

# Impllosion

MATTER, MEANING, AFFECT

In this workshop, we are thinking about medical jargon as a material phenomenon that also carries meaning and feelings.

This means we are paying attention to how jargon is materialized in things like brochures and advertisements, in the tone of voice of the clinician, or in the bodies of patients who feel jargon (and whose lives are shaped by it).

Instructions: Choose a “jargony object” from our archive of brochures, posters, and other medical ephemera. Your group will try to answer the questions included in this card deck while making a mind map of your answers on the paper in front of you. In the first round you will use only what you already know. In the second round, you can research online.

The term “jargon” can seem abstract. But the objects and scenes in which and where jargon shows up are specific.

# Context and Situatedness

Science and technology studies tracks how matter and meaning are tangled up together. This is called “material semiotics”: a set of tools for “exploring how practices in the social world are woven out of threads that are simultaneously semiotic (because they are relational and/or carry meanings) and material (because they are about the physical stuff caught up and shaped in those relations).” (Law 2023)

As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

Where does your object appear or exist in the world?

**How does your object appear in the world?**

**What does your object appear next to or in?**

**At what times does your object appear? How do these times matter?**

**What activities or ways of life enable a person to come across your object?**

**What kinds of audiences is your object geared towards?**

**Who is excluded by your object?**

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Jargon doesn’t come from nowhere. Many practitioners, institutions, infrastructures, tools, and even non-human actors work together to make it. “Actor,” here, means any person or thing acting to produce the object.

# Labor and Production

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

How was your object produced?

**What actors are involved in the work of making your object?  
(This might include nonhuman actors like printers, microbes, viruses, syringes, or CT scan machines...)**

**Where has your object travelled to and from?**

**How is your object used and is using it seen as a form of work?**

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Jargon is often produced and used by experts and institutions before it enters lay-peoples’ vocabulary. Jargon can be tied to certain systems of knowledge and attitudes about which kinds of knowledge matter.

# Education, Experts, and Institutions

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

Where do people learn about your object (or the knowledge and practices it contains)?

**What kinds of knowledge count when talking about your object? (Hint: this might mean scientific or medical knowledges, folk or anecdotal knowledges, knowledge gained from lived or personal experiences, etc.)**

**What professionals are involved in making expert decisions around this object and the knowledge and practices it refers to?**

**How is your object and the knowledges, practices, practitioners, and institutions it contains or refers to funded?**

**What kinds of controversies is your object involved in? (Hint: this might include conspiracy theories or alternative forms of medicine that call into question what counts as “legitimate” medical knowledge)**

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Jargon is produced and used in political contexts. It can be leveraged by politicians and policy-makers or be related to regulatory bodies and the law. Using jargon is a political act: it embeds ideas about who should be represented or have access.

# Politics

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

What bodies play a part in approving your object, the product or practices included in it, or the claims it makes? (Hint: this might include lobbyists, patents, corporate sponsorships, etc.)

**What are the histories of the regulations concerning your object and the practices in it?**

**How is your object (or the knowledge and practices contained in it) used or understood within political discourses? (Hint: this might mean thinking about how it is mobilized or understood by the “right” or “left,” how it is be used as a platform, etc.)**

**What political positions come up through the lens of your object?**

**How is your object hegemonic? Does it try to coerce us to consent to dominant systems?**

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Jargon is implicated in economies of medical research, insurance claims, and pharmaceutical production and sales. Its use can determine who pays or gets paid.

# Economics

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

How is your object (or the knowledges, practices, or products included in it) marketed, purchased, or consumed? Where and by whom?

**What kinds of capital, debt, credit, and labor relations are involved in producing and circulating your object (or the practices or products it refers to)? Who sells it?**

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Jargon shows up in many kinds of texts that are produced in specific situations by specific groups of people.

# Textuality

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

Who produced the text included on your object?

**Who can read the text  
included on your object?**

**What kinds of literacies are  
assumed by your object's text?**

**Where are these kinds of texts  
stored or archived?**

**Where and in what  
organizations and institutions  
is the text on your object  
produced and read?**

**What are the histories of the  
text included in your object?  
How are they funded?**

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Jargon refers to and acts on certain kinds of bodies.

# Bodies

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

How are bodies related to your object? What kinds of bodies use it? (Hint: this may include non-human bodies)

**What forms of attention are involved with your object?**

**What emotions are involved with your object?**

**How is gender related to your object?**

**How is sexuality related to your object?**

**How is race related to your object?**

**How is disability related to your object?**

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Jargon is involved in many cultural stories from how we imagine ourselves as medical subjects, how we see ourselves as particular kinds of citizens, to pop culture and the shows or movies we watch.

# Myths and Cultural Stories

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As you answer your deck of questions, you can consider the object itself, but also the practitioners, knowledges, practices, and even products contained in it.

What roles does your object (or the ideas or products it contains) play in fantasies or dreams? (Hint: this might include things like daydreams, the “American Dream,” fantasies about romance, success, or health, etc.)

**What kinds of national(ist) narratives include your object or the things it refers to?**

**How does your object (or its contents) appear in entertainment?**

**What other grand narratives and strong associations involve your object? (progress, risk, joy, fear, science, militarism, success, decline, horror, self-improvement, financial security)**

**What other grand narratives and strong associations involve your object? (nuclear family, motherhood, fatherhood, independence, adolescence, democracy, origin stories, stories of difference, privilege, death, pornography, sports)?**