

Spoons & Spoonness – A Philosophical Inquiry through Creative Practice

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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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 authors 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.

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and to all users of spoons

Author's declaration

This is to certify that the work submitted in my thesis is my own and has not been submitted for any other degree. Every effort has been made to ensure the accurate acknowledgement of all literary and visual sources used in this thesis.

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Introduction

0.0 Introduction

From my training as a silversmith to my subsequent professional life¹, the focus of my work has been making objects for the dining table. What defines these objects is that they require handling and use – physical interaction. These are objects that fulfil their primary function only when handled, as opposed to ornamental domestic objects which lead a more static decorative life. My fascination with cutlery grew out of this interest.

By its very nature, cutlery requires handling and use, which raises issues of social interaction, manners and etiquette. Cutlery is complex both in terms of form and function and it remains a challenging subject for designers and silversmiths. The project-based research which underpins this PhD thesis, centres on one particular item of cutlery; the spoon. Within a basic three-part set of cutlery comprising knife, fork and spoon, the spoon has proved the most interesting one to me because it is a vessel and utensil combined into one uniquely distinct object, making it a challenging and worthy subject for scholarly exegesis.

0.1 Aims & Objectives & the Contribution to Knowledge

What is a spoon and what is it that makes a spoon a spoon? This is the simple but central question that has emerged out of my practice and defined the ground for the philosophical investigation which lies at the heart of this PhD.

In defining the (possibly extensive) remit of this thesis, there were several identifiable avenues that were *not* chosen as discrete themes:

- This thesis, for example, does not seek to explore issues around the ‘crafts’ other than where they directly impinged upon the work even although craft skills and material knowledge were required to explore and realise this project; crafts critics

¹ See appendix 6.2 for the chronology mapping early education and career, together with an account offering some insight into the author’s ideological positioning.

like Dormer and Adamson have explored such issues eloquently and at length². Nor does the thesis discuss issues around art and design other than where they also impinged upon the work. As will be discussed later, the subject of this thesis might be described as inhabiting the space between these semi-independent though permeable domains.

- Neither (by extension) does this thesis intend to address (in any profound way) materials or technology. As will be discussed, the materials in play in this author's practice are well understood and the technologies conservative.
- Nor does this thesis seek to examine symbolic or decorative detail (e.g. spoons associated with religious messages or decorated in certain styles) or concern itself with specific functions such as those associated with jam spoons, salt spoons etc. In this connection, although design will be discussed the thesis does *not* seek to represent itself as a design history of any kind. And as will be seen, although etiquette and social convention are considered, the thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive social history of manners of any kind³.

All of the above lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

Rather, the aim of this study has been to examine key issues directly and intrinsically related to spoons. These include issues relating to what is generally perceived to be the primary function of the spoon, namely to assist in the process of eating; together with issues relating to a secondary function, i.e. the impact of the spoon on our social behaviour, status and standing. More especially, this study concerns not only the object on the table but also the *object in our mind* - something that philosopher David Banach calls the 'platonic object' or the 'platonic form':

² See Dormer, P., *The Culture of Crafts*, Manchester University Press, 1997 and Adamson, G., *The Craft Reader*, Berg, Oxford & New York, 2010.

³ Authors like Nikolaus Pevsner and Tanya Harrod for example have written definitive histories around design and craft; Elias has written extensively around social conventions. See Pevsner, N., *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*; Harrod, T.; *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*; Elias, N., *The Civilizing Process*.

A (platonic) form is an abstract property or quality. Take any property of an object; separate it from that object and consider it by itself, and you are contemplating a form. For example, if you separate the roundness of a basketball from its colour, its weight, etc. and consider just roundness by itself, you are thinking of the form of roundness. Plato held that this property existed apart from the basketball, in a different mode of existence than the basketball. The form is not just the idea of roundness you have in your mind. It exists independently of the basketball and independently of whether someone thinks of it. All round objects, not just this basketball, participate or copy this same form of roundness⁴.

To this extent, this thesis is what might be described as a ‘philosophic’ enquiry⁵. In short, this study of spoons and what I come to refer to as *spoon-ness* (hereafter spoonness) is concerned with both the feeding of our bodies and the feeding of our culture⁶.

Such object types as spoons can very often be taken for granted and therefore all too often they are assumed to be of no scholarly interest. From pre-historic times the spoon has evolved functionally and been refined culturally without attracting much critical comment or reflection⁷. As Petroski noted of the pencil (arguably a similar ubiquitous object)⁸:

The pencil ... is so familiar as to be a virtually invisible part of our general culture and experience, and it is so common as to be taken up ... with barely a thought. Although the pencil has been indispensable, or perhaps because of that, its function is beyond comment⁹.

⁴ Banach, D., Philosophy Professor at Saint Anselm College, New Hampshire, US
<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/platform.htm>

⁵ Grayling, A.C., *Philosophy 1: A Guide through the Subject*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1: "The aim of philosophical inquiry is to gain insight into questions about knowledge, truth, reason, reality, meaning, mind, and value."

⁶ -ness a suffix forming nouns meaning: 1. quality, state or condition of being; 2. action or behaviour; 3. an instance of being or involving some quality or condition, *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, 2002.

⁷ There are many texts which deal with cutlery in general and our eating culture (socially & historically), but with very little focus on the spoon as a everyday item (see for instance: *Feeding Desire – Design and the Tools of the Table*, Smithsonian – Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2006; Glanville, P., Young, H., *Elegant Eating*, A&C Black, London, 2004.

⁸ Henry Petroski is an American engineer, civil engineering and history professor at Duke University. He has written over a dozen books – including *To Engineer is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design* (1985) and a number of titles detailing the industrial design history of common, everyday objects such as pencils, paper clips, and silverware.

⁹ Petroski, H., *The Pencil*, Faber and Faber, London, Boston, 1989, p.xi.

This description surely applies to spoons, whose existence is frequently unacknowledged (and almost invariably understated) but whose role is ultimately significant in terms of our everyday activities. We need to eat and to drink to survive but a social etiquette has emerged around the consumption of food in the west which requires the use of cutlery – a knife, fork and spoon¹⁰. If we need to transport small quantities of liquid or liquid foodstuffs from hand to mouth, a hollowed form is necessary. This hollow form needs to be ‘handled’ and manipulated in some way to become a means of transportation. The spoon is the result of this necessity and spoons can be found universally, independent of nationality, culture and status. There are other kinds of vessels used for transporting solid or liquid food, not just spoons, but whilst these vessels also need to be handled, they do not necessarily require *handles* - a spoon *by definition* needs a handle.

The aim of this body of research has been to subject this primary utensil called the ‘spoon’ to examination through both philosophical and practical means – as will be shown. In philosophical terms, as Honderich notes¹¹:

Socrates¹² insisted that we must be able to answer the question ‘What is X’ before we can say anything else about X. He understood this question as asking for the one thing common to all the many instances or examples of X ... even though he never found any answer that satisfied him¹³.

Socrates’ question is fundamental to every creative practitioner if he/she is to create original objects, rather than being overly influenced by already existing interpretations - even if there is no absolutely satisfying answer. The nature of this research has therefore taken the form of an enquiry into fundamental questions like: *What is a spoon? What makes a spoon a spoon?*; and *What is a spoon when it is in use?*

One might argue that $X = \text{Bowl} + \text{Handle} = \text{Spoon}$. On the other hand, what is X if the question goes beyond the analysis of primary function? X in this instance cannot be taken

¹⁰ Sample evidence to be found in the *Deutsches Klengen Museum*, Solingen, Germany, www.klengenmuseum.de, cutlery museum with the world largest collection of historic and contemporary eating utensils.

¹¹ Ted Honderich, Canadian-born British Philosopher and author.

¹² Socrates, Greek philosopher, 469 – 399 BC.

¹³ Honderich, T., *The Philosophers*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.17.

to mean aesthetic form as there are thousands of variations of the same fundamentals in terms of serving the primary function of the spoon. In terms of nomenclature, the English and German languages have only one word for spoon (in German Löffel), although there might be descriptors attached in the case of a jam spoon or a soup spoon. However, there is no 'single' object that can be said to adequately represent the spoon. Similarly it can be argued that there could not be just one definitive answer to the questions raised above but only propositions that reflect differing stages (or states) of understanding. However, this does not imply that there are no meaningful (albeit provisional) interpretations and material manifestations which have emerged during the course of the research journey embodied in the thesis which follows. Indeed it is the claim of this thesis that it has identified several such interpretations and material manifestations – and by so doing, it has contributed to knowledge in the field.

0.2 Practice - Led PhD Literature

This PhD constitutes a particular type of PhD associated with creative and artistic expression; a type that has come to be described as 'practice-led'. Such activity represents (historically) a relatively new strand of scholarly endeavour. In this sense it is interesting to refer to the Craft Council's 'Ideas in the Making: Practice in Theory' (1998), in which Pamela Johnson¹⁴ noted that:

It is important that the field of contemporary craft practice becomes more widely understood. The crafts are a diverse and sometimes contradictory set of practices, fundamentally about materials, processes and their related traditions, but it is possible to adopt different positions in relation to them¹⁵.

In pursuing *spoonness*, it is hoped that this PhD does indeed adopt a different position to much of the writing conventionally found in relation to material history and its particular preoccupations with the object.

¹⁴ Pamela Johnson, formerly editor of the Crafts Council's magazine *Crafts*, critic, curator and lecturer on contemporary visual art.

¹⁵ Johnson, P., *Ideas in the Making: Practice in Theory*, Craft Council, London, 1998, pp.10-11.

Furniture designer Philip Koomen¹⁶ noted in his PhD (2006):

The last fifteen years have seen a great resurgence in the crafts and with it, a good deal in the way of reflection on the problematic nature of research in this field - much of which has been driven by its key institution the Crafts Council. This led to a special literature of its own which has attempted to illuminate this relationship and negotiate the complexities of translating aesthetic and exigent impulses into a transparent text, i.e. turning making into writing. The Crafts Council's conference 'Making It' (1995) for example, was the final conference in a five year cycle intended to 'take stock' of the vexed relationship between research and the crafts. It agreed a set of three 'common principles in relation to crafts research' – principally that such research:

- Should be seen as a wide ranging matrix concerned with the interrelationship between the object, its place, the process, the individual and external forces.
- Should target audiences such as students/learners, peers, the public, other makers, clients, consumers, funders, worthy bodies and other researchers.
- Produces systematic forms of dissemination for research including exhibitions, catalogues, articles, refereed journals, conferences, papers and permanent crafts collections¹⁷.

Koomen's Doctoral project (around sustainable practice and the use of indigenous timbers in the furniture trade) can be seen to be in ideological terms very different from that developed here. Koomen's project closely relates to issues within craft and attempts to address commercial realities through advancing the idea of a sustainable 'semi-bespoke' practice. Commercial realities are something that this thesis also touches on, albeit from a different direction (see part three).

Researcher and designer/silversmith Kristina Niedderer's theoretical Doctoral project (a study in designing mindful interaction through artefacts – designing what she calls the

¹⁶ Philip Koomen established Philip Koomen Furniture in 1975. In 2007 he was awarded a PhD (Brunel University) for research undertaken into developing a sustainable practice.

¹⁷ Koomen, P., *Signed & Sealed*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2006, pp.18-19.

‘Performative Object’) could be seen as close to this research in terms of its subject in the broadest sense (the function of objects and the focus on drinking vessels). It also bears comparison in the way it links social convention and philosophical investigation with design practice. As Niedderer notes:

Design becomes here an activity of experimentally joining mental and physical levels of the phenomenon under investigation’¹⁸ ... ‘Heidegger’s’¹⁹ phenomenological analysis of ‘Das Ding (The Thing)’, together with my own analysis of the ‘Social Cups’ and a standard water glass, has provided me with a methodological framework for this heuristic inquiry into function²⁰.

However, the key difference between Niedderer’s work and this research is that this author’s investigation is *led* by practice whereas Niedderer’s ‘theoretical development of the conceptual analysis is *complemented* by an element of practice’²¹.

Furniture designer Lynn Jones’s doctoral project (‘the purpose of this study has been to establish the need for a breastfeeding chair and the designing of a chair to respond to that need’) touches on some issues relating to this PhD: ergonomic experiments and commercial prototyping through to production for example²².

While Lynn Jones’s project could be seen as being an example of a designer’s approach to solving problems, Neil Brownsword’s approach to creative ceramic practice is based around materials and process within a conceptual framework ‘located where the boundaries of fields in Visual Art Practice continue to overlap’. Although this PhD takes a very different approach to what might loosely be thought of as ergonomics and certainly is much less invested in materials and process, nevertheless both approaches can be seen to inform the methodology of this PhD²³.

¹⁸ Niedderer, C., *Designing the Performative Object: a study in designing mindful interaction through artefacts*, PhD Falmouth College of Art, 2004, p.29.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, German philosopher, 1889 – 1976.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.159.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.5.

²² Jones, L., *The research, design and concept development of a new chair to meet the needs of breastfeeding women and their infants*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2003, p.18.

²³ Brownsword, N., *Action/Reflection: A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2006, abstract.

0.3 Methodology

According to Research Professor Carole Malins, ‘the absence of an established and validated set of research methods in Art and Design’²⁴ has led to what ceramicist Neil Brownsword later describes as an ‘individually tailored approach’²⁵ by research practitioners who have developed their research methods and research tools around their individual projects. This is certainly the case here, where the format of the PhD has been developed to fuse philosophical thinking with design practice.

In this PhD, the objective has been to explore the concept of ‘*spoonness*’, i.e. just what it is that constitutes a spoon. The *object-in-view*, the *object-in-use* and the philosophical context (the *object-in-mind*) are here combined with design and workshop practice to generate a series of experiments, out of which were developed a series of new artefacts that challenge our understanding of the spoon. The resulting objects are not necessarily recognisable as ordinary spoons but are experimental elaborations developed around the platonic qualities of what might be called ‘*spoonness*’.

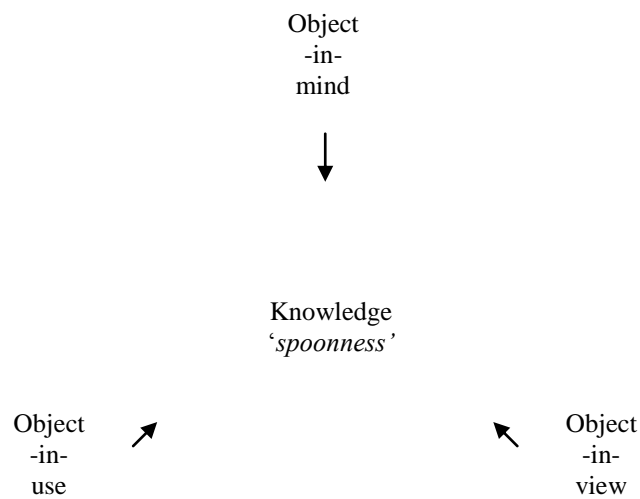
In platonic terms, while ‘*spoonness*’ can exist outside the object and, as noted above, the aim of the research has been to see if ‘*spoonness*’ could be materialised in artefacts through visual, functional or conceptual references while not necessarily take the form of the archetypical spoon itself. Initial research into the ‘bowl + handle’ made it possible, for example, to examine *spoonness* from different perspectives.

An approach modelled along the lines of an analytical ‘*triangulation*’²⁶ (see page 9) might be the most appropriate way to visualise this attempt to identify the quality of ‘*spoonness*’;

²⁴ Gray, C., Malins, J., *Visualising Research*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2004, p.102.

²⁵ Brownsword, N., *Action/Reflection: A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2006, p.9.

²⁶ Gray, C., Malins, J., *Visualising Research*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2004, p.31. ‘In the physical/geographical sense triangulation was a measuring technique used by navigators and surveyors for pin pointing a location from two or more positions.’



In terms of what ceramic artist Paul Scott calls the ‘topology of research’ (i.e. modelling the research process itself) the PhD perhaps needs to be thought of as a research model type where practice is used to explore and develop ‘new techniques or ways of working’²⁷ – less in terms of material manipulation than a philosophic investigation intended to unpick and rethink the very essence of practice. It conforms in its working methods (i.e. its production of objects) to the model he describes as defined by ‘origination – acquisition/immersion/evolution – resolution – peer review’²⁸. However, this thesis develops Scott’s idea of peer review to incorporate public response – a subtle but important distinction (see section 3.1).

This PhD rests upon a belief in inter-disciplinary practice and the following means were employed to develop the PhD and provide historical understanding and theoretical insight within a research methodology framed in terms of observation, experimentation and review:

²⁷ Scott, P., *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection – A Theory of Surface*, PhD Manchester Metropolitan University, 2010, p.32.

²⁸ Ibid. p.40.

- Primary historical research - including the collecting of spoons and related artefacts
- Conference attendance – national and international (such as *Research into Practice* Conference, 1 – 2 July 2006, University of Hertfordshire)
- Discussion and debate - with peers and others in post-exhibition fora.
- Making and object development
- The production of pieces for national and international exhibitions and design fairs (such as Galerie SO, Switzerland 2004, Collect at the V&A 2005&7, Milan Furniture Fair 2006/7/8)
- Workshops (*Handle(s)* ARCO, Lisbon, 2007)
- Cinematic exposition (*Emilie Eating Soup*, 2005)

It is key to this PhD that, in seeking to develop some rather more broadly informed understanding of the spoon ‘in its entirety’; it should examine the spoon ‘in use’. The spoon fulfils its primary function only when handled, when it is no longer just an object on display or hidden in a drawer. To achieve this aim, a series of objectives were developed and the methodological framework developed to enable an examination of the spoon above and beyond questions around material and techniques and issues beyond the parameters of craft and the discipline of the silversmith.

First of all, in terms of what might be thought of as ‘observation and analysis’, an elemental analysis of the bowl and the handle of the spoon was undertaken in relation to historical, cultural and functional contexts. This provided the context for further ‘experimentation’ through models, test samples and assemblages. This ‘practice-led’ experiment opened up the possibility for ‘original contributions to knowledge’ manifested in a series of conceptual objects developed during the course of the research journey. All five primary senses are involved in the act of eating and by extension they continue to function when we are handling a spoon: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. This dimension was explored through the medium of film – opening up further insights into the essential nature of what I come to call the ‘spoon-in-use’ - furnishing a further contribution to knowledge in the form of cinematic/filmic documents exploring the nature of *spoonness* (see section 3.4).

To examine how objects were read in a public and institutional context, the work generated from this research was placed into the public realm and displayed at a number of national and international exhibitions for ‘peer review’, ranging from museums and commercial galleries to industrial fairs. This allowed the work to be subject to comment, provide a forum for critical appraisal and to position itself in such a way as to contribute to knowledge across the broad field of craft and design. The catalogues that accompanied some of these events provided further opportunity for critical exegesis, public comment and scholarly review.

Finally, an associated text was prepared – *the thesis* – which constitutes the written element of the PhD and seeks to capture (and interpret) all of the above. The thesis which follows describes the research journey and contextualises the PhD and contributes to knowledge by furnishing new insights into creative practice and providing a discursive platform for dialogue and review.

Each of the above point to a research trajectory that has variety and depth and makes use of accepted research methods²⁹. In addition to the above (which are discussed in more detail in Part Three), PhD literature based around material practice is reviewed (so called ‘practice-led’ PhDs) with a view to locating the thesis against others in this particular field and defining its particular trajectory (see below).

0.4 The Organisation of the Text – an Overview

In constructing a written thesis around this PhD, the process of writing has attempted to emulate what Nicolas Davey³⁰ describes as:

an ontological enablement ... (which) draws, tightens and slackens the line between the material and the intellectual. It prizes open the enigma of the silent materiality of the art object and allows it to breathe by connecting it to the ideational horizons

²⁹ See Gray, C., Malins, J., *Visualizing Research*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2004

³⁰ Nicolas Davey, philosopher, historian, author and lecturer.

beyond the context of its initial production... it is an activity which opens up a reflective space between a work's sensuous immediacy and its concept³¹.

The thesis is organised into the three sections which follow this introduction and are followed in turn by a conclusion.

