Exploring the Ethnoaesthetics of Navajo Weaving

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When Navajo cultural specialists emphasize *hózhǫ́* [1] as an aspect of the Diné[2] worldview, they focus on inner beauty, the essence of beauty, the process of beauty. Following this sophisticated approach, many contemporary Native weavers consider weaving to be as important for its internal processes as for its external appearance, beyond its attractive motifs, design layouts and color schemes. As scholar and Navajo religious practitioner Harry Walters explained, "[A]rt has a side that is very seductive. It is beauty, and this beauty can be misleading…it should be taken for just what it is—not to be indulged in but rather to be used to a certain degree and no more. If you look at art only for its beauty, it will be misleading. Our songs, prayers, and rituals are very important for this reason because they give art substance" (1996:29; Fig. 2).

[1] Anthropologist Gary Witherspoon has discussed the concept of *hózhǫ́* at some length, glossing it in English as "beauty" and "harmony" but noting that it also includes "the intellectual notion of order, the emotional state of happiness, the physical state of health, the moral condition of good" (1987a:59).

[2] Diné is the indigenous name for the Navajo people and translates as "the people." It can be used interchangeably with "Navajo"; however, it is used here when traditional, philosophical and spiritual aspects of the culture are emphasized.

1. Two Grey Hills tapestry by Margaret Yazzie, Navajo, 1981. Tapestry weave. Handspun native wool (natural colors and top-dyed black). 29" x 20" (73.7 cm x 50.8 cm). In this finely woven piece, the weaver's pathway extends from the brown inner background through three enclosing borders to the edge. Courtesy of the Santa Fe Collection of Navajo Rugs donated by Dr. Charles and Linda Rimmer, Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona. Cat. No. 4650-30. Photograph by Jim Freeman.

2. Rose Owens, Cross Canyon, Arizona, 1980. "This weaving takes all of my thought — *ntsékees,*" Owens asserted, "It takes hard thinking and concentration. When I sell a rug, I sell my thoughts, so they should be worth something [valuable]" (1988). Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

For many Navajos, any conversation about aesthetics is underlain by two fundamental values of Diné culture—autonomy and variability (Lamphere 1977:38–42). Respect for individual autonomy pervades Navajo culture, including child rearing, family relations, making a living, religious practices and aesthetic approaches to weaving. Weaver and scholar D. Y. Begay has written,

> There is a Navajo phrase, *aashi bi'bohlii,* which means, "It's up to you." When my mother uses this term, she is saying that there are no formulas in weaving. Weaving allows us to create and to express ourselves with tools, materials, and designs. It's up to you—up to the weaver. It's your choice. There are no rules as long as you know the basic techniques (1996:25).

Expert weaver and artist Marilou Schultz asserts,

> We can't answer for other weavers….It's not anybody else's place to say, [for instance,] "Oh, a kokopelli doesn't belong in a Navajo rug"….[I]t's my creativity, my creative meaning (Musun-Miller 2008:80).

Dedication to individuality leads to internal cultural variability and flexibility. In weaving, this means how and why weavers make choices that are far from simple. Many weavers defy common stereotypes and are mindful that decisions are "up to them," not governed by outsiders. As weaver Barbara Ornelas explained,

> [T]he Navajo Reservation is so big that our stories...are all a little different. What people know in New Mexico, people in Arizona have a different version [of]. SO, it's really hard to pinpoint what the true meaning is behind...[motifs] on a rug. I always tell people that rugs are like a verse in the Bible. There's 365 ways of interpreting that one verse and Navajo weaving is like that (Notarnicola 2001:63).

Navajo weaving has been addressed from many angles in recent years. Texts and exhibitions by Navajo authors and curators are scarce but nevertheless seminal (Denetdale 2007; Sarah Paul Begay 2006; D.Y. Begay 1996, 2006; Begay-Foss 2002, 2011;Keams 1996; McGreevy and Begay 1994; Muskett 2004; Ornelas and Pete n.d.; Roessel 1970, 1981, 1983; Schultz 2004; Sunrise 2002; Thomas 1996, 1999; Walters 1977, 1996). Publications by non-Navajos have examined weaving through history and materiality (Wheat 2003; Whitaker 2002; Bonar 1996; Hedlund 1990; Kent 1985), social organization and relations (Ahlberg 2008; McLerran 2006; Hedlund 1983, 1992), linguistics (Witherspoon 1977), economics and marketing (Wilkins 2008, M'Closkey 2002), collecting (Hedlund 2004; Webster 2003; Blomberg 1988), semiotics and iconography (Valette and Valette 2000; Willink and Zolbrod 1996; McGreevy and Begay 1994) and artistry (Hedlund 1992, 2011; Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977).

These contrasting studies reveal the multifaceted, shifting contexts of weaving. Accepting the subject's varied nature, this article explores cultural aesthetics that lie beyond beauty, conceptually, drawing from Native views as much as an outsider might.[3] We begin with a review of ethnoaesthetic approaches by earlier writers, with the caveat that none of us have grasped Navajo weaving's core meanings adequately. New perspectives are presented via Diné narratives concerned with the origins of weaving. A description of the Diné pre-contact aesthetic canon follows, which leads to an exploration of harmony, balance and the potential explanatory power of lazy lines and the weaver's pathway (Figs. 1, 10). From this emerges a discussion of the designing process. Finally, we discover a trend toward renewed symbolism and storytelling in creative practice, and recognize the changing nature of Navajo and, indeed, all cultural perspectives. My observations throughout are embedded in profound respect for the thoughtful accomplishments of weavers, past and present.

Previous Ethnoaesthetic Studies

The search for meaning in Navajo woven design has persisted for well over 100 years. Nearly every observer wants to know, "What do the designs say? Are there symbols and do they tell stories? What stories?" In the early 1900s, Father Berard Haile of the Franciscan Mission at St. Michaels, Arizona, proclaimed weaving's secular nature, however mistaken this notion was, by saying it lacked outright symbolism:

> There is no system as to the use of the different figures, that is, they are not arranged into any kind of hieroglyphic order by

[3] An earlier version of some ideas in this article was presented at the de Young Museum, San Francisco, thanks to an invitation from Jill d'Allessandro (Hedlund 2013).

