

WILLOW BASKETRY DEMONSTRATION AND LECTURE - Given by Bernard Graves at the Hiram Summer Conference at Ruskin Mill in June 1994

Forgive me if I stutter a little, but as you may know, for a practising craftsman it is rather difficult to raise into consciousness aspects of movement. Movement is, of course, best witnessed in action, watching craftsmen at work. But in keeping with the Hiram school of thinking, we as craftsmen are charged with the task of raising our work into consciousness so that we can also make the connection to the conceptual life, to the developing thinking life of the teenager.

Before I do basketwork with you this morning, however, I would like to demonstrate the processes of willow basketry, because that will best illustrate what I want to bring to you. I shall also indicate some of the secrets that lie behind the gestures of the crafts, and I shall try to pick out some archetypal examples.

I'd like to look first in general terms at man's movement, his ability to move. We share this ability with the mineral kingdom. But whereas an animal learns the movement it needs for its life very rapidly after birth - within minutes the calf can be standing suckling from its mother - a child usually takes 1½ years to learn to crawl, stand upright and then walk. It is as if we are delayed in our motor development. It takes time for man to express the symphony of movements which belong to him.

Movement is also intrinsic to our awareness of the presence of life. I once found someone slumped over the wheel of a car, motionless. What is the first thing one does in this situation? One looks for a sign of movement. Unfortunately this poor man had had a heart attack and died at the wheel of his car, but I found myself looking for movement, be it his breath, his eyes, but there was none. I picked up a limb and it flopped. Movement seems to me to confirm the presence of life itself within the human being. I think the Gospel account is archetypal here. Elizabeth's child (John the Baptist) "leaped in her womb" in recognition of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This quickening movement is an archetypal sign of life.

When we observe a young child, a baby, we see a wonderfully joyful bundle of movement. It can't help it - when it is awake it continually moves: toes are moving, limbs and fingers are moving, everything seems to be moving. The young child up to school seems almost to be moved from the outside by invisible strings, like a puppet. His movements are in response to what is around him, to what he senses. It takes a long time for the child to begin to focus, orientate, to control these movements, to bring harmony and self-direction to them.

We know from Rudolf Steiner, and other people who have worked on these ideas, how the mastery of such outer movements as standing and walking are then interiorised, and go towards developing speech and language, then later on rise into the realm of consciousness to help develop the faculty of thinking and the processes of logic. This is the path of the interiorisation of movement.

I would like to investigate how movement, in all its pedagogical manifestations, goes ultimately towards fostering the healthy soul forces of the child: the speaking of a poem by the teacher, with a movement intrinsic in the verse; the movement brought by the eurythmy teacher or the handwork teacher, to name but a few. These soul

forces are threefold: firstly the ability to come into the right action, our will; secondly our sentient or feeling life; and lastly our conceptual forces, or thinking life. More particularly, I am interested in how craft movements contribute to the development of these faculties in the growing child. Teachers of all kinds are in the same boat here: we are directly involved in the unfolding and making manifest of these soul forces in the child. In a way, you could say it is what our job consists of to be part of the incarnating path of the child towards puberty.

As craftsmen, of course, we are most directly concerned with how movement is entered into with the hand, and with its reciprocal echo in the whole body gesture. I would like to call the whole symphony of movements each craftsman performs the 'craft gestures'. Within this symphony of movements of each craftsman there are certain essential, perhaps even archetypal, gestures which belong to each craft. These essential gestures I think are the means whereby the individual will impulses are made subject as it were to a higher order, a higher impulse. Perhaps we see this in the archetype of that craft gesture. And there is a man called Udo Steuck of the Christian Community, who has given some wonderfully inspiring thoughts over the years on the connection of the craft gestures and the crafts themselves with their cosmic counterparts in the zodiac. Something of this can be made available to those interested.

Now it is in the nature of the craft gestures that when practised the gesture works inwards to continue to foster a healthy inner life. Of course there is the result to be seen in the actual work achieved outwardly, but we are aware that we ourselves are formed and fashioned by that very craft which we take up or bring, to our students.

I should like now to point to a deeply significant thought which Rudolf Steiner gave us, relating especially to the development of adolescents. We are probably all familiar with the idea that during the first seven years of life the child gradually forms its own etheric body by interiorising the child's environment, and discarding the inherited etheric body by school age, around seven years. We call this moment the 'birth of the etheric'. During the next seven years a comparable building of the astral body occurs, with the 'birth' of the individual astral at around age 14, the point where the youngster starts out on the journey to discover self.

