HOWARD RISATTI

# A THEORY OF CRAFT

## FUNCTION AND AESTHETIC EXPRESSION

FOREWORD BY KENNETH R. TRAPP

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# FOREWORD

Considering the lowly status craft holds vis-à-vis other visual arts, arguing that craft is art is a courageous undertaking. In *A Theory of Craft*, Howard Risatti presents a thoughtful and careful argument that this is, in fact, the case, that craft is art. He has been developing the arguments presented in this book for over two decades. As his thoughts about craft took form and became clearer, the author struggled to find the appropriate organizational structure to address such thorny dichotomous issues as "function versus nonfunction," "craft versus design," "the artist as intellectual versus the craftsperson as object maker," and "artistic content versus physical object." As the reader will see, each chapter is written to address a particular issue, with chapter building on chapter, to the conclusion that craft is art. Drawing liberally on his scholarly background in artistic theory, in particular as it pertains to Modern Art, aesthetic theory, and other philosophical discourse, as well as casting an acute eye to contemporary culture, Risatti challenges many of the long-held stereotypes about craft that hinder a true understanding of the art form. His conclusions challenge us to reevaluate our ideas not only about craft but also about what actually constitutes a work of art.

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# INTRODUCTION

*To see or hear is nothing.*
*To recognize (or not recognize) is everything.*
ANDRÉ BRETON
Le Surréalisme et la peinture *(1928)*

■ ■ ■

In the last three decades there has been much discussion about the relationship between craft and fine art. In many ways this discussion was anticipated by "The New Ceramic Presence," an article written by Rose Slivka that appeared in *Craft Horizon* in 1961. In this article Slivka attempts to relate what she identifies as a "new ceramic presence" to modern industrial culture and to the new trends occurring in contemporary painting. She argues that "the painter-potter avoids immediate functional association . . . and so, the value of use becomes a secondary or even arbitrary attribute." To the inevitable question that this position implies ("Is it craft?"), Slivka replies that it is indeed craft unless "all links with the idea of function have been severed, [then] it leaves the field of craft."[1]

Slivka's article came at the beginning of a wider debate about the status of craft vis-à-vis fine art. To some extent this debate was spurred on in subsequent decades by the astronomically high prices that fine art, but especially painting, was commanding at auction.[2] As British ceramist Greyson

1. Slivka, "New Ceramic Presence," 36. Rosemary Hill locates the same attitude in England around 1973 with the publication of *Crafts* magazine by the Crafts Advisory Committee; see her "2001 Peter Dormer Lecture," especially 45–47.

2. Examples of auction prices include Jasper Johns's *Out the Window*, which fetched $3.63 million in 1986; two years later his *False Start* sold $15.5 million. In 1987 Van Gogh's *Irises* sold for what seemed a staggering $49 million, while eleven years later his *Portrait of the Artist Without a Beard* (1889) sold for $71.5 million. These prices were shat-

Perry, winner of the prestigious 2003 Turner Prize awarded by the Tate Gallery in London, noted, "Pottery is older than painting, with just as venerable a history, but if you look at the big prices in auction houses . . . paintings get the big sums."[3]

However, it is not just the "go-go" eighties or the "new technology bubble" of the nineties or even the renewed affluence of the last few years that explain fine art's high prices. Its prestige is also a factor. In no small part this prestige can be linked to the tradition of critical discourse surrounding contemporary fine art that has appeared in newspapers, journals, and magazines for well over a century. Moreover, this critical discourse reflects the intellectualization of painting and sculpture and even architecture as the fine arts and is based on a tradition of aesthetic theory that began with the ancient Greeks and was revived in the eighteenth century with philosophers such as Alexander Baumgarten, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, among others. What this theoretical and critical discourse has done is provide an intellectual framework within which to ground fine art, to transform it, as it were, from a mere object of trade or handwork into a conceptually and intellectually centered activity.

By contrast, historically the field of craft has not undergone a similar "intellectualization," nor has it had the same kind of critical and theoretical support, either from within or without, that has characterized the fine arts. This remains largely the case even though there are craft critics who have taken a more theoretical/intellectual approach to the field. Nonetheless, as art and craft critic Janet Koplos has pointed out in a talk to a professional ceramics organization, "Crafts critics tend to be nontheoretical; they're usually either historically oriented or they give sensory, experiential emphasis to their writing. I don't know whether that's a cause or an effect of the fact that the crafts field, in general, is also nontheoretical." Koplos went on to say that "the big question . . .