3. Woman's two-piece dress *(biil),* Navajo, 1850–1860. Tapestry weave. Handspun native wool (Z-spun singles, indigo and native dyes); raveled red wool (S-spun pairs, lac 59-85% + cochineal 41-15% dyes). 45" x 33" (114.3 cm x 83.8 cm). Many dresses have patterns that derive from earlier basketry, as though the basket's encircling design was unrolled and straightened across each dress panel. To form the traditional dress, two panels (of which only one can be seen here) are stitched together at the shoulders and sides and, when worn, are belted around the middle with a handwoven sash. Today, this style continues to be woven and worn for girls' puberty rituals *(kinaaldá)* and other ceremonies. Courtesy of the Nelle A. Dermont Collection, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. 8407. Photograph by Helga Teiwes.

which a woman could weave her life's history, or any other history or story, into the blanket, as has been asserted by some writers….As for designs in modern blankets, which by some are interpreted as replete with religious symbolism, such interpretations merely attach an undue idealism and importance to the design which it does not contain....Then, too, it will be remembered that Navaho [*sic*] women are devout and faithful clients of their religion…and would scarcely trifle with religious symbols, many of which may be viewed in effigy in the course of certain rites, and at certain seasons of the year only (Franciscan Fathers 1910:250–251).

Haile also provided a roster of taboo motifs that should not be woven and a list of descriptively named and illustrated motifs. Included among the line drawings was a stepped triangle, said to be "kos yishchín,[4] (cloud image), a terraced figure on side of blanket" (1910:253); no other meteorological elements were mentioned.

In the 1930s, anthropologist Gladys Reichard lived with a Navajo family and became an astute observer of Navajo religion and symbolism (1950) as well as weaving (1934, 1936). She defined a symbol as "a design unit, or even an entire composition, which has a definite emotional content or meaning, immediately and spontaneously recognized by a group of people" (1936: 178). Using this limited designation, she concurred with the Franciscans, "The answer to the question, 'What does it mean?' is simply, 'Nothing'. The patterns the weavers use sometimes have names, although naming even is slightly developed among Navajo as compared with other craftswomen....Even such names as exist are singularly unpoetic" (1936:178). Curiously, Reichard noted the terraced triangle as symbolizing cloud imagery, but let it go as secular (1936:181).[5] Ironically, Reichard unwittingly exemplified the deeper cultural meaning of Navajo weaving through her ethnographic descriptions of weavers' interactions, learning and teaching methods, and technical processes. By example rather than articulation, her books locate the ethnoaesthetics of weaving in indigenous processes, over and above the woven products, which she excused as borrowed and commercialized.

Anthropologist Kate Peck Kent grappled with Navajo aesthetic identity by examining textiles in museum collections. She first sought a visible Navajo aesthetic in formal stylistic principles related to color, motif, structure and composition, but found this approach lacking (1985; Hedlund 1989b). Even though she described balance in design structure, ambiguity of figures and ground, bilateral symmetry, and the angularity and large-scale qualities of motifs, Kent doubted that a single set of aesthetic principles existed (1985:4). Like Reichard, she concluded, "[It] is the process of textile production that has cultural and personal meaning, not the design of the finished piece" (1985:113). Further, she queried, "[H]ow exactly are we to define a 'Navajo textile'?" and replied, "As in the case of other traditional crafts, the common thread that ties the old and new together is technique: a Navajo textile is one that has been woven by a Navajo using traditional processes and tools" (1985:115).

Moving to a more-theoretical level of analysis, anthropologist Gary Witherspoon emphasized creative transformation and dynamic synthesis: "Beauty is not 'out there' in things to be perceived by the perceptive and appreciative viewer; it is a creation of thought. The Navajo experience beauty primarily through expression and creation, not through perception and preservation.

[4] Throughout, Navajo words are repeated as they appeared in original texts and have not been modified to accord with more recent standards (Young and Morgan 1980).

[5] In an insightful paper, anthropologist Jill Alhlberg Yohe contends with discrepancies between Reichard's dismissals and more recent attention paid by weavers to symbolic meaning (2009).

Beauty is not so much a perceptual experience as it is a conceptual one" (1977:151; 1987a, 1987b). He observed, "In the Navajo world...the aesthetic experience—the creation of beauty—is simultaneously intellectual, emotional, moral, aesthetic, and biological" (1977:154). As Witherspoon and coauthor Glen Peterson, a professor of art, summarized, "In Navajo society, the emphasis of art is placed on creation rather than consumption, production rather than preservation, and design rather than display" (1995:3–4).

While important epistemological, linguistic and cultural issues were raised, Witherspoon did not provide ethnographic evidence for his interpretations. Despite his having spent considerable time within Navajo families and communities, his explanations lacked a connection to weavers' experiences. The textiles that Witherspoon selected to illustrate his points were nonrepresentative, labeled with ambiguous qualities not recognized by many weavers. In his search for "primordial semiotic paradigms," an 1890s Germantown piece and a Wide Ruins rug, among others, were used to portray indigenous sensibilities without outside influence. Further attempts to "read" textiles from the 1800s and 1900s were supported by relying on earlier sources (Mills 1959; Hatcher 1974) and contemporary art-historical analysis (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977).

In contrast to Haile, Reichard and Kent, Witherspoon reduced the meaning of Navajo weaving to isolated symbols—"cultural motifs"—that, he asserted, form the link between woven designs and Diné ideology. The triangular emblems of Monster Slayer and Born for Water, the Twin War Gods who are sons of Changing Woman, became a focal point, rather than the beliefs and actions surrounding weaving (Witherspoon and Peterson 1995). The motifs, constructed with smooth diagonal edges, were not readily incorporated into Navajo weaving until the late 1800s. Despite an emphasis on weaving's internal substance rather than its outside influences, the authors' arguments mapped Western symbols onto an uncharted aesthetic process.

With similar holistic intentions, *Weaving a World: Textiles and the Navajo Way of Seeing* championed Navajo weaving as "a conceptual art with much to say about the people who produce it" (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:xiii). Context became paramount:

> Navajo rugs are highly regarded everywhere, but the full depth of their artistry goes unrecognized when removed from their setting and from things elders say. There is more to a rug than a straight selvage, a tight weave, aniline or vegetal dyes, or an even pattern. An entire culture might be woven into a single textile: its mythic and historical associations, its ceremonial practices, its need for balance and order, its sense of place. The earth and the sky, the light of day and the dark of night, the mesas and the canyons together with all they represent have found their way into warp and weft as securely as has the yarn (1996:3–4).

Embarking on a search for meaning beyond technique and craftsmanship, Navajo scholar Roseann S. Willink and English professor Paul G. Zolbrod interviewed elder Navajo women and men while examining blankets and rugs in a museum collection (1996:xvii–xv). Although praised for seeking Native perspectives (Denetdale 2007:25), the project included "traditionally reared Navajos," who were presumed knowledgeable in indigenous ways (1996:80), but who were not necessarily Diné cultural specialists. Leading questions during group sessions and excitement at viewing the older textiles prompted speculation about designs that trumped knowledge about weaving's deeper significance. While the goal was to "learn to combine comments such as these [free associations] with detailed observation and with what the stories say" (1996:80), contributions were accepted uncritically. Even with the Navajo penchant for variability, this approach to gathering and interpreting information produced unreliable results.