In a lecture given in 1921 entitled 'The Etheric Heart', (originally distributed in The Golden Blade 1985, and now printed as 'The Human Heart'), Rudolf Steiner points very directly to the being and manifestation of movement in the development of the astral body from puberty onwards. The lecture is called 'The Etheric Heart' because, unlike the rest of the organism, the heart defers the shedding of its inherited etheric substance until the time of puberty. He describes how this etheric heart is cosmically formed before birth, being a mirror of the entire zodiac planetary system, sun and moon. It is interiorised in the region of the physical heart, and at puberty all movements we have experienced are inscribed by the astral body and stream towards the region of our etheric heart.

Now, in an imagination, I refer to this etheric heart as a kind of cosmic treasure trove, a casket, a basket, and into this basket come the effects of movement on our plastic astral body; they are like precious stones or jewels in the casket. It is also the intentions behind our movements which are inscribed here, and the effects of our

deeds, too. And at death these 'treasures' are handed over to the cosmos again and they form the future possibilities of the next incarnation, particularly our next habit body, etheric body, and in the physical realm they form the head in our next incarnation. This is as far as he takes the idea.

So, in other words when we look at the physiognomy of our brothers and sisters on earth around us now we see a kind of echo or imprint before us when we look at the way we walk, or at our temperaments. We have a kind of imprint of the work gesture of a previous life; the ability to come into movement in the past. When I came across this I realised why all teenagers enjoy being subjected to a schooling of the will, through different craft workshops. I know as adults we would find that very difficult. It's all right with conference weekends, when you do a little bit of felting here and a little something else there, but we would not enjoy a whole school programme of it; perhaps we might find that a little difficult.

We would require a certain amount of choice and freedom in our work. But just as every child in class five realises his Greekness, or in class six his Romanness, as it is being addressed by the teacher, so I have experienced that through weaving, pottery and basketwork they sense unconsciously that the possibility arises for them to be impressed by what the craft gestures are offering. They offer something needed in their own maturation, in their own biography, at that moment in time. And it may well be that the teenager will become a computer scientist in later life, but right now they need what basketry can give them. It belongs in the process of healthy individual development, at the time of adolescence, as a help towards maturation and the unfolding of individual egohood and freedom.

Now: craft, hand-power, hand-work. Of course it is only possible in as much as I come into some activity. I cannot think a basket into being. And so in a sense the threshold for all crafts is via the gate of the will. Activity has to happen, and of course there are many hurdles to be overcome. We know the passivity, the lethargy, the not-wanting-to; the awkwardness and self-consciousness which arises when a person is confronted with having to do something. As adults we sort of say "Well, I'm all thumbs.", We shrug it off: we have a way of dealing with it when we make mistakes. But an adolescent hasn't got that ability to objectify the self, which helps adults to shrug it off, and so in that moment they are very, very exposed.

Last week I visited a blacksmith just outside Wakefield, and I was reminded of an experience I had as a child. On the way to my grandmother's house, where I used to go on Saturdays for extra tuition in reading and writing (because I wasn't very good at them), there was a blacksmith, who used to shoe horses. I always used to arrive at my grandmother's an hour and a half late. They were very tolerant of this because they knew where I was. My bus just happened to stop before my grandparents' house, and I had to walk the rest of the way, past the blacksmith's.

You know, I couldn't get past it. I was literally spellbound by what the blacksmith was doing: the fire, the noise, the hissing. But above all I remember the tapping: the anvil percussion. I don't remember the presence of the elemental or fairy world in childhood, but I do remember slipping into a strange form of consciousness whilst watching the blacksmith at work. And I now know how it is to be at the other end, performing these gestures, and what is actually taking place. Because when you watch a blacksmith, a weaver or a potter, something akin to music is witnessed: something

alive and appeasing, healing of itself, just through watching the gestures of the craft. There is grace in the movement of the blacksmith, although he may be a big, burly man with tattoos up his arm, as this chap in Wakefield was. When he spoke to us as a man he was quite different, almost scary. When he was a blacksmith he was suddenly transformed and he had a lightness and grace in his movements, and he really performed a kind of dance there. And out of this dance, of course, the shoe appeared, as would the basket from the basketmaker...

