

## THE CRAFT GESTURE .Notes from a lecture by Bernard Graves 1996

Why do craft as part of our curriculum? Surely not to turn out professionals. The time when the traditional crafts were practised to serve our everyday needs is now past in most of the world. I believe, however, that crafts can continue to serve a relevant need in the human being today, and if the value of crafts is correctly understood, they can then serve as a valuable support in meeting the pedagogical needs of children at home and in school.

Historically crafts have played an important part in the civilisation of the human being. Their origin and function was, no doubt, not purely utilitarian initially, but a means whereby the human being retained a connection with the Gods, continued in the act of creation. Craft belonged to religious life and practice, only gradually did the developing utilitarian mind evolve crafts as hand work to meet the human need.

Craftwork and the small cottage industries in England prior to the Industrial Revolution can be seen as early and intermediate technology. With the disappearance of craftwork as such and the increase in technological achievements providing for our every need, the human being's practical involvement with raw material has been severely curtailed.

Along with diminished opportunities for children and adults to be creative in their play or work, we forgo the joy and sense of achievement that creativity can give us and stunt the essential formative powers handwork provides the growing child and adult.

“To educate through Art is to awaken the human being to his/her own nobler attitudes and qualities and to quicken his/her perception of the world he/she lives in, so that he/she may come to know his/her self as the being who gives meaning to creation. Unless the human being can re-create his/her self through an orderly education of the heart as well as head, unless his/her will can be guided to serve spirit as well as matter, he/she may cease to be a human being and become a prototype of his/her misconception of his/her self: a beast without a mission.”

*F Edmunds*

In craft activity head, heart and hands are brought into a particular relationship with each other. Craft activities not only serve to convey the nature and processes involved with different materials, traditional skills, use of tools and equipment; there is also a more hidden if you like therapeutic aspect from which we benefit when practising true craft.

For it is in the very nature of handwork crafts to bring order and to bestow order; to bring order to the materials used and to bestow order upon the maker, the creator. In the practising of crafts we can indeed rise above our creature state to that of co-creator.

In the practising of crafts a potter, for instance, does not only leave a thumb print on the clay, but is inwardly impressed by the creative processes at work.

The vehicle for this ‘dual action’ is what I call the ‘craft gesture’, to be seen in the movements of the craftsmen. When acquired, these movements play upon the soul of the human being, giving a beat in the sphere of ‘will’, rhythm in the sphere of heart and ‘feelings’, and a melody in the ‘thinking’ human being. This is actually our focus tonight, the ‘being of movement’ and its resonance within the soul of the human being.

There is no doubt that the use of movement in education was (for Rudolf Steiner) of critical importance. In fact it was the basis for one of his central pedagogical laws, developed in *The Study of Man*.

“If we wish to address the soul/spirit realm of the child (to awaken the sleeping Ego within) we get the child to move. If however we wish to effect a change within the physical organism we sit the child still and tell him/her a story, the imagination of which will be taken in via the soul and work its way into the physical body!”

What, then, is the relevance of movement for the developing child, the adolescent and mature person?

Rudolf Steiner spoke about movement on many occasions. In one lecture (September 1916) he presented an unusual idea regarding movement and speech. There he explained that the human being was originally designed not to be a speaking creature, but rather to express him/herself through movement. However, what was originally intended changed .gesture transformed into speech movement and other movements.

**Originally**

**Present**

**Gesturing Movement**

Speech movements

Gesture, mime, dance activity, eurythmy

Movement, patterns of work craft gestures

Something of the original gesturing human being remains as we can understand its language i.e. sewing, hammering sawing etc..

The human being shares the ability to move with animals, but whereas animals learn the movements they require more or less at birth the human being needs several years’ practice to develop all the movements required to enable him/her to walk in an upright position.

The new-born infant expresses a multitude of movements, of which he/she is not yet master. Control comes from above to below .eyes to legs and feet. Movement at first takes hold of the child, from the outside as it were, and limb movements are only gradually mastered,

The young child’s ultimate goal and achievement comes in attaining uprightness and then in those first tentative steps in walking. This is however only the beginning. The expression of movement in the child leads on to other faculties in the realm of the soul. Crawling, walking and all manner of bodily movements lay the foundation for the acquisition of many finer skills: speech and, ultimately, thinking processes are realized as a result of the internalisation of outer movement habits.

The movements entered into in handwork and craft activities are not just training in motor skills; in the practice of work movements, which would be better described as ‘working gesture’, the will of the pupil and student of the craft are made subject to a greater governing order, and it is in the very nature of this process that the character of the gesture works inwards to foster the unfolding and harmonious development of cognition, aesthetic sensibility and practical know-how.