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tered by Picasso's *Boy With a Pipe*, which sold for $104.1 million in 2004 and Klimt's *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, which went for $135 million in June 2006. For more on this and auction prices see Risatti, "Crafts and Fine Art," 62–70; Allen, "Rule No. 1"; Melikian, "Contemporary Art"; and Rubinstein, "Klimt Portrait."

3. For Perry's remarks see "Refuge for Artists." Critic John Perreault asks the art world, "Why is it important to distinguish craft from other art objects?" He goes on to answer his own question: "Because prices and careers need to be protected, categories must hold." See his "Craft Is Not Sculpture," 33.

is whether it matters if crafts benefit from emulating [fine] art's intellectual structure." Her answer is that it doesn't matter and that "lusting after equality with [fine] art has, in fact, been destructive to crafts." Ultimately, she encourages craft's people to be "distinctly yourself, especially where it means being unlike mainstream fine arts."[4]

In a recent issue of *Ceramics Monthly*, craft critic Matthew Kangas also discussed the problem of the intellectual standing of the craft field. Kangas quotes fine art critic Donald Kuspit, who praises Garth Clark's curatorial efforts to "overturn the deeply rooted negative attitude that ceramics is inherently trivial." Kangas also quotes craft critic John Perreault, who faults the craft field for ignoring its own history. Even more damning, it seems to me, is the experience of fine art critic Peter Schjeldahl who, in reviewing a 1987 exhibition of Adrian Saxe's ceramics, somehow felt he was "encroaching on a field where suspicion of intellect is a given, anti-intellectualism being a shadow of certain positive values embodied in most modern craft movements." Echoing these observations, Kangas ends his "Comment" with a plea "for the American ceramics movement to attain the same intellectual maturity demanded by painters and sculptors."[5] And finally, there is the plea from craft critic Glenn Brown, who, in speaking of contemporary installations, argued that "the failure to develop a body of theory that is faithful to the craft tradition yet effectively asserts the contemporary relevance of craft practice has left craft consciousness vulnerable to pejorative stereotyping. Worse yet, the craft world has permitted itself to be bastardized, represented as alienated from some of the very characteristics—multiplicity, dispersion, interaction, and temporalness—that have defined its tradition."[6]

Despite such pleas for a more intellectual approach to the field, writing about craft is still largely devoted to practical issues such as materials and techniques. Lack of a critical and theoretical framework within which to ground the field helps explain its generally low prestige (aesthetically and otherwise) and, consequently, its inability to overturn what

4. Her address was to the "Texas Clay 2 Symposium" in San Marcos, Texas, February 12–14, 1993. For a reprint see Koplos, "What Is This Thing Called Craft?" 12–13.

5. While Kangas is addressing ceramics specifically, I believe Schjeldahl's comments apply to the craft field generally. See Kangas, "Comment," 110, 110–112, and 112, respectively.

6. Brown, "Ceramic Installation," 18.

Kuspit sees as "a fixed hierarchy of the arts [that still] lingers," a hierarchy in which fine art rests at the top.[7] It also helps explain the slight regard given contemporary craft objects in the marketplace. Considering this, Slivka's article can be viewed as an early attempt to remedy this situation, to cast craft activity in a new light. Unfortunately, by taking a vast leap over unchartered theoretical territory, her claim that the "painter-potter avoids immediate functional association" seems to suggest that the craft field should ensconce itself within the already existing critical and theoretical discourse surrounding the fine arts; it unintentionally, I believe, reinforces what Perreault sees as a fear of pots, a "fear that the utilitarian and the aesthetic could be once again truly united."[8] I think the gap left by the uncharted theoretical territory in craft needs to be filled before the kind of craft objects that have implied or metaphorical function, rather than actual function, will be accepted as replete with meaning.