Now one could say that essentially what has happened is that through the mastery of his craft movements (attained through personal effort, not God-given), his 'learned good habits' have brought ideas out of the realm of the spiritual, (or perhaps one could say, out of the abstract realm), and been transformed, given shape and material expression. This is, in a way, the archetypal deed of the craftsman. He brings an idea into the physical world. An artist has to be a craftsman (learning how to use his materials, paints etc.,) but perhaps he raises materials to a certain level at which something, original can arise. Craftsmen and artists are not totally separate: they are one in a way, but every artist has to become a craftsman, and every craftsman has to learn to be an artist, too.

Now we mentioned last night that in contrast to the blacksmith working, when we see a machine it conjures up a very different experience. There the work gesture is merely a mimicry of the abstract gesture. The movement is conceptualised and made possible by the machine, and the musical element is omitted. If you go to a modern blacksmith's workshop, the experience is horrific. Then you see what a power hammer does. Have you ever seen a power hammer? It's unbelievable: it's frightening. It does the work very efficiently, but it is quite without the musical element.

So how do we, as teachers, firstly acquire these gestures, and how then do we impart them? What is this process of osmosis almost, whereby we give the gestures to the students, help them to acquire them? What is the process whereby they are learned? Of course, at an obvious level, in the first instance I must perform the right gesture myself, and if I pick up my hammer today in my right hand, and use it with my right hand, and then tomorrow with my left, and then in the afternoon I change back to my right hand again, there is no way the apprentice or student is going to know what to do.

The process, thereby habits are learned is really an enhanced form of imitation. You may have noticed that your own young children, if you have them, mimic your gestures, and seeing this you've thought, 'My God' That's me.! This is because the being of movement is the gesture, and the pre-school child is most sensitive to what lives in gesture in the adult world. Not so much what we say as adults, but what we do, is influential with the young child. This is one of the reasons why Steiner indicated that the kindergarten should be placed right next door to the blacksmith's workshop, so that the children would be impressed by the activity of the work.

I'd like to point now to what developed as the archetypal schooling of the will, in the form of the Craft Guilds, where there was apprentice, journeyman and master. One started as an apprentice, not literally just sweeping the floor, although very often it was that kind of activity. I think that probably just being around the work that was

going on, in the atmosphere of it, one just sort of came in from the outside. (It's interesting having workshops with adults instead of children the adults want to get right in and do the most complicated things on day one; they want to jump over many steps, which are necessary before one can sit at the basketmaker's plank...). And although I'm not suggesting that we should reinstate the five or seven years apprenticeship idea, I think if we could distil what was happening in this phase we might find a way, in the modern context, to bring that into our workshop practice.

So what was actually happening in the apprenticeship phase? Surely the first thing is that the student learns the movements, until they become a habit, unconsciously absorbed by his own etheric body. Now we know that in the initial stage of trying to learn a new physical skill, (whether it be riding a bicycle, working willows, or whatever), the threshold is very critical we feel very awkward, very conscious of the movements that are needed, and that causes us to be almost sclerotic in our gestures. This is because we are having to bring too much consciousness to a realm that should be basically unconscious. We were discussing this this morning, saying that in this realm of movement we are essentially unconscious. It doesn't mean we are immoral or amoral in the consequences of our will - not at all, we have to develop that - but we are, as such, unconscious). So, as I said, we experience a threshold of hyperconsciousness until we acquire new habits, and then the movements begin to flow.

It has happened in a workshop, several times, that a youngster has been experiencing that very threshold and says 'I can't do it. I cannot do it.' He's frustrated, awkward. And then one day - it happens best after they have left off the work for a term - they come back, and you don't say anything, you just start work, and he suddenly says, "Hey, I've got it." It takes time to work into the etheric body it takes time to sink in. There is value in not giving students too long a time on any craft, but saying 'we'll come back to it'. This of course raises the issue of how the work is programmed into the school curriculum.

So, the apprentice has to interiorise the movements which have been personalised by the master. He takes from the master the archetypal aspect of the movement and interiorises it, makes it his own. And that takes time.

Then, after apprenticeship comes the journeyman phase, when he travelled around to see other masters working. What he has to learn in this stage is how to distinguish between the archetypal and individual elements in the craft of the masters he observes. He himself moves in this way from the archetype towards developing his own individual way of working, and this is what we are about in our work with adolescents. We are trying to help them to discover their individuality. We could say that the apprenticeship period is a time when the human individual will is ordered by cosmic will.

