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Preface

What does it take to create an Indigenous counter-space and the space for counter-stories within a country such as Canada, formally just over 150 years old? What does it mean to work among the colonial newcomers and settlers of other tongues who have constructed a way of life that is in crisis because it depends categorically on the destruction of relations between lands, waters, air, animals, peoples, and spirits? What does it mean to take the camera and, with that very instrument of anthropological gaze, create other ways of looking, listening, speaking, sound-ing, imagining, and storytelling? What body and soul, what strengths and dreams, can hold a collective imagining for the nation-state to change?

Such is the lifework of Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin. Her history of documentary filmmaking has indelibly shaped the trajectory of Indigenous resistance in Canada, with global implications. It has rewoven and continues to rebuild the relations between her peoples and their histories, stories, sounds, lands, communities, traditions, and languages. Mobilizing against the hauntings of erasure, her works are a testimony of resilience and inexorable recovery, sustained as much by children's voices as by the warriors who stand the ground for their land. Her passion and commitment—to create another story for all generations—carry through to her most recent film honouring the powerful voice of Murray Sinclair, the former senator who chaired Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008–15), which exposed the history and lasting impacts of the Canadian residential school system for Indigenous children. This report prompted substantive and ongoing policy changes, but it also led to the discovery of missing and murdered children, long known but physically revealed as never before this past year. "The power of the word is sacred," Obomsawin says of her latest film, and, we add, so is the power of her films.

This book and the exhibition owe their realization to the brilliant work of Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) curator Hila Peleg, who initiated this project, and Richard William Hill, art historian and Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art, Vancouver Art Gallery, both of whom

worked closely with Obomsawin. We are tremendously indebted to all the writers in this publication, who have supported and contributed to Obomsawin's work in multiple ways. A very special thanks to Michael Shu, Obomsawin's gracious and tireless assistant, for his generosity and attention to detail. Critically important has been the support of the National Film Board of Canada and CBC/Radio-Canada. We are immensely thankful to our funders, especially the Canada Council for the Arts and the Embassy of Canada, Berlin, for supporting this collaboration.

But, above all, we express our deepest appreciation to Alanis Obomsawin herself, who has contributed not only her work but her grace, intelligence, kindness, deep insight, and enthusiasm to make this project possible. It has been an honour and a profound pleasure for all of us to be able to work with her, and we are deeply grateful.

Barbara Fischer
Art Museum at the University of Toronto

Anthony Kiendl
Vancouver Art Gallery

Bernd Scherer
Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Introduction: The Children Have to Hear Another Story

—Richard William Hill and Hila Peleg

Alanis Obomsawin was born into a dark period of Indigenous history, yet somehow she was able to manifest a light in that darkness. Over the course of many decades, this light has grown from an initial spark to a fire around which many gather to share counsel and hear stories. Or to say it differently: despite beginning her life in a period when the options for social and political agency of Indigenous Peoples were radically and systemically foreclosed, Obomsawin has managed to consistently create and access public platforms to advance her peoples' concerns and tell their stories. The texts and images in this book are all, in one sense or another, about how she did this and what it has meant that she did. We hope to reflect on how much light Obomsawin has helped to bring into this world through a tribute of careful analysis and personal reflections.

It is necessary, however, to first probe more deeply into the darkness. In the year she was born, 1932, Indigenous children in Canada were sent by the state to church-run boarding schools. These schools had the explicit mandate of destroying Indigenous cultures, beliefs, and languages and replacing them with the cultures and Christian denominations of European settlers. They were not only often poorly funded vocational schools offering inadequate education but also sites of frequent physical and sexual abuse. And in all Canadian schools, children were taught a version of history that held Indigenous Peoples and cultures in contempt, one that vilified and belittled them as savages.

If you were an Indigenous person who wanted to vote in a federal election in 1932, you would be required to give up your "Indian status" and associated treaty and collective rights—few people chose to do this. If you were an Indigenous woman and married a non-Indigenous man, you would automatically lose your status. And if you wanted to practise ceremonies such as the Sun Dance or the Potlatch or even create the objects associated with them, you would be breaking the law as laid down in the Indian Act. Perversely, however, if you wanted to create traditional objects for sale outside the community, this was almost always acceptable, and the patronage of such markets was often driven by stereotypes and ignorance of actual local traditions. If one hoped to see Indigenous people in the public sphere, you would find a deluge of "Indian" imagery in popular media, from pulp magazines to Hollywood westerns, but very few actual Indigenous people representing themselves or their cultures. Likewise, in academia and public-policy discussions, there were anthropologists and other "Indian experts" to speak about and confidently propose solutions to the "Indian problem."

How, then, did Obomsawin manage such a successful campaign for creating visibility and cultural resurgence in the face of these obstacles? It is true that she came of age when attitudes and social conditions were changing in the world, however slowly. And there was a growing number of people who, like Obomsawin, were learning to navigate

the institutional systems of the dominant culture and becoming agents of change capable of helping the wider community. But what were the sources of vision that made this possible for Obomsawin? Our first task is to listen carefully to her own explanations.

A good place to start is her account "Alanis Obomsawin: What Drives Me," which you can find at the close of this book. Growing up away from her home community, she was spared residential school, but nevertheless taught a curriculum that slandered and disparaged her Waban-Aki heritage. As the only Indigenous child in her class, she was subject to vicious racist bullying and abuse at school and in town. Her circumstances would have broken many strong people, or at least prevented them from achieving their full potential. Yet when her father died when she was twelve—another terrible blow—Obomsawin resolved: "Nobody's going to beat me up anymore. I'm the one that decided that." This act of will was followed by a surprisingly adult insight: "I thought, if the children could hear the stories I hear, maybe they would be behaving differently." Her commitment to children and the transformative potential of education has remained a driving force throughout her lifework.

For Obomsawin, this combination of strength and vision has been supported profoundly by her vivid dream life. "As a little girl," she said, "it's my dreams that saved my life." In part they were an escape: "At least when I was sleeping, nobody was beating me. I had a whole world." In this world she had "hundreds of animals ... always protecting me, dancing with me, [playing] all kinds of games. I call them horses, but they don't look exactly like the horses we know. All the animals that are my friends, I give them names that are like the ones we see. But they all look different." There are many horses and other nonhuman persons to be seen in her works on paper, each passing on their energy, strength, and compassion to the woman who dreams them.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Obomsawin's documentary filmmaking begins with children. As Jesse Wente notes in his contribution to this volume on Obomsawin's 1971 debut film, *Christmas at Moose Factory*, her decision to depict this Cree community from the perspective of its children, through their own drawings and stories, was unheard of at the time. It was, however, entirely consistent with her commitment to listening to children and treating their opinions with respect. In another 1970s film, *Mother of Many Children* (1977), Indigenous women from a range of communities across Canada share their strength and wisdom. Doreen Manuel's text reflects on the crucial role of not only motherhood but intergenerational exchange in the development of Indigenous cultural activism, as seen in the film.

