

WRITING THE IMPLOSION: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time

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I have taught a course called Science and Politics for a number of years and one year in particular, it was very early in the morning, a big lecture class at 8:00am. To get to the lecture hall we all passed this little shop that sold good coffee and chocolate croissants. . . . And *just as a way of waking up* in the morning, I would ask people to *unpack* objects, to take a chocolate croissant and lead me through flour and chocolate and butter and sugar and coffee and *connect us to world histories* that way. I would ask people to pick an object, the T-shirt that the person sitting next to them was wearing, what was printed on it, the label, the very fact of labeling, the fibre composition. If it's got polyester, then take me through the history of Purity Hall and research labs at Du Pont; you know, back me up into nitrogen chemistry. If it's cotton, then back me into pesticides and the California water projects and where cotton is grown and the length of the fibre and what about what you are wearing on your chest? I would ask people, as a way of talking about science and politics, to take a pencil, a piece of paper, the architecture of the lecture hall that you walked past; pick something and get the class started by giving me an account of it.

—Donna Haraway, in *Live Theory* (emphasis added)

WAKING UP TO CONNECTIONS . . .

Coffee is not enough, alas. Necessary for some of us, but not enough to properly wake up to the connectedness of the world, to our connectedness to world histories. But why not? How do T-shirts, croissants, and pencils contain their histories without our being aware of them? Why does even Donna Haraway, a historian of these particular connections, need to wake up each day to them again?

The everyday, it seems, conspires against us, or with that part of us that wants to live in an everyday in which objects are mere parts of the world and it all makes a certain kind of sleepy sense. The connections Haraway instigates in the coffee shop may strike one as outrageous, certainly so early in the morning. They require promiscuous knowledge; they seem to accuse one of not having done enough homework. Anxieties arise, some look for an exit. Even worse, the connections may threaten the well-made world one lives in. One senses a potentially dangerous *demand* in them. The dormant activist stirs, “If I find out that T-shirts contribute to environmental degradation or coffee to poverty, how am I going to get out of bed at all?” How to live, how to know, how to be comfortable. How did comfort get wired in anyway?

Published in the same year as Haraway’s “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 2* considered post–World War II cinema and described a similar opposition between films that use the everyday to “make us grasp something intolerable and unbearable” and those that “no matter how violent, are directed to a pragmatic visual function which ‘tolerates’ or ‘puts up with’ practically anything” (Deleuze 1989, 19). The words *intolerable* and *unbearable* may seem overblown for T-shirts and coffee, but I ask your indulgence with this matter to understand how Deleuze (in dialogue with Michel Foucault) wants to use these terms to signal an embodied form of politics aspiring to something different, opposed to a commonsense body and business as usual, a politics that indicates a (perhaps grudging) acceptance of the order of things and people.¹ I want to put Deleuze’s *Cinema 2* in dialogue with Haraway’s work on connections, because working through the former helps me unpack the process of Haraway’s inquisitive implsion method and some of its aims better.² Following this exegesis, I offer a homework project for putting this method into practice.

Haraway wakes up to connections precisely to rewire her common sense that every day conspires against this new physiology. For both Haraway and Deleuze, it is in our bodies that we are most vulnerable to comfort.

Neither everyday nor limit-situations are marked by anything rare or extraordinary. . . . It is just a factory, a school. . . . We mix with all that, even death, even accidents, in our normal life or on holidays. We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensory-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving them. . . . We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful. It should be pointed out here that even metaphors are sensory-motor evasions, and furnish us with something to say when we no longer know what to do. (Deleuze 1989, 20)

Hovering about, haunting all sides of our everyday worlds are other stories, other accounts, other connections that we may suspect, yet that paralyze us sometimes due to their enormity. Writing about cutting-edge films for their formation of new concepts, Deleuze does not analyze the processes of sensory-motor enculturation produced by more popular media. Haraway's *Primate Visions* takes on this challenge, examining the excruciating ways in which "nature stories" about primates, primitives, women, and civilization are produced in post–World War II films and scientific articles. She explains how the processes of iconically and categorically dividing nature from history both give us our common sense about the neat world and therapeutically inoculate us against worrying about the loose ends.