Responses to the low prestige and poor market value of craft have led to claims that there is little or no difference between craft and fine art; therefore, there should be no distinction, no separation between the two fields. Such claims are made mostly by people in the craft field who tend to affiliate themselves with sculpture rather than by fine artists. In 1999, Paula Owen, a painter and a long-time craft advocate who also writes and directs the Southwest School of Art and Craft in San Antonio, curated an exhibition titled "Abstract Craft." In the exhibition brochure she writes that "the artists and objects in this exhibition argue . . . against fixed definitions or separate categories of art and craft." Having stated this, she goes on to postulate a specifically craft sensibility, something that supports rather than denies a separation between the two fields.[9]

While Owens may be right about a "craft sensibility," it seems to me what advocates like her, Perreault, and others are actually calling for is aesthetic parity between craft and fine art.[10] But however desirable aesthetic parity may be, framing the issue around the elimination of

7. Kuspit as quoted by Kangas, "Comment," 110.

8. Slivka, "New Ceramics Presence," 36, and Perreault as quoted by Kangas in "Comment," 112.

9. Owen, "Abstract Craft." For more of her views see her "Labels, Lingo, and Legacy."

10. I think it significant that Perreault's "Craft Is Not Sculpture" was published in the art magazine *Sculpture* and not a magazine devoted exclusively to craft.

craft and fine art as separate categories is a questionable strategy. At a practical level it faces several problems, including established habits of thinking about the two fields that make this "no separation" argument difficult to accept. For one thing, viewers often identify objects as craft by their materials. An object made in what is now regarded as a traditional craft material (say clay/ceramic) is automatically regarded by many people as a craft object (see Figure 1).[11] Such a conclusion is unfounded simply from a historical perspective. Large-scale figurative sculpture has been made of clay/ceramic at least since Etruscan times (see Figure 2). Yet habits of thought are difficult to overcome. If sculptural objects in clay/ceramic can't readily cross over into the realm of fine art sculpture, even given the historical precedents, then sculptural works in uniquely craft material such as glass and fiber have even less of a chance of resisting being automatically relegated to the category of craft.

The problem of defining craft by material aside, there is a more significant issue that the "no separation" argument ignores. This has to do with the identity of craft and fine art, both as objects and as concepts. What, from a theoretical point of view, is a craft object? Do craft objects share the same theoretical basis as fine art objects? Are the fields of craft and fine art, in some real and meaningful way, actually the same? Without knowing the answers to such questions, how can one relate craft to fine art, much less make the claim they should be viewed as members of the same class of objects? The "no separation" argument remains unsatisfactory for both craft and fine art because it ignores these questions; it implies that either it is unnecessary to understand formally and conceptually exactly what is referred to when speaking of craft and fine art, or, on the other hand, that formally and conceptually craft and fine art are exactly the same enterprises.

As to the first point (that understanding is not necessary), I believe it a gravely mistaken notion because understanding, and hence recognition, is essential to identity and meaning. This is something that the German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued. As art critic Klaus Davi notes in an interview, Gadamer's concept of games and game playing leads to a reevaluation of the concept of mimesis; that is to say, to the concept of representation. For Gadamer,

11. For more on the work of Allan Rosenbaum, see Risatti, "Eccentric Abstractions."

FIGURE 1. Allan Rosenbaum, *Tale*, 2002, earthenware, stain, glaze (28″ high × 19″ wide × 15″ deep). Photograph courtesy of the artist.
This over life-size head is part of a widespread contemporary movement utilizing clay and sophisticated ceramic hand-building and glazing techniques to make figurative sculpture. While influenced by Funk Art of Northern California and Chicago, Rosenbaum eschews the scatological and overtly political that typifies that work in favor of deeply psychological overtones. Nonetheless, many people would consider this work craft because of its material.

FIGURE 2. *Apollo of Veii*, Portonaccio Temple, Veii, Italy, ca. 510–500 B.C., painted terracotta (ca. 5′ 11″). Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome, Italy. Photograph: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

This is one of many life-size sculptures in painted ceramic to come down to us from antiquity. Other examples include the more than 7,000 life-size painted terracotta figures of horses and soldiers of the Imperial Bodyguard from the tomb of Shihuangdi, first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, 221–206 B.C., Lintong, near Xi'an, Shaanxi, China.

mimesis involves much more than simply realism or naturalism, what in the Aristotelian sense would be the unities of time, space, and action. Gadamer's concept of mimesis has to do with how "imitation is grounded within a knowledge of cognitive meaning." Gadamer argues that every work, whether abstract or realistic, is a "representation" of its time, of the historical moment in which it is made. In this sense, the concept of mimesis, as Gadamer says, "implies the concept of recognition. With a work of art, some element is 'recognized as something' [only] when its essence has been grasped."[12]

