The system of material objects, whether made locally in a community or imported, along with the techniques and activities which the making and effective use of these objects demand, lay down for a community one of the basic conditions of daily life, and provide a framework and programme circumscribing other types of behaviour which are less easy to understand and describe.

But having once obtained precise knowledge of a specific object and its associated activities, and the prevailing norms associated with each, it can be used as a "sounding" into the matrix of changing social relations which surrounds it.

Socio-economic Relations surrounding the object

Transactions in connection with the object involve relationships between individual and group. Raw materials may be acquired with the ownership of land, by purchase or exchange, or the appropriation of recognized waste. Making may be done by paid labour, family group, or in return for rights to use. A work group will have a structure, with some exercise of leadership, and certain types of ceremonial behaviour. Similarly the conditions of disposal and use may be analysed and described.

Place of the object in the Colonial Society

The making and use of the object involve socio-economic relationships within a household group, a group of kin or associates, and also with the economic, social and political institutions of the colonial society. One way of looking at these relations is to question the extent to which the making and use of the object, and the ends which it serves, are furthered or frustrated by the pressure of the colonial society, working from without or within. The object may lose value because of the importation of cheaper more convenient articles from a large economic enterprise, or it may displace imported articles. Its making, disposal, and use may be subject to a variety of legislation, e.g. Excise, Health Regulations, Taxation, Compulsory Registration and Insurance etc. It may interact with education programmes, i.e. the technique of use may be taught in school, or it may be pronounced undesirable in school. It may conflict with, or be auxiliary to recognised church practices.

The "Meanings" of the object

Having considered the object first technologically, and next as being the subject of a series of arrangements used in society for handling it as scarce means, it may also be considered as a recognised symbol within the community of some values of a non-economic kind. The object may be associated in people's minds with some aspect of the system of ideas by which they interpret behaviour, and the whole system of social relations. Thus a trash house may symbolise a lowly position in the order of social prestige, whilst the replacement of trash by a galvanized roof symbolises a rise in that order. The wearing by women of white clothes and a white head-tie may symbolise membership of a certain religious sect. The cooking of a dish may be a symbol of recognition of a festival day, and the playing of marbles and the drinking of rum may symbolise the fact of belonging to an age group. A particular object in a special position may symbolise the belief in the presence and availability of supernatural power.