In summary, in all of these stories humans from scientific cultures are placed in "nature" in gestures that absolve the reader and viewer of unspoken transgressions, that relieve the anxieties of separation and solitary isolation on a threatened planet and for a culture threatened by the consequences of its own history. But the films and articles rigorously exclude the contextualizing politics of decolonization and exploitation of the emergent Third World. . . .³ Instead the dramas of communication, origin, extinction and reproduction are played out in a nature that seems innocent of history. . . . It is precisely to renaturalize "man" after the calamities of advanced industrialism, and especially after the bomb, that apes and (white) people are placed together in *both* the "natural" world of the forest and the "cultural" world of language-users and pet-keepers. (Haraway 1989, 156)

Key to war movies featuring bands of brothers and heroism are bits of complex threads about even horrific events, used in ways that isolate them into nice nuggets. The universal myth here is that most comfortable of epistemic objects, a cliché, a story that should be redundant yet whose enjoyment and function is to be repeated: the comfort of a McDonald's in times of peace and war. And weaving though our lives from start to finish, clichés are part of us.

The image constantly sinks to the state of the cliché: because it is introduced into sensory-motor linkages, because it itself organizes or induces these linkages, because we never perceive everything that is in the image, because it is made for that purpose. . . . Civilization of the image? In fact, it is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image. (Deleuze 1989, 21)

Thus we are not awake when we are awake. Our eyes are open, but we perceive only clichés, “only what we are interested in perceiving” (Deleuze 1989, 20). Even if we read newspapers, watch cable news (CNN, BBC, or FOX), or follow and resend Facebook posts, the war-torn, poverty- and disease-stricken, unequal, unbearable world is tragic—but somehow tolerable. A problem shared, I would argue, by Haraway and Deleuze, is how to disrupt our own tolerance, how to see the intolerable in the everyday. “If our sensory-motor schema jam or break, then a different type of image can appear” (Deleuze 1989, 20). Deleuze detects in cinema a potential to *shock* thinking, beyond imagination (for imagination is precisely what popular cinema aims to reproduce). “For it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world, on the contrary, it is because this world is intolerable that it can no longer think a world or think itself” (Deleuze 1989, 169–70). Deleuze points to another kind of thinking, another kind of politics to come, as something to be invented that does not already make sense.⁴

While Haraway looks to science fiction for ways of imagining how the world could be otherwise, her primary method of analysis is resolutely empirical.⁵ By looking differently, through other eyes—human fleshy, mouse murine, cyborg—she confronts intolerable and unbearable worlds within everyday objects. “Vision is *always* a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (Haraway 1988, 192). In this double practice, seeing and the apparatus of seeing are both interrogated and held accountable. This is not a reflexive practice of the seen and

the seer, because reflection implies a self-presence, a comfortable sense of one's identities and stakes. Rather, it is diffracted. One only sees at all through eyes that are themselves devices with histories of their own. Haraway (1988, 192) continues: "These points also apply to testimony from the position of 'oneself.' We are not immediately present to ourselves. Self-knowledge requires a semiotic-material technology linking meanings and bodies. Self-identity is a bad visual system."

Non-innocence and complicity are necessary if one is to confront world histories as histories that one is a part of and accountable to. Without these stances, one easily falls into some incarnation of a god-trick, claiming to see the world from nowhere in particular. Situated knowledge as a method begins at this point of bloody eyes seeing a violent world and not turning away because that would only add to the violence: commitment. One will pursue connections like a bloodhound to try and make better stories, fuller world histories, stronger objectivity.⁶ One fights for one's own eyes as well as for those of others. "Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over *how* to see. . . . [O]bjectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about" (Haraway 1988, 194, 195).

This commitment to investigate is something we come to have to do. Deleuze described Franz Kafka's commitment similarly: "The impossibility of not 'writing,' the impossibility of writing in the dominant language, the impossibility of writing differently" (Deleuze 1989, 217).⁷ For Haraway (1997, 68), the stakes are always high, but they are also everywhere:

The relations of democracy and knowledge are up for materialized refiguring at every level of the onion of doing technoscience, not just after all the serious epistemological action is over. I believe that last statement is a fact; I know it is my hope and commitment. This position is not relativism; it is a principled refusal of the stacked deck that forces choice between loaded dualities such as realism and relativism.

