

Name: Paula Diane Wilson

Student Number: 1803668

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Lecturer: Julia Lockheart

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Within this proposal for an independent inquiry research question I will be defining and exploring three keywords that influence my personal practice. These three keywords arose from comprehensive research and evaluation, aided by A Dictionary of Critical Theory (Buchanan, 2018). For clarity, within this work, critical theory is described as “a hybrid of history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and sociology”.

I will look at the definition of *Making*, *Concept* and *Reflection* and how they impact on practice within the Design Crafts sector whilst also considering the nuanced meanings of each keyword. Furthermore, I will seek to establish links not only between these three keywords, but also how they connect with themes of spirituality, wellbeing and mental health.

My first keyword is *Making* and this, alongside *Creation*, is defined by Waite (2012, pp. 163, 437-438) as:

*Making (Make, Makes, Making, Made):* form something by putting parts together or mixing substances; bring something about; cause

*Make something up:* put something together from parts or ingredients

*Create:* bring into existence

*Creation:* the action of bringing something into existence; a thing which has been made or invented

*Creative:* involving the use of the imagination in order to create something

Praxis is the Greek word for ‘doing’ and it is “widely used in critical theory to signify purposive and purposeful human activity, that is to say human activity with a specific goal and a tangible outcome” (Buchanan, 2018, p.397). It could be argued therefore that *making* and *creating* are somewhat interchangeable with *doing*, as they also result in an end product, the aforementioned tangible outcome. There are however subtle differences and for the purposes of this essay *making* will be discussed as both a creative process; additionally the duality of meaning will be considered in the context of *making a difference*.

Within Design Crafts, practice is an essential, and often repetitive, part of the making process; continually striving to master your craft and make real the initial imagined end product. It is throughout this making process that persistence and reflection become second nature, a continuous cycle of 'make, reflect, make better'. As makers we learn through the process of making not only about the technique, but about ourselves; these processes teach us transferable skills for life, such as perseverance and problem solving and help us to achieve our desired outcomes. That being said, there are many factors that influence making and, when discussing practices in Cultural Studies, Buchanan (2018, p. 395) states that "we can know what people do because their activity can be observed and recorded, but we cannot know why they do what they do because their intentions and purposes are not visible." Researching texts such as *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters: The Education of a Craftsman* (Korn, 2017) and *The Craft Reader* (Adamson, 2010) will allow further investigation into the reasons for making and the effects of the making process on wellbeing and mental health.

*Waite (2012, p. 197)* refers to *making a difference* as something that has an effect. My aim is to facilitate change through my practice by raising awareness of issues such as mental health and the plight of our planet; this is a driving force in my design and underpins my personal manifesto.



Fig. 1 *Moon Capture* (Author, 2019)



Fig.2 *Moon Fracture* (Author, 2019)

The process of slip-casting was used to create ceramic moons; *Moon Capture* and *Moon Fracture* were created to explore the impact of external sources on our emotions through heat, stress and pressure.

There has been much discussion around mental health and wellbeing due to the recent global pandemic. The report *Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health in Wales* (Mind, 2021) states that 'mental health issues have impacted on the vulnerable and the young within our society'. Fifty four per cent of adults named 'doing something creative' as a coping mechanism. Consciously raising awareness and promoting wellbeing through our making, through art and design, through creative practices, can help towards addressing some of the issues raised. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (2015) include not only Good Health and Wellbeing but also refer to, amongst others, Climate Action and Life Below Water. Adopting sustainable making practices and raising awareness through design will therefore allow us to strive towards these goals and to make a difference.

The second keyword I have chosen is *Concept* [ORIGIN: Greek, form, pattern]

Definition: Waite, M. (2012, pp. 143)

*Concept*: an abstract idea

*Conception*: creation; the forming of a plan or idea; concept or idea; ability to imagine or understand

*Conceptual*: relating to concepts or ideas

*Conceptualize (or conceptualise)*: form an idea of something in the mind

A creative concept aims to elicit an audience response, often emotional and sometimes inspiring action. It is a theme that connects you to like-minded people and can help in establishing links with your client base or intended audience. When considering design concepts I am continually drawn to two themes; the first being the literal and spiritual connections we have with the sea and the other being the spiritual connections with nature and the self that can be found in many Japanese concepts. It is in the context of these two themes that I will discuss the keyword *concept*.

Blue Mind thinking refers to the positive effects experienced when you are in, on or near water; leading texts on this topic include *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do* (Nicholls, 2014) and *By the Sea: The therapeutic benefits of being in, on and by the water* (Cracknell, 2019).