A crucial context to understanding Obomsawin's body of work is her home community. For almost her entire adult

life, she has lived between her home in Montreal and her home reserve of Odanak, a little over one hundred kilometres to the northeast. Obomsawin made a film about her people and community, *Waban-Aki: People from Where the Sun Rises*, in 2006. As Monique Nolett-Ille, an esteemed member of the community, writes, the film provides a deeply informed and historically layered portrait of her people's resilience and cultural vitality.

Karrmen Crey's essay, "In Situ: Indigenous Media Landscapes in Canada," maps out the Indigenous media world in Canada that has been the developing context for Obomsawin's work. Crey begins with the many representational challenges Indigenous Peoples faced in the early decades of Obomsawin's career—that ubiquitous Hollywood Indian—before charting the growing sovereignty movement and the attendant and quickly expanding Indigenous media environment.

"Indian Roadblocks: Five Things That Happened from 1973 to 1990" provides a more personal context. Richard William Hill narrates events from his early life sorted through an awareness of the issues that have dominated Obomsawin's work: mothers and children, education, political activism, and struggles for sovereignty. It is as much a story of his mother as himself: a child's evolving perspective on how she found her way to higher education and a career empowering Indigenous families and communities. In her essay "Animal Magic," which considers the films *Walker* (1991), *Sigwan* (2005), and *When All the Leaves Are Gone* (2010), Lisa Steele, who lost her own mother at a young age, has written a moving review on the connection between animals and Indigenous children who have experienced loss and trauma.

In the years leading up to her filmmaking, Obomsawin worked not only as a singer and musician but as a programmer of the Mariposa Folk Festival in Southern Ontario. When the James Bay Cree began to protest an unwanted hydroelectric project on their territories, Obomsawin characteristically brought all the tools at her disposal to address the situation. Drawing on her connections with Indigenous performers across Canada, she organized the James Bay Festival in Montreal in 1977 to support the struggle. At the same time, she made a film: *Amisk*, a unique document of the intersections of Indigenous cultures, musical traditions, and activism at this generative moment. Hill spoke with two wise and experienced Cree performers, Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Joseph Naytowhow, about this documentary; their conversation provides insight into the many challenges faced by Indigenous performers at the time and their remarkable role in that period of cultural resurgence. Alexandra Juhasz also took *Amisk* as the subject for her essay, "The Gift of Time: Listening in *Amisk*." Obomsawin's strategy of listening long and attentively before bringing in cameras and crew is Juhasz's entry point for a close reading of the film, making

legible the complex relationship between the content and form of what might look at first like a simple "concert film," yet is anything but.

Through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the attempt to articulate a positive vision of Indigenous cultures that characterized earlier activism began to develop into a broader and more explicitly political program. This included movements to defend Treaty Rights and sovereignty over political organizations, social services, and territory. Because of the multigenerational damage to families and cultural institutions inflicted by colonial dehumanization and assimilation, Indigenous Peoples have long been overrepresented as recipients of social services. Until the 1980s, these services were not administered by Indigenous communities. One of the galvanizing moments in the struggle for Indigenous control of social services was the tragic suicide of a bright seventeen-year-old Métis boy, Richard Cardinal, who had spent his short life being neglected and abused as he was moved through twenty-eight different foster homes. Loretta Todd provides a moving discussion of Obomsawin's 1986 film, *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child*, sharing the film's moral outrage and profound desire that Indigenous children no longer be harmed by neglect and societal indifference. As a revealing counterpoint, *Poundmaker's Lodge: A Healing Place* (1987) presents the hopeful model of an Indigenous-run addiction and mental health facility. Richard Fung discusses Obomsawin's film through the lens of his own growing awareness of Indigenous issues as an activist filmmaker and long-time ally who understands the productive movement between the personal and the political.

From the 1980s onward, struggles for sovereignty over territory and resources at times erupted into open conflict between Indigenous communities and the Canadian state. The L'nu artist Ursula Johnson looks at three films Obomsawin has made about her peoples' struggle for fishing rights: *Incident at Restigouche* (1984), *Is the Crown at War with Us?* (2002), and *Our Nationhood* (2003). Johnson frames the films through her own history of engagement with the issue, including very recent confrontations that remind us that the problem persists. We have also included internal National Film Board (NFB) documents that provide a vivid sense of the challenges Obomsawin had to face in funding *Incident at Restigouche*.

With this experience in mind, when Obomsawin learned that a standoff had developed between Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) communities and the Quebec provincial police over the town of Oka's plans to expand a golf course into territory claimed by Kanyen'kehà:ka, she did not wait for permission. She simply went there and announced she would be making a film. This became *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), a defining Indigenous-filmed account from behind the barricades during the

seventy-eight-day armed standoff during the summer of 1990. It was an event that is seared into the minds of every Indigenous person in Canada who lived through that period, and it demolished for many Canadians the illusion that their country had a benevolent relationship with First Nations. Obomsawin was so affected by the crisis that she ended up making four films about it, but *Kanehsatake* is the best known and most discussed. Despite this voluminous literature, Obomsawin's former NFB colleague Robert Verrall shares a novel perspective from inside the making of the film, including creating the featured drawings that illustrate the history of the region.

Obomsawin's voice is central to this book—texts from the narration of her films are present throughout. Monika Kin Gagnon also took on the daunting task of interviewing the woman she describes as the "queen of the interview." Their conversation provides insight into Obomsawin's life and work as well as her powerful, generous personality. It becomes clear from their discussion that, existing long before the emergence of social media, relational aesthetics, or social practice art, Obomsawin's foundational medium might be best described as the development of social networks of care and support.

These networks require an ethics of responsibility to all who are involved, and mapping these connections requires knowledge and attention. In "Listening, Dreaming, Fabricating," Jessica L. Horton dives deeply into the imagery in Obomsawin's films and print works to explore the cultural specificity of her practice and how this then organizes a worldview. Horton attends closely to the web of connections between the dream world, the other-than-human world, and the sensuous modes of fabrication depicted in her films and prints, arguing that Obomsawin is able to mobilize these as strategies of resistance to colonial logics. In "Salmon Stills in Motion: The Local as Colonial Critique in the Films of Alanis Obomsawin," Elizabeth A. Povinelli begins with a similar insight and objective—to disrupt Western imaginaries about the ways in which the more-than-human world is connected to the political. Povinelli begins with the very specific subjects and locales in Obomsawin's films and her techniques in representing them to then draw out a powerful critique that expands to the scale of the global system. In doing so, she collapses convenient geographic distances to reveal a legacy of often troubling connectedness; she also implicates European viewers, directly and explicitly, as products of a colonial history that has not yet truly ended. Jason Ryle then discusses the persistence of Obomsawin's activist concerns in a series of her more recent films, noting how often her decision to address a particular issue continues to be motivated by concern for the well-being of children.

