BODIES IN TRANSLATION: PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

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Introduction: Core Values and Commitments

Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life (BIT), is a multidisciplinary, university-community research project that aims to cultivate and research activist art. In this project, 'activist art' refers to the following: disability art, d/Deaf art, Mad art, aging and e/Elder art, fat art, and Indigenous art. We, the researchers, artists, curators, practitioners, and community members on this grant, explore the relationship between cultivating activist art and achieving social and political justice. We focus on disability, D/deaf, Mad, aging, e/Elder, fat and Indigenous art throughout this project because these groups are routinely represented as non-vital, a representation that often produces alienating, violent, and even deadly effects.

Acknowledging that we live and create on Indigenous lands across this North part of Turtle Island, we seek to contribute to the decolonizing and indigenizing of activist art, research, and praxis. By working to decolonize and support the indigenization of disability and activist arts, we seek to contribute to Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty. We believe that activist art holds the power to represent aggrieved groups differently: as artistic, creative, agentive, political, community-connected, and full of vitality.

This document outlines the four guiding principles that inform our project governance, relationships, and activities, along with examples for what each might look like in practice. The purpose of this document is to ensure that all BIT researchers and partners are working in ways that are collaborative and complementary. As partners on this project, we ask you to read through these principles and enact them throughout the projects that you are bringing to BIT.

Our guiding principles are:

1. Leading with difference
2. Enacting radical reciprocity
3. Manifesting accessibility
4. Working in decolonizing and intersectional ways

In-keeping with our understanding of vitality as creative life force, this is a living document. We acknowledge that many BIT partners have key values that you hold close and enact in ways that make sense given your contexts, mandates, leadership models, activisms, and art practices. In this document, we honour those differences as we make transparent the values that frame and animate our work. Because justice-seeking ways of thinking and working as vital, living practices are always evolving, we welcome your feedback and reflections on this document's content.

We offer more examples and practical guidance in our online resource guide, **Vital Practices in the Arts**, which will be referenced throughout this document.

Leading with Difference

> *" To crip is to open up with desire for the ways that disability disrupts."* - Kelly Fritsch

Like many activist projects that have come before us, we are committed to developing and supporting projects that are led by the most affected. In specific terms, this means we engage projects that are *led* by disabled people, Deaf people, Mad people, aging/ed people, fat people, Indigenous people, and queer people of colour. Projects that speak to experiences of disability must be led by disabled people or people who have lived experience of the intersections of embodied difference. More specifically, projects about queer people of colour's experiences of disability must be led by disability-identified queer people of colour; projects about fat stigma and race must be led by fat people of colour; and projects about Indigenous futures must be led by Indigenous people.

Assuming you already are, we ask that you continue to lead with difference in your BIT-related projects, and we invite you to think about the disruption that disability and all forms of difference make to leadership practices. With Kelly Fritsch, we invite you to approach such disruption with desire rather than with tolerance or as something to avoid. When we don't orient to leading through difference as disruptive, we run the risk of only working with those who can conform or easily slide into "normative" (standard or typical) ways of leading. Instead, we make the case for disrupting how we imagine leadership altogether, and for wanting, supporting and cultivating non-normative and new models of leadership.

Leading with Difference in Practice

We offer some examples of ways that we lead with difference in our research and give a longer list in our *Vital Practices* guide:

- Develop relations with and hire disabled, d/Deaf, Mad, fat, aging, and otherwise non-normatively embodied artists as well as Indigenous artists and activists.

- Partner, collaborate with, and follow the leadership/guidance of disabled, d/Deaf, Mad, fat, aging and otherwise non-normatively embodied academics/researchers as well as Indigenous academics/researchers.

- Enact disability justice by approaching accessibility as a foundational aspect of all project activities, not as an add-on.

As we continue to do our work, we expect that this list will grow and expand. We're enthusiastic to learn about how disruption can change and innovate new ways of leading that we have yet to imagine.

