

## Access in the Making (AIM) Lab

### Manifesto

## Acknowledgement<sup>1</sup>

As we write our Manifesto, we want to acknowledge in bold letters that it was the methodological work of **the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR)** that has inspired and guided us throughout the process.<sup>2</sup> We are extremely grateful to CLEAR Lab for the incredible amount of work that they have done in how to run a feminist and anti-colonial lab,<sup>3</sup> and their generosity in sharing this know-how with others. **We cannot cite you and thank you enough.**

## Citation

Inspired by CLEAR Lab's work, AIM Lab has worked on this document over almost a process of ten months (and we are still and will be working on it). This document is the result of *labour*, including doing research, collective conversations, and editing. This document is a research output. This document is *a publication*. If you quote, use, or in any way benefit from this document, cite it.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in our *Manifesto* and *Protocols*, we make the deliberate decision to use, not endnotes, *but footnotes*. In order to subvert the design hierarchy scripted into footnotes (which automatically decreases their font size vis-a-vis the font size of main text) we choose to use the same font size for both footnotes and the main body of the text, with the same line spacing. These design choices reflect our commitments to feminist ethics of citation. Through these choices, we seek to emphasize the shoulders we stand upon, and the various intellectual genealogies, activist, and artistic traditions that we draw from. Thank you, Annemarie Mol, Sara Ahmed, and Max Liboiron for teaching us about the importance of citations and the politics of footnotes (Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points, "; Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*).

<sup>2</sup> CLEAR, *CLEAR Lab Book: A living manual of our values, guidelines, and protocols*.

<sup>3</sup> For methodological projects of the CLEAR Lab, see:

<https://civiclaboratory.nl/methodological-projects/>

Cite as:

AIM Lab. *Access in the Making (AIM) Lab Manifesto*. Montreal: Access in the Making Lab, 2022.

As a lab committed to disability justice and feminist citational practices, we are especially concerned that the intellectual labour of marginalized folks (including BIPOC, disabled artists, activists, scholars) and those occupying precarious positions in the academia (graduate students, adjuncts, emerging scholars) are not properly (sometimes, never) recognized. Our own citational practices seek to dismantle that ignorance and erasure, and we hope that you, the reader, will do the same.

### **Manifesto publication co-authorship**

This publication emerged out of a series of numerous conversations within AIM as well as from a litany of members' own experiences in various academic and community spaces as well as activist and social movements. The writing of this manifesto was by and large produced by AIM Lab Coordinator, Prakash Krishnan and AIM Director, Arseli Dokumaci in consultation with AIM's Steering Committee. Specific sections of these documents, such as certain protocols, have been developed by other key AIM members. Where such sections are present, the respective authors will be mentioned or cited in the text as appropriate.

## **Territorial Acknowledgement**

The Access in the Making Lab (AIM) is physically located within Concordia University's Communication and Journalism (CJ) building on the island commonly referred to as Montréal in English/French, as Tiohtià:ke in Kanien'kéha, and as Mooniyang in Anishinaabemowin. Prior to the arrival of European settlements that forced the displacement of Indigenous peoples from this area, the Land on which the bulk of our organizing, research and activities take place has been the homeland to several Indigenous and other peoples including the Anishinaabeg, and Kanien'kehá:ka who are officially recognized by Concordia University as the traditional custodians of the Lands and Waters on which we are situated.

As a consortium of researchers, artists, and activists living and working across so-called Canada as well as across the globe, we remain cognizant of the ways in which our activities both in-person and online have far-reaching impacts on Indigenous communities. This includes our use of cloud and other technological platforms and media technologies for hybridized activities and events which are built and operated on stolen Lands. While issues facing Indigenous communities across so-called Canada cannot (and should not) be identically mapped over other regions or nations, AIM considers it crucial to think broadly about the ways in which questions around access (physical, technological or otherwise) is intrinsically linked to Indigenous people's inaccess to their traditional Lands, language, culture, traditions, safe drinking water, food, etc.

