**SLIDE 1: TITLE SLIDE**

“Sound after the Materialist Turn: The Kits for Cultural History”

Thank the audience and fellow panellists; mention Twitter handle (?)

**SLIDE 2: URL**

Point audience to the URL for the slidedeck, should they wish to follow along:  **[uvicmakerlab.github.io/dh2014](http://uvicmakerlab.github.io/dh2014" \t "_blank)**

**SLIDE 3: SOUND STUDIES: THE MATERIALIST TURN**

In sound studies, a materialist turn has significantly influenced scholarship during the last fifteen years or so. Here, we might consider Jonathan Sterne’s work on transducers from the nineteenth century or his more recent research on the role that compression and formats—such as the MP3—play in audio culture. Elsewhere, Lisa Gitelman stresses why the stuff of phonographs and gramophones matter for media studies, Emily Thompson unpacks acoustics through architecture, and Tara Rodgers builds feminist histories personal perspectives in tandem with the particulars of handmade musical instruments. Broadly speaking, this research suggests that sound cannot be reduced to something “out there,” in the air, without substance or shape, even if it routinely escapes us. Indeed, the materialist turn prompts us to consider how sound is, for example, inscribed, stored, reproduced, and repeatedly re-membered—articulated through the assembly of parts and expressed across a range of fidelities, which are highly dependent on historical context and embodied experiences.

**SLIDE 4a: TODAY’S PRESENTATION**

Today, I am presenting some collaborative research—conducted across the University of Victoria in British Columbia and Western University in Ontario—that directly engages this materialist turn in sound studies. Supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the four-year project . . .

**SLIDE 4b: TODAY’S PRESENTATION**

reconstructs historical experiments and physical mechanisms in order to better understand how they are culturally embedded, pushing both media studies and science and technology studies (STS) beyond—to echo Matthew Kirschenbaum’s arguments in *Mechanisms*—primarily conceptual treatments of platforms and systems. We call the project . . .

**SLIDE 4c: TODAY’S PRESENTATION**

“Kits for Cultural History” (that’s K-I-T-S, “kits”), and during the first year of our research we started reconstructing electronic jewellery from the Victorian period, videogames from the late 1950s, electronic synthesizers from the mid-twentieth century, and wire recorders from the first half of the 1900s. While sound is not always the focus of this research, its importance—as a fundamental component of the histories we are studying—cannot be ignored. Among other things, it reminds us how central the technical and cultural development of audio was to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the development of physical artefacts such as synthesizers and wire recorders. It also reminds us how . . .

**SLIDE 4d: TODAY’S PRESENTATION**

thinking materially across media—including visuals and audio—helps us better comprehend how particular platforms, systems, and agendas emerged, without resorting to mono-causal, instrumentalist, or positivist interpretations of technologies. But beyond that, the wonderful irony of the material turn is that a rigorous engagement with the physical stuff of these platforms and systems only . . .

**SLIDE 4e: TODAY’S PRESENTATION**

*highlights* what persistently evades historians, theorists, and critics of sound. As I hope to show today, the Kits for the Cultural History project ultimately underscores . . .

**SLIDE 5: IMPOSSIBILITY**

the very *impossibility of completely recovering sound and its historical conditions*, even through acts of reconstruction. Put differently, attention to the physical stuff \_\_\_\_ what’s missing, what demands speculation, … Materialist approaches are not, in the last instance, about explaining away history through the artefacts at hand. Rather, they are about accentuating what we have lost, do not know, cannot access, … --- all in order to give the impossible a try anyway. In many ways, the Kits for Cultural History are invested in these impossibilities, in investigating the material histories of phenomena such as sound while acknowledging that we cannot hear how or what they did back then.

**SLIDE 6: AN OUTLINE FOR THE NEXT TEN MINUTES**

During the next ten minutes, I will outline the typical recipe for a kit, the core motivations for them, and examples from the kits that speak specifically to how the kits contribute to sound studies research.

**SLIDE 7: A TYPICAL RECIPE FOR A KIT**

Both digital and analog, across online and offline

**SLIDE 8: INSTRUCTIONS and PARTS**

Instructions for how to turn this into that (based on historical examples, such as Heathkits, and contemporary practice by groups such as SparkFun). Also, parts required for assembly (compact, simple, and anchored in reuse; such parts may include microcontrollers, wiring, protoboards, sensors, and actuators). Influenced by Hannah Perner-Wilson and Garnet Hertz. Importantly, in their didacticism, these instructions are not somehow outside of culture. For instance, gender, expertise, and power with the Heathkits. Liz Losh has suggested, mansplaining.

**SLIDE 9: CONTEXTUAL MATERIALS**

Contextual materials, including visual and dynamic media from archives, in print and/or on an SD card.

**SLIDE 10: ORIGINAL SCHOLARSHIP**

Open-access scholarship about the media and technologies at hand**.** The scholarship may be short or long form. It may be “middle state.” Inspired by MediaCommons, Vectors, and other such media studies projects.The kits assume a variety of forms, in hand and on screen, capable of being circulated accordingly

**SLIDE 11: FROM THE ARCHIVES**

Content relies on existing technologies and media currently in storage of GLAM institutions, including the Canada Science and Technology Museum.

**SLIDE 12a: CORE MOTIVATIONS**

**SLIDE 12b: MOTIVATION 1**

**Produce scholarship through new media.** Media are not only an object of inquiry but also a means of articulating and expressing scholarship**.**

**SLIDE 13: EXAMPLE 1**

Tara McPherson: “With a few exceptions, we remain content to comment about technology and media, rather than to participate more actively in constructing knowledge in and through our objects of study.”

**SLIDE 14: MOTIVATION 2**

**Make objects that make arguments.** Connect embodied, creative, tinkering-based practices to the production of physical objects. Connect history with embodied experience, if at a remove.

**SLIDE 15: EXAMPLE 2**

Anne Balsamo: “the role of the hand and of the body in the process of learning and making culture.” A role that cannot be ignored in a moment when abstract visualizations and big data are prominent in academic research across the disciplines

**SLIDE 16: MOTIVATION 3**

Create or assemble objects that are not intended to inspire awe at how withdrawn or ineffable they are, but **rather prompt hands-on engagement and the reuse of materials.**

**SLIDE 17: EXAMPLE 3**

Alison Knowles on the Fluxkit: the construction of the kits is an event, and those kits ultimately represent various arts and styles in a single space. Knowles: “If something is broken or lost in it, it could be replaced . . . in a way that you could not fix up a Monet painting.”

**SLIDE 18: MOTIVATION 4**

**Making and made objects are not innocuous**, or somehow removed from cultural assumptions and social relations. Tara Rodgers: “The tools for making electronic music are not innocent: true sound ‘mediums,’ they are an interface to ghosts of … projects past.”

Also, underscore how—through the effects of transduction—sources are rationalized as the causes of media phenomena. De- and re-manufacture technologies without the assumption that we can see or hear like they did back then. The kits are not an attempt to relive the past or assume another’s interiority. Instead, the point is to recompile media history based on the contingencies and knowledge of the present. Jonathan Sterne: “History is nothing but exteriorities.” Yet Kari Kraus, through her emphasis on conjecture, calls for “what if?” approaches to the past, for “alternate configurations” and “counterfactuals.”

There are always alternate versions of history running alongside documents and artefacts. As such, use the present as a context for reanimating rather than explaining away history.

**SLIDE 19: KIT EXAMPLES**

**SLIDE \_\_\_: THANK YOU**

**SLIDE \_\_\_: KITS FOR CULTURAL HISTORY**