

“Nitawâhtâw” Searching for a Métis Approach to Audio-Visual Anthropology:
Cultural, Linguistic, Methodological, and Ethical Considerations

by

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Abstract

Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Academy has long been an important focus in Indigenous scholarship, particularly in the social sciences. From this project has come a push for each researcher to design a unique approach rooted in their own personal, familial, community, and cultural values. With this attention to values and protocol, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can develop an approach that challenges the colonial thinking and practices which have so profoundly harmed Indigenous peoples around the globe. As a Cree-Métis person with mixed European ancestry, I feel a responsibility to, and a passion for, learning to work and be in the community *in a good way*. My thesis is an exploration toward developing my own Cree-Métis approach to audio-visual anthropology and to my academic language. Learning from the work of salient Cree-Métis filmmakers, such as Christine Welsh and Gil Cardinal, and the literature of Indigenous and audio-visual researchers, I search for a practice that speaks to my teachings and values. In addition, I discuss the importance of language and my desire to depart from the history of the words “research”, “researcher”, and “research participant”. Instead, I consider Cree words whose meanings reflect my commitment to my unique, culturally informed, anti-oppressive, decolonized approach to my work, my “participants”, and academia. *All my relations!*

Keywords

Cree-Métis, decolonization, self-location, audio-visual anthropology, film, visual sovereignty,

linguistic sovereignty

kiskinwahamâtowin, nahihtam, miyohtahêw, miyo-pimatisiwn

Introduction:

Developing My Cree-Métis Research Practice in Audio-Visual Anthropology

Decolonizing and Indigenizing the academy has long been an important focus in Indigenous scholarship. Scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr., Margaret Kovach, and Kathleen Absolon, have worked to imagine a transformed academy. One proposed method of realizing this goal is for each researcher to design a unique approach to their work and discipline rooted in their personal, familial, community, and cultural values (Absolon and Willett 2005; Edosdi 2008; Weber-Pillwax 2004). With this attention to one's own ethics and protocol, and those of the community with which one works, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can develop methods and ethics which challenge the colonial institutions, thinking, and practices that have so profoundly harmed Indigenous peoples across the globe.

As a Cree-Métis person with mixed European ancestry who is honoured to live and work in Coast Salish territory, I feel a weighty responsibility to, and a passion for learning to be in the community and the academy *in a good way*. I have been unsatisfied at best and deeply insulted at worst by anthropological representations of Indigenous peoples around the world and I believe that by taking control of our own representations, we can “alter traditional anthropological representations of [our]selves” (D. MacDougall 1997, p. 285). This activist motivation is felt by many Indigenous artists, academics, and community members. Like Corntassel (2003), I may be accused of being an “activist posing as an academic”, but I believe that activism and anthropology are not only compatible but indeed essential for truly ethical research. In her audio-based work, Waldock (2016) found that she could not isolate her motivations and perspectives as an artist, academic, and activist and realized that these aspects of her identity should in fact *not* be separated, but incorporated into what she refers to as her *trinitarian* research approach.

Waldock learned that her research participants (or “partners”, as she refers to them) “[did] not wish to inhabit a passive informant position to [her] research” but wanted to actively fight back against, and challenge the power imbalances in their lives. She found power in her trinitarian approach as it also integrated the interests of the community. She asserts that her participatory, multisensory methodology shifts the nature of her work, so “instead of listening *in on*” her research partners, she is able to “listen *to and with* them” (p. 66, emphasis added). I also view myself as a trinitarian researcher. My desire to create sociopolitical change, to create a space where “research participants” can tell their own stories in their own voice, and my interest in storytelling and Indigenous epistemologies, has led to my focus in audio-visual methods in anthropology. Not only does film allow me to take control over my story and representation, it also allows me to create a space for other Indigenous people with whom I work to tell their own story in their own way. However, to pursue an “Indigenous” ethnographic film practice would only serve to further reinforce essentialized ideas of pan-Indigenous practices, beliefs, and culture.

Importantly, Absolon stresses that “prescriptions or formulas for Indigenous Methodologies do not exist” (2011, p. 48). On the other extreme, to pursue an anthropological practice *informed* by my Cree-Métis paradigm, would “reference the centre, acknowledging the authority of the ethnographer, the anthropologist”. Instead, if “we assert our own meanings and philosophies of representation we... maintain our Aboriginal right to name ourselves” (Todd 1992, p. 75). If I assert my own paradigms and values as the center of my practice rather than those of the Academy, I maintain my Cree-Métis right to name and define my own “research” approach. Some of the ethics and values which I discuss are echoed in other non-Indigenous articles, by the American Anthropological Association, and other institutional research ethics

protocols, none of which I will discuss. It is important for me to acknowledge this in order to explain my reasoning; this exclusion is to emphasize that these similarities do not stem from an accordance with these scholars and institutions, but come from my own values. This is an important step toward crediting community and individual ethics as serious and legitimate, as they are often not considered to be as formal, or to have as much authority as institutional ethics (Weber-Pillwax 2004). I acknowledge I am young in the discipline and in my cultural journey, therefore, I recognize that I have much work to do to refine my personal ethics and protocol. I understand this research project to be an essential prerequisite to my professional future to assure I will have an understanding of my responsibilities and obligations as a Cree-Métis person, and as an Indigenous “researcher” engaging in community-based, audio-visual research *before* I enter into my role as a researcher wherein I represent not only my discipline and university, but my family and nation as well.

To develop my Cree-Métis approach, I look to the work of a selection of salient Cree-Métis filmmakers in order to understand how their approach reflects the decolonizing project as it relates to the literature of Indigenous (specifically Cree-Métis) researchers, and of audio-visual anthropology. While there are some notable exclusions, such as Loretta Todd, I will discuss the work of three Cree-Métis filmmakers: Christine Welsh, Gil Cardinal, and Clint Alberta, as well as other influential Indigenous filmmakers, to emphasize how this cinematic tradition speaks to my teachings and values, and can inform my practice. I have identified three important themes from which to learn: editing, narrative construction, and presence of the filmmaker. In addition, I discuss the importance of language and my desire to dissociate my work from the history and reputation of the words: “research”, “researcher”, and “research participant” and the associated painful memories held by innumerable Indigenous people. Instead, I search for Cree words

whose meanings reflect my commitment to this personalized, culturally informed, anti-oppressive, decolonized approach to my work, my “participants”, and academia. The questions which have guided my work are as follows:

1. How does my particular ancestry and lived experience furnish my understanding of my identity and culture as a Cree-Métis person?
2. What are my relevant cultural and academic values? How can I instill these values in my methods?
3. Which Cree words reflect the values and the relationships I want to build?
4. How have other Cree-Métis scholars and filmmakers approached their work? What can I learn from them?

One can only speak with authority about oneself; one’s teachings and perspectives are not representative of one's entire community, and certainly not of all one's demographic. My elder, and renowned Cree-Métis filmmaker, Christine Welsh, told me that she never refers to a singular, general Métis experience, identity, or culture because she understands that there are so many different experiences. This is important to remember as Indigenous people are constantly asked to offer “the Indigenous perspective”. Corntassel (2003) relates to this all too familiar experience when in his professorship (at a university he gives the pseudonym *Yonega*) he was frequently expected to be the representative of all North American Indigenous people as the token

Indigenous person on staff. But who can speak for all of these people from their one perspective? My conversation with Welsh was humbling and it reminded me that my goal in this paper is to explore my own, particular truth and approach, and is statedly not representative of all Cree-Métis or Métis experiences, values, and protocols. Therefore, my paper is firmly rooted in the context of a subjective, personal exploration. Many Indigenous scholars have employed a narrative approach in their writing, and/or incorporated storytelling as research. My paper is influenced by this tradition as a way to integrate my personal subjective paradigm, but also as a method to increase its accessibility.