## What is this manifesto for?

Welcome to Access in the Making (AIM) Lab! If you're reading this, you are likely a prospective, current, or visiting member of the lab, or perhaps you are simply curious about AIM. In either case, we are glad to have you here. This document aims to be a one-stop shop for outlining the guiding principles, values, and protocols of the lab. These guidelines are not only meant for onboarding new members, but for all of us to have a foundational and grounding text upon which to return when questions or complex situations arise. Conceived in the spirit of a feminist, anti-colonialist manifesto, this "living document" aims to bring transparency to our operations, and clearly state the guiding values and expectations we have as members of the AIM community. This includes topics such as what our values are and how we enact them in our research, how we work collectively, and how we resolve problems. We invite you to read this in full and then return to key sections when needed. If you are an active AIM member, with access to the live version of this document, please add your notes, suggestions, and questions using the comment feature. We will return to this document to review and revise on a regular basis. Happy reading and welcome to the AIM Lab.

## We have for a while been in the making: AIM's history

The AIM Lab has emerged through incremental efforts over the course of eight years. In this sense, the AIM Lab has been in-the-making for some time already. Here is an abridged version of the story. A more detailed version, including images and other documentation from past events, is available on our website under About → What. In 2013, Kim Sawchuk, Laurence Parent, Arseli Dokumacı and other researchers affiliated with Concordia's Mobile Media Lab formed the Montreal In/accessible Collective (MIA) in collaboration with our community partner, Regroupement des activistes pour l'inclusion au Québec (RAPLIQ) and Catalan artist Antoni Abad. MIA collective developed a series of media projects on disability and discrimination, including the Megafone project, MIA video capsules, and Virtual Poster Series Traffic Lights. Building from this groundwork, Kim Sawchuk and Arseli Dokumacı, co-founded and co-chaired the [first working group](#) (WG) on [Disability and Performance](#) in 2014 at

the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. The WG held four international gatherings: at the Encuentro Festival/Conference, MANIFEST! Choreographing Social Movements in the Americas in Montreal in 2014, Bodies-In-Transit: at the Articulating the Americas (and Beyond) Convergence in [New York \(USA\) in 2014](#), at the 2016 Encuentro Festivals/Conferences in Santiago ([Chile](#)), and at the 2019 Encuentro in [Mexico City \(Mexico\)](#). Through cross-departmental efforts, and just a few months after the Encuentro Festival, we founded Quebec's first [Critical Disability Studies Working Group](#) (CDSWG) in a university context at Concordia. Sponsored by Concordia's Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture, CDSWG branched across departments, bringing together students, faculty, researchers and creators from Communication Studies, Art Education, Anthropology, Sociology, History, the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, Educational Technology, Applied Human Sciences, and more. Initially, CDSWG was a modest effort providing a dedicated space for researchers, students, community activists, and media practitioners committed to critical disability studies to meet and discuss their current research and develop ideas for future collaboration. Beginning with a series of research presentations, workshops, and screenings by CDSWG members, our activities rapidly increased. Other researchers, staff members, NGO's, local community members, and many more who were genuinely interested in questions of disability and access began to contact us, wanting to learn and do more. Over time, our networks expanded through further collaborations with local, national, and international artists, activists, community members and grassroots organizations, and with a series of events, including two international symposia. A year after its foundation, CDSWG branched beyond both the university and Montreal. Given its expanding needs, the Milieux Institute began housing CDSWG under its Participatory Media Cluster and its wheelchair-accessible physical space in Concordia's downtown campus as of 2015. Since then, CDSWG continued its activities at an ever-increasing scale. [A list of these activities is available on our website.](#)

In 2020, Arseli Dokumaci, founding member of the CDSWG, was appointed as a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Critical Disability Studies and Media Technologies at

Concordia University. In addition to the CRC, Arseli was awarded with a Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) grant to establish a new lab in this area. Arseli held consultation meetings with the founding and active members of CDSWG, and through this consultative process, it was decided that the CDSWG would slowly be dissolved into what would become the AIM Lab. The plans for the construction of the AIM Lab began in early 2020, and AIM Lab started operating virtually as of September 2020. In May 2021, AIM established its virtual presence with the launch of its website. In December 2021, the current AIM steering committee met for their first retreat wherein the values and principles of the lab were solidified and from which this manifesto emerged.