4. Woman's one-piece *manta,* Navajo, 1870–1875. Twill (diagonal and diamond) tapestry weave. Handspun native wool (Z-spun singles, indigo dye); raveled red wool (S-spun pairs, cochineal 54% + lac 46% dyes); raveled coral-pink wool (Z-spun singles, synthetic dye). 31" x 47" (78.7 cm x 119.4 cm). Terraced zigzags figure prominently in two-piece dresses as well as *mantas*. The tiny dark blue tassels emerging from each side of the pink center are remnants of twined side cords, signs that the *manta* was woven up to that point, then turned upside down in the loom and completed from the opposite end; the final weaving met at this finish point. Courtesy of the E. E. Ellwood Collection, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. E-2859. Photograph by Helga Teiwes.

5. Second Phase chief-style blanket *(hanolchaadi),* Navajo, 1865–1875. Tapestry weave. Handspun native wool (Z-spun singles, natural color, indigo and native dyes); raveled red, magenta and pink wool (S- and Z-spun, tripled, paired and singles, cochineal and lac dyes). 50" x 67" (127 cm x 170.2 cm). Many of the earliest Navajo layouts place emphasis on the rectangular fabric's center and ends. This aesthetic sensibility continued throughout the 1800s, and even to the present for some weavers. Some Navajo specialists warn again repairing older textiles because of potential psychic dangers to the restorer. "Just let it wear and tear," says one weaver, "It's kind of like there is the spirit of the original weaver still woven within" (Hedlund 1996:65). Courtesy of the John Wetherill Collection, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. E-2211. Photograph by Helga Teiwes.

My conversations with, observations of, and collaborations with Navajo and other weavers over the past four decades have resulted in many themes to explore. Following an ethnographic study of a Navajo weaving community (Hedlund 1983) and a variety of collaborative projects with weavers, by 1988 I became convinced that

> the level of interpretation at which Navajo weaving is most powerful, and most informative about Navajo culture, is neither Kent's historicism nor Witherspoon's symbolism, but rather it is in some intermediate position gained through an understanding and interpretation of the cultural processes of weaving, not the design products of weaving. Further, that any anthropological assessment of Navajo aesthetics must be derived from the weavers' own commentary and actions, not from an etic (outside) analysis of rugs or blankets (Hedlund 1988:2).

A pilot project involved showing eight experienced Navajo weavers seventy "flash cards" with equal-sized color photographs of Navajo blankets and rugs, for a series of triad sorts and projective tests (Werner and Schoepfle 1987:93–94). The participants' ages ranged from forty to sixty-five, and six regions of the Navajo Nation were represented. Most discussions were conducted in Navajo with a translator. This study showed promise as a model for future research; however, with a limited sample of interviewees, language constraints and summer scheduling (rather than during winter's storytelling time), results were more tantalizing than substantive (Hedlund 1989a, 1989b). The results did affirm that weavers are skilled at assessing Navajo textiles from any time period through their culturally shared understandings of process. I concluded that the meaning of Navajo weaving "lies much deeper than isolated motifs that might symbolize specific, codified ideas—it is an entire way of seeing and performing—indeed, it is an entire way of life" (Hedlund 1989a:91).

As part of her investigations into the cultural construction of personhood in the Navajo world, anthropologist Maureen Schwarz became interested in the design system on traditional Navajo women's dresses (*biil*; Fig. 3) and their relationship to Diné basketry (1997). Her inquiry into the structure and meaning of the designs on ceremonial baskets and dresses documented iconography and related it to the Diné worldview. Schwarz argued that "the Navajo creation story, which documents the origin and construction of this world, is the *aesthetic locus* of Navajo culture and that the *process* of creation of aesthetic form evolves from it" (1993:363). In recounting the origins of the Navajo universe, the sacred *hooghan* (home, also spelled hogan), the ceremonial basket and the *biil,* she demonstrated their parallel structures and symbolic significance.

Although many early basketry designs are known, the wedding basket (also used in other contexts) is the most common type. Likely one of the oldest styles, it is still made and used. In 1950, Frank Goldtooth, a Navajo medicine man, described its symbolism (Fig. 12):

> The center spot in the basket represents the beginning of this earth as the Navajo emerged from the cane. The white portion surrounding the center spot is the earth. The black represents the six or ten sacred mountains to the Navajo and forms a boundary-line of the early Navajo people….Only six mountains are represented in some of the baskets, for that is the number of mountains brought up from below during the flood. Above the represented earth are clouds which have many colors represented within them, as do real clouds above the earth. These clouds are all mixed up, like it is outdoors, for the clouds are tinged with many different colors: black, gray, blue, yellow, and red….The white and black clouds are important. They represent the same thing—the making of rain. The rain represented in the basket is to bring comfort to the earth—to make plants and all things grow….Next to the mountains is a red spectrum upon which the gods travel. The sun-ray is to make things on earth grow and to make things go the right way. This sun-ray in the basket is to bring comfort to the earth, to make plants and all things grow and to keep the earth and the people warm. The number of the clouds has no significance. The finish point of

the basket always goes to the east. The path or opening always leads to the east (Fishler 1954:208–209).

Schwarz documented the correspondence between the stepped and linear (circular) designs on baskets and those on women's dresses, noting that a color reversal (from light to dark, and dark to light) also occurs. She concluded that the Navajo aesthetic system in both baskets and dresses represents ideal Navajo spatial organization and reflects Navajo cosmology and sacred geography (Fig. 4; Schwarz 1993).

The Spiritual Origins of Navajo Weaving

Navajo weaving's sacred origins were recorded by Haile:

The Spider Man drew some cotton (ndak'á') from his side and instructed the Navaho to make a loom. The cotton-warp was made of spider-web (nashjéi bitl'ól). The upper cross-pole was called yábitl'ól (sky or upper cord), the lower cross-pole ní'bitl'ól (earth or lower cord). The warp-sticks were made of shábitl'ól (sun rays), the upper strings, fastening the warp to the ool, of atsínitl'ish (lightning), the lower strings of shabitl'ájiłchi (sun halo), the heald was a tsághadindíni ísenil (rock crystal heald), the cord-heald stick was made of atsólaghal (sheet lighting), and was secured to the warp strands by means of nlsátl'ól biłdestl'ó' (rain ray cords).

The batten-stick was also made of shabil'ijiłchi (sun halo), while the beidzói (comb) was of yołgaí (white shell). Four spindles or distaffs were added to this, the disks of which were of cannel-coal, turquoise, abalone and white bead, respectively, and the spindle sticks of atsínltl'ish (zigzag lightning), hájiłgish (flash lightning), atsólaghał (sheet lighting), and nłtsátl'ól (rainray), respectively (Franciscan Fathers 1910:222).

