

Manual for object analysis

devised by

MA Design History and Material Culture students

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Some questions to ask about an object

1. What does it feel like?
2. What does it smell like?
3. What does it taste like?
4. What does it sound like?
5. Can it be amplified?
6. How can it be amplified?
7. Can you hold it?
8. Can you touch it?
9. Could you ever touch it?
10. What's the optimum viewing distance of the object?
11. How do different viewing angles change your sense of it?
12. What expectations does it place on the person viewing it?
13. What's the optimum listening distance from the object?
14. Did the maker expect it to be seen?
15. Did the maker expect it to be seen from a particular perspective?
16. What are the physical dimensions of the object?
17. How much does it weigh?
18. What unit of measurement are you using when describing the dimensions of this object?
19. What unit of measurement are you using when describing the weight of this object?
20. What other units of measurement might be used?
21. What units of measurement might have been used to make this object?
22. Were units of measurement used to sell this object?
23. Does it look heavy or light?
24. Does it look heavy or light in comparison to similar objects?
25. How are you deciding what objects this object is similar to?
26. How would you describe its texture?
27. Is it made from one or more materials?
28. What material is it made from?
29. What materials is it made from?
30. What does it look like at a molecular level?
31. What would it be like if you doubled or tripled its scale or increased it 10, 100, 1000-fold?
32. Does it have any words or letters or numbers on it?
33. How were those words or letters or numbers put on it?
34. How would you describe those words or letters or numbers?
35. Are those words or letters or numbers meant to be read?
36. What language or languages those words or letters or numbers in?
37. What style is it?
38. Who created the terminology for that style?
39. Is it 'about' anything?
40. Is it clear what it is?
41. What colour is it?
42. Is it more than one colour?

43. How do you understand colour in relation to this object?
44. Might that colour, those colours have been described differently at the time the object was made?
45. Might that colour, those colours have been described differently in the place the object was made?
46. To whom might it be clear what it is?
47. What clues does it give us to tell us who made it?
48. What clues does it give us to tell us how it was made?
49. Does it suggest anything about what has happened to it since it was made?
50. Are any parts of it more used than others?
51. Is it more worn in particular places?
52. Are any bits of it broken?
53. Has it been repaired?
54. Does it have different parts?
55. Does any of it move?
56. In what context was the object made?
57. Who made the object?
58. Can you access further information about the maker?
59. From what sources?
60. What is the style of the object?
61. What time period does it belong to?
62. Who describes that time period?
63. How do we measure time?
64. How would we describe the time it was made?
65. How would that time be described at the time it was made?
66. Where was the object made?
67. Where and what is that place now?
68. Is that place on a map?
69. Can we see that place?
70. Can we go to that place?
71. What did that place look smell feel sound taste like?
72. Where did the materials used in its construction come from?
73. Who got those materials?
74. What processes did those materials undergo?
75. Who determined those processes?
76. Was there suffering in the making of it?
77. Who suffered in the making of it?
78. What does it tell us about the technology of the time in which it was made?
79. What does it tell us about the technology in the place in which it was made?
80. What was the object used for?
81. Did it always have the same use?
82. Was it useful?
83. Who was it useful to?
84. What did useful mean when it was made?
85. What did useful mean where it was made?
86. Are there any discolourations, distortions, wearing or chipping that

- provide clues as to the nature of the object's usage?
87. Did/does the object have a practical function?
 88. To whom is it practical?
 89. What was its intellectual use?
 90. What was its aesthetic use?
 91. What was its sentimental use?
 92. Do you know who owned the object?
 93. What else might the owner of the object owned?
 94. Who else might have used the object?
 95. Can the object's provenance (the full history of its ownership) be traced?
 96. What sort of status did the object confer on its owner?
 97. What value did the object have when it was first produced?
 98. What is its value now?
 99. Does it have a monetary value?
 100. If it was purchased for money, what was of equivalent value at the time?
 101. Where was it sold, if it was sold?
 102. Where might it be sold now, if it was to be sold?
 103. Has the value of the object changed over time?
 104. Where is the object now?
 105. How did it get there?
 106. Has it been categorised?
 107. Is it described in a catalogue?
 108. What sort of values are conveyed in the way it is catalogued?
 109. Is it part of a collection?
 110. Who decided it should be in a collection?
 111. What else is in that collection?
 112. How is it interpreted?
 113. Is it on display?
 114. How does the way it is displayed affect the way it is understood?
 115. Does it have a label?
 116. Does that label convey a value system, for example by establishing hierarchies?
 117. Does the label centre particular cultures or forms of knowledge?
 118. Where does it live?
 119. What or who else lives there?
 120. Does anyone miss the object?
 121. Can the object be visited?
 122. What are the barriers to accessing the object?
 123. Does anyone want the object to be destroyed?
 124. Did the object generate other objects?
 125. What parts of the body interacted with the object?
 126. Did the use of the object affect the body?
 127. Where was the object stored?
 128. How did people find out about the object?
 129. Was the object advertised?
 130. Where was it advertised?
 131. What did the advertisement look like?
 132. Why did it look like that?

133. What did the advertisement say?
134. Why did it say that?
135. How much did it cost to advertise the object?
136. Is there a non human-centered way of describing the object?
137. What organisms might the object have interacted with over its life to date?
138. Could the object have been a gift?
139. What did a gift mean in relation to the time and place the object was gifted in?
140. Was the recipient of the object compelled to reciprocate for receiving the object?
141. How might the recipient of the object have reciprocated on receiving the object?
142. What are the legal implications of the ownership of this object?
143. Is it a commodity?
144. Might it become commodified in the future?
145. What bureaucratic processes might this object have passed through?
146. Has the object ever been cleaned?
147. What would or does the process of cleaning the object tell us about concepts or categories of cleanliness and dirt?
148. How could you make the object funny?
149. How could the object be used as a weapon?
150. How could the object's agency be augmented?
151. Could the object be turned into an other object?

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