### **AIM's statement on access**

Access is a ubiquitous term that is being used in many other places than disability politics and scholarship. (Even within disability studies and activism, what people, various institutions, and other actors understand from access can vary significantly). In consideration of these differences, we want to be specific about what we understand from access and how we approach it in our practices. There are three tenets that define AIM's approach to access.

- 1) At the AIM Lab, we approach access broadly, multidimensionally, and intersectionally.** Access, for us, is not just about disability, which comprises in itself so many things, and intersects with other identities, experiences and social positions. In other words, access, for us, is not just about ramps, building codes, or legal provisions. Access is also about access to drinking water, clean air, food, shelter, and other basic necessities of life; access to healthcare, medication, information, knowledge, training, mentorship, as well as access to respite from the ableist expectations of the academy and the individualizing demands and competitive atmosphere of the contemporary neoliberal university.

- 2) As the AIM Lab, we consider access from an anti-colonial framework.** AIM does not take for granted that we all understand the same thing from access, and that access, no matter what, should always be there. As the AIM Lab, we acknowledge that access can take on very different meanings depending on who uses them, in which context, and for what purposes. And not all these meanings are benevolent. As an anti-colonial lab, we commit to being continually self-reflexive, and to pay close attention to the limits and changing meanings of access, as we engage with access work. Drawing on decolonial theorists, we commit to engaging with place-based specificities<sup>4</sup>, and being in good relations with the Land<sup>5</sup>, by which we mean learning about the colonial violences and genocides that have taken place on this Land, and the survival, strength, and resistance of Kahnawakeronon.
- 3) As the AIM Lab, we engage access creatively, critically, and curiously, rather than legally, institutionally, and retroactively.** The AIM Lab is concerned, not with what access is, but with what access could be. To that effect, we collectively experiment, improvise, and speculate. The AIM Lab draws on disability activism and scholarship, centers the knowledge, skills, and virtuosity of disabled people in the making of access. At the AIM Lab, we practice, what we call, “access as research-creation”. Research-creation refers to when the doing of hands-on artistic or media work becomes the process of research itself. Practicing “access as research-creation” means to not taking things for granted, and instead being ready for surprises, failures, conflicts, and tensions. In engaging access as research-creation, the AIM Lab promotes unlearning, letting go of assumptions, fostering access intimacy, and collectively working towards accessible futures.

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<sup>4</sup> Glen and Simpson. "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity."

<sup>5</sup> Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism.

## The Space

The AIM Lab is physically located on the ground floor of Communication and Journalism (CJ) building at Concordia's beautiful and spacious Loyola Campus. The AIM Lab has been designed with access in mind from the get-go. The design, planning and construction of the AIM Lab has taken more than two years. It included extensive research on the accessibility of the Loyola campus, CJ building, the lab space, furniture, materials, and equipment to a variety of disabled users. In the process, we worked alongside multiple access consultants who are themselves disabled experts.<sup>6</sup> We are proud to say that AIM Lab is the first lab at Concordia to be designed with comprehensive accessibility as a goal from the outset. We hope that the knowledge and expertise gained during the construction of the AIM Lab will inform the future constructions in Concordia and beyond. That is why we are sharing all the story and documentation of our making (including the making of our physical space as well as the making of this website) on our website.

At the flexible and open space of AIM Lab, we provide tools and equipment (including 3D printers, computers, software, and audio-video kits) to respond to the questions of how to make things work within limits, and how to create access that does not yet exist. Our doors are open to anyone (including guide dogs and other companions) who wants to join our curious crew of access-tinkerers and affordance-creators.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the story of our making, please visit [About - Where - Space](#).