Enacting Radical Reciprocity

Reciprocity is key to effective partnerships; it entails building meaningful relationships using transparency, honesty, respect, and wonder to foster mutual, though not necessarily equal, exchanges. Reciprocity is a core value in social justice-oriented research. It is also a core value in Indigenous thought systems, research methods, and forms of governance across Turtle Island.

In research, reciprocity is based on the belief that researchers, collaborators and participating communities each have a stake in the research, and that research should be mutually beneficial. Here, reciprocity is intertwined with the twin value of reflexivity—the belief that researchers should continually reflect on issues of power and positionality in our work. Cree scholar Margaret Kovach notes that researcher self-locating is vital to Indigenous research—a primary way that researchers and communities enter into respectful relationships. According to her, "[i]n asking others to share stories, it is necessary to share our own, starting with self-location. For many active in Indigenous research, this comes naturally, as a part of community protocol. The researcher's self-location provides an opportunity for the research participant to situate and assess the researcher's motivations for the research, thus beginning the relationship that is elemental to story-based methodology."[1]

A core component of reciprocity is open sharing of outputs. BIT researchers, artists, curators, practitioners, and community members are expected to share that which is generated with the rest of the team to facilitate collaboration and to enable the outputs from the grant to make the most impact. Reciprocity, in this regard, requires us to share outputs amongst the research team in service of the overall aim of this grant: to cultivate and disseminate activist art across Ontario.

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[1] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 98.

Another core component of reciprocity is sharing acknowledgments of support and participation. We are expected to acknowledge the partnership and support of the *Bodies in Translation* project as well as contributing partners and communities when presenting outputs.

We seek to enact reciprocity with 3 groups involved in BIT:
1. Aggrieved and justice-seeking groups
2. Organizational and artistic partners and collaborators
3. Research partners and collaborators

When approaching any of these groups, but especially with justice-seeking communities, we do not consider reciprocity to be symmetrical. Symmetrical reciprocity assumes sameness, which erases differences and power relations operating between researcher and researched. Following feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young, asymmetrical or what we are calling 'radical reciprocity' recognizes the similarities and points of contact between people but also acknowledges differences—in histories, life experiences, embodied ways of being and social positions—which cannot be transcended or overcome**.**

Margaret Kovach describes reciprocity as central to Indigenous research, noting that seeking knowledge "ought not to be extractive but reciprocal, to ensure an ecological and cosmological balance." [2] Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) brings together ideas of respect, reciprocity and relationality in his concept of "relational accountability," [3] meaning that researchers must cultivate relationships and stay accountable to the communities they research. Researchers need to take responsibility to ensure reciprocal relationships, according to Wilson, for without reciprocity, "one side of the relationship can gain power and substance at the expense of the other".[4] More deeply still, artist Vanessa Dion Fletcher (Potawatami/Lenape) explores in her artwork how settler ideas about reciprocity are premised on a capitalist model of transaction that begins and ends when a person gives compensation for the knowledge, support, or resources they receive; Indigenous thought systems, in contrast, understand reciprocity as a way of entering into relationship, where an initial, agreed-upon exchange commits all parties to take responsibility for sustaining the health of the relationship.

As these thinkers and artists show, radical reciprocity does not assume all parties are equal (in power or resources) or that agreements are finite transactions; rather, it asks us to enter into agreements as ongoing relationships in which we acknowledge power dynamics, respect our differences, and share responsibility for the well-being of the relationship as a living entity. For more about radical reciprocity, please see Dion Fletcher's Wampum Belt example in *Vital Practices*.

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[2] Ibid, 57.

[3] Shawn Wilson. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 99.

[4] Ibid, 79.

Radical Reciprocity in Practice

Here are some practices that all partners and partnered projects (projects receiving funding and in-kind support) are expected to adopt in order to enact radical reciprocity as defined in this grant:

- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) attached to these Guiding Principles of Governance.