Self-Location:

“Research begins with our own story, our own vulnerability” (Kovach et al. 2013, 492)

Self-locating has become a standard practice in Indigenous scholarship (similar practices are also popular in feminist anthropology, gender studies, and social work) as a way to be transparent about biases, demonstrate connection to, and investment in the research, to ensure accountability, and to gain the trust of the communities in which we work (Absolon and Willett 2005; Kovach 2009; Kovach et al. 2013). Self-locating can contribute to research practice in many ways, but two primary functions are that of a formal introduction, and of making clear one’s connections to family, community, culture, language, and land (Kovach et al. 2013). A formal introduction which includes one’s name and/or traditional name, parents and grandparents, clans, houses, nation, home lands, and current home among other identifying information is common among most North American Indigenous communities. Therefore by incorporating a self-location we incorporate an important cultural practice. By making clear our location, this introduction also demonstrates our connections, influences, motivation, and how we came to the work we are doing. This is an important step toward earning the trust of our “research

participants”, “if the researcher is separated from the research and is taken away from its relationship, it will not be accepted within an Indigenous paradigm” (Wilson 2008 in Kovach et al. 2013). *Relational research* is a practice “in which the Indigenous researcher ‘fulfill[s] their obligations to the world around them, including the collective in a manner that is accountable and practical to ‘all my relations’ ” (Hart 2009 in Kovach et al. 2013, p. 493).

I am Scottish, Norwegian, English, French, and Cree-Métis on my mother’s side and first generation Canadian from the Netherlands on my father’s side. My Métis family names are Bruce, Cook, Short, Cocking, and McNab. I was born in 1996 in Maple Ridge, which is Katzie territory, where I lived for ten years. My mother, Irene Ives, worked closely with the Katzie Nation and through their relationship I learned about some of their culture and teachings. My family moved to Brentwood Bay B.C., where I lived for the next 11 years on W̱SÁNEĆ territory. Through my time as a guest on Coast Salish lands, I have been practicing how to be in this community *in a good way*, and was given teachings to carry as my own before I was able to find the teachings from my own nation. At times, I have been criticized for overemphasizing my Métis heritage over my other ancestries or having too small a blood quantum to be authentic. I have always known that I am Dutch. My father, Murk Toorenburgh, has taught me some of our language, our recipes, and I even wore klompjes (wooden shoes) as a child. This part of my identity has never been questioned. However, for generations, my family actively hid and eschew association with “Indianness”; we have forgotten the names of our ancestors, forgotten our language, and an entire part of our family story, until fully uncovered by my mother and reclaimed over the past fifteen years. Our community has encouraged my family to embrace our heritage; to re-member (Absolon and Willett 2005) these names, stories, teachings, and family members to make sure the future generations of my family will know all parts of their identity

equally and know where they come from. In addition, the time I have spent walking this journey has taught me more about responsibility, relatedness, and community than ever before. “Authenticity” is a treacherous debate (Brayboy 2000; Innes 2009) and one which is not mine to define, however, despite my light skin and hair, and my coming into my culture and identity later in my life, I am confident in my identity: I am Métis. I believe that my location as an Indigenous person uniquely prepares me to build positive, nuanced relationships and “research” projects as compared to Outsider researchers (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000; Innes 2009; Ranco 2006) who subscribe to the idea that one needs to exoticize their participant communities in order to better understand their subject(s). However, being Indigenous will not automatically earn me the trust of the community, and “[t]he mere presence of Indian blood within a scholar... does not ensure better or more sensitive historical or cultural understandings of Indian people” (Champagne 1998, p. 183). That is why it is so important for me to do this work now, and to continue to do so for the rest of my career.

Wahkootowin is a Cree term which means “relationship”, “kinship”, or “relative”/“relation”, but it further describes the idea that “family was the foundational relationship for pursuing any economic, political, social, or cultural activities” (B. MacDougall 2006, p. 433). This idea of relatedness is a foundational value of many Cree-Métis people and communities. This strongly influences my work as I strive to understand my relatedness to my community, family, my “participants”, my discipline, and my work. Further, establishing family connections and relatedness can help to build trust between Indigenous individuals (Weber-Pillwax 2004). However, I understand that despite an Indigenous identity, I am also an anthropologist; a title which can carry with it painful memories, mistrust, and hostility, and a history of violence and exploitation (Asad 1973; Berreman 1974; Brayboy 2000; Castellano

2004; Deloria 1968 and 1973; Hart 2002). Many researchers have used Indigenous peoples and knowledges to serve their own ends (Gaudry 2011; Mihesuah 2005) and their work has constructed and maintained the reputation of Indigenous people as uncivilized, unintelligent, and savage and their culture as undeveloped, irrelevant, and dying (Raheja 2013). Therefore, I must work hard to be truthful about the power dynamics and history at play, actively work to decolonize and work against these imbalances, and demonstrate that I understand and take seriously these factors. Central to this is the reorganizing of the intellectual structures in which I work. I intentionally root my practice in my Cree-Métis values, grow the trunk of my work in anti-oppressive and decolonizing practices, and branch out into anthropological thought and methods. This is important because it subverts the power relationship of the anthropologist who “translates” Indigenous ways to a Western intellectual audience. It is a decolonized practice which “do[es] not reaffirm the power of the state” (Goeman , p. 192), the academy, and hegemonic ‘cognitive imperialism’ (Hart 2002, p. 30). Like Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee anthropologist) and Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi Political Scientist), my self-understanding is that I am a mixed heritage Cree-Métis person first, and an anthropologist second, and I want to work to reflect my pursuit of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (good living, living in a good way, honouring your relations, being healthy). It centers my values and culture as the body and Western, academic knowledge and values as the accessory. Therefore, my intention is not to advance anthropological knowledge but, like many feminist, activist, and Indigenous researchers, to work for the interest of people with which we work and to develop new methods to do so. Despite my critical perspective of anthropology, I have faith in the potential of the discipline to do better in the eyes of the people who matter, our “participant” communities.

The journey to realize this transformed, anti-oppressive, decolonized approach will be

very different for each individual. To centre this journey on my Cree-Métis identity is a very meaningful decision and defines what this journey will entail for me. This is best articulated by Lorilee Wastasecoot, “reconciliation is for settlers, us Indigenous people, we have our own work to do” (Lecture on the repatriation of children's art from Indian Residential Schools, given at the University of Victoria, March 15th, 2018). She asked, how can we talk about reconciliation with settlers and the state when we have not had time to reconcile with ourselves? This can be said about the academy as well; how can we pursue reconciliation within the academy if we, Indigenous researchers, have not yet reconciled our values, our histories, and our paradigms with our research practice and our discipline? This is the beginning of my journey.

Ethics, Paradigm, Practice, and Protocol:

“Prescriptions or formulas for Indigenous Methodologies do not exist” (Absolon 2011, pg. 48)

Ideas of ethics and protocol are fluid despite being presented as rigid rules of right and wrong, as the values and morals which motivate their production are constantly changing across time, place, and community. It is important that scholars each mould their own practice as they work within different contexts, with different issues, and different communities; each of which will have different roles and responsibilities required of them. Thus, it is crucial to regularly revisit and adjust our ethics, practice, and protocol in order to assure that we, as researchers, are performing at our best in accordance with our personal paradigms and that of our “participants”.

Non-Indigenous researchers who work with Indigenous communities are often frustrated with scholars and community members who criticize the discipline without offering concrete solutions; however this omission is fully intentional. As Absolon (2011) states, there are no universal prescriptions or formulas. If scholars were to assert a universal practice, it would allow

for researchers to apply these principles and guidelines without critically engaging in their own particular self-location and working situation. This untested and uncritical application would lead to claims of decolonized practice without the deep self-reflection and questioning that is at the core of the decolonizing process; a process which cannot be fully completed at present, but must be actively worked toward as long as we live in bodies and minds, on lands, and within institutions and power structures which have been colonized. As a researcher, one cannot enter into a community claiming to be cleansed of colonial influence. Even if this were possible, one would be entering a community which continues to live within a colonial context therefore decolonization will continually need to be attended to. Anthropology has made important and commendable steps toward a decolonized, anti-oppressive practice and should be encouraged and celebrated. While I do recognize and commend this progress, researchers cannot understand themselves as having transcended the abuses of the past and must “make decisions about today’s methods based on yesterday’s activities and methods” (Weber-Pillwax 2004, p. 85).