Now there is of course another very important element, and that is rhythm, connected more to our sentient being, having its place in the rhythmic activity of heart and lung. Every craft has its own right rhythm, which we adapt to suit our own individual disposition or temperament. I have to be very careful as a teacher of adolescents not to impose my own rhythm, my gesture, implicitly on the young person. I have, I would say, in the very early days of the teaching, that right to say 'you do it like this', and I know that it can subsequently be interiorised and adapted to become his own. As in

education generally, we are not seeking to create replicas of ourselves, but particularly in the teaching of craft one needs to know when is the moment to let go, and allow them to develop their own right rhythm, their relationship to the work gesture. The rhythm of the blacksmith's movement is obvious, and so it is with the weaver: maybe it will become obvious, when I show you where the basketmaker's rhythm can be found.

A third aspect arises now: where is the conceptual dimension in craft teaching? How does craftwork performed in this way help to develop the conceptual life of the young person? This seems contradictory to what I said before, namely that consciousness does not truly enter into movement, since our conceptual life is conscious, of course. But the conceptual element I have in mind is expressed ultimately in what we see made manifest as form. That form is the conceptualised aspect of our thinking life. In other words, I have a picture of this basket in mind, and now there it is. Of course there are times when I allow free creativity; something new comes about, in the realisation of which I again enter into this area of conscious thought. The head comes into play, as it were. It is the realm whereby the thought is brought, through rhythm, into matter. It is a three-fold path, and it is intrinsic in every craft and every aspect of craft.

I will now take three archetypal crafts, and try to describe where in them these three areas of human experience live. The three crafts I have chosen each have an accent towards one of these areas in particular. Let's take pottery as a first example, particularly the modelling side of pottery, where we process the clay the wedging of the clay in preparation for use. If you think about it, you have a hard, solid old rock, dead matter, which has been subject to a long process of decay, and now it is made ready by the wedging process, ready to receive form through the movement of the hands of the potter in the activity of modelling. I don't mean the decoration of the clay or the slip-glazed painting, but the forming, impressing, modelling, sculptural processes. This is not done so much with the fingertips it's done with the palm. This is will activity. It's like making bread, like the kneading of the dough. The will is carried along with the rhythm, but it is essentially a will gesture. That gesture of impressing the matter with our hands is foremost in our perception of someone doing this. Pushing, pulling, resistance all these belong very much to the exercise of the will.

There is also, however, a thinking quality, and feeling too, expressed via the artistry, the way we decorate the pot, the colours we choose to glaze it with. This activity raises it into a different realm. So you have on the one hand the will activity in the formation, the movement of impressing the clay, including a rhythmic component in this activity; the conceptual factor appears in the idea expressed in the eventual shape, form, design of the pot; and the rhythmic factor, the feeling quality, is principally expressed in the decoration, the artistry.

Now if we turn to weaving on a loom, the most obvious movement is a repeated rhythmical one, up and down with the beating of the baton. With the archetypal warp and weft, the rhythm consists of up and down and in and out, and the large shuttle moves from left to right rhythmically. It's well known that weavers dream off, as if they are out on the sea, as they weave away.

There are many songs and sagas that illustrate this element of semi-consciousness in the activity of weaving. (Spinning is very different: we spin thoughts...) So the weaver's gesture lies very much in the middle realm: it's a rhythmic, breathing process, in a two-dimensional plane. The cloth spreads like a sea in front of the weaver, and in the workshop the students settle into their own 'boats' their own looms, and become part of them. The social interaction in the workshop has to go away for a while: you can't chit-chat. You get into your own boat and go out to sea.

There is also the thinking element again here, however. Once one has mastered the rhythmic element it is necessary to grasp, via logical thought, the fact that when different threads are picked up different weave patterns come about in the cloth, and this is determined by a set of numbers. I have seen "special needs" students who cannot read or write or do arithmetic, yet they can interpret the series of numbers on the head of the loom which correspond to the foot pedals, and it has been a mystery to us all how they do it. But it is not the head working with those numbers - it is the feet. Again here we have a conceptual element being introduced to the student via the will, in the feet, through the movement of the pedals, which also imbue the cloth with this thought or idea, or pattern.