The Indigenous world in Canada is a brighter place now than it was when Obomsawin began her life's journey. Her

artistic practice is evidence that steady hard work can produce real change. Yet it is equally evident that there remains much to be done. Speaking with us about the recent discovery of unmarked graves at former residential schools in Canada, Obomsawin said:

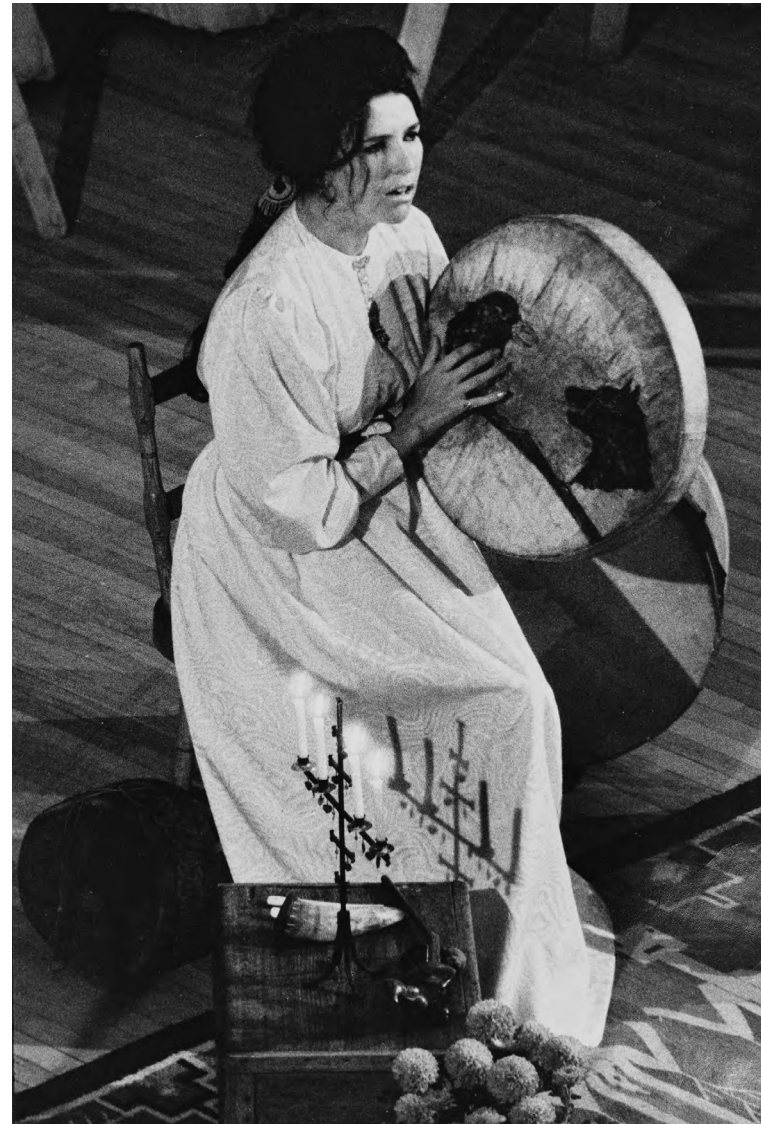
We knew that in the early '60s; we talked about it when nobody was listening—they said, "Ah, the Indians, they're always complaining." Now it's different. People are appalled by that and they want to know more. They say, "How come we never knew that?" Well, they weren't listening. Now they are.

And she also said:

I think of all those young [Indigenous] people making films now. They're so curious, and they're so responsible, and they're so beautiful. The doors are open. If ever there was a time when anything is possible, it's right now.

“Before I made films, I was singing”

Alanis Obomsawin in conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon



Alanis Obomsawin performing at the Museum of Man, Ottawa, date unknown

I.

Alanis Obomsawin welcomes me into her home in Tio'tia:ke, also known as Montreal, a small enclave in the busy downtown where she has lived since 1967 or 1968. The first time I visit her, the world is approaching the first anniversary of the Covid-19 pandemic, if one is inclined to call it an anniversary. In Canada, we've largely been in social isolation of various kinds for a year. Since March 13, 2020, retail businesses and restaurants have been closed, with universities (including the one where I work) functioning remotely. We continue to be in a “red zone,” as the health-care system is at capacity and contagion remains at a threateningly high level.

Alanis lives in a beautiful greystone residence on both the third and fourth floors. I climb some fifty stairs and arrive on the landing carrying a bouquet and wearing a face mask. For those who have not met Alanis, she is glamorous elegant, generous, and for all this, somewhat intimidating. Inside, her living and dining rooms and kitchen have been retrofitted into bright workspaces. I see a familiar Covid-inspired pattern of various “projects” or “islands” of activity spread throughout. There is a stack of colourful fabrics and quilts, which she is making for children. Green plants and orchids flower in the sunny windows—I recognize the window immortalized in the footage of her interview-debate with Lucien Lessard, then fisheries minister in Quebec, from her 1984 film *Incident at Restigouche*: bright-pink potted geraniums separated Lessard and Obomsawin like

witnesses or a jury as they argued, a distracting life lesson about taking time to tend to flowers.

We initially chat about the worldwide ambience of the last year: a forced pause and a blessing. This time for Alanis has resulted in poring over her archives, which I can see organized on her long dining table. There are multiple media formats and the devices needed to play them, including a VHS player with a small built-in TV lent to her by her National Film Board (NFB) assistant, Michael Shu. “I have a lot of VHS tapes,” she admits. There is also a Nagra recorder—perhaps the same one seen hoisted over one shoulder and attached to a boom mic in her film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993)—and a stack of quarter-inch audiotapes. “I have some amazing interview recordings,” she tells me. One of these recordings, an interview with the acclaimed Haida artist Bill Reid (1920–1998), has resulted in one of the several new films she is currently working on.

How does one approach an interview with the Queen of the Interview? She laughs when I ask her, in a knowing yet slightly playful way. I've been advised by Michael not to bring preset questions, not to have expectations of outcomes or specific answers. Our initial conversation lasts two hours. The interview is mostly in French, then moves fluidly to English after Alanis receives a call from Paul Voudrach, an environmental protection officer, whom she has been trying to contact for the last month. He is in another film she is currently working on about

the recently retired Canadian senator and First Nations lawyer Murray Sinclair, who chaired Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from 2009 to 2015. Sinclair is very much in the news again, offering solace and guidance regarding the horrific discovery of 215 children's unmarked graves at Kamloops Indian Residential School in late May 2021.