Part One: The Rationale

This sets out the rationale for the project, offering a critical insight into the author and the formation of what might be described as his creative identity. More significantly, this section discusses the origination of the PhD and the idea of a more philosophic kind of enquiry intended to extend the current discourse around material practice.

Part Two: From Hand to Mouth

This section adopts a more personal tone in its attempt to 'turn making into meaning'. It goes to the heart of the project by dealing with a series of fundamental questions around what is called *spoonness* and concepts associated with the handling of spoons – to do with things like vessels, handles, domestic ritual and social order. This part of the text articulates (for the purposes of the PhD) that which might otherwise be articulated through (and subsumed in) the making of the object itself. In this sense it offers a close, privileged and defining insight into the preoccupations of this particular designer-maker.

Part Three: Turning Meaning into Public Discourse

This section undertakes a critical analysis of what might be thought of as the public journey. It deals with the emergence of key objects developed in the course of the PhD project and discusses the associated exhibitions, catalogues and allied films (all of which might be said to represent the author's creative practice) in terms of their relatedness to ideas and issues around creative practice and their subsequent reception. In this sense the discussion ranges across the piece in its attempt to locate this project within the creative and discursive parameters of the field.

³¹ Davey, N., *Writing and the In-Between Point*, Art & Research Journal, Issue 7, 1999, p.13.

Conclusion: Final Thoughts

This section offers some reflection upon the outcomes of the research journey and the value of the project (in terms of its creative success as well as what might be called its PhD – ness), together with some observations regarding potential opportunities for related creative work as well as further post-doctoral development.

0.5 The Submission Contents of the PhD

As Davey also noted:

Writing does not and cannot translate verbatim the complexity of lived experience and therefore should not be criticised for what it cannot do³².

In this context it should be noted that this PhD comprises several elements. They include the following:

- A body of objects which have emerged during the course of the PhD and have been shown in various exhibitions.
- A written text (the thesis) intended to document and contextualise the PhD project in such a way as to comprise evidence of ‘systematic investigation within a specific context in order to solve an identified problem in that context’ and allow ‘systematic dissemination of the results’³³.
- Together with further documents relating to the PhD including:
 - The film *Emilie Eating Soup*, produced and directed by Fabian (2005/8)
 - The film *Ipart chef + 4 parts designer*, produced by V&A (2009)
 - Material related to exhibitions at Milan Furniture Fair (2006/7/8)
 - The catalogues:
 - *a Field of Silver : Silver in a Field* (2001/2),
 - *Form (...) Handlung*, Galerie SO (2004),
 - *Much depends on Dinner* (2007)
 - *Mo-Billy in Milan* (2008)

³² Brownsword, N., (citing Davey, N.) *Action/Reflection: A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2006, p.16.

³³ Brown, B., et al., *Types of Research in the Creative Arts and Design*, A.H.R.B. March 2004, p.5.

It should be noted that all of the above texts were made available for the *viva voce* together with a range of the objects created and exhibited during the course of the PhD. Together they not only constitute a new body of work but also new thinking around the creative process and a platform for further discussion and debate across the art and design field.

Part One: The Rationale

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to offer a context for the genesis of this PhD and some insight into the thinking that underpins it. This section begins with a reflective account of the subject (perhaps a pre-occupation) which, above all others, has shaped this author's practice and gone on to determine the theme of the PhD – spoons. Part one then describes *A Field of Silver: Silver in a Field*, a project developed in 2001 which proved to be pivotal in the subsequent development of this project. Part One concludes by setting out the rationale which emerged around the idea of *spoonness* and out of the critical and creative ambitions released by the *Field of Silver* project – which (together) were to determine the structure of this PhD.

1.1 Rethinking Practice

During the author's early years in England, his practice was focused on designing and making speculative (and often very time consuming) one-off silver objects for exhibition. This initially proved successful; the work was much reviewed, it was purchased by key collectors and institutions and it did a great deal to establish a critical reputation¹.



fig. 1. Carafe,
sterling silver,
pumice stone,
H: 340mm,
1998



fig. 2.
Teapot,
sterling silver,
maple wood,
L: 410mm.

¹ Examples of such work included objects like the following: **fig. 1.**, A carafe for the international touring exhibition *Metalmorphoses*. **fig. 2.**, A tea-pot made for *The Feast of Silver* Exhibition, curated by Simone ten Hompel (Contemporary Applied Arts 14 January – 26 February 2000), later also shown at *Silver Lives*, Gilbert Collections' Exhibition (London - October 2001). **fig. 3.**, A *Figure of Eight* felt bowl, purchased by the Birmingham Museum in 2002 - see Part Three. **fig. 4.**, A commission from the Sheffield Assay Office to design and make a beaker for their silver collection to accompany *The Millenium Punch Bowl* – an annual commission bringing together a collection of beakers made by individual silversmiths such as Michael Rowe, Maria Hanson and Rebecca De Quinn, amongst others.



fig. 3. Bowl,
sterling silver, felt,
W: 490mm, 2002/3

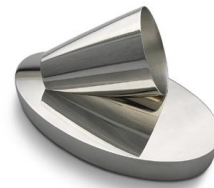


fig.4. Beaker,
sterling silver, oval
L: 220mm, 2001

Having become established as a practitioner on the exhibition circuit at this point, it would have been easy to continue to repeat work in this way. However the temptation to design and make further speculative pieces for exhibition - despite critical acclaim - was overtaken by a desire to take the work in a new direction. The values and preconceptions that had come to define the work had become inhibitive.

It was at this critical moment in 2001 that the author began collaboration with silversmith Simone ten Hompel on a research project that was to be called a *Field of Silver – Silver in a Field*²:

On 13 September last year, an international group of ten silversmiths gathered in a field at Bishopsland, South Oxfordshire³. It seems an unlikely setting for a silversmithing workshop, but for the organisers of ‘A Field of Silver – Silver in a Field’, Andreas Fabian and Simone ten Hompel, it was the perfect location. For the aim of this three-day event was to stimulate, in a radical way. Each artist was invited to make a silver piece, but away from their workshops and without traditional silversmithing tools – a back-to-basic approach designed to challenge traditional approaches to silversmithing and to work, through improvisation, towards a changed aesthetic⁴.

² Simone ten Hompel, silversmith, Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2005, reader in silversmithing & jewellery, London Metropolitan University.

³ David Clarke (UK), Maike Dahl (Germany), Hilde de Decker (Belgium), Howard Fenn (UK), Felix Flury (Switzerland), Chris Knight (UK), Alistair McCallum (UK), Christoph Zellweger (Switzerland), Andreas Fabian (UK) and Simone ten Hompel (UK).

⁴ Rudge, G., (editor) *Field Studies*, Crafts, March/April 2002, pp.30-33.

At the time, Helen Clifford⁵ asked of the *Field of Silver* project:

Will the freedom of deprivation be a creative opportunity...⁶?

This event was to prove more significant than perhaps either of its co-authors had anticipated (and, somewhat ironically, what this author subsequently became best known for). It led directly to this PhD - which can also be (beyond its interest in spoons) a project through which to re-examine personal practice and reflect upon the creative process. Some five years after the *Field of Silver* project was first mounted, it was revived at the Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries. Terry Grimly noted at the time how⁷:

An unusual recent addition to the Birmingham Collection is an installation arising from a project undertaken in 2001, when ten silversmiths were introduced into a field in South Oxfordshire and handed raw material and minimal tools. Perhaps unsurprisingly what they came up with is not that great, but reportedly the experience proved to be quite influential for a number of them⁸.

Speaking as one of the co-initiators of this project, Grimly was right: the material outcome was not the motivation for this event - the nature of creative practice was what it was about. It was this aspect in particular that was key to nurturing a more speculative approach to constructing this doctoral project.



fig. 5. A selection of images documenting the research project *a Field of Silver : Silver in a Field*, South Oxfordshire, 2001

⁵ Dr. Helen Clifford, freelance researcher, writer and curator specialising in 17th and 18th century decorative art and silver

⁶ Clifford, H., foreword to *a Field of Silver : Silver in a Field*, published by Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College and Sir John Cass School of Art, Media and Design, London Metropolitan University, London 2002, pp.1-3.

⁷ Terry Grimley, Birmingham Post's arts editor and journalist

⁸ Grimley, T., *Shining Lights of Silver*, The Birmingham Post, 22nd November 2006.



fig. 6. The installation of the research project at Gallery Flow, 26 April – 8 June, 2002, London

The challenge in designing a museum installation for *Silver Field* (fig.6) lay in bringing work created outside in the landscape, indoors. With ten participants in total, a democratic means of display was needed to make sure that no individual participant was perceived as more important than any other. The *Field of Silver* participants (together with the objects they made) were shown as a whole, linked yet visually separated – an accurate visualisation of the project in terms of objects and the ‘unheard’ but none-the-less important debate amongst its participants.

The installation took the title *A floor: A field: A carpet*⁹. The idea of the carpet offered an useful analogy for a field and the ideal vehicle for bringing the collection indoors. The act of removing a carpet tile to provide a space within which to display the work of each participant gave to each an equal space - which in essence was what *Field of Silver* was all about.

The space where objects are exhibited can exert a considerable influence – as will be discussed later in Part Three - but what is the influence of the space where things are made? This aspect of the *Field of Silver* project had a liberating effect – for example it gave me the freedom to focus on the essence of things, enjoy the luxury of play and ‘taking risks’. The project also provided the opportunity to explore a kind of raw materiality, forcing me to work the fine silver sheet without the benefit of workshop and tools.

⁹ The entire installation (a collaboration between the author and jeweller Elizabeth Callinicos) was purchased in 2002 by the Contemporary Art Society Special Collection Scheme on behalf of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery with funds from the Arts Council Lottery Fund and with additional support from the Crafts Council and the Friends of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

The theme I pursued during the *Field of Silver* event was the idea of ‘the bowl’, exploring just how little was needed to express and materialise its essence (fig.7). Working in this way reminded the author of the importance of two-dimensional drawing in developing three-dimensional objects and the significance of the ‘line’. In particular, the famous line by Paul Klee in which he describes a line as ‘taking a dot for a walk’¹⁰.

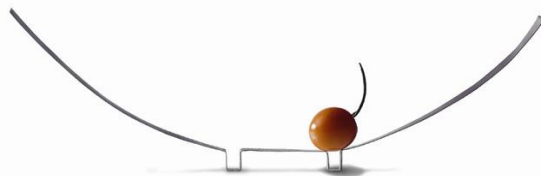


fig. 7. Fine silver bowl, W: 160mm, made during the *Field of Silver* project, 2001

More significantly, the project was interesting because it is easy to take for granted (at least for this author) the Modernist principles which have done much to underpin an approach to design which relates strictly to utility function and its resolution in the aesthetics of an object. Inculcated at an early stage (see appendix 6.2) it still remains a kind of default position for many practitioners today. However, the *Field of Silver* project helped realise the limitations of this (perhaps overly rigid) vocabulary of form. In short, the *Field of Silver* project demonstrated the possibility of a different way forward by shifting the emphasis away from form and function to materialising what might best be described as the ‘essence’ of an object. No less important, the subsequent exhibition also suggested the possibility of disseminating ideas into the public realm which involved probing beneath the skin of the object and the veil of practice. It was what might be thought of as (essentially) an ideological exercise that became interesting to this author – the kind of reflective enquiry that would lend itself to the possibilities inherent in the ‘practice-led’ PhD.

¹⁰ Sibyl Moholy-Nagy writes in her introduction to Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook* about his use of line: ‘... the object is not merely rendered two-dimensionally, it becomes „räumlich“, related to physical and intellectual space’. Moholy-Nagy, S., *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Faber & Faber, London 1953, p.9.

1.2 Why Spoons

The author has collected spoons for most of his adult life and this remains an ongoing activity. Spoons come in all sorts of forms and materials and serve all kinds of purposes and so eventually criteria were established for the organisation of the collection. It was always important that the criteria for collecting spoons related to my studio practice and latterly to the broader remit of the PhD. Initially for example, it was examples of modernist aesthetics that proved interesting, particularly as they related to commercial and industrial applications such as might be found in hotel or airline cutlery where economy (of line and function) was at a premium¹¹.

As the research around the PhD progressed it proved necessary to broaden the criteria for collecting in order to examine related objects which could be seen to exemplify the quality of *spoonness*, including implements such as garden spades and forks which, for example, ultimately resulted in the design 'hemDing' now produced by Thorsten van Elten Ltd. (see fig.8 and Part Three for a more detailed discussion of this object.)



fig. 8. hemDing,
in production with
Thorsten van Elten
Ltd.,
ø 460mm,
H: 360mm, 2008

Many people collect spoons; they collect them as souvenirs, for sentimental reasons, for a range of practical purposes or purely because of the pleasure spoons bring to their lives. A wonderful collection of spoons that the jeweller Herman Jünger collected is noteworthy.

¹¹ Before collecting spoons, collecting cutlery from airline catering companies had been a pre-occupation because it represented an interesting theme - cutlery designed for use in a very limited space and for very specific circumstances and there appeared (at first sight) to be an interesting connection between the design of the cutlery, the respective airlines' nationality and company logos to be found on the handle. This interest culminated in a short spell of teaching on this theme at the Royal College of Art in 1992. Close observations subsequently led me to conclude that this latter relationship was not apparent.

It was described and illustrated in his book ‘Herbei, Herbei was Löffel sei’¹². The book is an inspiration; it is beautifully illustrated and refers to many common sayings in relation to the spoon¹³ which illustrates again how important the spoon is in the western culture, a commonly understood point of reference that has become woven into the fabric of our culture. Perhaps it is no surprise then to find that museums such as London’s V&A Museum collect cutlery (including spoons) to document history in relation to cultural and socio-political changes. Long established cutlery companies such as Puiforcat (Paris) similarly maintain an archive of designs. More recently in early 2008, English Heritage (in conjunction with Birmingham City Council) bought the factory of one of Birmingham’s historic cutlery manufacturers (together with its entire contents) in order to preserve it and turn it into a public museum¹⁴.

Why collect spoons? Owning such a collection allows one to handle these objects – *handling* such objects is necessary (as will be discussed in Part Two) if one is to properly understand them. Spoons are also a pleasure to look at. For example, an older spoon that shows the ‘marks of life’ constitutes an intimate experience – a kind of poetic revelation. Such marks are the eloquent witnesses of usage over time. In a similar way, monograms engraved on handles talk about ownership and status or in the case of spoons designed for airplanes, bear witness to a company or brand. (see page 53, the P4P design demonstrates the influence of this observation)

¹² See Jünger, H., *Herbei, herbei, was Löffel sei*, Anabas-Verlag, Giessen, Germany, 1993

¹³ For example:

- ‘Den Löffel abgeben’ (to give up the spoon) – meaning to ‘kick the bucket’ (or put more formally – to die).
- ‘He needs a long spoon who sups with the devil.’ This saying was employed as early as the C14th by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. It was also used later in the C16th by William Shakespeare in ‘*The Tempest*’.
- ‘With the fork it is an honour; with the spoon you get more’ – an old saying relating to etiquette and manners.
- ‘You often imagine, you great, rich, powerful people, that you have eaten Solomon’s wisdom with a spoon.’ – a reference to conceited behaviour.
- ‘The Wooden Spoon Award’ – At Cambridge University the Wooden Spoon was awarded to the student who achieved the lowest exam marks.
- ‘I was born with a plastic spoon in my mouth’ ; in 1966 *The Who* parodied the expression ‘born with a silver spoon’ in their song *Substitute* - an example relating material (silver/plastic) to status (high/low).

¹⁴ See *English Heritage buys Victorian Silver Factory*, by Charles Clover Environment Editor, Telegraph, 09/04/2008, www.telegraph.co.uk



fig. 9. Part of the author's varied collection of spoons

In terms of marks on cutlery applied intentionally for the purpose of quality control or provenance of manufacture (notably hallmarking) one can very quickly identify traditional French cutlery from English cutlery, for example, by the positioning of the hallmark. English cutlery, like German cutlery, is laid at the table with the prongs and the spoon facing up. The hallmark is located on the back of the handle and therefore remains hidden. A traditional French fork is laid at the table with the prongs facing down. However, the hallmarks are located on the front of the fork and inside the spoon bowl and therefore also remain hidden – a curious phenomenon which is perhaps explained in terms of etiquette, ‘intervening’ to deny the manufacturer his presence at the table. The French etiquette of the downward placement originated in the 17th Century:

Prior to the seventeenth century, spoon handles had been designed with round or polygonal stems, a shape that tended to turn over on the table. For balance, mid-seventeenth-century handles were designed with a wider, flatter stem, and with ends that curved upward. The wider handle provided room on the back for engraved ornamentation, such as a monogram or a crest. To display the ornamentation, French aristocrats laid the spoon facedown on the table. Because the handle of the fork emulated that of the spoon, it too was ornamented on the back and laid on the table face down. The etiquette of the downward placement continues, mainly in formal table settings¹⁵.

¹⁵ Drachenfels, S. Von, *Feeding Desire*, Assouline Publishing, New York, 2006, pp.169-170.

Most cutlery found in public and private collections is likely to have seen use at some point and in doing so, will have undergone a very interesting journey. Something of the intimate and extraordinary nature of this phenomenon was described by artist Richard Wentworth - albeit discussing plates not spoons - during his participation in the exhibition 'At Home with Art' at the Haywood Gallery (1999):

The strangest thing about plates is that when you sit down to eat you get your own, but the moment you finish it's somebody else's. Plates operate in a complex world of manners, sharedness and separation – a public / private thing, enormously widely experienced. This makes them very special¹⁶.

Whatever a spoon might look like, it is without exception based on the simple principle of bowl and handle or bowl-like and handle-like forms – i.e. it possesses the quality of being ansate¹⁷. The diversity of spoons we might use (no matter how complex in form or what purpose they have been designed for) is nevertheless an interpretation of this principle. One never ceases to be astonished at the enormous range of possibilities and manifestations of this simple defining principle.

Very often collectors separate their collections into the contemporary (as opposed to historical) and in fact will often collect according to quite specific criteria which may or may not relate to historical time lines. In terms of this author's current collecting, as noted above, it is given over to collecting examples which exemplify the idea around which this PhD has been formed - *spoonness*. It includes examples of both contemporary design as well as historical artefacts. In fact, in terms of the relationship of the contemporary to the present, it can be argued that the present doesn't exist; the moment a spoon is made it already belongs to the past¹⁸.

A collection of spoons inevitably invites questions around interpretation and the complex business of reading objects – questions all too frequently left unanswered. In the context of this PhD, further questions were to surface around whether the various spoons (and

¹⁶ Painter, C., *At Home with Art*, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, 1999, p.55.

¹⁷ Ansate – having a handle or handle-like shape, *The Chambers Dictionary*, 1993.

¹⁸ Einstein's thoughts about this aspect of time may be relevant here: in a letter to his closest friend Michaelangelo Besso (21st March 1955) he wrote that: The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, however persistent. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/page/samplep-18.html>.

related objects) illustrated in this thesis have been read in specific ways – and if so why? Does the author have a selective view? How does the author/designer best explain his intentions? How far can one piece be used to explain another for instance, in any particular installation? These are the kinds of questions that can be seen to inform Part Three, as the thesis attempts to unpack the critical issues that underpinned the research journey, determined the author's material responses and shaped the reception of the resulting objects when they were circulated in the public domain.

We can see that collecting spoons goes far beyond any purely practical use. In this specific case, they have served to nourish and inform a research and design process (which it is acknowledged may well be very specific to this author / maker and to this PhD) which we may feel sure was unlikely to have been imagined by the original makers and designers of the many spoons which currently figure in this author's collection.

1.3 A Philosophy of Practice

Form is not the aim of our work, but only the result. Form by itself, does not exist. Form as an aim is formalism, and that we reject¹⁹.

Mies van der Rohe

... the thing that matters behind the skin ...²⁰

Marjan Unger

The aim of my work has always been to try to think beyond craftsmanship²¹. The technical skills acquired over the years have only ever served as a means through which to express thoughts and realise ideas without having to rely on the knowledge of others or the assistance of machines. The inculcation of artisan skills have allowed this author to execute highly complex processes using no more than hands and a simple range of tools -

¹⁹ Frampton, K., Cava, J., *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, USA, p.161.