If anthropology was instrumental in the colonization and oppression of, and genocidal violence against Indigenous peoples (Asch 1992; Pinkoski 2008; Pinkoski and Asch 2007), why would I choose anthropology as my discipline? This answer is not simple. Some may argue Audre Lorde’s statement, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”, but others have argued that the house of anthropology and of ethnographic film was built on a foundation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledges and that we must take back those foundations. Indigenous filmmakers are “appropriating some of the ‘master’s tools’, such as some forms of media technology, to Indigenous ends in order to rebuild their own houses” (Raheja 2010, p. 18). I am reminded of the words of my elder, Deryl Henderson: “white man’s sickness, white man’s medicine”. This teaching could be seen as contradictory to my decolonizing and indigenizing

goal, but I disagree. To fix anthropology, we must be better anthropologists and to fix media representations, we must assert visual sovereignty (Dowell 2013; Raheja 2013, 2010; Rickard et al. 1995). Indigenous filmmakers have long been using visual technology and practice to “revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure ethnographic film conventions, at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created by these conventions” (Raheja 2013, p. 60). The second part of that teaching is, “spiritual sickness, spiritual medicine”. I believe that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in North America are experiencing spiritual and cultural sickness as we are *all* hurt by colonization and its racial stratification, misogyny, queerphobia, gender binary, and xenophobia. Our spiritual and cultural sickness will be different for each of us. I find my cure in connection to, and relationships with self, family, community, nation, spirit, culture, ceremony, and land. I reconcile my privilege and role in the present colonial structure, my white man’s sickness, with my personhood as a dis-membered (Absolon and Willett 2005) Cree-Métis, my spiritual and cultural sickness, to create my own medicine. Anthropology has been uniquely fortunate to have received a wealth, greater than any other discipline, of criticism from its own subject; from the communities who have seen the implications and consequences of our work across time. These criticisms have equipped the discipline with an animate and active mirror with which to use our considerable self-awareness in the interest of working toward a better practice, a more responsible discipline, and a more positive impact in our community.

Many scholars are calling for an anthropology that does not simply “do no harm” but strives to do research which directly benefits the individuals and communities with which we work. In an Indigenous context, this often manifests as activism and an “almost exclusiv[e]” responsibly to participating individuals and communities (Gaudry 2011, p. 114). Gaudry’s *insurgent research* calls for the explicit use of Indigenous world-view and an orientation of one’s

research toward Indigenous peoples and communities. I find this approach particularly inspiring as it is motivated by Gaudry's belief, which I share, that “as a Métis scholar, I feel I have a particular responsibility to fight intellectual colonialism” and further that most “[critical Indigenous academics] have a specific responsibility to our communities, friends, and families that often outweighs academic considerations” (p. 114). *Action research* (Tax 1975) contributes the assertion that research is only as valuable as it is useful to the community. *Applied anthropology* argues that researchers design their work to be reciprocal, engage the community in as many steps in the research process as possible, and to assure that research is mutually beneficial (Polgar 1979). Polgar's *committed research* contributes a greater attention to politics and power, which resonates for me, as North American Indigenous people are constantly in conversation with these forces in land claims, policy, the Ministry of Child and Family Development, and the justice system for instance. Finally, I am inspired by Waldock's (2016) *trinitarian* approach as previously discussed, because her ideal of “listen to and with” (p. 66) individuals and communities reconnects to the above theoretical influences, which regard community members as co-creators and benefactors of the research.

Waldock is careful with the language she chooses to talk about the subject matter and the people with whom she works. This attention to language has been a central theme in feminist and third-world anthropologies and in Indigenous scholarship because the words we use have not only denotative, but connotative, historic, and symbolic meanings as well. Therefore our work and writings as researchers, no matter how transformative and anti-oppressive, can be completely dismissed if we still use the oppressive, racist, objectifying language that was once acceptable to scholarly writing. “Language embodies the way a society thinks” (Little Bear 2000, p. 78). It follows that if one uses the language of a particular community, they will be associated with that

community by their colleagues and “participants”. To decolonize my practice, I must also decolonize my language, as “through learning and speaking a particular language, an individual absorbs the collective thought processes of a people” (Little Bear 2000, p. 78).

Language and Re-naming:

“If we are to gather and share knowledge in an Indigenous way, we must find new words to liberate and decolonize our processes for doing so” (Absolon and Willett 2005, p. 114)

Developing decolonized research methodology is an essential pursuit, however, even the most decolonized, anti-oppressive methods cannot be fully realized without also decolonizing the language with which one talks about one's methods and work. Terms such as “research” are not only denotative symbols but also powerful emblems of a legacy and structure of power that is the academy, the law, and the state. Ideas of science and research are given the authority of “fact” and “truth”, and these scientific facts (whether they be true or not) have been used to justify and legitimize oppression and violence. Especially in the context of the colonization of North America, where anthropologists such as Steward theorized that Indigenous peoples were not culturally or cognitively evolved enough to understand land ownership, governance, or even social organization (Steward 1955a and 1955b). In considering the power of language to do harm, Indigenous communities have mobilized the healing abilities of language through revitalization, relearning, renaming, and re-termining. These linguistic efforts have included language learning programs, the renaming of geographic locations from their colonial names back to their traditional names, the renaming of our nations from government-determined to self determined, and the re-termining of practices and concepts such as repatriation to rematriation. Using our own words asserts “linguistic sovereignty”, and by my use of Cree words I am “invoking the nuance of Cree semantics” (Innes 2013, p. 25).

In this paper I have placed the words “research” and “participant” in quotations to problematize my usage of them in leading to the following discussion. Absolon and Willett (2005) call for the re-naming of the word “research” because it has “too much racist and colonial baggage attached to it to be used in an Indigenous context”, further they assert that “if we are to gather and share knowledge in an Indigenous way, we must find new words to liberate and decolonize our processes for doing so” (p. 114). They argue that by using our own language we distinguish ourselves and our work from the colonial, Western, positivist legacy. I have extended this further to re-name “researcher” and “research participant” or “subject”. My Indigenous ancestors would have spoken many languages from English, French, and Gaelic, to Cree, Saulteaux, Michif, and Bungi, but for many generations, our family has not had our language due to the affects of assimilationist policy. With this, I must acknowledge that I am attempting to learn some Cree, but am by no means an authority on the language. I have chosen Cree as opposed to Bungi or Michif because it is more widely spoken and my elders speak Cree. I have found the following terms from a Cree dictionary (LeClaire and Cardinal 2002), and have sought advice from my elders, but I acknowledge that there are many different dialects and it is possible that my terms are incorrect. This is a work in progress, but it is where I will begin.

Research is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2018) as “studious inquiry or examination; especially investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws”. This definition is at odds with my intentions as I do not wish to find “facts”, “theories”, or “laws” but to work with individuals and communities to realize their goals and contribute to their projects. Merriam-Webster offers another definition, “the collecting of information about a particular subject”. The “collection of

information” has often resulted in the removal of the knowledge from the originating communities and its publishing under the name of the ethnographer (Gaudry 2011). This extractive research method exploits Indigenous knowledges and does little to help those from whom the knowledge comes. Instead, I suggest the word, *kiskinwahamâtowin*, which means “teaching one another, learning; educating”. This acknowledges that both my “participants” and I have knowledge and expertise to share and that we both learn from one another. Some knowledge keepers, and I would agree, understand themselves to have the equivalent of a master’s or doctoral degree in their knowledge of plants, land, animals, medicine, carving, fishing, etcetera (Ignace, Speck, and Taylor 1987). This also speaks to my values of respect, reciprocity, and working together. *Kiskinwahamâtowin* reflects my intended outcomes for my work: mutual embetterment, building relationships, and benefiting the lives with which I work.