Gadamer's concept of mimesis is instructive for our discussion of craft because it strikes at the core of how we go beyond simply looking at things we casually encounter in the world, to actually seeing them in the sense of recognizing and comprehending them. When we say in English, "Take a *look* at this. Do you *see* what I mean?" we are making such a distinction. While Gadamer's argument is quite nuanced, his point becomes clear from a simple example. Say we are at an airport to pick up someone and passengers are leaving the gate. Though we look at them, we pay little attention, except to subconsciously note that the plane must have just arrived. Then we look at someone we recognize and say hello. We recognize this person because we know him to be a neighbor from down the street. Soon we also recognize the person we have come to meet, an old friend we have known for many years, and we embrace. In both instances it is clear that recognition involves more than just looking, that recognition only comes from knowing. This is Gadamer's point. Moreover, the deeper the level of knowing, the more profound the level of recognition, which is one reason why the response to a person who does something completely out of character is to say, "I don't recognize you anymore." A side of their character has been revealed that was unknown to us. And in fact, the word "recognition" actually means to "re-know."[13]

My point is twofold. One is that we must find a way to go beyond simply looking at craft objects as things that have function or are made

12. See Davi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," 78.

13. Something of the original sense of the word comes back to us when we encounter someone like TV celebrities. Upon seeing them on the street we have the feeling of knowing them because of our familiarity with their TV roles. However, off-camera, in real life, they may be completely unlike the roles they portray, making it clear that what we recognize are not real persons, but simply physical features.

of certain materials (e.g., clay, glass, wood, fiber, or metal); and two, we must begin to see and recognize them in the sense of comprehending them by grasping their essence. However, comprehension, in the sense of understanding and meaning about which we are speaking, always occurs within structured limits or boundaries, what Gadamer calls "games." In this sense, games refer to any structured set or system of conventions or rules; these could be the rules or conventions that the artist or writer manipulates and the viewer or reader recognizes (say those of portraiture or the sonnet) just as easily as the rules of ordinary, everyday games like football or boxing. Only when one knows the rules of the football game or boxing match does one recognize that it is not a free-for-all or an argument that has gotten out of hand. Unlike the uninitiated, because we know the rules, we don't call the authorities but watch in a certain way, paying attention to salient aspects of the contest, always within the formal structure created by the rules.[14]

That meaning is necessarily grounded within a system of "conventions" or rules pertains equally to the conceptual aspects of things (what something is) as well as to their perceptual/formal aspects (how they look)—what is often characterized by the polarities "form and content" and "theory and praxis." Such bi-polar separations, however, misconstrue the interdependent nature of this relationship. Knowing and understanding/comprehending (as opposed to simply looking or hearing) are not only intimately related formally and conceptually, they are co-dependent and are essential to any system of communication, including art. As Gadamer writes, "Only if we 'recognize' what is represented [in a picture] are we able to 'read' a picture; in fact, that is what ultimately makes it a picture." He goes on to conclude that "seeing means articulating."[15]

14. Literary critic Jonathan Culler notes that a poem "has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated." Without these conventions, a poem may seem no more than an inept attempt at prose. He also notes that "to speak of the structure of a sentence is necessarily to imply an internalized grammar that gives it that structure." See Culler quoted in Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*, xvii–xviii. George Kubler makes a similar point in relation to visual art when he argues that "every meaning requires a support, or vehicle, or a holder. These [supports] are the bearers of meaning, and without them no meaning would cross from me to you, or from you to me, or indeed from any part of nature to any other part." See his *Shape of Time*, vii.

15. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 91.

The importance of this for the discussion of craft and fine art that follows is that recognition and comprehension of both craft and fine art require an understanding of them at an essential, elemental level. To recognize them in the same way we recognize a neighbor from down the street whom we only know well enough to say hello while walking the dog after work is to know them in formal appearance alone; it is like encountering a celebrity walking down the street. To know at the level Gadamer is talking about is to know at a more profound and deeper level.

