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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Meta Praxis

Craft Practice: A Way of Being

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Preface

Irene Orr
META PRAXIS

Encounters

What is the importance of craft making (the practice and process) for our sense of being human?

This research takes the form of a meditation in making, a personal story revealing encounters within practice, actively seeking the interrelated component parts within process, and sensory pathways which give vitality to the making of craft.

I look at the importance and meanings beyond the immediate notion of craft as a functional object. The process of creating and production has a unique bearing on our sense of being human and the significance of this.

I have developed the term 'Meta Praxis' to embrace the many aspects of what we encounter beyond the practice. I have devised an image of 'Meta Praxis' to visually portray this exploration.

As part of this research, I have met and interviewed pioneer individuals from Buddhism, craft, anthropology and neuroscience, in order to synthesise and draw attention to explicit correspondences of similar direct relationships to sensations rooted within the craftsman's way of being, to lay bare the interconnections and importance of hand, heart, mind and process. I am looking at direct experience as a knowledge pathway, and how it leads us towards understanding awareness, the application of such in a meaningful way as wisdom, the implications of this, and the transformative qualities of such a practice.

I have engaged with literature as a means of highlighting specific encounters as dynamic affirmations analogous with direct inquiry within this practice-led research.

Encounters took me along a path

A walk in uncertainty..... letting go of a traditional academic model of critical analysis, allowing the sensations of touch, engaging with the language of materials and aesthetics, to take us towards another way of knowing, towards direct experience, a practice of absorption, focus and agency, to transmute and deepen observation, instinct, process, materiality and the nature of mind, and the consequences of this activity.

The physical work - jewellery and silversmithing in precious metals - looks specifically to nature as an allegory to inspire the personal imagery within my enquiry. Taking natural elements found within drawing, walking and thinking around the concept of "everything is in process" with the intention of evoking beauty, curiosity and a desire to read the accompanying essays. All the work can be entered as an individual item, to be touched, worn, viewed, read, contemplated. However, for the concept of interconnected, the work is to be experienced as a whole, as with individual instruments coming together as an orchestra. I have produced a navigation to guide the

participant; however, I wish that, in engaging with this thesis, you will become absorbed in its entirety. I consider the segments of work, each an instrument of sense, as offering an opening to response, and the whole work connected as an orchestra might resonate as all instruments play together. Each artefact, piece or set of pieces, is a contemplation on:

- Drawings (as a primary expression of observation)
- Play (as a freedom to express and explore)
- Metamorphosis (to draw attention to constant transformation)
- Contemplation (experience within mind, meditation and flow)
- Threads (embodied interconnections)
- Gratitude (reciprocity as in human spirit)
- Poiesis (the grace of craft skills)
- Seeds (as ideas, beginnings and intricate systems of potential)
- Quench (techniques nurtured in thoughts and actions)
- Fragility (observations in awareness)

All with intention to evoke informed encounter with the 'Meta Praxis' - an expression I created to describe and connect the elements of "beyond the practice" and to reveal within process our potential and ability, and to echo investigation through meditation.

I often heard others say and felt myself that, in being engaged with making craft, we enter a meditative state of mind and, as the source of a worldwide interest in a contemporary contemplation practice, a way to health and wellness. I wanted to seek the root of any similarities and differences by interrogating my personal involvement in both practices. The direct experience in both practices is the teaching, our observations, attention and awareness, which lead us to choices and knowing. Being within an active process brings us to an understanding whereby we can be motivated by our connections to 'Meta Praxis', an opening up to our embodied sensory system, a route through our mind and body, working with and through materials to a place to flourish and grow. It is a path of learning, a specific route to knowledge, choice, potential connectivity and thriving. Emphasis, in both meditation and making, is on training, skills, an exploration within possible key revelatory and transformative experiences.

As a maker, in my experience I find immense pleasure and happiness in my work. Meditation is the practice of observing the mind and recognising its strengths and weaknesses with a view to comprehend by direct experience the nature of reality. Making is the practice of engaging with materials for purpose and not meditation; however, within a craft practice we are within a process which has attributes of encounters which can hold the qualities of a meditation practice. The values of attention and observation, the conditions of "flow" also called Jhâna in Buddhism are conditions of pleasure, growth, balance and flourishing. Both meditation and making within a craft practice bring us through direct experience to understand the nature of within the practice, within the doing. This brings us to an awareness, which, within Buddhist teaching, is the space where all choice and reality is

encountered. This can only be accessed and beneficial by engaging with direct encounter itself. It is the 'doing' that delivers a transformative experience by being in the process.

