

# STORIES HELD IN A TIME TRAVELLER'S *HOGAN*

by

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## **Abstract**

The wor(l)ds contained in this MFA thesis document and accompanying MFA exhibition, *Stories Held in a Time Traveller's Hogan*, offer glimmers into Diné Time, Diné Aesthetics, Indigenous Futurisms, and *Sa'q̓h Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón*. These Diné Knowledges reach across time and space to Diné Ancestors, to Diné Time Travellers, to the Land, and to family. These connections are held within constellations of temporality and relationality that are created by stories. Throughout this re-search journey, I began to wonder, how do we activate the Land as Time Machine? What happens when portals, or spaces of fluid time energy on the Land, start making their own stories? Diné Time Travellers open up a space for these questions. They are masterful weavers of time, story, and Diné Aesthetics. Their weavings illuminate pathways for dreaming expansively outside of colonial realities. For this thesis project, the Diné Time Travellers wanted to visit the Sacred Mountains to spend time with their stories that reside in the Land there. This document and exhibition are alive with those stories.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you is not a big enough word to encompass the deep gratitude, appreciation, and love I have for my mom and dad, Mary and Joe, and my brother, Hayden. I could not have opened a single portal or spoken to a single Diné Time Traveller without you. You are my *hogan*.

Mom, you show me every day what it means to live as a proud and strong Diné *asdzáán*. You taught me that laughter really is medicine.

Dad, you inspired my love of sci-fi and without that I would not have found Indigenous Futurisms. You remind me to dream big, think deeply, and not give up.

Hayden! You saved me so many times this past year. You may be my little brother, but I look up to you in so many ways. Thanks for always reminding me to be silly, to relax, and to breathe when I need it most.

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To my *chei* and *misán*, Robert and Ruth Roessel, although you have passed on from the earth-surface world, your love, teachings, and passion in giving back to Diné people still sings through my heart. You taught me the importance of community, of home.

To the Lands that have held me throughout this thesis project, here in Tkaronto—Dish with One Spoon Treaty Territory and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat. Long walks through these territories kept me grounded while far from home.

To the Sacred Mountains, *Sis Naajini*, *Dibé Ntsaa*, *Dook'o'ooshíid*, *Tsoodziit*. You were calling to me for so long. I am so grateful this project gave me the opportunity to share corn pollen prayers and visit with the stories held in the Land.

Diné Time Travellers.... You helped me open portals into worlds, temporalities, stories, dreams.... I had never imagined before. Then you walked through those portals with me. *Ahéhee'*.

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## **In the East.... Welcome to my Celestial *Hogan***

*Yá'át'ééh abiní. Nááts'ílid at'ééd yinishyé, Kiyaa'áanii nishł́, Bilagáana bashishchiin, do Tsinajinii dashicheii, do Bilagáana dashinalí. Ákót'éego diné asdzáán nishł́.*

*Would you like to come into my celestial hogan?*

*The bluebird's song is twinkling, crystal clear in the early calm, but it's so chilly outside.  
Come in, the fire's hot, and coffee's on.*

*Sun beams shine brightly as they peak over*

*Sis Naajiní, White Shell Mountain.*

*Light spills through the creases of the East facing door,  
carrying the most subtle caress of warmth.*

*The earth is coated in frost, it's still winter.  
Fields of the tiniest cacti surround the hogan, a circle of protection.*

*The rest will be here any minute....  
The wind picks up outside as we prepare to listen to her thinking and making.*

*Corn pollen prayers have been spoken.*

*The stories can be told now.*



Figure 1: 360 video still at Sis Naajiní, the Eastern Sacred Mountain, 2021.

## ***Yá'át'ééh.* Introductions**

Diné Time Travellers welcome me into their celestial *hogan*.

A *hogan* is an eight-sided Diné home, and this one is holding space and time for us to speak about my MFA thesis work. I introduce myself first in *Diné Bizaad* then in English. My name is Nicole Roessel Neidhardt. My Diné name is *Nááts'íilid at'ééd*. I am Diné (Navajo) of *Kiyaa'áanii* Clan (Towering House Clan) on my mother, Mary Roessel's side, as well as Scottish and German, and a blend of German, French, Ukrainian ancestry on my father, Joe Neidhardt's side. I tell them that I wrote this thesis document to accompany my MFA thesis work and exhibition, *Stories Held in a Time Traveller's Hogan* (April 1 – 11, 2021 at Thirthing Gallery, Tkoronto, ON). They want to know how I communicate Diné Knowledge(s) through this written form, through English. I'll explain.

This thesis paper follows Diné rules.

First, I play with grammar and punctuation throughout the document, not always following grammatically correct English. This is intentional. Diné Knowledge(s) when written in English have a different flow. Rhythm. Sentence fragments. Indentations and new paragraphs are all useful tools in sharing Diné Knowledge(s). These tools invoke the speaking voice on the written page. I tell them my Primary Supervisor, Peter Morin, inspired me to use this writing technique with his MFA Thesis, *Circle* (2011).

Second, throughout the document I use four dot ellipses in red “....”. This typographical mark honours the lived experience of oral knowledge transmission between *misán* (grandmother), *shimá* (mother), and child. This mark offers a space for breath.... giving the preceding words a chance to breathe.... Each dot is the passage of time.... the travelling of ideas, knowledges, stories between wor(l)ds.... The red references the red earth of *Dinétaah* (the

Navajo homelands) and the space above the dots is the air.... the breath of the speaker, the storyteller, the time traveller. Their breath.... This mark is not an ellipsis in the traditional English language sense, indicating something has been skipped or taken out ~~as far as the reader (you) knows.~~

Third, I use a narrative structure for parts of this document to tell stories. Storytelling is part of Diné Oral Traditions and pedagogy.... These parts of the document, as well as the conversations with *Nááts'íílid*, are a form of “storywork” as articulated by Jo-Ann Archibald (Sto:lo Nation) in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (2008). I am making meaning from the stories I have worked with and retelling these stories to the “storylistener”/reader (you) to share back the importance of these stories and the knowledges held within them. These stories do not always follow a linear trajectory. Ideas are referenced circularly throughout and may be introduced early in the document, only to be defined later on. This intentional tactic breaks away from linear notions of time and space and recenters Diné Time.... Diné worldview.... and Diné story....

Fourth, in the “Conversations with *Nááts'íílid*” portion of this paper, I employ conversation as a form of knowledge sharing. *Nááts'íílid* (the Time Traveller version of myself) and I speak about Indigenous Futurisms, *Sa'q'h Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*, Diné Aesthetics, and Diné Time. The reader (you) is invited to listen to edited segments of our conversations. I trust that once they (you) have visited with our words, they (you) will have a fuller understanding of my thinking and making, and of the artistic lineage(s) that my thinking and making belong to.

I tell the Diné Time Travellers I was inspired to follow this unconventional format by Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree), in his book *Research is Ceremony* (2008). Throughout the book, he writes letters to his sons, and in one chapter uses conversation with colleagues to



illustrate the relationality between the ideas and people he is working with. I was also inspired by bell hooks' chapter "Paolo Freire" in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994). In this chapter, she has a conversation between bell hooks, her writing voice, and herself as Gloria Watkins about the impact Paolo Freire has had on her writing and thinking. She introduces the chapter by saying the format allows her intimacy and familiarity in a way that an essay cannot (hooks 45).

Conversation is a method I have employed throughout my "re-searching" (Absolon 21), thinking, and making journey. I have used dialogue, conversation, and letters as a way to make meaning and think through new ideas, much like others such as: James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Shawn Wilson, bell hooks, and my *chei* (grandpa) Robert Roessel. The familiarity present in these forms of communication offer a form of storytelling through experience. I am deeply present in my re-search, as are my ancestors, my family, and the Diné Time Travellers visiting with me. This intimacy supports understanding and engaging with my work and ideas.

I tell the Diné Time Travellers that all of these tools come together to create a structure that holds my practice and the knowledges and stories I work with, with immense care. Some might think of the writing techniques I employ in this thesis document as experimental, or not beholden to academic writing conventions. This is true. These techniques are necessary for me to share Diné Knowledges, stories, ways of being and creating that my ancestors would be proud of and understand.

The Diné Time Travellers, who have been listening intently, nod.

*Diné Knowledge systems require Diné tools in order to speak on paper....*

## **In the South.... Blue Twilight**

*Steam rises from my cup of piñon coffee.*

*I only like soy creamer in it. And so do you.*

*The sky's expansiveness engulfs the horizon as fluffy, creamy clouds dot the noonday sky,*

*Blue Twilight.*

*Fry bread grease lingers in the corners of my mouth from our meal of mutton and squash stew.*

*You told me these mountains, with their rugged, rocky surface, remind you of the stories Chei told us about the Twins,*

*Naayéé' Neezghání and Tó Bájísh Chíní*

*(Monster Slayer and Child Born of Water).*

*The Twins killed the giant, Yé'itsoh, near the Sacred Mountain,*

*Tsoodził, Turquoise Mountain.*

*It must have been humongous because you can still see the giant's blood everywhere.*

*It once coursed over these mountains, down these valleys.  
(It courses over these mountains, down these valleys.)*

*Solidified now as porous black volcanic rock.*

*They travelled by lightning.*

*You tell me one day.... I will too.*

## Story of the Artwork



### Sacred Mountain Prayer

*East .... Oh, how the beautiful and strong White Shell Mountain stands in the East. It is dressed with the spirit of White Shell thinking which makes my feelings and thoughts strong and makes my mind beautiful. Dawn Boy's and Dawn Girl's voices echo clearly within my thoughts, and the bluebirds singing ahead of me, tell me I am safe and protected.*

*South .... Oh, how the beautiful and positive Turquoise Mountain stands, with plans of life and knowledge in the South direction (which I may think, plan and prepare myself to fulfill my life). My life is beautiful.*

*West .... Oh, how the beautiful and powerful Abalone Shell Mountain stands in the West which is my growth. The Yellow Evening Twilight Boy and Girl, their voices so soft, tell me that I am loved and that I am a unique Diné. From the special place where you dwell, Mother Changing Woman, watch over and protect me.*

*North .... Oh, how the beautiful and strong Black Jet Mountain stands in the North direction. It is dressed with Black Jet clothes which is my awareness of life. The Folding Darkness Boy and Girl tell me: My Child, rest, and have a life filled with interest and desire.*

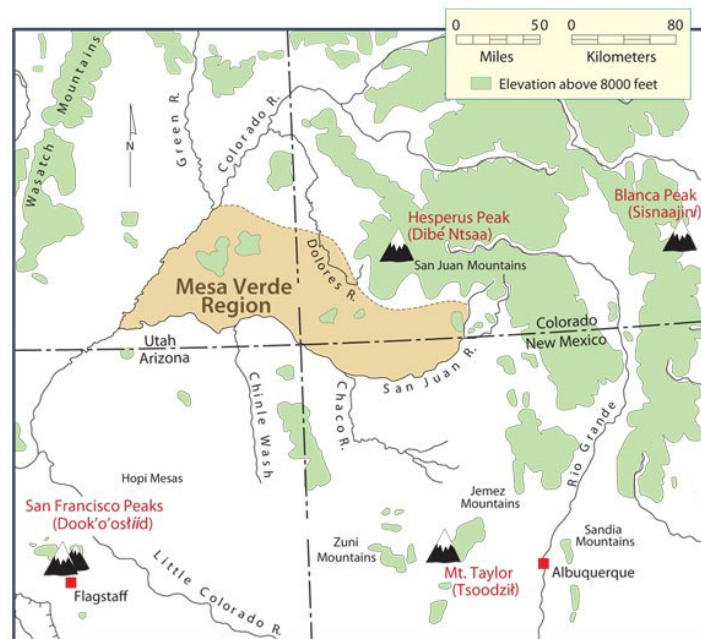


Figure 2: Map of 4 Navajo Sacred Mountains from Decolonial Atlas. <https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2015/02/22/the-four-sacred-mountains-of-the-navajo/>

This is a story about travelling....

