

# A Variety of Objects, from Tools to Art: A Template for Collectors

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From the instant we reach out of bed to quell the morning alarm clock to the moment we turn off the bedside lamp, each one of us enjoys deliberate, yet scarcely regarded, relationships with a wide variety of things. These things are neither parts of ourselves, nor other living beings. They are inanimate objects. These objects make possible the lives we lead, whether we are hunter-gatherers or software designers. Many of them are tools: “Any instrument of manual operation” in Dr. Johnson’s formulation.<sup>1</sup> The laptop at which I now sit is such a tool. It is the physical means by which I achieve an end – writing this essay.

While all tools as I have just described them are objects, clearly not all objects are tools. Equally clearly, neither are all objects art. Just as it is not always easy to know where to draw the line between objects that are tools and objects that are not, so it is not always easy to draw the line between art and other kinds of objects. We know that there is a particular relationship between tools and works of art: works of art are generally made by artists using a variety of tools – paint brushes, chisels, etching needles, sticks of chalk, welding torches, and so on. Yet we also sense that there is a certain continuum between the artist’s tools and the work of art. The preservation of many painters’ palettes, for example, suggests as much.

In this essay I propose to examine this complex relationship between tools and art. I do so in order to explore aspects of a troublesome problem concerning the relationship between the functional and the numinous in objects. This is a matter that concerns all who are interested in art and in discerning those qualities that might distinguish it from other things, especially given that we accord the status of art – decorative (or applied) art or design – to many objects of functional or practical use, as well as to things in which we assume that aesthetic or other numinous qualities predominate. Judging a wide range of objects, and deciding what might be the nature of our interest in them, is a matter of immediate concern to anyone who collects, whether privately or on behalf of an institution. Therefore, rather than confine discussion to those qualities of objects that strictly adhere to Dr. Johnson’s definition of *tool*, I shall subsume many qualities that address practical or otherwise functional ends under that term, and use it elastically in order to address a diversity of functions. By doing so I hope to press beyond familiar arguments in aesthetics about the nature of art. So let us ask: When is an object a tool (broadly speaking) and when is it art? In attempting to trace this often fugitive distinction we may learn something about our relationship to



Figure 1, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns*, c. 1668, low fired clay, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

both kinds of objects. Let us begin by considering some tools associated with art.

*Pettinelle* and *stexchi* are tools, toothed and untoothed respectively, used by sculptors to form and articulate clay sketches. The terms were in use in Italy from at least the later sixteenth century, the former meaning a kind of small comb, the latter a kind of stick.<sup>2</sup> Clear traces of their use can be discerned in the clay sketches that form part of the complex production of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s monumental sculpture projects.<sup>3</sup> They are unambiguously tools. Such tools were used to form clay sketch models, several of which survive in spite of their fragility. An example is the *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns* in the Fogg Art Museum (fig. 1). It forms part of the project that occupied Bernini and his workshop between 1667 and 1672: the decoration of the Ponte Sant’Angelo, Rome with twelve monumental angels bearing the instruments of

the Passion.<sup>4</sup> We clearly regard this sketch model and others like it as art, yet is it also a tool? Arguably yes. Although it is a work of art and has long been treated as such, it was initially used within Bernini’s workshop to address a particular problem and, by doing so, successfully, to reach the next stage in the realization of the project.<sup>5</sup> This model appears to have established the pose of the



Figure 2, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns*, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums: partial reconstruction of point-to-point measurements taken from pointing marks (diagram by Anthony Sigel, Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard University Art Museums)

figure.<sup>6</sup> This is suggested not only by the similarity between this figure and the finished marble in the church of Sant’Andrea delle Fratte, but by its being one of a number of such clay sketches that have been repeatedly indented at key spots with the tips of pointing instruments, and marked with struck lines<sup>7</sup> (fig. 2). It was clearly the object of reference from which the relative proportions for a further, probably far larger, model were derived. In this sense, too, it served as a tool. Yet is such a description exhaustive? We might think not. The object is at once art and tool.

