

Craft Skills and Their Role in Healing Ourselves and the World.

How should we live in the world such that we have culturally enriching and worthwhile lives when the material and social fabric of our situation does little to nurture or sustain the kinds of relationships with each other and with nature that would seem to be a prerequisite for a healthy life?

In this paper I will briefly examine the claim that there are compensatory benefits - such as cosmopolitanism and increasing self reflection - that mitigate the psychological and social problems of living un-embedded lives in placeless environments. I will then propose that this is not enough and we need a more active engagement with the material realm to lead to a mutual healing. Craft practices, where we transform parts of the material realm, can contribute to sustainable living in obvious ways.

However, in this paper I want to examine something of the way in which embodied engagement with materials, particularly raw materials where we have a felt understanding of the processes that have brought them about, can transform our relationship with the world and bring about an inner healing. This inner aspect is particularly important at a time when environmental consciousness can easily construe the human being as a solely destructive force in nature. In making things, and also particularly in mending things, rather than falling in line with a dominant throw away culture we are not just knitting some slippers we are making a stand for something. But what?

In this paper I develop a case for re-engaging with nature through the material realm by examining how in doing something we recognise our own embodied natures and our relationship to the world as one of caring and skilfully blending our labour with natures' processes. We also are brought up against, when compared to a more skilled craftsperson, the need for humility, practice and learning, and a direct image of the need for care, diligence and other important personal and social virtues.

However, even the idea of craft working can be usurped by a consumerist culture of 'ready-made' craft items produced to fill our leisure hours rather than engaging us wholly in the making of a world from what we learn about it from the working of materials. Why this should be effective is to do with the transformatory power of active, purposive engagement with the material realm as a means to develop environmental virtues. Moreover, we can do this even in the midst of contemporary 'thinned out' places such that they and ourselves are re-integrated into the material fabric of the world.