6. Barbara Teller Ornelas, Tucson, Arizona, 2004. For more precision, some weavers today replace their loom's zigzag tensioning cords with metal turnbuckles. Still, inspiration for designs may come from any source, including classic Diné blankets. Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

Walters explained further, "Weaving did not originate in one particular place or with one individual, but in a series of events that involved the participation of different Holy Beings" (1977). He illustrated this by presenting three versions of weaving's origins. The first story emphasizes the antiquity of weaving, the use of indigenous cotton fibers and the sacred parts of the loom (Fig. 6). Precautions taken around weaving are balanced with the value that weaving provides to the weaver:

While the people were still in the underworld, at a certain place where two rivers cross, there grew a plant called Ni Dik'a Ts'ooz (fine fiber cotton). Two people brought the seeds of that plant to this world. They were the spiders. They said that this plant would be used for clothing, instead of skins. The seeds were planted in the earth.

When the plants were ripe and the cotton gathered, the people made spi[n]dles and spun the cotton.

"You must spin toward you, or the beautiful goods will depart from you," instructed Spider Woman.

Then Spider Man and Spider Woman showed the people how to set up a loom. As they set up or made each part of the loom, they gave them names. All the names indicated that every part of the loom would bring beautiful goods (prosperity) to the weaver. The crosspoles were made of sky and earth cords, the warp sticks of sun rays, the heddles of crystal and sheet lightening [*sic*]. The batten was of sun halo and the comb was of white shell. There were four spindles; one was a stick of zig-zag lightening [*sic*] with a whorl of cannel coal; another a stick of flash lightening with a whorl of turquoise; the third had a stick of sheet lightening with a whorl of abalone and a rain stream with a whorl of white shell formed the stick of the fourth.

"Now you know all that I have named for you," said Spider man [to] the people.

"It is yours to work with and to use in following your wishes. From now on when a baby girl is born to your tribe, you shall go and find a spider web; you must take it and rub it on the baby's arms and hands. Thus when she is grown she will weave and her fingers and arms will never tire" (Walters 1977).

The second version reiterates proper behavior concerned with weaving, stresses the difficulty of its tasks and refers again to the sacred nature of the tools:

The First Woman who called herself White Shell Woman wanted to weave a rug. She asked Spider Woman to help her and Spider Woman prepared a loom for her by putting the Sun halo (Shabitlajilehi) on all four sides of the loom. She made the warp strands with her webs and looped the loom with lightning. All the weaving tools were made and First Woman started to weave and for four days she couldn't get the wool through the warp and became very frustrated, she threw down the tools and the rug.

At the break of dawn she heard someone chanting in the house where she left her loom. She came in and the rug was finished and standing. Several young women were sitting there and they scolded her for tearing down the loom.

There was the Batten Stick, Comb and Sheep. These were female and were with the young among women sitting there. The women told her, "These are the things you did not want; the Comb, Batten Stick and Sheep." But Comb, Batten

7. Kalley Keams, Phoenix, Arizona, 1996. Weaving chairs can take modern form, but the knowledge behind the loom is deeply cultural. As anthropologist John Farella has written, "Navajos are not change oriented but rather…they are changing in order to remain 'traditional.' Specifically, they are altering their technology to maintain their epistemology" (1984:190). Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

Stick and Sheep had a council and forgave First Woman for the disrespect she had shown them. They said that in the future they would be utilized by the people.

The young women told First Woman to take a look once again at the rug, it is really the precious stones (Nitziis) and precious valuables (Yodi). Then they told her never to disrespect the rug again because in the future Diné will make their living from rug weaving (Walters 1977).

The third version also emphasizes respect for the loom and its parts, while introducing the potential value of weaving as a trade item and the superior quality of Navajo blankets. Coyote, the trickster, ends up paying Navajo weavers the ultimate compliment:

Begochidi, a Holy Being had some cotton in the bag she always carried.[6] One day, she decided to make use of the contents in her bag.

After some thinking and planning, she made a spindle and spun the cotton into long strands. After she had spun enough cotton to make a complete rug, she set up her loom and began to weave. After weaving for four days, her rug still wasn't finished. She became frustrated and used abusive language to her rug. She then lay down and took a nap. She awoke to find a man adorned with magnificent vari[e]gated stones standing near the rug. It was Spider Man and he advised her to seek help from Spider Woman. He told her of all the wealth she could gain from weaving. She apologized for her rude behavior.

When she completed her rug, she took it to a place where the Spider people were weaving their rugs. They were naming all the parts of the rugs as they worked. Their rugs were far more beautiful than hers and she was ashamed.

Coyote came and admired the rugs of the Spider people. He ran back to the other people and told them that the Spider people had some beautiful rugs to trade, even though trading had not been mentioned by the Spider people.

The people came and traded tanned hides for blankets. Coyote, not being satisfied with everything, decided to test each garment to see which one would be his. On a cold January night he took eight of the Spider people's blankets. They too did not keep him warm. He tried several others and at last he took Begochidi's blanket.

Next morning he awoke to find the snow melted around him and he was warm. "This is worth having. This will be mine," he said (Walters 1977).

None of these narratives focus on the appearance of specific designs worked into blankets or rugs; these are left to the discretion of individual weavers. Just as traditional weaving songs follow the progression of weaving (Thomas 1996:36–38), each version addresses Diné ethnoaesthetics from the standpoint of process, not product. Emphasis is placed on thought and action, tool making and creative intentions.

Pre-Contact Diné Aesthetics

While origin stories provide important themes, what was in the minds of past weavers? At least they left behind a complex and splendid material record to compare with the oral histories.[7] Kalley Keams (Fig. 7), a contemporary weaver, noted:

I see [nineteenth-century blankets] as the weavers' personal expressions. I see them as a way for a person to become balanced, to deal with what is going on in his or her life. Even the rugs that were made to be used, even the wearing blankets, have spiritual meaning. How can anyone create a piece, any kind of art or craft, without putting himself or herself into it? (Bonar 1996:150).

Early Diné designs appear principally on women's *mantas* and *biil* and on men's striped shirts and shoulder blankets (Fig. 5). Prior to Spanish, Mexican and Anglo influences, Navajo blanket fragments and garments were decorated with bands, segmented bars, terraced (stepped) zigzags, triangles and diamonds, equilateral crosses, and stepped L- and T-shapes (Wheat 2003: 131–139). Motifs and their layouts contrast with traditional Pueblo textiles, which have different motifs, rhythms and arrangements (Whitaker 1986:64–75) and relate strongly to those in early Navajo basketry.[8] Navajo formats tend to emphasize the center, corners and ends rather than all-over or vertical sequences; contain complex banded sets; and create positive/negative illusions (Fig. 8).