Time Travel specifically.

A story about Diné Time Travellers.... snow storms.... Sacred Mountains.... and the Time Machines that are found there.

It's a story about my family and how their unconditional support helps me to stand in slipstreams and open portals.

### ***Sis Naajini***

Morning darkness fills the air.... the moments before folding darkness transforms into dawn. We are in what is now known as Alamosa, Colorado about to drive to *Sis Naajini*, the Eastern Sacred Mountain. We drove up the night before from our home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is so early that the frigid morning air is in stark contrast to our breath.... which is creating a little steam room behind our masks. The global Covid-19 pandemic has made masks our norm. Masks are our astronaut gear, protecting us as we travel to the four Navajo Sacred Mountains to document my mirror mylar installation on the Land with a 360° camera for my final thesis project (see Appendix A for 360 video links). I am travelling with my brother, Hayden, my mom, Mary, my dad, Joe, and our two dogs, Bear and Shushy. Along with us, are 4 stencils of Diné Time Travellers that I designed, and hand-cut out of mirror mylar, each one 3.5 ft x 5.5 ft. Mirror mylar is a time



Figure 3: Nicole and Hayden holding their Diné Time Traveller portraits at Sis Naajini, 2021.

travelling material.... A highly reflective, strong, ephemeral type of plastic sheet. It glitters like the Glittering World around us, the 4<sup>th</sup> world in Diné Creation Stories (Yazzie 17), the world we live in now....

Mirror mylar bounces light into slipstreams....

swirling together reflections of sky, Land, and body....

bending the world(s) around us with the slightest movement....

These mirror mylar portraits of Diné Time Travellers are based on my brother, my mom, my aunty Faith, and *Nááts'íílid*—the Time Travelling version of myself. Two sets of siblings. Two sets of Time Travellers.... Much like the Twins, *Naayéé' Neezghání* (Monster Slayer) and *Tó Bájísh Chíní* (Child Born of Water), the sons of Changing Woman from Diné Creation Stories. Each portrait is hung from a wooden, painted lightning bolt built by my brother and I. The Twins travel by lightning, and we would need it for our journey too.

*Nááts'íílid* must have been right there with us that early morning, as we drove to the foot of *Sis Naajini*, the Eastern Sacred Mountain. Monumental clouds sat atop the mountain peaks and plains of snow-covered dirt, rocks, and tiny cacti stretched out all around the base of the mountain. We were dressed for the occasion, wearing clothes to attend the futuristic ceremony we were creating. Our cheeks glittered with silver sparkles, reminding us that we are of the Glittering World....

We were going to open a portal.... maybe to time travel.... maybe for stories to time travel to us.... We wanted to visit with the Diné Time Travellers we brought with us, made of mirror mylar, light, wind, and a bit of ceremony and prayer. I wanted to bring my work to the mountains. The Sacred Mountains. To the *Diyin Dine'é* (Holy People). To *Nááts'íílid*.... To

Dawn Boy.<sup>1</sup> To let them know, what I make, I make for them and for all Diné people. My work is for my family—who are my support structure, my *hogan*. We would be creating a *hogan* on the mountain. The walls of this *hogan* made from four mirror mylar stencils and four of our own bodies. Four Diné Time Travellers.... Four Earth-Surface people.... Eight sides in all.

Our vehicles traversed the mountain until we found a little clearing partway up. The “road” became unpassable after a point. Before we began, we had to alert the mountain to our presence. We found two rocks that created a doorway into the clearing we would be using. We entered through the door and my mom led a procession around the space, opening it up. Clockwise. We introduced ourselves to the mountain. Said the “Sacred Mountain Prayer.” We blessed the 4 directions—east, south, west, north—with corn pollen.... We said *yá’át’ééh* to the *Diyin Dine’é* (Holy People). Told them why we were there. Once the space was open, we could begin. This was done at each of the following Sacred Mountains as well. It had to be done before we could take out the mirror mylar stencils of the Diné Time Travellers.

There’s a misconception that you time travel all alone.... That there’s only ever room for one person in a time machine. When you ask the mountain to open a portal through time.... through story.... through the Land.... you don’t do it alone. Your support system gives you the necessary strength, holds you up, so the portal doesn’t consume you. Time Travellers must work in pairs (or more) if they are to navigate the slipstreams of temporal realities. The Twins taught me that.

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn Boy helped my ancestor *Asdzáq Anilí* on her journey home to *Dinétaah* when escaping from the Long Walk in the 1860’s. See Appendix B to read *Asdzáq Anilí’s* story.



As we unpacked the four mirror mylar stencils, the sun started peaking over the clouds that were sitting atop the mountain. We brought them into the cleared space we had created. The Diné Time Travellers were attached to the wooden lightning bolts, so we could hold them up, so they could stand, dance, sway, and glitter alongside us. As soon as the Diné Time Travellers emerged.... the wind picked up. I think the mountain was welcoming us.... the energy swirling and peaking around us.

My mom, dad, brother and I each held up a Diné Time Traveller between us. Standing in a circle, we created the 8 walls of a *hogan*. My family is my *hogan*. They are the support system that helps me thrive, that sustains me, that spoils me with unconditional love. There is no one else I could have opened this portal with. There is no one else who could have held me together as the wind picked up to such extremes that morning that the Diné Time Traveller's portraits started shredding in the wind. The mirror mylar tore with each gust as we stood there in our *hogan* on the mountain.



Figure 4: 360 video still at Sis Naajini, the Eastern Sacred Mountain, 2021.

But we remained.... we laughed.... we held the stencils high and let them ripple in the wind. They were tearing, but not being destroyed. The wind is a powerful force and that morning was a strong reminder of that fact.

We felt that power. The strength of the wind.... the beauty of the mountain.... the sun beams shining on us through the clouds.... I felt transported. The Diné Time Travellers glittering reflections of the world around us, their shadows dancing on the dirt beneath our feet. In the midst of the wind, I prayed for a moment of breath, of calm.... And the mountain listened. For the shortest time, or maybe the longest time.... the wind calmed and we stood in awe.... just smiling at one another, at the Diné Time Travellers between us....

What stories came to the surface that morning?

What energies did the wind bring into our bodies and breath out through our laughter?

*The Land is a Time Machine....*

It holds so many of our stories upon and deep within its soil. When we stood at the foot of *Sis Naajini* we were standing at the feet of a living, breathing story. The Land holds our Creation Stories in its breath.... Being there we visited with that breath, shared that breath. The stories are in the Land and when we stood on that sacred soil the stories woke up.... became alive again.

As I rolled up the Diné Time Travellers.... I saw the extent of the damage. They were torn all over.... and I couldn't stop the tears from streaming down my face. We lovingly put them away, but I felt devastated by the wreckage made by the wind.

I was in awe at the experience of the first mountain. It had not been what I planned or expected. The elation was just as profound as the sorrow. I thought my project could not



continue because the damage was too great to my installation/Time Machine/*hogan*. I thought it was over. My family wouldn't let me give up. We got some pancakes at IHOP and decided to travel to the next Sacred Mountain, *Dibé Ntsaa*. The Northern Sacred Mountain, Black Jet Mountain.

To get there we had to travel through a wicked snow storm across the Rocky Mountains. In two cars, we separated. Hayden took the smaller, better winter-equipped car across Wolf Creek Pass to get to our little cabin in Pagosa Springs for the night.

My mom, dad, and I decided to take our RV down south to cross at a smaller mountain pass. On the way we saw two eagles, sitting in a tree. My mom said they were *Chei* and *Misán*, looking out for us. I think they were too.... The remainder of the trip was all consuming, stressful, snow-packed and icy. There was no time to even think about the damaged stencils. We were just trying to survive the journey.

After trying and failing to cross the more southern mountain pass, we turned around and drove further south to try another pass. We only benefitted from sanded and cleared roads for half the crossing, the second half a treacherous white-knuckle experience. Eventually, we made it safely to our cabin in Pagosa Springs. Exhausted, stressed, and burnt out. A trip that should have taken us 1.5 hours to do, had taken us 9 hours. But we were alive. I imagine space travel and time travel must be equally, if not more so, terrifying.

It was at this point I really started to grieve for my project. I thought there was no hope of remaking the stencils for the next day's journey to the mountain. My thesis project was

ripped and in tatters.... But my dad, a fellow lover of all things sci-fi, would not let me give up. He reminded me that in all the sci-fi books and shows that influence me.... that help me to dream about space, and alternate universes, and other worlds.... had a major lesson that I needed to learn. In those stories, when those characters travel through space in their ships, they often take a lot of damage. Warp cores go offline. Time machines break. Portals are destroyed and the characters never give up. They fix their ships. They fix their time machines. They fix their portals. How could I



*Figure 5: My dad helping me to repair my damaged mirror mylar stencils, 2021.*

expect time travel to be so easy? To be perfect? To be pristine. Time travel is a dangerous business, and damage and repair is integral to the process....

We stayed up late into the night repairing the stencils with clear strong tape. Each one we combed over, looking for tears, patching them, and carefully packing them away for the next day's journey.