Only from understanding at such a level can meaning itself be given to form by a maker and apprehended by a viewer. In all visual art the very possibility of meaning itself is dependent upon knowing and understanding the conceptual ground upon which the formal object rests. In this sense, to recognize the nature of some*thing* (such as a craft object) requires understanding and knowledge of the thing itself—how it is made, what it is for, and how it fits into the continuum of its historical tradition.[16]

I can't stress enough that this applies equally to fine art as to craft. If one had no idea what a picture or a sculpture is, how could one make such a thing and how would one respond to it? This may seem a foolish question, but the history of Modern Art suggests otherwise, for it is exactly the problem confronted by "jurors" when they first saw Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (Figure 3), a simple store-bought urinal he submitted as a work of sculpture to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York in 1917. Because it did not posses enough of the salient, characteristic features that would have allowed it to be recognized and understood *as* sculpture, the organizers of the exhibition rejected it even though they said there was to be no jurying process for the exhibition. In the eyes of the organizers it was not a question of *Fountain* being a "bad" sculpture; it simply wasn't a sculpture at all.[17]

Any level of understanding/comprehension of craft and fine art in the sense in which we are speaking can only come from a deep knowl-

16. For these reasons, I think Perreault's definition of craft as "handmade" using "traditional craft materials," "processes," and "craft formats such as vessels, clothing, jewelry, and furniture" would be more useful if grounded within a theoretical framework. See Perreault's "Craft Is Not Sculpture," 34.

17. For more on the history and reception of Fountain, see Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp*.


FIGURE 3. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964, porcelain (unconfirmed size: 360 × 480 × 610 mm). Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1999, Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain. Photograph courtesy of Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, N.Y., © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y./ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp.

The original, now lost, was an ordinary urinal Duchamp purchased from a plumbing store and signed R. Mutt, before entering it into the inaugural exhibition of the American Society of Independent Artists in New York in April 1917. Interestingly, Duchamp was on the society's board of directors and was head of the exhibition's hanging committee at the time he submitted *Fountain* under R. Mutt's name to the exhibition. During the installation of the exhibition, *Fountain* drew such heated criticism that it was withdrawn and Duchamp and several other members resigned in protest.

edge of them as both formal and conceptual enterprises. That is why the assumption implied in the "no separation" argument, that craft and fine art are exactly the same, can only be demonstrated by examining craft, both internally as a practice and externally in relation to fine art. Only in this way can one discover whether craft is the same as fine art or a practice unique unto itself.

CHAPTER 1

# PURPOSE, USE, AND FUNCTION

In trying to identify, know, and eventually understand craft objects, it is helpful to begin by examining man-made things generally. One can approach them from any number of categories, including their usefulness and their desirableness. George Kubler, in *The Shape of Time*, argues against use, saying that "if we depart from use alone, all useless things are overlooked, but if we take the desirableness of things as our point of departure, then useful objects are properly seen as things we value more or less dearly."[1] His approach has advantages as long as we don't conflate use and usefulness with desire and as long as we are careful to distinguish between desire and actual need; for while need fosters desire, desire itself may not always depend on actual need; there are many things that we desire but do not need. Another point to keep in mind is that usefulness and function are not necessarily the same; the use to which something may be put may have nothing to do with the functional reason why it was made.

Many man-made things are desired because of an actual need, while others are not. As examples we can take prostheses (artificial limbs) and military weapons of all kinds. Desire in the case of prostheses springs from a genuine need to overcome physical impairment; desire in cases of cosmetic prostheses may come from a wish to appear normal, which is important though not quite the same as correcting a physical impairment. And in the case of weapons,

1. Kubler, *Shape of Time*, 1.

some people desire them even though they have no actual need; apparently they just like weapons. Society, on the other hand, does not actually desire weapons (or so it is hoped), but having a need for security military weapons are seen as a way to fulfill this need, though this is something peace treaties and mutual understanding pacts may also do. Other man-made things that are desired but do not spring from need in any practical, physical sense are toys and even many works of art. Thus, the connection between need and desire is not always as clear as Kubler suggests.

Rather than focusing on the desirableness of things as a point of departure, I want to approach them in terms of purpose. I am defining purpose in the general sense of an end or aim to be achieved. All man-made objects—simply because they are man-made—must have a purpose for someone to spend time and energy to make them. Whether the purpose was to give pleasure or to make someone whole or to protect someone from enemies or to amuse and entertain does not change this fact. However, the purpose to be achieved, just as in the case of national security, is not to be confused with the instrumental means of achieving it. As I have said, security may be achieved by different instruments including weapons of war, peace treaties, and mutual understanding pacts; these are the instruments that actually function to fulfill, to achieve the purpose of national security. It is in this sense that man-made objects are the actual instruments that function to achieve whatever purpose or end it was that initiated their making.