Alanis is elated to hear from Voudrach, whose video testimony to the TRC has been included in her film but whom she has never met in person.

“Allo? Oui. Oh, don't tell me. My god, you're like a god. I'm so happy to talk to you. I've been looking for you. I feel like I'm a detective—I'll tell you why. Do you know who I am? My name is Alanis Obomsawin, and I've been making films at the National Film Board for fifty-two years, and I'm an old lady! The NFB is making a box set of many of the films, which will have bonus footage, so you can find out more about the communities.

“Right now, I'm finishing a film with Senator Murray Sinclair, whom you must know. It's a very beautiful film. It's very moving, and you have a big part in it. And I wanted to tell you because we took images from when they filmed you for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when people were giving their story about residential schools. Do you remember? Wait until you see yourself!

“I prefer to interview people myself. I usually go into a community and spend a lot of time with people. But

I'm using material that was already filmed by someone else. I want to make sure that it's okay with you. When it's finished, I'm going to send you a copy.

"So where are you? In Inuvik right now?"

"I was in Inuvik once. I was also in Povungnituk, to film with Inuit who are in my film *Mother of Many Children* (1977).

"You'll hear from me again. And if you want to see any of the films I made, I can send them to you. Thank you so much!" (*Hangs up the phone.*)

"Wow. Oh, wow. I'm so happy. You know why? We recently filmed Murray Sinclair when he got the prize [Global Citizen Prize], and then my editor found other film material, and, you know, I never work like that—I usually go to communities all the time. I want people to know their testimonies are being included. It's so moving when he speaks. His name is Paul Voudrach, and oh ... I can't believe it!" (*Claps her hands.*)

"It's not my usual way of working," she repeats numerous times. "I usually meet people."

This phone call exemplifies Alanis's relational method of working, of building relationships and trust with individuals and communities. Through our conversation, I begin to understand her films as an extension of these relations, lending greater insight into the many films she has made: with the Mi'kmaq in Listuguj (Restigouche), the

people of Norway House (Manitoba), since 2010, and Attawapiskat River (Ontario), and the Kanyen'kehà:ka of Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawà:ke in the 1990s. "I go where I'm needed," she says when I ask her about her long-standing relationships in these communities and how she thinks about her career of the last fifty years or more. She also tells me: "I don't think of it as a 'career.'"

I visit again one week later. My transcript doesn't quite represent the layered, animated energies of our conversation, which traverses languages and temporalities, nor the captivating quality of Alanis's storytelling, nor the rhythmic creaking of the rocking chair she was seated in, and nor do I think it can. What does appear on the page, though, is how she embodies the people she is speaking about—literally, she speaks in their voices and with their turns of phrase, whether it be the court judge or the school principal. What is a translation conundrum is how she moves seamlessly between French and English for specific, deliberate, storytelling effect. Being the director she is, she also gestures to different parts of the room, as though stage directions, to signal how close, for example, a journalist gets when they tell her, straight-faced, that she's compromised Quebec sovereignty with her film *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000), which shows white Quebecers throwing rocks at Elders and children exiting the camps at Kahnawà:ke during the Oka Crisis in 1990. I tell her that, in reviewing our conversation, I can now hear things I hadn't initially. She says, "It's always

like that." And further, "It's like that with the camera, too. There's things you didn't see."

Our first conversation begins with me asking Alanis when she moved to Montreal.

Monika Kin Gagnon: How long have you lived in this house?

Alanis Obomsawin: It's been a long time! 1967 or 1968. I came to Montreal when I was twenty-four years old. I lived and went to school in Trois-Rivières after growing up in Odanak. I was twenty-two, and I didn't speak English, and I went to visit one of my aunts and my uncle, who had a house in Delray Beach, Florida, for two weeks. I stayed for two years! Initially, I was afraid to stay. Then I organized myself to get a job. During the day, I modelled bathing suits for the distributor of Catalina bathing suits. I also had to take care of two little girls. I looked after them every night. Their father was a doctor, and the parents went out every night. I stayed with them, and I loved the children. That's how I started to learn English. I was also reading the Indian Act.

The people I stayed with were very good to me. They gave me a car during the day, so I could go to Miami Beach to model all day long. There was a pool, and it was luxurious. After that I came to Montreal. I didn't go back to Trois-Rivières. I've been in Montreal ever since.

MKG: Can I ask you more about your reading of the Indian Act?

AO: Well, I read it so I would be able to work in English. I had only read the French version. It's criminal what the government did with the legislation of the Indian Act. And there are still many parts of it left that have an impact. It is hard to believe how this was used to justify all the dishonest things, all the lies. It's hard to read it. You have to read it to believe it.

MKG: In 1969, Jean Chrétien, who was minister of Indian Affairs, presented the White Paper to eliminate the Indian Act. Do you have any recollections about this time?

AO: There were some who pointed out that the Indian Act is actually the only place where the government admits that it's our land! So, there were many people who said that if it was eliminated, the government would then have no remaining responsibility toward our people, the land, and all the laws that concern the territories of each nation. In other words, in the Indian Act, it's clear that it's our land, it's our territory, it's our country.

The Indian Act is the most racist thing in the world in my opinion. Our people have been criminalized through it. At the Canadian Confederation in 1867, First Nations were given the right to vote only if they gave up their Indian status. When you look at the history of the Indian Act, which was passed in 1876, there's one point when [Canada's first prime minister, John A.] Macdonald brought in reforms in 1885 allowing some Indians the right to vote; the Liberal's election law of 1898 later withdrew these rights, which were only

reinstated in 1960. In the meantime, the government, in order to diminish and control Indians even more, passed the Indian Act. In it they said a Canadian citizen could vote, but an Indian is not a citizen. The Indian Act is *full* of things like that, so I was absolutely raging in French. I said to myself that I had to learn English to be able to also rage in English.

MKG: It seems unusual for someone to be reading the Indian Act so closely in the way that you did.

AO: I *still* read it. I find all kinds of stuff. For example, what I find insulting now is if you're registered with the federal government as having Indian status, you have to renew your status card every ten years. I don't even do this, because I'm not a car! It's so insulting. It's frightening. Even when I say this, I'm revolted. It's really like the government is laughing at us: "Go renew your card every ten years!" I'm sorry ... let them put me in jail ... I won't do it.

MKG: At the end of your film *Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger* (2019), the legal counsel for the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Julian Falconer, states that the "Indian Act is, by its very definition, a tool of oppression" and that the government's "own apparatus has handcuffed and paralyzed them," despite their best intentions.