### **Dibé Ntsaa**

The storm raged on through the night and the next morning, we awoke to another foot and a half of snow. We decided to get some chains (just in case) and travelled on to the foothills of the next Sacred Mountain, *Dibé Ntsaa*. The snow joined us for the entire journey. Falling heavily, then lightly, then blizzardly. There was wet.... sleeting snow.... corn snow.... giant lazy snowflakes....

We arrived at the foothills of the mountain after continuing our journey for two more hours. Going up the mountain in the storm was too dangerous, so we found a small road and turned off. Pretty quickly we realized we couldn't go too far down this road because it was too icy. As if on cue, we began turning around and slid into a ditch. Thank the HOLY PEOPLE we got chains that morning because we had to use them to maneuver the RV out of the ditch. Snow kept falling in big fluffy flakes.... we realized we had gotten stuck next to the perfect clearing. There was an open field just down from the road with a winter stream meandering through. I knew this was the place. This was the place for the next portal....

We unpacked the stencils and trekked down through 3 feet of snow into this little clearing. My mom and I opened the space with a prayer, corn pollen, and a procession circling the space. Clockwise. My family, as brave, as loving, as wonderful as ever, held up the Diné Time Travellers again. In a circle.... our *hogan*.... next to me.... we prayed together, we laughed together.... We remained committed to our path.... to my project. If that is not love, I don't know what is.



Figure 6: 360 video still at Dibé Ntsaa, the Northern Sacred Mountain, 2021.

Holding the Diné Time Travellers up high, we started moving in a circle. Snowflakes glittered off the stencils, reflecting the light, and one another, and the world and earth around us. The Diné Time Travellers felt alive.... Breathing.... Enjoying the beauty of the snow as much as we were. The wind was calm this time, leaving the snow to interact with the Diné Time Travellers. Snowflakes coated our hoods, shoulders and the stencils as we moved.

My mom and I closed the portal after saying goodbye to the Diné Time Travellers. We cleared the energy with a prayer, corn pollen, and a walk around the space. Clockwise.

Afterwards we played in the snow. The dogs, who had joined us on this journey, bounding through it as well. The energy in the clearing, although now closed up, was still electric. I wonder how long those resonances will last in that place.... the Land.... the snow.... held us that afternoon. Let us have this moment of euphoria. I think the Diné Time Travellers were there playing with us too.... they must have been.



## Home

The next portal was at our home in Santa Fe on the traditional territories of the Tewa people. Land that has held me for a majority of my life. We took the Diné Time Travellers out under the light of the full moon in February. My mom and I again opened the space with a prayer, corn pollen, and a circular procession. Clockwise. The moon was so bright it cast shadows on the ground. I attached LED lights to the wooden lightning beams and they glowed warm white light under the stars. The Diné Time Travellers were so happy. Shimmering with light and reflecting the folding darkness that surrounded us.... and our moonlit *hogan*.... We set the LEDs to glow in various colours and we had a dance party.

Shaking.... bouncing.... swaying.... We laughed and didn't want to say goodbye. Eventually our arms tired and we carefully walked them back inside, to rest upon our kitchen table, but this wasn't until all of us were ready. We closed the portal under the moonlight.

My mom had a vision that night, outside her bedroom window, in the world(s) between dreams and waking. As she looked outside, glowing orbs of light sparkled and slowly travelled away into the darkness. She said it was the Diné Time Travellers saying goodbye.



Figure 7:360 video still at my home, on Tewa Territory (Santa Fe, NM), during the full moon, 2021..

### **Dook'o'osłííd**

The final trip we made was to *Dook'o'osłííd* in the west and *Tsoodzil* in the south. We drove all day to get to *Dook'o'osłííd* by sunset, 7 hours on the road. Mom read the Creation Stories of the four Sacred Mountains from *Navajo History* by Ethelou Yazzie (1971) while we drove. How the mountains were fastened to the earth with lightning, a stone knife, a



sunbeam, and a rainbow.... How the mountains travelled from previous worlds to be with us in the Glittering World....

When we arrived at *Dook'o'osłííd* in the west, we found a spot on the mountain surrounded by towering Ponderosa pine trees with patches of snow on the ground. The day was crystal blue.... not a cloud in the sky as yellow twilight began peaking from behind the mountain.... We opened the space in the same way as the previous mountains. A prayer, corn pollen and a circular procession. Clockwise. We opened two portals there. One in the snow and one in a grove of trees. The Diné Time Travellers wanted to lay on the ground for this one and we let them rest for a while on the snow.... on the Land.... Resting as an act of care.... The colours of the sunset reflected off the mylar, creating a rainbow of colour and light. The world(s) around us, at each Sacred Mountain, collaborated with the Diné Time Travellers, with us, to create our *hogan*. These different environments reflected off the mirror mylar, so that each portal had such a distinct aesthetic, feeling, and energy.



Figure 8: 360 video still at *Dook'o'osłííd*, the Western Sacred Mountain, 2021.



*Tsoodzil* was the last mountain we travelled to in the south. My mom said the Land around this mountain reminded her of the stories of the Twins, Monster Slayer and Child Born of Water, and the monsters they slayed to protect the Navajo in the early times. I could feel those stories all around us.... We could almost hear my *chei* telling the stories as we drove up to the mountain....

We followed a dirt road upwards, until mud and snow stopped our ascent. The mountain creating a barrier to the top. We found a spectacular little clearing on the side of the mountain, in the afternoon, amongst towering pine trees. The snow at this place was deep, with patches of mud, and bright sunlight.

We brought the dogs with us again, Bear and Shushy. They had travelled with us on all previous trips, so we wanted them to be part of the portal opening this time. Again, we opened the space with a prayer, corn pollen, and a procession around the area. Clockwise. The Diné Time Travellers came out to be with us on the mountain. They swayed in the light breeze.... casting shadows on the ground.... reflecting bright, blinding sun beams on our laughing faces. We laughed so much at each Sacred Mountain.

The portraits of the Diné Time Travellers were elusive, coming into focus as the wind shifted, and just as quickly vanishing when sunlight blinded us. By nature, they are fluid, constantly moving, shifting. Each Diné Time Traveller blended in with the world(s) around us.... They reflected the world(s) around us.... both seen and unseen.... Before saying goodbye, for the last time on this journey, we danced with them.... we said prayers to the mountains.... to the *Diyin Dine'é* (Holy People).... to the cosmos and to the Land.





Figure 9: 360 video still at Tsoodzít, the Southern Sacred Mountain, 2021.

Portals take a lot of energy to open. That's why you do it with family.

When they are open.... they are so breathtakingly beautiful it can be overwhelming....

They are often not what you would expect.

They are activated by love.... by wind, snow, rainbow sunsets, and sunbeams....

and most importantly, by laughter.





## **In the West.... Yellow Evening Sunset**

*A fire breathes life and heat into the hogan,  
creating a womb-like space for us to talk.*

*This celestial hogan has walls made up of stars with a floor of clouds....  
coated in rugs woven of the finest red earth.*

*It feels like the L A N D B A C K home, in Round Rock, only softer, warmer.  
The center, the hearth, holds a glowing ember flame sitting in a rainbow basket.*

*The flame is the colour of sunsets at*

*Dook'o'ooskíid, Abalone Shell Mountain.*

*Lightning lights up the sky outside the east facing front door.  
Rain falls in sheets on the sun beam roof.*

*You laid down a hand-spun Tree of Life weaving.  
I always loved the multicoloured bluebirds that surround the cornstalk in those rugs.*

*You say this will hold me in temporal sync during our visit.  
You always do this.*

*It's a new rug every time.  
A new universe to ground me and our discussions.*

*Nááts'íilid wanted me to visit her and how could I refuse?*

## Conversations with *Nááts'íílid*



Figure 10: Nááts'íílid basking in Dook'o'oslíid's sunset, (detail of mirror mylar stencil), 2021.

The following are edited segments of conversations that happened over many moving space times, in many shifting locations, and realities around *Dinétah* and beyond. They are organized by topic area for ease of reading and clarity.

### **Indigenous Futurisms**

*The smell of coffee permeates the air. We are inside Nááts'íílid's hogan. I pour 2 cups of coffee.*

*Cream and sugar in mine, black for yours. I join you at the wooden table. The thick plastic tablecloth is covered in bluebirds and patched in places with silver tape.*

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: I prefer the term Diné Futurisms.

NICOLE: I like this term too. It is more aligned with my thinking and making. Linking to the larger field of Indigenous Futurisms puts me in relationality with those scholars, thinkers and makers, though. Primary among them would be Dr. Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) who coined the term Indigenous Futurisms in her 2012 book, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. Indigenous Futurisms has become such a vibrant, thriving space. Indigenous academics, writers, and artists draw from their Indigeneity to envision possible futures, dream about alternate realities, reimagine histories, and tell Indigenous stories.

The possibilities in this field are endless. I would love to think alongside<sup>2</sup> you about Indigenous Futurisms.... Diné Futurisms.... because it helps me to hold up the knowledges that have come before me.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: I'd be happy to dream alongside you.... The Glittering World is starting to show you its full colours.

NICOLE: Our *shimá*, Mary Roessel, pointed out that I must be drawn to mirror mylar as a material, because it glitters like the Glittering World around us.... She is the heart of my practice.... alongside our *misán*, Ruth Roessel....

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Matriarchs guiding you.... us.... me.... through the cosmos. She's helped you open many portals recently.

NICOLE: She has. The first portal I opened was my Diné Basket Portal. What I didn't realize at the time is that it was a portal into Indigenous Futurisms.... a portal to you, *Nááts'íílid*.... It was made of mirror mylar, light, and red sand. The porous walls, a 13.7 ft by 4 ft hand-cut mirror mylar stencil, re-created this ephemeral Diné ceremonial basket.

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<sup>2</sup> This notion of thinking alongside someone, supporting their thoughts, contributing and bouncing ideas off one another was shared with me by Karyn Recollet, a Cree academic and Indigenous Futurist.



Figure 11: Diné Basket Portal, 1st iteration. OCAD University, 2019.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: It was a pocket of Diné Time.... of Diné story.... of Diné world(s).... I loved the second iteration of that installation because you gathered earth from our home, Round Rock, AZ as the base of the portal.

NICOLE: Presencing the Land in the gallery space was an important shift from the red sand I used in the first iteration. By using earth from Round Rock, I had incorporated another story into the work. The basket designs held our Creation Stories and the earth held the story of me and my cousin, Sam, collecting the sand from Mars<sup>3</sup>.... The portal *set in motion*<sup>4</sup>.... a space.... a time.... where Ancestors and Creation Stories came into temporal sync with our present....