As I explored the nature of my mind, with direct instruction from Buddhist teachers, I took a fundamental truth within the philosophy "impermanence: everything is in change" to use as the inspiration and conceptual content for the creative- and practice-based part of this research.

My work within this research explores my personal way of being. The artefacts aim to encapsulate the way life is inhabited including deeper ethical questions and choices that we encounter through the making process.

Contemplation of process, and material awareness, all contribute to highlight and raise ethical issues directly. By making choices within practice, I can make change, emphasise issues and raise awareness of choice. Ultimately, this is an inner way of considering ethical issues. Underpinning this research is my definition of craft and the intent to address and avoid the exploitation of other people and natural resources.

My work relates specifically to the concept of human interconnectedness and the consequences of our actions by choosing themes such as: metamorphosis (we are nature); snow on blossom (an acknowledgement of changing weather patterns); and seeds (as pods of potential), all creating an opening for a response. As an independent maker, in my practice, I am intimate with choice; and it is within that choice that there is the ability to make a difference. This is about changing ourselves from the inside out and not specifically about forcing a change on the world from the outside. The agency of ethical choices has consequential action as those actions resonate outwards. Through the knowledge route of an intimacy of materials and individual choices, there is change. Underpinning all my research is the position of no exploitation! When we make a true connection via love with someone or something, there is no place for exploitation. Through changing ourselves as individuals, we can find that this can have a wider societal influence. Change at an individual level is an expansive process that can also effect change at the community and societal level.

As I dug beneath the surface of my inquiry, direct encounter led me to what to delve into. As a starting point of drawing, I pay attention, witness and experience so much contentment while searching for ideas. If training towards skill is required for a craftsman and training towards skill is imperative to a meditation, then observation and attention are the practice in both meditation and making.

The work consists of physical practice, from drawings, to samples, to playful artefacts, to finished pieces. The process for me is a circular movement of inspiration, observation, reflection, sampling, playfulness,

utterances and moving between them all as an idea emerges and settles from experimentation.

My process took me to:

Drawing

- As a means of observation
- As a training in awareness
- As a place of calm focus where breath and line merge
- As a primary means of expression

Making

- Bringing forth form (poiesis)
- Raising consciousness
- Embodying awareness in a unique personal individual language of materials, tools and mind
- Participating in the process
- Learning intimacy with the nature of materials
- Developing skills, constant challenge with growth, and raising consciousness through experience. Technical skills? What kind of skills?
- Playing, making samples, provoking ideas

The texts “Reflections, Insights and Affirmations” are my personal thoughts, experiences and connections arising through the encounters, engaging through literature of different perspectives, disciplines and viewpoints.

- Affirmations of encounters during this research. Making connections, a confluence of ideas to determine the similarities, and differences, within practices and to extract the nuances of positive reinforcement for ‘Meta Praxis’.
- Deepening the understanding of such encounters through the disciplines of craft, anthropology, Buddhist meditation, contemporary contemplation, and relevant recent research within neuroscience and philosophy.
- Meditation is the practice of observing and training the mind that can lead to an understanding of how the mind works and hence our perception of reality.
- Making is a practice of active engagement, with materials, mind and body, which may take us through to encounters with ‘Meta Praxis’, and the transformative qualities of this.
- Comparisons and synthesis of knowledge pathways arrived at through experiences within craft, anthropology, Buddhism, and neuroscience.

Encounters follows my process of making, creating and the relationships found during the practice. These were my primary expressions found within my practice.

Reflections, Insights and Affirmations.

1. Draw
2. Play
3. Potential
4. Contemplation
5. Connection
6. Reciprocity
7. Skill
8. Consciousness
9. Beauty
10. Raising

The Films

1. Contemplating making – 30 minutes
2. Discovering – 10 minutes
3. Hands – 10 minutes

Film 1 Contemplating Making

Interviews

I looked towards others, experts and world respected authority's in their chosen professions, of craft, anthropology, Buddhism, and neuroscience, to have conversations to see if there were any resonances with my personal findings explored within the essays. I make, through these conversations, from entirely different viewpoints, connections to reveal the web of interconnected thoughts, relationships and viewpoints of vital encounters within this research the contemplative nature of practice, direct experience, skill, growth, process, attention and awareness all assimilated to form 'Meta Praxis'.

I have written an introduction to the interviews, as these have formed an important link between my own personal findings and affirmations from wider authoritative research and viewpoints and have created a film of the conversations: The introduction is also the invitation to understand the relationships to the interviewees, myself, and the research.

