grounded in the realities of late capitalism — is emerging. In place of the do-it-yourself idealist activist comes the capitalist bricoleur, the individual who moves between the spheres of work and leisure, production and consumption, and autonomy and dependence. This figure of the bricoleur symbolises the human capacity for creative action, independently of access to resources or technology; it is originally independent of the economic context. In the contemporary world, though, and especially under the conditions of a capitalist economy and consumer culture, DIY practices have undergone a significant transformation. Today, the bricoleur is often no longer just a maker-improver, but also a consumer, a "capitalist bricoleur" whose practices are strongly conditioned by market access, material and infrastructural resources, and dominant cultural narratives.

Contemporary DIY, while still seen as a bottom-up form of creativity, is heavily dependent on global supply chains. Paradoxically, as a practice of independence, it relies today on products supplied by large corporations,

from cheap Chinese 3D printers and electronic components from Amazon to semi-finished products available in DIY stores (Davies 2017). Creative independence thus remains an illusion if it is based on ready-made, industrially produced modules.

Cooperative or communal spaces are increasingly rare; DIY spaces predominantly involve private or corporate models of access, such as TechShops in the US, which require high fees and exclude those without leisure time or financial capital (Rosner & Fox 2016). As a result, what was supposed to be a democratic movement often turns out to be an exclusive middle-class privilege. Our empirical material aligns with these observations. The survey data indicate that DIY is predominantly practised by individuals with higher education, stable employment and sufficient leisure time, while many participants describe themselves as beginners or moderately skilled makers. This suggests that contemporary DIY, at least in the form revealed by our research, is less a continuation of craft traditions and more a middle-class project of self-formation, lifestyle management and controlled experimentation.

Capitalist conditions shape not only access to tools and materials, but also the motivations and lifestyles of contemporary bricoleurs. Making becomes part of self-expression, lifestyle or even fashion; it is a hobby occupation though not necessarily a critical one. Even hackers rarely see themselves as actors of political or social change; their activity exists more in an aesthetic-private realm, as a form of entertainment or a way of spending free time. It is thus an activity deeply intertwined with the capitalist notion of freedom, which is based on the consumption of goods and leisure time.

DIY, as our fieldwork well shows, becomes not so much an act of rebellion as an everyday practice, a form of recreation, an opportunity for self-development or a way of maintaining a middle-class identity. From this perspective, DIY does not oppose the system but functions within it — as a response to shortages and crises, but also market niches. Practices such as home renovation, figurine printing or hobby repairs do not necessarily seek to change the system; rather, they provide satisfaction, fulfilment and sometimes simply savings. Self-activities are treated as ordinary, even intimate activities, sometimes habitual, unapologetic and individualistic.

The capitalist bricoleur is a figure who does not so much change the world as manoeuvre within it; they are flexible, creative and goal--oriented, and combine the skills of user and creator. Their DIY activity is often the result of a need for efficiency, for productive leisure, or an attempt to reconcile multiple roles — those of worker, parent, hobbyist and consumer. Rather than a radical alternative to the system, DIY today more often fits into the logic of an entrepreneurial culture of self-reliance, technical competence and creativity. Traits such as resourcefulness, flexibility and adaptability — while ostensibly emancipatory — are at the same time compatible with the logic of the neoliberal order. Ultimately, DIY understood in this way does not demolish the order but co-creates it, taming its contradictions and responding to its deficits, but not necessarily offering an alternative.

In this context, it is worth referring to Colin Campbell's (2005) concept of craft consumption. He points out that contemporary consumption — especially among the middle class — increasingly resembles craft production. Consumers not only select products, but actively compose them, putting together ready-made, mass-produced elements into new wholes. In this way, DIY becomes a form of design-oriented consumption, expressing individual ambition and identity. While Campbell suggests that this process is an expression of agency, there is no denying that it remains deeply rooted in the system of mass production; cooking, sewing or assembling furniture from IKEA is not an escape from the market, but a creative use of it. The point is that much of the consumption undertaken by individuals in contemporary Western societies should be seen as artisanal activity; that is, activity in which individuals not only exercise control over the consumption process, but also bring skills, knowledge, judgement, love and passion to consumption in the same way that traditional craftsmen and craftswomen have always been assumed to approach their work (Campbell 2005: 5).