²⁰ Fabian, A., Hompel, S. ten, *A Field of Silver – Silver in a Field*, published by Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College and Sir John Cass School of Art, Media and Design, London Metropolitan University, London 2002, p.6.

²¹ Schwarz, M., Yair, K., *Making Value: craft & the economic and social contribution of makers*, report published by the crafts council, 2010, p.9. 'Craft is increasingly understood as a distinctive set of knowledges, skills and aptitudes, centred around a process of reflective engagement with the material and digital worlds.'

a very strong position from which to develop formal prototypes (in metal and other materials) which would otherwise require time-consuming and expensive machine processes. In fact, it is tempting to argue that such hand skills are much more efficient in generating and adapting prototypes than the complex processes so frequently required to programme the machines so often called upon to generate such prototypes. However, perhaps this is a historic prejudice which might easily be exposed by the advocates of some of the newly emerging (and now more accessible) technologies such as rapid prototyping and laser sintering – a discussion that lies beyond the scope of this thesis²².

What is important here is that the possession of traditional craft skills can only ‘enhance’ our understanding of the potential of new technologies. That said, there is little to be gained from advocating the value of pursuing craft skills for their own sake either. As Cho noted ‘crafts cannot be formulated for its own purposes’²³. Such skills need to be applied to something with more meaning and purpose, if they are to be justified; ‘the most important role of craft is to convey a sense of understanding the way we live’²⁴.

Like Tessa Peters, the author believes it makes little difference whether an object has been made by hand or by machine:

‘How something has been made is, at best, of secondary importance (perhaps reserved for discussions with other practitioners) and at worst unhelpful’²⁵.

What is important is ‘what’ has been made and ‘why’ it has been made. Making by hand is only significant in so far as it generates a feeling of satisfaction, a sense of achievement and innate understanding gathered *through the hands* – the pleasure of the *haptic*. The

²² In 2010 the critic Max Fraser curated (in partnership with the Crafts Council) a very interesting exhibition titled Lab Craft which ‘explores the use of (digital) technology as an extension to the capabilities of the human hand.’ and sees this as an ‘exciting extension to the makers toolbox’ rather than as a substitute for craft skills. Lab Craft (Digital adventures in Contemporary Craft), www.craftscouncil.org.uk/collection-and-exhibitions/.../digital-craft, design exhibition; *Tent London*, 2010 (including the likes of Tomoko Azumi, Tord Boontje).

²³ Cho, S., *Craft and Labour*, MPhil (RCA) thesis, 2006, p.179.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Brownsword, N., *Action/Reflection: A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture*, PhD BCUC/Brunel University, 2006, p.260.; citing Peters, T., citing Johnson, P., in the context of how to locate work within Visual Arts Practice, ‘the necessity of framing work in terms of what has been made and why it has been made, so that first and foremost its cultural significance can be understood’.

idea of the haptic is particularly relevant to the subject closest to me - the spoon - which is an object we handle on a daily basis. As Sennett notes:

Of all the human limbs, the hands make the most varied movements, movements that can be controlled at will. Science has sought to show how these motions, plus the hand's varied ways of gripping and the sense of touch, affect how we think²⁶.

and crucially:

The hand's action defines the cavity of space and the fullness of the object that occupy it. Surface, volume, density and weight are not optical phenomena²⁷.

This sense of the haptic resonates particularly with this author's preference for silver. As German silversmith Professor Werner Bünck²⁸ observed:

... the process of working and forming metal is relatively simple but because of their nature they take a long time and therefore gain almost meditative and contemplative character. Nowhere else is the maker included so closely and so intensely in the process of creating and forming²⁹.

In this context, there is luxury in being able to spend time making a silver object. Polishing a piece by hand for hours, sometimes days or weeks allows an intimate relationship with the piece to develop which brings in turn a deeper insight and understanding of its form, weight and surface detail³⁰.

A very strong influence in this author's youth was the writing of Albert Camus, who believed that we are all caught up in an absurd world and disoriented by a search for

²⁶ Sennett, R., *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008, p.149.

²⁷ Focillon, H., *The Life of Forms in Art*, Zone Books, New York, 1992, p.28.

²⁸ Professor Werner Bünck, German silversmith, designer for industry in glass and porcelain, teacher.

²⁹ Fabian, A., *Form (...) Handlung*, Edition Galerie SO, 2004, Switzerland, p.41.

³⁰ As Simone ten Hompel has noted:

‘... Fabian is possessed by silver with a function; he loves the silversmith's craft as ardently as he loves life itself.’

See Wimmer, I., *Drei britische Immigranten*, Schmuck, Ebner Verlag, Hamburg, Dezember/Januar 2000, pp.56-60.

meaning in a meaningless world³¹. What this suggested (to this author at least) was that we are all responsible for our individual actions. However, with education and training came the sense, both as a social being and designer-maker that responsibility was also owed to others. This view was advocated (among others) by Wilhelm Wagenfeld who memorably defined the responsibility of the modern designer at the beginning of the last century in the 'Deutsches Warenbuch' when he suggested that³²:

Good products are beneficial not only to a nation's economic progress but also in terms of its moral and artistic development. All possessions have good or evil consequences. The things in our homes and in everyday life help or hinder us; they create bad or good moods and produce opinions and habits which shape and influence our life without our being conscious of it³³.

The logical consequence of this argument is that all designers, architects, craftsmen (be they bakers, basket makers, jewellers or silversmiths) have a responsibility for their work and for the impact it has on others, although of course the impact of their work may well vary. If one takes, for example, the design of a teapot and briefly compare this to the design of a building. If the design of a teapot makes its user feel uncomfortable, - whatever the reason may be - then he can take it or leave it. But if an architect designs a public building which people don't like, they have no choice but to use it.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry³⁴ reminds us that:

You know you have achieved perfection in design - not when you have nothing more to add but when you have nothing more to take away³⁵.

³¹ See in particular Camus' novel *L'Étranger*, (*The Stranger* or *The outsider*), published 1942, which is recognised as a key text of 20th century philosophy.

³² Wilhelm Wagenfeld (1900- 1990) trained as a silversmith in Bremen (Germany) before he studied at the Bauhaus in Weimar. He became one of the most important industrial designers of the 20th century. One of his classics is the *Wagenfeld Lampe* designed 1924 and still in production.

³³ Wagenfeld, W., *Täglich in der Hand*, Worpsweder Verlag, Worpswede, 1987, Germany, p.41.

³⁴ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), French writer, pilot; *Vol de Nuit* (Night Flight) was the first of his major works and made his name. (first published 1931 by Gallimard, Paris)

³⁵ See Saint-Exupéry, A. de, *Wind Sand und Sterne*, Karl Rauch Verlag Düsseldorf, Germany, 2001, p.56. Saint-Exupéry's 'The Little Prince' sums up my experience with regard to taking (or rather *not* taking) commissions as a silversmith and designer. When the little prince asked the pilot to draw a little sheep, the pilot started to draw one sheep, then another and then a third one. The little prince was not pleased and always wanted changes in the drawing until the pilot finally drew a box with a few holes in it and said 'Your sheep is in the box!' Now the little prince had exactly the sheep that he wanted - which was the

However, after a career spent following this credo and materialising ideas in the shape of three-dimensional objects largely for the gallery (see appendix 6.2) following the experience of *Field of Silver* it became clear that it was necessary for me to do more. It was important, for example, to think again about designing for the commercial market rather than just continue to produce one-offs for the gallery market. I began to think increasingly about how I might generate a more varied body of work and disseminate it in more imaginative ways. Above all, it became important to develop ideas more rigorously – particularly in terms of my continuing pre-occupation with spoons and an increasing desire to explore the idea of *spoonness*. It became clear that all of this could be best collated and accommodated in terms of a PhD project. This alone would arguably allow the intellectual freedom to pursue such varied ambitions within a structured and methodical framework as no other vehicle might. It would allow to navigate the chosen theme (*spoonness*) from a philosophical point of view within a critical and reflective framework - free of commercial imperatives and beyond the narrow material and technical demands that so often constrain the designer-maker³⁶.

All of the above confirms the philosophic approach to practice of this author and the elements which (in turn) are integral to the very nature of this PhD. Above all, it is concerned with ideas and issues around that which lies beneath the skin and that which lies beyond craft. It is in a holistic spirit that this PhD has tried to reflect on the nature of creative practice and re-examine that unassuming metaphor of the everyday, the spoon - reassessing its significance and the relationship we have come to form with this ubiquitous and quotidian object and just what it is that determines the very essence of *spoonness*.

sheep that existed in his imagination! This short story explains all too well just how difficult it can be to deliver a commission to a client if specific expectations already exist.

³⁶ This perhaps serves to endorse the insight of the maker, critic and teacher Hans Stofer, who observed of my work some years ago that:

... the majority of his oeuvre is dominated by a clear and open style which steers clear of ephemeral fads and fashionable trends' and concluded that my work revealed '... a silversmith with the heart of a designer.

See Wimmer, I., *Drei britische Immigranten*, Schmuck, Ebner Verlag, Hamburg, Dezember/Januar 2000, pp.56-60.

Part Two: From Hand to Mouth – Spoons & Spoonness

2.0 Introduction

Sometimes key but understated ideas and issues in material culture can be overlooked and therefore taken to be non-issues. My intention is not to find answers to a set or chosen problem around, say, the relationship between ‘form and function’ or certain critical hierarchies but to raise fundamental questions out of the research process. This process has been led by ‘learning through making’ and informed by observation, reflection and discourse. These questions will be identified and subject to examination within the body of this text and while this section will look to address questions around spoons and *spoonness*, broader questions will be addressed in Part Three.

As noted earlier, the spoon has evolved functionally and it has been refined culturally without attracting much critical comment, reflection or written record. Despite its independent development, what we recognise as a spoon today is commonly seen as a member of the family of objects known to us as cutlery: knives; forks and spoons. In fact the origins of the names reflect how they were perceived in earlier centuries and the roles they performed:

- Spoon – ‘an (eating, or serving, etc) instrument with a shallow bowl and a handle. For early and pre-modern societies the word for spoon focused on the materials from which they were first made. Prehistoric peoples must have used shells. The Greek and Latin words are derived from *cochlea*, a spiral-shaped snail shell (2). The Anglo-Saxon word *spōn*, meaning a chip or splinter of wood suggests an alternative North European material, and approach to the problem of spoon making (3). The middle German word for spoon *span* and Old Dutch *spaen* share a common heritage.....As cultures and languages became more sophisticated the word for spoon changed, reflecting the increased importance of how the spoon was used. In modern German the word for spoon is *Löffel* from *laffen* which means to lap up, or *lepel* in Dutch’¹.
- Knife – an instrument with a blade for cutting or spreading.

¹ Fabian, A., (Clifford, H.), *Form (...) Handlung*, Edition Galerie SO, 2004, Switzerland, pp.11-15.

The word knife is derived from a Scandinavian (kniv) and German source (Middle low German knif, later `Knief, Kneif`), meaning to nip, to pinch. Although the German word for knife changed into Messer, the word Kneif is still used for small knives or shoe makers' knives. In etymological terms the English word spoon refers to material and form, whereas the word knife refers to an action.

- Fork – a pronged instrument (such as an eating implement) for spiking and lifting
The word Fork is derived from the Latin word `furca` which as a verb means to pick up, to branch out.

- Cutlery – implements for eating food.

The word cutlery is derived from Old French `coutellerie` which means cutting utensils and has its roots probably in the Latin word for a small knife: cultellus.

2.1 Object & Language: Beyond Words

It is clear from the above that language² is important if we are to communicate ideas to one another – but can words ever fully explain the meaning embodied in objects? The German word for object is 'Gegenstand', which translates as one thing 'standing against' another - perhaps even standing against us - which implies a relationship. The essence of an object is never revealed to us directly but by extension, is only revealed to us through our perception of it, through what Marjan Unger³ calls:

... the complicated relationship between form and content, or between what we see, the skin of objects, and the thing that matters behind the skin⁴.

Or in the words of Antoine de Saint – Exupéry:

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye⁵.

² The authors fascination for language stems from his cultural experience as a child through to his professional life (see appendix 6.2).

³ Marjan Unger, Dutch art historian, tutor and writer.

⁴ Fabian, A., Hompel, S. ten , *A Field of Silver : Silver in a Field*, essay by Unger, M., BCUC, London Guildhall University, 2001.

⁵ Saint-Exupéry, A. de., *Der kleine Prinz*, Karl Rauch Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1997, p.98.

Kant was interested in what he called ‘das Ding an sich’ - ‘the thing itself’. According to Kant, the only fact we can know about ‘das Ding an sich’ is that such things do exist. But since everything we perceive is affected by our ideas about understanding and reason, ‘das Ding an sich’ must remain (philosophically speaking) entirely beyond our grasp⁶.

Plato⁷ believed in the essence of things and in ideal forms. In his celebrated ‘cave’ analogy, he refers to objects being only a kind of imperfect shadow of the ideal form. He also draws a distinction between ‘the world of form, available to the intellect but not to the senses’⁸. According to Plato the ‘real’ world exists outside our world of objects. The idea precedes (and therefore has precedence over) the object.

But if Plato is right, aren’t we entitled to ask whether the essence of an object can ever be articulated in words without the object itself? And for the maker especially, there is a world of difference between an object in view and an object in use. An object in use (arguably) is in a fuller and more complete relationship which must carry with it enhanced meaning (although some might argue that an object in use carries less meaning in becoming an extension of ourselves).

Language will always present problems. There is of course a language of words (written and spoken) but there is also a language of forms. We may communicate through form, words, or gesture. Communication goes two ways - how do we ‘read’ an object for example? Can we assist reading by placing the object in a meaningful context? However, how we react to an object when we put it to use may raise very different issues.

The etymology of words may sometimes come to our aid. In German, for example, the origin of the term for the spoon bowl is ‘Laffe’, meaning to lap (i.e. drink by scooping with the tongue), revealing terms that originate in actions. In English, the same spoon bowl is derived from the description of a form, bolus (Latin for a lump, a rounded mass).

⁶ The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) makes a distinct difference between what he called noumena: the thing-in-itself and the phenomena: the thing how we perceive it; <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/420847/noumenon>

⁷ Plato, Greek philosopher, 428 – 348 BC.

⁸ Honderich, T., *The Philosophers*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.17-19.

Arguably the name for an object derived from the description of an action, gives a more complete, if not more precise, representation of the object and of its use. It is also interesting to observe the difference in translation of the English word 'tablespoon' which indicates a location and suggests a flat surface, whereas the German word for the same object, 'Esslöffel', indicates an action and a purpose. (essen = eating).

The German word for cutlery again derives from the *action* of 'putting on', 'bestecken'. It is very interesting that in the Pons German/English dictionary the word 'bestecken' is translated as 'to decorate' and not as to 'put on'. People once travelled with their cutlery attached to their clothing, like it was jewellery - perhaps an indication of its historical status and speaking of the very personal and intimate nature of the relationship with the objects concerned. Another link between cutlery and jewellery is suggested through the German word 'tragen', meaning 'to carry' *and* 'to wear', but translates into English as only meaning 'to carry'. Arguably, we 'carry' objects as we 'carry' jewellery.

However, as Wittgenstein famously declared⁹:

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence¹⁰.

Wittgenstein could easily have extended his remark to include objects, because many everyday objects have 'come about' in the absence (or 'silence') of the written word, and escaped the attention of designers and cultural commentators, if not anthropologists. How one therefore 'communicates' the essence of the spoon (what might be called its spoonness) is not always straightforward.

More recently in the twentieth century, John Berger observed that an idea or a thought can be communicated through words¹¹. The function of an object – in this case a spoon – can also be communicated through words. But can the inherent quality of a spoon be conveyed solely through the object itself and without handling it? Don't we only really only fully comprehend a spoon in its entirety through handling it? And if a truer and/or

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Austrian philosopher. His work is dominated by a concern with the nature of language, the way in which it represents the world, and the implications this has for logic and mathematics. His later work focuses on the actions of people and the role their linguistic activities play in their lives. (see *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.389-391.).

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge Classics, London & New York, 2002, p.89.

¹¹ Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*, BBC/Penguin, London, 1979, introduction.

more complete understanding of the spoon comes about through handling it, then in what new sense through handling it, have we now ‘read’ the object and come to understand it? How do we gain an understanding of the everyday objects that surround us? Through the knowledge which we obtain through our senses when handling a spoon, can we really translate this into a language which demonstrates an original understanding of the spoon? We may be able to describe its function but there is a distinct difference between knowing a spoon only through description (through words or an illustration) and knowing it through our experience of handling it and putting it to use. As philosopher Bertrand Russell noted:

A thing is known by acquaintance when there is a direct experience of it. It is known by description if it can only be described as a thing with such-and-such properties¹².

Russell’s idea of ‘acquaintance’ is an interesting one. In the case of a spoon both means of gaining (acquiring) knowledge are involved, but we might also add the term ‘demonstration’ to the term description. The use of the spoon may be ‘demonstrated’ to a child but the child will probably handle it clumsily and grasp it with their fist on their first attempt. Only by acquaintance with it (i.e. over a period of time) and by their own experience will the child learn how to handle the spoon efficiently and effectively and come to an understanding of what might be called *spoonness*, as the child’s growing experience develops from the basic function of handling a spoon for eating to an understanding of the complexity of using a spoon within a sophisticated cultural code of association and meaning.

¹² Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 6th edition, Oxford, 1994, p.4.

2.2 From the Hollow to the Handle¹³

The following definitions have been taken from the dictionary¹⁴:

- bowl – a vessel, characteristically of approximately hemispherical shape, for domestic use: more wide than deep
- handle – part by which a thing is held, opened or picked up
- handle - from hand + -le (suffix) expressing the sense of an appliance or tool
- ansate (or ansated) – having a handle or handle-like shape (latin: ansa= handle)

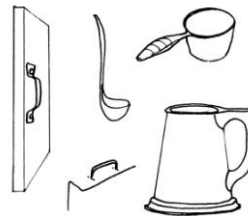


fig. 10. Drawing from: Seppa, H., *Form Emphasis for Metalsmith*, Kent State University Press, 3rd edition, US, 1998, p.111.

However, Klee neatly opens up an interesting problematic in ‘The Language of Form’ when he noted:

The father of every missile, therefore also the arrow, was the thought of how to extend my range → as far as there¹⁵.

This idea could be easily applied to a vessel. The thinking behind a vessel is about how we transport a substance from A to B or how we store a substance, thereby extending its possibilities in space and time. The moment man started to think about his future, short or long term; he needed vessels (i.e. a hollow form) to store or to transport food and liquid. Nomadic man for example needed to consider his future and think about the transport and preservation of food and water over relatively long distances and extended periods of

¹³ Phrase taken from essay by Marian Unger from the publication *Form (...) Handlung*, Galerie So Edition, Solothurn, Switzerland, 2004, pp.18-19.

¹⁴ The Chambers Dictionary, Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, Edinburgh, 1993.

¹⁵ Braem, H., Heil, C., *Die Sprache der Formen*, Wirtschaftsverlag Langen Müller/Herbig, Munich, Germany, 1990, p.203.

time. Agriculturalist man however (being less nomadic perhaps) did not have these needs, although he too had to deal with the problem of storage of food and water if he was to survive seasonal climate change. Both nomads and agriculturalists shared the need to consume liquids daily.

However, in terms of this PhD, what is interesting here has nothing to do with long-term storage or long distance transport but is to do with the immediacy and intimacy of the use of a vessel experienced in the act of consuming liquid over the short distance from source to mouth. What is really interesting are vessels which require an action of their user; a performance of some kind in order to fulfil their function – at its simplest, an activity defined by the idea of *filling ... emptying*.

If spoons are defined by the conjunction of bowl and handle (ie. spoon = bowl + handle) then what brought about the metamorphosis of this hybrid and how did the addition (or evolution) of a handle come to change the identity and function of a vessel and bring about the utensil we know as the spoon? The spoon has continuously gone through such changes, reflecting our society on a social, cultural and political level – a process which remains ongoing.

In pursuing a closer understanding of spoons, the following questions became key; these questions are distinctly different but interrelated.