- Recognise funding and in-kind support received from the *Bodies in Translation* Grant in all public-facing and research activities. This means using the BIT logo on all public facing activities: verbally acknowledging BIT at events, using our hashtag (#BodiesInTranslation) when promoting events and other outputs on social media, and acknowledging BIT in all academic publications, including by referencing our funder, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Partnership Grant (Grant Number 895-2016-1024). Various formats of the BIT logo are available on the BIT Slack Channel or by request from the Research Project Manager, Artistic Producer, and Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator (Contact info below).

- Report on all BIT related activities to the BIT Research Project Manager in a timely way so that we can develop yearly and mid-term reports that accurately reflect the scope of our activities (Contact info below).

- Share artistic outputs and documentation of research projects and events with the BIT team through our Research Project Manager or Artistic Producer (with whomever you have established a relationship), and through our BIT Slack Channel. For example, if a video is produced for a BIT-sponsored symposium, it should be made available to other members of the team to use in their pedagogical and artistic endeavours (Contact info below).

- Share scholarly outputs (e.g. publications, reviews) and non-scholarly outputs (e.g. accessibility guides, written descriptions, reports, etc.) that are supported by and/or partnered with BIT on the BIT Slack Channel, and/or with the Research Project Manager or Artistic Director.

- Share the details of your public events with our Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator so that BIT can promote it.

- Strive for clear communication (e.g. by using MOUs, contracts), clear scoping of projects, and ongoing evaluation. Tools to accomplish this can be obtained from our BIT Slack Channel and/or the Research Project Manager and/or the Artistic Producer.

- We strongly encourage BIT partners and members of the BIT research team to write about BIT sponsored and partnered projects for both academic and community-facing publications. In the spirit of radical reciprocity, we propose that researchers, artists, organizers and others whose intellectual, creative and other invisible labour contributed to projects be invited into writing teams on any articles written about them. If you are

uncertain about who should be invited to co-author or be acknowledged in your publications, contact the [Research Project Manager](#) or BIT Co-Directors (Contact info below).

We are committed to a process of sharing scholarly and non-scholarly outputs in ways that make visible and recognize people's creative and intellectual labour.

Manifesting Access

Let's try thinking of accessibility as a creative, long-term process. It's not just about the built environment, but about ideas of agency and power."
– Carmen Papalia[5]

Bodies in Translation is dedicated to producing and sharing arts and knowledge in ways that are accessible, collaborative, and responsive. Disrupting normative ways of knowing and doing, we seek to enact an iterative, evolving, or 'open' accessibility standard in a way that centres our intersectional communities.

Disability artist Carmen Papalia offers an accessibility manifesto, exploring an "Open Access" approach to guiding how we practice access and inclusion (An Accessibility Manifesto, 2018). In

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[5] Carmen Papalia. An Accessibility Manifesto for the Arts. *Canadian Art* (2018). https://canadianart.ca/essays/access-revived/

this manifesto,[6] Papalia invites us to move beyond the conventional notions of access as something that can be planned for in the form of a 'check list,' and consider the ways that disability enables us to redefine how it is that we understand care and community. Throughout the BIT project, we can think of Open Access as something that is built upon the knowledge and the access requirements of those involved.

Manifesting open accessibility is iterative; it is a continual negotiation of trust between those who practice support as an exchange of mutual understanding and acknowledgement. We embrace this orientation to accessibility throughout our project—it is integral to BIT and everything we do.

This means we work continually to dismantle barriers at physical, systemic, state-sanctioned, linguistic, and attitudinal levels. Our research is driven by the recognition that each of us is an expert in what we require for access, rather than assuming that accessibility can be achieved simply through adopting 'universal' standards. We are guided by principles of interdependence, collective exchange, and equality of voice and practice.

While our grant complies with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) website standard of accessibility (https://www.aoda.ca/),[7] our research goes further towards innovating and cultivating experimental inclusive cultural practices in artistic production and cultural spaces across Ontario and Canada. We experiment with, explore, and research emerging practices and ideas that contribute to ways of manifesting accessibility that are:

- Reflexive: evaluating what does and does not work, and integrating this learning into the way we work,
- Iterative: experimenting with new practices as we go and evaluating their successes and challenges, and
- Intersectional: considering how to re-configure spaces to welcome a diversity of marginalized people.