TAKE A WALK ON THE WILY SIDE . . .

When my students read Haraway, they are often struck by the density of descriptions that span centuries and cultures, corporations and identities, without ever being nonspecific. Her stories of the bomb, gene, brain, mouse, vampire, and the like are not generic stories of mice, for instance, but of OncoMouseTM, and even of particular OncoMiceTM at specific labs. Students complain sometimes

about the too much information that inhabit them, and worry that the stories are biased. They often voice as criticism what Haraway (1997, 68) takes as a principle of research: “Stories and facts do not naturally keep a respectable distance; indeed, they promiscuously cohabit the same very material places.” The actual liveliness, the wiliness of nature and culture as natureculture is what I wish to point to and respond with. But often this does not convince them. Instead I have found that the best way to get my students to appreciate Haraway’s necessary work is to give them an assignment. I call it the “Implosion Project,” after her most productive methodological image. Implosion is a concept whose first dictionary definition is “a violent collapse inward,” as when a star collapses on its own gravity to form a black hole. Analogously, world histories are not just found inside objects, and objects do not “point” to them; in important ways each object is made of imploded histories: “Any interesting being in technoscience, like a textbook, molecule, equation, mouse, pipette, bomb, fungus, technician, agitator, or scientist can—and often should—be teased open to show the sticky economic, technical, political, organic, historical, mythic, and textual threads that make up its tissues” (Haraway 1997, 68).

Haraway’s lists are always important constructions. Here, facts, media, things, people are equally all implisions, all material-semiotic actors, all unpackable, all full of different threads that “can—and often should” be teased out. The list of threads—“economic, technical, political, organic, historical, mythic, and textual”—appears in more or less similar forms, with economic, labor, epistemological, and other dimensions appearing. Haraway (1997, 68) also defines implosion as a *force* bringing multiple dimensions together, connecting them, and as “a *claim* for heterogeneous and continual construction through historically located practice, where the actors are not all human.” So the first part of the assignment is to see how many dimensions of a particular object one knows about, to explore the vastly different stories that one can tell about it.

The multiple dimensions that make up objects also make up ourselves, as well as our categories. Telling the stories of an object therefore begins unpacking our own clichés, our certainties, our affects. Writes Haraway (1997, 68): “The point is simple: the technical, textual, organic, historical, formal, mythic, economic, and political dimensions of entities, actions, and worlds implode in the gravity well of technoscience—or perhaps of any world massive enough to bend our attention, warp our certainties, and sustain our lives.”

Following connections is thus the only way to proceed, no matter how worrisome the result. The physics here is serious: the world itself is warped and

the straight lines we see between categories may be twisted, but those twists must be carefully followed. Only in this manner can we confront the histories and the intolerable not just in objects but in ourselves, in our identities as partial, in our senses, our worries, and our common sense. As does Deleuze, though in an implosive, grounded register, Haraway seeks other ways of thinking, writing, and doing politics. “We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway 1988, 196).

The Implosion Project is designed to guide one through the arduous homework required to write an implosion with awareness and commitment. It consists of a series of questions, organized by dimensions to explore the tissues of an object. Following these is a set of analytic twists, each one turning the implosion on oneself, one’s common sense, and on the world. The project originated while I was a teaching assistant for Haraway’s “Science and Politics” class at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I came to see that it helped generate more interesting projects, ones that mattered to the writer, and at the same time helped explicate some aspects of Haraway’s unique style and power. I have continued to experiment with it and assign it in almost all my classes. I will explain how after I outline the process.

IMPLOSION PROJECT: The Assignment

Implosion Projects are attempts to teach and learn about the embeddedness of objects, facts, actions, and people in the world and the world in them. The emphasis is on details and nonobvious connections, as well as on the many dimensions with which we can analyze them: labor, professional, material, technological, political, economic, symbolic, textual, bodily, historical, educational.