- What is a bowl? (e.g. pages 34, 38)
- What is a handle? (e.g. pages 34, 88)
- How might the two be linked? (e.g. pages 88, 92)
- What happens when a functional element is subtracted (a backwards journey!) from an object like a spoon? (e.g. page 82)
- How does proportion, the materials used, material combinations and surface detail influence function and affect our perception of an object and its content? (e.g. page 92, 96)
- How far does the form of an object influence our action and what is the nature of form in relation to function - material history's most persistent anxiety? (e.g. page 87)

- How does decoration – a social need as opposed to directly biological – come to play its part in personalising and ‘adding value’ to the object? (e.g. page 88)

These questions have fuelled the research of this PhD and defined its reach.

Returning to the definition of ‘Gegenstand’ (the German word for object, discussed on page 30), it is worth considering that to pick something up is a very particular activity for which one needs the use of hands. Hands are very useful, thumbs even more so. Our hands are constructed in such a way that we can not only hold, but also actually grip an object. Our thumb plays a crucial role in this ability and biological research suggests that this is one of the key features which helped to differentiate us from other primates.

The author was introduced to the work of Fellini, Godard, Buñuel, Fassbinder, Herzog to mention just a few while working in the 1980s as a film projectionist in an ‘alternative’ cinema in Bremen, Germany. This proved to be a formative experience. Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* had a big impact at that time and has proved very relevant in relation to this particular body of research – particularly the iconic sequence illustrating the ‘dawn of man’ (fig.11 and 12), in which an ape picked up a bone and started to discover that a bone could also be ‘used’ as a tool and a weapon, rather than just eaten.



fig.11. Still from *2001: A Space Odyssey* with screenplay from Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke (1968, Turner Entertainment Co.)

Whether by intent or by default, we now know that some animals are also tool makers like us although arguably, mankind is still most often defined by its ability to ‘handle’ and create a sophisticated range of objects:

.. with greater brain capacity, our human ancestors learned how to hold things in their hands, to think about what they held, and eventually to shape the things held; man-apes could make tools, humans make culture¹⁶.



fig. 12. Still from *2001: A Space Odyssey* with screenplay from Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke (1968, Turner Entertainment Co.)

It is the position of the thumb in relation to the fingers that first enabled us to grip complex forms in a safe manner and transport objects over a long or short distance:

The human hand differs from that of the apes in having a much longer thumb, less curved finger bones, and broad, spatulate fingertips. It is capable of holding objects in a power grip (as one would hold a tennis racket) and also has a highly developed precision grip, where an object is deftly held between the thumb and one or more fingers (called opposability, as one might hold a razor blade for cutting paper)¹⁷.

However, we should remember, as Sennett also observed, that:

it is not the hand that is perfect, but the whole nervous mechanism by which movements of the hand are evoked, coordinated, and controlled which enabled *Homo sapiens* to develop¹⁸.

The size of the objects we can grip and hold is determined by the size of our hands and by our strength. In order to be able to lift large objects for example, we need handles on these objects. The need for a handle has become ubiquitous to human beings through the

¹⁶ Sennett, R., *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008, p.150.

¹⁷ Schick, Kathy D., Toth, N., *Making Silent Stones Speak*, Touchstone, New York, 1993, p.102.

¹⁸ Sennett, R., *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008, p.150.

biological need for sustenance. What influenced the need for a spoon when our hands or found objects such as shells would ‘do the job’ remains an interesting question. Social etiquette as we understand it now came much later, much of it developed by courtly convention – something which again lies beyond the scope of this thesis. The image below makes a critical comment on our social etiquette and eating habits, playing with our understanding of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ eating habits and table manners¹⁹.



fig. 13. Image from the *Tableclothing* range by Nicola Hall, 2002

Apart from the size of the objects we want to lift for reasons of sustenance and/or transport, other practical criteria are also relevant – such as temperature and leverage. Generally our hands accommodate the shape of the objects (or the handles) we want to pick up. But when were they ‘invented’ and was it ‘by chance or by design’? Did these forms evolve in response to the shape and abilities of our hands or their shortcomings? A spoon can easily be compared in form to the skeletal structure of the human forearm and hand. Interestingly enough, the proportions of the spoon handle to bowl frequently replicates the proportional relationship between our forearm and hand.

A spoon holds a smaller quantity than the bowl in which the whole portion is placed and served. It holds a ‘mouth’ sized quantity (like the portions of a chocolate bar): a bowl might hold the quantity a stomach can hold but biologically, the contents of the bowl can only be consumed in small mouth-sized amounts.

¹⁹ Nicola Hall’s work was part of an international exhibition of tableware by artists and designers shown at Galerie Sophie Lachaert in Tielrode (Belgium) under the title *Table d’ouvrage* in spring 2003. ‘...in short, it is tableware which demands consideration and revision of everyday habits.....the mealtime is an essential part of daily life and there are times when what you use to serve is just as important as what you eat. The choice of a certain tablecloth sets the tone even before a single dish is served’ - excerpt from website; <http://www.lachaert.com/galerietielrode/table/index.htm>

The historical evidence suggests (significantly) that the handles on spoons have not changed with regard to their overall form but that what has changed is their length. They have become longer and as a consequence, hands are now more disconnected from the food – symbolic of the nature/culture divide that has distinguished civilised man from lesser beings. Animals eat their food without ceremony, often bloodily. Humans prepare their food carefully and their eating is refined and ordered, according to cultural code and social precedence.

It is possible here to draw a parallel between the development of our spoons, our eating culture and the development of our technology:

...the transition, in the history of human technicity, from the hand-tool to the machine is not from the simple to the complex ... It is a history ... not of complexification but of externalisation²⁰.

Why did humans develop table manners? Were these developments independent of other developments in our social behaviour or co-incident, reflecting our commitment to others and our attitude towards life? These were questions that naturally arose from my research. They are questions addressed by sociologist Norbert Elias, who sees the development of table manners in the much broader context of civilisation. What is particularly interesting is the connection he draws between table manners and language:

... there being people so *delicate* that they would not wish to eat soup in which you dipped it (the spoon) after putting it into your mouth (Antoine de Courtin, 1672, *Nouveau traité de civilité*).

This *délicatesse*, this sensibility and a highly developed feeling for what was *embarrassing*, was at first a distinguishing feature of small courtly circles, then of court society as a whole. This applies to language in exactly the same way as to our eating habits²¹.

²⁰ Ingold, T., *The Perception of the Environment*, Routledge, London, New York, 2000, p.289.

²¹ Elias, N., *The Civilizing Process*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1994, revised edition 2000, p.98.

What is clear here is the way in which (historically) people came to pay the same attention to eating manners as to their way of speaking and writing. What is particularly interesting here is that Elias argues that issues of hygiene were not the driving force behind the development of our table manners, as is so often assumed:

At any rate, the so-called rational explanations are very far in the background compared to others. In the earliest stages the need for restraint was usually explained by saying: Do this and not that, for it is not *courtois*, not *courtly*...²²

The introduction of mirrors in the 17th century and the precedent set by the court of Louis XIV and the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, may well have played a key role in the process of refining our (table) manners and enhancing our social awareness.

One did not look at oneself in the mirror, the mirror looked at you; the mirror dictated its own laws and served as a normative instrument for measuring conformity to the social code²³.

And as Baudrillard noted²⁴:

The mirror is an opulent object which affords the self-indulgent bourgeois individual the opportunity to exercise his privilege – to reproduce his own image and revel in his possessions...it carries the stamp of approval of an entire social order: it is no coincidence that the century of Louis XIV is epitomized by the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles²⁵.

By allowing us to see ourselves as others see us, mirrors have played their part in elevating our self-awareness, separating body and mind. In the context of social order and individuality it is interesting to observe how:

...between the 18th and the 19th centuries on the bourgeois table, the Russian-style settings (individual helpings brought to individual guests) replaced the French-style

²² Ibid, p.97.

²³ Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p.134.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist.

²⁵ Baudrillard, J., *The System of Objects*, Verso, London & New York, 1996, p.22.

services (communal dishes shared by the diners)... This was the definitive triumph of individualism... while the medieval and Renaissance distribution was based on the principles of class differences and hierarchy²⁶.

All of which is to show that the very short distance from the 'hollow to the handle' is not only a measure of manners but how those manners are (in turn) a metaphor for the history of civilisation.

2.3 The Spoon & Spoonness

The following dialogue shows how overlooked and taken for granted the spoon is in everyday life:

...Boijmans is organising an exhibition with Lam de Wolf (visual artist) and Paul Derrez (Galerie RA) entitled *What Do You Mean, Spoons?* Could you write a short foreword for the accompanying catalogue?

Excuse me, you did say spoons?

Yes, spoons, you know spoons! Spoons by contemporary artists and designers along with old and modern examples from our decorative arts collection.

Er, okay. To be honest, I can't imagine a day in my life without a spoon, but I've never before given it a second thought....²⁷

Ex, Sjarel; Director, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen;

Collectively, utensils such as spoons contribute to an understated but significant part of the fabric of everyday life. The spoon is used everywhere in the civilised world, independent of nationality, culture or status, with very few exceptions. Wiebke Meurer's

²⁶ Ferreri, M., *Cutlery*, Corraini Editore s.r.l., Mantova, Giorgetti S.p.A., Milan, 1997, p.14.

²⁷ Gaba-van Dongen, A., *What Do You Mean, Spoons?*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherland, 2005, p.7.

object (see fig.14) shows spoons seemingly folded into other spoons, yet it is ultimately only one spoon. In its way it demonstrates how a single and definitive spoon design does not exist but it also serves to emphasise what all spoons have in common. They are based on the same principle: *bowl & handle*. The example also suggests how each spoon has the potential within it to suggest another spoon.



fig. 14. Wiebke Meurer, Silver spoon for private commission, castings taken from spoons from private collection, 2000

All five primary senses are involved in the act of eating. In the case of using a spoon during a meal, we feel its weight, we feel how it balances in our hand and between our fingers, we feel its surface and we see its colour; we perceive the temperature of its material (with and without liquid). We hear the sound the spoon makes when touching a porcelain bowl or a metal, a wooden, a ceramic or a plastic bowl. We feel the movements we make when taking liquid out of a bowl or vessel and the movements we make with the spoon in the liquid as we test its consistency. We smell, see and taste the food. We may be aware that we are doing something very intimate by feeling the spoon in our mouths, on our lips, whether we use it in a public or a private space. We might also remind ourselves that we often use a spoon that others have previously had in their mouths – in this sense the spoon is an intensely intimate instrument.

The spoon is always used in a specific context, in a particular environment. We might hear people around us talking. We might hear music, or a train or a car passing by. We notice other objects in relation to the spoon: a bowl, a drinking glass, other utensils, furniture, a space filled with objects. We see a place setting with its rules of arrangement/engagement depending on the location, the time or the occasion - and therefore anticipated social behaviour.

Exupéry once said:

The rite is in time what the home is in space²⁸.

We may eat and use a spoon alone or in the company of others, in a private or in a public environment. Observing other people using their cutlery may influence our own handling of a spoon causing us to consciously or unconsciously alter our behaviour. Watching other people – but even more our parent’s intervention – will also have an impact on how we learn to use a spoon and (over time) how we actually come to use it in different social circumstances. Our relationship to other people at the dining table, whether an informal or a formal occasion, will influence our behaviour and our etiquette. It will also impact on our handling of the spoon. Depending on the situation in which we handle a spoon, our body language may change. In a formal setting we may feel tense. In an informal setting we may be more relaxed.

All of the above demonstrates how a spoon exists within a highly complex field. For example, a small drop of soup on the bottom of our spoon might make us change our whole body language. We don’t want it to drop onto the tablecloth – that might be seen as ‘bad manners’ - it could leave a mark on the cloth and, more significantly, leave a stain on our social reputation. Or, even worse, it might leave a mark on our clothes, a mark that we take from the table with us and with it the taint of bad manners taken beyond the point of eating, beyond the consumption of food, beyond the table and the people with whom we have eaten - on into the public domain. This may become a ‘sign’ to others - a stain upon our status and standing.

How we carry ourselves at the table and the role played by the spoon within these domestic dramas may be heavy with meaning. We might feel that we don’t like the food or we might feel that now we are full. Once the meal is finished, the spoon will become redundant for a period of time until the next time it is required. It will fulfil its purpose only when in use once again, when handled again in the consumption of more food.

²⁸ Quoted by Origlia, G., in Bellini, M., *Eating as Design Album/1*, Gruppo Editoriale Electa s.p.a., Milan, Italy, 1980, p.9.

All these perceptions are necessary to experience a spoon fully on all levels of meaning (physically, intellectually and socially) to know what a spoon really means to us.

As Helen Clifford observed after 'Taking Soup' at the V&A²⁹:

A surprise to me was how personal the connections with a spoon can be. Most of the people who justified their choice of spoon chose a life story experience, I think with the possible gender association with the shape. I am pretty sure you would not get the same responses if you had asked people to choose a knife or fork! I think the conversation levels were interesting - the arrival of the soup brought a different dynamic- the meeting of function and social context so important for thinking about the use of the spoon³⁰.

Using implements such as spoons is a holistic experience which can only be properly understood by handling the object itself and putting it to use. Just as we broaden our knowledge and gain some understanding of our world by acting in it, surely it is equally true that we can only come to a full understanding of the spoon by putting it to use? We know that liquids must be held or transported in a hollow form, e.g. a spoon, a bowl or a pot depending on the distance to be travelled, whether it is from the kitchen to the table or from the hand to the mouth. In using and handling these objects (while drinking, scooping or pouring liquids) we gain valuable insights about how we manipulate the world and so we begin to appreciate just why these ubiquitous hollow forms are so indispensable. We learn that a deep spoon bowl is more efficient and will keep the soup warm for a longer period of time than a spoon with a shallow bowl. We learn that the size of the spoon bowl and its shape will bear directly upon the temperature of the soup and the way in which we satisfy our appetite. The size, shape and depth we have grown accustomed to in our spoons are in fact a response to that very need.

The shape of a handle tells us how to approach the object, how to grasp it and how to handle it. We respond to it. The spoon has moved away from being determined by purely

²⁹ The *Soup at the V&A* symposium was held on 23rd February 2006 at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. A collaboration between the author and Helen Clifford and 11 invited guests: R.Batchelor, P.Binns, K.Bremkamp, E.Callinicos, H.Clifford, S.Fraser, S.ten Hompel, M.Mathias, M.Rowe, H.Stofer and D.Taylor.

³⁰ Email from Helen Clifford in her response to the *Soup at the V&A* seminar, February 2006. This symposium will be discussed in greater detail in Part Three.

practical, economical aspects. The form of the handle no longer communicates with the user in an entirely direct way anymore. We no longer hold the spoon by its handle by gripping it with our hand (i.e. as instinctively as a child would). This makes the spoon one of the few objects of everyday life which is not defined by purely practical requirements. Our contemporary way of handling the spoon between thumb and fingers is defined by manners and etiquette. Handling a spoon instinctively does not seem appropriate anymore and has become culturally determined. In this sense, the spoon cannot be defined only as an eating utensil but must also be reckoned an instrument of social distinction. As Baudrillard noted in this connection:

Every Object claims to be functional ... functionality is the ability to become integrated into an overall scheme. An object's functionality is the very thing that enables it to transcend its main *function* in the direction of a secondary one, to play a part, to become a combining element, an adjustable item, within a universal system of signs³¹.

Having discussed spoons and *spoonness* above, Part Three will animate (and further illuminate) some of the detail here through analysis of specific objects and /or events relating to the research journey and the idea of *spoonness* - as well as developing a broader range of associated ideas and issues around reception and display (and what might be called PhD-ness) which emerged when these objects were subject to exhibition and placed in the public realm.

³¹ Baudrillard, J., *The System of Objects*, Verso, London, 1996, p.63.

Part Three: Turning Meaning into Public Discourse

3.0 Introduction

Can the connection between object and user be described as linear? In geometrical terms, a line always separates and combines at one and the same time: it can connect A and B but at the same time separates the space on each side of it, whatever form the line takes. Is our connection with the object not always based on a selective experience and therefore by its nature also a separating process?

Marcel Duchamp concluded his essay 'The Creative Act' that:

...all in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act ...¹

These lines could equally be applied to the work of a designer: the user of a designed object (like Duchamp's spectator) brings it into contact with the real world and (in effect) completes the creative act.

This chapter is neither intended to provide a chronology nor a complete narrative of the research journey but develop a critical analysis that discusses how this PhD relates to discourse within the field. It deals with the emergence of key objects and discusses the associated exhibitions, catalogues and allied films - all of which might be said to represent the author's creative practice - in terms of their relation to ideas and issues around creative practice. In this sense Part Three seeks to locate this project (and this author) within the creative and discursive parameters of the field. The discussion begins with a consideration of the 'Work in Progress' exhibition held at Galerie SO (Switzerland) in 2004 and an analysis of its partial resolution in the '1 part chef & 4 parts design' events held at Somerset House and the V&A in 2009; it describes and contextualises the 'By Chance or Design' artefacts and concludes with an account of the making of the film 'Emilie Eating Soup' (2006).

¹ Battcock, G., *The New Art*, Dutton, New York, 1973, pp.46-48.

3.1 'Work in Progress', Galerie SO, Solothurn, Switzerland, 2004

An annual exhibition staged at the Victoria & Albert Museum called *Collect* (V&A 2004) provided the opportunity to exhibit a small selection of silver objects that were made during the development of this PhD – several of which were later reworked and refined. After seeing this work and knowing something of my association with the *Field of Silver* project, the galleriste Felix Flury² opened up a discussion around the possibility of a solo show at his new gallery in Solothurn (Galerie SO³), Switzerland featuring work in progress relating to the PhD; *Work in Progress* (fig.15) subsequently became the title for the exhibition.



fig. 15. *Work in Progress* show at Galerie SO, Solothurn, Switzerland, 2004

The key issue of the exhibition (for me) was to show 'research work' in the context of a stand-alone gallery exhibition, to find out just how an audience would respond to these experimental pieces. However, in order to avoid preconceptions, it was important not to describe the exhibition as 'PhD research work' or provide text panels or other means of

² Jeweller and gallery owner, Galerie SO in Solothurn, Switzerland and Gallery SO in London.

³ 'Galerie SO sees itself as 'a showroom for the objects with which we like to surround ourselves but it is also a venue for artistic discussion/debate about the importance of *things*.' Excerpt from the gallery's press release of the time (2004).

labelling the work, in a way likely to influence the audience's responses. The title *Work in Progress* was all the information offered about the nature of this exhibition and provided what contemporary crafts commentator Kate McIntyre described as an 'open framework' and a 'paradigm of theory in practice':

He (Fabian) was anxious to set up an open framework to allow each individual to engage with the work in his or her own way. While there was plenty of discussion happening during the opening, in a number of languages, the exhibition itself could be read as a conversation without words (this approach chimes with the stated ethos of the gallery, to provide a venue for artistic discussions about the importance of things)...while the idea that objects act as language is not new, this exhibition offered a paradigm of theory in practice⁴.

The *Work in Progress* exhibition demonstrated Felix Flury's willingness to promote developmental work in his gallery – however it posed an interesting dilemma.⁵ If these objects were to be offered for sale, they needed a price. Flury's experience with the fine art world proved useful in calculating prices for the more conceptual, experimental artefacts – and represented a steep learning curve for this author. This exhibition was innovative (for this author at least) in that it exhibited (so-called) developmental work (e.g. fig.16 & 17) alongside (so-called) finished objects (e.g. fig.41). This posed intriguing issues in terms of deciding not only when a design is resolved (something perhaps all artists and craftsman are faced with) but more significantly, at what point in its genesis work can be usefully shown to the public in terms of having some (albeit) provisional meaning.

In the exhibition, 'unfinished' models were deliberately displayed between finished artefacts in order to blur the boundaries between these two categories. Although it was very clear to me what pieces were finished and which were provisional, the public did not

⁴ McIntyre, K., *Andreas Fabian: Work in Progress*, Crafts, January/February 2005, p.59.

⁵ Flury was particularly impressed by an exhibition he had seen at the time of the works of the architects Herzog & de Meuron. (Swiss architects, recently best known for the design (collaboration with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei) Beijing National Stadium, also known as the 'Birds nest'. Although according to Flury it was a very small exhibition it had a very strong impact on him. He was fascinated to see the quality of their models in terms of showing a thought process as well as their execution.

make that clear separation. Objects I saw as work in progress were read by viewers as finished pieces they wished to purchase – presumably for use or display at home.