An advantage of approaching objects from the point of view of purpose is that purpose forces us to examine use and usefulness in relation to function; I am defining function as that which an object actually does, by virtue of the intention of its maker, in order to fulfill a purpose. When we understand purpose in this way it becomes clear that the use to which a man-made thing may be put need not necessarily correspond to either the purpose or the function for which it was made; using a chair as a prop to keep open a door is neither its function nor a fulfillment of its purpose. Making a distinction between use and function in this way is important for craft when one considers that craft objects are often rather indiscriminately characterized simply as objects of use; in this sense use is seen as reflecting craft's purpose. But this position raises questions, not the least of which has to do with craft's relationship to other so-called useful, utilitarian, functional, or applied things—two obvious examples being tools and machines. Are tools and machines

craft objects or are they something else? If they are something else, how and in what way are they so? Furthermore, can the giving of pleasure by an object of pure desire be considered doing something in the same sense that tools and machines do something? Or asked another way, can fine art objects be said to be useful, functional, and applied since it is said they give pleasure? If so, does this mean that craft and fine art are the same category of objects? If not, does it necessarily mean they stand in opposition? These are a few of the questions we must consider, and to begin sorting them out, terms like "applied" (as in applied object), "use" (as in object of use), and "function" (as in functional object) need to be carefully examined. I should say at this point that I think craft objects belong to a large group of objects, all of which have an applied function; but I also think craft objects can be distinguished as a separate class within this large group by the nature of their functions. I hope my reasons for thinking this will become clear as we sort through the above list of terms.

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "applied" means "put to practical use; practical, as distinguished from *abstract* or *theoretical*." Thus in the strict sense—and this is the sense in which I would like to employ the term—one could say that applied objects are those whose purpose is to fulfill practical as opposed to theoretical, abstract, or imaginary aims; they are the actual objects, instruments, if you like, made to carry out or perform some practical, physical function. Thus applied function differs from purpose in that once purpose has been recognized or conceptualized as an end or aim, an actual physical object must be made that is capable of performing/carrying out a specific physical "operation" to realize that purpose; this "operation" shall be designated the object's function.

In this scenario, purpose initiates function and function initiates object, object being the physical solution to the problem posed by purpose.[2] For example, while the purpose that initiated the making of a canteen and a sheep-skin coat may be the same (survival, one in the desert and the other in winter cold), their applied functions (the way they instrumentally solve these problems) are different—one is by carrying water,

2. While we may not always know an object's original purpose or its function, as in many old tools that are no longer necessary, we don't actually have to. From their general form we can surmise, as does Kant, that they are tools and as such are applied objects. For Kant's views see his *Analytic of the Beautiful*, 45.

the other by keeping the body warm. Similarly, while the purpose that initiated the making of carpentry tools is the same, to aid in construction, their specific applied functions differ—some are made for cutting, others for hammering, sawing, chiseling, or planing. Purpose is the aim that instigated the making of an object; applied function is the specific practical "operation" intended to fulfill that purpose or aim; and an applied object is the actual thing, the instrument that functions to carry out the "operation."[3]

Having said this, let us now turn our attention to the question of use and function, especially as regards the idea of "useful objects." Not only does reference to useful suggest the opposition "useful versus nonuseful," it isn't helpful in understanding the nature of man-made objects because, as I have said, use need not correspond to intended function. Most if not all objects can have a use or, more accurately, be made usable by being put to use. A sledge hammer can pound and it can be used as a paperweight or a lever. A handsaw can cut a board and be used as a straight-edge or to make music. A chair can be sat in and used to prop open a door. These uses make them useful objects, but since they are unrelated to the intended purpose and function for which these objects were made, knowing these uses doesn't necessarily reveal much about these objects, nor does it always help identify them as things—after all, even an object found in nature like a stone can become a "use object" simply by being put to use. Furthermore, the use to which something may be put may change, but its originating function always remains constant. For these reasons, we must not think of "use objects" or "useful objects" or "things of use" as synonymous with applied objects. Applied objects are objects with an intentional applied function; they are objects intended to fulfill the purpose that initiated their making.

