

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE OBJECT : A STUDY IN MATERIAL CULTURE

by

SOUMITRI VARADARAJAN

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Submitted

in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, DELHI

HAUZ KHAS, NEW DELHI – 110 016

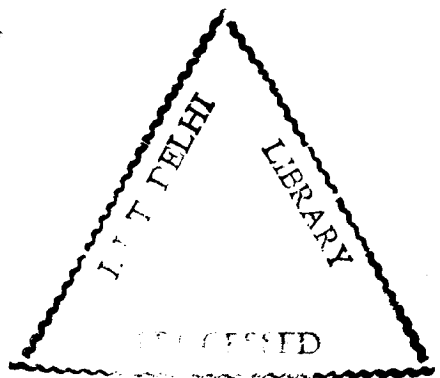
JULY, 2003

Material supplied

TM
7.011:008(540)
VAR-L

14

I. I. T. DELHI.
LIBRARY
Acc. No. IH-2940



Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled ***Life Cycle of the Object: A Study in Material Culture*** being submitted by Soumitri Varadarajan, to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bonafide research work carried out by him.

This thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other university or institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

Soumitri Varadarajan has worked under my guidance, and supervision for the submission of the thesis, which to my knowledge has reached the required standard.



Dr. (Ms.) Amrit Srinivasan

Associate Professor

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

New Delhi 110 016, India

Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking my supervisor Amrit Srinivasan for her unstinting support in bearing with me through the various twists and turns that characterised a four and half year journey to attempt a thesis on the culture of objects.

Sanil for being available to listen and open up vistas in the interrogation of concepts. Ravinder for her offers to read and suggest texts and unexplored dimensions. My students and project staff for their ear and help in giving me opportunities to articulate as yet unformed thoughts. And for bearing with me as I wandered in front of them through uncharted areas of design pedagogy. My colleagues in the department for their support and understanding.

My wife Sophie for putting up with my frequent absences from the critical task of bringing up the children. For her support and understanding. My children Raya and Iain for being such a joy and for providing all the distractions that I needed in my breaks from writing.

Lotika for her support. Kim for the critical comments at the start of the writing, and all those phone calls to keep me going. Padma for her encouragement.

And finally, Mo for being the crucial factor that made everything possible. Who appeared from nowhere just to be there for me. For his encouragement and the precision of his comments on the margins.



G.Y. SOUMRAI
98RHU001

Abstract

The thesis looks at the theoretical position of design on the object. The historical analysis shows that the practice of design; has not apprehended the richness of an object in society, does not have a perspective that sees it as a social or cultural artefact, and hence does not have a core al framework dealing with the object in a complex fashion. The focus of ent study is the object in the household. The thesis explores the object in the spatial and temporal axes. It builds a framework for the description and interpretation of an object in society. The spatial location of the object generates meanings. These meanings emerge from the relationship of the object with people. Furthermore, this meaning is location specific hence the siting of the object in a space is important. In the first chapter, the topic of design in India is introduced as being in crisis. This, the problem, is perceived from examples of dissonance/ variation in the perception of the meaning of design in universities/academia, industry and in society. In the second chapter, the historical trajectory of design is described from the colonial period to the present. The description highlights the fact of design in India as being preoccupied with issues other than that concerning the object. In chapter three,

the object is described in theoretical frameworks as being socially and spatially embedded. The object is apprehended as an inventory and classification of all objects, in a household. In chapter four, the object is described as having a temporal trajectory that is referred to as its life cycle. The chapter concludes by proposing a composite theoretical framework to describe an object. In chapter five, the specific case study of the household is described as a negotiated outcome of the perceptions of the householders and the spaces and their structures encountered by them. The location of objects is shown to be specific to spaces. In chapter six, specific objects are described in the context of their siting, design and development through time. The final chapter concludes by discussing the implications of the theoretical framework of the life cycle of the object upon design theory and practice.