In these respects, artisanal consumption is very similar to craft production of the type valued by thinkers such as Marx, Veblen and Morris, all of whom saw it as an authentic expression of humanity as opposed to the alienating production processes of industrialisation. The key difference is that Campbell's version of artisanal consumption is inextricably linked to mass production. This is because craft consumers

are often involved in making connections and producing assemblages that can "consist of several elements that are themselves mass-produced retail goods" (Campbell 2005: 27). Ultimately, the capitalist bricoleur is no longer the same creator that Lévi-Strauss described. They are a user of ready-made components, a participant in markets and a subject of class structures; their practices, though creative, are deeply embedded in the infrastructure of contemporary consumer capitalism.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This article has argued that DIY and amateur craft practices constitute a particularly revealing site for examining anthropology's new sensibilities, understood as a shift towards attentiveness to materiality, embodiment, affect and everyday relations. Rather than approaching DIY as a social movement, an innovation paradigm or a form of creative activism, we focused on its mundane, intimate and often private enactments. This analytical move allowed us to trace how seemingly inconsequential practices — performed in basements, garages and improvised workshops — become meaningful forms of being-in-the--world, rooted in care, sensory engagement and embodied knowledge.

While the existing critical literature has already questioned the romantic image of the bricoleur and challenged the idea of DIY as an inherently emancipatory alternative to capitalism, our contribution lies in re-situating this critique at the level of everyday practice. We have shown that the tensions identified in previous research — between autonomy and dependence, creativity and consumption, and freedom and inequality — are not only structural or discursive, but are reproduced and negotiated through bodily routines, material encounters and affective relations with tools and things. In this sense, the demystification of DIY does not lead to its dismissal as a mere consumer pastime; instead, it reveals the complex ways in which care, pleasure and self-making coexist with class--conditioned access to resources and infrastructures.

Empirically, the article contributes to the literature by drawing on qualitative, sensory and object-centred research conducted in a context that remains underrepresented in studies of DIY and making. By focusing on amateur craft practices embedded in everyday domestic spaces rather

than institutionalised makerspaces alone, we were able to capture forms of creativity that are less visible, less spectacular and less easily aligned with dominant narratives of innovation or resistance. This perspective highlights how global imaginaries of creativity and self-reliance are locally appropriated and translated into ordinary practices shaped by housing conditions, work rhythms and middle-class lifestyles.

Analytically, our findings resonate with practice-oriented and sensory approaches to craft and making (Ingold 2013; Marchand 2022; Pink 2009), while also extending consumption-oriented critiques such as Campbell's notion of craft consumption. DIY emerges here as a hybrid formation: a practice of care and existential anchoring that simultaneously operates within the logics of late capitalism. The figure of the contemporary bricoleur is thus neither a romantic outsider nor a passive consumer, but a subject navigating between making and buying, autonomy and market dependence, and pleasure and productivity. It is precisely this ambivalence, rather than a clear-cut oppositional stance, that characterises DIY as an everyday practice today.

From the perspective of anthropology's new sensibilities, DIY offers more than an additional empirical field. It foregrounds a mode of knowing that privileges process over outcome, attentiveness over efficiency, and bodily co-presence over abstract representation. In studying DIY activity, anthropology is invited to take seriously what is repetitive, unspectacular and intimate. In these practices, social structures are neither heroically contested nor simply reproduced, but quietly inhabited and adjusted.

The analysis presented here opens several directions for further research. Comparative studies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts could illuminate how class, gender and spatial conditions shape access to DIY as a practice of care and self-regulation. Longitudinal approaches might explore how engagement in amateur making changes over the life course or in response to experiences of precarity, burnout or crisis. Finally, further methodological experimentation with sensory, visual and object-oriented methods could deepen our understanding of how embodied knowledge and affect circulate within everyday practices of making.

In conclusion, DIY appears not as a marginal or nostalgic residue of pre-industrial craft, but as a contemporary micro-practice through which

broader transformations of work, consumption and subjectivity can be observed. Attending to these modest, often overlooked activities allows anthropology to engage critically with the ordinary, recognising in it not a romantic escape from modernity, but one of its most revealing expressions.

REFERENCES

Anderson Glenn, 2007, *Thinking Through Craft*, Oxford: Berg.

Campbell Colin, 2005, *The Craft Consumer*, "Journal of Consumer Culture", 5(1): 23–42.

Carr Chantel & Gibson Chris, 2016, *Geographies of Making: Rethinking Materials and Skills for Volatile Futures*, "Progress in Human Geography", 40(3): 297–315.

Dant Tim, 1999, *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles*, Buckingham; Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Davies Sarah R., 2017, *Hackerspaces. Making the Maker Movement*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dougherty, Dale, 2012, *The Maker Movement*, "Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization", 7(3): 11–4.