Now we ascend to knitting. Rudolf Steiner said to teachers, "What can we do on the first day of school?" And do you know what his answer was? 'Let the children be aware that they have hands' That is exactly what he said.. 'Hands with which to work'. And then he said 'You must do knitting'. If we take the rhythmical movement of the weaver and then minimalise it, bringing it up higher and working with the fingertips, then we are knitting. To drop a stitch is terrible! Of course some children don't care two hoots, but the majority of them are devastated if this happens, and it must be put right at all costs. Now we do knitting in class one, not because it represents the beginning of the craft curriculum, but for a specific reason. We are using here the digital part of the hands, the fingers not so much the 'will' part, which would be the palms, (the hands are also threefold, like the whole human being). We are using the part of the hand which we use to count - we don't count on our palms - and this is the thinking area of the hands. The interiorisation which accompanies the movement of knitting will help to develop a healthy conceptual life in adolescence. In fact in the 'Supplementary Course' Rudolf Steiner said to teachers as they went into the upper school, 'You don't need to worry about the development of intellectual faculties of upper school

pupils: that is the job of teachers in the lower school. What you have to do is help them to become aware that they have hands and a body, which are their new instruments of learning'. That says it all, because what has been attained through movement, rhythm, poetry, through knitting, in the lower school, all that is interiorised and works upwards through the child towards the soul-spiritual nature. In fact it is a basic pedagogical law that if you wish to address the soul and spiritual nature of the child you should introduce activity, move into rhythm, into walking, stamping or clapping. If you want to address the physical body (and this is how as a teacher you can put your children to sleep, or make them go blue in the face), if you wish to work almost curatively (and in my work I have to be very aware of this), you sit the child still and tell them a story. You feed him imaginations, you enter via that imaginative world, and these imaginations are digested by the child and assimilated into the physical realm, to such an extent that one can thus actually heal the physical body, So, you see, one works with what seems to be the opposite pole, the opposite

way round. We all know it as adults, we've just never thought about it - we're all stressed out, we have problems: personally I like to go and dig the garden, get into movement, go for a walk. (I know we also say 'sleep on it', but I am here referring to getting to grips with ourselves through movement, through activity).

Now we shall go on to basket-making. As Aonghus saw when he visited us, we have in Aberdeen a piece of land which we are able to use for the purpose of growing willows. I know some of you are keen to set down a plantation of willows, and afterwards we can carry on that discussion if you want more information on how to do it. But it is of course, a craft which allows for the possibilities of work within the context of the landscape, with the cycle of the seasons, and also work in the workshop. I can illustrate this.

It depends of course on the time of year when the students from the Waldorf school come, whether we are cutting, harvesting, or whether it's the stripping time in spring. There is a lean time for activity, which is the summertime. But the last group I had came out in the Autumn term. On the first day I like them to go out to the willows and then come to the workshop via that experience, rather than enter the workshop and start working with materials straight away. To begin with they are all hyped up and excited, coming to a new workshop, and so when you say we're going out to see the willows their faces drop, because they thought they were coming along to do something. We have to go way down the hill and down a track, and gradually we get nearer and they see these things growing there, and gradually they become captivated by it. At first, being out on the land, on a farm, is a bit dispiriting, but give them a row to start cutting, and 'Oh, dear! what a mess': Willows here, there and everywhere, total chaos! Of course you told them exactly how to lay them out, with the butts all going the same way, with one person picking them up and another taking them to the barrel, grading them. You take the tips and shake them out, then go down a foot and grade them into piles of different lengths. It all seems so easy... If they mix the butts and tips together the A wrong way round it doesn't work ..hen you come to grade them in the first instance, so you start to meet the consequences of your slackness straight away. A lot of craft work is about that, about suddenly realising what you have done or not done, and carrying the can for it, and saying 'I did that', or 'I didn't do that', and it is easier to accept as feedback from the materials rather than from the teacher, parent or whoever is saying the same thing.

So, willows. In the very name of the plant we have water, 'wil-low', with the 'l' sounds. Of course willows like water - essentially they grow on water and light. It is known that most willows actually put back more than they take out of the ground. It is a watery plant. The 'l' sound gives us the rising of the water, the sap, up to the growing, tip. On a good day, you can actually watch them grow and almost hear them growing. You saw in the album the sets which we planted in the spring, 30 centimetres long, set down in April or May in Scotland, by autumn were six, seven and eight feet tall, just in one season's growth. And there is something exciting about that. There is vigour, vitality, which the students are unconsciously witnessing.