The word “researcher” obviously stems from the definition of “research”, but it has a further social and historical significance. The Oxford Dictionary (2018) definition reads: “A person whose job involves discovering or verifying information for use in a book, programme, etcetera”. Again, this poses an important ideological incongruity between the term and my intentions and teachings. I have been told by my Cree-Métis relations as well as Coast Salish friends and teachers that no one person can own anyone, or anything but themselves. This includes people, land, and even knowledge. In my teachings, all knowledge exists in the world, and it is shared with us by the land and the animals, the Creator and ancestors. Knowledge, like songs and dreams, come *through* us - they are not *made* by us. Considering this, I do not understand myself to be creating or discovering knowledge. I have also made clear that ethnographic information discussed in my “research” is not intended to be used in ethnographies or textbooks simply as an interesting ethnographic case study or anecdote, but to be put to use

working in the community. I believe the ethnographic, cultural, community knowledge within the “research” must be protected against those who may use it oppressively, to create sensationalized historical accounts, or produce harmful theories such as those of human nature, cognition, evolution, etc... However, I do hope to promote *kiskinwahamâtowin* among my colleagues, in future articles which can contribute to the academic decolonizing pursuit, through discussions of methods and ideas learned from community-engaged experiences. It is important to make this distinction clear. For the most part, knowledge-keepers do not participate in research projects in order to assist researchers, but to assure that their knowledge will be available for the living young people and future generations so they will know “where they have come from and where they are supposed to be going” (Ignace, Speck, and Taylor 1987, p. 171).

“Researcher” has also become a dirty word in Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous people feel that researchers are a curse, as they are frequently attracted to work with Indigenous peoples and subjects due to any number of ill or well-meaning intentions, but regardless do great harm (Deloria 1969; Snarch 2004). Researchers are all too often non-Indigenous, funded by predominantly white groups, carried out within predominantly non-Indigenous institutions, verified and peer-reviewed by people who do not belong to the community, and the information is used by non-Indigenous governments, companies, and others - often for ends which are not serving the community’s interests (Snarch 2004). Further, hundreds of thousands of dollars are dedicated to these research projects - money which could be used to bring clean drinking water and infrastructure improvements to isolated and disadvantaged reserve and non-reserve communities. For example: I wrote all my high school papers on my own laptop, using online word processors, and submitting them through email. My partner, J.P. Muldoe, wrote all his assignments by hand, paying for a cellphone with little reception, living on a Northern B.C.

reserve, with unpaved roads, frequent water advisories, and in the midst of a suicide crisis. These communities do not need “researchers” - they need people who want to listen to *their* concerns in order to understand and work with them as allies, to solve real problems, in “real communities” (Weber-Pillwax 2004, p. 80).

To replace “researcher”, I suggest the word *nahihtam*, which means “s/he is an effective listener; s/he listens well”. This word speaks to me because of my deep belief in the importance and cultural significance of listening. Listening means investing and opening oneself to another. In my childhood, my mother brought me visit the Katzie First Nation, where I first learned about witnessing. Witnessing is a serious, formal responsibility which asks of the witness to pay close attention to all the details of an event; tasking them with remembering and telling the story of that event for the rest of their lives. As a listener, I understand myself to have a similar responsibility: to open myself to my “participants” and carry forward what I have learned. *Nahihtam* also humbles my position as “researcher” and acknowledges that I am not in a position of greater power; that I am learning from the community, not studying them. This also means that I listen and act upon what is asked of me. Marginalized, non-European communities in the United States and Canada, have coined the term, “White Activism”. This used to describe privileged individuals who are usually well-meaning but often attempt to help marginalized people by imposing their ideas of helping onto those they intend to help. They act without much consideration of the community's self-identified goals or the potential long-term implications of their work. This concern, for example, is often raised of Voluntourism. In Indigenous gatherings, I have heard it said that “sometimes the help that is needed is simply washing the dishes after a feast”, meaning, that to help you must do what is needed though it may not be glamorous. As has been argued by many scholars, communities know themselves best, and they know what they

need.

As I inhabit the role of *nahihtam*, I am no longer working with a “research participant”. Different disciplines use different terminology to refer to the people who sit on the other side of the researcher’s desk. Anthropology has shifted standardized ethics to reject the objectification of “subjects” and to move toward a practice which regards people as “participants”. Further, the discipline requires some level of participation in the project by these “participants” whether it be in research design, editing, etcetera. The Oxford Dictionary (2018) defines “participant” as “A person who takes part in something”. They offer the example, “staff are to be active participants in the decision-making process”. While the definition does not in itself carry the following implication, the given example reflects the ways in which this term is typically used: a “participant” is someone who is participating in an *existing* event or project. Further, this event or project such as a marathon, charity event, or competition, is typically run by another authority such as an event organizer, company, or governing body. This connotation ascribes the “researcher” primary authority and relegates the “participant” to a lesser role, with less control and less recognition.

In this light, I propose *miyohtahêw*, which means “s/he guides s.o. well” to replace “participant” or “subject”. I chose this word because it again honours the role that “participants” play, which is that of a teacher from whom the *nahihtam* learns. It also speaks to my teaching that if one asks another to share a story or teaching, then one must allow them to answer in their own way and to not press for a specific answer. *Miyohtahêw* also honours the individual or community’s self-understanding and honours them as the experts on themselves. When I imagine a guide, I am reminded of the act of walking together. This well represents the journey that is *kiskinwahamâtowin*. The work of planning and executing a film is also a literal and figurative

journey. Avoiding confirmation bias by not going in search of proof for a theory, I must enter into a learning relationship without my own agenda, other than to help. I seek *kiskinwahamâtowin*. Rather than forcing myself onto people or attempting to speak for them, I demonstrate my ability and intention to be a *nahihtam*. Instead of taking the stories and the knowledge that is shared with me out of the community and using it for my own goals, I work together with *miyohtahêw* to determine how the information will be kept, disseminated, and used. When making a film, Christine Welsh told me that I must not go out in search of people who will fit my own narrative, but instead to “go out and find the story in the people who can tell it” (personal communication, February 28th, 2018). In this way, I can use my privileged position to create a space where the power is given to the speakers to tell the story that they need to tell.

Film Analysis:

“That’s a powerful place to speak from in a document - to tell a story from the inside.”

Abenaki filmmaker, Alanis Obomsawin (Steven 1993, p. 186).

In addition to considering the theoretical and linguistic foundations of my Cree-Métis approach to audio-visual anthropology, it is also essential to look at my filmic predecessors and learn from their choices to strengthen my own practice. For this thesis, I critically analyzed the work of Cree-Métis filmmakers Christine Welsh, Gil Cardinal, and Clint Alberta (also known under the last names Morrill, Tourangeau, Star, and Karatechamp), as well as several other influential Indigenous filmmakers. The films I selected from the works of these filmmakers are, *Kuper Island: Return to the Healing Circle* (1997), directed and produced by Christine Welsh and Peter Campbell; *Women in the Shadows* (1991) directed by Norma Bailey and produced by Christine Welsh; *Foster Child* (1987) directed by Gil Cardinal and produced by Jerry Krepakevich; *David With F.A.S.* (1997) directed by Gil Cardinal and produced by Graydon

McCray; and *Deep Inside Clint Star* (1999) directed by Clint Alberta and produced by Silva Basmajian. I chose Welsh and Alberta's films due to the personal impact they have had on me earlier in my life. Cardinal's films were suggested to me by Welsh due to his important contributions to the canon of Métis film.