A film interlinking diverse disciplines and parallel encounters

- Silversmith- Michael Lloyd
- Jeweller - Kayo Saito
- Textile Artist – Jason Pollen
- Anthropologist - Professor Tim Ingold
- Buddhist- Lama Rinchen Palmo
- Neuroscientist- Dr Richard Davidson
- Mind and life Institute- Aaron Stern

Film 2
Discovery

A personal look at my own practice.

Film 3
Hands

Hands revealing thoughts whilst making.

Photography

- To record images
- A moment in time
- Inspiration

The contents of this thesis are all interrelated, and are intended to amplify, to look closely beneath the surface of our lives as craftsman, the 'Meta Praxis' of our endeavours, the space we create for the flourishing and emergence of knowledge through direct experience, and to be a different kind of knowledge to that normally associated with the academy.

Motivation and Intention

I have worked with my hands, with design, making, creating a life, making a living. The strength of feeling I held, that at its core, within making, there was a crucible of a unique route to knowledge. To contribute to what lay beyond my praxis, my practice, the procedures I met seemed to touch every part of my life. Was this relevant to a world of advancement and, if so, why? My intention was to contribute in highlighting the importance of the practice of making.

I was intent on making this research of interest to the craft community, and beyond. To reveal a worth, the human values inherent in making, the connections we encounter through and within the processes of making.

Curiosity gained so much momentum within my world of making craft, that I started to believe there is an undercurrent of unidentified forces which connect us to something that felt affirmatively at the heart of human experience.

I wanted to look closer at the possibility of any deeper connections we might be unaware of whilst engaging in the process of making, to bring forth the potential to thrive in a fundamental, practical way and to look at the consequences of this to observe if an integral part of being human was rooted there. Enjoyment, pleasure, I set out to reveal a mystery and love of why did it make me feel good? In a world of increasing stimulation, information and disconnection, in what ways could making things contribute to our health and sense of wellbeing? Other than a widely acknowledged economic contribution, what are the other constituents within the making of craft that enriches us, our relationships collectively, culturally and personally.

Acknowledging areas of difficulty inherent in being an artist/craftsman (career pathways, economic perspectives, facilities, skill origins), I wanted to understand the intricacies of my urge to make. In what way was sensory engagement beneficial other than a commercial one?

There were stories to reflect upon, a rich seam of human endeavour which somehow was an enhanced view of a desire to seek out a wealth of optimism.

This 'nature of experience' became a long-held yearning to unravel these questions. Mark Moustakas (psychologist) writes on the validity of encounter (as used by me within this practice-led research):

“Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. What appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is

knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated.”¹

Experience told me that inspiration often leaves the room, but options, to dig deep, work hard, learn resilience, take advice or change direction in the way one would seek out new directions when walking and getting lost, remain, engaging in openness and discovery. Most moments come through intuition, developed and nurtured by testing waters, trials, errors, many mistakes, collaboration, foraging. A playfulness occurs, an interaction with paintbrushes, hammers, pliers as extensions of hands, worn to the curves of your palms like the soles of your feet. Discovery was often around a corner, an idea pushed, sat upon, tried and tested, until the wonder of process exposed the consequences of gestation into something tangible. For me, the patterns of land- and sea-scape, the secrets of transformation, the illuminations of old manuscripts, the decorative features in ancient cultures, entwined into an imagination, became condensed and appropriated into the work.

Moustakas reiterated this as a relevant method of investigation:

“I returned to lyric poetry, autobiography, and biography. I engaged in an immersion process, open and receptive to the nature of discovery, welcoming alternating rhythms of concentrated focus and invented distraction. I searched within my knowledge and experience for deeper awareness that would illuminate structures and essences of heuristic discovery”²

My methodology is practice led, with knowledge being revealed, to further expand the knowledge of practice. My artefacts are part of the orchestration of this research, connected through conceptualisation, encounter and reflection to the exegesis. These also form an interconnected part of the research, by becoming an artefact, and also a non-traditional presentation, by being aesthetically hand bound in keeping with the sensitivity of the expedition. The processes within my practice is the riverbed of research, fed by tributaries of discovery, notes, drawings, samples, explored further through words, literature, other artists and disciplines of observations such as anthropology, Buddhism, and neuroscience as connectors to the importance of experience, observation, the flourishing of contemplation and the mind, meditation and other illuminating discoveries, further affirming my experience. I use this connectivity as a methodology; my methods are to probe phenomena of practice, shedding protocol and convention to widen the boundaries of research, an entering in and through, rather than justification and evidentiality. Experiential research is, as its name indicates, “experintia”, testing possibilities participation and skills gained from experience. “Experiri” means to put to the test, attempt and “perir” means to risk.