Now, having been harvested, some of the willows are dried. This one has been dried with the bark on, you see. And then it will be soaked, mellowed, before it is used. Some others are pitted, put into water, (a stream or a bath), after cutting in about October or November, when the leaves fall, and left there over Christmas until early

spring, and then all the buds will start to open up and catkins develop. And that's the time when the cambium cell layer has swelled away from the wood and allowed the new growth. That's the point when you can strip the willow to obtain the white willow, the natural wood colour. Most people are familiar with the buff colour. This one here has a brown colour, and this is achieved by boiling the willow for eight to twelve hours with the bark on, at any time of year it's dried, and then you strip it. Different colours - brown, chocolate, purple, almost blackcurrant colour, can be achieved by steaming the willow with the bark on for an hour or two in a vat of boiling water.

So there is quite a lot involved in the preparation of the willow, and it is wonderful if you can have the opportunity of stripping the willow outside. Again you get this 'But it's not basketmaking...', but once they have done one they realise, and it becomes addictive. I have been on the streets in Aberdeen with the youngsters, and they demonstrate to the general public. People come up and have a go, then they don't go away!

You have a thing here called a willow break - it's two rods welded together, or one continuous one with what look like ram's horns on the top, and you slap the butt end in and pull it, and that squeezes the wood, and when it springs back it bounces the bark off. Turn it round, and then you slap that end in, and the idea is to get it off all in one go. In the end they very much enjoy it. The other side of the matter is, of course, that if they do it wrongly and they don't pull right there are lots of possibilities for mistakes - they end up fracturing their willows or bending and kinking them. And then when they come to make the basket they have all this material which isn't right, it's fractured and broken, and they think, 'If only I'd taken a bit more care'. It's a bit like the weavers when they prepare their warps. If they make a mistake at that point, later on when they come to do their weaving, they know about it.

So, the atmosphere when you come into the workshop is of course very specific to basketmaking, as it would be specific to any particular craft. There's a smell, which is probably the first thing that people notice. It's a honey-scented, sweet smell when you've got the willow mellowed to the right degree. There can be also a rather nasty smell, particularly in the summer, when it's difficult to avoid, which is the smell of the mould. It's a musty smell, but still mellow, sweet, and which has a sort of uplifting quality about it that most people can enjoy. In fact it's the smell of the salicylic acid. When you boil it and it steams off it is very, very pungent, and people ask what it is and begin to sniff, and when told they say 'Oh, very nice.... It's the stuff they make aspirin from!

When the class nine students come into the workshop they get a little record book to keep, with drawings, illustrations of the basketwork process, and for their own work, their own designs, to go into as well, and they take it away with them as a record of what they do, because I like them to come back and pick it up again. We start at class nine, which is of course the time when we introduce the crafts, as opposed to handwork. I can't go into that now, but that is the point when leatherwork and basketwork come in to the curriculum.

Now let's look at the actual process. Having soaked the willows they are mellowed under blankets, under cloth. That sort of sweet smell pervades the whole workshop. It's a pleasant smell. You see in all craft work we're not just developing skills: all the

senses come into play. Each rod has a butt end and a tip end, and in the terminology given to different parts of the basket we have a certain mirroring, of the human being: back, belly, butt end... There is something in each individual willow of uprightness, and it also has elasticity, tension, and I can really feel this inner tension when I bend it. This way it feels really floppy, that way there's an inner tension. I can feel its dynamic inner elasticity, which calls on my will. I have to exercise my will to actually put this rod in place, because it seems to have a will of its own. They will go all over the place if one dreams off to sleep. Now, in basket terminology you have a foot track, on which the basket stands; you have the sides of the basket, the crown or border, and in this case you have a handle to finish it off. What you actually have is an expression of something that lives in this middle realm of the human being. The basket is a sort of extension of our hand, of our conveying faculty, a limb function of course, but it's also part of our middle realm. Bringing the basket into balance as you carry it also presupposes that you have an inner balance of your own, so it has to do with that human quality also.

The whole of the process of basketmaking, which I am trying to show you, mirrors very much this middle space of the human being. The basket is like our ribcage, with its own pace in the centre, its own heart space and rhythmical elements, And in the process of weaving the basket there is a spiralling gesture; the woven materials are working their way round, creating their own space, so you have in front of you a volume being created.