Manifesting Access in Practice
Some broad-stroke examples of manifesting accessibility in BIT artistic and research activities include the following practices, but we encourage you to think about accessibility broadly, politically, and in context. When you begin a project, think about accessibility and intersectionality; consider physical, attitudinal, social, and other barriers and how we might begin to address, resist, and disrupt them.

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[6] For more information, please see our *Vital Practices* guide, where the five principles of the manifesto are listed and described in greater detail.
[7] The Act is here: https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191, and Web Standards are here: https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/).

Use accessible venues
Are the building and the meeting space easily accessible? Are there push buttons on the doors? Is the venue on an accessible transit route? Are the bathrooms accessible? Are there all gender bathrooms? Are there wide seats or chairs without arms? Is the atmosphere (images on the walls, social history of the space, etc.) welcoming to diverse groups, including racialized, Indigenous and disabled people?

Create accessible promotional materials
Are your PDFs screen readable? Are the visual materials described? Have you clearly stated what access accommodations you will provide? Have you used access labels? Do you include start and end times so that people can book wheel-trans or other forms of transportation?

Practice accessible hospitality
How are you anticipating welcoming disabled and differently embodied people? Are there flexible, plastic straws at the bar? Are there wide seats or chairs without arms for fat and large bodies? Are the aisles between tables wide enough for a wheelchair or scooter? Is there a quiet room?

Consider designating an 'Access Coordinator'
The Access Coordinator is the point person for accessibility at your event. They will communicate with participants and potential audiences about what forms of access are being integrated into the event and arrange for that access. The Access Coordinator may invite participants and audiences to make further access requests; however, doing so requires that you consider all requests relative to your resources (budget, people-power, time, space, etc.) and that you communicate which additional requests you can support prior to the event. Asking your communities what they require in order to participate fully will provide you with information that will help you work towards making future events more accessible.

Consider generating an Access Guide
An Access Guide is a document that communicates information about an event through description and image. It often includes information about the location, space, people, accessibility, schedule, and access guidelines (See the Access Guide section of Vital Practices in the Arts).

Evaluate your efforts
How effective have you been in your efforts to create an accessible event? Conduct feedback surveys and use this information to guide your next endeavour. We would be grateful if you shared your learnings with us so we could add them to our developing compendium of Vital Practices in the Arts.

Remember
Access involves thinking with and through bodies and minds who are marginalized by colonial processes and white supremacy. For example, hosting an event, workshop, or presentation in a university space requires reflection on colonial dispossession of land from First Nations, Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, as people we invite into university space are all too familiar with how they have been excluded.

We approach accessibility as vital to *every* step of artistic and research processes.
In all activities, we aim to animate this model of accessibility by:

- Cultivating and supporting disability arts and artists,
- Creating an accessible archive and knowledge platform for research, exchange, collaboration, and learning,
- Leading and desiring difference as an integral and vital part of practicing accessibility (and making this desire plain in our communications around activities and invitations to participate).

Accessibility practices are iterative, dynamic, and collaborative, much like all of the work that we do. They will continue to expand as we do this work. We welcome your contributions in helping us build, improve and expand our practices.

Additionally, we want to encourage those working towards access and inclusion to think broadly and politically about accessibility—to take into account experiences of ableism that intersect with racism, sexism, ageism, sizeism, queer and transphobia, settler-colonialism, and white supremacy.

We acknowledge Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Black feminists who originated intersectional perspectives and analytic tools, and the movements that continue to fight for intersectional disability liberation and disability justice. For more information about the intersections of our work, please see *Working in Intersectional Ways* in *Vital Practices in the Arts.*

For a fulsome discussion of accessibility in practice, please read our resource guide *Vital Practices in the Arts.* We also encourage you to reach out to the BIT Artistic Producer and Research Project Manager for advice, guidance, consultation, and support on how to manifest accessibility in your projects (contact info below).