¹ Moustakas, 1990

² Ibid., p.10

I am drawn to the unknown, a curiosity seeded in an imagination fuelled by notions of adventure, colour, fear of dullness, thirsty for an understanding of how things come to be, the diversity of us, the potential of us. The freedom of choice and a deep desire to understand the making and working of objects, peoples and ceremony, drives me. This research does not follow the convention of dialectic processes but of seeking verification of the vital human value of knowledge through direct experience.

Walking in the wilderness, travelling into uncharted territories, ideas gushed and seeped through a dam of conflicting obligations, and drew me to an inclination towards a viewpoint of connection of mind, making, and flourishing.

What was the commonality of the participatory, life-affirming practices I witnessed in my craft community, in ceremony, in participation, in practical skills evident in craft used for such purposes? As I traverse our planet, what am I drawn to, what can I learn through direct experience? I laid down a foundation of questions that have become the core of this research.

My inspiration and curiosity has been kindled through observing spice-coloured robed monks bearing alms through whispers of mist at dawn on the Irrawaddy, exquisite daily ceremonial offerings on Bali, Japanese intricate textile design, story-inspired ceramics of native American Indians, the weavers of the outer Hebrides, all have contributed insights to the purpose of craft, of observance, and the intertwined importance of making a life through the active, connection of materials, place, community and the stories of which we are all part.

I had seen and felt at first hand the transformative powers practice and process hold; how making uncovers our human attributes and behaviour alongside an ability to imbue pleasure, both within the originator and the recipient. We change as we are 'led by practice' and change, 'becoming' within and through change; using our resources and skills to promote positive change is part of being human.

'Making' puts you, as an active contributor, into the working and investigative nature of experience; it makes visible and relational a sense of active engagement with the world. Through the work predominately of Professor Tim Ingold Anthropology has taken a lead in re-considering craft. Ingold through his work in human evolution, language and technology increasingly looked at craft as a means of correspondence, and the centrality of a skilled practice as a legitimate route of observation, perspective and relational action and a way of living within the world as means of knowing it. His work links the themes of environmental perception and skilled practice. His research within KFI (Knowing from the Inside) embodied a viewpoint of knowing from within.³ He advocates:

³ Ingold, 2015a

“Making creates knowledge, builds environments and transforms lives. Thinking through making and provided me with an academic view point through Anthropology of a new way to regard craft as being within this world other than object to analyse.”⁴

I became both interested and took part in the research within Professor Ingold’s work. He supplied a rich seam of academic research, personal guidance and inspiration for this work. My supervisor Emilia Ferraro was also part of the Knowing from the Inside research team and has been a pioneer in looking at craft and well-being.

“Craft and sustainable development are intricately connected with the way human beings create and interpret life.”⁵

Buddhism is a philosophy that explores how to live a fulfilling life, through participating in understanding the “self” in practice, with skill and training.

Meditation is bearing witness to your mind’s conscious deliberations in its tumbleweed of intricate complexity. Commonality between these diverse practices is the practice itself.

Consistent in the world of making was that making the work made people feel ‘happy’. Here, then, was an explosion of investigation into being ‘happy’, through the Buddhist practices of meditation and the consequential state of mindfulness.

Here were two diverse practices, both rooted within a personal ‘doing’ practice, both rooted in direct experience.

“When I say I wish to follow in the Buddhas footsteps, the key point for me is that the Buddha used his own intelligence to discover the meaning of life within himself. He did not discover it from texts written by somebody else, or from any formalized set of rules. He found it within himself, within his own noble heart. We all have the potential to do this.”⁶

My intention is to highlight the importance of our involvement in making craft, its contribution to our sense of being in this world, its inherent route to direct experience, a knowledge route unique in its qualities achieved through understanding materials, process, experience, creativity connecting to core values, growth, actions and understanding. In a world increasingly channelled through rational knowledge, what is to be gained by an enhanced view of unravelling the wonders and mystery of our experience within the encounter of making craft.

⁴ Ingold, 2013

⁵ Ferraro *et al.*, 2011

⁶ Karmapa, 2013

Interact

This research is practice-led, with knowledge made known within the practice. It is based upon my own practice (of both making and meditation) and the encounters this has brought with it, **revealing a new understanding of engagement within the practice**, a recognition that together direct experience, observation, process and practice is a route to knowledge and a legitimate method of scholarly research and a contribution to the Academy.

This research draws attention to the making process; the experience exposes us to vital behaviours, senses, emotions and skills from which we can connect to being enlivened and to thrive with positive human traits. The experience of interaction within the works is paramount to opening oneself up to a sensual and intellectual response. It is to examine value of connectivity, of sensuality, of touch and of material intelligence.