## **AIM Governance**

### **Horizontal structure**

The AIM Lab is constantly negotiating an idealized horizontal spirit with the realities of being a Canada Research Chair (CRC)-funded research lab. The reality is that with transient membership (as graduate students, postdocs, and community researchers come and go), uneven pay structures (tenured and tenure-track professor salaries versus temporary contracts for research assistantships and research associate positions), and other imbalanced power structures (e.g., supervisor-supervisee, employee-employer relationships, Concordia student/staff vs community member access, PhD vs MA vs BA dynamics, precarious academic positions, etc.), it is, at this time, not possible, nor honest to proclaim the AIM Lab as existing under a completely flat organizational structure.

That said, we do strive to create and foster an equitable environment for learning, experimentation, making, and research. The AIM Lab is a space in which everyone involved has a voice and the opportunity to participate in and pitch projects and events, collaborate with others, access working space and equipment, provide and receive feedback on creative projects, and more. We also have structures in place (such as consensus-based decision making) in order to mitigate power imbalances and distribute power as evenly as possible within the limits of a CRC and an institution.

### **AIM Structure**

The AIM Lab's structure is comprised of two tiers of membership: 1) steering committee, 2) residents.

#### **1. Steering committee**

The Steering Committee (SC) is responsible for the everyday operations, current and future planning, and decision-making process of the AIM Lab. The SC has the

responsibility of leading and managing lab projects, communications, events, working groups, and all other lab activities. All SC members are required to:

- a) attend weekly AIM regular meetings,
- b) take the lead or co-lead on at least one of its ongoing projects,
- c) undertake at least one task that is related to AIM's everyday operations (such as the regular update of AIM's website; writing audio descriptions for a project),
- d) actively participate in AIM's activities, events and projects.

The SC is comprised of AIM's director in addition to research assistants, associates, affiliates, and postdoctoral fellows. All SC members are paid staff, compensated through formal employment (research assistants and research associates), and all the hours they work at AIM are compensated and counts towards their employment. SC membership is open on an invitation basis only.

All steering committee members are required to read Concordia's [Indigenous Directions Action Plan](#) and attend the [Pîkiskwêâtân, The Indigenous Learning Series](#) during the year of their onboarding. If a member has already attended the Pîkiskwêâtân, The Indigenous Learning Series, they do not have to repeat them the next year(s). For graduate students, the attendance to the series and the reading of Indigenous Directions Action Plan are counted as their paid RA hours.

It is important to note that no SC member is a dedicated full-time AIM staff person, and everyone is engaged in a variety of other works including personal research projects, teaching, coursework, artistic practices, as well as their own personal duties. As such, responsibilities, time commitments, and energies are always in flux, and responsibilities are shared equally among the members so that one individual member is not overburdened with too many tasks, and each member is supported in their tasks. That said, if a SC member needs to step back from their duties, or has the capacity to take on more duties, it is their responsibility to make their needs known in a timely manner to those they share their tasks with (i.e., project co-leads) as well as with the director.

(Please note that such requests should not be made at the last minute as this adds extra pressure on everyone).

The full list of active SC members' profiles is available on our website under [About → Who](#).

## **2. Residents**

In addition to the SC, who are actively involved in the governing of the lab, the AIM community occasionally invites the participation of residents. As either an artist in residence or a researcher in residence, residents are invited to join AIM for a limited duration to see through the completion of an artistic, research or any other AIM-related project. This project may either be a project of one's own conception or a resident may join an existing project at AIM or agree to undertake a project developed by AIM. All new project proposals will have to undergo an approval process by the SC and AIM's collective decision-making protocol. Artists and researchers in residence are paid a stipend for their participation in AIM projects (either through formal employment as postdocs, research associates or research assistants or through honoraria). Any outputs produced through the residency, or which received support from AIM must be credited in the appropriate channels. Depending on the nature of their project, residents might be required to sign an MoU with AIM.

