

BEAUTY AND GRACE IN MAKING ARTEFACTS

An Anthropological Gaze upon Crafting in the World

Dirck van Bekkum, cultural anthropology (MsC.), occupational therapist, artisan,
Nijmegen Area: The Netherlands, moira@ctt.nl

ABSTRACT

In this chapter we assume, following Tim Ingold (2007; 2010; 2013) and Diederick Raven (2013), that humans, being social animals living in families/communities, are being constituted by and constitute their environments by mental-manual crafting. Extending conceptualizations of Franz Boas (1930) and Gregory Bateson (1972) we claim that these crafting practices are self-correcting learning processes of exchanging information and bring about, in individual and collectives of humans, experiences of gratification, well-being, beauty and grace. This seems to be a universal human goal being indispensable in cultural and biological reproduction. Rooted in crafting as a human universal we propose an analytical, educational practice and reflexive Arts and Crafts Impulse (ACI) model to study crafting practices. The model is three leveled: functionality, aesthetics and symbolic and aims at bridging several biases around crafting experiences/interactions in both academic and everyday life languages. The model emerged from the author's empirical data and interactions in crafting in: a) a ten years fieldwork in psychiatric occupational therapy, b) several projects in vocational training, c) being born into blacksmith's family traditions and being a 'crafting artisan' himself.

INTRODUCTION

Trying to make sense of human crafting practices from an academic (anthropological) and interdisciplinary perspective is not an easy task.

Having embarked on a 'clinical and crafting' anthropological path long ago directs me to produce knowledge most directly from empirical data (Van Bekkum 1994). This is a pragmatist position which can be defined as:

'.. The substantial core of pragmatism is an opposition to the absolute separation of thought from action, of pure from applied science, of intuition or revelation from experience or experimental verification, of private interests from public concern..' (Wiener 1974: 551-570).

My ambition to develop 'experience-near' concepts, in order to connect with life worlds of hundreds of young men I guided in therapy, complicates this endeavor further (Geertz 1974; Wikan 1991).¹ Empirical data and reflected experiences/interactions, on which this paper is build, are derived from three projects (clusters of observations/interactions).

During and after my anthropological studies I worked for ten years as an occupational therapist with psychiatrically hospitalized young men in a metal workshop (Van Bekkum 1988; 1993; 1994).

During these years I, as a 'clinical and crafting' anthropologist, collected-ordered-analyzed data from which a number of reports have been published in journals and manuals in (transcultural) psychiatry and (juvenile) youth care (Van Bekkum 1992; Van Bekkum et. al. 2010).

Later on, as a self-employed anthropologist, I was involved in several research and rehabilitation projects in vocational training (Van Bekkum 2006). During my whole life I was involved in crafting practices being born into blacksmiths traditions in both fatherly and motherly sides and being a 'crafting artisan' myself (website with overview will be launched in Mach 2015). Crafting and transforming materials, including reflections, have been part of my academic and applying studies for 25 years.....