

# INF 1501: Culture & Technology I (Fall 2017) - Implosion Project

"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."

- Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium*, p. 68

**This course has one connected assignment, split into various parts.** To carry it out, you will need to select a technological artifact that you will study in-depth over the course of the semester. You will examine this object in three stages: two short papers, each worth 25% of the final mark, and a final project worth 35% of the final mark.

## 1. Choose an Object

**Due:** By end of class, Sept. 18

Choose your object carefully. You are not required to select a "digital" or "information" technology, but you are strongly encouraged to consider your direction in the MI program. Ask yourself: by studying this artifact, will I explore issues that help me clarify and attain my objectives in the MI? You will want something that relates to your intellectual interests. The more specific your technological artifact, the better. Making the most of the ongoing assignment will require you to choose an artifact with socio-cultural histories, materialities, and/or contexts that interest you. Over the course of the semester we will collectively work a series of transformations on the objects selected by you and your peers, culminating in an individual document that is an accretion of your coursework. The richness of your analysis will be in part determined by the highly specific connections you can draw between your object and other parts of the world.

## 2. Implosion Report (A) - 25%

**Length:** 8 pages

**Due:** Oct. 16

Each week, you will write approximately one page of text to summarize specific dimensions of your object. These dimensions may include the object's material specificity (e.g. what materials were involved in its production) or its political operations (e.g. what kinds of local, national, and international bodies claim jurisdiction over it). Detailed instructions will be given in the second half of each class as we engage in pair and group discussions to examine the objects. What you write is expected to be descriptive and reflexive. It will not be turned in weekly, but a rough, iterative draft should be prepared throughout (and after) each class. This will provide a foundation for your first analytical document, a short paper of approximately 8 pages. In this paper, you will deconstruct your object. Your task will be to describe it, situate it in a context where one might encounter it, and discuss it in relation to thematics that have come up in the course. In order to do this, you might choose to focus on multiple thematics, or select a small number (2 or 3) to read your object through. Something that might guide you in this process will be to think about how your technological

artifact participates in a larger network of objects.

For this assignment, it will likely be useful to include charts or diagrams that visualize the object's relations. This first report should also summarize the relative importance of different dimensions (i.e. which dimension is most important for understanding the object, and which is least important) that have been discussed up to this point.

### **3. Implosion Report (B) - 25%**

**Length:** 8 pages

**Due:** Nov. 13

Continue the work started in the previous assignment. Using the reflexive documents that you should have been preparing weekly as a foundation, describe your object in more nuanced detail than in your first assignment. Think of additional vectors to read it through/along, and then bring your object to bear on the more recent thematics that have been discussed in class. Something that might guide you in this assignment will be to think about who the human actors are who build, interact with, control, repair, or destroy your object. For this assignment, it might be useful to include maps, images, gifs, or short videos. This second report will require you to put the various dimensions into relation (i.e. by constructing a dimensional matrix).

### **4. Reconstructing the Object - 35%**

**Length:** 15 pages

**Due:** Dec. 11

Prior to beginning the final assignment, you may find it useful to think about where you have gaps in knowledge with respect to your object. To fill these gaps, think first about the dimensions of the object that you are most familiar with. What interest, passion, or experience has led you to acquire this familiarity? Then, consider what you don't know and how you might go about acquiring new knowledge about your object (recall some of the methods discussed in week 3). The final assignment entails writing up the process of "taking apart" and "putting together." You are allowed to make as much use of the previous assignments as necessary.

Up to this point, you have mostly been deconstructing your object - taking it apart; reverse-engineering the black box in which you discovered it; possibly undertaken some sort of media archaeology. For this assignment, you must reconstruct it, but from an entirely speculative perspective. Construct an alternative world in which it might reside. Create a scrapbook from the future. Build an alien user interface for it. Situate it in a game. Treat a dimension of the object as a kind of pivot point for how the object is situated in society, then swap out some aspect of this dimension. Upon changing it, think about how all of the other dimensions change. Finally, ask yourself: what is the one great thing you want to say about this technological artifact you've been thinking about all semester that nobody else has? What tools and styles of writing can you use to communicate this story?

Create additional visual or material resources for this final exercise to go alongside the text, but don't neglect the discursive aspect of this assignment. Even if you present a strong material or visual argument, you must also present a textual one. Your goal should be to sketch out a thematic matrix and understand how your speculative object might reside within it. This will require a cogent and well-developed narrative.

This assignment will be marked on argument, creativity, coherence, and style. A 3% per-day late penalty will be applied.