**Experiential Observation +**

**Synesthetic Analysis +**

**Polysemous Interpretation =**

**A GUIDE TO MULTI-SENSORY ARTIFACT STUDY**

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**Experiential Observation (step 1)**

**Observation:** *Is using sight to notice details, identifying and describing qualities.*

**Experiential observation:** *Employing all available senses systematically to perceive and describe the material qualities of a study object.*

Observe the material qualities of the piece with all your senses and note:

- What are the size, shape, and form of this piece?
- What is it made of? Consider feel, color, texture, smell, etc.
- What are the decorative elements? Moving from one area/side to the other in a regular way, following your interest/physical manipulation.
- Where does it make you look, where is your eye and hand drawn?
- What part or parts does it have?
- Is anything missing, broken, worn, burned, etc.?
- Can you tell how it was held, worn, stored, etc.?
- Are there physical signs of repair?
- Of mounting or display?
- Of cataloging or sale?
- Of additions or subtractions?
Synesthetic Analysis (step 2)

**Analysis:** A critical consideration; extrapolates intention or meaning.

**Synesthetic analysis:** Uses multi-sensory observations to explicate a study object’s possible affordances, meanings, and uses, as well as the possible intentions of its creators and users.

Use Experiential Observations to consider:
- What is this item?
- What materials, crafts, skills, and technologies were needed to produce it?
- How were these obtained?
- How long did it take to make?
- Who might have made the item? Consider all qualities of identity (age, gender, etc.).
- How was this object used? How can you tell?
- What might have been used with it?
- How would it be experienced when it was in use? Think about all the senses.
- Who might have used the item?
- Did making or using this item require special knowledge?
- Were the maker and user the same person?
- When was it used (time of day, year)?
- How long would this item be used? How might it be discarded or retired?
- What might the designs or decorations depict?

Polysemous Interpretation (step 3)

**Interpretation:** Making sense of something by explaining its meaning, significance, or utility.

**Polysemous interpretation:** Drawing on analytical insights to suggest plausible explanations for qualities or meanings, considering multiple contextualizing sources and standpoints and being reflexive.

Use your Synesthetic Analysis to answer:
- How might this item have been valued and by whom? Why do you think that?
- How does this item make you feel? Why, to what are you responding?
- Did it bring people together? Who and how? Why do you think that?
- Did it separate people or create boundaries or tensions?
- How do you think it came to Stanford University?
- What in your experiences helps you to make sense of this item?
- What in your scholarly training or other knowledge helps?
- What was surprising, intriguing, or puzzling about the item?
- What questions does it inspire you to ask?
- What might you be assuming or taking for granted about this item?
- What social, cultural, reflexive, anthropological issues does it raise for you? How might you address these issues?