

*Notes Concerning the Objects that are on
my Work-table**

There are a lot of objects on my work-table. The oldest no doubt is my pen; the most recent is a small round ashtray that I bought last week. It's of white ceramic and the scene on it shows the war memorial in Beirut (from the 1914 war, I presume, not yet the one that's breaking out now).

I spend several hours a day sitting at my work-table. Sometimes I would like it to be as empty as possible. But most often, I prefer it to be cluttered, almost to excess. The table itself is made from a sheet of glass 1 metre 40 in length and 70 centimetres across, resting on metal trestles. Its stability is far from perfect and it's no bad thing in actual fact that it should be heavily loaded or even overloaded; the weight of the objects it supports helps to keep it steady.

I tidy my work-table quite frequently. This consists of putting all the objects somewhere else and replacing them one by one. I wipe the glass table with a duster (sometimes soaked in a special product) and do the same with each object. The problem is then to decide whether a particular object should or should not be on the table (next a place has to be found for it, but usually that isn't difficult).

This rearrangement of my territory rarely takes place at random. It most often corresponds to the beginning or end of a specific piece of work; it intervenes in the middle of those indecisive days when I don't quite know whether I'm going to get started and when I simply cling on to these activities of withdrawal: tidying, sorting, setting in order. At these moments I dream of a work surface that is *virgo intacta*: everything in its place, nothing superfluous, nothing sticking out, all the pencils well sharpened (but why have several pencils? I can see six merely at a glance!),

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all the paper in a pile or, better still, no paper at all, only an exercise book open at a blank page. (Myth of the impeccably smooth desk of the Managing Director: I have seen one that was a small steel fortress, crammed with electronic equipment, or what purported to be so, which appeared and disappeared when you pressed the controls on a superior sort of dashboard.)

Later on, once my work is advancing or else stalled, my work-table becomes cluttered with objects that have sometimes accumulated there purely by chance (secateurs, folding rule), or else by some temporary necessity (coffee cup). Some will remain for a few minutes, others for a few days, others, which seem to have got there in a somewhat contingent fashion, will take up permanent residence. We're not dealing exclusively with objects directly connected with the business of writing (paper, stationery, books); others are connected with a daily practice (smoking) or a periodical one (taking snuff, drawing, eating sweets, playing patience, solving puzzles), with some perhaps superstitious foible (setting a little push-button calendar), or linked not to any particular function but to memories perhaps, or to some tactile or visual pleasure, or simply to a liking for the knick-knack in question (boxes, stones, pebbles, bud-vase).

On the whole, I could say that the objects that are on my work-table are there because I want them to be. This isn't connected simply with their function or with my own negligence. For example, there's no tube of glue on my work-table; that's to be found in a small set of drawers at the side. I put it back there a moment ago after using it. I could have left it on my work-table, but I put it away almost automatically (I say 'almost' because, since I've been describing what there is on my work-table, I am paying closer attention to my movements). Thus, there are objects useful for my work which aren't or aren't always on my work-table (glue, scissors, sticky tape, bottles of ink, stapler), others which aren't immediately useful (sealing wax), or useful for some other purpose (nail file), or not useful at all (ammonite), but which are there all the same.

These objects have in a way been chosen, been preferred to others. It's obvious, for example, that there will always be an

ashtray on my work-table (unless I give up smoking), but it won't always be the same ashtray. Generally speaking, the same ashtray stays there for quite some time; one day, in accordance with criteria that it mightn't be without interest to investigate further, I shall put it somewhere else (near the table on which I do my typing, for example, or near the plank on which my dictionaries are, or on a shelf, or in another room) and another ashtray will replace it. (An obvious invalidation of what I've just been claiming: at this precise moment, there are three ashtrays on my work-table, that is, two surplus ones which are as it happens empty; one is the war memorial, acquired very recently; the other, which shows a charming view of the roofs of the town of Ingolstadt, has just been stuck together again. The one in use has a black plastic body and a white perforated metal lid. As I look at them, and describe them, I realize in any case that they're not among my current favourites. The war memorial is definitely too small to be anything more than an ashtray for mealtimes, Ingolstadt is very fragile, and as for the black one with the lid, the cigarettes I throw away in it go on smouldering for ever.)

A desk-lamp, a cigarette box, a bud-vase, a matchbox-holder, a cardboard box containing little multi-coloured index-cards, a large carton bouilli inkwell incrustated with tortoiseshell, a glass pencil-box, several stones, three hand-turned wooden boxes, an alarm-clock, a push-button calendar, a lump of lead, a large cigar box (with no cigars in, but full of small objects), a steel spiral into which you can slide letters that are pending, a dagger handle of polished stone, account books, exercise books, loose sheets, multiple writing instruments or accessories, a big hand-blotter, several books, a glass full of pencils, a small gilded wooden box. (Nothing seems easier than to draw up a list, in actual fact it's far more complicated than it appears; you always forget something, you are tempted to write, etc., but an inventory is when you don't write, etc. With rare exceptions (Butor), contemporary writing has lost the art of enumeration: the catalogues of Rabelais, the Linnaean list of fish in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, the list of the geographers who've explored Australia in *Captain Grant's Children*.)

It's several years now since I contemplated writing the history of some of the objects that are on my work-table. I wrote the beginning of it nearly three years ago; re-reading it, I notice that, of the seven objects I talked about, four are still on my work-table (although I've moved house in between). Two have been changed: a hand-blotter, which I've replaced by another hand-blotter (they're very much alike, but the second one is bigger), and a battery alarm-clock (whose normal position, as I've already noted, is on my bedside table, where it is today), replaced by another, wind-up alarm-clock. The third object has disappeared from my work-table. This was a Plexiglas cube made up of eight cubes attached to each other in such a way as to enable it to take on a great many shapes. It was given to me by François le Lionnais* and is now in another room, on the shelf above a radiator, next to several other brainteasers and puzzles (one of these is on my work-table: a double tangram, i.e. twice seven bits of black and white plastic that can be used to form an almost infinite number of geometrical figures).

Before, I didn't have a work-table, I mean there was no table for that express purpose. It still quite often happens today that I do my work in a café. At home, however, it's very rare for me to work (write) anywhere except at my work-table (for example, I almost never write in bed) and my work-table isn't used for anything except my work. (Once again, even as I write these words, this turns out to be not wholly accurate; two or three times a year, when I give a party, my work-table is entirely cleared and covered in paper tablecloths – like the plank on which my dictionaries are piled – and becomes a sideboard.)

Thus a certain history of my tastes (their permanence, their evolution, their phases) will come to be inscribed in this project. More precisely, it will be, once again, a way of marking out my space, a somewhat oblique approach to my daily practice, a way of talking about my work, about my history and my preoccupations, an attempt to grasp something pertaining to my experience, not at the level of its remote reflections, but at the very point where it emerges.

*A mathematician who was one of the founders of the OuLiPo.

Study of Objects

1. You are going to start the found objects lessons by observing and describing in detail your selection of objects. Allow your observations and descriptions to lead you to the object you wish to carve in polystyrene. Describe why.
2. Carve your object in foam.
 - This will require you to observe your object and it's 3D form even more intently.
 - And to master a technique with which to depict it.
3. Imagine your object altered and distorted in an unnatural manner. Carve it again in this distorted form.
 - this is designed to help you envisage the materiality of the object and the form in which to make work

Also please research an artist who has used found objects

This project will be assessed next Monday morning.

This is an exercise in observing and understanding objects formally and conceptually before moving on and using the actual found objects in your work next week.