Now I can't demonstrate exactly the posture of the traditional basketmaker because it is indeed actually on the floor, or raised up just a few inches with a piece box by sitting on his sandwich box or a cushion. And he is usually seated somewhere around the outside of the workshop, with the basketmaker's plank in front of him. Interestingly, what happens during the process of basketmaking is that the craftsman rises from an initially horizontal working position - like a sleeping posture, perhaps - towards a much more conscious, upright position as he works nearer to the crown and border of his basket. We have benches in the workshop which keep the same elevation; they are raised to this height with a little stool, so you are actually in the authentic position but just raised up a little bit. The traditional posture was too difficult, and many people say to us, 'Gosh.' How awkward and cumbersome that way', but that's ridiculous because these positions have evolved over centuries of craft work. As in every craft, there's a right way to do it.

Now, how do we start? Well, the real threshold for entering into basketry is the grading and selection, of the willow rods for the basket. The student is not expected to do that because he doesn't know what he needs. But once you've got that far the first thing you have to do is choose the different sticks you need for the various parts of the basket. This requires judgement, foresight, planning, making a design or drawing. (This element is present in most crafts).

This bundle was actually put together by a student. It's supposed to be made up of rods of the same thickness, and yet it has some thick and some thin, which would make life very difficult for an unskilled basketmaker. A student might tie a piece of string with a peg, for a gauge or measuring rod, and as long as he doesn't let go he can manage, but if this one slips the whole lot starts changing. It's the whole question of preparation and care. It's not possible to do it by eye. It starts out being by eye, and

some people get out the callipers and start measuring. But in fact it's a tactile thing you start with your eyes because we're all trained to use our eyes as our principal aid to thinking but eyes are deceptive the most deceptive sense a human being has. They don't always tell us the truth, and that's why blind people can make baskets very aptly.

So you select your materials and you have it all there, and you're ready to start. Now we talked about a thinking element which enters weaving through the pattern, and there is also that same element in basketry. There is logic needed in weaving materials together. Mathematical law comes into it, and you suddenly find that there are some students who are fascinated by it, and they really get into numbers. So again, to start with I would have to tell the students what they need, and I'll begin by demonstrating the most simple, basic processes. The point of entry is a very conscious one. What I'm going to do is thread the six base sticks through each other. I'm not going to weave, I'm not going to fall asleep, I'm going to have to be very, very conscious.

You take one rod., you find its tension. And if you can imagine it, that is going to be the inside of my basket. This is going to be underneath the basket, the crown of the base. Then I put it on the board and judge a point at the centre of that rod, and I pierce it through. There's hardly a more conscious feeling than that. Some students suddenly hesitate 'Oh, teacher, where's the ruler?' because they need the security of a precise measuring instrument, but I don't have a ruler in the workshop for that reason. I've thrown it away, because what you really need is to judge, or approximate, because until you can do that you can't really be accurate in using your measure. You can use callipers or digital rulers, but do you really sense that measurement? Then you have to do that to all six. You pierce the three and I'll show you what to do right from the first stage. What you get is all sorts of combinations of that possibility. You end up with three of these and you think, 'How do I get them together?' It's an absolute nightmare. Then these other three go together, butt to tip, thick and thin. That's what's called the slath; you use that tension for a good crown on the base. If you don't achieve it, when you put weight in the basket it bellies out. Some baskets are made wrong, and they rock, because that hasn't been taken into account. Then the slath is tied together so that you make a cross first of all in very conscious form. Then you start to tie the slath together, the tip ends of two rods are used to start with. Now this is the beginning of the spiralling gesture, but you don't experience that yet. Now this cross formation is transformed into a star, and then comes the geometry: twelve o'clock, six o'clock, three o'clock, nine o'clock etc., and those don't move you move the other rods into the spaces in between them, and by the time you've finished weaving you've actually got equally spaced base sticks in the fashion of a star. Of course the mathematical geniuses amongst us will know how many points there are on this star, but it's amazing what diverse answers you get when you ask the students that same question! You know you started with three thick ones and three thin ones - you put them through; now how many have you got? They say 'One,' 'Two' 'Four' 'Seven' etc., and these are pupils from the Waldorf school. You wonder what on earth has been going, on all these years.

The base is woven to the required width producing this flattish shape. As they say in the cookery demonstrations here's one I made earlier... You would then have a base like this. Trim off the butts carefully another very conscious activity, (if it's not you ruin the basket or cut your finger off.) Then you'd have something like that, a base,

and that's where it starts. You can see the crown. That is of course where the archetypal sense of convex form comes from. It's a ceiling, a celestial dome which is mirrored down to the human being. In this case it's going to become a foot, a base for the basket to stand on.