In addition to these scientific findings that underpin our emotional connection to bodies of water, Buchanan (2018, p.69) explains the concept of Blue Humanities, referring to it as “a movement in literary and cultural studies that, drawing on critical practices and theoretical approaches from new historicism and new materialism, focuses on the presence of the ocean in cultural texts”. Mentz (2009) though believes it is also “about re-establishing a kind of

poetics of the ocean, thus re-establishing a humanistic connection with it". It is this connection between the ocean and our emotions that influences my practice and I intend to establish a means of recording primary research on this topic, specifically within Wales.

Researching texts such as *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (Mentz, 2009) and *Object Lessons: Ocean* (Mentz, 2020) will allow further investigation into Blue Humanities and Blue Mind thinking. As Mentz (2009) refers to Shakespeare's symbolic use of the sea in *The Tempest*, John William Waterhouse, almost a century earlier, takes inspiration from the tragicomedy in a more literal manner, depicting the shipwreck itself in his painting *The Tempest* (1916), shown in Fig. 3.



Fig. 3 *The Tempest* (1916)

Whilst the text clearly details the author's thought processes and opinions, Waterhouse's visual representation allows for personal interpretation by the viewer. Understanding this allows you to consider the message you wish to portray to your audience; whether you want to make a definitive statement, to use the power of suggestion or whether you want to allow your viewer to draw their own conclusions.

There are many Japanese concepts and they are often based on the self and nurturing the soul, on sustainability and simplicity; they also hold deep connections with nature. *Kyoka Suigestu* refers to that which, although visible, cannot be touched. A common example includes the moon reflecting on the ocean; this concept establishes connections to both the sea and to reflection (my final keyword). A further example includes the reflections of objects, often flowers, in a mirror. Karen LaMonte explores this concept in an abstract manner in her haunting mirror sculptures (Fig. 4) using photography and glass; I have also explored similar techniques within my practice, attempting to (figuratively) capture raindrops, water and memories within glass (Fig 5, Fig 6 and Fig 7).



Fig. 4 *Mirror Sculptures* (2011)



Fig. 5 *Wave* (2021)



Fig.6 *Raindrops* (2021)