Working in Decolonizing and Intersectional Ways

Land acknowledgements
Land acknowledgements are an important starting point for recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and guardianship over the land. We offer a few examples in our resource *Vital Practices in the*

Arts. While acknowledging territory is important, it is only a small part of cultivating strong relationships with the Indigenous Peoples (Inuit, First Nations and Metis) on the land we currently call Canada. Acknowledging territory and First Peoples should take place within the larger context of genuine and ongoing work to forge real understanding, and to challenge the legacies of colonialism.

Land acknowledgements can be a part—but are not the whole picture—of consciously and actively enacting this responsibility. To avoid what have come to be regarded as 'canned' or standardized land acknowledgements, we encourage you to do your own research into the covenants, treaty agreements, and Indigenous nations related to the land on which you create/ work/ act/ gather. Consult with Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous-authored websites, if you don't know the history of colonization in your area. The Canadian Association of University Teachers provides this [resource](). We also encourage you to position yourself in relation to the traditional territory—as original peoples, Indigenous visitor, refugee, immigrant, settler, or from the intersectional position in which you live. If appropriate, we encourage BIT partners to invite an Elder to open your events and to offer monetary payment and other gifts of thanks each time Elders work with you.

Allyship and Solidarity
In this work, we encourage collaborators to consider the action of allyship and working in solidarity. This means engaging in a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust and accountability with justice-seeking peoples, taking leadership and direction from these groups, listening more and speaking less, and mobilizing our privilege to speak difficult and risky truths, which necessarily includes building our capacities to receive constructive, relationship-enhancing criticism. It means educating ourselves about the histories and legacies of oppression and resistance of others, and examining how we are each implicated in those histories and conditions. We acknowledge how this work takes energy and time. For more information about allyship as a verb, please see the section called *Working in Solidarity* in *Vital Practices*.

***Decoloniality and Intersectionality* in Practice**
The following are some further considerations for working in decolonizing and intersectional ways:

- Recognise and investigate the nexus between Indigeneity and disability by bringing a decolonizing, indigenizing, and disability justice lens into our artistic collaborations and research. This may require us to work with a continually destabilized understanding of disability—and to constantly re-evaluate how we work, and with whom—uprooting the narrative of disability pride to make room for other ways of orienting to disability. For example, we can consider disability produced through the shameful and abhorrent conditions of settler colonialism, such as impairment and debility caused by environmental racism.

- Work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples at conceptual, methodological, and structural levels. For example, take leadership from Indigenous researchers and artists working on and with BIT; regularly consult with Indigenous ethics protocols and contact our Research Project Manager if you wish to speak with the *Bodies in Translation* Knowledge Keeper Mona Stonefish; hire and work with artists at the intersections of disability and Indigeneity; and invite other Indigenous researchers, artists, and Elders you have developed relationships with to co-lead in our activities and to speak at our events, etc.

- Think broadly and politically about accessibility; think practically about marginalized people's access to art making, artistic spaces, and archives. Sometimes, when we collaborate with various communities and individuals, we will rub up against ways in which differences and activisms come into conflict and disrupt each other. For example, thinking with Cherokee artist-academic Qwo-Li Driskell, working towards Indigenous sovereignty and against settler colonialism and its effects may be disruptive to the disability community's emphasis on accessibility and its typical meaning; the right to access any place and space. Disabled and nondisabled settlers, for example, may not have the right to access all spaces, particularly when living on stolen land.

When we desire and cultivate the ways that non-normatively embodied people disrupt culture, we have the tremendous opportunity to shape and lead arts and culture with difference. We do this not only to be inclusive, but in recognition of how we open up and create new standards of artistic excellence when we make arts and culture accessible, and when we are led by difference.

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Slack Channel for **Bodies in Translation**:
- bodiesintranslation.slack.com