Through my discussions with Welsh, a retired associate professor in Gender Studies at the University of Victoria, I noticed similarities in the works of these three filmmakers. I have identified several practices which I believe will be important to my own audio-visual work. While there are many aspects of these films I could discuss, I focus on a particular set of themes which, I believe, are profoundly decolonial and rooted in shared Métis values. These similarities lay in choices of editing, narrative construction, and the presence of the filmmaker. These filmmakers produce works which break from Hollywood and Western conventions and their final works are reflective of the distinct Indigenous film tradition growing across the globe. Focusing this analysis further, I search for teachings from these filmmakers which I can put into my own practice.

Editing

Editing is arguably the most important part of film, as it can drastically change the narrative, emotional climate, and viewing experience. Welsh, Cardinal, and Alberta share three important practices: use of silence, long takes, and the inclusion of footage that would almost certainly be edited out in Western film. In Cardinal's *Foster Child* (1987), Cardinal chooses not to make use of music while Welsh uses music only for transitions in *Kuper Island: Return to the Healing Circle* (1997) and leaves interviews without added music. Hollywood rigorously avoids silence, even creating white noise to play during quiet moments to address the auditory

experience in a theatre where silence is stark in contrast to the surround-sound. These Métis films are not made with an exclusively commercial orientation focused on theatre screening - they not only accept silence, but employ it with intention.

In my eleven years living on WSÁNEĆ territory, I have been taught that it is respectful to give a silent moment after someone speaks before one speaks next. This is simply to assure that the person had finished, but more importantly to allow a moment for listeners to fully absorb and reflect on what has been said. Similarly, all three filmmakers make important and unconventional use of long takes (a scene which is drawn out much longer than the rest of the film or than the genre convention) which allows viewers to follow an interviewee's full thought. I understand this to also be a method through which to create a high-fidelity portrayal of a *miyohtahêw*, as their message is uninterrupted by editing. These two practices speak to my value of listening. As previously mentioned, I understand myself to be in a witnessing role, a *nahihtam*, and listening is my most powerful way of learning. Further, to listen is to hear with intention and focus; listening demonstrates respect to the speaker and appreciation for their willingness to share. Like Olsen (Welsh and Olsen 2003), I have noticed that listening is especially meaningful to Coast Salish people as "listening does not mean simply hearing or even remembering. Listening is the act of documentation" and the listener "becomes the bearer and the keeper of important social, historical, and family information and the means by which that information is passed on" (p. 150). As oral, aural peoples, the act of listening is of central importance to Indigenous peoples across North America (Gauthier 2013).

Listening practices can also be explored in how a filmmaker chooses to edit interviews. In all the films I discuss, the filmmakers incorporate silence in numerous impactful ways. Examples include choosing at times, or in total, not to use musical soundtracks, not using voice-

over, including interviews with long silences as the interviewee reflects or hesitates, or cutting the sound entirely from a scene. This fearless use of silence often breaks with documentary and film convention as it is often interpreted as boring or slow. However, this use of silence is a testament to the significance of cultural listening practice and the importance of allowing an interviewee the time and space to fully express what they need to, while the viewer has a chance to let their words and message sink in. This silence also draws attention to the sensory and textual information that remains, encouraging viewers to figuratively lean in to the moment. These silences, and the long takes that accompany them, result in a much slower pacing. This nonconformance with conventional pacing evidences an assertion of visual sovereignty as filmmakers require viewers to participate in culturally specific rhythms (Raheja 2013).

In his documentary, *Deep Inside Clint Star*, Alberta interviews friend, Tawny Maine, on a bridge (min. 32:40). She tells Alberta about her relationship with her boyfriend of nine years, sharing her suspicion that her boyfriend, who is white, does not take her out in public because he is ashamed of her and her race.

During this time, the camera zooms out and the boom microphone (a large microphone suspended over a set, outside of the frame) is clearly visible in the



top of the screen. This would render the footage unusable, or at least require it to be edited so the microphone would not be visible. Alberta makes the choice to keep this footage unaltered. This can be understood to be an indication of his respect and appreciation that this was an important story for Maine and one which she wanted to share. While it is certainly true that most interview

footage is edited out for a plethora of reasons, it would have done Maine a disservice to cut this story for the exclusive reason of adhering to aesthetic filmic convention. Alberta includes many features which would typically be understood as errors, such visible boom mics, camera crew, poor lighting, and last-minute interview cancellations. Mayer (2008) argues that the inclusion of these so-called errors makes the film more accessible, and even “creates a way of listening respectfully because it ‘presents,’ connects to, the individual and community responsible for making the film” (p. 12).

In the scene pictured above, Alberta sits and looks away from Maine, who is angled toward Alberta and spends much of the interview looking at Alberta, who never returns her gaze. This could be seen as unprofessional, but Alberta includes footage of them sitting down and having their lapel microphones placed, and during this time he playfully explains that he will be looking away during the interview:

Offscreen man: “Now what I am thinking is, she can sit down in your position and you can sit in her position so she will be noticeable.” (to Alberta)

Alberta: “Yes, good.” (to offscreen man)
(Alberta and Main switch spots)

Maine: “So much for your psychological mind fuck.” (to Alberta)

Alberta: “I know!”
(both laugh)
“I’m just - I’m going to rigidly look this way, you won’t even have a chance to look at me.”

(Maine looks at Alberta and laughs at the absurdity. They begin the

interview, casually talking about traveling to Toronto)

While Alberta's rigid physical positioning and lack of eye-contact is a strange choice and appears to make Maine somewhat uncomfortable it also appears to offer some comic relief. Despite his unusual behaviour, he immediately forgets his promise to stare forward and turns to comfort Maine as she explains that she had quit drinking because she had been sexually assaulted at a party. He proceeds to hug her, offer words of sympathy and admiration, and then turns to the camera crew and to them he wished to stop filming for the day.

Alberta: "No!" (to Maine, reacting to her story)

Maine: "Yeah, so..."

Alberta: "That's so bad! Oh..."

(They hug)

"...That sucks. How have you dealt with that?"

Maine: "Um, I don't know, it just sort of went away. I didn't really... do anything about it. I just went on with life. I just vowed, you know, never to be in that position ever again."

Alberta: "That kicks ass."

Maine: "So, never get drunk to that point. I can never drink anymore so..."

Alberta: "You're the best..." (to Maine)

"That's all I want to do today." (to offscreen man)

Offscreen man: "Yeah?"

Albert: "Yeah, what do you think?"

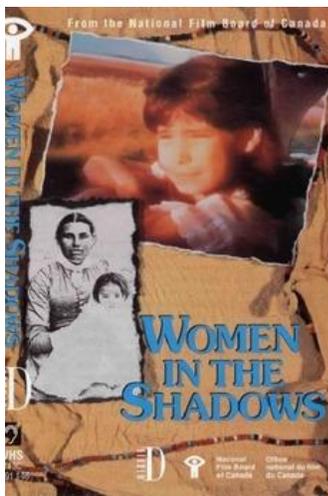
Offscreen man: “That’s good.”

Alberta: “You kick ass.” (to Maine)

[Scene End]

It might seem unusual that Alberta would include him turning to the man offscreen and ending the interview as this type of production direction would usually remain behind the scenes, this flagrantly disregards Hollywood cinematic convention which always strives for seamless editing (Mayer 2008). However, this editing choice is not carelessness or unprofessionalism, but is actually hugely significant symbolic and meaningful. Due to the disruption of standardized fluid visual narrative construction, Alberta’s film reads like an imperfect home-video, which constantly reminds the viewer that film is a constructed representation of reality, and further that “we are witnessing something intimate” (Mayer 2008, p. 12). The long take of the conversation captures the organic way in which the interview unfolded and Alberta’s presence in the scene informs the viewer that Maine knew she was being filmed and willingly shared the story of her sexual assault. By including this footage, Alberta respects her desire to share this traumatic story, but also demonstrates attention to, and care for her by calling for filming to end for the day. Including this directorial moment makes clear his intentions: not to sensationalize or exploit the pain of the people he interviews, but to give them the space to share their stories.