I have used a variety of media with which to explore, including metal work, drawing, photography and video. The significance of this work and what I find there in the practice is described in poetic writing and in conversations with leading experts in the fields of craft, anthropology, Buddhism and neuroscience which exposed a relational interconnectedness. The conceptualization of my work is rooted in explorations of transformation and growth.

This research is also led by practice in the sense that, as I absorbed myself in the work, practice and process drove the questions to research. Its purpose is to lay out the kind of knowledge associated with the practitioner, the process and the poesis of the work.

Each artefact, piece of paper, image, metal, every shade and weight and tint has been practiced so I know its behaviour and characteristics. It is also the story of process, materials and action. Some outcomes are accidental, allowing technique, skill, material behaviour or play to be an intimate part of the process. Some are the result of hours of practice; each is carefully considered or arrived at through making decisions, by touch, by texture, by light, by technical knowledge.

Each element has been carefully chosen for the purpose of this research. It is the story of observing a method of process, an interacting immersion into a rendezvous with making; but it also reveals the thoughts, behaviour and observations I meet when occupied in practice, taking those thoughts into the physical work - Silversmithing and silver artefacts, drawings and samples.

The materials are all carefully considered; from the cotton rag handmade papers, the tactile quality and luminescence of all the papers used; the weight of the linen threads holding drawings and samples of work in place. I purposefully use Japanese stab binding techniques, originally created to bind ledgers together, so changes could be made by un-doing the stitches, therefore facilitating replacing paper leaves and re-sewing. It is also an aesthetic choice,

binding with care and grace. I have used the communicative properties of the metals, predominately silver, with finishes of polish, fine silver white, oxidation and gold details. Colour is introduced on metal through enamel, each shade chosen as a tone and hue to honour another, each hand ground in distilled water, and painted with sable brushes before firing in kilns at 750-800°C. My techniques of hand piercing, hammering, casting, filing all have been decided according to the desired outcome of the piece in question. Some techniques I have discovered by trial and error, discovering methods that work specifically for the task in hand.

This research is about the connections of our mind working in harmony with our whole physical and creative self; and, therefore, the technique is part of my skill and described in detail where I am relating it to a specific behaviour or feeling or encounter. The presentation is designed to house the work for protection, aesthetics, accessibility and portability for exhibition. The boxes have been conceived to nest the work, the papers and book covers, textures all to embrace a calm exterior to reveal the work inside. My drawings, as part of the presentation boxes, are to create intimacy and identity. To protect the drawings, each has been hand coated in beeswax, for durability and finish.

As I reveal my enactment, senses, and conditions, I interweave a story of 'Meta Praxis' that which lies beyond the practice.

Each box contains an element of the work, with an exploration through words within the essays. I have written purposely on encounters through practice which interweave personal story, streams of consciousness, and, as the making of this PhD lead me through transformative times when only poetry seemed to touch the space between the artefacts and the exegesis, verse. Lengthy quotes from experts in diverse disciplines are there as affirmations of my encounters, creating the tributaries of craft, anthropology, Buddhism and science to engage with the confluence of interconnected thoughts, discovery and findings. The physical work and essays follow a process within my thoughts and actions, and originate with the drawings where I begin. Only by the practice, by direct experience, do we connect to the phenomenon within 'Meta Praxis'. Both making craft and Buddhist meditation reveals itself by doing. It is personal pronesis that embraces the encounters, an entanglement that has agency and potency.

Each box explores an aspect of this and is inspired by dissecting what I have found within my own understanding. I explore the meditative quality of making and the craft of meditation.

Box 1 - Breath into Line
Reflections 1 - Draw

I start by drawing "Breath into Line". These are my practice of observation, a meditation on precision and meander, tone and

fragility, trails to intricacy. The drawings are where I start, they are my silence, pleasure, gratitude and meditation.

Words through the essays link my engagement by thinking through my experience, interwoven with resonating parallel observations, perspectives within respected publications significant to the research. What significance and consequence of the encounters have other craftsmen, artists, and makers experienced? What is revealed there?

Box 2- Play: Investigate Reflections 2- Play

Play, experiment, accident, practice, exploration, seeing, all contribute to the growth of thought, and the origin of ideas, to train and practice to see clearly through a chaos of thoughts, a foraging at the root of creativity.

What is the importance of play? As I make samples to release ideas, to learn the behaviour of hands to materials, I look to how important story, meandering, is to our mind's activity. To have ideas, to ignite our consciousness to imagination, wonder and practice, we must create a clear space.

Box 3- Metamorphosis Reflections 3- Potential

Nature is our life force, our life support system. I use imagery from my garden, my walks, my drawings to translate into form, following my personal process and the consequences of this.