<sup>3</sup> Mars is the colloquial term of the area surrounding Round Rock, AZ. The earth is so red there, it looks like a Martian landscape.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase is in reference to a poem by Leslie Marmon Silko, a novelist and poet from Laguna Pueblo, in her book *Ceremony* (1997). This phrase has since stuck with me, speaking about actions and visions that set realities into existence. A link to the poem can be found here: <http://cult320.onmason.com/files/2012/08/Ceremony-excerpt.pdf>



NÁÁTS'ÍLID: You also created a physical manifestation of your/our own emergence as a Time Traveller.... You brought our ancestors *and* Diné Time Travellers into the room when you installed that portal.... you just didn't know how to speak to them yet. I am grateful to Peter Morin for reminding you to close the portal.... These can be unwieldy technologies if not treated with the utmost respect.

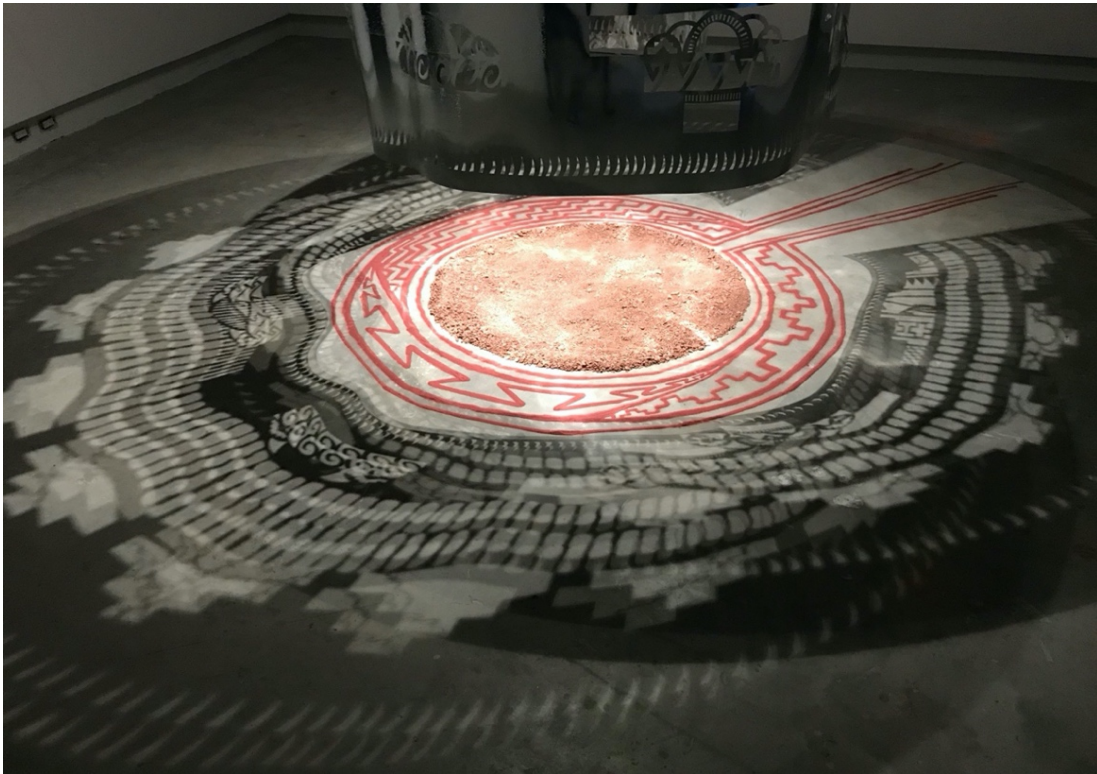


Figure 12: Diné Basket Portal, 2nd iteration for the Constellations of Kin Exhibition, curated by Eli Hirtle for the ImagineNative Film Festival, 2020.

NICOLE: That was a dreaming portal into Indigenous Futurisms.... It helped me open my mind to the possibilities of Diné storytelling, Diné conceptions of time, Time Travelling Matriarchs, portals and slipstreams....

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Slipstreaming through Diné Temporalities....

NICOLE: Native slipstream is one of the five pillars of Indigenous Futurisms that Grace Dillon outlined in *Walking the Clouds*. The other four are Contact, Indigenous Science and Sustainability, Native Apocalypse, and *Biskaabiiyang*—"Returning to Ourselves." There are

elements of the other pillars that resonate with my work, but slipstream has become a theoretical backbone. Dillon says,

“Native slipstream, a species of speculative fiction within the [science fiction] realm, infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities and multiverses, and alternative histories. As its name implies, Native slipstream views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time.” (3)

This visual description of a slipstream really stuck with me, and I’ve been transforming my thinking around it ever since.

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: Slipstreams are a way to build worlds outside of linear time. Outside of colonial realities.... Inside of Diné existence....

NICOLE: Yes! A significant part of Indigenous Futurisms as a theory is about this process of Indigenous world building outside of and separate from colonial realities.... It is a way to dream out of oppressive systems.... a way to resist erasure and assimilation.... it can be a radical form of decolonization and resurgence in the same breath....

As Sandra D. Styres (Mohawk) says, “Decolonization is an unsettling process of shifting and unravelling the tangled colonial relations of power and privilege” (36). Indigenous Futurisms gives me a framework that allows me to decolonize this tangled web of coloniality around me.... And re-connect (Smith 149) stronger than before with my Diné identity.... Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K. Yang’s view of decolonization in “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” is just as pertinent in this discussion. Decolonization cannot be a metaphor. It has to involve the repatriation of Land to Indigenous peoples “simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is *all* of the land, and not just symbolically” (7).

These decolonial futures, alternate realities, rewritten histories, and other temporalities that are integral to Indigenous Futurisms, is the active dreaming of decolonial futures. We must

dream it in order to *set it in motion....* Afterall, "Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous Sovereignty and futurity" (Tuck and Yang 35).

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Diné Futurisms is an avenue.... a slipstream.... that allows us to dream about liberation and make it real. You have used Diné stories to do this dreaming and thinking work.

NICOLE: Lou Cornum, a fellow Diné Futurist, said it so eloquently, "Stories are a technology we use to guide us through the chaos of overlapping times and spaces. Indigenous Futurism is about honing our technologies to the most liberating ends" (Cornum, "Creation Story is a Spaceship"). Liberation has always felt really integral to Indigenous Futurisms.... especially when you consider this lineage of thought and creation stems from Afrofuturism.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Afrofuturist matriarchs were some of my first teachers. Alongside Diné Time Travellers, they taught me how to swim through slipstreams.... dream new worlds into existence.... and communicate with my ancestors and descendants....

NICOLE: Krystal Paraboo (Afro-Jamaican, Indo-Guianese, Euro-Portuguese) did this excellent talk on Afrofuturism. In her introduction she said, "Afrofuturism, in essence, evaluates the past and future to create better conditions for the present generation of Black people. This is done through the use of technology, and it's often presented through various forms of art, music, literature, but essentially it's an aesthetic and philosophical reimagining of futures full of arts, full of sciences and technology and most importantly it's told through a Black lens" (Paraboo 00:40 – 01:08). She talks about Afrofuturism's aim to reconstruct Black identity within a framework of Black Culture that is created, dreamed, and articulated by Black people.... for Black people....

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: And does she mention Octavia Butler,<sup>5</sup> the mother of Afrofuturism?

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<sup>5</sup> Octavia Butler (1947 – 2006) was a renowned African American author from the earth-surface world, who wrote Afro-futuristic, feminist dystopian novels that explored many of the founding themes of Afrofuturism.

NICOLE: Yes! She mentioned how many of her science fiction novels were forms of Afrofuturism and went on to clarify a really important point. Afrofuturism, and in my perspective, Indigenous Futurism as well, cannot be lumped into the field of sci-fi.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Sci-fi's colonial history shapes its identity and articulation out in the world. It was Nalo Hopkinson<sup>6</sup> who said "Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives... for many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere" (7). Black and Indigenous peoples are survivors of apocalypse.... We learned how to transform our realities.... re-connect to our ancestors.... dream about our descendants.... and centre our knowledges to rebuild and thrive again.

NICOLE: Truly survivors of apocalypse.... That quote gets to the core of how problematic sci-fi is and has been in the past. The great irony is that sci-fi has this colonial history, and it is also a field full of progressive ideologies and possible futures that can be in stark contrast to the realities we live in today. Grace Dillon points out that sci-fi has the powerful ability to create a sense of self-awareness in the reader, to see elements of their current realities projected as possible futures ("Miindiwag" 221). But as Blaire Topash-Caldwell (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi) said so well, "Science fiction...is still riddled with racist rhetoric, erasure of Indigenous peoples, and limited conceptions of the future due to its reliance on a singular knowledge system: Western empiricism" (86).

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Sci-fi has long been a roadmap for colonial futures.... It has shaped the aesthetic of the future and in doing so has contributed to a dominant settler imaginary that thrives on exploration, extraction, violence, and displacement.

NICOLE: Exactly, and it is so important for me to be aware of the history. Sci-fi has roots to the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment Era, and the Slave Trade Era (Paraboo 02:16 – 02:31).

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<sup>6</sup> Nalo Hopkinson is a Jamaican-born speculative fiction writer from the earth-surface world.



It is a field that has been dominated by Eurocentric, cisgender, heterosexual white men who have only dreamt about the future from their own knowledge systems and actively, violently, excluded or appropriated BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) knowledges. Knowing this history helps me to see Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism as radical acts of resistance to these colonial futures. Resistance centered around liberation is what truly unites Indigenous and Afrofuturism. And I think it's important to speak a bit more about the history of Afrofuturism, if you don't mind?

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: I was hoping you would.

NICOLE: Mark Dery coined the term in 1993, but Afrofuturism has a much longer history. Paraboo contextualizes this history so well, saying Afrofuturism was a direct response to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, scientific racism such as Eugenics, White Supremacy, and western science itself. For over 500 years, African peoples were stolen, dehumanized, and treated as commodities by Europeans to build the western world. As time went on and generations were further disconnected from their African roots, Pan-African movements began growing. Afrofuturism was one of these movements that aimed at reimagining a future that reconnected with their African roots, free of enslavement, free of White Supremacy (Paraboo 02:30 – 04:03). It was a radical act of liberation.... of freedom.... Afrofuturism was and still is, a portal for generations of Black peoples....

