



THE **BODY ELECTRIC**
ICRE

...The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked meat of the body,
The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence downward toward the knees,
The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and the marrow in the bones,
The exquisite realization of health;
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul,
O I say now these are the soul!

Walt Whitman "I sing the body electric"

Welcome to *The Body Electric*, the inaugural digital art exhibit for the ICRE. This year, the show explores practices of knowing, producing, inhabiting and learning about the medical body. It includes works by artists and health care practitioners which engage broadly with several themes: perspective and situated knowledges, naming and mapping, simulation and hybridity, and how art can disrupt medicine's dominant ways of knowing. In addition to the video of curated art work, the show includes *Shot Through with Light*, a digital narrative account of historical and contemporary medical technologies which enact the medical body. Lastly, there is an interactive station called *X-selfies* where participants photograph themselves and then render the photo as an X-ray. This station calls upon the user to reflect on self-representation, and on the aesthetic popularization of medical images.

In the show, the works by Lisa Boivin, Ilana Divantman, Khrystyna Herasym and Jane Martin call attention to a multiplicity of perspectives in medicine; their vantages of otherness (child, patient, Indigenous person) lie in counterpoint to a dominant medical perspective. While it is an elemental principle in art, the notion of perspective has only recently entered the discourses of science and medicine. Medicine's epistemology of objectivity implies a practitioner who is a detached, neutral and omniscient observer. Scholars from the social sciences and humanities have challenged the notion of scientific "truth", and put forward other possible paradigms. Donna Haraway, for example, exhorts scientists to situate their knowledge and acknowledge their partial perspectives. If a multitude of partial perspectives come together dialogically, the results of a scientific inquiry will be more robust than the findings which emerge from detached and disembodied observations.ⁱ

The theme of a detached and dominant perspective in medicine resonates with Michel Foucault's concept of the anatomo-clinical gaze, which he suggests developed at the end of the 18th century. Foucault describes a multisensory, external, deciphering gaze that plunges to the depths of a patient's body to provide a clinical reading of it. The metonymic medical eye names, orders and defines disease. Through practices of viewing, percussing, palpating, listening, it maps both the visible surface of the body and brings to light its secret depths revealed through autopsy.ⁱⁱ A similar revelatory mapping now occurs through contemporary imaging technologies. The works by Rose Adams, José Gascón Hurtado, Rose Martin, Linn Milligan and Lia Pas intersect with *The Body Electric's* exploration of the naming and mapping of bodies; they call attention to these practices both within and outside of medical science.

The current imaging technologies which expose a body's interior to the deciphering medical gaze are digital ones. They render the medical body in code. Simulation is one of the most recent practices of codification, and it now plays a significant role in medical education. Trainees may learn auscultation from a mannequin with computer entrails, or laparoscopic techniques from a haptic simulator. Furthermore, just as patient bodies are simulated by mannequins, sophisticated prosthetic apparatuses give rise to human-animal-machine hybrids. In the era of posthuman medicineⁱⁱⁱ, medical bodies are often cyborgs—a human being may have a porcine heart valve or an artificial retina; she may be connected to a dialysis machine or to a breathing apparatus. The works of Susan Beniston, Lisa Carrie Goldberg, Masood Hassan, Kaisu Koski, Ana Jofre and Janice Wong illustrate how boundaries between organisms and machines are leaky and ambiguous in an era of cyborgs and informatics.

The boundaries between art and medicine have been permeable for hundreds of years. Allison Crawford explores this trajectory in her digital narrative entitled *Shot Through with Light*. Historically, medical learners studied aestheticized anatomical drawings, and these drawings in turn heavily influenced the traditions of painting. Art in medicine is no longer merely a tool for documentation and representation but is a tool used in research and in the expression of ineffable experiences. The works of Jack Butler and Bryn Ludlow are examples of visual art as a research methodology, while Max Montalvo's video highlights art as a way to represent our interior landscapes. All of the pieces in *The Body Electric* disrupt pervasive medical practices: as works of art, they force us to think about the artist, the medium, the perspective and the conditions of production. By depicting medical subjects, the viewer can engage not only with the work of art but with medicine and its practices in a critical, reflective way. As participants and viewers of *The Body Electric*, and as inhabitants of bodies, we hope that you will do the same.

— Dr. Lisa Richardson

ⁱ Haraway, Donna J. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

ⁱⁱ Foucault, Michel. 1973. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Vintage Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Waldby, Catherine. 2000. *The Visible Human Project: Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine*. New York: Routledge.