Is the quality of tool in direct relation to the work of art confined to the sketch? Might we not pursue the notion of the tool

further in the production process, even to the finished product, and describe it, too, as a tool, albeit of a different kind? Is Bernini’s monumental marble *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns* a tool for achieving a sacred end? It was originally intended for the parapet of the Ponte Sant’Angelo where it was to serve as a tool to direct and reinforce the piety of pilgrims on their way to the Basilica of Saint Peter. Here “tool” takes on a meaning more metaphorical than literal, for while the term can serve to point to scarcely disputable functions, as in the case of its application to the clay sketch, “tool” far from exhausts our immediate understanding of this monumental sculpture. Indeed, it was swiftly recognized as a work of art too fine to serve its intended purpose. According to Bernini’s contemporary biographer, Filippo Baldinucci, after viewing the *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns* and the *Angel Holding the Superscription* in Bernini’s workshop Pope Clement IX declared them too precious to be exposed to the weather. They remained in the hands of Bernini and his heirs until donated by his grandson to the family’s parish church in 1729. Meanwhile, Bernini saw to the making of new versions of these angels for the bridge.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the first marble versions, at the Pope’s instigation the angels’ character as works of art overrode their use as devotional tools.

How might we go about reconciling the ambiguities between the characteristics of objects as works of art on the one hand and as tools on the other? We might think of all these things – sculptors’ modeling tools, clay sketches, monumental marble sculptures – as occupying points on an axis ranging from the predominantly practical and functional at one end, to the predominantly numinous, including the aesthetic and even the spiritual, at the other. The predominance of one set of terms with reference to any given object does not necessarily preclude consideration of the other set. Much depends on circumstance. When the viewer chooses to stress its aesthetic qualities, a tool can be art, and when a viewer chooses to stress its instrumental qualities, art can be a tool. Neither need we necessarily think of either of these sets of qualities as essential or inherent.

We can begin to understand how this tool-art axis functions by acknowledging that we habitually allocate any given object an appropriate everyday place upon it. For instance, we habitually allocate the Bernini marble angel to “art”, and the chisel used to carve it to “tool”. These are common-sense designations that we might imagine sharing with Pope Clement IX. Yet art historians regularly subvert ordinary expectations regarding where on the tool-art axis any given object lies. For example, a materialist discussion of Bernini’s projects might stress the nature of the physical problems encountered in handling bronze, various marbles, gold, and silver. This can prompt our appreciation of the objects in terms of the handling of the tools required to make them. Furthermore, the discussion of the social mechanisms of patronage and the workshop in the context of which this art was produced can enhance our appreciation of those objects as social tools. Such discussions of art in terms of mechanical and social tools can leave the aesthetic or even the spiritual aspects of the objects themselves largely out of the account as a set of implicitly shared, but scarcely defined, cultural assumptions. This is Jennifer Montagu’s strat-



Figure 3, Woodworker's template, Chester County, Pennsylvania, c. 1725-30, poplar, Collection of Joseph and Jean McFalls

egy in her innovative studies, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art* (1989), and *Gold, Silver, and Bronze: Metal Sculpture of the Roman Baroque* (1996).

If such art historical discussion treats art as tools, we might imagine another in which tools are treated as art. An art historian might discuss the sculptor's tools – the *pettinelle* and *stecchi* for modeling clay, for instance – as things of beauty in their own right. She might stress the elegance and economy of the carved boxwood in purely aesthetic, rather than in practical terms. I know of no survivals of seventeenth-century examples of such vulnerable tools, but their simple, successful solutions to practical problems live on in contemporary clay modelers' tools. However, a rare example of a tool from another, manually related, art has survived by chance. This is a template for defining the profiles of carved wooden moldings (fig. 3). It was discovered behind a mantel in a house in Chester County, Pennsylvania built at the end of the seventeenth century, and is in the collection of Joseph and Jean McFalls. When it was displayed in the exhibition *Worldly Goods: The Arts of Early Pennsylvania, 1680-1758* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1999, Jack Lindsey, the curator, chose to draw

attention not so much to its practical character as to its aesthetic qualities.<sup>9</sup> Its succession of curves and steps along one side, although entirely functional, lead us to perceive it readily in abstract aesthetic terms. Here is the tool as art.

If art historians and curators play on the ambiguities of an object's place upon the tool-art axis, so too do artists. The visitor to the *Worldly Goods* exhibition could stroll into another gallery to find similarly functional objects claimed for the world of art, for the Philadelphia Museum of Art contains one of the most extensive and important holdings of the works of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Duchamp's art provides an invaluable guide to the issues we are examining.