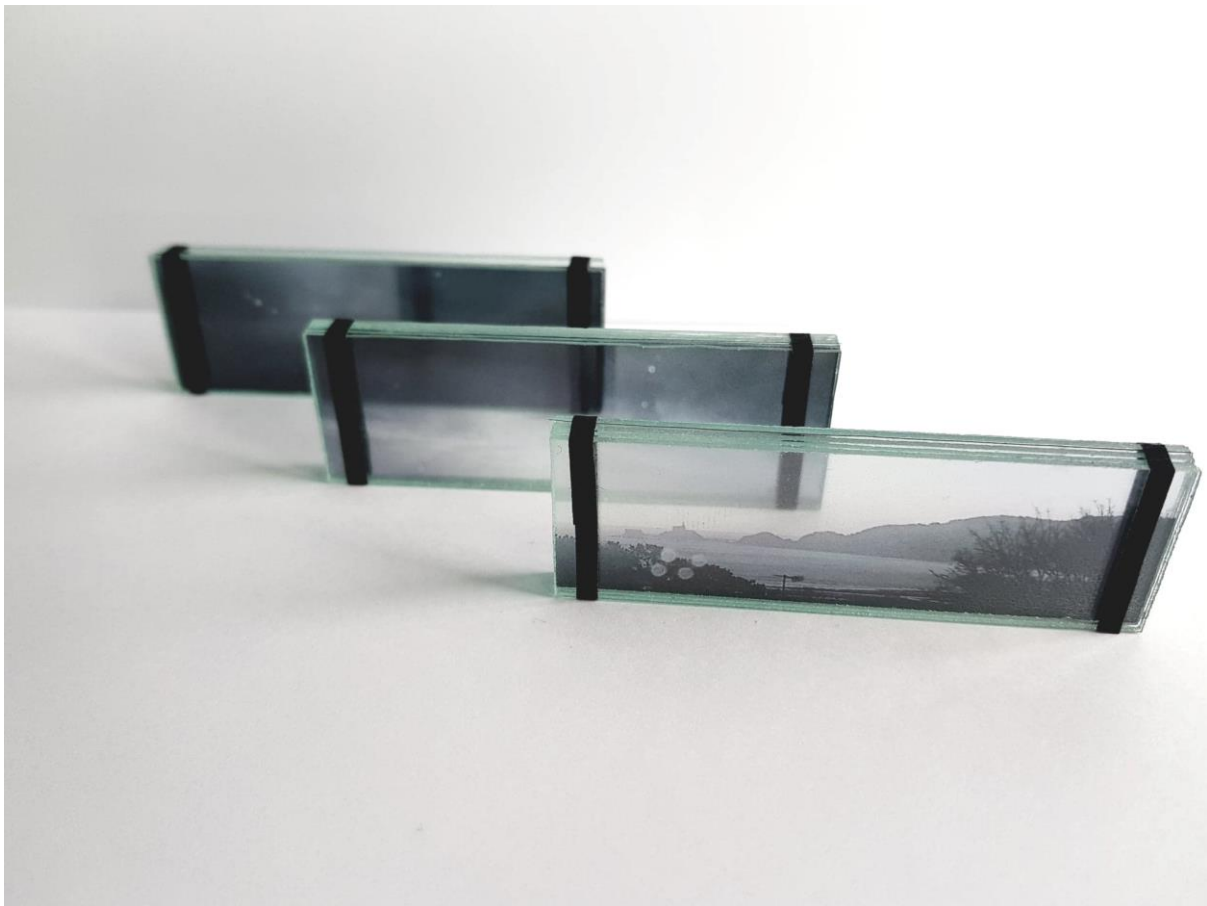


Fig.7 *Memories* (2021)

Kanso relates to simplicity and minimalism whilst Wabi Sabi embraces imperfection. Asymmetry is the basis of Fukinsei and Seijaku embraces tranquility in activity. Mottainai encourages us not to be wasteful and Ukiyo represents the 'floating world'. Perhaps one of the better known Japanese concepts is Kintsugi (Golden Joinery); the concept here is that an object is more beautiful for having been broken, and this could equally be applied to humanity. Embracing our flaws, imperfections or the parts we consider broken can often be empowering and results in a serene strength and inner beauty that is somehow visible to others.

When considering Japanese concepts, the following texts will allow further investigation: Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence (Juniper, 2003) and The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty (Yanagi, 1989). This extended research will seek to establish the impact and contribution of both concepts in promoting wellbeing and mental health whilst raising awareness of the natural world, its benefits and the challenges currently being faced.

My third and final keyword is *reflection* [ORIGIN Latin, *reflecterre* 'bend back'].

Definition [1]: Waite, M. (2012, pp. 460-461, 607)

*Reflect*: (reflect on) think seriously about

*Reflective*: providing a reflection; thoughtful

*Reflect*: show in a realistic or appropriate way: schools should reflect cultural differences; (reflect well/badly on) bring about a good or bad impression of

*Reflection* is embedded into my practice when used in the context of reflecting on learning and making and is particularly beneficial when attempting to master new techniques.

Graham Gibbs, a sociologist and psychologist, conducted a study called 'Learn by Doing.' It is about encouraging people to think systematically, about experiences they had during a specific situation, event or activity. Learning Performance (2019)

Whilst studying the Agored Cymru Learning Coach Diploma in 2014 I completed a module on *Reflective Practice*; this led to familiarisation with Gibbs Reflective Cycle, a model consisting of six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. In terms of wellbeing, this process can also be applied to life in general, allowing us to learn from our mistakes and to better understand ourselves.

In practice, this raises a set of questions designed to facilitate effective reflection and simple versions could include:

- What went well?
- How did I feel?
- What could have gone better?
- How can it be done better next time?
- What did I learn from this?
- What changes will I make?

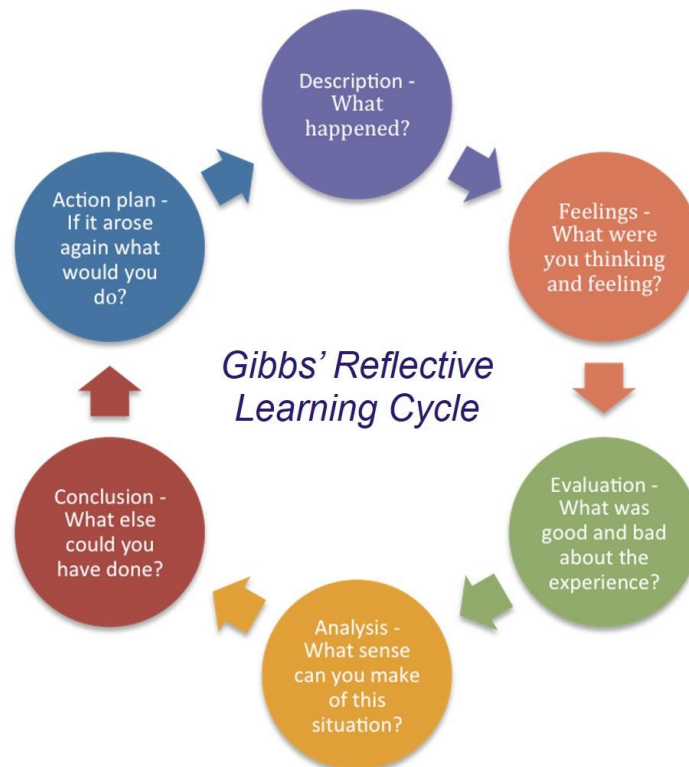


Fig. 8 Gibbs Reflective Learning Cycle (2022)