Narrative Construction



Christine Welsh tells her own story of tracing her Cree-Métis lineage back to Winnipeg in the 1700s in her documentary, *Women in the Shadows* (1991). In interviews with her family, archivists, experts, and other Cree-Métis people she connects with along the way, Welsh

guides the viewer through her physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual journey to rediscover her Cree-Métis ancestors and identity. Like many Métis families, Welsh's family had long hidden their identity and Welsh was met not only with her own difficult emotions, but also with stark resistance when trying to learn about her family history from her patrilineal (the line through which Welsh receives her Cree-Métis heritage) great-aunt, Jean, who seems to be quite upset by what she refers to as Welsh's "obsession" (min. 05:40)

Jean: "You're taking it too much upon yourself to try to find out some of these things that are really, well, they they seem important to you, but to me, you're making an obsession of it! And uh, that's not good for anybody! I mean, you uh, you, you found out most of the things that you wanted to find out, so continue on with what you're doing and uh, feel like you've accomplished a mission, that you've done something, that you've accomplished what you were looking for!"

Welsh: "But I don't feel that, I feel like-"

Jean: "Well you should." (she interrupts)

Welsh: (Laughs in an exasperated manner) "I feel like there is more to find out!"

Jean: "Well I don't see what more there could be to find out!"

Welsh: "Well there's a whole, there's a whole past! I mean I, I've got people's names and when they were born and where they came from and so on, but it's a whole... what I'm really looking for is some notion of a past that I knew nothing about and I think it's fascinating. For many, many, many people who are descendants of people like George Taylor and the Indian women that they met here and married, that all of the children of those people have a, have a unique

history and heritage. It makes them very special and it's something they should be proud of-"

Jean: "-But they're not looking for it!" (She interrupts)

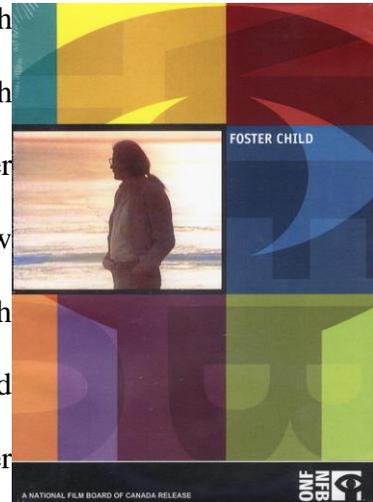
(She shakes her head while Welsh continues)

Welsh: "Well lots of them are! And if you can be proud of that, you know who you are and where you come from. Other wise you, you know, you exist in some sort of limbo, not knowing!"

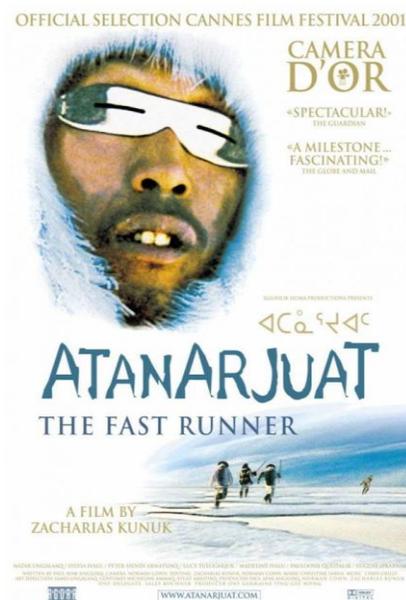
[Scene End]

This single interview perfectly captures the experience of countless Métis people; by filming her kitchen table conversation with her great-aunt, Welsh concretizes the abstract reports of the harms of forced assimilation, dispossession, dis-membering, dislocation, disenfranchisement, genocide, and racism in one single conversation that has equivalents in the lived experiences of thousands of Indigenous people. This deeply personal film could be dismissed as simply an autobiography, but *Women in the Shadows* is not just an audio-visual diary entry, it is a vulnerable chronicling of an identity journey which is a common experience for many Indigenous people, particularly for Canadian Métis people as we must prove our lineage to the government in order to achieve official registration as Métis. Therefore this film tells not just Welsh's story, but the story of so many in our nation.

Similarly, Gil Cardinal embarks on a journey to find his birth family in his film, *Foster Child* (1987). This film opens with Cardinal discussing his unceremonious placement into his foster family. They offer their blessing and encouragement for the now grown Cardinal to find his birth mother. Through interviews with social workers, a failed encounter with a potential father, and following several leads to dead ends, Cardinal invites the viewer along to witness the pain, confusion, and excitement of re-membering (Absolon and Willett 2005). Learning through watching, viewers who do not understand the Sixties Scoop, or the pain of being taken away from one's family can have a window through which to see this reality, and those who are familiar with this experience can heal through watching Cardinal heal himself. Bravely, Cardinal allows the camera to follow him into first meetings with long lost family. This is a great gift that he gives: to invite viewers into extremely personal moments with unpredictable outcomes. Through this profound vulnerability and openness, *Foster Child*



exposes the injustice of the foster system and powerlessness of birth families, foster families, the children, and even the social workers caught in a system that was designed to continue the genocidal agenda of the Indian Residential Schools. Despite the typical role of filmmakers as working behind the camera, Welsh and Cardinal use their own lives, voices, and bodies in order to tell their story; when we do this, we take control of our own representations and subvert the representations made by Outsider researchers and filmmakers; we exercise visual



sovereignty.

Although not representing his personal life, Kunuk also draws from his culture and his community as he endeavours to tell the famous Inuit oral-story, *Atanarjuat* or “The Fast Runner” in his film of the same title. This internationally decorated film is in Inuktitut with English subtitles and makes no effort to adhere to Western and Hollywood conventions and standards even in advertising, as the official film poster prioritizes the Inuktitut title in roman orthography as well as in syllabics over the English title. As a consequence of the Inuit-immersion, the story can be difficult to follow for non-Inuit viewers at times. However this orientation toward an Inuit audience serves as a powerful example of film “being altered to tell our stories, our way, and [in *Atanarjuat*] gone were the stereotypes of past...” Ojibway film critic, Jesse Wente (*Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian* 2009).

Similarly, all but one of Swampy Cree filmmaker, Kevin Lee Burton’s film are in Cree. As seen in *Atanarjuate*, Burton “identifies his primary goal as creating films in the Cree language for Cree and Indigenous audiences” (Dowell 2013, p. 157). This is an essential component of Indigenous film; the orientation of film “first and foremost” toward the community from which the story comes (Murray qtd. in Schweninger 2013, p. 193). This is an important distinction from the idea of ethnographer as cross cultural translator, because contextualizing and orienting film toward the originating community keeps the representation as knowledge community-owned. If one were to alter the original words, emotions, experiences, expressions, and so on toward a Western audience, for example, any audience outside that culture would be consuming a representation particularly constructed to be consumable by a third party and therefore miss the opportunity to directly encounter the individuals, communities, stories, languages, and cultures in their own terms. Rather than inviting others to a dinner party

hosted and catered by someone else, film oriented toward its own community of origin, invites all people to come to *our* figurative kitchen table (Weber-Pillwax 2004), eat *our* food, listen to *our* stories, in *our* voices, in *our* own language.

Identity and personal storying is a central theme in Métis and broader Indigenous film but it is not just a form of self-expression, it is also a political and cultural act where we can subvert stereotypes and misrepresentations while producing and promoting our own culture and image (D. MacDougall 2006, p. 218). In Cree-Métis filmmaker, Shane Belcourt's, film *Tkaronto* (2007), he tells the story of two young Indigenous people, Ray (Métis) and Jolene (Ojibwa), as they try to understand their identity and their culture. Schweninger (2013) argues for the importance of self-representation, that in telling a story where the characters "take control of their images" and thereby "take control of their history, their own destiny", Belcourt *also* takes control of his own image, identity, history, and destiny (Schweninger 2013, p. 2013). Whether it be fictitious or auto-biographical stories, Belcourt states that by "going so personal, it becomes universal" (Schweninger 2013, p. 199). Like the sovereign right to self determination, right to name ourselves, and our right to linguistic sovereignty, we can exercise visual sovereignty by subverting, re-creating, and producing our own representations.