“From this many things follow for the treatment of the human being. For example, when a human being does bodily work he/she moves his/her limbs. This means he/she is entirely immersed, he/she is swimming about in the spirit. This is not the spirit that has dammed itself up within him/her, this is the spirit that is outside him/her. If you chop wood, or if you walk-whenever you move your limbs in work of some sort-whether useful or not-you are constantly splashing about in spirit; you are concerned constantly with spirit. This is very important. And, further it is important to ask ourselves: What if we are doing spiritual work, if we are thinking or reading-how is it then? Well, this is a concern of the spirit and soul that is within us. Now it is not we who splash about in spirit with our limbs, but the spirit and soul is at work in us and continuously makes use of our bodily nature; that is, spirit and soul come to expression wholly as a bodily process within us. And here within us by means of this damming up, matter is constantly being thrown back upon itself. In spiritual work the activity of the body is excessive, in *bodily* work, on the other hand, the activity of the spirit is excessive. We cannot do spiritual work, work of soul and spirit, except with the continuous participation of the body. When we do bodily work the spirit and soul within us takes part only in so far as our thoughts direct our walking, or guide our work. But the spirit and soul nature takes part in it from without. We continuously work into the spirit of the world; we continuously unite ourselves with the spirit of the world when we do bodily work. Bodily work is spiritual; spiritual work is bodily, its effect is bodily upon and within the human being. We must understand this paradox and make it our own, namely that bodily work is spiritual and spiritual work bodily, both in the human being and in its effects on the human being. Spirit is flooding round us when do bodily work. Matter is active within us when we do spiritual work..”

*The Study of Man · Rudolf Steiner*

I will now address the use and effect of movement in young people following puberty. Movement for the adolescent takes on particular significance and impresses itself into the soul of the young person in a different way than for a younger child.

## ADOLESCENCE

Puberty marks the distinct close of a certain chapter of human biography. The emerging human being leaves the joys and charms of childhood and enters the somewhat turbulent seas of adolescence - a time of ripening and maturing. The child steps out of paradise and onto the earth, for the first time coming up against its density, its material resistance. Inwardly this often corresponds to an inner descent - his/her own inner tendency towards densification; in response to the feeling of 'dropping' and the weight of gravity there can be desperate attempts by the adolescent to gain levity - freedom of spirit.

Often just at this time there is a crisis of WILL - the youngster being a fledgling, unable yet to fly gracefully, unable to exercise his/her intellectual capabilities and clumsy in the application of his/her physical energies and movements. Often at sea, emotionally out of balance - yet longing and seeking for a reunification and confirmation of his/her identity, the burgeoning individual is, above all, seeking recognition of her/his attempts to become her/himself. We are as teachers, friends of adolescents, spiritual midwives - helping the youngster to be re-born.

What seems very important in this phase of life is to give the adolescent the possibility to find his/her self and afford him/her the opportunity to enter into a relationship with the world and fellow human beings in a direct and practical way. To give the young person the possibility to exercise his/her 'doing' - so that he/she can be given the opportunity to tangibly grasp, take hold of the world and its substances. In this very process not only will the person mould, fashion and transform matter into useful objects - but he/she will be impressed, fashioned, influenced by the different elements and processes involved in the various crafts. The craft gesture will have a reciprocal movement inwards which helps give self confidence, build self esteem. There are some who can grasp the world intellect. However, I believe for the majority, intellectual awakening and real understanding is attained via a more experienceable; dare I say, 'hands on approach'.

A certain wisdom is, perhaps, encapsulated in these words :

    'I hear and I forget' (essential to the process of learning)

    'I see and I remember' (Middle school)

    'I do it and I understand' (Upper school)

### **The Human Heart**

Yet what we do not see so clearly is what is taking place deep within the heart and soul of every teenager. For further reading and reference, I point to the only lecture of its kind by Rudolf Steiner: 'The Etheric Heart', 1922. What he says here is important to understanding how 'movements' become one with our personal karma, for the adolescent more than ever before at this point through his/her activity. The limb motor activity becomes inserted via the astral Body into the already prepared 'Etheric Heart Organism'. Rudolf Steiner describes this is the importance of the birth of the astral body, when the cosmically prepared ether heart is joined by the individually wrought karma. Our deeds, all our actions, outer movements are inscribed, he says, in 'traces' into the astral body. Not only my movements, but also what I have accomplished, and my 'intentionality' are inscribed there. This individually inscribed astral body streams towards the etheric heart and is received by it; our 'cosmic treasure trove'. Rudolf Steiner points out how all our movement gestures, transformed and held by the etheric heart, are at death given over to the cosmos, sown as seeds for our 'future karma'. Deeds became us.