Pick an artifact, a fact, a process as “it.” Make sure it is as specific as possible (not just fluoxetine, but one of those colored, branded Prozac pills that is in your medicine cabinet; not just the fact that a monkey can use sign language, but the materialized, stated claim in a 1999 journal article). How can it be conceptualized? What is it to different groups of people and individuals? How is it situated in the world and how is the world situated in it? Following is a hastily put-together, quite incomplete, yet apparently excessive list of possibly relevant aspects of any artifact (whether it be a social movement, a name, a grouping, a set of actions, or a process in the form of a thing, a grain of rice, a mouse, a mouse pad, an ad about a mouse, you, a fact of life, a book, a statistic, an event, a story . . .).

With your specific artifact, fact, object, or process in front of you, brainstorm: Go through the list slowly and try to answer each question as best you can. Diagram or make a chart if you need to. It may seem hard to know where to put different answers, as the questions are indiscrete. “Potent categories collapse into each other. Analytically and provisionally we may want to move what counts as the political to the background and to foreground elements called technical, formal, or quantitative, or to highlight the textual and semiotic while muting the economic or mythic” (Haraway 1997, 68).

Note your form of certainty as well: whether you feel you know the answer in detail, have a good idea about it, a guess, or no idea. Take your time. It may take more than one session. Don’t do any extra research at this point. Type it in so you can add more later. If there are more dimensions that strike you as needing inclusions, add them and iterate questions for them as well.

These questions are only hints, but remember that almost any answer provides a cluster of new artifacts (try not to go more than three levels down). The object of this project is to explore the real complexity of specificity and situatedness. These words only mean something in the context of specific knowledges and matter, and in contests over what matters. In these contexts they allow us to get at the world in an effective and affective way; they help show us how the world matters and how it might be otherwise. Following this is a set of analytic twists, each one turning the implsion on oneself, one’s common sense, and on the world.

How Is the World in “It” and How Is “It” in the World?

Labor dimensions: How was it produced and who is involved in its production? Are there stages in its production? Where has it traveled to and from? What are the histories of its productions? Who maintains these processes of production? Where are they maintained? How is it used and how is using it seen as labor, or not? What forms of labor and work incorporate it or make use of it? Is it used up? If not, how is it passed on, transferred, communicated? What routes do these processes take? What kinds of actors (human and nonhuman) are involved, and what kinds are excluded?

Professional/Epistemological dimensions: How is knowledge of the process and its production demarcated and professionalized? What kinds of knowledge count in talking about it? What kind of professionals are involved in making expert decisions regarding its development, production, and dis-

semination? How are each of these stages funded? In projecting its future use? What kinds of controversies of this knowledge are happening? Who is involved? In what kinds of institutions do they work? How is it articulated by medical, legal, governmental, religious, psychological, engineering, military, economic, academic, new age, and educational professionals? What are the political-economic histories of this?

Material dimensions: What materials are involved in its production and maintenance? Where have these materials come from? How are they disposed of? What hazards are considered among these materials? What are the labor dimensions of these material productions? What are the global, economic, and political dimensions of their use? What are the histories, sciences, and political dimensions of these materials? How do these help constitute it?

Technological dimensions: What kinds of technologies and machines enable it to be produced and maintained? What technologies are joined with it? Who has access to these machines and technologies? What are their histories? What sorts of information technologies are involved? What are the political, economic, bodily, labor, and historical dimensions of these technologies? How do they help constitute it?

Context and situatedness: Where does it appear in the world? How does it appear and next to what or in what? What activities or ways of life enable one to come across it? What kinds of audiences is it addressed to? Who is excluded in these addresses? When can it appear? What is the rhythm of its appearance? How does this matter?

Political dimensions: What kinds of local, national, and international bodies claim jurisdiction over it? What bodies play a part in approving it (e.g., lobbyists, patents, corporate sponsorship, etc.)? What are the histories of regulations concerning it? How do these regulations help constitute it? How is it understood in terms of political positions in the world? How can we articulate the ways it is understood with political discourses? How is it hegemonic—in what ways can we see it as marshaling our consent to dominant orders? What kinds of legislation affect it? How do political considerations make use of it? What are the political positions as seen through the lens of this artifact (they often vary by artifact and moment)? How does this matter?