What was particularly interesting here was that most of these ‘unfinished’ objects had been made up in provisional materials –for instance made in clear Perspex⁶ rather than glass or in a white vacuum forming material⁷ rather than porcelain (e.g. fig.46). Because these provisional models had not been realised in their intended final materials, they had (for me at least) the unmistakable characteristics of provisional models - but clearly not for the gallery audience. This vividly pointed up the unwitting preconceptions that had been formed around the exhibition on my part, which in turn provoked interesting questions around my long standing prejudice regarding the hierarchy of materials and a historic preference for silver as opposed to an expensive but stigmatised material such as Corian⁸ which I have increasingly used for larger pieces. This is perhaps only to be expected when one comes from a silversmithing background but the experience revealed a need to rethink the implications of inherited assumptions around appropriate materials.

Alongside these “material issues” gallery visitors also recognized what this designer-maker had thought of as provisional “thought-objects” as satisfactorily resolved *in and of themselves* - as “finished” as those objects I had thought of as formally resolved.

Such objects had previously been regarded by me as a crucial yet provisional part of the design process. Perhaps belatedly, what I recognised was the value of objects that were essentially ideological in their nature. Objects which I had designed to foreground concepts such as ‘inside and outside’, ‘addition and subtraction’ ‘form and function’ and the idea of “spoonness” clearly spoke *to the gallery audience itself*. This served to affirm (to this author at least) the exhibition process and the viability of exhibiting ‘work in progress’ to the gallery audience and above all, *the value of the conceptual*.

⁶ Lucite; also called Plexiglas, British Perspex, trademark name of polymethyl methacrylate; <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/350622/Lucite>

⁷ High impact polystyrene, HIPS.

⁸ Corian, acrylic polymer and alumina trihydrate, sheets often used for kitchen surfaces and more recently for architectural cladding; http://www.corian.co.uk/Corian/en_GB/tech_info/technicalindex.html



fig. 16. Samples of Work in Progress shown at Galerie SO, 30 October – 27 November 2004

While this exhibition proved formative to this author in terms of discussion and debate about how artefacts are developed and subsequently read, it also revealed this designer-maker's lack of understanding around the idea of finish.



fig. 17. A selection from *Work in Progress* shown at Galerie SO, later shown at *David Watkins and his Students*, CAA, London 16 September – 29 October 2005

An object can be resolved, made so that it works for instance - and so conform to what might be thought of as a finished piece. But doesn't this 'finished' piece only correspond to one interpretation at one specific moment in time? Isn't the concept behind the object - a spoon for example - far too complex to be interpreted through just one example? Can it be argued that interpretation is never really 'finished' as such? While spoons exist as familiar and familial objects that transcend time, don't they also exist in metaphorical singularity – *as an idea of spoonness* - with an infinite number of possible interpretations and material manifestations arising from usage, fashion, technological and material developments at any given moment in time? Arguably therefore, every finished piece might be seen as a piece of research – and in that sense provisional, i.e. only *temporarily finished* with the possibility of being (continuously) revisited & refinished. In this sense any finished piece carries with it the inherent possibility of being refinished - i.e. it is not finished only *temporarily paused*.

While all of the above seems to point to a philosophic complexity that threatens to collapse on itself, the audience at Galerie SO clearly had fewer problems than this author had assumed in understanding that some objects had a limited use or were only intended to express ideas about function – or (at the very least) *their desire to buy* suggested a less problematic view of these objects. This points to a need to re-examine our understanding of what represents a finished piece, i.e. the quality of what might be termed ‘finishedness’ and in turn what we mean by that familiar term ‘function’. How far is it relevant or useful to simply express an idea? And in what sense does ‘function’ relate to the idea of ‘finishedness’? Isn’t it true that it requires the use of an object by the user/spectator to ‘complete the creative act’ – another example of the sense in which a finished piece remains unfinished - here to be continuously refinished in the hands of the user? Isn’t it the case that a functional object – *out-of-use* - is reduced to a symbolic or ideological sign? There seems to be no literature that explores this philosophical conundrum around the status of the (functional) object *when it is not in use*.

The ‘Work in Progress’ exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue (appended), designed to function independently of the exhibition. The catalogue was to be the second of an ongoing series of Galerie SO publications and presented a further range of possibilities to explore⁹. The title ‘Form (...) Handlung’ was adopted¹⁰. The dots in closed brackets were intended to refer to what happens between reading an object and handling it. It was also meant to raise issues around interpretation and the relevance of context.

The key concept the catalogue sought to explore was the sense in which a book itself could be regarded as a kind of vessel. In collaboration with a graphic designer, the layout of the text was visually enhanced to illustrate this concept¹¹. On each page the layout was dictated by a curved line on each side of the spine (whether employing text or images) leaving a void whose silhouette could be read as an empty vessel. In addition, all objects were shown against a neutral white background to avoid any textual cue.

⁹ Hans Stofer and Simone ten Hompel have subsequently produced a publication in conjunction with the gallery. Stofer, H., *Design Wilderness*, Edition Galerie SO, 2006; Hompel, S. ten., *Inside*, Edition Galerie SO, 2009.

¹⁰ Fabian, A., *Form (...) Handlung*, Edition Galerie SO, 2004

¹¹ Gerdtsgedesign, Florian Gerdt, Hamburg, Germany; <http://www.gerdtsgedesign.de/brands.php>

Catalogues are useful as a means of documentation, dissemination and interpretation; they project images and provide context. While these images are only two-dimensional reproductions of three-dimensional objects, they are often seen by a larger audience over a longer period of time than the objects viewed by the gallery audience. As more and more catalogues are made available on-line, we are increasingly confronted with these reproductions and representations which may have more impact on our lives than the original object which we might never see – a phenomenon which has come to increasingly pre-occupy this practitioner and led indirectly to the making of the film ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ (discussed in section 3.4).

3.2 By Chance or By Design – P4P, spounglass & hemDing

Work began in 2005 on a series of experimental products which were eventually exhibited under the title *By Chance or By Design*¹². The starting point for this group of objects was the notion that the weakest point of a spoon is the connection between the bowl and the handle, the part that can bend easily and in the worst case even break. The experiment began (logically enough) by detaching spoon handles from their respective bowls in order to re-attach them to other objects related to holding food, whether solid or liquid.

This notion of disconnecting / reconnecting parts was an attempt to explore both new mechanical possibilities as well as potentially new ideological terrain which might generate the kind of ‘surprise’ discussed in the journal *Design Issues* in 2008:

The product user benefits from the surprise because it makes the product more interesting to interact with. In addition, it requires updating, extending, or revising the knowledge the expectation was based on. This implies that a user can learn something new about a product or some aspects of a product¹³.

¹² Exhibited during the Milan Furniture Fair at the show: *Much Depends on Diner*, 18 - 23 April 2007.

¹³ Ludden, Geke, D.S., Schifferstein, H., Hekkert, P., *Design in Mind*, *Design Issues*, Volume 24, Number 2, Spring 2008, p.28.

One such ‘surprising’ object that generated a very positive critical reception was the Petits Fours Plate (see fig.18, also P4P time line in Appendix 6.1, hereafter referred to as the P4P). The original P4P was a shallow porcelain plate with a 17th century silver spoon handle attached vertically in the centre of the plate. The monograph on the silver handle as well as the marks of use offered the suggestion of a history and a past; they indicated personal ownership too although the story behind the owner(s) remains unknown.



fig. 18. Original *P4P*, Austrian-Hungarian silver spoon handle, Vienna 1839, 813 silver purity, porcelain plate, ø 220mm, H: 175mm

In one sense this experiment was not so much about *spoonness* as history and narrative. The used spoon handle was incorporated to indicate how over the course of time we often come to re-own objects: that all objects have a real past – even if we don’t know the story. In the case of the spoon handle used for the P4P, the only facts we know (thanks to the hallmarking) are the time and place of the spoon’s manufacture, together with its silver content and the possibility that somebody with the initials MB originally commissioned it. However, it is important to point out that the P4P handle could just as easily have been derived from a fork rather than a spoon. Handles on forks and handles on spoons are traditionally identical.

The P4P was first exhibited in a private exhibition (Association of British Designer Silversmith¹⁴), before being shown to the wider public in a gallery (Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries¹⁵) and eventually exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum. After

¹⁴ Association of British Designer Silversmith (ABDS) is now known as CBS – Contemporary British Silversmith.

¹⁵ Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries, *Treasures of Today*, 21st October 2006 – 14th January 2007, Birmingham.

that it was shown at the Milan International Furniture Design Fair ¹⁶ and thereafter a number of international trade fairs before once again ending up for sale in London's Design Museum; by which time it was affordable to a larger audience and no longer represented by a single unique object but available in serial production.

In the course of this journey, the silver spoon handle on the P4P changed following discussions with Innermost, the manufacturing company responsible for the production of the P4P. The monogram on the handle used on the original design was fundamental to the original conception but Innermost was not sure how the potential audience would perceive it. They sensed that it would raise questions around the origin of the initials and the fact that neither they (nor this author) were in a position to explain the story behind the monogram represented a problem. The initials MB were perceived as being (at one and the same time) both too specific and too anonymous. In the end we agreed to replace the monogram MB found on the original antique artefact with the designer's initials - AF. This plays very much to the idea of the brand as well as the designer as celebrity – both key to contemporary design.

Other interesting changes also took place. For example, in order to make the object affordable to a larger audience, the silver handle was replaced with a cast stainless steel handle. As with a spoon, where the connection between the bowl and the handle represents the weakest point, in the case of the P4P the connection between the plate and the handle was the detail that required most attention. Saving on production costs and resolving technical and aesthetic detail became a carefully calculated equation between the author and the manufacturers - one little plastic washer used to avoid direct material contact between the screw and the plate (for example) provoked a serious discussion regarding financial implications relative to larger volumes rather than small scale batch production.

Looking at the many locations where the P4P design was exhibited, it was clear that different venues provided different contexts - each with its own particular audience. At BMG the design was exhibited in the context of the silversmith and the P4P provoked questions around the extent to which it had been 'designed' as opposed to 'crafted' – a

¹⁶ Furniture Fair Milan, *Salone Satellite*, 18 - 23 April 2007, Milan.

familiar critical trope. More positively, it demonstrated for many how easy it can be to develop connections between different industries - in this case the connection between the silver and the porcelain industries.

Interestingly enough, at the BMG exhibition, the P4P plate was displayed behind glass and so therefore the audience was not able to handle it – nor did it carry the title ‘Petits Fours Plate’ at that time. Viewing the object behind the glass in this way, the glass of the showcases acts not only as protection and separation but also, incidentally, as a mirror that creates a visual connection between the viewer and the object - the viewer seeing himself or herself with the object in one image – an interesting ideational relationship commented on recently by art historian and curator Mònica Gaspar¹⁷. However, at the V&A’s *Collect*, the same piece was shown in an open space. Although the audience had easy access to the piece, it was clear (from this author’s brief observations) not many felt that they could pick the P4P up and handle it. Interestingly enough, a very different response was observed when the same piece was exhibited in Milan during the 2007 International Furniture Fair, again in open space but this time on a dining table. Here people felt free to handle it and seemed particularly interested in how it looked from underneath – perhaps curious about the nature of the construction at this point.

Connecting a spoon handle to a plate is arguably not - in surrealist terms - ‘...situating existing objects in a completely new context...’¹⁸ but it does materialize the ‘real functioning of thought’, a surrealist concept¹⁹. Now while I don’t wish to overstate the surreal dimension of the P4P, it is certainly a connection that surfaced in response to the next object in this series, the so-called “spoonglass” which combined the bowl of a wine glass with a similar spoon handle to that used for the design of the P4P.

¹⁷ Gaspar, M., *The portable Museum*, paper, International Symposium: Artefact, Sint Lucas, Antwerp, Belgium, 2005.

¹⁸ Bucquoye, M., Van den Strom, D., *Design Today – Forms with a Smile*, Stichting Kunstboek, Oostkamp, Belgium, 2008, pp.15.

¹⁹ Surrealism: Desire Unbound; exhibition at the Tate Modern, 2001/2, <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/surrealism/intro.htm>



fig. 19/20. Images from *Form (...) Handlung*, 2004, pp. 18 & 21.

fig. 21. Elongated with sterling silver Austrian-Hungarian silver spoon handle, Vienna 1839, 813 silver purity, joint: bone, glass: Company Riedel L: 285mm, 2006/7

The three images above illustrate how this design was initially inspired by visual observations relating the act of eating with a spoon to the act of drinking from a wine glass. In the recombined design that was to emerge as *spoonglass*, the liquid in the glass can be seen to create a direct reference to the shape of liquid in a spoon bowl. Although ‘spoonglass’ was not taken up for commercial reproduction like the P4P, it provoked favourable critical response in publications as diverse as the journal ‘Série Limitée’ (France), the book ‘Design Today – Forms with a Smile’ (Belgium) and the online magazine ‘Trendease’ (United States and France)²⁰.

‘Design Today’ divides the postmodern field into four key aspects which are summed up by its chapter divisions as follows: 1 - Make us Smile, 2 - Surrealism: Alive and Kicking, 3 - Iconic, Ironic and Poetic, 4 – A Little Smile and Chaos. The editors of the book (Moniek E. Bucquoye and Dieter van den Storm) positioned the design of ‘spoonglass’ in section 2 – Surrealism, referencing the work against surrealist artists such as Dali, Magritte and Max Ernst, arguing that Ettore Sottsass was the first contemporary designer to adopt the notion that:

‘design is not only functional but also emotional and fun’²¹.

²⁰ Léonforté, P.; Série Limitée, *La table à couteaux tirés*, Issue No. 57, Les Echos, Paris, 2007, p.48.; Bucquoye, M., Storm, D. van den, *Design Today, Forms with a Smile*, Stichting Kunstboek, Oostkamp, Belgium, 2008, pp.15-16. & p.29.; Trendease, *Set the Table for Tomorrow*, May Issue, New York, Paris, 2007.

²¹ Bucquoye, M., Van den Strom, D., *Design Today – Forms with a Smile*, Stichting Kunstboek, Oostkamp, Belgium, 2008, pp.15-16.

Interestingly enough, *Série Limitée* similarly makes reference to surrealism though prefers novelist Franz Kafka as its inspirational figure; following the lead of Andrea Branzi perhaps, who has in recent years designed a number of iconic objects for Alessi and argues:

..increasingly the objects found in the home will...have more of a literary value than a functional one²².

If the idea of “story telling” in an object is not new, *narrative* certainly seems to have become increasingly important to contemporary design – as evidenced by the V&A’s most recent exhibition “Telling Tales – Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design” (2010). However, this tendency to narrative is not without its critics. As Grant Gibson (editor of *Crafts Magazine*) points out, designers Jasper Morrison and Naoto Fukasawa believe that design should be fundamentally understated and that the media has been responsible for encouraging an unnecessary (and usually undesirable) flamboyancy in design causing us to forget that ‘beauty can be found in the most ordinary objects’. However, as Gibson concedes:

On the other is a school of thought, led by a clutch of young Dutch designers, who see design as another form of self-expression. Working on one-off or small batch production pieces, they skate around the fringes of industrial design, fine art and craft. So while Morrison admits that he thinks ‘design is in danger of becoming something false and out of tune with real life, when it could be doing something worthwhile’, Job Smeets says he hopes ‘our work is a little bit artistic because otherwise it would be a little bit boring, it wouldn’t show anything, it wouldn’t be expressive’²³.

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition ‘Telling Tales’ uses the term ‘design artists’ when referring to the designer-makers involved in the exhibition – an increasingly popular term. However we might ask whether this kind of work really represents an attempt by designers to engage “art”. Does developing some sense of narrative within the

²² Dormer, P., *The Culture of Crafts*, Manchester University Press, 1997, p.131.

²³ Gibson, G., <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/crafts-magazine/reviews/view/2009/telling-tales-at-the-va?from=/crafts-magazine/reviews/list/2009>

object necessarily bring it closer to the condition of art? Or is designer Hartmut Esslinger fundamentally right when he suggests something which is of practical use can never be art²⁴?

This discussion around art and design remains crucial in part because it helps question the hierarchies we find (although these boundaries are blurring) and it helps to show that a designed object can be far more than just functional. Interestingly enough, in this connection, Galerie SO (London) subsequently invited me to participate in an exhibition with the working title 'Multiples: Between Art & Design' (November 2010) – an opportunity for this designer-maker / designer-artist to contribute to the ongoing discussion and promote his view that *if* we feel the need for a classification then design *can* be compared with (and likened to) art in terms of its contribution to the social realm and the cultural sphere; i.e. the concern with proportion, line and detail; the aesthetic experience of handling and/or contemplating it.

It seems manifestly true that we continue to ask more of our objects – something beyond the modernist idea of pure function - and Niederer is right to talk of a new category of *performative objects*:

The realisation of the performative object on a physical-operational level is thought to be based on a modification of function and further, on a disruption of function to cause questioning, reflection and creative action based on a disruption of the normal pattern²⁵.

This modification and/or disruption of function can be seen as an interesting device to raise questions around purpose, function, convention etc (elements of which can be seen in the design of 'spoonglass' for example). However, such intellectual demands raise other questions. Perhaps our everyday objects are not suited to such purposes? We have gallery and museum spaces for "demanding" objects (performative objects if you will) but don't we also need *un-demanding* objects to fulfil their practical everyday purpose

²⁴ Hartmut Esslinger (former Apple Designer), Founder of Frog Design and Professor for Design in Vienna, *Der Spiegel* Magazine, Nr.17, 26th April 2010, p.72.

²⁵ Niederer, C., *Designing the Performative Object: a study in designing mindful interaction through artefacts*, PhD Falmouth College of Art, 2004, p.73.

and allow us to go about our ordinary lives? In connection with the V&A exhibition for example, Jasper Morrison is surely right in claiming space for ‘understated’ design (objects he has called supernormal²⁶) with attributes such as simplicity and honesty - although by using the term “honest” we already add human, ethical attributes to design and complicate the issue. As Richard Sennett notes in “The Craftsman”:

This humanizing language (has) bred in turn one of the great dualisms of modern material consciousness: the contrast between naturalness and artificiality²⁷.

Although some of the designs produced in the course of this PhD for the series *By Chance or By Design* were positioned by ‘Design Today’ in this narrative category, my strict intention was that my objects should only tell the story of their purpose and meaning in a design context – *and no other*. This (in hindsight) was undoubtedly naïve on the part of this author. It is inevitable that such objects (any objects) will draw a range of different interpretations. This seems particularly true of hemDing (see fig.22 below) whose success seems perhaps best explained for the very reason that it does seem to touch so directly upon a range of ideas and issues currently circulating within the design field around nature and artifice, the past and the present and ecology.



fig. 22. Original *hemDing*, with vintage wooden D-shaped spade handle and porcelain bowl. ø460mm, H: 360mm, 2008

Rather like the P4P, ‘hemDing’ began life by bringing together two disparate fragments – in this case part of a vintage wooden D-shaped spade handle with a large porcelain bowl. Why is ‘hemDing’ relevant to spoons? Spades and spoons are different in scale and

²⁶Supernormal dialogue (2006), interview by Fumiko Ito, Axis Gallery, Tokyo; Jasper Morrison & Naoto Fukasawa; ‘it’s not easy to write a formula for the Super Normal object, I’m not sure it can even be planned. An object becomes Super Normal through use.’ <http://www.jaspermorrison.com/html/4996075.html>

²⁷ Sennett, R., *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008, pp.135-136.

purpose, but nonetheless they have similarities: a spade is used for nurturing the ground and that which grows in it. It is used for scooping, lifting and turning. A spoon is used for the consumption of food grown in the ground and nurtured by the spade. A spade is utilised in the field or garden rather than in the household. However, the word ‘utensil’, derived from ‘utilised’, is more commonly associated with the tools used in the preparation and consumption of food.