## CRAFT GESTURE

I first became aware of the powerful effect of a well mastered craft gesture as a young boy when, on the way to my grandparents, I was caught by the magic of the local blacksmith, as he forged the shoes for the horses. Watching him at work I experienced the ease with which he moved, the almost a musical element sounding from his very movements. There was a grace and lightness in his limbs, and though the work was hard, he performed a kind of dance. When the music was over and the activity ceased, something that never was before emerged.

Through human mastery of movement an idea is transformed, given shape and material expression.

The machine in contrast; conjures up the very opposite experience, the work gesture being but a mimic of human gesture and robotic in character. It is only the mirror of an abstract human thought. It appears that when movement is void of the 'musical element', it strikes a chord of dissonance.

### *Craft Gesture - Complementary Gesture*

Each craft has its own symphony of working gestures, but as important to the acquisition of the astral skills, such as hammer/planing is the realisation of the point of rest and of the complementary gesture. The arm hammers, where as the body moves away freely, it is free of this movement. This degree of separation cannot be achieved by the animal in its movement i.e. with a woodpecker, the whole body pecks, it follows the pecking limb, its entire body can but peck. In the human being this is different: we are meant to be free human beings. The point around which the working gesture and the complementary or counter gesture move is the place of the 'human ego'. I hammer, not it hammers.

How, then, are 'work gestures' acquired? I believe this is done through a process of 'enhanced imitation', play transformed into work.

### **(I) Schooling of the Will - the apprentice**

The first step in the process of gaining the work gesture is chiefly directed to the will. At first the student has to learn the movement, till it becomes a habit, unconsciously absorbed by the ether body. Only then can he/she have a sense of 'freedom of movement' at which point he/she can adapt the almost archetypal given movement to a movement he/she can call his/her own habit. This is the time of apprenticeship, the schooling of the will in accordance with the cosmic wisdom of each working gesture, for our true will impulses come from the stars. We could say, human will becomes ordered into Cosmic Will. In this aspect, in the sphere of our will, all craft work with all this various movement is primarily a training of the will, whereby earthly matter can be transformed.

*Will* aspect of movement in craft:

- 3 virtues :
- 1 Motor activity becomes 'skill'; will impulses subject to materials and tools
  - 2 Transformation of will impulses into beautiful forms
  - 3 Insignificant activity can become a virtue

## (II) Rhythm

Yet there is clearly another element to all craft movements, that of the right rhythm: the working rhythm of the master is suited to our own disposition, temperament.

Listen to the beating of the blacksmith as he hammers his iron, there are secondary taps. His own established sense of rhythm brings the two elements of his own will and the Cosmic Will together. The different rhythms of craft work are revealed in many kinds of song.

## (III) Aspect of Thought, in the Will, lives in the 'Form Element'

Last, but no less important, is the aspect of 'thought' living in the movements. For although it is the limbs that execute the movements, through which the will activity engages with different materials, the form that emerges as a result of this activity, came from our 'head nature', as the idea held in mind!

The realisation of the idea, the thought, however, lies in this case in the rhythm:

THOUGHT>RHYTHM> FORM IN MATTER

The form is sensed through the feeling nature, rather than the eyes.

## EFFECT OF CRAFT GESTURE

When mastered, craft gestures of themselves can, as I have indicated, have a profound effect on the one who observes, in fact so profound is the gesture of the adult on a young child that Rudolf Steiner indicated he wanted young children to be in the proximity of working craftsmen.

Work gesture - Imitation - Play - develop healthy imagination and work into the physical body of the child.

### *Therapeutic value of Craft Gesture*

In taking into account that every craft has a 'special wisdom' conveyed by its particular set of movements, it is evident that specific crafts can work in a therapeutic manner, especially in enhancing one or other realm of soul activity.

E.g.	1	Pottery - Will - limb activity
	2	Weaving - Feeling - rhythmic element
	3	Knitting - thinking - precise movement

### **1. Pottery** : Particularly in the modelling aspect.

Hard solid old rock, dead matter following a long process of decay - but now ready to receive form through the movements of the hands of the potter.

In modelling it is the realm of pure limb movement, say rather than rhythm, that comes to the fore. Putting, Pushing, Pulling, responding to the clay. Only later, when the student has learnt to respond to the material, does the actual 'will' element recede into the background and


‘thinking’ appear in the design aspect with an expression of feeling through the artistic elements. Yet these elements too, have to flow through actual movement.

## **2. Weaving**

In weaving on a loom, the most apparent movement is initially repeated and rhythmic: up, down, in and out. A breathing process is imitated.

Straight forward weaving needs little conscious thinking. The limb movements are carried along by the rhythm which is acquired. These rhythmic movements can induce a kind of ‘dream sleep’. The outer movements turn inwards, helping to establish harmony within.