I am in constant transformation; metamorphosis is that process. Making brings me to an opening up to the forces of process, ideas merging with skill to bring forth form.

Box 4- Snow Falling on Blossom Reflections 4- Contemplation

I look to Buddhist teachings on contemplation and meditation to see how it parallels with my direct experience of craft practice, the importance of awareness, the positive affect of contemplation. I look to explanations, teachings through direct experience to understand impermanence, the importance of training towards skill, what is meditation, mind training, and how this may relate to **knowledge through practice**. 'Snow Falling on Blossom' is an image I have from a talk given by the anthropologist and Zen teacher, Buddhist Abbot and activist, Joan Halifax, for whom on an exquisite spring day under bright blue skies and searing sunshine in April, a snow flurry appeared; and she opened her talk with, "How surprising it is to see snow falling on blossom". An exquisite way to observe our fluctuating and unpredictable weather patterns. I now use this image as a way to think

of unpredictable and fluctuating patterns of thoughts, actions and how we might affect this in positive ways.

Box 5- Interdependent
Reflections 5- Connection

How do we connect? What do the circumstances of attention, the need to belong, relationships of interconnectivity of events do? How does personal experience and being alert to relational interactions affect us? What can we learn by this? Threads of thought are intertwined, by contemplation and awareness of connections.

Box 6- Flourish
Reflections 6- Reciprocity

Gratitude is a correlation to spirit and generosity. I look at the gift economy, the importance of the movement of story and meaningful action. Reciprocity is a life force for continuum and gratitude, as part of the integral human trait to trade, give and take and the importance of recognising this interaction.

Box 7- Poiesis
Reflections 7- Skill

I look at the craft, skill, training, the poetry uncovered and the power of knowing how to make. Skills define us, leading us towards choice and empowerment. I consider how we can train both our mind and hands towards skills. The Centre for Healthy Minds Institute considers training the mind for human flourishing and wellness as a skill. Training the mind is a key component to my linking Buddhist thinking to the skills of a craftsman.

Box 8- Seeds
Reflections 8- Consciousness

How does our conscious mind relate to our perception of things? Where might we look to transform our relationship to the thoughts that run through our mind? What can Buddhism teach us about consciousness and might the skill of training the mind help us transform our perceptions? Can this happen when engaged within a productive pattern of thought? Can the wholeness we experience while engaged with practice help? I use the imagery of seeds both as an aesthetic and as a deeper connection to potential and our store house (i-cloud) of sub-conscious thoughts.

Box 9- Fragility
Reflections 9- Beauty

If beauty and aesthetics are a force of nature, what might we learn from them? I look to the continuous cycles of change, of waning, of growth; all around us we can observe the transformations of life's mysteries. If we accept, we are a part of this, and active participants, where may this knowledge take us?

Box 10- Quench: Three vessels with seed heads
Reflections 10- Raising

Observing thinking about the physicality of skills, on the required repetition, while raising a piece of silver into a vessel, what context does that have on our humanness. What if we have skills to raise our awareness, and as a consequence, raise our consciousness to choose, and we can train to use this with potential? I use the word Quench to name these pieces to determine a yearning to satiate a desire for knowledge. To quench metal is a technical term for hardening metal; we anneal it by heating it to high temperatures to change the physical structure to increase its ductility for working. We quench metal to harden it when it has been worked on. The seed heads drifting over are a reference to dandelion seeds, being called the rustic oracle; its flowers always open about 5am and shut again at 8pm. Shepherds used the precision of this as a way of telling the time. It is also a reference to Lama Rinchen Palmo (Buddhist teacher) saying to me, "We do not have a moment to lose". The vessels are empty other than with seeds, the concept of 'emptiness' in Buddhism is also 'awareness' where consciousness appears.

This work is intended to be predominately an experience that is joyful, but I wish for it to highlight the enormous humanness we embrace, our potential for good, the possibilities for training the mind through the route of engaged direct experience.

Craft

This research does not aim to provide a new definition of craft; it is the revealing of its potential for human thriving inherent within and through its practice. Whilst debates continue regarding definitions of craft, this thesis aims to relay the belief that craft has properties of transformational forces fundamental within human endeavour and becoming. I have used, in the making of this work, my own practice of precious metals, jewellery and silversmithing to observe why the active engagement of using my hands, intellect, and materials leads me to a sense of unity, a connection to a myriad of human emotions and behaviours. The practice is the direct participatory experience of materials (specifically metals, but other materials and craft techniques touch through to the same encounters). The direct experience of the phenomena in bringing craft into being, in all its wonder and beauty.