All three objects P4P, the spoonglass and hemDing were constructed according to the same principle - a vessel with a handle attached. A scaled down version of a spade could almost be used as a spoon. Now in production by Thorsten van Elten, hemDing is produced in two versions: one with a vintage handle (like the P4P design with its antique spoon handle) and the other design with a new handle. Both handle designs are the same. In relationship to the current trend in design, it is perhaps no surprise that the “vintage look” which more viscerally references tradition and symbolically embodies a nostalgic vision of the past has proved to be the commercially more successful – though (inevitably) there is only a limited and diminishing supply of these old handles.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where ‘hemDing’ is also sold, describes the design as one of a kind in which:

Cool-sighted functionalism meets reinterpretation and wry humour to create domestic objects that sensually occupy a much more thoughtful table landscape than the usual²⁸.

The French magazine *Le Figaro* (Madame) referred to ‘hemDing’ as ‘neurustique;’ and the Parisian outlet *Benisom*²⁹ placed it alongside *Droog Designs*³⁰ in their category ‘Simply Ecolo’. Other descriptive terms attached to ‘hemDing’ included ‘fundamental’ and ‘metropolurbaine’³¹.

²⁸ www.mcachicago.org; citing Simon Fraser; curator, jeweller, critic & teacher.

²⁹ www.bensimon.com (autour du monde)

³⁰ www.droog.com, established in 1993, “.....Droog stands for a luxury of content and experience that change perspective on daily life....”

³¹ www.madame.lefigaro.fr

While all of these terms in large part represent the rhetoric of advertising, it seems clear that ‘hemDing’ has been successful in playing to the postmodern fascination with *nostalgia* and the sense of an Arcadian past when we were much closer to nature. The ‘hemDing’, perhaps even more than the P4P, seems to evoke this idealised relationship in a particularly poetic and resonant way, perhaps because of the charged contact provided by the worn and warm feel of its vintage wooden D-handle. It is where ‘handling’ and a sense of the haptic seem to have come together with ideas around nature and artifice in a particularly vibrant way - that would seem to best explain the success of this object and its postmodern credentials. In this sense ‘hemDing’ can be seen to stand in direct relation to Andrea Branzi’s postmodern collection of so-called ‘Domestic Animals’. According to Branzi:

The style in which these objects have been created can be described as ‘Neoprimitive’ in the sense that they make use of archetypal symbols and materials, in conformity with a canon of myth, to produce emotional effects. Hybrid objects, i.e., objects produced by a mix of technological means and formal codes³².

Branzi’s term ‘Neo-Primitive’ may have fallen out of favour since the 1980s but his definition of postmodern practice seems as current today as a generation ago.

3.3 1 Part Chef + 4 Parts Design

We perceive an object through our eyes first and instinctively start to interrogate it in order to understand it, after which we might pick it up and use it. Other senses like the haptic (the sense of touch) now help us to more fully understand the object; how it feels, how it works. This sense of touch - the physical experience of touch - is crucial to design. The absolute relationship between spoons and the consumption of food (arguably) made some kind of collaboration with a chef inevitable at some stage in the research around this PhD. ‘1 part chef & 4 parts design’ became the vehicle to explore the possibilities of

³² Branzi, A., *Domestic Animals*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1987 (unpaginated) .

such a collaboration and an ideal platform from which to explore some of the issues that emerged from the work.

The *1 part chef + 4 parts design* event took place at the V&A (fig.23) and Somerset House (fig.24) during London Fashion Week 2009 and involved a collaboration between myself, three fellow designers and a chef³³.



fig. 23/24. *1 part chef + 4 parts design* at the V&A Poynter Room, March 2009 and at Somerset House Salt Room, September 2009

The event was innovative in several ways. For the first time (for this author at least) another designer – in this case a chef – was called upon to respond directly to designs created as part of this research process to initiate his own journey, creating a delicate cuisine around these hitherto speculative objects – as can be seen illustrated below.



fig. 25/26. Both images show food prepared for the author's objects by the chef Roberto Cortez.

³³ *1 part chef*: Roberto Cortez, Santa Barbara, United States, www.robortocortez.com
4 parts designer: furniture designer Tomás Alonso, www.tomas-alonso.com, silversmith and tableware designer Katja Bremkamp, www.katjabremkamp.com, jeweller Elizabeth Callinicos, silversmith and tableware designer Andreas Fabian, www.andreasfabian.eu, all designers are based in the UK.

It was necessary to think in terms of batch production for this event, with numbers determined by the number of guests participating – no easy thing for this designer-maker who has always privileged the one-off object as opposed to batch/mass-produced pieces.

This raises the problem of how we determine value and begs the familiar question around which is of more ‘value’ – the one-off or the serial production? Is there a hierarchy of value between the two - or is this in fact a false construct? This is a subject that has long pre-occupied art and it continues to do so still. Recently in 2007, the question of value and uniqueness has been raised around the durability of Damien Hirst’s work by art historian Petra Lange-Berndt, who asked:

How should one deal with the short-term durability of certain materials? And how does replacement affect the meaning and value of the work³⁴?

The philosopher Walter Benjamin famously commented in 1936 that:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be³⁵.

From my point of view as a designer-maker (perhaps unusually) the notion of uniqueness does not represent any ‘added’ value or any value per se, however it does open up interesting questions around process and the way things are made. All of my early one-off designs had the potential for reproduction (as a result of the techniques employed) although if *I* were tasked with reproducing these objects, I would lose much of the pleasure and joy of making. There is a problem here, as David Pye has noted:

³⁴ In 2004 Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991, hit the headlines when the work was sold to an American collector. However, the media attention did not focus on the selling price alone but on the fact that the shark, once caught in Australia, faced a second death: the original animal was showing advanced signs of decay and Hirst had substituted it with a fresh specimen. Tate’s Online Research Journal, Tate Papers Autumn 2007 by Petra Lange-Berndt.

³⁵ Benjamin, W., *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Transcribed: by Andy Blunden 1998; proofed and corrected Feb. 2005. Source: UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television; <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

Workmanship of the better sort is called, in an honorific way, craftsmanship. Nobody, however, is prepared to say where craftsmanship ends and ordinary manufacture begins³⁶.

If we relate craftsmanship to the creative process (e.g. ‘designing through making’, a term often used in the context of applied arts), then I would argue that the reproduction of an object is (for me) where manufacture begins, however high the level of skill employed or however limited the production.

However to return to ‘1 part chef + 4 parts design’, one of the most acclaimed designs created for this collaborative event took the form of an innovative wine glass. The design began with the idea of transporting liquid to the mouth using the hand as a vessel. It also touched on the notion of how a liquid is used to determine what is horizontal (i.e. the spirit level) and also how liquid follows form and therefore describes form. These deliberations were to result in the design of a spoon made from glass (see fig.27/28) in which the liquid is held in the handle as well as in the bowl. The design was subsequently titled “ghostspoon” because only when it was filled with liquid did the object reveal its inner form³⁷.



fig. 27/28.
‘ghostspoon’,
Pyrex glass,
L: 200mm, 2008

After the event at Somerset House, the critic and writer Corinne Julius suggested that this event ‘all sounds very pretentious’ but conceded that ‘the new implements did create

³⁶ Adamson, G., *The Craft Reader*, Berg, Oxford · New York, 2010, p.43.

³⁷ ‘ghostspoon’ is made from Pyrex; (brand name for thermal shock resistant borosilicate glass).

unusual eating sensations³⁸. The chef Roberto Cortez was more enthusiastic and has subsequently made use of the ghostspoon (in batch productions of 99 pieces) for recent culinary events in Berlin and California:

When it is filled with a liquid, I notice that people hold the ghostspoon with much more care than a glass. It is unfamiliar in a sense but this is important because they come in contact with this element and take time to study the contents and how the liquid comes in contact with the lips, the motion of tilting to empty the contents of the spoon and immediately notice the exact temperature of the liquid.³⁹



fig. 29. ‘ghostspoons’ in use at the *French Laundry*, Nappa Valley, San Francisco, 2010

‘Ghostspoon’ is a work in progress and continues to evolve. The sommelier from the French Laundry in the Nappa Valley has recently suggested that the design could be improved by some sort of ring or mat on the table on which to rest the bowl of the spoon so the contents would be less likely to spill and stain the cloth⁴⁰. Roberto Cortez has had the idea of sealing the liquid poured into the handle of the ghostspoon with a layer of mousse. Serving the ‘ghostspoon’ on a special cloth and on a large plate...the mousse is consumed from the ‘ghostspoon’ bowl with a smaller spoon. As the mousse slowly diminishes, the liquid pours out into the bowl, at which point the ‘ghostspoon’ can be lifted and the remaining liquid contents consumed. While such ideas may well be further

³⁸ Julius, C., *New Food, New Implements, New Sensations*, Crafts, November/December 2009, p.57.

³⁹ Email from Roberto Cortez, 24th February 2010.

⁴⁰ Dennis Kelly (head sommelier), French style American restaurant near San Francisco (Nappa Valley), California, US.

evidence of ‘pretentiousness’ to some critics, surely (on a more positive note) they endorse the value of cross-cultural collaboration of the kind employed by ‘1 part chef & 4 parts design’. In this connection, the collaboration of a chef, a jeweller, a furniture designer, a silversmith and a tableware designer again highlights the fact that an object should not be seen in isolation - it is always part of a larger context in which every element contributes to a holistic synthesis.

As noted in the introduction, this chapter has not sought to offer a chronological account of the research journey nor an exhaustive exhumation of every detail (PhD time-line appended). What this chapter has sought to do is provide an account which helps relate this project and the work of this author to the broad discursive field within which it operates - and in turn seeks to contribute. However, in foregrounding three key moments (the ‘Work in Progress’ exhibition at Gallerie SO (Switzerland 2004), ‘By Chance or by Design’ and the ‘1 part chef & 4 parts design’ events (Somerset House and V&A 2009), it has set aside the project which ultimately (and perhaps unexpectedly) has come to resonate more than any other with this author – namely ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ (2006).

3.4 The Spoon-in-use and ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ (V&A 2006)

As noted earlier, the object out-of-use is stripped of meaning – only in the hands of a user can it become complete. So it was that the spoon-in-use (in its broadest sense) became the key to opening up the idea of “spoonness”. In order to demonstrate the proof of this conviction (in so far as such proof is possible) it seemed that some kind of visual evidence was required which might (in turn) offer a platform for discussion – this idea was ultimately translated into the film ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ and the academic symposium held around it at the V&A in 2006.

The film was inspired in large part by a memorable earlier event. In 2005 I had the opportunity to visit the Biennale in Venice and was particularly impressed by Runa Islam’s film ‘Be the first to see what you see as you see it!’ (2004, courtesy of Jay Jopling, White Cube Gallery, London). The drama of the film was expressed in a very direct and simple way and was fascinating to watch:

‘After toying with the objects, the woman begins gently pushing dishes, cups, and saucers off their stands to smash on the floor’⁴¹.



fig. 30. Still with audience of Runa Islams’ film: *Be the first to see what you see as you see it*, 2004 (picture: AP, www.telegraph.co.uk)

It was clear that it would be hugely interesting to document on film someone using a spoon to ingest food – perhaps some kind of soup. Soup, rather than something solid, made sense because it would require a more pronounced physical awareness of the handling of the spoon in order to move the hot liquid soup safely from the bowl of the spoon into the mouth. Making use of the medium of film not only allowed visual documentation *in real-time* but also offered the possibility of cinematic techniques to rewind, zoom in and out, change the speed or freeze any particular moment. The components needed to create such a film were relatively straightforward. They included a suitable space, lighting, a table, a chair, a table cloth, a spoon, a bowl, the soup and (not least) a ‘diner’.

It was not originally thought necessary for a professional actor to be employed, it was assumed that eating soup was so ordinary a task; it would not present a problem for anyone to ‘perform’ in front of a camera. This was a mistake. It proved difficult to find anyone able to remain ‘natural’ while being filmed eating – which must say something about the importance of etiquette and the vulnerability we experience in having our everyday acts scrutinized.

⁴¹ Janet Owen (curator and writer, Los Angeles) on Runa Islams’ film, shown at the Hammer Museum Exhibition, Los Angeles, 22nd October – 22nd January 2006; http://www.hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/detail/exhibition_id/70

The actor Emilie Chevillon was invited to participate and instructed to walk in shot from the left, sit down, eat the soup and leave the image to the right⁴². The cameraman had instructions to occasionally zoom in very close to the subject, closer than we would normally be to the person we share our meals with⁴³. Emilie was also asked to look into the camera in order to establish eye to eye contact with her audience – much like the eye to eye contact we have when eating with a person sitting opposite to us.

The spoon at issue was shown together with an oversized bowl and a table and chair – the basics of a table setting. Together they created an almost orchestral effect. The lines described by the spoon in the soup whilst eating were reminiscent of drawing, or of the choreography of a dance. The way the actor sometimes struggled with the spoon relative to the oversized bowl was anticipated. However, it quickly became clear that the central issue for Emilie was not so much handling the spoon in the ‘right’ manner but trying to avoid the dripping of the soup. Her whole body language was influenced by this problem. It was almost impossible to avoid dripping the soup as beneath the spoon bowl, the liquid would build up to form a drop which periodically fell back into the bowl.

During the editing of the film, it became clear that what we were to call ‘the drop’ (see fig.32) became the key moment to focus on and we decided to keep the whole film silent, apart from the sound one drop of liquid makes when dripping back into the liquid from which it came⁴⁴. This prompted some further thought to avoid a worst case scenario in which a drop of soup missed the bowl to land on the table cloth or (even worse) on Emilie’s clothes - something which might constitute evidence of ‘bad table manners’ – a sign of social inferiority. Exploring the socio-political realm in this way lay beyond our immediate interest in the manipulation of the spoon.

⁴² Emilie Chevillon, Paris based theatre actress.

⁴³ David Creighton, School of Visual & Communication Arts, Buckinghamshire New University.

⁴⁴ Stephen Partridge, School of Music, Entertainment & Moving Image, Buckinghamshire New University.



fig. 31/32.
Image from
Form (...)
Handlung,
2004
Still from film:
Emilie Eating
Soup, 2006/8

What this film provided was an opportunity to observe the object-in-use rather than out-of-use. It showed the remarkable complexity of handling a spoon – involving not just the transportation of a liquid from A to B, but the ‘how’ of transporting it. The film highlighted the intimacy of using a spoon, the struggle to avoid the drip - and beyond that the struggle of trying to appear ‘well-mannered’.

The film represents one person’s ‘interpretation’ of a spoon in use in a specific and contrived everyday situation – this is readily admitted. However, it also represented a performance in which the spoon (in use) played a key role. The spoon (or more precisely the spoon-in-use) became the vehicle through which was revealed insights into social status and filmic performance – and in complicity with the actress, the spoon also became the star and centre frame.

Films are useful. They are not only a means of documentation but also a means of visualising an object-in-use. While the objects described above (the P4P, Ghostspoon & hemDing) enabled me to materialise platonic aspects of ‘spoonness’, ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ enabled the visualisation of what I have called the spoon-in-use. Together they (arguably) represent the closest we can get to understanding this quality of ‘spoonness’.

Following the completion of the film, the critic Helen Clifford and I invited a select group of people to attend a symposium at the V&A⁴⁵, the only requirement being that they bring their own spoons and eat soup and engage in some discussion about its use and the film 'Emilie Eating Soup'. The collection of spoons brought to this event was diverse and the criteria for selection varied - some very personal, some chosen with design considerations to the fore and others choosing to bring along spoons made by the participants themselves. In some cases the handle of the spoon chosen proved too long to take soup (see image below) or the size of the spoon bowl proved too shallow to keep the soup warm whilst eating. In one case the spoon bowl proved too small to eat at an appropriate pace and finish the soup on time, its owner finding themselves in the uncomfortable situation of being observed by others while eating soup which had long since gone cold.



fig. 33. *Soup* at the V&A Symposium, Dr. Helen Clifford handling a spoon designed and made by Simon Fraser, 2006

Clearly the different sizes and depths of the spoon bowls had a stronger impact on the dynamic of the meal than the varying shapes of handle designs. We can learn to handle over or undersized spoon handles but it seems more difficult to eat our soup from a spoon bowl which sits outside the parameters of a standard sized tablespoon bowl. This somewhat mundane observation may well explain why, over time, the shape and the length of a spoon handle has undergone a more radical change than the size of the spoon bowl – something that had not previously occurred to this designer and maker of spoons.

⁴⁵ *Soup at the V&A* was held on 23rd February 2006. A collaboration with Helen Clifford and 11 invited guests: R.Batchelor, P.Binns, K.Bremkamp, E.Callinicos, H.Clifford, S.Fraser, S.ten Hompel, M.Mathias, M.Rowe, H.Stofer and D.Taylor.

A short debate around the table focused on the question: Do we “eat” soup with a spoon or do we “drink” soup from a spoon? The answers varied along different social (and national) lines. Some participants felt that this also would depend on the consistency of the soup. No consensus was found – another surprise to this author. However, one conclusion was shared - as much as we may begin by theorizing about spoons, we cannot ultimately avoid the lapse into general socialising that inevitably results from having food and drink on the table. In truth, this event didn’t go well – and this was in no small part the fault of the author. On reflection, it would have been more sensible to have shown ‘Emilie Eating Soup’ at the beginning of the symposium (rather than at the end) to initiate discussion and shape the following debate, forestalling what (in the event) turned out to be a genial but unfocussed session.



fig. 34. *Emilie Eating Soup* shown at the *Soup* symposium at the Victoria & Albert Museum, 2006

3.5 A Reflective Evaluation of Practice - Led Investigations

Reflecting on the designs developed during this research and their reception in the public domain, it is now apparent that minor changes in detail and materials would have led to different outcomes – such is (perhaps) the lot of all artists, designers and makers.

One very simple example relates to the design of the P4P. Professor emeritus of Visual Design Peter Jenny for example has written about the importance of the ‘invisible’ - the

thing beneath the surface⁴⁶. Jenny uses the example of a jug which though half emerged in milk, still remains recognizable as a jug. In the case of the P4P, although the design would appear to reference spoons clearly enough through the shape of its handle and the accompanying monogram, not everyone has recognised what seemed to this author an obvious reference. Leaving a small part of the spoon-bowl visible at the end of the handle would have helped the viewing audience better make that important connection and so read the references embedded there.

Similarly, titles and names are useful tools to explain an object but nomenclature remains problematic. As Gray and Malins noted:

... the ability to communicate verbally and visually are equally important. However, we have yet to experience and be convinced by purely visual argument. The self-explanatory object/artefact constituting a complete research report remains a challenge (Friedmann, 2002). On the other hand, the inclusion of different kinds of visual evidence as components of an argument is entirely reasonable⁴⁷.

It is often argued (and this author would largely agree) that *No name = No label = No baggage*. However, the name 'P4P' (derived from the fuller title *Petits Fours Plate* and somehow more abstract, more suggestive of a multiple commodity) certainly seemed to resonate with its audience. The 'hemDing' design for Thorsten van Elten Ltd (2008), the name of which was on the one hand an adaptation of the place where the handles were sourced (Hemdingen in Germany) while on the other hand included the word 'ding' which translates from the German as 'thing', similarly proved compelling to its audience. Incorporating the German word 'Ding' created a nice ironic reference to Kant's famous so-called *noumena*⁴⁸. 'Das Ding an sich' (the thing-in-itself) is a phrase Heidegger borrowed for his iconic essay 'The Thing' in which he also used the example of a jug to

⁴⁶ Jenny, P., *Das Wort, Das Spiel, Das Bild* (the word, the game, the image), Hochschulverlag AG an der ETH Zürich, 1996, p.16.

⁴⁷ Gray, C., Malins, J., *Visualizing Research*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham, 2004, p.95.

⁴⁸ *Noumena* - in the philosophy of Kant, the thing-in-itself as opposed to what Kant called the *phenomenon* – the thing as it appears to an observer. Kant claimed that man's speculative reason can only know phenomena and can never penetrate to the noumena;
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/420847/noumenon>

demonstrate that the essence of an object lies in our experience of its function⁴⁹. In the case of the jug, Heidegger suggests this means *holding* and *giving* (*holding* the liquid that has been poured in - and *giving* by pouring out the liquid). For hemDing this means *holding* (the pastries or fruit placed on the platter) and *offering* (to family, guests etc.) rather than giving.