Economic dimensions: The process as commodity: how is it marketed, purchased, consumed? Where and by whom? How is it involved in a world marketplace? What kinds of capital, debt, credit, and labor relations are involved in producing, marketing, and circulating it? Who sells it? How are costs calculated? How are risks calculated? By whom and when? What are the histories and materialities of those relations? Who is involved at each stage and how are differences in power situated? How do these help constitute it?

Textual dimensions: What texts are involved in it? What texts refer to it? What kinds of texts? Who produces them and who reads them? Where and in what organizations and institutions are the texts produced and read? What are the histories of these texts and how are they funded? What kinds of textual associations can be made? How does this matter?

Bodily/organic dimensions: How are bodies related to it? What forms of attention, affect, emotion, and cognition are involved? Are there particular ways in which we think of ourselves that also involve or sustain this process? What kinds of bodies, including nonhumans, and bodily relations are involved in producing it? What kinds make use of it? How are these bodies and relations gendered? Are there racial, gendered, differently abled, or other group identifications that help construct these bodies? What ways of life are involved? What are the histories of all these relations? How do these help constitute it?

Historical dimensions: What concepts refer to it? What are the histories of these concepts? Was it invented, when and by whom? Are there different and competing versions of its histories? Who tells these histories? How has it traveled historically? Repeat the above dimensions for each aspect of its history. How do these help constitute it?

Particle Dimensions: How can the process be divided up? What are its parts? What are its stages? Treating each part or stage as a process, repeat the above analysis.

Educational dimensions: How does it appear in our socialization? When do we learn about it in school? During the rest of life? What kinds of people/bodies get to learn about it? How much do we learn about it? What aspects

of it are avoided? What are the histories of teaching about it? How does this matter?

Mythological dimensions: What roles does it play in fantasies? What kinds of national narratives make use of it? How does it appear in entertainment? What other grand narratives, stories, and strong associations involve it (e.g., progress, risk, joy, fear, science, militarism, success, decline, horror, self-improvement, financial security, nuclear family, motherhood, fatherhood, independence, adolescence, democracy, origin stories, stories of difference, privilege, death, pornography, sports)? How do these matter?

Symbolic dimensions: What are the many different ways in which it can be taken as a symbol? How does this process serve in symbolic systems? What sorts of ideas, metaphors, movements, ideologies, and the like are associated with it? For whom are these relevant, to whom do they matter, and what contests over meaning are they involved in? What are the histories of these meanings and contests over meaning? How do they matter?

WALKTHROUGH

Twist 1: Brainstorm → Knowledge Map

When you are done, you have a map of your knowledge on the subject, of your common sense as well, of what you have *felt* worth knowing, and of what you have *learned to attend to* in your life, every day and academically. The brainstorm is thus really a braindump.

The braindump is also a story dump, getting all the stories you have learned to tell about the subject, with all their plots and forms and tropes, out in the open. Hopefully at some point you ran out on certain questions and really started thinking about connections in new ways. I have noticed when I conduct ethnographic interviews and oral histories that people usually have at least one to three hours of canned stories—honed, carefully put-together stories—that are fascinating and designed to be so. This is understandable and necessary as people have to explain themselves to others repeatedly and stories are mnemonic condensation devices for meanings and facts, representing the experience of badly told tales and misunderstandings. But after those initial one to three hours, if one keeps asking questions about specific connections, people, and events, a vast land opens up of forgotten memories, tentative and alternative explanations, and new understandings and formulations of meanings.

While brainstorming, you hopefully find ways to exhaust your stories about what is interesting about your implosion and come to see their limitations. Despite “knowing that everything is connected,” there are limits to the connections you are able to make. These limitations can be considered the mundane, at the mundane level of that which *you didn’t know you knew*. New patterns, relations, and actors come to mind.