AO: In cities especially, there are many Indians who are not registered, and children with special needs don't have support. So, it has been a battle against this lack of support and the loopholes the provincial and federal

governments keep utilizing. There was supposed to be a session to examine this again in March, but that hearing has been cancelled. There have been a lot of problems because the government is refusing to help children who live in the cities who are not registered under the Indian Act but who are Indians.

But still, I can't be negative because I think there are many great things happening, and I think there are many good people. Those who find us inferior to them, that's their problem. If we think about the 1960s in relation to 2021, it's not the same. There are good people everywhere, even in the government, who are fighting to make changes. We're going to a place we've never been before. That's what I believe. There's no one who's going to make me think that we're going to be mistreated like before.

MKG: Your films transform perspectives about our entangled colonial histories and contribute to a decolonization process. I've been teaching media studies for twenty-two years now, and I often show your film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. The students who are from Montreal can't believe that this event happened here, in this city. They are overwhelmed—I see it in their eyes—to know that these events are so recent and of this place. They feel responsible.

AO: It's important. It's historic. That's what happened, and times are changing. I got a lot of negative publicity for the film in Quebec. White people in Quebec were furious that I had made

this film. There's a journalist who came to do an interview here, and she's sitting there, I was standing there. We didn't throw punches, but just about.

She said, "Why did you put in the sequence where they're throwing rocks at the cars?"

I said, "That sequence is historical, and that's how it happened."

She said, "You've put a veil over our sovereignty because of that."

We argued. It was scary. She was doing an article on me, and she shot me down.

Years went by, and then when the NFB made the box set with the four Kanehsatà:ke films in 2009, their publicity people in Montreal said, "Alanis, this person wants to interview you. She'll meet you in a restaurant." And it was her.

I thought, "We'll fight again!"

But I went in to meet her, and she said to me, "What you did with these films is so important."

I thought I was talking to a different person! She was lovely. I like her a lot now. When I had a party recently, I invited her. I told her, "We won't punch each other in the face this time!" It seems like she doesn't want to admit to what happened, but today she has a totally different opinion. Imagine what that tells me. It's amazing!

MKG: You've worked in many different communities and nations, each with their particular histories, cultures,

languages, and politics. I was wondering if you have any thoughts on how the Indian Act treats all Indigenous Peoples as if they are a singular group?

AO: The Indian Act is just for registered people, yet it treats all people as if they are registered. There are a lot of Indians who are not registered. They're not part of this system. Although, the Métis and Inuit are now encompassed by the Act.

MKG: In your experience, making films and being in conversation with so many different communities, have there been any challenges to working with and understanding the history of a particular culture, nation, or its politics?

AO: It's different from one place to another. The difference impassions me; it doesn't preoccupy me. I listen, and I learn a lot of things. In one nation, the way they think does not mean that another nation will think exactly the same. It depends on ideas, on laws.

MKG: Do you do research before you go to a place, or do you go in and learn on-site?

AO: I make films for different reasons. Sometimes it's something that happens at a certain time. It depends on laws, policies, and the current government. I'm always reading and trying to understand how things are changing and progressing.

MKG: I love your story about how you went to the camp for *Kanehsatake*. You were in your car driving to work, listening to the radio, and you heard

about the blockade at Oka, and immediately you decided to change the project you were working on.

AO: That's the way it is. When a community has something going on, I respond. I had so many bad experiences making *Incident at Restigouche* because the NFB was not able to support me, provided no money. It was scary. That's why I went to Kanehsatà:ke right away. I didn't want to have another incident like the making of *Restigouche*. So today, I'm very happy to have the films, but when I did them, that was something else!

MKG: You have such close, trusting relationships with the communities at Restigouche, Norway House, and Attawapiskat River. You often revisit and make several films that follow up on what is happening. Can you speak about this?

AO: In every community I've been in, a relation automatically grows. I'm lucky because a lot of people know me before I get there. Before I made films, I was singing. I was known all over the country. I did a lot of touring to hundreds of schools, including residential schools in the 1960s—it's not like I show up somewhere and they don't know who I am. I generally have a very sacred relationship with everyone. I love them so much.

II.

Alanis's recollection of touring and singing at residential schools generates further stories of visiting prisons

to sing. I connect this early cultivation of relations and networks across the country, often through performance, as the foundation of her filmmaking practice. Hearing about her singing at festivals, schools, and prisons in the 1960s highlights for me how she relates the needs and conditions of a community to governmentality.

MKG: How many prisons have you visited and performed at?

AO: Probably about ten or fifteen prisons. I used to go out west a lot in the 1960s. I visited the three prairie provinces [Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta] and went to visit courts and trials at that time. There were lines of Indians, mostly men, but women too, waiting for their trial. In the court, you would hear a gavel drop and a voice saying, "You're accused of ..." *bang!* "Ten days in jail! Or you pay a fine, fifty bucks!" There was no one who was able to have their own voice or anything in that context. That's what I saw: only "guilty, guilty, guilty." This happened continually.

Once, there was a human rights representative who came to court in Regina [Saskatchewan]—I think it was Regina. The lawyer was observing. Later I heard him talking with an Indian defendant. He said, "How much money do you have?"

The guy says, "I don't have any money!"

"I don't believe you. I want to see what you have in your pocket. Show me your pocket."

Then, the guy goes into his pocket, and he's got seventeen cents.

The lawyer says, "Give me your seventeen cents. I'm going to take your case. It's going to cost you seventeen cents."

He defended him. I'll never forget that. There's all kinds of examples like this. When you see my film *We Can't Make the Same Mistake Twice* (2016), you see how our people are treated in court and what has changed since the 1960s. There is a respect that now exists. We have a voice. I have lived long enough to see this.

MKG: This recalls your account of the court trial in 1981 in *Restigouche*, how the judge is completely disrespectful of everybody. In one of your witness interviews, a woman talks about how she was frightened because the judge was so aggressive and dismissive. Were you interested in going to court to pay witness?

AO: Yes, because there were so many people in the prisons. There were people from all the reserves that we knew who were going to prison. I was able to see exactly what was going on in the courts: defendants didn't have a voice; they never had money for a lawyer; there was never a chance. That's what really tormented me. It was similar to what I experienced in school when I was younger. It was racism. That's why I'm here and why I'm doing what I'm doing, because I rebelled against those judgments.

I started visiting prisons in the 1960s when Indigenous Peoples became

citizens of Canada. Someone said, "Did you know, Alanis, that 68 percent of the prisoners in Canada are Indigenous Peoples."

I said, "68 percent?"

"Yes. 68 percent."

"Oh well," I said, "my relatives are in prison, so I'll go see them!"

I got to know people and said I wanted to visit prisons. That's how it started. There was one person, an ethnologist of some kind, who had been in prison himself. He helped me a lot so that I could be received in many prisons.

