

BANFF NEW MEDIA INSTITUTE WELCOME

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The Banff Centre, Canada

On behalf of The Banff New Media Institute (BNMI) and The Banff Centre, it is my pleasure to welcome the distinguished participants of Refresh! 2005 marks the 10th Anniversary of the BNMI and we are honoured to have the meaningful occasion of The First International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology take place here as part of our 10th year celebration.

The BNMI aims to be an active participant in the professional development, production, research, critical reception and creation of discourse about artists, producers and researchers who engage with new media, art, science, technology and contemporary culture(s). The BNMI is not about borders, but instead chooses to engage in the hybrid articulation of new media that emerges over time. We recognize that as an institution our value is relational to individuals and networks and we are positioned both at the centre and periphery of the discourse(s) of new media practice and research.

Here we are now in 2005, a point and time when the notion of new media needs careful reflection and analysis. The BNMI finds itself located in this moment of arrival and departure, intellectually and institutionally. This moment to us represents, to borrow a phrase from Alvin Toffler, the first wave of media arts drawing to a close and the beginning of the second wave. At the BNMI we recognize the disciplinary anomie that media arts / new media represents. Such recognition leads to the impetus of understanding the politics of ontology in discourse making and the apophenia that is possible in a networked reality. We are engaged in a process of dealing with the tensions of both trying to mature and deepen practice but at the same time recognizing that as an institute dedicated to new media we must have the aptitude to continually connect to newness, nimbleness, innovation and the next generation of discovery.

The history of The Banff Centre is more developed. For almost 75 years, the impact of the inspiring mountain location, the creative atmosphere, the diverse group of participants from many backgrounds and disciplines, and the strong support from Centre staff have combined to make a powerful experience that is intellectually, physically, and emotionally stimulating. Our alumni create, produce and perform works of art all over the world, lead our institutions, organizations and businesses, and play significant roles in our cultural, social, intellectual and economic well-being.

So it is with great interest and admiration that I extend a welcome to the group of scholars who have journeyed to the high altitudes of Banff to share learnings and inquiries of great importance at Refresh! The First International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology. I would like to extend a special thank you to Oliver Grau, Conference Chair, Sara Diamond, Summit Chair, and Roger Malina, Publications Committee Lead, for their rigour and tenacity in realizing Refresh! into reality. Finally thank you to the staff and work studies of the BNMI and CEE. It is a privilege to work with such an informed and professional team.

Thank you!

Susan Kennard

CONFERENCE CHAIR'S WELCOME

Oliver Grau, Director, Database of Virtual Art
Danube University Krems, Austria

Welcome to Banff! Welcome to REFRESH!

This conference has been in the air for some time — 450 applicants from art history, history of science, media-, culture-, film-, sound studies, and other related disciplines who answered the call for papers are an indicator for a high level of interest. Naturally, this is a source of great encouragement for all those who, over the past three years, have been involved in the planning and preparation for this conference, the first ever meeting in our field of research. I admit that when we hosted our brainstorming conference two years ago in Italy, the conference itself was still a rather vague entity. Obviously, the overwhelming response not only meant gladness but also a great deal of hard work for our international Program Committee and Advisory Board. REFRESH! is the result of this collective process; a conference that for the first time is being streamed by our international partners.

Over the last thirty years media art has evolved into a vital contemporary factor. Digital art has become the art of our times, yet it has still not “arrived” in the cultural institutions of our societies. Although there are festivals worldwide with spectacular attendance figures, ambitious projects, innumerable publications, discussion forums, and emerging database documentation projects, media art is still rarely collected by museums, it is not included or supported within the mainframe of art history or other academic disciplines, and it is almost inaccessible for the non-north-western public and their scholars. To change this is our goal! What is needed is a wider view encompassing media art in the context of the treasures left us by past experiences, possessions, and insights, just as Rudolf Arnheim demanded not so long ago.