Twist 2: Gap Map → Ignorance Map

Now if you imagine that each question on the assignment is a patch on a big chart colored by your degree of knowledge-attention-care about it, then you might also see some metapatterns: dimensions or subdimensions where you know a lot, and others where you are quite ignorant. This should be thought of as your *gap-map*. Start reflecting and writing about *how* you came to know the areas you do. Here is my Wittgensteinian probe: “How specifically did you come to know those answers? And how did you come to care to know about the questions?” Again, specificity often comes with resistance. Did you learn it in a particular grade or class, as a result of what curriculum? Did you become curious through a friend who had become interested how? Did you always seem to know it, or find it on the web, or on TV—why was it there? Here you are mapping another dimension, your personal politics, your personal, political, economic, institutional, historical, religious, and regional forms of attention and understanding and how they have come to matter for your world.

I am conscious of the odd perspective provided by my historical position—a PhD in biology for an Irish Catholic girl was made possible by Sputnik’s impact on US national science-education policy. I have a body and mind as much constructed by the post–Second World War arms race and cold war as by the women’s movements. There are more grounds for hope in focusing on the contradictory effects of politics designed to produce loyal American technocrats, which also produced large numbers of dissidents, than in focusing on the present defeats. (Haraway 1990, 173)

If you turn the gap-map inside out, reversing the figure-ground relationship, and imagine as colored in all the areas where you know the least, you now start to pay attention to patterns of ignorance. Science studies scholars like Robert Proctor have begun to study this realm of “Agnotology: The Cultural Production of Ignorance.”⁸ Here you should consider the explanations that come to mind to explain (even defensively) *why* you do not know these things. These stories about

unimportance, difficulty, obscurity, inefficiency (too little time or bang for the buck), and exhaustion speak to the ways in which your knowledge and attention and caring have been shaped. Are there also counterstories about this ignorance, accounts of others who know and care so you do not have to?

Your assignment for this phase is to imagine how and where you could get the answers you are missing. Even if time, money, effort, and intimidation would keep you from getting some of them: What are the places that might have answers? Who could you talk to? Who obsesses and collects this knowledge?

Twist 3: Archives, Experts, Counter-Memory, Gaps

We have to tear [statements] away from their virtual self-evidence . . . they themselves pose a whole cluster of questions: What are they? How can they be defined or limited?

—Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

Now with resources and research tools at hand, try to answer more questions. If possible keep track of where the answers are and where they are not. Note which answers turn out to be harder to get than you anticipated. Perhaps some statistics you assumed were regularly collected have not been for decades. Perhaps they were never collected because no one was interested, or they were specifically *not* interested.

Who controls these answers—what persons, institutions, databases, experts, disciplines? Each answer is also an implosion with its own dimensions: the history of its coming to be posed, the disciplinary formations that made it askable in the first place, the material infrastructure that made it visible, and the archive that preserved it. Foucault's (1972, 50–52) *Archaeology of Knowledge* is exemplary in analyzing this process for every question and answer:

Who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals is accorded the right to use this sort of language? . . . it involves a system of differentiation and relations with other individuals . . . medical statements cannot come from anybody. . . . We must also describe the institutional sites from which the doctor makes his discourse, and from which the discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application. . . . And the positions of the subject defined by situations: questioning subject, listening subject, seeing subject, observing subject.

Foucault emphasizes seeing each statement you discover as part of a material archive: it has *survived* its initial production and been transformed and preserved so that you could find it. Your task is to attend to the specific archives *about* the implosion you are studying as a way of thinking about how they are *connected* to it.

The task consists of not “treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as *practices* that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course discourses are composed of signs, but what they do is *more* than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault 1972, 49).

In Haraway’s work, the archives are active participants in the implosions she studies; they are often appendages (e.g., Rockefeller) of the institutional missions that produced the implosions, and the archives are often part of the mission itself. The Smithsonian Institution’s mission to archive itself helps shape the collecting projects that generate animal knowledge and types.

As you answer your questions, you can start to see the contours of knowledge and attention that maybe help explain *how* you came to know and not know. As Haraway (1997, 218) puts it, “Discourses are not just ‘words’; they are material-semiotic practices through which objects of attention and knowing subjects are both constituted.” This notion of how our world can “bend our attention [and] warp our certainties” (Haraway 1997, 68) and sometimes productively be called ideology if we use it to see how materially specific it is and how productive it is in giving us some stories to tell, even while disabling others.

Twist 4: Exhaustion—Isn’t this Incredibly Messy and Time Consuming?

