

# Tools for Everyday Life

Everyday life is a skilled, dexterous engagement with our environment. To walk across a room, drink a glass of water, or flick on a light switch are sequences of action that require many hours of practice. If such activities are not considered skilled in the same way that a musician or craftsperson's specialism might be, it can only be because of their relative ubiquity. For in circumstances where everyday skills are won, as with a child's first steps, lost, as an effect of old age, or missing, as adult Westerners first try to use chopsticks, the practiced nature of ordinary skill becomes profoundly apparent.

This project considers the actions of everyday life not as monotonous, thoughtless acts of daily toil, but rhythmic, practiced interactions with the material world. It is based on the understanding that we are all skilful practitioners, in our own way.

## The Assignment

The assignments that underpin the Tools project explore specific aspects of everyday life. The brief this time round has 3 steps.

### *Step One – Do some reading*

*Read* the attached two-page excerpt from anthropologist Tim Ingold's essay 'The Sighted Watchmaker'. In the text, Ingold makes the case that designed objects do not make life any easier, but instead 'set the rules of the game', demanding that we develop skills in order to interact with the world.

### *Step Two – Investigate 'measurement'*

*Investigate* an everyday activity/task where the act of measuring plays an important role. We spend much of our time trying to quantify the things around us. These processes require not just units of standardised or mutually agreed measurement but products that manage the collection and display of this data. Measuring devices are not just benign suppliers of information that can aid us in our day to day lives, they can warn of and protect us from the dangers of too much or little of a phenomenon and as a result their shapes and forms often help us use more or less of a 'thing'.

Through the analysis of the activity/task, you should begin to focus on one of the 'tools' used and consider how it enables a skilful interaction between humans and their environment.

### *Step Three – Design and make*

*Design and make a 12" / 300mm ruler that rewards skilled engagement with the material world.*

In the context of skilled trades, the quality of tools is taken seriously. Years of practice make tradespeople sensitive to the response of the material world. The use of good tools – a perfectly weighted hammer, freshly sharpened chisel or a shit hot paint brush – can reward this sensitivity by performing their task so well that, in addition to the required practical result, they gift some additional pleasure to a job.

### **End up with**

March 2014\_ Interim presentation of everyday action analysis

April 2014\_ Working prototype/production version with which to tease people