For the duration of their residency, residents are invited to attend regular AIM meetings, participate in AIM's ongoing projects, and propose events and activities, but do not have the operational responsibilities of the SC. Residents are also able to make requests for access to the AIM Lab space at Concordia University as well as to make requests to loan equipment. These requests will be fulfilled where possible, however priority will be given to the SC. Residents can also propose projects to AIM, give feedback, as well as make requests for support for projects related to AIM's mission.

**Open calls for residents open periodically.** To be notified of when calls open, check our website and follow our social media accounts (@AccessMaking on Twitter and Instagram). Any additional residency inquiries can be sent to [info@accessinthemaking.ca](mailto:info@accessinthemaking.ca).

**All members are asked to fulfil three key requirements:**

- **Provide website profile**

New members are asked to submit material for their profile page on AIM's website, and to annually update their profile as their membership continues.

- **Provide information for external grant reporting**

Once a year in the spring, members are required to respond to a questionnaire designed to collect information needed for AIM's annual reporting to external funding agencies. Departing members (e.g. graduating students) are required to respond to the questionnaire following their departure if it covers any part of their period of membership.

- **Make acknowledgment of AIM support**

Members are asked to credit Access in the Making Lab in any publicly presented projects and any publications created using AIM resources.

## **Member Onboarding**

Irrespective to which member category you belong, onboarding for all members begins the same. The first step is to read the lab Manifesto, Values, and Principles in full. These texts will give you a good idea of the spirit and values embodied by and at AIM as well as a list of resources that guide our operations as a disability justice-oriented research lab that strives to operate from a place that is also feminist and anti-oppressive. Before proposing any projects, you are invited to attend our monthly open-house meetings to see how the values written in this guide are put into action. From these meetings, you will get the chance to meet the other members and familiarize yourself with the current active projects at AIM.

The next step is to set up a meeting with AIM's director who will put you in touch with the coordinators of the project(s) you will be working on. From then on, most of your direct communications will be handled autonomously with the project or working group coordinators. If you are looking to work in the AIM Lab space at Concordia University, or would like to loan equipment, you are welcome to contact the equipment coordinator who will set up an appointment to give you an orientation of the space and available equipment for loan and for in-lab use.

If you are leaving AIM, we are sad to see you go, but understand that nothing can last forever. We all wish you the best for your future endeavors. As part of the formal exiting process, you will first need to process any and all equipment returns with the Equipment Coordinator.<sup>7</sup>

### **Funding Structure**

Access in the Making Lab is funded by a Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Critical Disability Studies and Media Technologies, and a Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) grant. Two of AIM's main projects are funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant (PI, Dr. Dokumaci), and a Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et Culture (FRQSC) Research Support for New Academics Grant (PI, Dr. Dokumaci). These funds are used to pay the salaries of research assistants, research affiliates, research associates who are working as part of the AIM; to hire access consultants; to pay honorariums to artists, activists, community collaborators working with AIM; to pay vendors for their services; and to fund AIM's ongoing research projects, events, and activities. As the PI of these funded projects, Dr. Dokumaci makes the ultimate financial decisions regarding the use of the funds. As AIM's lab coordinator, Prakash Krishnan is given signing authority to access the

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<sup>7</sup> For further information on member onboarding and exiting, please see "Onboarding and Exiting Protocol" on our website.

expense management of the grants which would allow him to manage payments and procurements.

Given that AIM operates thanks to these generous funding sources, certain actions need to be performed by us as part of our responsibility. This includes that members, affiliates, internal and external collaborators acknowledge AIM's support to any of our projects, events, and activities (including theses, artworks, publications, conference presentations and any other dissemination activities) that were created using AIM resources or had any input from AIM (including intellectual input). These acknowledgements are the recognition that AIM members, affiliates and collaborators owe to AIM's funders and maintaining these practices – even if deeply bureaucratic – are part of our spirit of relation building.

**The requirement of funding acknowledgement applies in the following cases:**

- conducting media interviews, speeches and presentations at conferences and workshops;
- receiving an honor or award;
- creating conference or workshop materials, web materials, press releases and other media materials; and
- submitting publications, project reports, monographs, videos or films and other outputs of the research project, citing the name of the funding opportunity.