Since 1915 Duchamp's "readymades" – apparently everyday objects appropriated by the artist – whether subtly modified or not, have challenged conceptions of art and the nature of the art object. His *Peigne* (1916), in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (fig. 4), is a gray steel comb. A hand-held tool, it seems to mimic the planar form of the woodworker's template. Like the template, it too has a pair of small holes drilled through it, as though to allow it to be secured for similar practical use. Its designation and inscription effected its transfer from the practical to the purely aesthetic realm.<sup>10</sup> That inscription – "3 or 4 drops of arrogance have nothing to do with unsociability" – can lead us to interpret the object as in one sense a template for civility.<sup>11</sup> The very existence of the tool – the comb – that has been turned into a work of art – *Peigne* – encourages us to perceive the McFalls template in a manner quite different from that associated with the practice of woodworking. That shift from tool to art, initiated by the artist, acknowledged by Duchamp's collector-patrons, Walter and Louise Arensberg, was confirmed by the object's transfer with their collection in 1950 to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was a shift also performed, though in a different manner and to different effect, on the McFalls template. Private collectors and art museums, as well as artists, play a crucial role in subverting as well as more habitually in confirming our expectations regarding the place of an object on the tool-art axis.

The matter of how our perception and understanding of objects as they range along the tool-art axis is modified by their relationships, contrived or inadvertent, with other objects, is further illuminated by an earlier work by Duchamp: *Trois Stoppages-Etalon* (1913-14) (*Three Standard Stoppages*) in the Museum of Modern Art, New York (fig. 5). This is one of Duchamp's earliest attempts to displace conventional ideas of what constitutes an art object. He does not do so by the designation of a "readymade" as he was soon to do, but by making a perverse set of scientific tools that constitute a work of art. To quote a note in the artist's "*Boite Verte*" (Paris, 1934) ("*Green Box*"), "A straight horizontal thread one meter in length falls from a height of one meter on to a horizontal plane while twisting *at will* and gives a new form to the unit of length".<sup>12</sup> Duchamp performed this act three times (on the principle of a sequence "one, two, many"). The result in each case was a slightly wavy length of thread that was then set onto a strip of canvas, itself glued to a long, narrow sheet of glass. Duchamp then made three wooden rules or templates recording the course of each thread along one edge. The whole set of "standard stoppages" – a



Figure 4, Marcel Duchamp, *Peigne*, 1916 (*Comb*) Philadelphia Museum of Art

transformation of a standard unit of measurement by the operation of chance – was placed in an adapted croquet box. "I keep the line, and I have a deformed meter," as Duchamp himself put it.<sup>13</sup> By producing wooden templates, Duchamp ironically standardized his three "deformed meters" which together stand for an infinity of unrepeatable variations.

The whole purpose of a template as a tool is to ensure accurate repeatability in conformity with a standard arithmetical measurement or geometrical form. The Pennsylvanian woodworker's template makes feasible the accurate production of the kind of molding to be found in late seventeenth-century wall paneling, or in the articulation of case furniture, by making constituent geometrical elements conveniently and consistently available. We can infer the use of such a tool clearly from a late seventeenth or early eighteenth-century Philadelphia walnut chest in the Philadelphia Museum of Art<sup>14</sup> (fig. 6). Its parts suggest a harmony of form deriving from combinations of geometrical figures associated with the mathematical regularity of classical architecture. But what kind of tools are Duchamp's templates? What manner of paneling or chest would result from their employment? They are tools, of course, only in the sense of resembling tools. They lie at the other end of the tool-art axis from the Pennsylvanian template. We should ask, rather, what kind of art they may be. One answer is that they are works of art that help us to appropriate certain tools as works of art in their own right. They sanction such an appropriation in a manner that would not be available to us were we to do no more than to draw attention to the aesthetic quality of the

formal geometry of the woodworker's template in isolation. To do so is perfectly feasible. To place any "found object" in an art collection is to draw attention to its formal qualities perceived aesthetically, and to recontextualize our awareness by inviting a reassessment of its functional qualities. Yet Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* is far from being a "readymade" or a "found object". It is a carefully and purposefully contrived and constructed work of art. Its existence suggests that if any tool might be regarded on occasion as a work of art, so any work of art has within itself the qualities of a tool. This is so because it is a work of art that takes the form of a tool, albeit a tool to record and proliferate purely artistic and philosophical, rather than practically useful, data.

To date we have discussed the tool-art axis and some objects that we might seek to place upon it in terms of the actuality of those things themselves. In this sense the Pennsylvanian woodworker's template and the Bernini angel are things in the world, equally accessible to our senses and intellects, occupying real space and duration. One self-evident characteristic of the *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns*, whether the clay sketch or the marble, however, reminds us that in order to proceed we must consider depiction and representation. We must be careful, though, not to treat the two as synonymous. While representation can be abstract, I count depiction to be imitative.

