

Call for Submissions

October 10, 1991

Dear _____

We are inviting you to participate in a "virtual" seminar to be held this fall, 1991, as part of an artists' residency at The Banff Centre for the Arts, in Banff, Alberta, Canada.

The 10-week residency which involves 21 artists and writers is centred around the notion of the *bioapparatus*, a term we use to cover a wide range of issues concerning the technologized body as well as the current cultural and political manifestations of one specific new technology, virtual reality.

Within the framework of the residency, we are conducting a seminar that will be a site for input and responses around the issues of the *bioapparatus*. As the subject is vast, we want to encourage discourse and debate, and to involve a large number of people in mapping this territory. We are asking people whose work we believe to be important to the debate, as well as each of the 20 residency participants who will be at The Banff Centre, to contribute one page in response to the notion of the *bioapparatus*.

We are inviting you to participate through a short print contribution. This submission, along with others, will form the basis of discussion during the seminar at the end of October. We feel that your written contribution would be a valuable one, as the primary reason for undertaking such a thematic residency is to encourage multidisciplinary discussion in a field where much debate is needed. At the end of the residency the resulting texts will be published in magazine/tabloid form and distributed to each contributor. We are also in discussion with an international publisher who has expressed interest in the project. In order to publish your submission, we require that you sign one copy of the attached agreement, which must be returned with your submission.

The enclosed material describes the background to the *Bioapparatus* Residency and includes a framework for discussion which we would like you to respond to, details about the seminar, a list of the actual residency participants, and a list of people invited to contribute as virtual participants.

We would greatly appreciate your contribution, as it will become the basis for what we consider to be a timely and important debate. We will be following up this letter by phone in case you would like more information.

Sincerely,

Catherine Richards and Nell Tenhaaf
Seminar Leaders

A VIRTUAL SEMINAR ON THE BIOAPPARATUS

BACKGROUND TO THE RESIDENCY

The Art Studio program at The Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta, offers three 10-week residencies a year, bringing together a group of 20 artists, writers and theoreticians to address themes of current cultural interest.

For the fall 1991 residency, we formulated a residency theme and suggested participants in the context of a collaboration between Art Studio and Media Arts programs of The Banff Centre. The collaboration is a fortuitous one as it draws on and develops our overlapping interests as independent cultural producers in issues of new technologies, not the least of which concerns what could be meant by the term "new."

The residency is related to a longer term project at The Banff Centre called *Art and Virtual Environments*. This project is directed toward artistic use of virtual reality technology. The plan is to ultimately make virtual reality technology available to artists through the Media Arts Program of The Banff Centre. This process will begin during the *bioapparatus* residency by providing an on-site virtual reality system.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

With Michael Century, Lorne Falk and Vern Hume (Banff Centre for the Arts directors of Program Development, Art Studio and Media Arts respectively) we constructed a residency on the *bioapparatus*. As a general framework, we agreed to look at the technological apparatus in its intimacy with the body, examining the history of this interrelationship and its sociocultural implications. Such issues have constituted the site for much of the postmodernist debate on representation and the pronounced cultural shifts of the past few decades.

The *bioapparatus* residency will explore questions of the integrity of the body and of subjectivity. The apparatus, as we construe it, is itself a perceptual model, a reflection of social and cultural value systems, of desires. It can be seen as a metaphor that not only describes but generates subjectivity, a subjectivity problematized by the objectifying effect of any technological instrument. The apparatus splits the body, the person, into subject and object, and its history thus merges with the philosophical history of dualism: body/mind, nature/culture, female/male. One question posed by feminist critiques of technology in the context of media, science and medicine is whether the historically constructed subject/object relation can be reconstituted so that its power dynamic is one of commonality and attunement rather than objectification and conquest.

Virtual reality or virtual environment technology is of particular interest in the context of the *bioapparatus*. It is a symptom as well as an instrument of a re-ordering of perception and, one can anticipate, of power relations. The current mythology surrounding the

technology reconstitutes the mind/body opposition, and raises issues of "bodily materiality" (a term proposed by Rosi Braidotti). As such, virtuality can be looked at as an expression of social discourses that are already in place. One of the intentions of the residency is to address the broader context of sociocultural shifts that are both the cause and symptom of technological changes.

Some other issues related to the *bioapparatus* are:

- the idea of machines as essentially social assemblages
- the tool as a political site for shifts in the mediascape and its definition: the military, the American "world culture" and its media, the drug cowboys, medicine
- the fictions of science and the science of fiction
- "man"/machine interaction, cyborgs, boundary degeneration
- artists' definitions of machines: futurism, bachelor machines

PLEASE RESPOND

The apparatus has probed, extended and blurred the boundaries between viewer and viewed, knower and known. Virtual reality can be seen as one moment on this trajectory. The apparatus has now become so sophisticated that it presents itself as merging with the body – becoming the *bioapparatus* – obscuring the borders drawn by instrumentality and redefining body functions of perception, sensations, understanding.

What is the most pressing issue, for you, concerning the *bioapparatus*? What would you add to this description of the *bioapparatus*?

Please send a one-page response, typed or legibly handwritten, including original drawings or diagrams if you wish, by September 30, 1991, along with the enclosed Publication Agreement. No submissions can or will be used without a signed copy of this agreement.

To: Pauline Martin
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Fax: (403)762-6659

Thank you very much for your contribution. We are excited about the emerging discourse on this subject and look forward to compiling the results of this project. Please ensure you enclose an address to which your copies of the publication can be forwarded.

Catherine Richards and Nell Tenhaaf
Seminar Leaders