Her talk deeply affected me and helped me to understand the learning I still have to do to support Black folks in the struggle for liberation.... Black Lives Matter no matter what world(s) we're on....

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: *Black Lives Matter no matter what world(s) we're on....* Across time, space, and slipstream....

NICOLE: I was reading a short story called "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls" by Kai Minosh Pyle (Métis, Ojibwe). The main character was speaking about Afrofuturism and said

this, “the Afrofuturists imagined the future, but not just any future. They imagined ways that they could get free, ways they could hold their ancestors and descendants in the same hands” (Pyle 79).

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: *In the same hands....* such a lovely expression of care.

NICOLE: and such a powerful visual to hold in my mind....

.... would you like another cup of coffee?

*Nááts’ílid nods. I walk over to the old drip coffee maker, glass stained with use. I refill our cups. Mine is chipped at the top, an illustration of coyote wearing an orange bandana in front of a red mesa with the name Ruth printed at the bottom. Nááts’ílid’s is white, with the Diné College logo on it.*

*I grab some blue corn cookies on the way back.*

*We take a moment to have a few sips.*

*Sitting in silence....*

*Breathing....*

NICOLE: Holding my ancestors and descendants in the same hands is something I have learned how to do better through my learnings from Indigenous artists like Peter Morin (Tahltan), Skawennati (Mohawk), Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo), Ryan Singer (Diné) and academics: Dr. Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe), Dr. Amber Hickey, Chelsea Herr (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma), Karyn Recollet (Cree), Dr. Suzanne N Fricke, Jason Edward Lewis (Kanaka Maoli, Samoan, Cherokee) and Lou Cornum (Diné).

It’s important to name them. And there are others who are unnamed here.... They have all given me so much.... new ways to dream.... and many of them don’t even know it!

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: How do you see yourself in relationality to them?

NICOLE: I feel inspired by them.... Inspired to push myself to dream and imagine what could be.... Skawennati and Jason Edward Lewis' work through the Initiative for Indigenous Futures (IIF) and Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) were the first people I found in this field. Their drive to envision Indigenous peoples and communities in the future, engaging in technological and virtual worlds, opened my mind to the possibilities. Jason Edward Lewis made this important point about Indigenous peoples in the future,

"Our absence from the future imaginaries of the settler culture should worry us.

Absence implies non-existence, or, at the very least, non-importance. A people that are absent in the future need not be consulted in the present about how that future comes about." (qtd. in Hickey pp165-66)

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Future thinking is such a radical act of decolonial practice for Indigenous peoples and communities. We've endured genocide, colonization, assimilationist policies that all aimed at us not having a future.... And yet, here we are.... here we will be.

NICOLE: We will thrive beyond our wildest dreams in the future! Skawennati's *machinimas*<sup>7</sup> *TimeTraveller*™ and *She Falls For Ages* have been influential works in my practice as well. The series *TimeTraveller*™ is about Hunter, a Mohawk man from the future year 2121, and Karahkwenhawi, a Mohawk woman from 2011, who both travel through time to visit historical occurrences with their *TimeTraveller*™ glasses. This technology allows them to experience multiple temporalities and live through Indigenous histories.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: I wish I had a pair of those. I probably would have started time travelling when I was a lot younger.

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<sup>7</sup> A *machinima* is a movie made in a virtual environment. These works are built and filmed in the interactive multi-player platform game Second Life.

NICOLE: If you ever find a pair, grab one for me too. This work is great because it “contributes to the re-envisioning of Indigenous histories, imagining Indigenous futurity, and consider[s] how time travel might be a tool of creative resistance” (Hickey 167). The series taught me a way to make time slippery.... fluid.... and circular.... through story.

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: *She Falls for Ages* is my favourite *machinima*. It is described as a sci-fi retelling of a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Creation Story, but it is more than a retelling. Reality shifted when she made that work.... I can see it has greatly influenced your own practice as well.

NICOLE: Skawennati’s storytelling created space for me to follow in her footsteps and dream new realities into existence alongside her. She reimagined this Haudenosaunee Creation Story and created a temporal loop between past, present, and future through story. Watching this work taught me how to do the same. Telling Diné Creation Stories, coyote stories, and histories is central to my own practice. In doing so I am thinking about these stories in new ways.... different ways.... futuristic ways.... timeless ways.... open ways....

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: This is the heart of Ancestor Artists<sup>8</sup>....

This is the heart of resurgence work....

This is the heart of the Land....

This is the heart of Diné Time Travellers....

NICOLE: This is my heart too.... Telling these stories, travelling through time, and doing this dream work is something Indigenous people already do in our cultures and Oral Traditions. I’m reminded of something Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) said in an interview with Jarrett Martineau (nêhiyaw, Dene Sųłiné),

“Our old stories have always talked about the future and the past at the same time.

They’ve always co-inhabited the spiritual real, the birthright of the storyteller has always

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<sup>8</sup> Ancestor Artists is a term taught to me by my primary supervisor, Peter Morin from the Tahltan Nation. I am grateful for the way this term has influenced my thinking and brought my Ancestor Artists into my consciousness while doing this work. *Ahéhee’* Peter.

been to make the stories that come through them relevant to the current generation. A lot of what science fiction deals with—parallel universes, time travel, space travel, and technology is what our traditional stories also deal with.” (qtd. in Martineau 106)

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: Our stories naturally do what Indigenous Futurisms calls upon them to do....

NICOLE: This is why Indigenous Futurisms is a grounding theory in my practice, alongside *Sa’qh Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón*. Indigenous Futurisms as a theoretical framework, holds many of the methodologies I am engaging with. Methodologies such as, slipstreaming, time travel, storytelling, and dreaming. These guide me in my writing, thinking, and making.

Why are you making that face?

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: I don’t think we need to use these colonial terminologies to understand things that are so innate to our being, to our worldview, and our understanding of reality.

NICOLE: You are right. I engage in this struggle to exist in this colonial world surrounding me by using their language, by following (some of) their rules. Indigenous Futurisms helps me to find flight paths out of settler colonialism.

As Leanne Simpson says so eloquently, “My flight to escape colonial reality was a flight into *Nishnaabewin*. It was a returning, in the present, to myself. It was an unfolding of a different present. It was freedom as a way of being as a constellation of relationship, freedom as world making, freedom as a practice. It was *biiskabiyang*” (Simpson 18). As you’ll remember, *Biiskabiyang* is also one of the 5 pillars of Indigenous Futurism.

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: This flight to escape colonial reality is a flight into *Dinétaah*.... A flight to visit with your ancestors, descendants, and Diné Time Travellers in the same breath.... In each installation you create, you learn alongside them how to dream worlds into existence.

NICOLE: Time is an important part of this world dreaming.... world building process. Amber Hickey's article, "Rupturing Settler Time: Visual Culture and Geographies of Indigenous Futurity" has been particularly profound in thinking about returning to Diné Time. In one quote she says,

"The return of time means a resurgence of ways of thinking about and experiencing time that stand up to temporal divisions enforced by colonial and capitalist norms. It means an embracing of slow, overlapping, and spiraling time. It means returns, renewals, and resurgences. Perhaps attuning ourselves to othered temporal realities evident in the work of Indigenous artists and activists may lead us toward decolonial realities that are both spatially and temporally decolonized." (Hickey 177)

Radically shifting and untangling our relationship to linear time and rematriating Indigenous temporalities is a powerful way to dream about the worlds we want to inhabit....

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: The quote I love most is the one that got you thinking about me.... to think that I could exist.

NICOLE: "Indigenous understandings of temporality are often not clearly linear—they may be spiraling, slipstreaming, or rhizomatic. If time is layered (or spiraling, or slipstreaming, or rhizomatic) rather than linear, perhaps we can think of all creative resistance happening at once and in alliance. Perhaps those who desire a decolonized future can travel through time to consult with movement makers of the past" (Hickey 166). I love this quote too. It aligns so well with my work and the work of Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo), who has also influenced me to connect with Diné Time Travellers.

His *Revolt 1680/2180* series really taught me how to push the limits of world building and storytelling grounded in Indigenous history and time. The work tells the history of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt in New Mexico and its reoccurrence in 2180 on a futuristic planet. He uses traditional pottery, photography, videography, and fashion to reveal pieces of the story. Each building upon what has come before. He has characters who travel through time, guiding people in each revolt and characters whose actions affect events in both eras. Time is so fluid in his story.... not linear.... but truly spiralling and rhizomatic.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: I can see how these influences supported you on your journey to visiting with me and my fellow Diné Time Travellers on the Sacred Mountains.... I'd love to chat with you more about this, but can we visit again another time? There is so much to say and the night is growing deeper.



*Figure 13: Mirror mylar stencil design of Diné Time Traveller, Whiteshell (my mom), 2021.*

### *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón—Diné Theory*

*Today it is bright out. The sun is hot and straight above the hogan we're in. Today, we drink iced tea instead of coffee, the tall glasses sweating beads of water in our hands. A fan is blowing cool air over my face, giving me goosebumps. We're sitting on the sheepskins this time. My legs crossed on the floor and back leaning against the pillows and cushions lining the wall. Sunbeams are diffused by the sheer turquoise curtains hanging from the windows.*

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: I see you are grounding your work in *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH). This is a great thing to do. Connecting deeply with these teachings can only strengthen who you are as a Diné person. These learnings are a journey. Practicing the concepts inherent in *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* helps to move away from linearity of thought.... Reciprocity and relationality as daily practice....

NICOLE: *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* has been transformational in my thinking and making processes. When I first wrote about it in my thesis proposal, I had not understood the weight of what I was going to begin re-searching, re-connecting with.... Miranda Haskie, a Diné scholar, said so eloquently,

“SNBH is so powerful that when people ‘follow the path of SNBH, the natural teaching,’ we understand ‘the depth of our life’... SNBH ‘represents the Diné traditional system of values and beliefs that provide teaching and learning of human existence in harmony with the natural world.’” (qtd. in Lee 36)

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Two pathways converge in *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*.... The *Sa'qh Naaghái* path, which is the protection way teachings and the *Bik'eh Hózhóón* path which is to live in *hózhó*.... in balance.... with health, happiness, and well-being. It also involves *K'é*.... which is living in proper relationship with the Land, plants, animals, and peoples around us. These teachings are held in the Sacred Mountains....