It may be useful to think of depiction as a subset of rep-

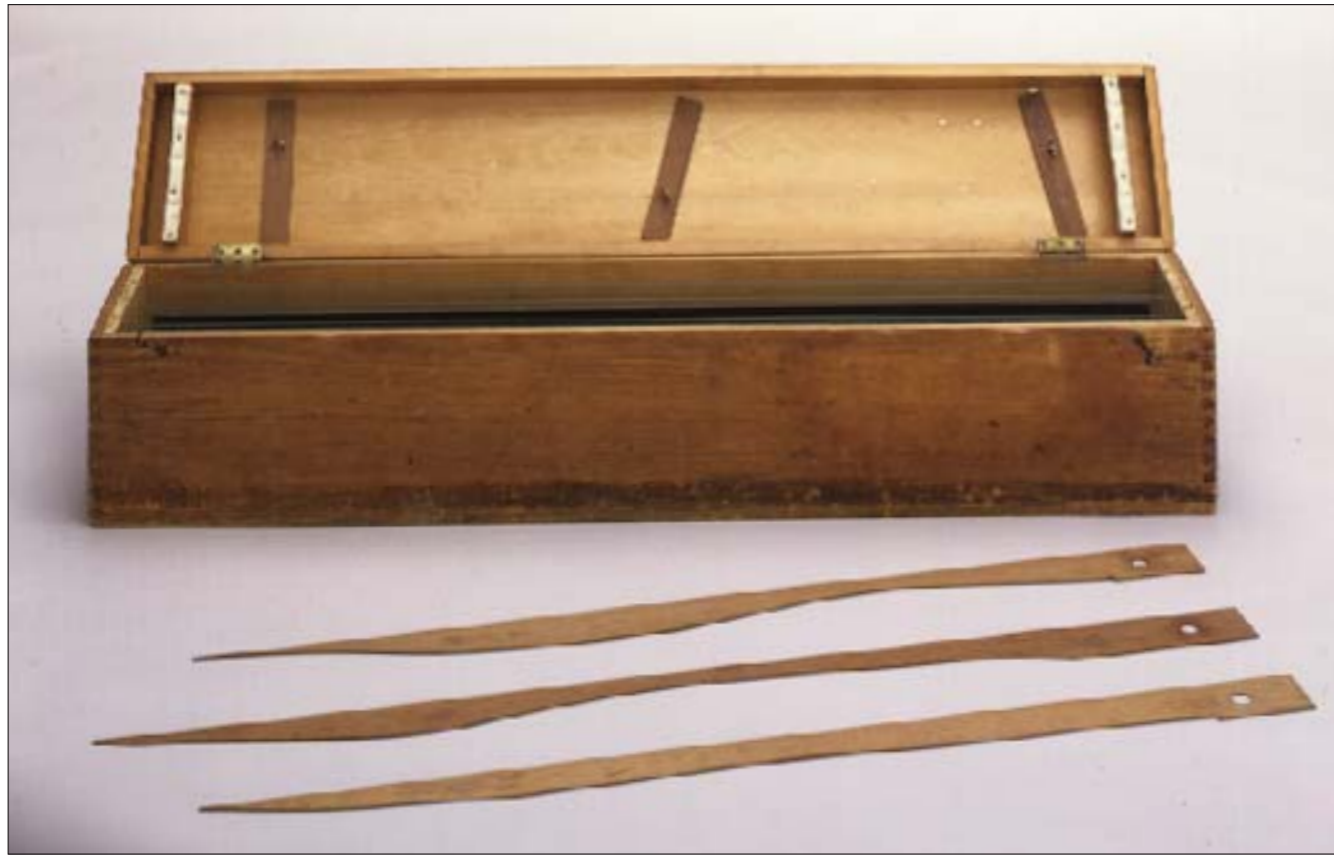


Figure 5, Marcel Duchamp, *Trois Stoppages-Etalon*, 1913-14 (*Three Standard Stoppages*), Museum of Modern Art, New York

resentation. Once again, Marcel Duchamp is our guide. In 1958 Duchamp produced a self-portrait by means of torn paper. Duchamp produced 137 examples for the de luxe edition of Robert Lebel's book *Sur Marcel Duchamp*<sup>5</sup> (fig. 7). The cut paper silhouette has a long history in portrait practice, yet the profile of Duchamp's head cast slightly downwards reads as an abstraction before we discern its depictive character. That depiction depends on the perception of a single, irregular line, and that line is the edge of a sheet of paper. Like the *Three Standard Stoppages* of over forty years previously, it is both the template of a likeness, and a unique variant of a standard measure. (And in addition, one should acknowledge that these paper objects could only be produced with the aid of a metal template.<sup>16</sup>)

Obviously, neither the edge of the Pennsylvanian woodworker's template nor those of each of the *Three Standard Stoppages* implies a depiction. Tools generally do not. None of these templates mobilizes adjoining space – the other side of the line formed by the object's edge – as the Duchamp self-portrait must in order to work as a depiction.