Presence of the Filmmaker

The presence of the filmmaker in this selection of films is perhaps the most meaningful filmmaking practice shared by these three directors. The ways in which Welsh, Cardinal, and Alberta include or exclude their bodies, voices, and actions is also indicative of their understanding of, and ability to wield the impact and significance of the *corporeal image*, a concept which argues that film is "as much affected by the bodies behind the camera as those

before it” (D. MacDougall 2006, p. 27). While some have argued that filmmakers who appear in their own films are narcissistic, including oneself when appropriate (as will be explained next) is essential as embodied knowledge in an important aspect of Indigenous film, but further “embodiment is central to the truth-claims of autobiographical documentary” (Mayer 2008, p. 11).

As earlier discussed, Welsh and Cardinal star in their autobiographical works, resulting in films whose power is in the embodiment of lived experiences of broader sociopolitical phenomena and of the portrayal of honest truth telling. In Alberta’s film, his presence explains his choice of participants and of his relationship to them which, undoubtedly contributed to a trusting environment in which his friends and family were more willing to share their personal memories, thoughts, and feelings. However, importantly, both Cardinal and Welsh alter their approaches when working with stories that are not their own. In *David with F.A.S.*, Cardinal creates a space for 21-year-old David Vandenbrink, to express his experience of living with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (F.A.S.). Cardinal approaches this film in a unique way, giving Vandenbrink his own hand-held camcorder with which to document whatever he wished. This footage is intercut with the professional footage taken by Cardinal and his team which offered a separate space for Vandenbrink’s non-Indigenous, adoptive family to express their thoughts, feeling, memories, and experiences of raising their son. In this film, Cardinal is only seen on screen once as he teaches Vandenbrink how to use his hand-held camera but for the remainder of the film is only present in his voice-over which narrates the film. I believe that Cardinal did not include himself as this cinematic space was uniquely constructed to amplify the voices of Vandenbrink and his family through the use of home video and emotional conversations rather than more formal interviews. However, Cardinal includes his voice in an interview in which, like Alberta,

he felt compelled to speak up in support in an intimate moment with Vandenbrink's father, Henry:

H. Vandenbrink: (Reflecting on his harsh parenting of his son prior to the discovery of Vandenbrink's diagnosis)
“Now I believe that some of my expectations were in fact... uh... I hesitate to say abuse, but when you're asking someone to do things that they're not capable of, it can almost be viewed as abuse... Even though I was ignorant, I do have a hard time excusing myself for some of my expectations.”

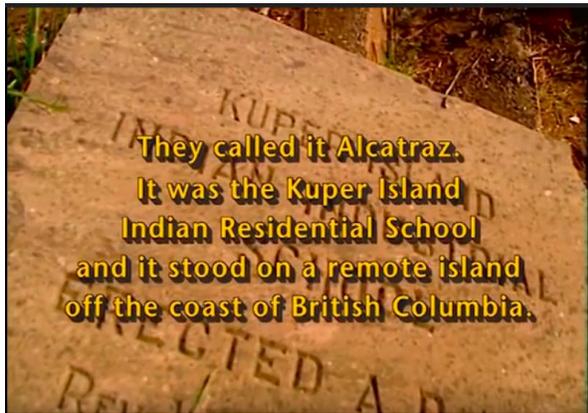
Cardinal: “But you didn't know.” (off screen)

H. Vandenbrink: “...Yeah, we didn't know.”

[Scene End]

Like Alberta in his interview with Maine, Cardinal demonstrates care and respect toward H. Vandenbrink as he interjects to remind that him that he was not a bad father, but struggling to support his son who was suffering from a disorder of which they were not yet aware. This is a significant detail; while Cardinal could have pushed H. Vandenbrink to explore this feeling deeper and thus produced a very dramatic and emotional interview, Cardinal chooses to push back against this harsh and painful self-judgement with empathy and gentleness, stopping a conversation which might reinforce H. Vandenbrink's self-blame. This moment of connection between Cardinal and H. Vandenbrink reminds viewers of the relationship between those in front and behind the camera. It additionally reminds viewers to watch and listen with empathy as the people on screen are in the midst of a trying and confusing time. In a more subtle way than in *Foster Child* and *Women in the Shadows*, Cardinal's inclusion of his interjection, is a practice of

reflexive filmmaking which emphasizes relationship, connection, and personal experience.



Whether subtly including oneself or more frequently appearing on screen, “inscribing [one’s] presence in the film, as narrator and subject” demonstrates relationship and “subverts the objectifying tendencies of the social documentary” (Pick 1999, p.77).

In contrast to the previously discussed films, Welsh is never seen nor heard on camera in *Kuper Island: Return to the Healing Circle* (1997). Explaining why she did not include herself in the film, Welsh (Welsh and Olsen 2003) offered two reasons. First, she reflected on her particular Métis family history and noted that it does not include Indian Residential Schools, because of this she felt that this was not her story to tell; second, she had been invited by the community to document, the story of the survivors and the momentous healing circle held in front of the abandoned school. Refusing even to impose herself as narrator, establishing and closing information which was not told by participants was conveyed through text (Christine Welsh, lecture at the University of Victoria, December 2017). The same logic could be extended to Cardinal’s approach the *David With F.A.S.*, as this was a film about David’s life and David’s experience, something which would be inappropriate for Cardinal to speak to. Also in parallel with *David with F.A.S.*, Welsh’s voice is heard once in an interview in *Kuper Island*. After discussing traumatic memories, brothers, Tony and James Charlie tease each other (min. 35:00):

Tony: (Reflecting on the abuse suffered at the Kuper IRS)

“I think it's going to be a great big part of our healing is to sit back and reflect on what we talked about during the day and realize all the things that we've been through. I think that's always a big part of our lives, is we look back as to what's happened in our life and that we want to change. So from today on there's going to be a big change in -”

James: “- in Tony.” (He interrupts)

Tony: “In Tony.” (Imitating James)

(Both laugh)

James: “He has, he has more problems than me!”

Tony: “Yeah, I do... I work with people everyday!”

(Both laugh, Welsh is heard laughing off camera)

[Scene End]

A Hollywood sensibility would not include this scene because it would introduce an unexplained female voice which might disturb the smooth, seamless conventional editing aesthetic. This moment of humour is an essential aspect of the portrayal of these brothers and further, of this community, and to cut this moment would be to detract from their portrayal. Humour is of great importance to most North American communities, this is evidenced in the moments of humour in many Indigenous films despite serious subject matter, for example, *Smoke Signals* (1998), *Reel Injun: on the Trail of the Hollywood Indian* (2009), *Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa: The People Go On* (2003), and *Incident at Restigouche* (1984). Including this moment, despite the unexplained woman's voice, was an important way of humanizing these men, rather than portraying them only as victims and survivors of trauma. Further, Welsh was not just allowing them to tell their story, but to tell it in their own way. This is also the approach

taken by accomplished Cree-Métis filmmaker, Loretta Todd. Rather than more actively direct her narratives, she prefers to confront injustice by allowing the “stories to be told by her subjects” and let them “take center stage and address the audience directly” (Gauthier 2013, p. 100). This echoes Welsh’s advice of finding the story in the people who can tell it.