When possible, make acknowledgements in English and French.

For information on how to do the acknowledgements, please see: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/using-utiliser/acknowledge-mention/index-eng.aspx>

## References

Ahmed, Sara. "Making Feminist Points." *feministkilljoys*, September 13, 2013.

<https://feministkilljoys.com/about/>

CLEAR. 2021. *CLEAR Lab Book: A living manual of our values, guidelines, and protocols, V.03*. St. John's, NL: Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Coulthard, Glen, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity." *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249-255.

Liboiron, Max. 2021. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mol, Annemarie. 2003. *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Duke University Press.

## APPENDIX 1: AIM PROTOCOLS

1. Core values and principles
  - Authors: Amy, Nicholas, Arseli
2. Consensus-based Decision-Making Protocol
  - Authors: Mitchell, Sabrina, Yolanda
3. Meeting Facilitation Protocol
  - Authors: Amy, Dresda
4. AIM Partnership Protocol
  - Authors: Yolanda, Diego, Mitchell (support)
5. Onboarding and Exiting Protocol
  - Authors: Jessie, Nicholas, Diego
6. Events Protocol
  - Authors: Raphelle, Sabrina, Roi
7. Apologies, Call-ins/Call-outs Protocol
  - Authors: Dresda, Jessie
8. Collective Authorship Protocol (forthcoming)
  - Authors: Arseli, Raphaelle (support), Prakash
9. Communication Protocol
  - Authors: Jessie (support), Amy, Roi
10. Equipment List and Use Protocol (forthcoming)
  - Authors: Prakash, Raphaëlle
11. Space Use Protocol (forthcoming)
  - Authors: Arseli, Prakash

## APPENDIX 2: AIM PROJECTS

### Projects in-progress

#### 1) Website design and development

Design lead: Roï

Developer: Leanne

Support: Prakash, Arseli

Accessibility leads: Jessie, Sabrina, Prakash

Content development: Prakash and Arseli

#### 2) Online exhibition: Air, river, sea, soil; a history of an exploited land

Curator and web design lead: Roï Saade

Web developer: Leanne

Support: Prakash and Arseli

#### 3) Artist roundtable for the online exhibition: Air, river, sea, soil; a history of an exploited land

Lead: Roï Saade

Support: Arseli

#### 4) Co-authored article

Project lead: Arseli

Co-authors: Nicholas, Jessie, Amy, Raphaëlle, Simone

## **Completed Projects**

When projects conclude, they will be moved into this section to maintain a record of peoples' contributions to the repertoire of AIM activities.

### **Audio Description in the Making Workshop**

Event facilitated by Cheryl Green and Thomas Reid

Project leads: Raphaëlle, Arseli

Project participants (SC members): Jessie, Nicholas, Prakash, Sabrina, Salima, Diego

### **Audio Description in the Making Exhibition**

Web design: Prakash

Support: Raphaëlle, Arseli

Project participants (SC members): Jessie, Nicholas, Prakash, Sabrina, Salima, Diego

### **Anti-racist Pedagogy Platform Accessibilization**

In partnership with Decolonial Perspectives and Practices Hub (Jamilah Dei-Sharpe)

Project leads: Nicholas

Support persons: Raphaëlle, Dresda, Arseli, Prakash

### **Indigenous Reads Book Club (2022 Winter)**

Dec-February Reading: Donna Goodleaf, *Entering the Warzone*

Coordinator: Diego

Participating members: Raphaëlle, Sabrina, Amy, Jessie, Arseli, Prakash, Nicholas, Dresda,

### **Panel: From Turtle Island to Palestine: How have we been surviving colonization?**

Panelists: Donna Kahérakwas Goodleaf and Razan AISalah

Date: 10, March 2022

Coordinator: Arseli

**Image description writing collaboration for the online exhibition “Air, river, sea, soil; a history of an exploited land”**

Lead: Arseli

Participants: Arseli, Amy, Jessie, Sabrina, Diego, Prakash, Nick, Yolanda, Dresda, Salima