I cannot follow here each of my stem cells, much less the much larger set that would be needed for the excessive account of technoscience that I crave. But I try to work out at least some of the knots.

—Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*

The reaction many of my students have to the messiness and overwhelming data this process generates itself requires examination. Do we think that stories of objects and facts and practices should be straightforward and not imploded? How much do we value efficiency and condensation over partial connections, extra

accountability, and more homework? Why have we been shaped so that we know the things we do and are ignorant to various degrees about so much else?

The process so far has been diagnostic. If you are seriously considering a topic for a research project or, cyborg forbid, a dissertation, and you get sick or bored of it after a week of imploding it, then you *definitely* need a different topic. The implosion process is designed to daunt and to lure. If you already know your story, then you will do no more than repeat common sense. Ideally the process will reveal connections that you did not know and that you did not know you cared about. Thicker weaves of dependence, accountability, and care are part of the *result* of this process. “Commitment after the implosions of technoscience requires immersion in the work of materializing new tropes in an always contingent practice of grounding or worlding” (Haraway 1997, 113).

Teaching Implosion

I have taught the above assignment in graduate classes where each step took a whole week. Students involved in dissertations or still figuring out their topic were instructed to braindump the first week, then comment on others the second week. The third week each individual constructed a gap map (some in color, all revealing of both “personal” preferences and the cultural, societal, and educational shaping of those preferences), and the following week everybody tried to see where they could find information and where they could not (or how expensive it would be to obtain). Attending to this process sometimes mutated students’ prior arguments and sometimes deepened them; it also nuanced their understanding of how every argument persists within a field of knowledge threads that are themselves “analytical, imaginative physical, and political choice[s]” (Haraway 1997, 129). From my reading, they became more careful writers, aware of the dimensions they were ignoring and of the limitations of the threads they depended on. Those going into the field reported that the process exploded their topic’s apparent coherence and the common sense that they brought to it, creating opportunities for connections and especially for gaps, generating a state of readiness to pay attention to surprise in the field.

In undergraduate classes for the Google generation, I developed a quicker and less intense artifact assignment aimed at learning to see connections—the world in the object (as multiplicities), and the object in the world (as lines of circulation and as a biography of things). Students were asked to first try and answer the questions without search, and then to use search, and in both cases to map the ways in which *everything is not connected, and many connections are*

nonobvious even in the search bar. Another version of this applied the same set of questions to Wikipedia entries, challenging students to ask which dimensions were left out of the entries and to see whether they could discover them and add to Wikipedia (a process that quickly reveals the ongoing politics of Wikipedia knowledge).

Other versions have been used in a writing class as a one-shot two-hour brainstorming activity—go, go go! A quick map of present thinking, jogging other thoughts, and then returning to writing. We also used a version in an STS (Science and Technology Studies) workshop, asking participants to make their answers into a map to post on walls and to bring others in on, finding inspiration in other maps, additional lines, and ways of following dimensions one had not thought of.

I want to end by recalling the humor, the pleasure, the joy with which Haraway writes and works on the world. This is due, I think, to the homework side of the implosive project I have emphasized. Once one has worked on all of this, analysis continues with renewed vigor, writing flows, new tables and classifications can be elaborated. I try never to forget Haraway's (1997, 128) wry admonishment: "Both people and things have a nonreducible trickster quality that resists categories and projects of all kinds. Yearning is fed from the gaps in categories and from the quirky liveliness of signs." Deleuze (1986a, 67) similarly explained, "What interests me is a rather special discipline, taxonomy, a classification of classifications, which, unlike linguistics, can't do without the notion of a sign. . . . Nothing is more fun than classifications!"⁹ And he explained of Foucault's work, "All this did not prevent him from sometimes treating the intolerable with great humor; we laughed a lot. Because it was not a matter of feeling indignant, but of seeing something not visible, of thinking about something almost at the limit of thought" (Deleuze 1986a, 1).¹⁰

Writing anew thus emerges from the encounter of our commitments with the liveliness of their objects. "What would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?" (Foucault 1986, 8). Haraway (1997, 129) provides a pedagogical guide to staying with this encounter:

Objects like the fetus, chip/computer, gene, race, ecosystem, brain, database, and bomb are stem cells of the technoscientific body. Each of these curious objects is a recent construct or material-semiotic "object of knowledge," forged by heterogeneous practices in the furnace of technoscience.