I visited one of the maximum security prisons—one of the serious ones where you're confined to your cell all day. They were expecting to have five hundred prisoners come hear me sing. It was, they warned us, the first time someone had gone there to entertain. It had never happened before. I was afraid I was going to look sexy, so I put on a nun's dress, like a Catholic sister's habit, that covered me up. (*Alanis gestures buttoning something up around her neck.*)

But I will never forget it in my life. When I got to the prison, the guards said, "Madame Obomsawin, *la population*—they called the prisoners *la population*!—it's the very first time someone has come to visit the prison." And they made awful jokes.

They also said, "I don't know if they'll actually come."

“The fact is I have time,” I said. “If they don’t come, I’ll leave. I’ll stay until four o’clock. Then if they come, I’ll do what I can.” That’s how we talked to each other.

Let’s say it was two o’clock, *il n’y avait pas un chat!*—there wasn’t a cat in the room. Let’s say 2:15 p.m., *pas de chats*. 2:30 p.m., there’s still no one! So I laughed, and the guard was so uncomfortable.

He said, “She’s come all the way here, and no one will come to see her.”

All of a sudden, let’s say it was like 2:40 p.m., prisoners started to arrive. Then there were five hundred people! There was a cement floor, so the metal chairs were making such a noise.

The guard said, “Hey, they’re all here. There’s five hundred of them!”

So, he took me to the front, and it was a flat floor. I said to him, “Well, I can’t see them. This doesn’t make any sense.”

There was a table in front of me and a microphone on a stand, and I was supposed to be here. (*Alanis demonstrates the setup as she speaks.*)

Then I said to myself, “*Il est malade!* He’s not thinking! I won’t see anything!”

So, I took a chair, and I put it on the table. Then I took another chair—I had on my nun’s habit—and I got on that chair to climb up and sit on the chair on the table. Then finally, “There! I can see you all!”

I started singing, and I had my drum.

There were two guys from Quebec sitting up front who laughed at me. It reminded me of when I used to go to Mass with my mother and I would laugh. They were laughing so hard. I had a hard time concentrating because of them. So, after I finished one of the songs, I said, “Yeah, well, it’s not funny to come here and sing for you people. Two of you up front are laughing your heads off at me. If it goes on like this, I’ll go and sit in their place, and they’ll sit up here, and we’ll see if it’s still funny.”

I could feel that the rest of them were about to beat up on them. “I can defend myself,” I thought. “I can handle them.”

I presented them with some words in my language, and then all the guys were stomping their feet and singing along with me.

The guards later said, “Okay, she has to go. That’s enough. It’s four o’clock.”

So, I get off my stage. There I am in my nun’s outfit. I wasn’t there to tempt them. There was not one guy who didn’t pass me and shake my hand or kiss my cheek and say, “Thank you for coming.”

I’ll never forget that. Even the two guys who laughed at me came up. I said, “I understand your response. I must have looked so funny up there like that.”

Those are great memories. I had a lot of fun. I could write a book just about that tour.

III.

Alanis’s embodied storytelling is captivating, and this insight into one of her early concerts weaves connections to her cultural activism—although she wouldn’t call it activism—and her understanding of the interlocking systems of power: how the Indian Act, residential schools, colonial law, and prisons function as tools of oppression. Civil rights activist and scholar Angela Davis wrote in 1998 that the prison-industrial complex’s fastest growing populations in the US were Native Americans and Black women, inscribing the racialization or colour of imprisonment. Alanis’s practice actively demonstrates how culture does a particular kind of work of resistance and hope—in this instance, through singing and expressing her Abenaki language and culture.

In Katerina Cizek’s *Dream Magic* (2008), a film made to commemorate Obomsawin’s Governor General’s Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement, Alanis reflects on these early years of performing: “I had no idea about filmmaking, never even thought about it. Previously to filmmaking, I was singing a lot. Talking about our history, I went to hundreds of universities, prisons, all kinds of schools, primary schools, young children. My main interest really was children. Always [was], still is.” These comments set the scene for Alanis’s filmmaking, the earned ease and accrued experience evident in every stage of her process, which has garnered much respect and many accolades. On my second visit to her home,

we turned to her more recent films of the last decade.

MKG: You began working on *Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger* in 2010, but it was only completed and released in 2019. Your film covers how Jordan’s short life inspired Jordan’s Principle, a government policy passed in 2007 ensuring First Nations children equitable access to health care after the federal and provincial Manitoba governments disputed responsibility for Jordan’s home care until he died in hospital. During this time, you worked with Norway House in the same Manitoba community and made several other films.

AO: Yes, I made *Our People Will Be Healed* (2017). Did you see it? I did that film in between Jordan’s film and *The People of the Kattawapiskak River* (2012) in James Bay on the Ontario side. I also made *Hi-Ho Mistahey!* (2013), which came out afterward because I put it aside to focus on what was happening with the housing battle at Attawapiskat First Nation. There were so many issues. Anyway, it was ugly. There was a reporter accusing Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence of all kinds of stuff. I said, “Well, I have to go and cover this.” After that, I went back to my film for the Attawapiskat school, *Hi-Ho Mistahey!*. Then it was *Trick or Treaty?* (2014) on the James Bay Cree Treaty 9 disputes. Have you seen it? That’s four films. After that I made *We Can’t Make the Same Mistake Twice* (2016).

When I make these films, my goal is always education. It is very important

for me to cover various perspectives so that not only the students but the teachers can really understand what’s going on. That’s why *We Can’t Make the Same Mistake Twice* is a long film.

MKG: Last year, on the occasion of winning the Glenn Gould Prize, a journalist from *La Presse* asked you if there was one film to watch from all your films. And you said, *Our People Will Be Healed*. I was wondering if you still think the same thing today?

AO: Yes, I do. I was so lucky to have made a film like that in my life. Imagine, we filmed five hundred children playing violins. The spirit behind the teaching at Norway House is extraordinary.

There’s the scene where the principal of the school is telling me that the seventh-, eighth-, ninth-grade classes were always full with students, but that in tenth grade, attendance starts to drop off, and then by twelfth grade, not many students come to class at all. I like the school’s response. They said, “We have a problem. Young people never want to get up in the morning. They always want to sleep longer.” So, the principal said, “We’re going to make a new rule. We’ll send another school bus to pick them up later, so they can sleep in longer.” Then she said, “We’ll tell the parents, ‘Even if they’re late, we’d rather have them come to school than leave them behind.’” And, you know, in other schools it’s not like that. If you don’t show up on time, the door is closed, and you lose grades. I really like the spirit behind their school’s approach. I call this an Indigenous way of thinking. “And so what if they’re

late? They can still come!” And they are part of it—the kids love their school.

What a great spirit, and how different! That’s why I love this film. It was a gift to see the kids talking and how they talk. Education is very important.