Contents

<i>Certificate</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>III</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>V</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>VII</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>X</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>XV</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background: Design in crisis	1
1.2 Approach and Methodology of Field Study	5
1.3 Chapter Summary	15
Chapter 2: The Project of Design in India	29
2.1.1 Art History and Archaeology: A Framework for Constructing History	32
2.2 Construct I: The Roots of Design	38
2.2.1 India the Great Civilization	39
2.2.2 Design in the Colonial Period	40
2.2.3 'Roots of Design' as a construct	46
2.3 Construct II: The Project of India	49
2.3.1 The Idea of India	50
2.3.2 Design for Nation Building	53
2.3.3 Design in the Project of India	60
2.4 Construct III: Contingent Frameworks	62
2.4.1 Contemporary Concerns	63
2.4.2 Design for Industry	66
2.4.3 Design as a Contingent Construct	69
2.5 The Indian Design Condition and the Problem Statement	70

Chapter 3: The Location of the Object in Material Culture	75
3.1 Ways to Think about the Object	77
3.2 On the Spatial Location of the Object in the Community	88
3.2.1 The Right Way: Practice and Habitus	91
3.2.2 Taste: Distinction and Difference in Society	94
3.2.3 The Other Objects: The Non-Goods or the Bads.	99
3.3 On the Spatial Location of the Object in the Household	104
3.3.1 The House is a Structured Universe	106
3.3.2 The Inward Looking House	109
3.3.3 Emplacement and Social Embeddedness	117
3.4 Objects are Socially Constructed	120
Chapter 4: The Life Cycle of the Object and its Social Construction.....	125
4.1 The Circulation of Objects in Society	128
4.1.1 Commodities and their Exchange	129
4.1.2 The Biography of the Object	132
4.2 The Social Construction of the Object	134
4.2.1 Networks are made up of Relevant Social Groups	139
4.2.2 Technological Determinism in Design	146
4.3 On Life Cycle Thinking	149
4.4 The Proposed Framework: The Life Cycle of the Object.....	160
Chapter 5: The Structure of the Household: Social and Spatial Aspects	167
5.1 Campus and Community.....	169
5.1.1 Design and Historical context	170
5.1.2 Campus Description.....	173
5.1.3 Accommodation on Campus.....	174
5.1.4 Community	177
5.2 The Traditional Dwelling Described	178
5.3 Household on Campus	185
5.3.1 Profile of Households	189
5.3.2 The Place for People and Things: the Courtyard and <i>Kamra</i>	191
5.3.3 The Place for the Hearth	197
5.3.4 The Place for Purification and Pollution	202
5.3.5 The Courtyard as Outside and Liminal spaces	207
5.4 Emplacement and Embeddedness	212
5.4.1 Places, Phases and Sites in the Household	215

Chapter 6: Object Sites in the Household: Commodity, Use and Waste 223

6.1	Site of Commodity	225
6.1.1	The Television	226
6.1.2	The Sofa Set.....	234
6.1.3	The Commodity Candidacy of Objects	240
6.2	The Site of Use	248
6.2.1	The Toothbrush Holder.....	249
6.2.2	The Box Bed	256
6.2.3	The Negotiation of Use.....	260
6.3	The Site of Waste	266
6.3.1	Vase with Artificial Flowers	267
6.3.2	Bric a Brac	272
6.3.3	The Heterotopia Located	275
6.4	The Site-Phase Intersection	282
6.4.1	Six Implications of the Intersection: The Construction of Material Culture	283

Chapter 7: Implications for Design Theory and Practice..... 291

7.1	The Problem: A Design History for India	295
7.2	Why does design need sociology or the reason to do a sociology of objects.	300
7.3	The Design of the Study.....	304
7.4	What was achieved?.....	307
7.5	What are the implications of this study?	310
7.6	Conclusion	314

Appendices 319-344

Appendix I: Questionnaire.....	319
Appendix II: Interview – Points for Discussion	331
Appendix III: India Report – Select Pages.....	333
Appendix IV: Design Policy for India I.....	338
Appendix V: Design Policy for India II.....	341

Bibliography 345

Bio Data 367