We might assume that depiction is more a property of art than of tools, yet is this indeed the case? Much art certainly functions in good part by means of depiction, but if we accept that depiction requires external referents – real things in the world that serve as models – much art, even non-abstract art, does not offer depictions. Bernini's *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns*, for instance, can hardly be said to be a depiction. Angels are not generally held to be subject to phenomenal encounter and sensual

apprehension. Rather, Bernini's angel is a representation based on a long-established set of conventions that govern our expectations concerning their appearance.<sup>17</sup>

While the character of some art is indisputably bound up with its depictive quality, reflection suggests that the more art we consider, the less depiction seems to matter. Let us take a case from the type of western art most generally acknowledged to depend on accurate depiction: fifteenth-century Netherlandish oil painting. In Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon Joris van der Paele, St. Donatian and St. George* (1434-36) (Stedelijk Museum van Schone Kunsten, Bruges) (fig. 8) sacred and earthly reality are shown as equally tangible. We feel that we would have recognized Canon van der Paele had we encountered him in the streets of Bruges, for van Eyck presents us with what must be a likeness of painstaking verisimilitude. Yet the sacred figures appear equally real. St. George's hand casts a shadow on the canon's surplice. There is nothing in the way the sacred figures are represented to distinguish them from the canon, other than their actions and attributes. Like the canon, they appear to be depicted rather than represented, yet we know that this cannot be so. Jan van Eyck conflated sacred and profane reality for devotional purposes, and subordinated depiction to representation by means of the adoption throughout of conventions appropriate to depiction alone. He accomplishes representation by means of implied real depiction

juxtaposed seamlessly with apparent real depiction. (That the depiction of real models can be inferred as underlying the representation of the sacred personages further complicates the matter.)

In the end it is representation that really matters. Depiction is a subordinate means to an end. In this respect van Eyck's panel is little different from Bernini's *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns*, Duchamp's *Self-Portrait*, or even the *Three Standard Stoppages* (except in appearance, of course). Van Eyck's *Joris van der Paele* represents and embodies ideas concerning devotion and the intercession of the saints in response to prayer. It is a devotional tool. Bernini's marble *Angel Holding the Crown of Thorns* represents an exclusively sacred reality to which the worshiper can relate devotionally. It is, none the less, an abstraction concerning a heavenly messenger's tangible presentation of a symbol (itself a tool) of Christ's Passion. This figure, too, is a devotional tool, though it owes its survival in a near pristine state to its immediate recognition as a work of art. Duchamp's *Self-Portrait* alternates in our perception between depiction and abstraction. In doing so it is – among other things – a representation of the principle of the unavailability to the viewer of simultaneity of perception. It is a tool in a variant of a celebrated psychological experiment, as well as a depictive portrait.<sup>18</sup> *The Three Standard Stoppages* is quite clearly an abstraction. It represents a set of philosophical ideas in the manner of a scientific experiment in the early twentieth century. It methodically explores the intersection of measurement and chance. It represents a set of intellectual procedures, even – just like the van Eyck and the Bernini – while inviting reflection upon them and the means by which they are represented.

Representation, rather than solely its subset, depiction, is therefore a quality of which we should be especially aware when considering objects on the tool-art axis. Can we distinguish art from tools by discerning representation in art objects and its absence in tools? Let us first consider depiction in relation to tools. Depiction is generally not a property of tools. However, we can all think of tools that incorporate depictions. Stencils that produce pictorial signs on packing cases are an example – that of a wine-glass to indicate fragility, for instance, or of an umbrella to instruct that it should be protected from water. Jasper Johns has long explored the character of stencils as tools, claiming the most functional marks produced by their means for the world of art. He also has a long history of responding to the art of Marcel Duchamp. In a work entitled *M.D.* (1974), he emulated Duchamp by making a die-cut cardboard stencil derived from Duchamp's torn paper *Self-Portrait*.<sup>19</sup> He voided the apertures to form Duchamp's initials, but left the form of the head attached for the user to remove in the manner of a commercial stencil (fig. 9). Johns's prominent pencil signature and individual annotation giving the number of each example in the edition of 100 proclaim that this is not actually a tool for practical use to produce a stenciled profile portrait of Duchamp accompanied by his initials, but rather an end product – a work of art – in itself. Like the *Three Standard Stoppages* it is a work of art that takes the form of a tool. Like the *Three Standard Stoppages* it thereby goes against the grain of our expectations.

