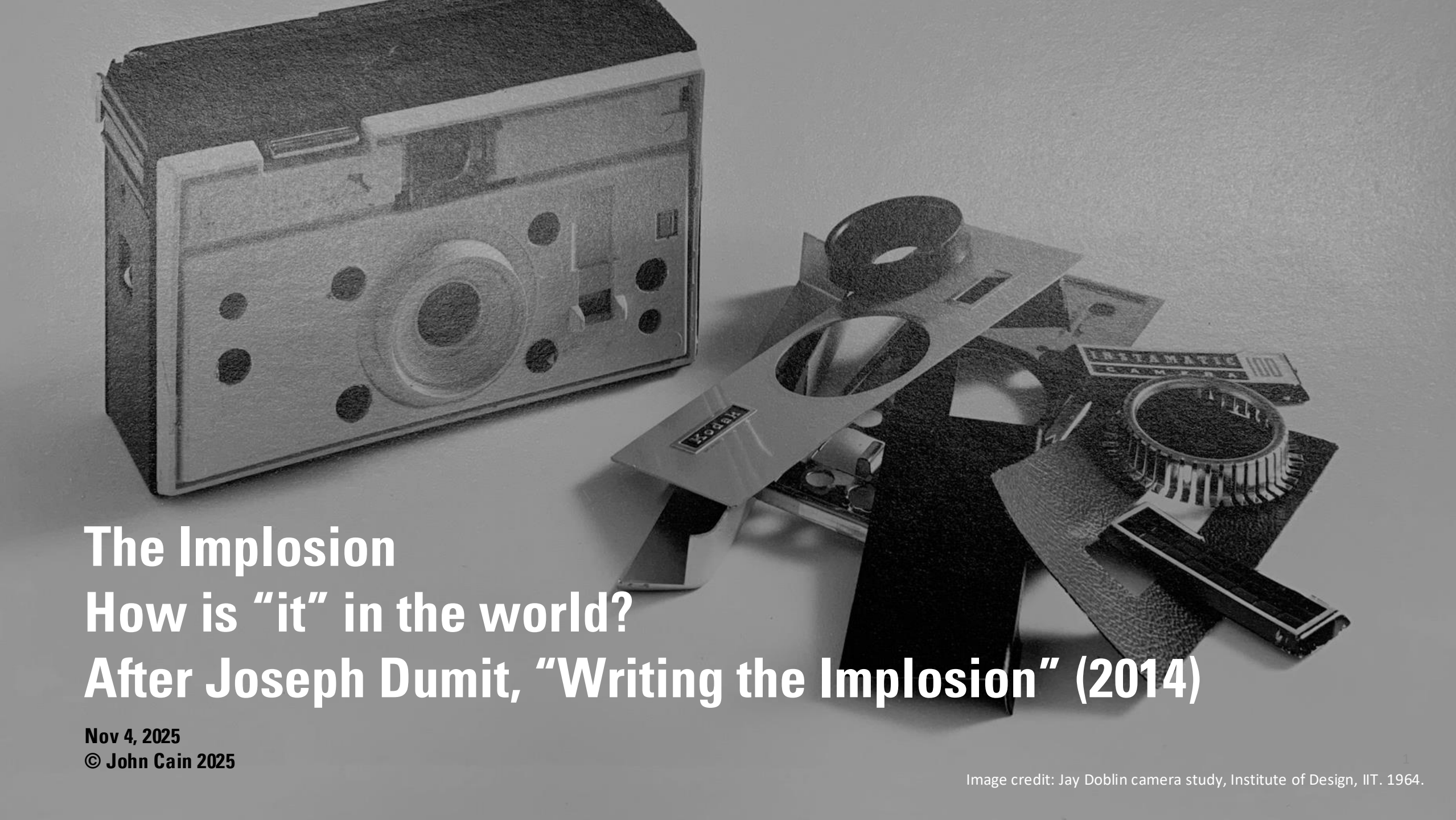


The Implosion
How is “it” in the world?
After Joseph Dumit, “Writing the Implosion” (2014)

Nov 4, 2025

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Image credit: Jay Doblin camera study, Institute of Design, IIT. 1964.

The exercise in a nutshell

Nothing is simply *itself*.
Every object is a knot…labor, materials, money, politics, history pressed into it.

Dumit's method (after Haraway): pick a thing. Trace its "sticky threads" (Haraway).
Map what the world put into it, and what it puts into the world.

Two questions:

- **How is it in the world?**
- **How is the world in it?**

Warm-up: two potato peelers (10 min)

Stamped steel. OXO Good Grips.

Same function, two bodies.

At your table: what's 'pressed' into each one? How is the world in it?

Whose hands? Whose factory? Whose arthritis? Whose brand?

Practice the move on something you can hold.

Tonight's "it"

Every table gets the same thing:

– one printed reply from a chatbot. [final "it" — HD/JC to confirm]

Why the same "it" at all 13 tables?

– Because the maps will not match.

– **Same object, different implosions — that is the finding.**

Eight threads to trace

Labor — who made it? who maintains it?

Material — what is it made of? where from?

Economic — who pays? who profits?

Technological — what must exist for it to work?

Political — who regulates it? who is excluded?

Historical — what had to happen first?

Bodily — whose bodies touch it? whose are changed by it?

Mythic — what story does it tell about itself?

(Dumit's list, abridged. Thin threads are fine. Empty ones are findings.)

Make the map (30 min)

Easel paper. The “it” in the center. Eight spokes.

One claim per sticky note.

Push each thread two hops out:

– the answer → the GPU → the fab → the water.

No devices.

If you don’t know, write the question and mark it “?”

Unanswered questions count.

Before time: star what surprised you. Underline the three claims you’d defend.

Class review (15 min)

Other tables' maps.

Same it. Thirteen maps. They don't match.

Which threads got thick? Which stayed empty? Why?

Week 2, again: the object coordinates us (Star & Griesemer)

…without requiring us to *agree*

Wrap up (5 min)

Nothing is simply itself.

- This week: Pickering, the dance of agency.
- Your map is what the dance looks like, stopped.

Reading week: Floridi, “AI as Agency Without Intelligence” + Cain & Pino.

- You have just drawn the supply chain of that agency.
- Keep the map in mind as you read.

Borrowed from

- Dumit, “Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time.” Cultural Anthropology 29:2 (2014).
- Haraway — the implosion move itself.
- Worked example: student implosion of the OXO peeler (PDF alongside this deck).
- Prior versions run at IIT Institute of Design, 2018–2025.