MKG: Watching the classroom scenes is quite extraordinary. When the teachers are telling the story of contact and colonization, demonstrating the beaded Wampum Belt as the Indigenous historical record of agreements, I thought, “This is so generous.” They are educating young people in a very generous way.

AO: Without any meanness. One day I was in one of the classes, and there was a boy who was quite tall. He was about fifteen years old, and he was in one of the classes with the young children. He was having difficulty walking, having some difficulty in his life. And I was sitting at a desk and watching what was happening in the class. Then there was a little girl, and she was maybe seven, eight years old. She looks, and she sees him walking. She gets up, she leaves her desk, she goes toward him, she takes his hand, and he was twice her height, and then she walks him to his desk and helps him sit down. Then she comes back, and she sits at her own desk.

I tell you, I had tears in my eyes watching that. That’s the spirit behind the school: You’re my equal. I love you. I’ll help you sit down. That made my day. I thought, “My god, this is beautiful.” Yes, that’s the difference.

IV.

Alanis's long-standing commitment to children and education is demonstrated from her very first film, *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971), for which she lived with and filmed children at the residential school at Moose Factory in Ontario. Connecting this first film to her more recent experiences at Norway House, an Indigenous-led school and curriculum, and to the Attawapiskat community's fight for education affirms that, in her own words: "Education is really the heart of what I do. And then it's the children that are the most important to me. I'm very interested in what's happening day to day, more generally. But I am always, my thoughts are always with the children, what happens to them, how it will be in life. I follow what they go through."

MKG: What is moving about your first film, *Christmas at Moose Factory*, is the rhythm and relationship you create between the children's voices, their stories, and their drawings. The attention you bring to their stories and voices is distinct from the film image. It moved me to observe this juxtaposition, both here and while watching your other films. You have such a particular way of attending to sound and narration in capturing reality and allowing your subjects to speak for themselves. As film festival producer André Dudemaine has noted, these filmstrip documentaries are in fact made by separating the sound recording from the filming and

by paying close attention to the sound-track. The raw material is the human voice, such as at the end of *Kanehsatake* when you narrate how you recorded a Warrior Song that was sung for you during the standoff. These are elements that I think about when I watch your films, when I listen to your films.

AO: One of the things that is so special about *Christmas at Moose Factory*—I went there the first time in 1967 or 1968—is that all the kids spoke Cree. English was their second language. The accent that the children had is so beautiful, so special. I have a lot of pleasure listening to them speak.

Before we came out of Kanehsatà:ke, Chief Simon announced, "We're going out of the camp this weekend."

I replied, "Well, I'm going out before you guys because they're going to confiscate all my equipment and film."

It then rained a little bit.

One of the warriors was Mi'kmaq, and he said, "When I come out of here, I am going to sing my Victory Song."

I had my Nagra tape recorder, and I said to him, "When you go out of the camp, there's only two of you who are Mi'kmaq. All the rest, they're Mohawk. They're going to sing *their* Victory Song, and we won't hear you. Why don't you sing it for me?"

He was hesitant. We were near a tree, and I said, "Sing it because then I'll have it. I can use it for the film."

He started singing.

Then—*brrrrrrrr*—the helicopter came overhead, so I encouraged him, "Go on."

I wanted him to repeat the song, so he repeated the song two, three times, and every time the helicopter came by.

So, when it came time for post-production, when we did the mix in the theatre, the music mixer for the NFB came in, and he had removed the sounds of the helicopter.

"Oh," I said, "you can't do that."

He said, "But come on, that breaks up the whole song."

I said, "No, I want it to be exactly how it happened, how emotional it was. It was amazing."

I was waving my arms. I said, "I want the feeling I got when I listened to it, and I want the helicopter."

And then he said, "She's crazy."

I said, "No, I insist on it."

And then, once it was done, he came back and said, "You know what, Alanis, you were right."

It was a big deal to me. I didn't want it to be fancy—you know, arranged. It was amazing, that moment.

MKG: It's the echo of the violence and the surveillance over the area. One wouldn't think of adding something like that, but it creates this atmosphere that is so important to the film.

V.

I ask Alanis if she recalls other examples of when sound has been important. Her response opens up onto her filmmaking processes and working methods: how she begins by visiting, listening, and sound recording without a camera and crew. While her filmmaking has been called a "cinema of sovereignty," in that it gives Indigenous communities a voice, journalist Jesse Wentz has also called it a "cinema of listening." Obomsawin's cinema of listening is resonant with the work of fellow (anti-)documentary filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, who refers to her own mode of filmmaking in a critical way as "speaking nearby," shifting traditional documentary's modes of speaking *about* or *on top of* to a speaking *with*, speaking *to*, or speaking *alongside*. While Obomsawin's and Trinh's films are quite distinct in form and how they are reflexive of the cinematic medium (Obomsawin treating film and video with a certain transparent urgency, and Trinh meditating on the materiality of cinema), their engagement with their subjects and layered polyvocality are kindred in

decentring relations of power. Furthermore, Obomsawin embraces an active listening and recursive relistening method—the recursive being relational.

AO: Well, for me, the word is the most important thing; it's sacred. I will always listen to the people I'm working with. Or, if I'm making a film about someone or a community, I record a lot of the sound beforehand. I don't go in there with a crew and then say, "I'm making a film here." I would never do that. I like to listen to the people who are the subjects and then have someone transcribe the recordings for me, and then I read it over and over again—they will tell you what your film is about.

During this process, I might say to myself, "There's something here I don't understand. I'm going to go back to when I feel like I know the story, when I understand it." Only then will I return with a team.

Despite the tasks of this very professional world, I can always go back to the original sound and relisten to the original recordings. That's how I like to work. When we come with a crew, we'll talk about the same subject, but I never ask them to pick up on something we were talking about. I can always go back to those original words and use other images with the sound. I think the first audio recordings are very rich. It's really the voice for me.

I think that this importance in the voice comes from the fact that I was raised

in Odanak. We didn't have electricity in those days; back then, there was only an earth road. So, at night, there were oil lamps. We heard the adults telling all kinds of stories. As most of the men were guides in the woods for those who went hunting and fishing, they always had interesting stories about the animals. They would talk about the animals the way they talked about a person—like the bear, what did he do?

We were about four or five kids listening. And so, you had four films right there! Each child makes images in their head; it's different for each child. For me, that's where it comes from. For me, the word has always been something special. I still work like this.

With *Kanehsatake*, which we could call "guerilla filmmaking," it wasn't possible to work in this way. But I stayed another two weeks after it was over to talk with and hear from the people who I knew were going to be in the film, to have another idea of how they felt. With *Kanehsatake*, I was doing at the end of the film what I usually do at the beginning—speaking with people and listening.