The Sacred Mountains were created in this world. They are the original *hogan* of the Diné.... They hold directional teachings about East, South, West, and North. The Mountains also hold



teachings about the interrelation of genders, the elements—like rain, wind, sun beams, rainbows, lightning—and how to live in harmony within these cycles of nature.... (“Yíní Náálzhooł Bee Ahít Láá’joolchííł”).<sup>9</sup> The principles of interconnection the Mountains teach, are the same principles of living a Diné life.... We have a responsibility to practice relationality, strive toward harmony, not only for ourselves, but for our communities, and the world(s) around us. As Lloyd L. Lee said, “SNBH is tied to multidimensional ways and interconnected realities” (38).

NICOLE: So then, going to the Sacred Mountains with our family was a way of practicing relationality.... And perhaps my work addresses Lee’s point. That as a philosophical matrix, *Sa’qah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* transcends our perceived notions of time and space, and expands through multiple worlds.... The portals we opened acknowledged those other world(s), realities, temporalities....

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: *Sa’qah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* is the core of what it means to be Diné in this world and every world that is above, below, before, behind, and all around us....

NICOLE: I was reading words by Herbert J. Benally, PhD, who stated that the “ancient tribal stories identify the creators of this world as SNBH, and in this concept, lies the sacred and spiritual identity of the Navajo people... SNBH is the very idea from which the universe is constructed. It is the power by which all things are created, organized, and governed. It is the life force of the universe” (qtd. in Nez 33-34).

And so aligned to this idea of a universal life force or energy, is Dr. Wilson Aronilth Jr.’s thoughts on *Sa’qah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón*,

“Aronilth equates SNBH to the water you drink, the food you eat, the air you breathe; it becomes your life and your purpose. SNBH is your prayer and song, showing you why you are here, and where you and future generations are going in the next 100, even 500,

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<sup>9</sup> “Yíní Náálzhooł Bee Ahít Láá’joolchííł” is a mental health project and resource my parents, Mary Roessel, MD, and Joe Neidhardt, MD, put together. In it, they interviewed Navajo Medicine Men: Nevy Jensen, Frank C. Young, and Johnson Dennison. The information from this paragraph comes from this written document.

years. He states that if you lose this, you will be confused. But to know SNBH is simple."  
(qtd. in Nez 32)

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: He also said, "Diné philosophy is alive because it comes from the Holy People"....  
(Aronilth Jr. 76).

NICOLE: Hearing these knowledge holders' explanations of *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóqón* reminds me how personal of a journey it is and how connected we all are. We each live *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóqón* in unique ways.... It is alive and all around us.... *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóqón* was in the corn pollen prayers we offered at the Sacred Mountains....

When I think about *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóqón* in relation to my practice, I look at the concept of *hózhó*<sup>10</sup> which is a part of *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóqón*. *Hózhó* is about living in balance and harmony with the world(s) around me. Living in this colonial world has violently thrown Indigenous communities out of balance. In many ways, we are still just trying to hold on.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: The last time there was this level of disharmony was when the Twins roamed the earth-surface world in the early times, killing monsters that were plaguing the Diné.

NICOLE: There are many new monsters in the here and now we have to deal with—white supremacy, settler colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia. The list goes on. But, the radical joy, love, and care in our communities offers a way forward.... Revitalizing languages, cultural practices, and art is an active rebalancing of the world(s) we live in....

If I use *hózhó* as a form of critical thinking, I actively reflect on balancing/rebalancing my interactions and relationalities with the world around me (Werito 29-30). So, in my arts practice, I am telling Diné stories, uplifting Diné Knowledges, presencing Diné Land, and disrupting colonial futures by dreaming of Diné Futures—Indigenous Futures.... I am re-

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<sup>10</sup> My understanding of *hózhó* comes from my *misán*, Ruth Roessel, my mom, Mary Roessel, and also the writings of Wilson Aronilth Jr., Larry Emerson, and Vincent Werito.

searching to find ways to actively rebalance the colonial landscape that I find myself in by contributing to this resurgence of Diné existence....

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: This reminds me of your short story, *Diné (Love Beyond) Time* (see Appendix C).

NICOLE: Yes, in that story I was thinking through the emergence of a Time Traveller, and the reason they were called upon to do this work was because the world(s) was so out of balance....

My emergence as an artist (and maybe one day a Time Traveller) is in response to my world being so out of balance too. I'm trying to recenter my Indigeneity in a sea of colonial reality. I want to be a series of floating islands of Diné existence that can travel around, but whose heart is always rooted in *Dinétaah*.... In my family.... Living and creating in *hózhó* and walking the Corn Pollen Path.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: The Corn Pollen Path is multidirectional.... multidimensional.... It goes forward, backward, upward, downward.... There are teachings upon teachings I have given you in dreams.... I so look forward to the day you uncover them all. And you know, Time Travellers travel numerous pathways as a way of living in *hózhó* and *Sa'q̓h Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón*.

NICOLE: Is one of these pathways Diné Aesthetics? All these pathways lead me to a returning to Diné story.... Diné design.... Diné Time.... I can reconnect with my Ancestor Artists in the same way I reconnect with Diné Time Travellers. Creating mirror mylar stencils, visiting the Sacred Mountains, opening portals, and talking to Diné Time Travellers.... is a returning to my ancestors.... in a futuristic way.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: *Decolonial Time Thinking*.... We just needed to open our eyes to those realities.

NICOLE: And hold those realities close, because they offer a vision for a way forward. I think that's why this work feels so relevant to me. Dreaming of Indigenous Futures—of Decolonial Futures—actively resists and combats the colonial realities that surround us.... It supports us in

moving into a Decolonial space and time.... I believe with all my heart, soul, and body that we have the power to set these liberatory futures *in motion*....



Figure 14: Mirror mylar stencil design of Diné Time Traveller, Faith (my aunty), 2021.

## **Diné Aesthetics**

*We sit outside the hogan in two folding chairs. The evening air is warm, heat lingering from the day. We're looking out at the mesas. They are fiery red. Deep crimson. The sun is setting behind us and if you look straight up at the fading blue sky, you can see the tiniest twinkle of the stars beginning to emerge for the night. We're drinking Navajo tea. Your favourite.*

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Pathways to.... of .... around .... and below.... Diné Aesthetics. How do you navigate them?

NICOLE: Well, as you taught me.... I first have to envision them.... reach out toward our Ancestor Artists and ask for help to travel them.... The pathways of Diné Aesthetics are in relationality with the world(s) around me and I must not forget that.

I connect Diné Aesthetics with both conscious and unconscious thought.... Using weaving designs, patterns, iconography that my ancestors used is such a powerful thing. What were they thinking when these designs were first created. Time expands and contracts when I cut a step pattern out of mirror mylar....

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: They are weaving on the loom as you are cutting mirror mylar.... They are working there beside you.... Weaving what they see, what they feel, what they were taught by Spider Woman.

NICOLE: I've always felt drawn to Spider Woman. Weaving has been calling to me since I was little. It's in my blood. Spider Woman taught the Navajo how to weave *hózhó*.... She was tasked by the Holy People to weave her pattern of the universe and then teach it to the Diné.... (Pete and Ornelas 10). Since then, weavers have taken the teachings from Spider Woman to weave their own realities into existence. I often feel like I'm weaving, just in a different medium.... I use many different weaving patterns in my mirror mylar stencils of Diné Time Travellers. I especially love horizontal lines and stripes. To me, horizontal lines are the earth, the world(s) around us.... The above world, the earth-surface world, the world(s) below, the world(s)

above.... These bands of land, sky, water.... one floating atop another. *Lines are the meeting of worlds....*

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Our Ancestor Artists exist in this Diné matrix of time, space and relationality. They are not just *in the past....* They come to us through these designs, the Land, and the stars.

NICOLE: Sounds like a *kinstillation*<sup>11</sup>.... A kinstillation of Diné makers, artists, thinkers and their ancestors, descendants, kinship relations.... All of whom are creating in relationality to one another.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: A bringing together of relations across time, space, and cosmos....

NICOLE: Time Travelling Weavers.... It is incredible how one rug holds enough knowledge, story, history, language, emotion to fill an entire PhD dissertation.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Or to fill an entire ocean.

NICOLE: Weavers truly weave entire universes into their designs. I feel a small part of this when I create a portrait of a Diné Time Traveller. Each detail holds so much.... Each pattern a reference.... Each design element a story.... One mirror mylar stencil can hold countless stories within its design. The intentionality I infuse within each piece, makes me feel deeply connected to weavers.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned through my thesis work, is that I have so much more learning to do about Diné Aesthetics. I grew up surrounded by it in my home, but I crave a deeper understanding of each design I work with. There is a lot of responsibility here, as Diné design has been violently appropriated and commodified by outsiders since contact. I hold a

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<sup>11</sup> Kinstillation is a term I learned from Karyn Recollet in a zoom panel talk she did alongside Joseph M. Pierce, Emily Johnson, and Susan Blight for the Pratt Institute on November 20, 2020.



responsibility to the knowledges held within the designs, to my Ancestor Artists who created these designs. Wielding those knowledges without full comprehension is powerful and sometimes scary.... I have to use these designs with as much respect and understanding as I can recover.... uncover.... remember....



*Figure 15: Mirror mylar stencil design of Diné Time Traveller, Hayden (my brother), 2021.*

## **Diné Time**

*I've never seen her hogan this energized. It almost feels like the walls are vibrating ever so slightly. Particles of dust glitter in the air as light from outside pours in through the hole in the center of the roof where the chimney is. She hands me a cup of Navajo tea in my favourite mug, the one with Ruth's name on it.... our misán's name.*

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: So, I heard you wanted to ask me some questions. Some questions about time?

NICOLE: Yes. I've been trying to parse out Diné Time in my thinking and in my installations. I need some help thinking it through because the concept of time is so abstract to me. It feels slippery and often time's so linear it is hard to see another way.

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: Breaking from linearity is a process of decolonization.... Diné Time is like a tortilla.... Remember what Leslie Marmon Silko said?

NICOLE: Ah yes. "For the old-time people, time was not a series of ticks of a clock, one following the other. For the old-time people time was round—like a tortilla; time had specified moments and specific locations so that the beloved ancestors who had passed on were not annihilated by death, but only relocated... All times go on existing side by side for all eternity. No moment is lost or destroyed. There are no future times or past times; there are *always all* the times, which differ slightly, as the locations on the tortilla differ slightly" (qtd. in Dillon, *Walking the Clouds* 26).

NÁÁTS'ÍÍLID: All times exist alongside one another because we are connected in *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*.... That energy that makes up our life, that is the same energy that was around when *chei* and *misán* walked the earth-surface world. That energy is still here, their energy is still here, and all our ancestors' energy is still here, held in the Land.... held in story.... in the wind, the snow, the moon, the sun beams, and the rainbows.... It is not only earth-surface energies that are interconnected, but all realities and temporalities too....