Constantly reflecting on your own values can be beneficial when reviewing your manifesto, your practice and your behaviour, allowing you to consider what is really important to you and what you can do to facilitate change. Personal reflection allows me to consider how I can make a difference by adopting sustainable practices (materials and processes) in addition to making positive contributions to the wellbeing of humanity and our planet.

Definition [2]: Waite, M. (2012, pp. 460-461, 607)

*Reflect*: throw back heat, light or sound from a surface (shiny surface); show an image of

*Reflection*: the process of light, heat, or sound being reflected; an image formed by reflection

Reflection in this context informs my making, especially when selecting materials; favouring those with reflective qualities leads to experimentation with both glass and a range of metals (silver, pewter, aluminium and copper). Light also impacts on the design process illuminating textures and forming shadows, dramatically elevating the appearance of the object (Fig. 9, Fig. 10, Fig.11 and Fig.12). Furthermore, reflection in this context links back to my second keyword, 'concept'; inspiration taken from Blue Mind/ Blue Humanities influences designs based on the reflective qualities of the sea whilst the Koi represents aspects of Japanese spirituality.

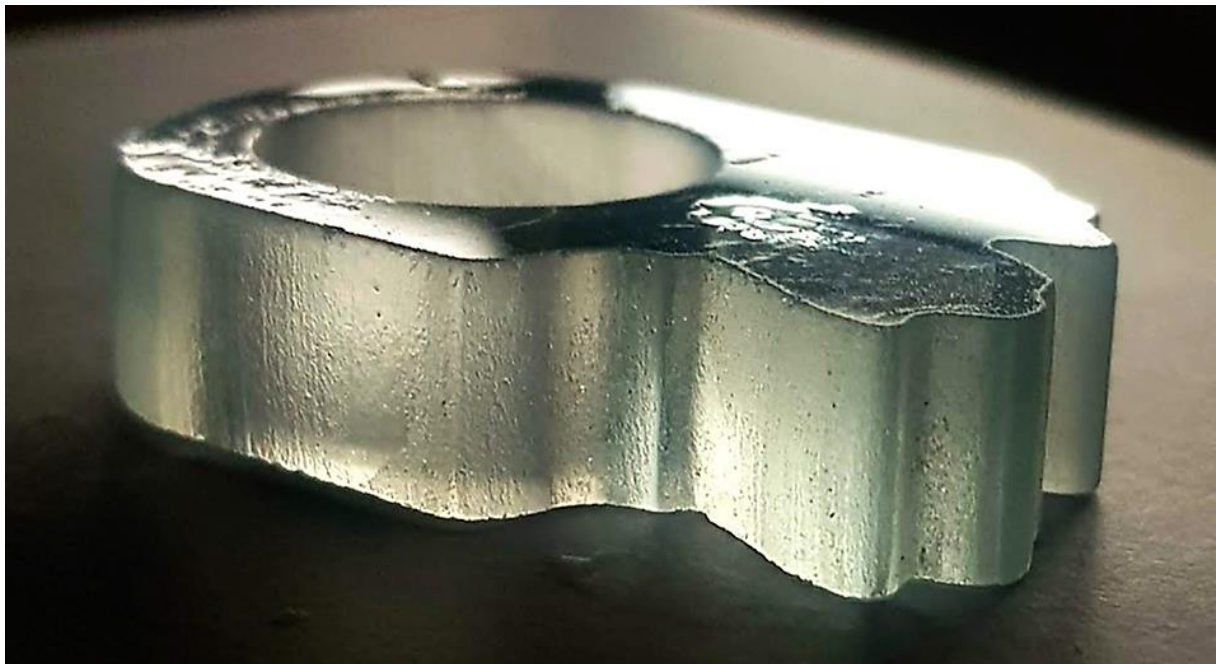


Fig.9 *Glass Coastline Ring* (2021)



Fig. 10 *Resin Koi* (2021)



Fig.11 *Acrylic on glass* (2021)