In the 1800s, when the repertoire became more ample, Navajo design retained (or sometimes exaggerated) these features as complexity increased. It continued to reflect earlier attention to particular symmetries and color contrasts. By the mid-1800s, all-over patterns

[6] This Holy Being, referred to by Washington Matthews as the male Békotsidi, "the god who carried the moon, and who is supposed by the Navahoes [*sic*] to be identical with the God of the Americans" (1994:86), was reputedly responsible for making all the domestic animals – "sheep, asses, horses, swine, goats, and fowls" (1994:86–87); that is, "all the animals whose creation is not otherwise accounted for in the myths" (1994:226, n.78).

[7] In addition, Ruth Roessel's articles and books contribute to reconstructing past lifeways and beliefs (Hedlund 1994).

[8] A comparison of earlier Apachean and Athabaskan artistic approaches (including northern Athabaskan beadwork) could prove interesting in further defining a framework for indigenous Diné design. Anthropologist Ellen K. Moore has analyzed Navajo beadwork as well (2003a).

8. Blanket/*sarape (beeldléi),* Navajo, 1870–1875. Tapestry weave. Handspun native wool (Z-spun singles, natural color, indigo and native dyes); raveled red wool (S- and Z-spun, tripled and paired, cochineal and lac dyes). 53" x 29" (134.6 cm x 73.7 cm). The typical Navajo emphasis on center and ends shows in this shoulder blanket. The four motifs around the central diamond are often described as weaver's combs, an example of a realistic pictorial element embedded in an otherwise geometric pattern. Placement of motifs and the color contrasts exemplify this weaver's approach to harmony and balance with dynamic symmetry. Courtesy of the John A. Logan Collection, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. 18063. Photograph by Helga Teiwes.

and isolated motifs, such as crosses, chevrons, bows, arrows and geometric elements, appeared; and stepped patterns persisted. Only in the late 1800s did exuberant serrate zigzags and elaborate concentric diamonds, narrow outlining, vertical orientations, fancy borders and complex "eye dazzlers" appear. The latter show Mexican, Spanish and Anglo influences that were incorporated into the earlier indigenous aesthetic.

Harmony and Balance

For generations, Navajo weavers have employed Diné concepts of harmony and balance, both explicitly and implicitly (Begay-Foss 2011:29; Witherspoon 1977, 1981). These principles follow traditional spiritual and philosophical practices of *hózhǫ́,* which Witherspoon noted encompass "order, good, harmony, health, and happiness, as well as beauty" (1981:31–32; 1987b). In Diné handwoven textiles, harmony and balance are literally and metaphorically expressed through symmetry and contrasting colors. Patterns are repeated and reversed. Design elements tend to be consistent in scale and do not crowd the space. Border motifs, if present, echo central designs and set up a rhythm that moves the eye from corners to center and back. The play between positive and negative spaces, sometimes with background and foreground becoming interchangeable, adds to a sense of harmony and balance.[9]

These aesthetic goals of harmony and balance are maintained and articulated by weavers today. Marilou Schultz, who has replicated classic blanket designs as well as created original artworks, has said, "Some challenges in weaving are being able to create intricate designs in the space determined by the dimensions of the warp versus simple bold designs, color coordination, balance in the overall design" (2004:30). One of the Spider Rock weavers[10] has described how her family achieves perfect symmetry by making sure that each design set is equal in size, "so that it will all come out even in the middle. And then from the middle it's just copying what you started with" (Musun-Miller 2008:59–60). Trained in the intricate style of Two Grey Hills, weaver Barbara Teller Ornelas has characterized her approach in this way: "The most beautiful part of the weaving is in the middle of weaving it. Everything has a rhythm, and you go with your heartbeat while weaving. Once you find your rhythm, you don't want to stop. Then you have found your balance, your hózhó. It's like being in the middle of a really great book; you don't want to stop until it's finished" (Notarnicola 2001:86).

As for color balance, many weavers strive to weight their colors equally, and alternate dark and light shades to enhance the contrast. Walters described the ideal relationship of colors: "When a weaver makes a rug…. [e]verything that she uses must balance….When a weaver distributes these colors evenly, and the design is working together nicely, there is balance" (1996:30).

[9] In addition, Navajo textiles exhibit many complex symmetry operations that are beyond the scope of this article to describe. Anthropologist Kathleen Whitaker revealed some tantalizing possibilities in nineteenth-century Navajo textiles (1986). A rigorous application of formal symmetry analysis as developed by anthropologist Dorothy Washburn and colleagues awaits further testing (Washburn and Crowe 1988).

[10] This family of weavers also calls themselves the Spider Rock Girls, which includes the daughters and nieces of weaver Emily Malone: LaVera, Larissa and Laramie Blake, Alyssa Malone, and Harriett and Carrie Whitney.

9. Pictorial rug by Mary Claw, Navajo, 1988. Tapestry weave. Commercially processed wool (natural colors and aniline dyes). 33" x 56" (83.8 cm x 142.2 cm). Woven wider than long with a prominent framing border, this rug appears like a painting. The treatment of clouds as nearly symmetrical terraced triangles is this weaver's idiosyncratic approach. Courtesy of the Santa Fe Collection of Navajo Rugs donated by Dr. Charles and Linda Rimmer, Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona. Cat. No. 4638-22. Photograph by Jim Freeman.

Having pioneered a style that capitalizes on optical illusion with colors, one of the Spider Rock Girls says: "The way someone would recognize it's a Spider Rock [rug style] is because of the black background. Some people see the black as the background, or some people see the colors….Some people see the colors as the design, some people see the black as the design….People do see it a lot different" (Musun-Miller 2008:60; Fig. 17).

A few weavers intentionally play with asymmetry, virtually unseen in historic textiles. The late Larry Yazzie moved away from quadrilateral symmetry in rugs he meant to hang on a wall in certain ways (Fig. 13). Likewise, Schultz says that her *Diversity* series

> started with just...making a small piece with abstract designs, just being able to do whatever I could in a rug, there were all of these abstract, geometric shapes. It didn't follow any pattern, there wasn't a symmetry to it. I just did it with stripes here and there….I was taking the yarn of many colors in the same skeins, in no particular order…so it gave it a real streaky effect throughout the whole rug. So I took that as the background and made an off-center design…so it had asymmetry….I wanted to make something special with that variegated yarn, and it couldn't just be like any other rug (Musun-Miller 2008:80–81).

Lazy Lines and Weaver's Pathways

The use of so-called "lazy lines" and "weaver's pathways" has not generally been considered part of the Navajo aesthetic system. Yet these features illustrate distinctive aspects of the Diné weaving process. If observers were looking for an indicator of the spiritual meaning of Navajo weaving, it might well be found in these subtle markers that symbolize the weaver's thought process.