On a broader note, the experience of working in collaborative projects and events also highlighted the value of working with others in terms of detail. For instance, designing a drinking vessel in the form of a spoon not only succeeded in suggesting new possibilities around innovative eating and drinking implements but confirmed that (in the final analysis) the user expects highly practical utensils which will allow them to focus on the pleasure of consuming food and drink, rather than struggling to avoid spillage. Such practical criticism for example helped improve the design of the ‘spoonglass’ (fig.35); changing the small wine glass bowl of the original for the bowl of a much larger brandy glass made the ‘spoonglass’ easier to handle, allowing the user to feel that they did not have to handle it quite so carefully in order to avoid spilling its contents across the table.



fig. 35. Adjusted ‘spoonglass’ with food prepared by Roberto Cortez, L: 300mm, 2008

However, it should be noted here that although the intention throughout has been to design objects with the user in mind and achieve an acceptable degree of functionality, this has not been the main purpose of the PhD. Similarly, the PhD has not sought to pursue critical acclaim, please the gallery audience or meet the expedient demands of commercial design. Put simply, it has been my intention in this PhD to offer a

⁴⁹ Heidegger, M., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York, 1971, pp.165-186.

philosophic insight into the concept of what I have called “spoonness” through the design and exhibition of a range of objects relating to the spoon and made transparent through this thesis – *and by so doing contribute to new knowledge in the field.*

As observed in the essay ‘Design in Mind’ in 2009:

Increasingly, the act of designing is considered to be or involve some kind of knowledge production. This directly follows from the type of knowledge designing relies on, which is practice-based and tacit, (i.e. embedded within the very act of designing).....The notion of intentionality stems from late-nineteenth-century German philosophy, and refers to mental activities that are *directed at* objects or processes in the world. These activities result in beliefs, hopes, and desires that are *about* the world but not, strictly speaking, physical properties of the world⁵⁰.

The spoon is a domestic and democratic implement familiar to everyone and it is of prime importance to me that my work reaches a broad audience. To this extent, the research that underpins the thesis has been inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural in its approach. It has taken varied forms and reached out to different audiences and by so doing constitutes a contribution to knowledge that is not focussed at any specific target group but across the field - the layman is as important to me as the collector, the critic or the commercial client.

Returning to Duchamp’s quote posed at the beginning of this section, if Duchamp is right in saying that the viewer adds to the creative act (or indeed completes it) and if the viewer also interprets the objects from his own view, what does this mean for the object itself? Will the same object always have different meanings to different users and in different contexts? Will it ever be truly possible to grasp the entirety of an object if we follow Duchamp’s statement to its natural conclusion?

⁵⁰ Heylighen, A., Cavallin, H., Bianchin, M., *Design in Mind*, Design Issues, Volume 25, Number 1, Winter 2009, pp.94-95.

Conclusion

Reflecting back on the research journey that underpins this thesis, two quotes captured the spirit of what has been of greatest importance. Aristotle: ‘All men by nature desire knowledge’¹; the second is from Onno Boekhoudt (tutor, Royal College of Art between 1990 and 2002): ‘To break down a wall is to build up a view’².

This ‘need’ to know, to understand, is fundamental to us all and remains the driving force behind this work. Finding what lies behind the ‘wall’ has been what matters most; what lies ‘beneath the skin’, understanding the ‘thing in itself’ – unpicking the assumptions and preconceptions, built up over time, by generations. In discussing key issues relating to spoons, clarifying and re-auditing existing knowledge and reconsidering long familiar concepts regarding the spoon and its context has been as important as generating new thinking around the idea of *spoonness*. In short, this thesis has argued that there are fundamental aspects *all* spoons have in common (whatever their age, material or shape) which together constitute what might be called their *spoonness*:

1. They consist of a hollow or bowl-like form *connected to* a handle. (i.e. they consist of three elements – bowl/handle/connection).
2. When in use one has to judge their weight and the level of material in the bowl (particularly so with liquid – which follows form) and balance the spoon accordingly (i.e. consider the spoon-in-use).
3. Their main purpose is to transport food in a socially acceptable way over the short distance from plate or bowl to mouth (i.e. they operate within the culture of eating).

In platonic terms, while the quality of ‘spoonness’ can exist outside of the object, the aim of much of the research which underpins this PhD has been to see if ‘spoonness’ could be better understood through its material manifestation (through visual, functional or conceptual reference) in artefacts which have not necessarily taken the form of an

¹ Knowles, E., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 6th edition, Aristoteles, p.25., Aristotle, Greek philosopher, 384 – 322 BC.

² Onno Boekhoudt, internationally renowned Dutch jeweller and teacher (1944 – 2002).

archetypical spoon and may not appear to bear any immediate or obvious resemblance to it.

The artefacts which follow (for example) were all created in the course of this PhD to refer to one or more of the individual aspects listed above, although it should be said that these aspects are interlinked and can not always be treated separately.

1. bowl and handle
2. connections
3. liquid follows form
4. spirit level
5. balance

Although these artefacts are not ‘spoons’ and don’t always take the shape of a spoon, they do ‘talk about’ spoonness and it was the search for ‘spoonness’ (spoonness as the research tool) rather than spoons *per se* which opened up the possibility of creating these new artefacts. And just as we can find ‘roundness’ in a range of objects, ‘spoonness’ can equally be found in objects which otherwise (visually & functionally) might seem to bear little or no direct relationship to spoons, opening our eyes to properties in objects *which we may well have not previously noticed*. While ideally all the artefacts illustrated here need to be *handled* to fully understand them, in the context of this thesis such images must serve as best they can as an aid to discussion and a means of dissemination – a problem familiar to art history as Mònica Gaspar³ has noted:

‘An *imaginary museum*, following the concept developed by André Malraux⁴, feeds itself with images, i.e. from that, which has been documented in a picture. From his point of view, art history can be understood as a fragmentary recollection of that what can be photographed’⁵.

³ Mònica Gaspar, art historian, curator.

⁴ André Malraux, French novelist (1901 – 1976).

⁵ Gaspar, M., *The portable Museum in BYL*, Henk (ed.), *Arte Fact*, Proceedings of the International Symposium Jewellery – Wearables / Ceramics – Objects, Antwerp: Sint Lukas Art Academy, 2006, pp.47-51.

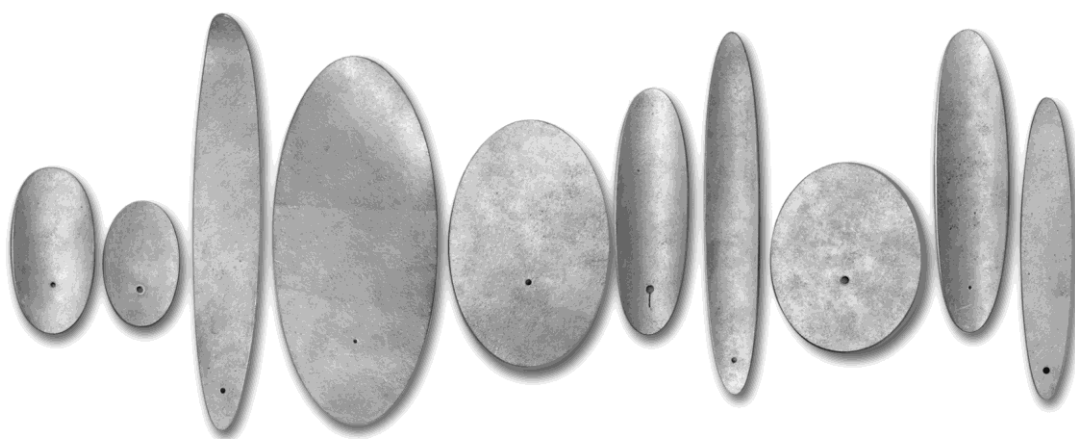


fig. 36. Inspired by the origin of the English word ‘spoon’, the objects above explore basic principles of creating scoop and spoon forms by employing single curves (see page 29).

**spoons and
scoops**

Material:
999 silver

max. L: 140 mm
max. H: 10 mm
max. W: 58 mm

2006



fig. 37. Animated by the form of the human head, the above object highlights the necessity of edges to create a vessel form and the significance of connections: in this case between bowl and handle.

form

Material:
999 silver

L: 330 mm
H: 13 mm
W: 175 mm

2004



fig. 38. The above object visualises the spoon form by creating a patinated copper skin silhouetting the negative impression of a spoon shape.

oval

Material:
copper

L: 241mm
H: 32 mm
W: 85mm

2003



fig. 39. The above object materialises the notion of ‘spoonness’ by focusing on the idea of balance, spirit level, bowl and handle.

wooden form

Material:
American walnut

L: 300 mm
H: 250 mm
W: 250 mm

2008



fig. 40. The above image shows a ‘closed’ spoon bowl shape, creating a flat surface and balancing on one point. The resulting form can also be seen to represent the materialised content of a spoon bowl.

spoon bowl II

Material:
gilding metal
(Cu + Zn alloy)

L: 407mm
H: 70 mm
W: 290 mm

2004



fig. 41. Disconnecting a spoon handle from a spoon bowl results in the spoon bowl tilting and thereby changing its direction and meaning: from a spoon bowl facing the individual user in a table setting to a bowl with an offering gesture. The felt insert creates a reference to the removed spoon handle.

spoon bowl I

Material:
925 Silver
felt insert

L: 403 mm
H: 70 mm
W: 294 mm

2003/4



fig. 42. In one of the above Corian spoon bowl shaped objects, the spoon handle has been removed and a loop attached to ‘hold’ the object. In the other, the inserted Corian dot has been inserted to introduce a reference to the former contact point of a spoon bowl with a flat surface, by which position and balance are emphasised and questioned.

spoon bowl IV

Material:
Corian
Silicon

L: 411 mm
H: 80 mm
W: 295 mm

2008



fig. 43. The above two forms explore the movement of liquid in a ‘spoon-in-use’. In the upper form liquid can run freely, whereas in the second form it is stopped by a separating wall, helping clarify the distinction between bowl and handle.

two scoops

Material:
925 silver
stainless steel
cream

L: 223 mm
H: 25 mm
W: 16 mm

2003



fig. 44. The concept behind the above experiment was to use liquid in a dining setting to create forms which embody ‘spoonness’ and which (potentially) could be developed into spoon designs. The forms are taken from a tilted soup bowl filled with plaster; the liquid plaster partly running onto the rim of the soup bowl.

plaster forms

Material:
plaster

max. L: 120 mm
max. H: 24 mm
max. W: 65 mm

2003



fig. 45. Liquid follows form: filled with liquid the above object reveals its inner form. The hollow handle can be seen to create direct reference to the hand as a vessel (see page 64).

ghost-spoon

Material:
glass (Pyrex)
milk

L: 200 mm
H: 36 mm
W: 47 mm

2008



fig. 46. A table spoon holds a ‘mouth’ sized quantity. The above Perspex bowl relies on the fact that liquid follows form and already separates its content into table spoon size portions.

bowl

Material:
plastic (Perspex)

Ø 215 mm
H: 45 mm

2004



fig. 47. The above image shows a 17th century silver spoon handle attached onto a shallow porcelain plate to render it able to function as a serving dish. The monograph on the silver handle as well as the marks of use suggests a particular history as well as personal ownership (see page 53).

P4P

Material:
porcelain
813 silver

Ø 220 mm
H: 175 mm

2006



fig. 48. Bowl and handle: the objects combine recycled porcelain chemistry bowls with decorative handles of found silver spoons transforming the spoon from a utensil into a distinct (drinking) vessel.

spoon-cups

Material:
porcelain (porcelain
manufacturer
Haldenwanger)
800 silver

Ø 61 mm
L: 198 mm

2006



fig. 49. The shape of the liquid in the above 'spoon-glass' can be seen to create a direct reference to the shape of liquid in a spoon bowl (see page 56).

spoon-glass

Material:

wine glass bowl (glass
manufacturer Riedel)
bone, 813 silver

Ø 80 mm

L: 285 mm

2006/7



fig. 50. The above image shows the adjusted spoon-glass. For functional purposes the original wine glass has been replaced by a large brandy glass and the connection between bowl and handle by a more prominent detail.

spoon-glass

Material:

Brandy glass (glass
manufacturer LSA)
plastic (Polyurethane)
stainless steel

Ø 115 mm

L: 300 mm

2008



fig. 51. The above one-off hemDing makes use of a vintage spade handle to reference to tradition and symbolically embody a nostalgic vision (see page 59).

**hemDing
(vintage)**

Material:
porcelain
ash wood

Ø 460 mm
H: 320 mm

2008



fig. 52. The above image (hemDing in production with a new spade handle) shows how 'reading' an object may be influenced by the context in which it is represented.

**hemDing
(new)**

Material:
porcelain
ash wood

Ø 460 mm
H: 320 mm

2008



fig. 53. The above image shows a rim disconnected from a bowl to form a separate bowl handle and - at the same time - a place setting.

Rim:Ring:Handle

Material:

porcelain (porcelain
manufacturer
Wedgwood)
Brilliant silver

Ø 300 mm

H: 55 mm

2007



fig. 54. The above ‘unfinished’ objects with disconnected spoon bowls and handles were used to explore the notion of table settings and their delineation of space and form through lines, walls and surfaces (see page 48).

**samples of
work in
progress**

Material:
copper, plastic
(high impact polystyrene),
plaster

Ø 220 mm
200 mm²

2003



fig. 55. The above objects variously focus on the idea of the ‘hollow’ vessel, how bowl and handle are defined through a separating wall, touch (the parts not covered in red are the parts in contact with the hand or the mouth) and finally the spoon-in-use (by making use of an unusual flexible connection between bowl and handle).

selection of spoons

Material:
porcelain, 925 silver
rubber, stainless steel,
sponge

max. L: 223 mm
max. H: 25 mm
max. W: 35 mm

2004

4.0 Contribution to Knowledge

In 2000 (two years before the registration of this PhD) the author contributed to an exhibition of spoons at The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh, curated by Amanda Game, exhibiting a series of utensils which fulfilled one particular function of the spoon – stirring¹. At the same time the series sought to express the development of a spoon through visual means and took on the title of *Birth of a Spoon* (fig.56). The first piece in the series had the potential to become either a spoon, a fork or a knife. The second piece in the series had only two possibilities, either a spoon or a fork. The third piece was clearly on the cusp of becoming a spoon – it could become nothing else.

In reflection, what was most interesting is how the second piece resembled the silhouette of a wine glass at that point where the bowl meets the stem, reminding me that a spoon is also a vessel which holds liquid – and this ability to serve as a ‘vessel’ is also one of the defining functions of a spoon. This insight was conveyed to me by the smallest of details, i.e. the line delineated by the transition of the bowl of the wine glass into its stem.



fig. 56. *Birth of a Spoon*,
Sterling silver,
L: 143mm, 2000

Research operates in a continuum and this PhD represents a continuation of what has gone before. In the example above, the connection between spoon and wineglass rendered visual in 2000 is something that was to resurface in the course of this PhD in the form of the ‘spoonglass’ (see fig.49). By the same token, the submission of the PhD and this summary can only represent a temporary pause in a process of experimentation that will continue beyond it.

The nature of a written thesis perhaps inevitably forces the use of titles and subtitles, signs without which it would have little shape. Evolving titles employed during the

¹ The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, exhibition: *spoons*, 9th September - 4th October 2000.

course of developing the text (for instance, a section originally titled ‘The Bowl and the Handle’ became ‘From Hand to Mouth’) signalled what was to become an increasingly broad approach to the question of what it is that constitutes a spoon, an approach which examines the spoon on three different (but interdependent) levels:

1. the physical appearance of the object we call a ‘spoon’,
2. the object in our hand – i.e. the object-in-use
3. the non-physical object - i.e. the platonic concept in our mind.

It became very clear that some kind of new term would prove useful in helping rethink and redefine the spoon in a new and more holistic way – this became the term ‘spoonness’. *Spoonness* became a way of thinking about the simple but highly complex question ‘what is a spoon?’ or to be more precise – ‘what is a spoon, when in use?’ – i.e. what I came to refer to as the *spoon-in-use*. Consequently, some of the objects made during the course of this project bear a more direct resemblance to spoons than others. Some (for example fig.52) lay emphasis rather more on the relationship of ‘the bowl and the handle’, others explore the *spoon-in-use* (fig.43) or the idea of *spoonness* (for example fig.39).

Although the spoon is a familiar object, curiously enough, it is not often used in pictograms. Pictograms are interesting because they rely upon archetypal images of familiar objects. What is curious is that there appears to be no ‘sign’ for a spoon in common usage. The pictogram representing a restaurant or café for example shows a knife and fork only - although we can eat almost anything with a spoon if the food is prepared appropriately. Perhaps the spoon is so familiar and such an ever-present item that it has become invisible - so invisible as to be unable to communicate or represent our eating culture, in and of itself. The McDonald advert shown in figure 57, illustrates how two opposing eating cultures co-exist at one and the same time in contemporary culture: on the one hand, the very basic use of our fingers to eat and on the other, the use of a fork - part of a whole complex social system employing a range of eating utensils.



fig. 57.
McDonald Advert,
CCP Heye
Werbeagentur
GmbH, Vienna,
Austria, 2003

Materialising the concept ‘spoonness’ required the development of a series of conceptual objects, some of which served no practical purpose or were immediately recognizable as related to the familiar spoons in everyday use. That said, it was never the intention of this project to add another spoon to the vast number of designs already in existence. New designs will appear and disappear - some sooner rather than later - but the concept that is here called *spoonness* (this author at least argues) will last. The exhibition (and subsequent reception) of objects created during the course of this PhD project were intended to provide a theoretical framework through which to mediate this concept of *spoonness* - and thereby provide a distinct and new contribution to knowledge in the field.

This research journey and all that it has entailed has been very liberating. In the context of having been trained as a silversmith, it has served to open up a range of possibilities which have gone far beyond the boundaries of that discipline and the limitation of its traditional materials and techniques. It has also seen this designer-maker trace the arc of the C20th in the sense of completing an exhilarating personal journey from partially reconstructed modernist to a late (perhaps very late) postmodernist. It has also served to point up the complexity of objects we might think of as utterly familiar and wholly understood; so absorbed into the fabric of everyday life as to have become ‘invisible’ – no longer worthy of comment. In teasing apart such assumptions and highlighting the importance of thinking beyond disciplinary lines, the thesis has also contributed to discourse in the field – a contribution which would have been profoundly limited if it had only explored spoons in terms of the craft of the silversmith, from a materials and process point of view. In this connection, the following list identifies some of the ways in which the research which underpins this PhD has intersected the field and its related ideas and issues:

- craft and the business of making
- the issue of materials
- the nature of the object
- the problematic nature of titles and terms of reference
- the art / design divide
- the value of exhibition and audience
- the virtue of cross-cultural / interdisciplinary practice

The philosophical nature of this research is what opened up the possibilities of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary practices and has in turn helped contribute to new knowledge relevant to the art and design field. By opening up these possibilities within my own practice, above all it is hoped this PhD will help other practitioners find ways of looking beyond the parameters of their discipline.