NICOLE: Time moves in circles, and Indigenous Knowledges move in circles too. In *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*, Absolon said, “[Indigenous Knowledge] exists in our visions, dreams, ceremonies, songs, dances and prayers. It is not knowledge that comes solely from books but is lived, experiential and enacted knowledge. It is cyclical and circular and follows the natural laws of Creation” (31).

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: You enacted circular knowledges, circular stories, when you traveled to the four Sacred Mountains with the mirror mylar portraits of me and my fellow Diné Time Travellers. At each portal you opened, you began by walking around the area, clockwise, in a circle. You said a prayer with corn pollen like *Misán* taught us to....

NICOLE: I was practicing *K’é*.... A practice of relationality with the Land.... A commitment to my responsibilities to respect and protect that space. Each Sacred Mountain had such a profound energy.... blessing the four directions with corn pollen, to open and close those portals was so important to working on the Land respectfully.

NÁÁTS’ÍLID: Corn pollen is central to understanding Diné Time. No Diné Time Traveller travels without it. Spider Woman gives us a lesson on why:

*Rub your feet with pollen and rest them.*

*Rub your hands with pollen and rest them.*

*Rub your body with pollen and lie at rest.*

*Rub your head with pollen and put your mind to rest.*

*Then truly your feet become pollen.*

*Your hands become pollen.*

*Your body becomes pollen.*

*Your head becomes pollen.*

*Your spirit will then become pollen.*

*Your voice will then become pollen.*

*All of you is as pollen is.*

*And what pollen is, that is what peace is (Willink and Zolbrod 84).*

NICOLE: Corn pollen is so grounding and liberating at the same time. It supported us on the Land, opening portals, activating Time Machines.... It called the Holy People to us.... It called our ancestors to us.... It called Diné Time Travellers to us....

In talking with *shimá* about corn pollen, she was reminding me that we eat corn pollen while praying in order to have a strong voice, sacred thoughts and be mindful of the present. We put it atop our head to ground us in the present moment.... to be mindful of beauty and our connection to nature. We sprinkle it to the east to ask for a positive journey and a good day. It focuses positive energy into the blessing and prayer.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: This was important work to do before opening a portal and inviting fellow Diné Time Travellers to join us on *Sis Naajiní*, *Tsoodzil*, *Dook'o'oostííd*, and *Dibé Ntsaa*.

NICOLE: It really was. Willink and Zolbrod speak to the energy pollen carries and how it creates a safe pathway forward, "Pollen bears the force and pervasiveness of sunlight and of each individual's indwelling spirit. It represents the power of the wind and the presence of air found everywhere. It clears the trail so a person can proceed safely, making a pathway of progress" (82).

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: The wind was definitely present that day on *Sis Naajiní*. The mountain's breath can be quite strong. And you know, the Land is always singing back to us.... Telling us stories with the breath, the air held within its surface.... This constant storytelling is an energy, an energy infused in every element of creation around us.... *Sa'qh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*.

NICOLE: I learned a word from David Begay in this amazing essay called "Diné Worldview and Futurism: A Holistic Perspective." The word was *at'ch'i'naazlá*, which "articulates the idea that all is related in a state of flux and interaction that takes up time and space with many dimensions in a unified field of energy" (50). This energy, this story that infuses all of creation.... is constantly in motion, in flux. "Everything is in a state or process of becoming" (Begay 51).

The portals we opened at the four Sacred Mountains were also in a process of becoming.... My family and I stood alongside Diné Time Travellers and we laughed and prayed and sang and danced.... It was a series of timeless moments.... Time and space coalesced on those mountain sides and I have never felt closer to you.

NÁÁTS'ÍLID: Your portals began telling stories.... Activating the *Land as Time Machine* with those stories.... Using the energy that is story to open portals....

The same energy that ripples through slipstreams,

allowing one to travel through time....

through dimensions....

through worlds....



*Figure 16: Mirror mylar stencil design of Diné Time Traveller, Nááts'íílid, 2021.*



## **In the North.... Folding Darkness**

*Folding Darkness blankets me.*

*The sky as black as*

*Dibé Ntsaa, Black Jet Mountain.*

*Stars shimmer above us and moon beams, bright as a little sun, rain down upon us.*

*Mirror mylar is beautiful in the moonlight.*

*We don't want to leave.*

*We don't want you to say goodbye just yet.*

*So instead, we dance under the full moon,*

*as it casts moon light shadows on the dirt, yucca, and cactus around us.*

*We shake our bodies to the sounds of the night.*

*We laugh.*

*We glitter under the stars.*

*We are a part of this Glittering World.*

*Orbs of light floated off in the distance as the dream world overtook us.*

*Shimá said you were saying goodbye....*

### ***Hágoónee': Closing***

This thesis paper, project, experience, artwork was transformative. All year my primary supervisor, Peter Morin, was quoting Shawn Wilson, "If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (135).

I'd like to believe I did it right.

My mind has expanded in ways I never dreamed of before now. My heart has never felt so committed to learning more about Diné stories and design. I want to keep talking with, visiting, and making portraits of Time Travellers and let them lead me to uncover parts of myself and the world around me through my practice.

I learned that dreaming about Indigenous Futures is a pathway of liberation. I learned that Indigenous Futurisms is a portal.

I don't want to stop creating. I don't want to stop dreaming. I don't want to stop putting into motion the worlds I hope to inhabit.

*Ahéhee'*, to everyone who made this dream a reality.

## Appendix A

These are YouTube links to the five 360° videos I created for this thesis project. They work best when viewed on a mobile device or tablet that has the YouTube App, but they can also be seen in any browser. I highly recommend turning on the highest definition in the video settings before watching and letting them load before viewing.

### Playlist that links to all videos:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwQuvJs6I8gwqRvkMYURW1E9wx5ChW1KU>

### Links to individual videos:



*Sis Naajini* 360° Video: <https://youtu.be/sugUtOc0Urw>



*Dibé Ntsaa* 360° Video: <https://youtu.be/WvnOFUpS-uo>



Home 360° Video: [https://youtu.be/8f\\_i0G3m2Cs](https://youtu.be/8f_i0G3m2Cs)



*Dook'o'oosliíd* 360° Video: <https://youtu.be/RGQF0so46Xk>



*Tsoodził* 360° Video: [https://youtu.be/b59ljl\\_Orcg](https://youtu.be/b59ljl_Orcg)

### Link to Nicole's MFA Virtual Exhibition that includes these 360 videos:

<http://nicoleneidhardt.com/stories-held-in-a-time-travellers-hogan>

## Appendix B

I wrote this story to accompany my installation, *Beam Me Up, Asdzáq Anilí* for the LAND BACK exhibition, curated by Eli Hirtle. The exhibition was held on Lkwungen Territories (Victoria, BC) at Open Space Gallery from September 2020 – January 2021. *Asdzáq Anilí* was an ancestor of mine, one of the first Time Travelling Matriarchs and Land Protectors who I dreamed about. This is the story of how she became a Time Travelling Land Protector.

### *Asdzáq Anilí Speaks*

I've been travelling for so long. And yet not long at all. Time is funny like that. It distorts, warps, bends, squeezes, crunches, lurches, and sometimes stops. But I don't. These slipstreams I travel flow like an eternal river. A river with no end, no beginning. Only cycles upon cycles of eddies, currents, and ripples. These temporal rivers are all around, but only a rare few can swim in them, can feel the liberation, the freedom held within their depths...

My name is *Asdzáq Anilí*. Raggedy Lady.

I couldn't always swim through time so freely. My people, the Diné, underwent extreme hardship, violence, and displacement during my years in *Diné Bikéyah*, the sacred land of the Diné.

Kit Carson—*my blood boils and my mind still fills with rage to think of him*—waged war on my people, the Diné, in order to forcibly relocate us to Fort Sumner between 1863 and 1866, earth-surface time. Forced relocation happened to thousands of tribes in those times... relocating nations in order to make way for white settlers, to violently claim the land, waters and its precious resources. Land that didn't recognize these people. Land that had no connection to these settlers, and settlers who had no connection to the land. It was a violent time. *It is a violent time.*

I was one of the rare few who escaped after being captured by the U.S. Army in the early 1860's, exact dates blend together for me now, but I know it was summer time. I was probably 15 years old... and I remember I was sitting in the shade by a cornfield when it happened. We had a look-out in those days, because of Kit Carson's scorched earth policy at that time, meaning they destroyed our *hogans*, orchards, cornfields, and killed all our animals... sheep, cattle, dogs. They were trying to starve us out. It was horror. It was devastation like I've never experienced.

The soldiers captured me as I fled through the cornfield, trying to hide... I don't know what happened to my family. I lost them in the chaos and never saw them again.

Then we marched. Like prisoners of war... they marched hundreds upon hundreds of Diné from our homelands, *Diné Bikéyah*, to a camp at Bosque Redondo, Fort Sumner. That walk, The Long Walk, was... *is....* too painful to recount. Walking. Walking. Walking. Walking. 450 miles to an unknown land. The brutality was gut wrenching. Flashes of memories still swell up, and those relatives, *those ancestors*, who died at the hands of such violence... *I hold them close to my heart... I hold their words, their breath, their tears tenderly. Sending love to them in the land they now reside in.* The Land holds us. It absorbs pain, death, despair. And it transforms it. It nurtures us through it all.

I escaped from the camp after more than a year imprisoned there, to return to my home, near the Waterless Mountains. I would not have made the 5-day journey home without the help of numerous of my animal kin. The guard dogs listened when I asked them not to bark when I first left in the night. The horses remained quiet and did not whinny, so I would not get caught. An owl guided me through the night, so I would not get lost. A bear carried me across the Rio Grande so I would not drown. A buck gave me its strength when I was on the verge of collapse so I could carry on. A visit from the *Diyin Dine'é* (the Holy People), from Dawn Boy, gave me the last ounce of strength I needed to complete my journey. He would come to visit me multiple times over my human life span, telling me stories of the future with each visit.

That journey home to *Diné Bikéyah*, to return to the Land, to protect the Land and the Diné who were left.... It shaped my life, it shaped my world... The grueling nature of that journey elevated the bond I had with the earth, the Land, the animals, the *Diyin Dine'é*. After that journey I had dreams and visions of the future, of many futures... My connection to the Land had become so innate, so natural we blended together and it felt like magic. Like ancestral magic flowing through my veins...