Johns's *M.D.* subverts our expectations regarding the place of depiction in relation to tools by reversing the status of tool



Figure 6, Chest, Philadelphia, c. 1685-1710, walnut, cedar, oak, pine, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased with the J. Stogdell Stokes Fund.

and notional depictive end product (the stenciled portrait of Duchamp). That very subversion depends on the common-sense belief that depiction is generally foreign to tools. This may indeed be so, yet representation seems to be inherent to the very business of each tool. Works of art and tools share the characteristic of representing their functions and the purposes that subtend them. For example, a mallet or hammer can be said to represent striking. Striking occurs in many specialized varieties in human work. Each type of mallet is a recognition of a specific form, or range of forms of striking, and is therefore its representation. Thus the physician's tool for inducing a reflex reaction in the human subject differs considerably from a sledgehammer. Both incorporate a pragmatic use of the principle of leverage, and both represent this principle; yet while the one also represents medical practice as a human activity, the other represents demolition. Both are carefully contrived adaptations dependent on a shared principle and a common human ability (to strike), and both share the quality common to all tools in that they represent human labor. Therefore a stylized depiction of the worker's hammer (paired with the peasant's sickle) became one of the most potent signs of the twentieth century (fig. 10).

Tools may principally be objects of use, rather than expressions of ideas, but they are representations none the less. Human ideas are embodied in the tool. This is quite specifically the case in the Pennsylvanian woodworker's template, for its form represents a desire to carve wood according to patterns that reflect those antique notions of harmony and proportion embodied in classical architecture. This template is therefore a modest, tenuous, but wholly practical link between early eighteenth-century Pennsylvania and the ancient Mediterranean world. As such it is a



Figure 7, Marcel Duchamp, *Auto-portrait de profil*, 1958 (*Self-Portrait in Profile*), papier déchiré

representation of ideals no less than is a near contemporary artifact from the same culture, William Penn's influential tract promoting his colony.<sup>20</sup>

Tools, then, are as involved in representation as art (and letters), and representation can scarcely be discussed in today's theoretical climate independently of the notion of the sign. How do tools relate to signs? Depictions of tools can quite clearly function as signs. The hammer and sickle is undoubtedly a sign, one so familiar – if superseded – as to require no explanation. Are tools themselves also signs? In what sense might a real hammer with which one might drive home a picture hook in a wall be a sign?

Signs function in contradistinction to one another, so the hammer can scarcely be a sign in isolation. Furthermore, in isolation, when held in the hand as an individual object of use, we principally perceive it as a thing in itself. Insofar as it represents human labor, however, it itself (rather than a depiction of it) can serve as a sign for such labor, but this function must be deliberately and clearly activated by means of designation, or juxtaposition, or be demonstrably amenable through circumstance to deliberate discernment in signification terms. Only then can the tool-as-sign take its place within a "system of objects", as Jean Baudrillard has described it.<sup>21</sup> Such systems are open to seemingly endless manipulation and interpretation at the hands of producers, marketers, advertisers and scholars. As far as art is concerned, the perception of such systems of objects underlies much recent work on the theory of art collecting.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than pursue objects solely or predominantly as signs, we might instead think to regard them as non-signs, even though we soon discover that a paradox is implicit in the proceeding. When an object seems to invite consideration in a non-semiotic manner we might recognize that rather than evading the

semiotic imperative wholly, such an object merely eschews one order of signification (depiction, say) to signify within another (among objects within any given group). Even if we think that our interest in works of art resides in their accidental, rather than in their codifiable, qualities, and those accidental qualities defy systematic analysis in semiotic terms, any object contrived so as to defy systematic signification none the less functions semiotically by contrast with such objects as do not defy such systematic signification.