4.1 Post Doctoral Work

As a result of the journey undertaken for this PhD, this interest in tableware and cutlery has evolved to centre around larger questions to do with our culture and is no longer focussed on one specific material or the discipline of silversmithing. This kind of freedom marks a moment (for this author at least) that parallels that achieved by the studio jewellery world a generation ago, when it first started to re-examine in the 1970s ‘what jewellery might be’² and rid itself of a preoccupation with precious metals and stones. Following the lead of Gijs Bakker³ (co-founder of Droog Design) contemporary Dutch designers like Helena Jongerius seem to have no problem working across disciplines in term of materials, processes and context. Their work ranges from jewellery to furniture and product design, using a range of production methods: from the hand made and low-tech, to high-tech commercial production. Similarly, in recent years, academic institutions in countries like Holland and Italy have broadened the reach of their traditional material based product design courses to teach courses labelled ‘Man and

² ‘What jewellery might be’ is an expression used by Jeweller David Watkins in the 70’s and still quoted in relation to his work to date. <http://www.artaurea.com/magazin/5-david-watkins>

³Baker, G., <http://www.gijsbakker.com/publications.html>

Well-Being’, ‘Man and Living’ or ‘Man and Identity’⁴. At the Domus Academy in Milan, a Masters Programme is now run under the title ‘Master in Interior and Living Design’ which aims:

.... to explore all aspects that concern design: from the most technical to the most intuitive ones.....to contemplate various nuances of meaning in the words to live, to dwell, to use...⁵

In terms of spoons, it is this author’s view that there is little genuinely useful literature to be found relating to the subject and even Jasper Morrison’s recent book offers little more than a series of images of spoons⁶. Surely there is space for a publication which is not generated by a design historian, a gallery owner, a collector or a chef, but is written from the perspective of a designer and maker. A publication around the notion of *spoonness*, drawing upon this thesis but aimed rather more broadly across the field, might well elevate our fundamental understanding of spoons and inspire other practitioners to rethink their approach to traditional product designers and by so doing, further contribute to knowledge in the field. The philosophical nature of the research which informs this PhD has looked beyond the flux of fashion and the orbit of the gallery and may well play to an audience interested in a more reflective account of material culture from a practitioner.

Finally, there are several other potentially interesting possibilities which have begun to emerge from this PhD. They include:

- Further collaboration with Roberto Cortez (chef) to develop more innovative utensils which will impact upon the display and consumption of food
- A collaborative project with an established design studio on tableware⁷.
- Research into why we use different sizes of spoons/cutlery and what determines those different sizes⁸.

⁴ Samples of titles of design departments / courses at the Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherland.

⁵ <http://www.domusacademy.com>

⁶ Morrison, J., *A Book of Spoons*, Imschoot, Gent, Belgium, 1997.

⁷ Design Studio based in the north of Hamburg (Germany) with international clients such as JOOP!, WMF, Rosenthal, Zwilling, RAK Porcelain and others. <http://www.doerfel-design.de/?view=profil>

⁸ Ferreri, M., *Cutlery*, Corraini Editore s.r.l., Mantova, Giorgetti S.p.A., Milan, 1997, p.20. ‘...have you ever wondered why table cutlery is larger than fruit cutlery, even though the hand and the mouth are the

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

It is in the nature of research that it does not only try to find answers but inevitably it also raises further questions. Such questions include:

- What is the status of the functional object when it is *out - of - use*? This is an intriguing philosophic question.
- What (more) might be developed around the idea of ‘connections’; conceptual connections as well as material connections? There are opportunities for an interesting exhibition here.
- What (more) might be said about titles and terms of reference & the value of exhibition and audience? There is the possibility of a useful research paper here.
- What (more) might be said around the object + the suffix ‘ness’? Could the philosophical approach of this PhD be applied to other everyday objects, for example the chair and the idea of *chairness*?

It is hoped that all of these possibilities help point up the usefulness of this PhD and put the question of its contribution to knowledge in the field beyond doubt.

4.3 Final Thoughts

The spoon is part of a whole symphony of objects that we use on the table to eat and drink. Just how fundamental the spoon is to our lives is illustrated by the following controversial image, used in an advertising campaign by Benetton (see figure 58):

same size, and a piece of apple is no smaller than a slice of meat? I believe that the explanation lies in the fact that the size of cutlery was tailored to suit the size of the plate...’ This still needs to be proved.



fig. 58. United Colors of Benetton and World Food Programme Communication Campaign 2003, www/Benetton.com/food

Spoons may be small and they might have become so familiar that we have stopped raising fundamental questions about their meaning - questions which go far beyond ergonomics, aesthetics and practical function. However both as a means of consuming food and of expressing ourselves socially - at home and in the public realm - the importance the spoon holds in our lives should not be underestimated.

What this thesis sought to express may well go beyond words, beyond objects and beyond imagery. However, words, objects and imagery are the only means we have to create an understanding which might (for the purposes of this PhD) be defined as a 'contribution to new knowledge' and to what might be regarded as a more fundamental understanding of what a spoon is and what *spoonness* is - *whatever its material manifestation*. Words and images without objects would not be enough to explain it. Arguably an object without words or images would not be enough to explain it. This is why this PhD must be viewed in its totality and cannot rest upon the thesis alone. However, it is hoped that this thesis has achieved new insights into those concerns that preoccupy the maker and shape the creative process, articulating that which might otherwise be articulated through (and subsumed in) the making of the object itself and more importantly still, helped open up this author's creative practice to scrutiny and further comment.

Finally - on a personal note - I would like to conclude this thesis with a quote from Angelika Schrobsdorff, who when interviewed about her life, said:

‘I can’t write anymore. I dare not write, I dissect every word, and therefore it disappears’⁹.

During the research, I often found it was necessary to ask how far can one go in dissecting a word, an object, a detail: This is a question that will be familiar to every maker. We must remember that an object consist of several elements which, brought together, comprise a whole which constitutes something over and above its constituent parts – it is not just the sum of them, it is always something more¹⁰. I believe the same can be said of this PhD project: with its various objects, images, observations and texts, it constitutes a historic episode for me, in which the whole has come to be so much more than just the sum of its parts.

⁹ Angelika Schrobsdorff (German author), interview published in *Stern Magazine*, issue 39, 2008, Hamburg, Germany, pp. 150-154.

¹⁰ Knowles, E., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 6th edition, Aristoteles, p.25.

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<http://www.jaspermorrison.com/html/4996075.html>
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Klingenmuseum (Solingen, Germany)

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6.0 PhD Time Line



2002

November 2002 registration of PhD at BCUC / Buckinghamshire New University and Brunel University

2003

Began practical research work for PhD



Expanded Cutlery for Airlines Collection - new focus on spoons or spoon like objects, in a range of materials & for a range of purposes

2004

Meeting Points : 25 years of Jewellery at ARCO, exhib. Gulbankian Foundation (Centro de Arte Moderna), Lisbon, 26 February - 30 May 2004



Im² ; exhibition at MARTa Herford, curated by Jan Hoet, Herford, Germany, 15 May – 27 June 2004



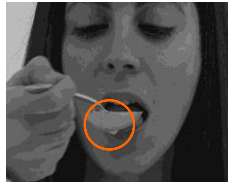
Work in Progress , solo show at Galerie SO, Solothurn, Switzerland, 30 October – 27 November 2004



2005

COLLECT, with Galerie SO, Switzerland, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 12 – 17 January 2005





www.andreasfabian.eu



Emilie Eating Soup, featuring Emilie Chevrillon, Camera David Creighton, Edited by Stephen Partridge in 2008

The David Watkins Era : David Watkins and his Students, exhibition at the Contemporary Applied Arts Gallery, London, 16 September – 29 October 2005

2006

Soup, seminar at the Victoria & Albert Museum, part of the BCUC/BNU Research in Action Programme with Dr. Helen Clifford & Andreas Fabian, 23 February 2006

Launch of website - designed in collaboration with Lucian Taylor

Tea for Two, new work from the IN/D Label Design Collective, Milan Furniture Fair, Salone Satellite, Milan, Italy, 5 – 10 April 2006

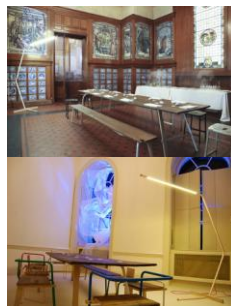
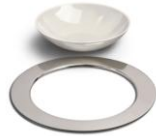
Treasures of Today (Goldsmiths' Company, TEN (ABDS), *Silver in a Field : A Field of Silver* installation & BMG's` permanent collection of contemporary metalwork. Four shows in one exhibition, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 21 October 2006 – 14 January 2007

2007

COLLECT, with Galerie SO, Switzerland, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 8 - 12 February 2007

Much Depends on Dinner, IN/D Label Design Collective, Milan Furniture Fair, Salone Satellite, Milan, Italy, 18 – 23 April 2007

P4P, selected by Innermost for production and launched 2008



The Connect Collection, launched during the ABDS *Connect Conference* at Aston University, Birmingham, 6 – 7 July 2007; The Court House, Hillsborough 1 – 28 August 2008; Quest Gallery, Oxford, 2 – 16 September, 2008; Craft in the Bay, Cardiff, 16 January – 8 March 2009

Handle(s), Workshop with students and graduates, ARCO, Lisbon, 16 – 20 July 2007

Moments of Indulgence, exhib. Millennium Galleries, Sheffield, 8 August – 28 October 2007

2008

Mo-Billy in Milan, New Business Gallery, Milan, Italy, 16 – 21 April 2008,

hemDing, selected by Thorsten van Elten Ltd. for production and launched September 2008 during London Design Week

2009 -

1 Part Chef + 4 Parts Design, incl. Chef : Roberto Cortez, Santa Barbara & Designers: Tomás Alonso, Katja Bremkamp, Elizabeth Callinicos, Andreas Fabian. Host: Simon Fraser, Victoria & Albert Museum, February 2009, Somerset House during London Fashion Week, September 2009

6.1 P4P Time Line



2006 private home exhibition (by invitation only), *TEN*, supported and sponsored by the former patron of the ABDS (Association of British Designer Silversmith), Charmian Adams, 24 – 26 May 2006

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery *Treasures of Toady, TEN, Silver in a Field : a Field of Silver* installation and BMGs` permanent collection of contemporary metalwork, four exhibitions in one show. 21 October 2006 – 14 January 2007

2007 Victoria & Albert Museum, London, *Collect*, showing with Galerie SO, Solothurn, Switzerland, 8 – 12 February 2007

Milan Furniture Fair, *Much depends on Diner*, new work from the IN/D Label Design Collective, 18 – 23 April 2007

P4P selected by Innermost for production and worldwide distribution



2008 **Launch of P4P at international Trade Fairs by Innermost in 2008** (selection)

USA (Innermost & 2Jane)
ICFF, New York
17 – 20 Mai

Japan (Innermost & Idea Japan)
Ambiente, Tokyo
11 – 13 June

China (Innermost)
100% Design, Shanghai
26 – 28 June

South Africa (Innermost & GLMS)
Sarcda Christams, Johannesburg
21 – 23 August

France (Innermost & Made in Live)
Maison & Objet, Paris
5 – 9 September

UK (Innermost)
100% Design, London
18 – 21 September

Spain (Innermost & +D2)
Intergift, Madrid
10 – 14 September


Outlets – showrooms (selection)

Design Museum Shop, London, UK
Frank Form, Stockholm, Sweden
Galerie Osebro, Porsgrunn, Norway
Made in Live, Paris, France
Homeless, Hong Kong, China
Optique, Queensland, Australia

On line shops (selection)

www.designmyworld.net (UK)
www.1770.co.uk
www.design55online.co.uk
www.2jane.com (United States)
www.top3.com (Australia)
www.madeinlive.com (France)

6.2 Pre – PhD Chronology

| | | |
|---|------------------------|---|
|  | 1984 - 1989 | Dipl. Des. Metallgestaltung, Fachhochschule Hildesheim, Germany |
|  | 1989 - 1991 | MA Metalwork, Royal College of Art, London |
|  | 1991 - 1997 | Freelance work for industry - clients inc. Rosenthal, Robbe & Berking, Tumasek, Independent studio practice - Germany |
|  | 1997 - | Moved from Germany to England Senior Lecturer – BA (Hons) Silversmithing, Metalwork & Jewellery & BA(Hons) Jewellery Buckinghamshire New University Production of speculative silver objects |
|  | 2001 | Curated research project <i>A Field of Silver</i> : <i>Silver in a Field</i> ; in collaboration with Simone ten Hompel - Oxfordshire, 13 – 16 September 2001 |

Two quotes from prominent practitioners, five years apart, identify aspects that underpin my approach as a practitioner:

... he (Andreas Fabian) loves the challenge of giving beautiful form to everyday objects, finding his own solutions to the traditional problems of domestic silverware (...) he is guided not by novelty, although the results are sometimes novel, but by a genuine intention to create objects that invite enquiry and are

pleasing both to the ‘eye’ and to the ‘touch’, giving those who see and handle them a fresh perception of their ritual and functional use¹.

Michael Rowe, *Kunst, Handwerk & Design*, 1992

... his works do not require sensational gestures, nor do they flirt with ephemeral fashions or design trends. Fabian`s work has obviously heeded what Walter Gropius said in a highly regarded speech held at the Royal Society of Arts in London 1961, namely, that too many artists rush insecurely from one novelty to the next rather than working steadily and slowly, basing their work on experience and careful studies².

Werner Bünck, *Schmuck Magazin*, 1997

I believe that one of my objectives as a silversmith and designer is to respond to people`s needs. I have always tried *not* to forget that the objects we put into the world are used by a wide variety of people who are as crucial to the way that objects are understood and used as the objects themselves. During the formative years of my childhood growing up in Lebanon and Afghanistan in the 1960s, I was fascinated to observe people seated on the ground, eating from large round metal trays instead of tables and using cups without handles and bread and salad leaves as ‘cutlery’. Perhaps my heightened curiosity in part was the result of coming from a western background. Even today, the handling of objects and the rituals around eating are an important aspect of my work. Where people make use of my work, and when and how they use the objects I have fashioned, remain key questions for me in relation to the subject I addressed in this body of work – spoons. My purpose in analysing the spoon was to identify the ‘essence’ of what I come to call *spoonness*. I distilled the subject to its fundamental components in order to reveal the qualities that best define the spoon in terms of its rudimentary function. The material aspect (i.e. literally made material) in the course of this PhD project, was to produce an order of objects of the kind produced by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi (always a source of inspiration to me) who was able to express the essence of his subjects with a

¹ Rowe, M., *Andreas Fabian –Silversmith*, Kunst, Handwerk & Design, 1/1992, Verlagsgesellschaft Ritterbach mgH, Frechen, pp.39-41.

² Bünck, W., *Responsibility to Form*, Schmuck Magazin, 1/1997, Ebner Verlag, Hamburg, p.87.

clear and clean economy of form³. Identifying fundamental principles and getting at the ‘essence’ of things forms the basis of my work as a silversmith.

It was during my study of metalwork and jewellery (1984 -1989) at the Fachhochschule Hildesheim that first introduced me to the modernist philosophy of *form and function* and taught me about the importance of maintaining a balance between craftsmanship and design – between shaping objects through making and paper-based conceptual development. Whether rational-functional or emotive-functional, Hildesheim taught that an object is only as good as its execution and the design education I received was shaped around the Bauhaus tradition of learning from a ‘master’. However, I did not want to be seen as an epigone of my master but rather as a designer and creator of original objects in my own right and it took some years to liberate myself and to find my own path, though (more positively) Hildesheim left me feeling well equipped to extend my studies at the Royal College of Art (RCA), London.

My studies at the RCA (1989-1991; approximately twenty years ago at the time of writing) deepened my increasing interest in tableware. In addition to the opportunity for formalistic development, I was able to resuscitate my interest in the manners and rituals associated with this category of objects which appeared so different to many other object families associated with metalwork and silversmithing. I have always been fascinated by objects that required human interaction to fulfil their role and remain interested in what might be communicated through the manipulation of their particular forms. Metalwork and silversmithing gave me a way to examine this field. The language of forms I used at the RCA became more experimental and in some ways, less formal. The RCA also marked the first time that I was ‘allowed’ to use machinery such as a spinning lathe rather than doing everything (quite literally) by hand. While my experience with the spinning lathe at the RCA was liberating, it was my training at Hildesheim and its emphasis on the hand-made that has remained core to my thinking.

³ See Adamson. G., *Thinking Through Craft*, Berg, Oxford, 2007 for Craft’s debt to Brancusi.

Although I find the discussion around technology interesting on a theoretical level, as a practitioner I have used appropriate technologies to achieve the results I am aiming for whether ‘by hand’ or ‘by machine’⁴.

By the end of my course at the RCA I felt equipped for the challenge of designing a set of cutlery (see figure 59)⁵.



fig. 59. Cutlery set, stainless steel and sterling silver, max. L: 250mm, 1991

An interest in combining different materials (fig.60,61,62) I acquired at Hildesheim resurfaced in this set of cutlery which combines stainless steel with Sterling silver for both functional and aesthetic reasons. In terms of commercial production, this posed a difficult and costly problem in 1991 and I was advised by the silver manufacturing company Puiforcat that production might be possible with technological developments – ten years hence! This set also raised issues with The Goldsmiths Company in terms of hallmarking: at the time, this combination of metals was forbidden to hallmark and proved to be problematic for the Makowers (see footnote 5) in terms of exhibiting an un-hallmarked piece in the Silver Galleries of the V&A.

⁴ While at the RCA I participated in the ‘batch production’ project initiated by David Watkins and Michael Rowe, which:

...aimed both to provide students with the design, production, marketing and management skills essential to produce batch jewellery and metalwork articles and to foster fruitful collaboration with commerce... (Frayling, C., *Art and Design - 100 years at the Royal College of Art*, Collins & Brown, London, 1999, p. 204.)

This project proved to be something of an antidote to an era which had been concerned with one-off studio work and it proved a liberating experience which opened up new opportunities. I also found this period at the RCA interesting in terms of linguistics too, marking the move from the use of the historic word ‘craftmanship’ to the preferred term ‘making’.

⁵ The set I made for my final project was to lead to a commission from the Makower Trust for the Victoria and Albert Museum silver collection (fig.59). The same set was given 1st Prize for the ‘Jugend Form Awards’ sponsored by homeware manufacturers Rosenthal AG, who I subsequently worked for five years as a freelance designer while developing an independent studio practice in Germany.

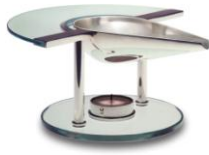


fig. 60. Sauce pan with warmer, sterling silver, glass, nightlight, L: 220mm, 1988



fig. 61. Set of vases for Rosenthal AG, porcelain and beech wood, max. H: 350mm, 1996



fig. 62. From left to right: teapot warmer, nightlight holder, nightlight holder with shield, glass, porcelain, max. ø 110mm, 1990 & 1999

Such unusual material combinations remained an important part of my thinking - as can be seen demonstrated by some of the key pieces made in the course of this PhD, illustrated in the thesis. In fact, during my early career I was fortunate enough to work freelance for a number of companies in the international kitchenware industry in a variety of materials ranging from glass, pewter, porcelain and steel to my preferred material – silver. This included working for the pewter company Tumasek (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) who primarily serve the Oriental and Asian markets and heard about my work from one of my peers at the RCA. Such work allowed me considerable insight into the end-user and their expectations of flat/hollow-ware and how the (non design-educated) public perceive designed objects at the point of purchase - the value of such experience still remains of significant importance to me today. It also taught me much about the importance of clarity of communication in design, especially with regard to relating form to content. However despite this early (commercial) success, I came to realise that this kind of commercial employment did not allow me the creative scope to explore the possibilities of the field in any consistent way.

In September 1997, I moved to England to undertake a Senior Lectureship and Course Leader role on the BA (Hons) Designed Metalwork and Jewellery course at what is now Buckinghamshire New University. This afforded me – in the long term - more time for creative development. By virtue of its location, my new role also demanded that I work in a second language, English. Language has always been important to me. Having grown

up abroad I became fluent in Portuguese and Arabic and (as was common in those days) I also learnt French at school. On moving to England, apart from everyday English, I had to learn English terms and expressions specific to my subject. As much as this was a struggle, I also think of it as providing an advantage in that it made me question the true meaning of words and the way in which we use them. Sometimes a German word can be more meaningful than its English equivalent. For example the German translation for 'designer' is 'Gestalter'. The word 'gestalten' means more than just to 'shape'. It refers not only to the form of an object but also to its essence, to its 'inner' qualities, to its 'Gestalt'. One might regret that in the course of globalised language the term 'designer' is now commonly used in Germany and often replaces the original word 'Gestalter'.

Working between two languages closest to me in recent years (English and German) has heightened my awareness of the similarities and disparities between words, a constant source of stimulation and (occasionally) intellectual provocation.

Appendices

6.3 Fabian A., *Emilie Eating Soup*, film on DVD, produced and directed by Fabian;
Camera: David Creighton (BNU); co-editor: Stephen Partridge (BNU); 2005/8

6.4 Fabian A., *Form (...) Handlung*, Galerie SO Edition 2004, Solothurn, Switzerland