Being able to listen, that's what counts the most. When you make a film, the best gift you can give to the people who are going to be part of it is time. To give time—that's what changes everything. If you're in a hurry, too quick, you miss things. If I have to go back several times, I go back until I'm sure that the person feels secure.

A lot of people I've worked with over the years have said to me, "Alanis, this is the first time I've ever said this to anyone." And I say, "Don't worry. When you go to sleep tonight, if you think, 'I should never have told Alanis what I told her,' I'll erase it." I won't play with people's lives. There are a lot of people who think, "Oh my gosh, I went and said that. Now everyone will know." They worry. I always want them to feel comfortable, and I won't play tricks like that. If there are things that are unclear or seem fragile, I go back to the people.

When one of my films was being edited, a person said to me, "I don't want you to show when I was crying."

So, I told her, "I used it in the edit, but I'll bring you to the editing room. You'll come and see what it looks like. If you still feel the same way, don't worry. I'll take it out."

She came. She was very afraid because it was very difficult.

I assured her, "Feel comfortable. I'd like to keep it, but if it doesn't suit you, I'll take it out." So, she sat down, and I said, "I'll leave you alone. I don't want to influence you."

And when she saw herself, she said, "Leave it in."

She realized that it didn't belittle her; it didn't make her look bad. She was very touched. She thought it was honest. She didn't have the anxiety she had before.

MKG: You mentioned several times that you have worked on your personal archives at home during Covid, and I wanted to ask you more about this. When I was getting my vaccine, I suddenly had this window onto a post-Covid time. I thought about this past year, and, wow, it was actually a moment to retreat and reflect and not be so busy all the time.

AO: At the beginning of the pandemic, I was thinking that it's going to be boring if I work at home. But, no, it has been quite the contrary. I'm really thankful, and I have learned things. I had a lot of material to work with. I'm very lucky because every time I do a film, I record just the sound by myself, conversations with some of the people I meet. So, I had a lot of recordings to go through, and I discovered things that I had completely forgotten about. For instance, I had forgotten that I had done an interview with Bill Reid in 1986. We are finishing the film. It's so much fun to hear his voice. With the *coffret*, box set, the NFB is doing, we've got so much new unseen bonus material for the collection. It's going to be great for those who teach. There's going to be at least eight new films in there.

In addition to Bill Reid, there is another one with Gitksan lawyer Cindy Blackstock, called *Retaliation*. We have a lot of recordings with her from all the films since 2010 that she's been in. We filmed a lot at the courts. There's also the one on Murray Sinclair. The bonuses are of many different people. When I was at Attawapiskat, I did another interview with Don Burnstick. Have you ever heard of him? He's a

Cree comedian from Edmonton. He came to Attawapiskat to talk to the students. Beautiful stuff. And Theo Fleury, a famous Métis hockey player. We did almost a half-hour on him. I'm very excited because I'm listening to all these people. There's another one on David Amram. I don't know if you know him? He's a classical musician but also does a lot of jazz. He's an amazing guy. I know him because when I was singing a lot, I saw him at some festivals. He came to the Montreal Jazz Festival in 2013—I think. I'm terrible with dates! And, what else? There's one called *Important to Us*, which has young students learning to sing. It's very sensitive, wonderful. So that's new too.

It has been pretty special—looking at my archives, the places I visited and did recordings but didn't shoot any film footage of. I had originally wanted to make education projects with this material. I spent some days crying, just thinking about what it was like at that time and seeing and hearing the people.

There was a woman who was in charge of the Friendship Centre in Prince George, Burns Lake, Lake Babine Nation. I was going to make an educational kit that could be used for teaching. But just when we were going to leave for Burns Lake, they called and said, "Tell Alanis not to come because there were murders here last night." "Oh, my god," I said. "Well, I'm going to go anyway. And we won't do any shooting. We'll just stay with them." And what had happened was, there had been a party, and a

young couple who were lovers, I guess, had trouble, were separated. And the girl was flirting with another young man at this party. So, the lover went in and shot her. Shot the boy who was with her, and shot himself. Three people. They were all eighteen to twenty years old. So, you know, I went there and it was unbelievable.

So that's why I cried all day when I was listening to some of this stuff. (*Alanis points to the media material on the table*.) At that time, one of the Chiefs came to me and said, "Alanis, we trust you. You can take pictures. We know that you'll take care." I was working with slides in those days, like filmstrips, for schools. And we took pictures of the funeral services, which are in *Mother of Many Children*. The people outside at the cemetery are crying, crying ... But it's like singing—I can't explain it to you. The profound sadness comes out. Every time I look at this, it's a very difficult sequence to look at because it's so, so sad, and at the same time, it's very beautiful.

I never did the educational kit that I wanted to do. I got busy doing other things. There's a very important sequence in that film, though. When I was listening to these recordings, it was as if I was back there. So, I called them up and spoke to one of the Chiefs, and I told him that we have a lot of sound recordings in their language. And he said lots of people still speak the language. I also sent him copies of all the images I have, and I sent a copy of *Mother of Many Children*. I said, "I'm warning you, it's very hard to look at."

When I called him up three weeks later, he said, "Everybody's seen it. I invited all my children." I'm sure it was really sad, but it's also historical and very beautiful. And I thought, "When I'm less busy, I'm going to get money, and I'm going to go back there and see what we can do with what I have." So that kind of reconnection through the previous film and the sound is incredible.

There was also a woman that I interviewed in Montreal. She must have come around to the Native Women's Shelter, because I was very involved in building that shelter in 1988. And I interviewed her. She told me her name, but she was from out west, from one of the reserves there, and I don't know what happened—I never saw her again. I was listening to the tapes recently, and she tells her whole life story, and it's just so moving. I'm trying to find her—I knew she had seven, eight children. I'm trying to find a connection with them to give them the sound because it's so beautiful, and it would be nice if they could hear it. I called the reserve where she's from to see if there's any name to be found—her last name is Paul. And they didn't call me back. I have to pursue it because I'd like her children to hear her. I'll find somebody that's related to her. I'm sure she's passed away by now; she was quite old then. It's things like that which I think are so rich for the family, for people, to see and to hear.

MKG: And then there is your own personal archive ...

AO: Yes, it's like a treasure. Of course, there's always the concern of how this

material will be used, because not everyone thinks the same way as I did when I first collected the material. Respect for the archive is very important, and it should not be used in any way or changed somehow because someone wants to say something different. I don't like that because it's appropriating the spirit of a person, saying, "I'm using this for such and such a thing," and it has nothing to do with the original context or intent.

When you've worked so long on these subjects, time passes, and when I go back to some of these places, they are unrecognizable. They are so changed. The value of all this is very great and historical—for the language, the sounds, but also what these places looked like. This is why I've had an incredible time here at home.