The word "applied," as in applied object, is more appropriate and revealing than "use" because "applied" implies intention, a response to a specific purpose. In this sense, to identify an object as an applied object

3. It may seem a conceit to separate purpose from need. If, for example, I need to cut a piece of bread and I use a knife, it seems that the purpose of the knife is to cut bread. But if I cut bread with a sword or even a saw, does this make their purpose the cutting of bread? Also, what about things I don't need, such as toys or basketballs? They have a purpose, but not a need. It makes more sense, at least for our study, to think of people as having needs and desires (the need to cut bread and the desire for entertainment or physical exercise that is fun) so that objects are made whose purpose is to fulfill these needs and desires.

is to say it is an object made with an intention to fulfill a purpose; it is an intentional object. On the other hand, the terms "use" or "useful objects" only denote something as usable for some end. That stones can be *used* as hammers or as pillows or as scrapers does not change the fact that they do not have an origin in purpose; strictly speaking, they possess neither intention nor purpose nor function. Only that for which a thing is intentionally made can properly be considered its function and thus part of its true purpose for being brought into the world.

What this means is that, as opposed to use or usefulness, practical physical function is something inherent to and never imposed on an applied object. It is built into it by its maker and exists at the very core of the object as a physical entity, a formed piece of matter. This is why an empty chair or empty pot still exhibit their intended function. It is also why how some*thing* is used, even a man-made thing, doesn't necessarily reveal much about it. Though a ceramic pot may be used to hammer tacks and a figurine may be used as a deadly weapon, such uses do not define these objects. That's why we may identify a specific figurine as a murder weapon but we can't identify every figurine as a murder weapon nor every murder weapon as a figurine.

With applied objects, because their function always has its root in the purpose that initiated their being made, function always reflects and is reflected in the applied object's physical make-up, in its physical distribution of matter. With use, because it is *any* activity or operation of which some*thing* happens to be capable of being put, it can even be imposed on an applied object regardless of the applied object's originating purpose (see Figure 4). As a result, use isn't a determinant of an object's physical form the way function *always* is.

While we will have more to say about the connections between physical form and function, for now we can conclude that applied objects are objects bound by the idea of a purpose *and* by the intentional act of *form giving*. Form giving is a willful act through which a thing is actually made as a specific physical form embodying a specific physical function. With objects of nature, since it is merely a happenstance that some have a physical shape that is useful, matching a preexistent shape to an existing need or function is to recognize their usefulness; it is an act of "shape-matching." (An act of *shape matching* also can be said to occur when man-made objects are used for something other than their intended function.) *Form giving*, on the other hand, is the creating of a specific form to fulfill a specific function; it is applying a form to a function.

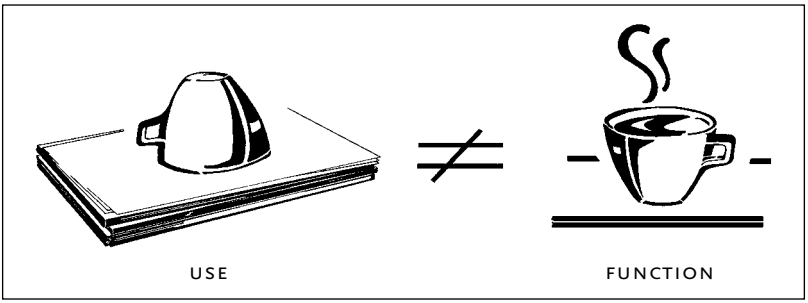


FIGURE 4. Examples of use and function.
Use does not equal function because the use to which objects can be put needn't correspond to their intended function. As this example shows, a cup's use as a paperweight, being unrelated to its function as a container, doesn't reveal much about its purpose or about it as a physical entity the way function does. About all this example of use tells us is that a cup is heavier than a piece of paper, something true of an almost unlimited number of objects.

For these reasons it holds that while all applied objects are necessarily objects of use, all objects of use are not necessarily applied objects.

Since applied objects have function as an essential part of their physical form as made objects, function remains long after radical changes have occurred to the social and cultural institutions that originally brought them into being. In this sense function exists as something independent of social and historical contexts, an observation apparent to anyone who has seen an ancient Chinese urn or a piece of Louis XV furniture. Despite being produced for exalted personages whose cultural milieu is socially, historically, and temporally far removed from our own and despite the vicissitudes of time that may have eroded their specific cultural significance, their applied function is still quite apparent.

A final point should be noted about these objects. Besides being applied objects, they also are recognized as extremely sophisticated examples of craft, which is to conclude that craft objects traditionally have been included among objects having an applied functional base. This means craft objects can be understood as belonging to that larger class of objects that we have been referring to as applied objects because they also are instigated by purpose and formed by applied function. However, the relationship between applied objects generally and crafts objects specifically is complex and needs to be explored in some detail in order to understand how craft objects are a separate class within the larger category of applied object.