Lazy lines in blankets and rugs from the 1800s and 1900s derive from the practice of weaving in sections across the loom. On a wide setup, the weaver would work on one segment, then move over to weave another and then a third or more until she progressed across the entire width. These sections were woven with diagonal boundaries so that each segment would be built above its neighbor, avoiding a vertical slit between sections. Lazy lines served not only to let the weaver work across the breadth of her loom but also to add ease to the tightly woven fabric, similar to the expansion joints on a long bridge (Fig. 11).[11]

The term lazy line—suggesting that the weaver was using a shortcut method—was in use by observers at least by the early 1900s. Writer Charles Avery Amsden demoted them to a footnote: "These lines are considered an evidence of indolence in the weaver"

[11] French tapestry weavers since before medieval times have used this method. Norwegian tapestry also employs these, called "trapping" in Norwegian and described as stretch marks. I am indebted to weaver Phyllis W. Smith, who pointed out the Norwegian technique and referred me to its source (White 1975).

(1934:54, n.7).[12] This technical element—actually a sign of conscientious effort, and not laziness—is a hallmark of Diné weaving. Few Pueblo weavers and no Hispanic or Mexican weavers employ it, so analysts can generally identify Southwestern blankets of unknown origin as Navajo by the presence of lazy lines. Today, few weavers employ this technique, since buyers have discouraged it as a visual defect that might lower the sales value.[13] Trader Mark Winter suggests that the making of smaller textiles, more-intricate designs and the "flawed" appearance in an otherwise perfect design constitute other reasons for its decline (2011:49).

Some diagonal breaks are highly visible in a textile's background, especially when the wool or yarn is not thoroughly carded or dyed. Navajo weaver and curator Joyce Begay-Foss observes, "[N]ot all visible diagonal breaks or lazy lines track the movement of the weaver across the tapestry. Some weavings demonstrate what are more than likely intentional designs, made to create a zigzag or lightning pattern, for example" (2011:53). As part of a small research project sponsored by anthropologist Joe Ben Wheat in 1973, I measured and traced on graph paper the lazy lines of a dozen representative Navajo blankets and tapestries to ascertain what sequence they were woven in and whether they formed a background pattern.[14] What became apparent from this investigation were the irregular sizes and asymmetrical layout of most lazy lines and their utility in allowing a weaver to focus on specific parts of complex designs while postponing work in other areas.

The weaver's pathway began appearing in bordered rugs of the early 1900s. Toward the end of the work, some weavers insert a strand of yarn that travels from inside the pattern to the textile's edge, usually in the upper right corner (Fig. 1). This may be a contrasting color, sometimes with one or more weft passes for emphasis, or a single yarn nearly or totally invisible to viewers. Although this strand was called a "spirit line" or "spirit trail," writer Noel Bennett suggested that "weaver's pathway" would be more appropriate (1974). In Navajo it is reportedly called *ch'ihónít'i* (exit or way out) or *'atiin* (path; Yohe 2012:23). Conversations with weavers affirm that the weaver's pathway is not universally used, nor is it used uniformly by individuals. Many weavers approach it pragmatically, using it for challenging projects or after several projects. Some add it because of its spiritual values; others say it involves a good story and facilitates selling a rug.

Many weavers consider this exiting strand an outlet for the energy they put into their work. Weavers say that because weaving comes from important knowledge and creativity, such focus requires compensatory action. The weaver's pathway promotes a release from the intense engagement with thoughtful and physical processes. Weaver and scholar Wesley Thomas has said, "Weaving is like creating a living being, a child, when we take a rug off the loom we go through an emotional separation" (Bonar 1996:98). Scholar Jill Ahlberg Yohe suggests that the need for disengagement provides another reason for a pathway—the exit "disentangles weavers from the finished product created to sell in the wider marketplace" (2012:26).

Traditional Navajo coiled baskets also exhibit a pathway—a consistent break in the encircling design that corresponds with the finishing point on the braided rim (Fig. 12). This feature is aligned to the east during ceremonies (Schwarz 1993:368; Begay-Foss 2011:21; Simpson 2003). A similar trait, called a "ceremonial break," appears on the filleted necks of Navajo pottery

10. Mary Lee Henderson Begay's start of a rug with classic terraced design, 1991. Instead of diagonal lazy lines, she uses stair steps and will darn the next section into the first with a needle, to avoid slits in the weave. Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

11. Detail showing diagonal lazy line, transitional blanket/rug, c.1900. Collected by Mrs. Fanny Miller. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. E-4620. Photograph by Helga Teiwes.

[12] Amsden's footnote also erroneously suggests that lazy lines are not used in twill-woven pieces and also that such weaves are restricted to narrower widths. In fact, the author owns a diamond-twill rug dating to the 1950s that measures 58 inches wide.

[13] Instead, some weavers create vertical joins that they "sew" together with yarn and a darning needle or use the method described in footnote 11.

[14] This research remains unpublished. Materials from this study are located with the Joe Ben Wheat Papers at the University of Colorado Museum, in Boulder (copies in the files of the author).

12. Wedding-style basket, Navajo or Southern Paiute, early 1900s. Coiled, *Rhus trilobata* (sumac). 10" diameter (25.4 cm). The encircling terraced zigzag pattern signifies a basket used for Navajo weddings and other Diné ceremonies. A "pathway" emerges through the design, emerging precisely at the spot on the rim where the basket's coiling was completed. The bump on the rim aids the medicine man in facing the basket's pathway toward the East during rituals. Gift of Mrs. Emma Franklin (Mrs. Harold K.) Estabrook, 1942. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson. Cat. No. E-1433. Photograph by Gina Watkinson.

13. Larry Yazzie, Tuba City, Arizona, 1993. Leaving a legacy of asymmetrical designs to inspire others, Yazzie used to say he liked "to paint with wool." Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

jars and is likened to the weaver's pathway (Brugge 1987:6; Hartman et al. 1987). Anthropologist David Brugge inferred that the insertion of this break was a symbolic means to assert Navajo identity onto an object originating from non-Navajo or foreign sources, thereby integrating it into Navajo practice (1981:16).

Attitudes toward the weaver's pathway provide further indications of the importance of process, on moving beyond the product and toward the next project. This is especially true when an invisible weaver's pathway is used and the broken thread forms a symbolic outlet from the rug. Once again, it is the thought, not a visible trait, that counts (Hedlund 1994:14).

Deliberate Errors

There are occasional reports that Navajo weavers purposefully insert a flaw into their blankets and rugs, but these may not derive from indigenous knowledge. In the midst of their labors—collecting raw materials, carding, spinning and dyeing the wool or buying their yarn, warping the loom, tying the heddle strings and, finally, weaving—what then? Intentionally make a mistake in the design? How many opportunities were there already to stray inadvertently from a perfect path? Some weavers tell me their handwork is naturally embedded with quirks of the mind and hand, so why should they add something to prove they are human and avoid competing with the gods? This notion of hubris may well have come, not from the Navajo world, but from the Mediterranean and Middle East—it may be an imported concept, like other now well-integrated elements in Navajo weaving. But this one, unlike borrowed motifs, imported colors or the sheep's wool itself, has not been embraced by most Navajo weavers as a useful loan.