With the master weaver, the purely rhythmic element is balanced with the knowledge, grasped through sequential thinking, of how different threads are picked up by the shafts and different weave patterns obtained.



### **The Brain and Finger Dexterity**

*By Hella Krause-Zimmer, Dornach*

Recent research at the Universities of Muenster and Constance have shown that the often-repeated and subtle finger exercises of violinists and guitarists enlarge the center of movement in the brain.

Scientific research thus confirms what Rudolf Steiner described in 1920<sup>1</sup>: our finger movements are significant teachers of elasticity in our thinking. A person with very clumsy hands will also not be a very subtle thinker. He or she will tend to think in less subtle terms and will tend to be more suited to materialism. This is because in order to be able to grasp a spiritual world-view, we require fine-meshed thoughts.

Rudolf Steiner then went on to speak of Waldorf education in which, for such very reasons, the boys as well as the girls learn to crochet and knit. Waldorf teachers need to know the significance of being able to move our fingers skillfully.

Briefly said: our finger movements influence our brain and our ability to think — which has now been proved scientifically.

*(from Das Goetheanum for Jan. 14, 1996)*

<sup>1</sup> *Man, Hieroglyph of the Universe*, 25 April 1920.

*From The Goetheanum News.*

### 3. Knitting - Hand

In contrast with the weaver's wide sweeping movements coming from shoulder to shoulder, the knitter is circumscribed by more precise and confined movements, more so than in either weaving or modelling. They are more exactly determined by the 'in and out' movements of two needles. The experience of movement passes here down the arms to the fingertips.

What raises the knitting movement to the point of consciousness is that the threads have to cross at every stitch. To bring left and right movement together in the human being means having the possibility of 'waking up' and beginning to re-form concepts.

Knitting activates thinking processes. Rudolf Steiner encouraged the practice of knitting in Class I.

The wisdom of the crafts and that 'secret knowledge' which they can impart is well illustrated, albeit in an imaginative way, in some Fairy Tales.

#### King Thrushbeard - Grimm

The 'Haughty Princess' is given tasks to perform:  
3 crafts - Basketry - Spinning - Selling Pots.

By making baskets I enlarge and balance something, my hands.

The hands belong to this middle realm of the human organism, along with the chest, heart and lungs. This middle realm of the 3 fold human being is the seat of my emotions, my feelings.

The basket acquires its own centre, an enclosed space. It mirrors very much the middle realm of the basket maker, where the ribs and chest cavity form a basket like space - containing the rhythmical system, in the beat of heart and lung. In the basket the heart beat is transferred to the rhythm of the weaving (in, out, 1, 2, 3, left hand).

The basket maker also in the changing body positions goes from a semi-prone position - dream consciousness - into a more upright, perhaps even standing position - vertical - awake consciousness.

The very characteristics of the willow, being hard, tough, tense yet elastic, flexible. warm, wet, alive, all work on those employing the material.

Is the Haughty Princess made to start with basketry to bring into balance her rather unrestrained emotional and self centred behaviour?

She has to find 'inner balance' before she is asked to 'spin' - thoughts and useful ideas - and sell pottery - stand with her feet firmly on the ground.

These transformed qualities are brought about by the therapeutic effect of different crafts, their 'Hidden Secret'.

As craftsman I am striving for the qualities of balance, beauty - uprightness, honesty, truth. I am exercising these qualities in my work piece, but the true practice of craft not only forms the outer shape, but equally important is what is formed within, in ourselves.

## 4-Fold Process

Apart from any particular therapeutic role the craft may offer, the actual 'processes' of work and involvement in any craft engages the practitioner in a 4 fold manner from conceptual - realised product.

### 1) PREPARATION

{Design

'Conceptual'

{Ideation – spiritual

Thinking activity

{Preparation of Material

{Plan ahead

### 2) ACTION – Activity

The craftsman brings his/her hands to bear upon the materials - workpiece, and works out of the mental picture that he/she has formed.

'Activity engages my will'

### 3) JUDGEMENT

As I proceed, I exercise judgement as to the shape and form.

'Engage feeling'

### 4) CONCLUSION

Finally I step back and look at what I have created.

'Combination'

Has it worked? Is it balanced ? I draw my conclusions. It is the nature with anything I make that it will always fall short of the Ideal! Does this give the motivation to try again and do better?

In my experience, these very qualities and working gestures present appropriate challenges to most adolescents. It needs not only physical strength, for example, to work with willows but also the WILL to want to do something with the material, to make it obey one's own will.

The schooling of the will is the practising of craft in the 'ideal' to imprint, to express an idea in the material and in so doing help to bring to birth an aspect of the self within the soul of the human being.

*(For private circulation)*

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