To be a construct does *not* mean to be unreal or made up; quite the opposite. Out of each of these nodes or stem cells, sticky threads lead to every nook and cranny of the world. *Which threads to follow is an analytical, imaginative, physical, and political choice.* I am committed to show how each of these stem cells is a knot of knowledge-making practices, industry and commerce, popular culture, social struggles, psychoanalytic formations, bodily histories, human and nonhuman actions, local and global flows, inherited narratives, new stories, syncretic technical/cultural processes, and more. (emphasis added)

ABSTRACT

This article puts a reading of Gilles Deleuze's Cinema 2 in dialogue with Donna Haraway's works and methods. Working through the former helps me unpack the process of Haraway's inquisitive "implosion" method and some of its aims better. I describe this as exploring how the world is interconnected one process and thing at a time, how these connections are vitally and politically important, and how this work is inexhaustible. Following this exegesis, I offer a series of exercises for putting this method into practice, one that I use myself and teach to graduate students and undergrads. [ethnography; writer's block; history of knowledge; commitment]

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault and Daniel Defert initiated the Group for Information on Prisons (GIP) that included Deleuze and others; the group published a newsletter, *Intolerable*, instigating change in talk about prisons. "Foucault . . . was in some fashion a seer. He saw things, and like all people who know how to see, who see something and see it deeply, he found what he saw to be intolerable. For him, to think meant to react to the intolerable, to something intolerable he had seen. And the intolerable never was the visible; it was something more. . . . But the intolerable was not a matter of ethics. That is, his ethics were to apprehend or to see something as intolerable, but it was not in the name of morals that something was intolerable. . . . If thinking did not reach the intolerable, it was not worthwhile to think. To think always meant to think about the limits of a situation. But it also meant to see" (Deleuze 1986b, 1). See also Foucault 2000; Foucault and Deleuze 1977.
2. I learned to work with Deleuze's words through attending John Rajchman's seminars at MIT (from 1997 to 2004). Rajchman's approach to the experimental and empirical practices of Deleuze and Foucault, in dialogue with my training in attention and writing from Haraway and Susan Harding, shaped the empirical methods and teaching forms I now employ (see Rajchman 1985, 1988, 2000).
3. The full sentence reads: "But the films and articles rigorously exclude the contextualizing politics of decolonization and exploitation of the emergent Third World, obligatory and normative heterosexuality, masculine dominance of a progressively war-based scientific enterprise in industrial civilization, and the racial symbolic and institutional organization of scientific research" (Haraway 1989, 156).

4. "The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema, it is the world which looks to us like a bad film" (Deleuze 1989, 171). See also Rajchman 2000.
5. Of course, science fiction is also a form of radical empiricism.
6. On "strong objectivity," see Harding 1991.
7. See Deleuze and Guattari 1986.
8. See the conference by the same name for other agnotologists, <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/AgnotologyConference.html> (accessed February 27, 2014). Steve Hiltgartner has also been exploring non-knowledge.
9. See also Rajchman's discussion of Deleuze's humor (2000), and Deleuze's discussion of the Stoic's humor versus Platonic irony (1987).
10. Foucault (1985, 4) described his relation to humor, writing, and struggle like this: "The bourgeoisie is not at all what Baudelaire thought, a pack of stupid and sluggish fools. The bourgeoisie is intelligent, lucid, calculating. No other form of domination has ever been so efficient, and subsequently so dangerous, so deeply rooted. It won't suffice to call the bourgeoisie villainous; it won't simply disappear like the flame of a blown-out candle. This justifies a certain sadness; it is thus necessary to bring into the struggle as much gaiety, lucidity and determination as possible. The only really sad thing is not to fight. . . . Basically I don't like to write: it is a very difficult activity to master. Writing interests me only in the measure that incorporates the reality of combat, as an instrument, a tactic, a spotlight. I would like my books to be like surgeon's knives, Molotov cocktails, or galleries in a mine, and, like fireworks, to be carbonized after use."

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