The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies—*homo faber* who makes and literally "works upon" as distinguished from the *animal laborans* which labors and "mixes with"—fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice. They are mostly, but not exclusively, objects for use and they possess the durability Locke needed for the establishment of property, the "value" Adam Smith needed for the exchange market, and they bear testimony to productivity, which Marx believed to be the test of human nature. Their proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man.

The durability of the human artifice is not absolute; the use we make of it, even though we do not consume it, uses it up. The life process which permeates our whole being invades it, too, and if we do not use the things of the world, they also will eventually decay, return into the over-all natural process from which they were drawn and against which they were erected. If left to itself or discarded from the human world, the chair will again become wood, and the wood will decay and return to the soil from which the tree sprang before it was cut off to become the material upon which to work and with which to build. But though this may be the unavoidable end of all single things in the world, the sign of their being products of a mortal maker, it is not so certainly the eventual fate of the human artifice itself, where all single things can be constantly replaced with the change of generations which come and inhabit the man-made world and go away. Moreover, while usage is bound to use up these objects, this end is not their destiny in the same way as destruction is the inherent end of all things for consumption. What usage wears out is durability.

It is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from men who produced and use them, their "objectivity" which makes them withstand, "stand against" and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users. From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that—in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying that the same man can never enter the same stream—men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same
table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world rather than the sublime indifference of an untouched nature, whose overwhelming elementary force, on the contrary, will compel them to swing relentlessly in the circle of their own biological movement, which fits so closely into the over-all cyclical movement of nature's household. Only we who have erected the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us, who have built it into the environment of nature so that we are protected from her, can look upon nature as something "objective." Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity.

Although use and consumption, like work and labor, are not the same, they seem to overlap in certain important areas to such an extent that the unanimous agreement with which both public and learned opinion have identified these two different matters seems well justified. Use, indeed, does contain an element of consumption, in so far as the wearing-out process comes about through the contact of the use object with the living consuming organism, and the closer the contact between the body and the used thing, the more plausible will an equation of the two appear. If one construes, for instance, the nature of use objects in terms of wearing apparel, he will be tempted to conclude that use is nothing but consumption at a slower pace. Against this stands what we mentioned before, that destruction, though unavoidable, is incidental to use but inherent in consumption. What distinguishes the most flimsy pair of shoes from mere consumer goods is that they do not spoil if I do not wear them, that they have an independence of their own, however modest, which enables them to survive even for a considerable time the changing moods of their owner. Used or unused, they will remain in the world for a certain while unless they are wantonly destroyed.

A similar, much more famous and much more plausible, argument can be raised in favor of an identification of work and labor. The most necessary and elementary labor of man, the tilling of the soil, seems to be a perfect example of labor transforming itself into work in the process, as it were. This seems so because tilling the soil, its close relation to the biological cycle and its utter dependence upon the larger cycle of nature notwithstanding, leaves some product behind which outlasts its own activity and forms a durable addition to the human artifice: the same task, performed year in and year out, will eventually transform the wilderness into cultivated land. The example figures prominently in all ancient and modern theories of laboring precisely for this reason. Yet, despite an undeniable similarity and although doubtless the time-honored dignity of agriculture arises from the fact that tilling the soil not only procures means of subsistence but in this process prepares the earth for the building of the world, even in this case the distinction remains quite clear: the cultivated land is not, properly speaking, a use object, which is there in its own durability and requires for its permanence no more than ordinary care in preservation; the tilled soil, if it is to remain cultivated, needs to be labored upon time and again. A true reification, in other words, in which the produced thing in its existence is secured once and for all, has never come to pass; it needs to be reproduced again and again in order to remain within the human world at all.
The Latin word *faber*, probably related to *facere* ("to make something" in the sense of production), originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material, such as stone or wood; it also was used as translation for the Greek *tektôn*, which has the same connotation. The word *fabri*, often followed by *tignarii*, especially designates construction workers and carpenters. I have been unable to ascertain when and where the expression *homo faber*, certainly of modern, postmedieval origin, first appeared. Jean Leclercq ("Vers la société basée sur le travail," *Revue du travail*, Vol. LI, No. 3 [March, 1950]) suggests that only Bergson "threw the concept of *homo faber* into the circulation of ideas."

This is implied in the Latin verb *obicere*, from which our "object" is a late derivation, and in the German word for object, *Gegenstand*. "Object" means, literally, "something thrown" or "put against."

---

1 The Latin word *faber*, probably related to *facere* ("to make something" in the sense of production), originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material, such as stone or wood; it also was used as translation for the Greek *tektôn*, which has the same connotation. The word *fabri*, often followed by *tignarii*, especially designates construction workers and carpenters. I have been unable to ascertain when and where the expression *homo faber*, certainly of modern, postmedieval origin, first appeared. Jean Leclercq ("Vers la société basée sur le travail," *Revue du travail*, Vol. LI, No. 3 [March, 1950]) suggests that only Bergson "threw the concept of *homo faber* into the circulation of ideas."

2 This is implied in the Latin verb *obicere*, from which our "object" is a late derivation, and in the German word for object, *Gegenstand*. "Object" means, literally, "something thrown" or "put against."