

Abstract

A social etiquette has emerged around the consumption of food in the West which requires the use of cutlery – knife, fork and spoon. It is the spoon that is the subject of this thesis, a utensil so familiar as to have become almost invisible. The significance of the spoon should not be underestimated and it is employed in this study as a device to offer insight into material practices, examine theoretical issues in relation to design and explore the culture of representation that has developed around objects in the contemporary field of visual and material culture. In this sense this thesis can be seen as located in the blurred boundaries of art, craft and design and as constituting a text which contextualises and supports a collection of artefacts developed in the course of a 'practice led' Art and Design PhD.

The spoon exists not only as an object whose usefulness transcends time but also in terms of a metaphorical singularity; as an idea with an infinite number of possible interpretations and material manifestations. This thesis originates in the idea of a reflective cross-disciplinary enquiry intended to explore fundamental questions around what the author defines as “spoonness”, articulating that which might otherwise be articulated through (and subsumed in) the making of the object itself. Significantly, by tracing the journey of the author’s film ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ together with the various objects, exhibitions and catalogues developed in the course of this research, this thesis also contributes to current critical discourse from the perspective of the practitioner - a voice that in the past has often been absent from academic discourse. It opens up the creative processes to scrutiny and further comment, *and serves as a model of analysis to others in the field of material culture to aid reflection upon their own practice* and generate new modes of innovation. A critical reflection upon the works’ subsequent reception at a series of prestigious international exhibitions and events is made throughout this thesis. These materials, together with this text, combine to represent the broad arc of this author’s creative practice and collectively define the innovative nature of this PhD.