Once again, Duchamp's work is our guide to this distinction. Even before semiotic orthodoxy took hold of the study of art, Robert Lebel, in 1959, commented on the semiotic subversion of *Three Standard Stoppages* as it applies to a standard sign system, that of the metric measurement of length. Lebel wrote: "By opposing laws imbued with humor to laws supposedly serious he indirectly casts doubts upon the absolute value of the latter. He makes them seem approximations, so that the arbitrary aspects of the system risk becoming obvious."<sup>23</sup> Yve-Alain Bois has commented on this aspect of the piece more recently. Bois cogently argued that in this work Duchamp, "put his finger on this semiological repression. His *Three Standard Stoppages* knocks one of the most arbitrary systems of the sign there is (the metric system) off its pedestal to show that once submitted to gravity, once lowered into the contingent world of things and bodies, the sign does not hold water: it dissolves as an (iterable) sign and regresses toward singularity."<sup>24</sup> Yet we must acknowledge that even an object's subversion of a sign system by design depends on its semiotic qualities. However, its accidental qualities matter equally, if not more fundamentally. In *Three Standard Stoppages* the meter, dropped from the height of a meter, becomes no more than an unpredictably and uniquely configured length of thread. It reverts from the formal to the formless. All objects – whether works of art, or tools, or other types – share this characteristic, even if we find it convenient not to recognize their unique character for the sake of our use, or of our arguments. However, it may be that it is just those unpredictable accidents of peculiarity which are not reducible to terms in a system of signs that provoke and hold our interest in the objects we think of as art.

In terms of representation, therefore, we can conclude that all conceivable objects on the tool-art axis are amenable to semiotic analysis in the sense of Baudrillard's "system of objects", which is a second order system referring to their uses rather than to their inherent apprehensible characteristics. Some objects are amenable to semiotic analysis in terms of a first order system encompassing signs of representation and, most obviously, its subset, depiction. But semiotic analysis in terms of neither a first nor a second order system can exhaust the interest of any given object, wherever it falls on the tool-art axis. We are obliged to conclude that we cannot use a semiotic definition of representation reliably to distinguish between tools and works of art. Indeed, I doubt whether one might use any definition of representation to establish such a distinction. Tools and works of art are equally singular and equally representational. These qualities seem to provide no reliable grounds for distinction.

Where do these observations leave the collector of art,



Figure 8, Jan van Eyck, *Virgin and Child with Canon Joris van der Paele, St. Donatian and St. George*, 1434-36, oil on wood, Stedelijk Museum van Schone Kunsten, Bruges

whether individual or institutional? Much depends on the use to which any given object is put at any given time. No object reveals all of itself in any given circumstance. The collector and critic Jim Ede (1895-1990) demonstrated this principle at his home-cum-installation, Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, England. There a sculpture by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915) and a weathered broom head that has lost its bristles might play off each other.<sup>25</sup> Other old broom heads encountered subsequently in the world may assume momentarily and enrichingly the associations of Ede's broom head, but if we fail to discard them and their like we would swiftly find ourselves overwhelmed and immobilized by the aesthetic potential of every object in the world. No object can occupy the entire tool-art axis simultaneously, but art can make us aware of the tool's latent potential in this respect, even if we do not invariably act upon this perception and treat each tool reverently as a work of art.

There is, though, an aesthetics of use whereby a tool, used

respectfully, acquires a patina of care that is immediately discernible to the observer as well as to the user. We can discern this quality in agricultural hand tools collected and displayed in institutions such as the Musée des arts et traditions populaires, Paris. More importantly, we might come across it in the field (to use an anthropological term deliberately). I have seen such tools in the *cantina* of a Tuscan farmhouse where an octogenarian retired estate worker kept his exquisitely cared for garden hoes, spades, and forks. They functioned there as elements of a practice regulated equally by aesthetics and function in perfect harmony. To have removed them from their context by "collecting" them would have been to trivialize and deprive them of their perfect equilibrium then obtaining within the tool-art spectrum.

This case suggests that although no object can be equally present to our attention in all its aspects in any given setting – the art collection, whether private or institutional, bringing out one set of aspects, daily use another – optimum points of balance in terms of circumstances that evoke a harmony of function and aesthetics can occasionally be found. Yet such finds – like the one in the Tuscan *cantina* – are often serendipitous and cannot be contrived.

A harmonious use of objects in the world must take



Figure 9, Jasper Johns, *M.D.*, 1974, die-cut cardboard stencil (edition of 100). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

precedence over the contrived harmony of the collection treated as a thing apart. Yet such collections, well conceived and well used, can give us vital clues as to how to establish such harmony in the wider world in our turn, all the better to promote the amelioration of the human condition. For then tools become art and art tools for good, common use.