Featherstone Mike, 1987, *Consumption and lifestyles*, „Theory, Culture & Society", 4(1): 55–70.

Gądecki Jacek & Piziak Bartosz, 2021, *Przestrzenie kreatywno warsztatowe. Makerspace'y, fab laby i warsztaty w przestrzeniach polskich miast*, Warszawa–Kraków: Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów,Obserwatorium Polityki Miejskiej.

Gądecki Jacek, 2026, *Materialność majsterkowania. O sprawczości ludzi, narzędzi i przestrzeni w praktykach współczesnego DIY*, Warszawa: Scholar (upcoming).

Ingold Tim, 2011, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, London: Routledge.

Ingold Tim, 2013, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London: Routledge.

Krajewski Marek (ed.), 2010, *Handmade: praca rąk w postindustrialnej rzeczywistości*, Warszawa: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana.

Klekot Ewa, 2020, *The Craft of Factory Labor Available to Purchase*. „Journal of American Folklore", 133(528): 205–27.

Leadbeater Charles & Miller Paul, 2004, *The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Society and Economy*, London: Demos.

MacKinnon Danny & Derickson Kate Driscoll, 2013, *From Resilience to Resourcefulness: A Critique of Resilience Policy and Activism*, "Progress in Human Geography", 37(2): 253––70.

Maines Rachel, 2009, *Hedonizing Technologies: Paths to Pleasure in Hobbies and Leisure*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Marchand Trevor H. J., 2022, *The Pursuit of Pleasurable Work: Craftwork in Twenty-First Century England*, New York: Berghahn Books.

Nosal Przemysław & Maciej Frąckowiak, 2025, *Zaradność społeczna: Od ujęcia egzystencjalnego do egzystencjalistycznego?* "Przegląd Socjologiczny", 74: 29–56.

Pallasmaa Juhaani, 2009, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Pink Sarah, 2009, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: SAGE.

Reckwitz Andreas, 2002, *Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing*, "European Journal of Social Theory", 5(2): 243–263.

Roberts Kenneth, 2011, *Leisure: the importance of being inconsequential*, "Leisure Studies", 30(1): 5–20.

Rosner Daniela K., Fox Sarah E., 2016, *Legacies of craft and the centrality of failure in a mother--operated hackerspace*, "New Media & Society", 18(4): 558–80.

Rowsell Jennifer, 2011, *Carrying my family with me: artefacts as emic perspectives*, "Qualitative Research", 11(3): 331–46.

Schatzki Theodore, 1996, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schatzki Theodore, 2002, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Sennett Richard, 2008, *The Craftsman*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Stebbins Robert, 2007, *A Serious Leisure: A Perspective for Our Time*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Stewart Kathleen, 2007, *Ordinary Affects*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Stocking George W. Jr., 1989, *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility*, "History of Anthropology", vol. 6, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

von Hippel Eric, 2005, *Democratizing Innovation*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Abstract

This article explores amateur craft practices (DIY — Do-It-Yourself) as intimate, relational, and materially embedded activities that provide a unique lens for exploring anthropology's "new sensibilities". The authors analyse DIY practices not merely as technical work, but as a socially and materially complex activity involving care, embodiment and sensory knowledge. Rejecting the romanticised image of the bricoleur, the paper highlights the classed nature of such practices and their entanglement with consumer capitalism. Ultimately, DIY is shown not as a rebellion against the system, but as a meaningful everyday practice operating within it — shaping identity, enabling resilience, and fostering alternative ways of being-in-the-world.

keywords: DIY (Do-It-Yourself), anthropology of materiality, practices of care, craft consumption

Abstrakt

Artykuł zawiera analizę amatorskich praktyk rzemieślniczych (DIY — *do it yourself*) jako prywatnych i relacyjnych działań materialnych, które stanowią

wyjątkowe pole badawcze z perspektywy „nowych wrażliwości" antropologii. Autorzy analizują majsterkowanie nie tylko jako pracę techniczną, ale jako złożoną społecznie i materialnie praktykę obejmującą troskę, ucieleśnienie i wiedzę sensoryczną. Odrzucając romantyczny wizerunek bricoleura, podkreślają klasową naturę takich praktyk i ich uwikłanie w kapitalizm konsumpcyjny. Majsterkowanie jest ukazywane nie jako bunt przeciwko systemowi, lecz jako znacząca, codzienna praktyka działania w jego ramach — kształtująca tożsamość, odporność i alternatywne sposoby bycia w świecie.

słowa kluczowe: majsterkowanie (DIY), antropologia materialności, praktyki troski, wiedza ucieleśniona