The research, while it embraces technical aspects of the work, is not a text on technique; it comments on skill and practice but as an engaged mind, tools and action rather than shape of hammers, temperature of solders, etc.

Our perception of craft changes, and continues to shift in shape from a historical, cultural and contemporary viewpoint, from being a trade skill to being a functional object, from hand made to fine art, inclusive of or excluding machines, technologies, being an individual, original piece, to an outcome of a collaboration and community of participants. It embraces and divides opinion.

For the purpose of this research, I identify craft as working closely with materials, to the understanding of their language, behaviours and technical boundaries. It is connected to skill and uses tools, including technology, manufactured and handmade to create physical artefacts.

Craft can be, but does not need to be, exclusively individual or exclusively handmade. It is motivated by making form and function for beneficial use.

Making craft is connected to **direct experience** and should be absent from exploitation. Its purpose can incorporate the conceptual and/or be entirely aesthetically, functionally or politically intentioned.

Craft predominately is rooted in a humble practical intention. As a useful form, it has an ability to become fine art predominately through originality, through concept, skill, technique and art market predilections.

Processes can incorporate creativity, concept and repetition.

Craft can be led by innovation or tradition, inclusive of creativity or pattern.

Makers should have choice and have access to personal freedom of expression. The intention and motivation are often guided by a need to make a functional object.

As makers, we are involved with materialising thought, emotion and behaviour.

I have chosen a selection of comments around the debate on craft to bring attention to the wide expectations and conversations surrounding craft. My own thoughts set out above have been influenced by these statements. My aim is to acknowledge different viewpoints: ideology, the industrial revolution, the art markets, the individual, the craft worker and new technologies. This research intends to go behind this debate and look closely at practice.

C. Wright Mills, a sociologist, comments on engaged practice, a viewpoint that depends on choice.

“The labourer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself; the satisfactions of working are their own reward; the details of daily labour are connected to the workers mind to the end product; the worker can control his or her own actions at work; skill develops within the work process, work is connected to the freedom to experiment, finally family, community, and politics are measured by the standards of inner satisfaction, coherence, and experiment in craft labour.”⁷

Ezra Shales, Professor of Art author of Shape of Craft, brings to the debate that skill is a core constituent and can be a collaborative event.

“When I teach, I value site visits and direct contact with stained glass or silkworms to touch the shape of craft. Only through direct experience can we balance archetypes with contemporary craftspeople. Moreover, we can learn to admire individuals without limiting ourselves to individualistic craft. Recognizing teams of craftspeople is critical- individual genius does not explain how the worlds gets built.”⁸

Christopher Frayling, ex-Director of the Royal College of Art, on skill and the origin of craft as being connected to hand skills.

“The commonplace definition of the word craft seems clear enough: an activity which involves skills in making things by hand; derived from the old English ‘craeft’ – meaning strength or skill.”⁹

Richard Sennett author of “The Craftsman”, connecting craft to human senses:

⁷ Mills, 2002, pp. 220-223

⁸ Shales, 2017, p. 10

⁹ Frayling, 2011, p. 9

“Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake.”¹⁰

Ezra Shales bringing to the fore that craft also comes from a need for functional objects.

“The most resilient craft- in a behavioural sense, not an aesthetic one - is born of necessity, such as a raft, a hut, a hat made of bark or refuse reborn as a child’s kite. These begin with environmental constraints as well as empathy. The great majority of craft exposes group identity, not an individual. Workmanship and tooling are at the centre of craft. If craft is a powerful transcendent allegory and design it is an elegant solution to a real problem, then craft should be thought of as plying usable material metaphors, placing them within reach and asking: what is a tool that nourishes? What is a woven pattern that gathers bodies into dialogue or designates regal authority? The beauty of the commonplace necessity can be savoured in many ways.”¹¹

Mary Caroline Richards connecting bodily relationships and spirituality in “Centering in Pottery”:

“All we need to do is to open up and perceive. It is not a concept I wish to convey. It is, rather, an experience of nature which I wish to summon into consciousness. It comes in like a light, cleaning the mind. It is not a matter of ‘adding to’ but of developing, of evolving”¹²