#### NOTES

- 1 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London, 1755: "Tool".
- 2 Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo di Raffaello Borghini, in cui della Pittura, e della Scultura si fa uella, de' piu illustri Pittori, e Sultori, et delle piu famosi opere loro si fa mentione*, Florence, 1584, 2, pp.148-149.
- 3 For a discussion of these, and other, seventeenth-century clay sculptor's tools, see Colette Czapski Hemingway, "Borghini, Félibien, and Five Angels for the Altar of the Blessed Sacrament" in Ivan Gaskell and Henry Lie, eds., *Sketches in Clay for Projects by Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, pp.151-161.
- 4 See, most recently, Mark S. Weil, "Bernini Drawings and Bozzetti for the Ponte Sant' Angelo: A New Look" in Gaskell and Lie, *Sketches in Clay*, pp.144-150.
- 5 For a discussion of such clay sketches as responses to a variety of problems, see Ivan Gaskell, "An Economy of Seventeenth-Century Clay Sculptors' Models" in Gaskell and Lie, *Sketches in Clay*, pp.26-30.
- 6 Weil, "Bernini Drawings and Bozzetti for the Ponte Sant' Angelo", p.148.
- 7 Anthony B. Sigel and Eugene F. Farrell, "Technical Observations and Petrographic Analysis" in Gaskell and Lie, *Sketches in Clay*, pp.75-81.

Figure 10, El Lissitzky, cover, *Katalog des Sowjet-Pavillons auf der Internationalen Pressa-Ausstellung Köln*, 1928, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

- 8 They were made by Paolo Nandini and Giulio Cartari, under Bernini's supervision (and in the case of the latter, with his participation). See Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, 4th edn., London, 1997, pp.287-291; see also Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, New Haven and London, 1989, pp.144-145, and Mark S. Weil, "Bernini Drawings and Bozzetti for the Ponte Sant' Angelo", pp.144-150. A slightly different reconstruction of the process is proposed by Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque*, Boston, New York, Toronto and London, 1997, pp.162-173.
- 9 Jack L. Lindsey, ed., *Worldly Goods: The Arts of Early Pennsylvania, 1680-1758*, exh. cat., Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1999, p.229, no.424, ill.
- 10 Marian Winter Martin, *Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia, 1954, no.78. It is inscribed on the upper edge, "3 ou 4 gouttes de hauteur n'ont rien à voir avec la sauvagerie"; and its designation is recorded upon it as having occurred at 11 a.m. on February 17, 1916 in New York.
- 11 Thierry de Duve's considered discussion of *Peigne* as an allusion to the tool used by Cubists to render wood in paint, and as the first or third person subjunctive of *peindre* ("qu'il peigne!" or "que je peigne!": "Let him paint!", or "That I could paint!") should also be considered (Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp.167-172).
- 12 Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, with chapters by Marcel Duchamp, André Breton and H.P. Roché, trans. George Heard Hamilton, New York, 1959, p.165, no.105.
- 13 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett, New York, 1971 (first edition, in French, Paris, 1967), p.47.
- 14 Lindsey, *Worldly Goods*, p.141 no.24, ill. p.142.
- 15 Lebel *Duchamp*, p.176 no.202, ill. p.iii.
- 16 See Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, New York, n.d. (1969), p.532, no.344, ill.
- 17 See, initially, Fritz Saxl, "Continuity and Variation in the Meaning of Images" in *Lectures*, London, 1957, 1, pp.1-12.
- 18 See E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York, 1960, especially pp.4-5 referring to Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion in the *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1953, p.194.
- 19 Johns's *M.D.* is not derived directly from the *papier déchiré*. He made a tracing of a 1959 silkscreen print after the *papier déchiré*, suspended it from a thread, and traced the outline of the cast shadow. He first used the resulting distorted image in the complex six panel canvas, *According to What*, 1964 (private collection). See Roberta Bernstein, "Seeing a Thing Can Sometimes Trigger the Mind to Make Another Thing", in Kirk Varnedoe, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1996-97, pp.45-46 with further references, and p.274.
- 20 William Penn, *A Letter from William Penn, Proprietary and Governour of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that Province, residing in London*, London, 1683.
- 21 Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets*, Paris, 1968.
- 22 See, for example, John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting*, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1994.
- 23 Lebel, *Duchamp*, p.29.
- 24 Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Kraus, *Formless: A User's Guide*, New York, 1997, p.28.
- 25 For illustrations of Ede's distinctive aesthetic involving the juxtaposition of natural and scarcely regarded human-made objects with Modernist works of art, see Jim Ede, *A Way of Life: Kettle's Yard*, Cambridge, 1984.

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