While Welsh, Cardinal, and Alberta starred in and actively lead the narrative in their self-explorative films, each demonstrates an appreciation for, and attention to the need to create a space for participants to lead the narratives and to allow them to tell their stories their own way. Further, they can identify when, how, and to what degree they should include themselves physically, verbally, or otherwise. This sensibility is not a typical, basic reflexivity but “*intelligently* used reflexivity” (Ruby 2000, p. 145, emphasis added). As I continue to consider the narrative construction, editing, and presence of the filmmaker, the dividing lines become more blurred and begin to feel increasingly arbitrary as each are so interconnected. This leads me to believe that there is a certain Cree-Métis cinematic paradigm. Burton states that his work certainly has a Cree aesthetic in his particular attention to Cree aural, visual, linguistic, and land based rhythms, motifs, and themes (Dowell 2013, p. 165). When I watch these films and look at these faces, when I hear these stories and these voices, I feel my family and my relatedness. I watch, listen, and learn so my films will be felt by my family and my relations.

Conclusion:

Nitawâhtâw - “S/he Searches for something in an optimistic way”

Despite the discussion of “filmmaking” in this paper, what I am ultimately referring to is audio-visual *research*, a term which makes Indigenous communities’ “skin crawl” as they remember how “our knowledge has been misrepresented and extracted” (Absolon and Willett

2005, p. 114), totem poles have been cut down and sold, regalia and masks have been stolen, graves have been robbed, and ethnographic research has been used to justify Indian Residential Schools, the stealing of land, and to argue against land claims. Ultimately, it is the legacy of objectifying, racist, harmful research that has been done in and on Indigenous communities (Deloria 1973; Berreman 1979; Gaudry 2011; Kievit et al. 2003) from which I wish to separate myself and my work. Although I am still learning my language and it is more than possible that my understanding of these Cree words is incorrect or incomplete, one step of my decolonizing process is the renaming of the academic terms. The language that one uses not only implies denotative meanings but also carry ideas of responsibility and world views (Alfred 2004). This is an issue that is being addressed in the broader anthropological discourse as “informant” or “research subject” has become “participant” or “partners” and qualitative research is now primarily referred to as being done “with” people rather than “on” people. While these are positive shifts, I think that it is important for me, as an Indigenous researcher, to further personalize and nuance my academic language so it reflects my particular paradigms and intentions. These words, especially when in my own language, will convey not only my intentions and perspectives, but also who I am and where I come from. If I use English academic words, it implies that my primary orientation is to the academy, while if I use Cree, it locates me as a Cree-Métis person, and a *relation*.

My intention behind orienting myself and my work toward my culture and personal identity rather my academic genealogy (Darnell 2001) is the result of years of critical self-reflection in my personal life as well as was, and continues to be, asked of me in my studies. The idea of “walking in two worlds” or “multiple worlds” is a common experience for Indigenous peoples as they navigate their lives, especially for those with multiple ancestries (Kovach et al.

2013). This has also been true for me as I am walking in the world of anthropology, in the world of Coast Salish territory on which I am a grateful guest, and in my multi-ancestral and Métis identity. As I have tried to navigate this multi-layered experience, I have been asked by my professors, my elders, my family, and friends, how do I want to be and who do I want to be in these worlds? After much consideration, I decided that I want to be a *relation* (as in the Cree prayer, “all my relations”) and for my conduct and work to make my mentors, peers, community, family, and myself proud. Creating this ideological, ethical, and methodological approach to audio-visual research, which blends anthropology, Indigenous studies, linguistics, and my culture and protocols is a way in which I can begin to develop a decolonized research praxis that fulfills my intentions, motivations, and responsibilities.

This language reflects values that are also reflected in the film practices I have observed in the works of these Cree-Métis filmmakers. In editing practice, the use of long takes and silence demonstrates attention to cultural listening practices. This deep listening is not only embedded in a cultural ethic but also in a research ethic which attempts to construct film as a “‘place’ where Native people can talk to each other about their losses, their memories of injustice, their desire to share what is good about their way of life” and by giving the people the microphone with which to share *specific* experiences as opposed to *generalized* ones, viewers can “perhaps arrive at a better appreciation of how the dispossessed, dislocated, and disoriented try to come out of an abyss” (Pick 2000, pp. 87-88). In making this place, an interviewee can fully enter into the role of *miyohtahêw*, guiding the narrative to the areas in which they need it to go. When individuals agree to participate in a film, they often speak with intention, purpose, and resolve, having in mind a message they feel they need to convey (Welsh and Olsen 2003). Since its initial critiquing the 1960’s, knowledge for knowledge’s sake is being increasingly rejected

(Berreman 1974). Understanding this, simply allowing individuals and communities to speak for themselves and tell their stories in their own way is a method through which filmmakers and audio-visual researchers can meet the call to produce work which does not only “*do no harm*”, but actually *benefits* the community.

The project to offer a space for *miyohtahêw* to speak necessitates that others listen with intent and compassion. As describing myself as *nahihtam*, I commit myself to “listen with an ear to [the] heart” (Welsh and Olsen 2003) and strive to construct narratives in a way which conveys the *miyohtahêw*'s message and honours the fact that they have shared their story with the explicit intention that “their voices would be heard” because when we are invited to listen, “with that listening [comes] the responsibility to tell” (p. 149). While it is impossible for researchers and filmmakers to not impact their work, it continues to be important for researcher and filmmakers to assure that the community remains in possession of the knowledge. In the fall of 2017, I made a short video for the Salish Weave Collective showcasing Tsartlip artist, Temosen (English name, Charles Elliott). Although I had made the video during a research apprenticeship at the University of Victoria, neither the University, the Salish Weave Collective, nor I owned the film. Ownership was given to Temosen so he would be able to control the use of his representation and his knowledge. In this agreement, the University, the Salish Weave Collective, and I would have to secure his permission to use the video for other purposes. This is becoming more common in academia, where communities are given ownership of the information and products of research done which concerns them. Although we may be producers of a final product, “the[ir] story does not become your story: it is only yours to pass on” (Welsh and Olsen 2003, p. 151).

Kiskinwahamâtowin is not only my goal in my audio-visual research but also my goal in advocating for personalized research methodologies. It may be asked of me, “Why is engaging in

a personal narrative research project of interest to others?” I argue that it is important for each researcher to do this work for themselves: to not simply apply research methods and ethics because someone says that it is the right thing to do, but because one has critically reflected on why, and how, the methods and ethics do, or do not, contribute toward one’s motivations, values, and intentions. In outlining their own Indigenous approach to collaborative film, Gitxaala researcher and filmmaker, Charles Menzies (2015), warns others against using his particular approach as a “blueprint” to be applied directly to their own practice, but hopes that others would consider his work and “borrow, sample, rearrange as [they] find appropriate” (p. 114) in order to develop their own unique approach. This closes the circle, bringing us back to the idea that there is no one universal truth and one can only speak with authority about themselves. By creating a place where Indigenous peoples can “address the audience directly”, their “personal narratives serve as a metonym for the experiences of First Nations people in Canada, and the act of sharing helps these individuals to reconstruct their identities and heal old wounds” (Gauthier 2013, p. 100). Further, by decolonizing and reconstructing our own identities as researchers, non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike, we can each form a practical and ethical approach which keeps each of us uniquely accountable to the responsibilities and obligations we have to ourselves, our families, communities, research communities, discipline, and the academy.

“Once we understand what kind of world they [those with power] have created, then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create.” (Maracle 1996, p. 90). To this end, Obomsawin, argues that Indigenous filmmakers have the ability to portray an emic perspective on Indigenous topics and that that self-representation can challenge film conventions as well as create social change (Steven 1993). As an Indigenous audio-visual anthropologist, I can use film to achieve my trinitarian, decolonized, activist agenda. This agenda requires that I continually

and critically reflect on my personal and professional self-location, and interrogate my ethics and methods to determine how best I can achieve my goals. *Nitawâhtâw* means, “s/he searches for something in an optimistic way”. In this paper, I searched optimistically to reconcile the anthropologist with the *otipemisiwak* (the Cree name for the Métis meaning, “the people who own themselves”) within me. I committed myself to this topic in order to begin my academic future *in a good way*, in an optimistic way; hoping to give back to and lift up *all my relations*.
Hiy hiy!

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