For this reason the Banff New Media Institute, Database of Virtual Art, and Leonardo decided to organize REFRESH! Where and how, we ask, do the lines run that connect contemporary media art with its pioneers, such as Duchamp, Moholy Nagy, and the Dadaists? What insights can we gain from the analysis of the last decade of media art and its visions in East and West against the backdrop of media history – a history that is to a large extent poorly known?

We believe that REFRESH! will be a milestone in the development of our fields. Here we will discuss questions of historiography, methodology, and the role of institutions of media art. There will be key debates on the function of inventions, artistic praxis in collaborative networks, and the prominent role of sound over the last decades, and we will engage with the importance of intercultural and pop culture themes in the histories of media art. In addition to better research and integration of media art history into academia, our other main goal is to document and preserve artworks that are in danger of being lost. Thus at Banff several of the most well-known international documentation projects for digital art will prepare the foundation of an international meta-database, which will enable a more comprehensive overview of this fast-growing field.

More conferences, publications, and database projects will follow. www.mediaarthistory.org provides an online platform, which will develop into a visible and accessible forum for our discussions and for important materials.

I am looking forward very much to the exciting presentations and discussions of the coming days as well as to the fruitful personal exchanges that makes this conference an event which remains.

Thank you very much for being here!

Oliver Grau

SUMMIT CHAIR'S WELCOME

Sara Diamond, President
Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto

It's good to eat together!
It's even better when we cook together!
Refresh! 2005

We are forewarned by post-structuralist historians that causality is arbitrary. The event structure is one instance in time. New science suggests that causality is highly localized. Hence, the dinner that “cooked up” what was to be, three years later, **Refresh! The First International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology**, was in part a coming together of many other activities, needs and delocalized actions and ingredients. Over Chinese-Japanese food during ISEA 2002 in Nagoya Roger Malina, Oliver Grau and I shared our intellectual as well as our culinary appetites with a group of other new media theorists, historians, archivists and friends. We wanted to collate the emerging disparate actions that were building dialogues and resources for the study of the histories of new media. The conversation was open ended. It danced between the need to assert and refine methodologies and a set of pragmatic needs to sustain that history making, such as the creation of data bases and archives and ongoing support for publication. By the end of that meal we all committed to the creation of a conference that would provide a fulcrum for considered scholarship around new media art history. It would complement smaller panels at the College Art Association, ISEA 2004 and the many archival and data base projects scattered around the world. The conference of 2005 in Banff was to be the first of many initiatives.

We hoped from the beginning that Refresh! Would be a truly international initiative, not only in the places where scholars came from, but in the kinds of practices and approaches to analysis that they considered. This event has made a first positive approach towards that inclusion, not only in specific sessions but across the various sessions. Digital technologies, digital media, mobile media, networks, are so pervasive in their presence and impact that an international approach is critical and will provoke a both criticism and history that pushes back against a homogenized aesthetic, assumptions of influences or cause or a canon.

Secondly, we hoped from the beginning that Refresh! Would engage a wide range of methodological approaches that stem from the complex set of disciplines that make up the expressions curators, critics, artists and historians name as new media art. These include ethnographic studies, games theory, reception theory, the history of science and technology, linguistic and literary theory, biological studies, psychology, post-colonial theory and gender studies—the list is rich and diverse. This diversity adds to the panoply of humanities scholarship in art, media and audio histories that inform new media. This is particularly true as new practitioners and generations enter the creative field.

For the most part, I participated in Refresh! from the vantage point of The Banff Centre with its focus on professional artists and scholars. I have since moved onto lead an institution that teaches young people to be artists, designers, curators, historians and critics of culture. I am even more convinced of the importance of Refresh! 2005 as well as future events and resulting publications, as a means to reach an emerging generation of thinkers. It will reinforce the importance of a self-reflexive gaze on the culture that surrounds them as well as a deep and lateral view of the many events that make up the apparent continuities and complexities of that culture.

I look forward to the delicate and exquisite delights that make up the panels and events of Refresh! 2005. We will share many meals together—may we savor the individual flavors, the mix of tastes and the inevitable planning of future feasts!

Thank you!

Sara Diamond