Now we have to prepare the side sticks, as they are called. And at this point I need to know precisely what shape of basket I want to achieve, whether I want a sort of belly-shaped basket or a straight sided one. If you look at an angle you can see the difference. Depending upon what I want I now make a slight cut on the butt end of the willow, either on the back or the belly side. This procedure is called a *slipe*, and it's done using the curved end of the knife.

This is of course an amazing threshold for the youngsters. In the end they all come round to doing it. Here you start pulling this way with the right hand, and exercise a bit of antipathy with the gesture of the left hand, balancing it, resisting it. It's about balance again, and I'm pivoting like this and then it works easily. You have to have a very sharp knife to do it properly, and having got the sharp knife and the technique you now have twelve base sticks. Now I'm going to 'stake up'. I need two rods for every base stick, so I need twenty-four, so prepare twenty-four. Then you take the base, the butt end, and grip it with the left hand. You place it next to the space here, and with the right hand you use a sliding, pumping action towards the left. And the girls say, 'Oh, it hurts sir!' Adults particularly are very good at finding other ways of doing this operation, and I usually have to go round afterwards and firm them up...

This is the stage of basketry when you can really run away with yourself. Imagine half a dozen students doing this in the workshop there's chaos: It's amazing to see it. And this is only making a small basket imagine how it would be if they were making long baskets, with eight or nine foot lengths of willow.

You remember we started with a cross, a very conscious gesture, which we worked to a star, which is a radial form, and then that form is accentuated. Traditionally it's done like this - it's called "putting the back out'. Imagine, the students are in here, hot and bothered and doing all this, and then they come upright again and look at it, and they say 'It's a sun." or 'It's a spider." Suddenly a picture emerges. The sun is of course the archetypal symbol. The basket is turned over and then the side stakes are picked up, in a gesture which is two movements, a pricking down and up at the same time, all around the basket. They will then be gathered up like this and tied in a loop at the top, and then you can begin to relate to this space in front of you as a basket. You have gone from two dimensions into three.

I usually have a dumb-bell with a hole in the middle, which goes into the basket because you need a little bit of weight there, otherwise it tips towards you as you pull on it. Now comes the more typical part of basketmaking which people normally have in mind when they think of the craft. They don't see all the other that led to this. In this process you have many possible variations, as with textile weaving. But to begin with you take the basic, most archetypal form of weaving, which is in and out, or in front of one and behind one, which is technically called 'randing'. It becomes a weave pattern, with the butt starting off the next consecutive space to the right, one at a time. Now this is where the mathematics are helpful. Many people can't understand why, if I have an even number of stakes, when I get back to the beginning again I'm off on

the same track as before. What that produces is one willow rod wrapped on the outside and one stuck on the inside. So you realise that you need an odd number. It's the same with weaving. Sometimes you need to take numbers divisible by three and add one, and all sorts of things, in order to achieve patterns in the side of your basket.

At this point most people quieten down, and it becomes a love affair almost, between you and your basket which is emerging out of this rhythmic spiralling of the rods. You see how left and right hand work together with a sort of giving and receiving activity. I always say that the thumb is the most important part of the basketmaker's body, because the thumb does the pressing in. The thumb is also the digit of the will. It's not two hands climbing up like a monkey - that doesn't work. It has to be done with a rhythm, which again you can't teach intellectually. You demonstrate, you do it..

This activity carries itself once you get into it, but to start with it is awkward - dexterity is needed. I have had students who are ambidextrous, or cross-dominant, and you get a situation where the left and right hand can't work harmoniously together, can't cross over, or can't give to one another. You get a focus on the left hand trying to do something, and the right hand goes to sleep. Then the right hand will come up and do something, and the left either comes up or does nothing at all - and so it goes.

Now we must stop here. This would then grow, and a border would be woven at the top, and handles could be put on. But even now you can see the space being enclosed, and it is this facet of basketry (apart from the challenge that the actual material gives you, the creation of order out of chaos), this balanced space, this body, which is so important, which has its own being. In fact the Indians recognised this in their mythology: baskets were always buried with the person who made them for that very reason. The person was ensouled, encapsulated, in the basket. He needed that basket to make the journey to another land after death.

Well, I hope the gestures have spoken for themselves. Thank you.

N.B. The use of the masculine gender ("he/him") is intended to be understood throughout as he/she, him/her.

Ruskin Mill 5th June 1994