I could communicate with the Land in ways I never had before. It would tell me about ceremonies, and medicines, and stories.

One day when I was quite old in earth-surface years, I woke at dawn and went to pray with the clouds. Sunlight was still far off, but there was a hazy glow starting to shift the sky into day. Dawn Boy was standing just outside my *hogan*, walking in from the East. I greeted them. They had a crisp, fresh, and youthful presence, as they always do. They told me of a vision they had... a vision that was already being set in motion. They said time was beginning to move differently around me. I was becoming out of sync with the world surrounding me. I was being pulled in by the current of a slipstream. They told me I could fight it, swim back to temporal normalcy... but they told me if I swam toward the current, with the current, I would be able to travel through times, temporalities, slipstreams, realms, and universes only the *Diyin Dine'é* knew of... They told me if I jumped in, I would exist in time differently than I had before. I would exist in the same temporal dimension as the *Diyin Dine'é*.

So I wrapped my blanket tightly around me and I swam. I swam through the desert sand, through the wind, through the rain, through sunshine and clouds...

And I've been swimming ever since.

Re-entering the earth-surface's temporality is challenging, but I return when I'm called, when I'm needed. After all, the Land still sustains me as much as it sustains those on earth. Protecting the Sacred is a teaching that has held me close in the depths of time... for millennia, for eons...

For this reason, I'm always there with you, alongside you, as you *Dadíłzinii Jidísin* (Respect the Sacred).



Figure 17: *Beam Me Up*, Asdzáá Anilí, hand-cut mirror mylar, sand from Diné Bikeyah, light, *LAND BACK* Exhibition curated by Eli Hirtle at Open Space, Victoria, BC, 2020.



## Appendix C

This story is a piece of practice writing and thinking. I dreamt it up to play within different temporalities, to explore forms of time travel, and to tell the origin story of a Diné Time Traveller.

### *Diné (Love Beyond) Time*

*come close.*

*closer...*

*I want to tell you... a secret. a story. a story about K'é. a story about relationality. a story about love. a story about the Land. a story about time travel.*

Time travel is not as easy as it looks. It takes an intimate relationship with the land and a strong fluency with time to swim through a slipstream without drowning. Time travelling machines are not what you would expect, either. They are all around us. You just need to understand how to *see* them, *feel* them.

But before we get into that, *Yá'át'ééh*, hello. I am *Diné*—Navajo. I grew up on *Diné Bikeyah* once upon a temporality. I am *Kinyaa'áanii*—Towering House Clan—born for *Honágháahnii*—One Walks Around Clan.

I was once an earth-surface person, a young *asdzáán*—a young woman. I grew up playing in the red clay dirt of my home territory near Round Rock, Arizona. I loved the sand there. The warmth it carried, the way little dust plumes rose up every time you picked up a handful... and the finest grains of earth you could imagine floated to the ground.

I had a dog named Shash, my best friend, who was my shadow as I spent hours upon hours herding the sheep and roaming the mountains, the mesas, the forests. I felt fully alive and deeply connected whenever I was surrounded by the natural world with Shash at my side. On one of these outings, when I was 10, we were exploring a canyon and got caught in a downpour. As we scrambled to get to higher ground, Shash slipped on loose earth and almost died in a flash flood. He was saved from drowning by a young person who risked their life to pluck Shash out of the rapidly rising waters.

Their name was K'os, which means cloud in *Diné Bizaad*. They had playful, cool bluish grey eyes, rimmed with long black lashes. These eyes later became my anchor amidst the swirling desert winds and the chaos that was my family. K'os' family lived across the *arroyo* from me at the foot

of the Chuska Mountains. They had short cropped hair, much to their *misán's* chagrin, a thunder booming laugh, and the most beautiful hands. Soft, yet firm hands, deeply lined since we were children. An old soul my *shimá* would say. Those hands gained character and texture as we aged. They used to hold me *so gently*, like I was the most revered thing in creation. As a non-binary person, the *Diyin Dine'é*—the Holy People—had blessed K'os with immense strength, fluidity, and responsibility. They were a powerful person. They thought deeply about the Land, their relationality to it and to their community. They attended ceremonies with their auntie, a Medicine Woman, and learned all our traditional songs. K'os taught me how to listen intently to the earth. How to find strands of deep time buried in the ground. We used to stay up late into the night, staring at the stars imagining Indigenous Futures. We would dream about *Diné* Time Travellers. Envision them going back and forth in time, passing messages between the front lines of Indigenous resistances in any time period they found themselves in.

#### *Time Travelling Land Protectors.*

We used to dream about time travellers who were warriors, elders, matriarchs, and land protectors. They would come tearing in whenever communities were threatened by violent settler colonial forces—extraction projects that took endlessly from the earth or pipelines that promised energy at the cost of life itself. We dreamed in the hopes our dreams would be strong enough to call them to our aid. To set this reality into motion.

Don't get me wrong, I loved—love—my my family, but K'os was my escape into the extraordinary, the magical, the other-worldly. My parents were—are—so full of love, of laughter, medicine, and hope. Despite the histories that tried to dictate our erasure as Indigenous peoples... my parents carried endless depths of resilience, of love for our family, our people, our land. My siblings were rambunctious, loud, and brilliant. A family full of academics, artists, activists and teachers... My family was my everything... but I had this connection with the Land that just felt deeper than I could explain... like I could communicate with it. Feel it shifting, moving. Like it was calling me. And K'os. They understood that. They could feel it too.

One crisp summer morning we were sitting atop the Chuska Mountains. We were herding sheep in an open meadow surrounded by pine trees, laughing much too loudly for the early morning air. Drinking steaming hot coffee and eating the *alkaad*—the cornmeal cake—from my niece's *Kinaaldá* ceremony. Blue birds were swooping between the trees, chirping. The sheep were grazing quietly. This. This right here was *Diné* Time. It was *Diné* reality, pure and porous. I try desperately to swim back to this moment. This calm. This breath. I still chuckle to myself at K'os' beautiful booming laugh. A laugh they never tried to reign in.

Just as the morning sun beams were peaking above the trees, a blast of blinding white light flooded the entire clearing. It was so intense that we fell back onto the grass... my fingers literally *vibrating* as energy passed through the ground like a ripple. As my vision cleared... a figure stood in front of us surrounded in ephemeral light.

#### *Dawn Boy.*

A visit from the *Diyin Dine'é* was something to take seriously. Dawn Boy was cloaked in a blanket of stars that faded into a beautiful morning blue. The air surrounding him was cool, and completely still. We sat there stricken in the face of such an other-worldly presence. The earth was still vibrating slightly... and as Dawn Boy spoke, crystal clear, the vibrations increased, following the cadence of his voice.

"*Yá'át'ééh abiní*, my children. I come with a vision. A future that needs to be set into motion. A future for our people. A future to rebalance the world.

I have been watching over you... guiding you. I know you can feel the earth's vibration when I speak... but you were starting to feel it, hear it, before I arrived. You have embodied *K'é* so fully that you are coming close to syncing up with the temporality of the cosmos... of deep time. I am here to guide you in the final stage of this process. I am here to teach you how to swim. To swim through time, through temporalities, through realities.

With this knowledge you can rebalance the world. You can reconnect us all in *Hózhó*.

The *Diyin Dine'é* are tired of watching over the death and destruction of our home. Many earth-surface people have forgotten the sacredness the earth holds. They have lost connection to that which sustains them. Taking endlessly is not possible in a world built for reciprocity. For relationality.

For this reason, I am here. I am here to help you phase out of this reality and into another temporality. You once dreamed of *Time Travelling Land Protectors*, and now we call on you to become one."

Breathlessly, we rose. Dawn Boy told us to take out our medicine pouches, to take some *tá'dííin*—some corn pollen—to our mouth, the top of our head, then sprinkle it to the east. He then taught us the songs. The prayers. Movements to make the ground rumble... to awaken the *time machine*. He told us stories upon stories of the Land where we stood. A web of relationality began taking form around us. *He told us the earth was the original time machine*. We needed to know the prayers... the stories... the ancestors who create the pure energy within the Land that supports one to phase out of earth's temporality. To *travel* through time.

I could feel it in my body. In the depths of my being. This energy that connected me to this place. This energy that connected me to K'os. It was singing through my veins... sounding like the songs sung in ceremony. I turned to look at K'os in wonderment and froze.

K'os had seen it before me. *Ma'ii*. Coyote. The trickster was circling our sheep while we had been focused on Dawn Boy. Quicker than I had time to process, K'os broke free of the web of energy we had been weaving. They bolted over to protect the sheep, knowing full well, their family's livelihood was at stake if any sheep were killed. I was so shocked I didn't realize the web was becoming tighter around me... brighter, the chanting louder, and all of a sudden I couldn't escape it. I was phasing out of the earth's time. I screamed for K'os and got one last

glimpse of their sky grey eyes, wide and beautiful. Shimmering almost silver from the light. Their mouth forming the words, *ayóó aníínishní*.

And then it all went black.

Silent. Watery. But not wet. Reality around me began to take shape. I felt like I was submerged under a vast ocean. Rippling and swirling... I was no longer in that meadow... but in some other place, other time.

Dawn Boy was in front of me again. He told me I was a time traveller now. A *Time Travelling Land Protector* like I had always dreamed of. I guess I had dreamed loud enough.

*K'os.*

Losing them hit me like a flood of bone-chilling icy fog. Dawn Boy told me they made a choice to stay. I couldn't change that.

I was reeling. I was numb. My skin prickling and my heart screaming.

Dawn Boy picked me up and led me to my new *hooghan* in the clouds. He made me coffee and sat with me for who knows how long.

*Over time... before time... behind time... above time... below time...* I began to come to terms with the fact that K'os was not here. Not with me. And I didn't know when they would be again. So... slowly. Ever so slowly. I began to heal. I began to learn. To understand what my role was. How time travel really worked... It wasn't as easy as K'os and I imagined, just popping in to visit different points in history. There were so many multitudes of realities and temporalities that learning to navigate them all took me millennia in earth-surface years.

But now... now I am fluent in the songs. I know the histories of the Land(s). I know the resonances of the earth(s)'s energy. I am ready to begin rebalancing the world(s).

I know the language(s) of time. And let me tell you, it's not linear.

Now I understand, I never lost K'os. They are with me. Their energy is the same energy that fills my core. I will find them again. I will see them again. I have to.

*Time spirals before me, behind me, above me, below me, all around me. If I swim strongly enough, I can make it back to them.*

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