Perhaps the notion of a deliberate mistake was suggested by observers who noticed a rug with lazy lines or a weaver's pathway. The idea might have come from traders, tourists or others eager for a story, wanting to imbue Navajo weaving with symbolic meaning from their point of view. Since first talking with Navajo weavers in the early 1970s, I have met few people who claim to insert a flaw knowingly into their design. Most weavers strive to produce as perfect a product as possible, with reasons ranging from personal pride to gaining the highest price. Many weavers talk about meticulous efforts to avoid or remove mistakes from their work, often by unweaving a portion of work to correct an error. One weaver noted, "The hardest part of weaving is when you make a mistake or it doesn't come out straight. When you've made a mistake, when you've gone so far and you notice that you just happened to make a mistake, then you have to go over and undo it again until you finish. Then, you feel a lot better" (Hedlund 1994:14).

Still, there may be weavers who make intentional flaws their practice, and Native views on this are subject to change. Yohe observes that certain weavers may insert a pathway "to materialize the positive attributes of

14. *Ye'ii bicheii* rug by Della Woody Begay, Navajo, 1980. Tapestry weave. Commercially processed and hand-spun native wool (natural colors, native and aniline dyes). 22" x 34" (55.9 cm x 86.4 cm). This weaver's dramatic handling of jagged towering clouds is hers alone. Courtesy of the Santa Fe Collection of Navajo Rugs donated by Dr. Charles and Linda Rimmer, Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona. Cat. No. 4650-2. Photograph by Jim Freeman.

human imperfection and humility" (2012:28), though it is non-weavers who voice such views (2015). Walters has reasoned, "To make something perfect means there is no more room for improvement, but it's important always to want to improve....If a weaver weaves a perfect rug, she will not have anything to compare with a future weaving, so she makes a little mistake on purpose—an imperfection" (1996:31). Such writing may even exert new influence on weavers who, like artists from any society, derive creative ideas from many sources.

Navajo prayer is composed of structure and performance, with both rigid and creative components (Gill 1981:186–187). Weaving, too, possesses these properties—techniques provide a formulaic backbone and designs are open to individual choice. The latter evoke "a network of symbols related to sense, experience, moods, emotions, and values" (Gill 1981:187). As meaning-makers, Navajo weavers are less concerned with technical issues in a mechanical or material sense, and more involved with technique as a relational part of the mental, kinesthetic and experiential process of weaving.

The Designing Process

Today, every weaver is free to develop his or her own designs. We can only presume this was the case in the past, just as grandmothers and mothers typically leave the choice of designs open to relatives who follow them. When teaching non-Navajos to weave, Keams has encountered students expecting to learn specific designs from her. However, her focus has always been on traditional methods, not motifs (1992).

Designs are derived from internal and external sources and may be the most personal and transitory part of weaving. Weavers talk about rug designs coming from their minds, sometimes premeditated and sometimes arriving just as they sit at the loom. Weavers say they literally will, or think, a rug into being by becoming mentally "saturated" with the process. Some get ideas from dreams; others from more conscious effort, including drawing or graphing patterns on paper. As with any modern artist, a weaver may select visually appealing or technically challenging designs, sometimes seen in photographs, books and exhibitions. Local surroundings, travel experiences and current events may contribute. A weaver may stick with a family pattern for life or switch often between different rug styles. Many note that their idea of a rug's appearance might change as the weaving grows upward on the loom.

Weaver Judy Davis of Vanderwagen, New Mexico, draws on knowledge passed from her great-grandmother, Ake' Nez Bah Mike, a medicine woman who knew weaving songs, prayers and rituals, and her grandmother, Anne Joe Willie, both from Breadsprings, New Mexico. She expounds on the designing process:

> The whole frame of the loom is considered what they call the frame of the world, what holds the whole world up in the universe. It is how you imagine the loom—it is vast and has so many things in it, the whole universe....When you sit at the loom, you consider, you imagine beyond the warp. That's how you get all the designs. When you are sitting and see those sunrays—in the evening the sunsets and the mornings the sunrises—all together they represent the designs [that could be]. The clouds make the designs—they are forever changing. Just like the clouds, they are never the same. When you sit at the loom you imagine and look beyond the strings, and you start weaving in that fashion (2015).

Purpose and Meaning in Navajo Weaving

While Navajo weaving embodies powerful cultural principles and values, the most repeated weaving narratives are not necessarily what many observers expect.

15. The Spider Rock Girls, left to right: Larissa Blake, LaVera Ambrose, Emily Malone and Laramie Blake, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, 2002. These young women have devised a unique multicolored rug style with a black background. Taking a group name much like pop musicians would, they dedicate their work to Spider Woman and the rock-spire landmark named for her near their home on the canyon's rim. Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund.

They are not, for instance, linear chronicles like those in Plains Indian pictographic drawings, nor do they have omnipresent symbolic elements like Pueblo art associated with religious katsina imagery. Weavers' histories refer conceptually to the land and livestock (especially sheep as a mother figure), obliquely to a give-and-take among kin and community, and pragmatically to economic pursuits that align with spiritual and cultural purposes. As Navajo scholar Jennifer Nez Denetdale observes, "[W]eavers' knowledge, rooted in cultural knowledge that has ceremonial and spiritual significance, has been crucial to Navajo cultural survival. Their labor often meant the difference between starving and having enough to eat" (2007:93). Weaver Pearl Sunrise wrote, "My mother always said that to be born into a family of weavers was a true wealthy inheritance. A strong weaving foundation for young girls in a family was so valuable because it taught them not only Diné traditional values but also creativity, ingenuity, and life skills" (2002:9–10). Albert Jackson, a male weaver, noted, "I have a grazing permit from my mom. We have to keep livestock on it so we can keep the land going for the family. That's the reason why I weave....There's something valuable about being here" (Stiver 1999:4).

Many weavers make it clear that

> [w]eaving *is* a metaphor and *has* metaphors at one and the same time. Many weavers speak of weaving as though it *stands for* many other things in life—the ultimate in hard work and ideal behavior for instance; it embodies patience and providing for the family. Also, weaving evokes other metaphors—it is "like" an addiction; "like" the birthing process—rugs are like babies; a weaver is "like" a man who is building a house (Hedlund 1993).

Just as the Navajo language is powerfully verb oriented, many of weaving's metaphors are equally action oriented. I have illustrated how weavers talk about weaving's contributions to their lives on personal, cultural and crosscultural planes; these benefits range from self-esteem, self-expression, family support and broadened horizons to new friendships (Hedlund 1999). And the Diné sense of humor as a balancing mechanism (1994: 14) should never be overlooked!