Fig. 12 *Pewter Sea Tile Pendant* (2020)

Definition [3]: Waite, M. (2012, pp. 460-461, 607)

*Reflecting telescope*: a telescope in which a mirror is used to collect and focus light

*Mirror*: a surface which reflects a clear image; something that accurately represents something else; reflect something

*Mirror image*: an image which is identical in form to another but has the structure reversed, as if seen in a mirror

Reflection is a recurring theme in the works of John William Waterhouse; in *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. 13, 1888) it appears literally as a reflection in water, whilst in *Miranda* (Fig. 14, 1875) it is the subject who appears to be reflecting at the edge of the sea. In Fig. 15 (1903), Echo gazes at Narcissus as he falls in love with his own reflection.



Fig.13 *The Lady of Shalott* (1888)



Fig. 14 *Miranda* (1875)



Fig 15, *Echo and Narcissus* (1903)

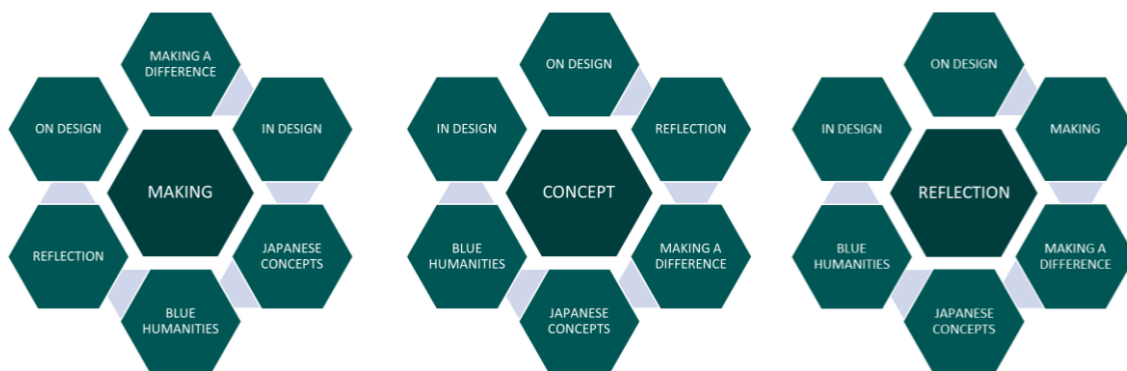


Fig. 16, *Keyword Connections* (2022)

The above diagrams (Fig. 16) were created by the author; using each keyword as the central reference point illustrates the synthesis between the keywords; the links between keywords can however be demonstrated in other ways such as mind maps (Fig.17).



When we think about water in the context of these concepts we can forge links with *Reflection* – the moon reflecting on the water appears in both of the aforementioned concepts. This is ‘reflection in design’. Continuing on this theme, *The Mirror: A History* (Melchior-Bonnet , 2002) explores reflection through the mirror. This expansive history journeys through making processes, self-image, mirror-image and distorting reality through an object which, once considered to be a luxury item available only to the few, is now so commonplace it is often ignored. This text is prefaced with a statement from Jean Delumeau which includes the words ‘The entire book should be quoted – and therefore must be read.’ It is hard to disagree with this.

When reflecting on practice I often create ‘Object Conversations’; this written conversation between myself and the object takes the form of a two way conversation and has so far included conversations with the colour black, the sea and rust. This process allows me to reflect on the reasons behind the selection of colour, material and concept whilst gaining a deeper understanding of the object and my personal connection to it, whether intended or subconscious. Using a reflection log for each project, ensuring that responses are comprehensive and honest allows the implementation of strategies or changes that will facilitate ongoing improvement and development.

These keywords, when used alone, provide direction for continued practice. When combined however they open up opportunities not previously recognised. It is on reflecting on these keywords, both individually and as a set of connected words, that has enabled me to identify an area for future research and to phrase a proposed question for an independent inquiry.

**Proposed question:**

How can conceptual design (including Blue Humanities/Blue Mind Thinking and Japanese/Asian aesthetics) help us to adopt more sustainable practices and raise awareness of environmental issues?

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## Images:

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Figure 3 : *The Tempest*, John William Waterhouse, 1916

Figure 4 : *Mirror Sculptures*, Karen LaMonte, 2011

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Figure 13 : *The Lady of Shalott*, John William Waterhouse 1888

Figure 14 : *Miranda*, John William Waterhouse, 1875

Figure 15 : *Echo and Narcissus*, John William Waterhouse, 1903

Figure 16 : *Keyword Connections*, Author, 2022

Figure 17 : *Keyword Mind Maps*, Author 2022

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