



# The Hospital and The Machine

Curated by Emily Collins

(Museum Consultant, WCHN History & Heritage Collection)



EDP 1200 Ultrasound Machine, QVH c1981

In the Hospital, the Machine is everywhere. From the Elevator to the Ventilator, the Microwave to the Autoclave, the Machine is useful.

This exhibition is a static procession of Machines once in the service of the Women's and Children's Hospital. It zooms in on the histories and workings of manifold inventions and contraptions: the manual, the motorised and the electronic.

Whirring and clicking, *The Hospital and The Machine* takes us on a retro spin around the 1950s to 1980s, winding up as the Hospital revolutionises its systems to engage in the Computer Age. As analog gives way to digital, the Machines increase in sophistication and automation.

Contemplating all of these Machines, one after the other, sets the imagination into overdrive. The EEG Machine starts to channel an Analog Music Synthesiser. The Computed Tomography Scanner console sparks nostalgia for a 1970s Space Invaders Arcade Game. A 'body part' of This Machine or That Machine looks lifted from a cast of pop culture characters – none of them Human. The Cardiograph Machine could be the distant relative of a Gonk Power Droid from *Star Wars*.

The Hospital Machine, unlike many a science-fictional Droid, is incapable of rising up and taking power. It must be told what instructions to execute. The Technician commands the EEG Machine via its Control Panel. The articulated arm of the

Ultrasound Machine only comes to life in the hand of the Radiographer.  
It is a puppet; a servant of Humankind.

The Hospital has the ultimate power. Administrators can hire and fire the Machine, relegating it to a laboratory corner when it becomes obsolete, or can no longer perform. A High-Maintenance Machine; a Non-Functioning Machine is a liability: a waste of space.

Yet the Hospital cannot take the Machine for granted. The relationship between them is one of interdependence. The Hospital relies upon the Machine to carry out crucial work. Buildings need building. Blood needs analysing. Lungs need ventilating. Lives need saving. To the modern Hospital, the Machine is indispensable.

And the Hospital covets the Machine. The Hospital strives to obtain the Best Machines, within its means. Auxiliaries and charities raise funds to support purchases of the Latest Machine. The highest standard of patient care and systems management demands it.

The Hospital Machine is privy to our personal moments and data. The Computer hoards our medical records. The Ultrasound Machine divulges our very insides. Again: do not fear. The Hospital Machine is benevolent; a helper of Humankind. It is more R2D2 than Dalek. And we need the Machine, in sickness and in health.

American inventor and futurist Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) once likened man [sic] to an extraordinarily complex mechanism equipped with “thousands of hydraulic and pneumatic pumps, with motors attached... millions of warning-signal, railroad and conveyer systems; crushers and cranes... and a universally distributed telephone system”. We, the Humankind, are hosts to trillions of tiny Biological Machines at the cellular level. Using our personal Molecular Machines, we contract our muscles and generate our own electrical power.

Let us celebrate the Machine. In sickness and in health, it is within us as well as without us.

*Emily Collins*



EEG Machine, ACH c1964



Research Autoclave, ACH 1980



Centrifuge, ACH 1965

This exhibition was planned and exhibited on the lands of the Kurna People. We pay our respects to the Kurna Elders past and present and to the Elders of the lands this brochure reaches.

The Curator wishes to thank: Jill Newman and Lauren Simeoni from the WCH Foundation; the WCHN History and Heritage Group past and present; Christopher Sprod (former WCH Clinical Photographer); Rob Hull (Flinders Medical Centre), Michelle Nisbet (WCH NICU) and Trevor Cresp (WCHN CET); David Parsons (WCH Respiratory and Sleep Medicine) and Tim Boord (WCHN Corporate Communications); the WCH Foundation Gallery Management Committee; and David Williams.

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## History and Heritage Collection

The Women's and Children's Health Network has a collection of historical artefacts which is managed by the WCHN History and Heritage Group. This was originally formed as the ICONS Group in 1995 by retired Adelaide Children's Hospital Staff. The Group aims to preserve, collect, collate, catalogue, store, display and interpret items of historical significance to the Women's and Children's Hospital and its predecessors the Adelaide Children's Hospital, the Queen Victoria Hospital and associated institutions.

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## Women's & Children's Hospital Foundation Arts in Health program

The WCH Foundation Arts in Health program coordinates five galleries in the Hospital, providing a space away from the stresses of treatment to distract, entertain and inspire, improving the visual environment. The Arts in Health programs integrate art into the life of the Hospital to improve people's health and wellbeing. We try to make the environment more 'child-friendly', making it look better and helping to make the time spent in hospital 'feel better'. The Yellow Heart Gallery provides a platform to share the WCHN History and Heritage Collection with the Hospital community and explore the significant people and events that shaped the Hospital today.

*The Hospital and The Machine* is on display in the Yellow Heart Gallery (Level 1, Zone F) at the Women's and Children's Hospital from mid-July until the end of October 2020

Cover image: GE 8800 CT Scanner Control Panel, ACH c1985



Women's &  
Children's Hospital  
Foundation

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