To many Navajos, weaving represents cultural practices worth maintaining and provides the means to preserving the larger Diné value system. "With my sisters," notes one of the Spider Rock Girls (Fig. 15),

> [W]e always tell them to weave, always tell them they need to learn and keep the tradition going. We just don't want it to die out….It really makes my grandmother proud that we do sit at our looms everyday. That's how she grew up. She was always told to weave. My mother always said that to us, "[W]eave, where else are you going to get your money?"…. If I want something, then I'm going to have to set up a rug and finish a rug and sell it to get the money. That's pretty much how I see it (Musun-Miller 2008:56).

Sarah Paul Begay, explaining one panel in her major weaving, *The Navajo Universe,* writes,

> At the end I made my own decision to put Spider Woman in the rug, because I think she belongs in there to be seen and to get her respect, and I think she is a cool lady to have shared her talents with us….Only I can understand my designs and my gift to you is through my rugs and I design for the wandering eye. My Grandmother taught me to make my own path and not to follow a trail, because you don't want to know what awaits you (2006:4).

And Wesley Thomas has noted,

> Today, we weave to demonstrate our desire and to express our artistic needs, as any artist does. The occupation of weaving tends to enthrall our minds on a daily basis. Our environmental surroundings are captured in and presented through our finished products. The cultural permission has also moved Navajo weaving from being classified as a craft to that of an art form (1999:9).

Symbolism and StorytellingToday

Today, the recognition of design origins, cultural symbolism and personal storytelling is growing as Navajo weavers increasingly consider themselves visual artists and gain familiarity with historical narratives. A few weavers are, once again, looking beyond beauty, toward more esoteric meaning as they name, frame, recall and narrate their work (Hedlund 2011:73–76; Muskett 2004; Sarah Paul Begay 2006).

Traditional stories accord the loom special properties that link weaving to cosmological and meteorological elements: dawn to dusk, earth and sky, sun and clouds, lightning and rainbows. Interviews with the late Rose Owens of Cross Canyon, Arizona (Fig. 2), and with other weavers during my 1988 card-sort study were replete with the identification of cloud symbols, descriptions of light/dark shading as dawn/twilight, and the labeling of other significant elements. However, the tools to interpret such information were not formulated—they required contextualization, with the creation story as the "aesthetic locus" of Navajo culture (Schwarz 1993:363–366). Walters explains, "The way the loom is put together is the same way elements in the universe are put together. The loom is a prayer; it brings forth rain" (2015).

In particular, clouds and cloud imagery, as seen on basketry, *biil* and *mantas,* are a recurrent theme. Davis describes her geometric designs figuratively as growing on the loom "like the clouds in the sky, always changing forms, different for each weaver" (2015). Other contemporary weavers take this to a literal level, creating idiosyncratic and expressive cloud forms in the skies of their pictorial rugs (Figs. 9, 14). It seems that no two weavers ever depict clouds in the same way. One weaver, Alma Hardy from The Gap, Arizona, even formed her initials into the shapes of clouds along the top of her pictorial rug.

In broader artistic ways, landscapes and atmospheric conditions provide profound possibilities for creativity (Fig. 16). D. Y. Begay has written,

> I grew up watching sunrises and sunsets in Tselani. My front yard view was the Lukachukai Mountains; I was always fascinated by the colors and the outlines of the mountains. Each day the colors and the light and the mountains were different and very beautiful. This has been my inspiration to achieve the beauty of the images in my weaving….There will always be something about the canyon walls that I want to capture (Moore 2003b:2).

Final Notes

Weaving the Diné way is far deeper and more complex than its motifs, colors or techniques. As artist Shonto Begay has described,

> At home, I watched my mother weave rugs. To my innocent eyes, I just saw colors and patterns composed on a loom. I did not see the significance of the designs. The passions of the native dyes, the recreation of the Spider Women stories in my mother's eyes as strands of wool flowed out of her hand. The spiritual connection she pushed down with every row wove her deeper into the heart of the pattern. My eyes were too dazzled to see a minute line she allowed from the center to the edge of the rug. Upon this line, she will travel back out of the pattern so she can continue to create other fine rugs (1988:34).

Weaving pervades Navajo culture and is the stuff of life—*Diné be'iina'*. It encompasses spiritual and religious, social and cultural realms that range from the essence of thought and time spent at the loom, to land, sheep, kin and community, to relations with the outside worlds of commerce and art. Today, weaving provides fresh opportunities for interpretation, cultural performance and autoethnography (Yohe 2009:7; McLerran 2006).

A greater understanding of its past, present and future relevance must rely on Navajo analyses of oral histories and narratives. And as Diné values and culture continue to evolve, our knowledge of weaving will benefit from fresh personal and poetic renditions, as well as scholarly Native approaches. Acknowledging complexity, as this article does, is one thing; actually understanding its nuances is another.

> Weaving is important for your thinking. Weaving is communication. It is like speaking Navajo. It enables me to communicate with weavers, my family, and my friends….Some of the technical terms and many of the underlying principles cannot be translated into English. A full understanding of Navajo weaving demands a knowledge of our language, because the activity cannot be separated from the Navajo words and beliefs from which it arises (D. Y. Begay 1996:17, 18).

I hope that others, especially bilingual Navajo intellectuals, pick up the threads, continue this conversation and contribute their own thoughts. In 1996, curator Eulalie Bonar challenged an exhibition team at the National Museum of the American Indian to refute the notions that, first, "everything there is to say about Navajo weaving has already been said—in part because

16. ***Pollen Path*** **by D.Y. Begay, Navajo, 2007. Tapestry weave. Handspun churro[?] wool,** ***Solidago*** **sp. (goldenrod),** ***Rubia tinctorum*** **(madder root),** ***Allium atrorubens*** **(purple onion skins),** ***Coreopsis tinctoria*** **(Plains coreopsis),** ***Hydnelium peckii*** **(fungus),** ***Phaseolus vulgaris*** **(beans),** ***Helianthus schweinitzii*** **(sunflower seeds), aniline dyes. 25" x 36" (63.5 cm x 91.4 cm). The work of D. Y. Begay often evokes Southwestern landscapes without resorting to realistic imagery. The artist says the title here "refers to corn pollen that we sprinkle to honor a new day and to ask for a blessing and balance in our life. We collect the pollen in late summer when the tips of the cornstalks start pollinating. The Pollen is collected in the very early morning before the sun rises. Pollen Path reflects peace, beauty and gratification in life" (D. Y. Begay 2007). Private collection.**

17. One of the Spider Rock Girls, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona. Photograph by Ann Lane Hedlund, 2002.

Navajo people have had little voice in the discourse" and second, "Navajo weaving has been determined to such an extent by the demands of the non-Indian market that it no longer qualifies as indigenous art" (1996:2). Beyond beauty, beyond boundaries, it seems there will always be more to learn from and perceive in Navajo weaving.

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