

## Instruments, Instrumentalities

2013 Leboff Seminar – Jonathan Sterne

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Office hours by appointment

### Prospectus:

What is an instrument?

Today, in a variety of fields, the definition of *instrument* and *instrumentality* is transforming. While retaining its older connotations of delegation, means to ends, and tool-use, the term *instrument*—and *instrumental*—now also implies bigger, messier complexes of technologies, bodies and rationalities. In some places, like the dashboards in cars, once-separate instruments collapse into systems. In others, like operating rooms, music studios, and financial markets, they proliferate wildly.

In this seminar, we will think transversally, across categories and contexts, to consider the form and meaning of musical instruments, technical instruments, and ideas of instrumentality.

### Readings:

15 April: Articulations, Processes

Meintjes, Louise. "The Recording Studio as Fetish." *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*, 71-108. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Canales, Jimena. "Moments of Contact." *A Tenth of a Second: A History*, 87-115. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Simondon, Gilbert. "Technical Mentality." *Parrhesia*, no. 7 (2009): 17-27.

Balsamo, Anne. "Taking Culture Seriously in the Age of Innovation." *Designing Culture: The Technocultural Imagination at Work*, 1-25. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.  
(see also: <http://www.designingculture.org/release-0711/flashroot.html> )

22 April: Bodies and Techniques

Elias, Norbert. "On Behavior at the Table." *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 72-109. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Maltham: Basil Blackwell, 2000.

Mauss, Marcel. "Body Techniques." *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, 95-123. Translated by Ben Brewster. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

Hookway, Brandon. "Cockpit." In *Cold War Hotheouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy*, edited by Beatriz Colomina, Aannmarie Brennan and Jeannie Kim. 22-54. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Murphy, Michelle. Immodest Witnessing, Affective Economies and Objectivity. *Seizing the*

*Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health and Technoscience*, 68-101. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

26 April – Orientation, Reorientation

Heidegger, Martin. "The Being of Entities Encountered in the Environment." *Being and Time*, 95-102. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Ahmed, Sara. "Orientation Toward Objects." *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 25-63. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Katz, Mark. "Mix and Scratch—The Turntable Becomes a Musical Instrument 1975-1978." *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ*, 43-69. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Williamson, Bess. "Electric Moms and Quad Drivers: People with Disabilities Buying, Making, and Using Technology in Postwar America." *American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2012): 5-29.

29 April – Means and Ends (Men Criticizing Instrumentality)

Horkheimer, Max. "Means and Ends." *Eclipse of Reason*, 1-39. New York: Continuum, 1947.

Gillespie, Tarleton. "The Politics of 'Platforms'." *New Media and Society* 12, no. 3 (2010): 347-64.

Marx, Karl. 1867/1990. (Sections of) Machinery and Large Scale Industry, in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 492-508 and 517-543.

### **Course Requirements:**

Auditors are expected to arrive having done the readings and prepared to discuss them. You will also have to participate in in-class reading and writing exercises.

### **Etiquette:**

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading (of required texts). I expect the very best you can give.
2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. There will be a strict limit on seek-and-destroy hermeneutics. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

### **Product (for enrolled students only):**

1. **April 15<sup>th</sup>:** In an email to me, you will name an instrument you want to study for the course and offer a paragraph explaining why you are interested in it. Your instrument can be as general as "the speedometer," "a cane," or as specific as "Prince's sign-shaped guitar";

the important thing is that there is a good deal of documentation about your instrument readily available to you. To avoid excessive ego investment, you should not choose something that will be the topic of your thesis or dissertation. One I've approved it, you can't change subjects.

2. **For each of the next three class meetings** (by 3pm the day before the class), you will acquire at least one artifact or document related to your instrument in that has some relation to the meeting's reading assignment. If your object is digital, make sure to save a local copy (404 is the most common page on the web). If your object is not digital, you find a way to document it digitally.

You are, of course, welcome to collect more, but this is meant to be a process of regular accumulation. Even if you collect a lot of documents in a single session, you are expected to keep at it.

3. **ALSO for each of the next three class meetings** (by 3pm the day before the class), you will send to the listserv a short paper of approximately 500-750 words (2-3 pages double-spaced in a standard font, excluding citations—2 pages is really ok, 3 pages is a max). The paper will make use of the document or artifact you acquired for the week (if you acquired more than one, focus on one, though others may be mentioned if necessary; you may also refer to material from previous meetings). Please keep the file size down so as not to jam up people's mailboxes. If you need us to see something large, please post it somewhere and share a link.

The paper must be written in the style of one of the authors we have read for the meeting. Choose an aspect of the week's assigned reading to imitate and try your best to imitate it. Your job is to try and occupy the same discursive headspace as the reading, except with your own material. The relevant aspects of "style" here are up to your interpretation. Is it something about the author's prose style that is relevant? Her analytical approach or theoretical commitments? The types of source materials he uses?

Bring your paper to class (and your artifact if it's good for show-and-tell) and be prepared to discuss your choices.

3. **Your final assignment, due May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 3pm** will be a short paper (6 pages, double-spaced, give or take) containing two parts: A) a proposal for further research on your instrument that includes clear research questions and their connections to larger debates in your field, a list of places to go and get primary source material, and further reading you know you need to do; and B) an assessment of your writing for the course, a list of goals for yourself as a writer, and a plan to work on them.