

BEAUTY AND GRACE IN MAKING ARTEFACTS

An Anthropological Gaze upon Crafting in the World

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Tao is eternal and not to be spoken of in words (Lao Tzu 6th century BC China)

Art without Craft is Cruelty (John Ruskin 19th century U.K.)

ABSTRACT (500 words)

In this chapter a clinical/analytical research model is presented. It emerged from my clinical fieldwork data and my own crafting experiences in: a) ten years of fieldwork in psychiatric occupational therapy with young men, b) several projects in vocational training, c) being born into blacksmith's family traditions and being an artisan myself. The model's claim is that it roots in our humanization past. The perspective taken in theorizing is a combined cross-cultural-comparative and cybernetic systems gaze. As an artisan-anthropologist I (field)worked as a group therapist in a creative expressive occupational therapy setting of a psychiatric department of a military hospital in The Netherlands, Europe. The fieldwork spanned ten years (1983-1993), the location of a metal workshop a separate building on the premises of the hospital, the number of guided young men was about five hundred and only five of them could not be motivated to make an artefact. Diversity within the total group of young men was composed by class, regional, religious, ethnic and national loyalties.

After the introduction in the first theoretical paragraph I use conceptions of anthropologists like Tim Ingold, Diederick Raven, Franz Boas and Gregory Bateson to find/test 'experience-near' concepts to explain our data in the case-vignettes. I use in particular Bateson's 'cybernetic systemic' conceptualizations to redress crafting & arts practices as self-correcting learning processes of exchanging information and bring about, in individual and collectives of humans, experiences of gratification, well-being, beauty and grace (Bateson 1967; see Sennett 2008;). The Batesonian approach contains overlaps with a phenomenological perspective (Morris 1973/1993; Whitehead 2003). These processes are repressed and 'hidden' by the dominant psychologised (individualized) discourses like separating of individuals from family-society and of mind from body-soul. In daily arts & crafting practices and in occupational therapy these European bound dualisms do not manifest themselves as leading and as inescapable. I represented this idea without words in an art piece of *MiBoSo* ([see Appendix I](#)).

In paragraph 2 I present three case vignettes. Both Abdelkarim's and Feisal's exemplary cases demonstrates this bridging intersectional boundaries (Crenshaw 1991) potential of arts & crafting. 2 The third vignette is on my own personal and my father's arts & crafting practices. With these case vignettes I reproduce my reflected-recursive-observations on human arts & crafting in different contexts related to crafting in the world.

In the paragraph 3 I weave together theoretical assumptions with the data from the case vignettes. These reflections strongly suggest the human universality of socially (group-minded) rooted pleasurable, mentally stabilizing/integrating, experiences of well-being and grace. Creating beauty and making special are active ingredients in arts & crafting.

In the conclusion I propose the concept, and suggest the existence, of an '[Arts and Craft Impulse](#)' (ACI) in humans to redress and understand the patterns of communication with the young men in crafting therapy (Van Bekkum 1994). The model has three levels: functionality, aesthetics and symbolic, and aims at bridging of client-therapist and of crafting experiences/interactions in different clinical professions and academic research practices.