¹⁰ Sennett, 2009, p. 9

¹¹ Shales, 2017, p. 8

¹² Richards, 1989, p. 37

Meta Praxis

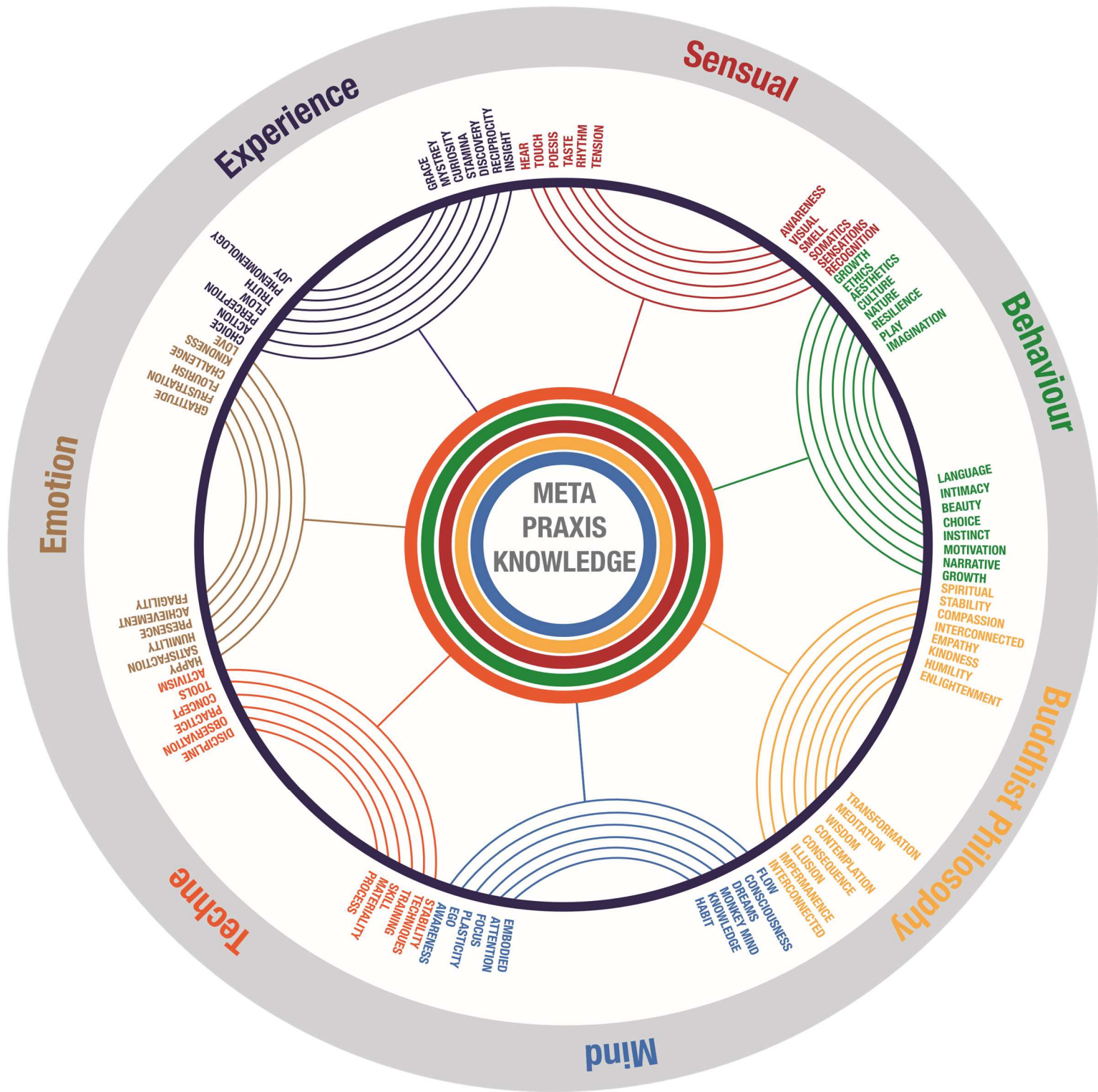
'Meta Praxis' is the potential for human flourishing through an awareness of practice and the value of making craft as an explicit knowledge pathway. Within and beyond the practice, this pathway has the potential to put us in touch with the essential vitality of life and its human value.

The exposition and articulation of 'Meta Praxis' and its potential is the original contribution to knowledge. This research leads us through interdisciplinary schools of thought (craft practice, Buddhism, anthropology, and neuroscience) to make connections and to set out why and how making craft is an explicit knowledge pathway and what is its importance for human thriving.

Chart

The chart represents possible reflections, encounters and human traits explored within the 'reflections'; each has multiple, personal and potential pathways represented in the chart. As the reader engages with the writing in each text, it is possible to explore these routes of knowledge and relate them specifically to the idea of 'Meta Praxis'.

The texts are the reflections of practice, with relevant encounters affirmed through an interdisciplinary approach.



**META PRAXIS
CRAFT PRACTICE: A WAY OF BEING**

