

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

DIOGANHDIH

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Location of Interview: Chinatown, New York City

Transcribed by Nybe Otterstone

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #181

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Dio... [laughs]

Dioganh dih: My name is too! [laughs] Like this is different!

Silverman: Hello my name is Aviva and I will be having a conversation with Dio for the New York Trans Oral History Project. In collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project subject on the experience of trans identifying people. It's November...what's the date?

Dioganh dih: 12th.

Silverman: 12th, 2019 and it's being recorded in Chinatown. Hi!

Dioganh dih: *She':kon*.¹ (Hello) Hello, how are you?

Silverman: Good. Could you tell me your name?

Dioganh dih: Yeah, my name is Dioganh dih.

Silverman: And I was wondering if you could tell me all the names, or some names that come to you, of your family members.

Dioganh dih: Like the names *of* my family members? Or names that I've gotten?

Silverman: Yeah, just, any kind of experience of naming related to you and your family.

Dioganh dih: Oh, yeah, so my name, I only have one name. I do not have a colonizer name. I only have my *Ongwe Honwe*, my Native name, which was given to me in a ceremony, by a clan mother, with my family there. And, yeah, I've had a series of nicknames. Dioganh dih— I got that name around, like, the age of two. But before that, people called me like, "*Khe' Ken:Uh*," which means "little sister." They called me "Goodie," cuz I was really good, and they called me "Smiley," cuz I smiled a lot. Um, yes, but I, Dio is just an abbreviation of Dioganh dih, and I use that throughout my music, and just like interactions with different people. And then I turned it into a little bit of an acronym. "Do It Ourselves." But most people in my family—no I'd say, a portion of people in my family have *Ongwe Honwe* names, like names given to them in the Long House, and then others have colonized names, like English names. Where there wasn't a ceremony around the name.

¹ Spellings of Mohawk words throughout this transcript are taken from Dictionary of Kanien'kéha.net, a website created for collaboration of elders and community in building a central place to preserve the Mohawk language.

<https://kanienkeha.net/phrases/greetings/onenkiwahi/>

Silverman: And why did some get some names and some get the others?

Dioganh dih: Well, that would have to do with, like, um, relationship to our Longhouse, and our culture and our traditions. So, my mom remarried, to a non-Native, a white man and then those were those names given to those kids were from his grandmother, so they were family names to him. But because my mom was no longer a part of the Longhouse in the same way since she married a non-Native, it just made more sense to get an English name.

Silverman: And you mentioned to me that you might get a new name?

Dioganh dih: I want a Mohawk name. So, my name is actually Onondaga. Interestingly enough, I am not Onondaga. Onondagas and Mohawks are both part of the *Haudenosaunee*, or the Iroquois, but I was born in Onondaga and I'm Mohawk. And now I live in a Mohawk territory called *Ahkwesahsne* and nobody can say my name because it's a different dialect. And people, sometimes there's even Mohawk people and they don't even know that I have *Ongwe Honwe* name. There's no "d's" in Mohawk, there's only "t's" that sound like "d's", so my name is like an indicator that I'm a little bit of an outsider. Which is like, not the biggest deal, but I think it would be awesome to have a Mohawk name as well.

Silverman: And how would that help?

Dioganh dih: That's kind of like more, I guess internal knowledge, that there's ceremonies for that. You just have to be a part of the community to like, get access to the ceremonies, you know. You have to build those relationships, which I'm still doing cuz I was born and raised in a different community and then I've spent time here and in Oakland.

Silverman: And what has your relationship been to New York state or where you grew up and what it's called, like, generally?

Dioganh dih: Um, well... we have never given up our land, it was taken from us. So, my relationship to the state is, I mean, I don't believe in it. But I have to exist in it. For example, the New York state DMV doesn't take my birth certificate because I was born on Onondaga Nation and I have a *Haudenosaunee* birth certificate so they refuse to take it. They told me to get a "real one" from New York state. As if you know that defines what a nation, or what a state is. So, I have a—yeah, I guess like a distaste in my mouth. Because it's a continued attack on my people, it's a continued attack on our land and on our rights. Since the Revolutionary War, that's when we lost like, 96% of our land. It was awarded to soldiers after the Revolutionary War, and a lot of the counties in upstate New York, they're named after war generals, Sullivan and um... yeah, I can't...that's the only one I can think of right now. But, yeah, if you look into the names of the counties in upstate New York, they're named after generals from the war, and it's just like a continued reminder of that genocide and displacement that's very much in your face, but then also invisibleized with our Native culture. So, I don't...I don't care for New York state. The fact I can't even get a license in New York state because I have a birth certificate from a sovereign nation, it just leaves a really

bad taste in my mouth. Because there's things that could be done, you know, like I know for example, there's folks who are undocumented who don't have birth certificates but they're able to get licenses.

Silverman: Um, and do you want to share a bit about growing up on the "rez?"

Dioganh dih: Yeah, I grew up, I was born on the rez, but then once my parents split up, I grew up off the reservation. So, a lot of my experience is living in a neighboring town and then my dad being on the rez. But my dad had a really awesome house. He had one of the oldest houses on the rez. Too old for pipes, so there was no running water. And he had a outhouse, which was really... it's funny looking back. And you think about, like, the challenges of going to the toilet in the middle of the night as like a 7-year-old, you know? And just needing to wake another sibling up to go to the bathroom. Having to put on your shoes and then running outside to the freezing cold outhouse, and then needing to check for spiders and then sitting on this cold toilet seat. Yeah, makes you appreciate different amenities, you know?

Silverman: And did you go to school on the reservation, or off it?

Dioganh dih: I went to school on the rez until the grade of like, maybe third, or fourth grade. And then I went to the neighboring white school and that was a culture shock for sure. It was like, different—obviously there were non-Natives, and we learned different things. We, like... I previously had been doing, like, we would learn our language, well it was Onondaga. We would learn the language every day, you know—so there was culture and language that were just completely immersed into our education. And then going to the non-Native school off the rez, it was like, we were learning —I remember I did a project on Ben Franklin and the states and Massachusetts and we had to each pick a state and had to each pick a person, it's like—why did I dress up like Ben Franklin when I was 10? It's so outta hand, you know, I just jumped into a completely different culture.

Silverman: And did you have any like family members at the time kind of like analyzing or like helping kind of to speak through those differences with you or was it something you had to kinda come to later?

Dioganh dih: No, I think it's something I've only come to in my adult life like the stark um, like the really the contrasts of lives, and we still like, played on softball teams and had friends my dad still lived on the rez so it wasn't it didn't feel so distant but looking back it was really difficult for me to adjust ...yeah...but thank goodness for therapy.

Silverman: What were other ways you adjusted?

Dioganh dih: Um, I adjusted later in life I know. I've like, yeah, I've just tied my adjusting to...I guess like social outcast moments where I felt "othered" and I felt different going to the non-Native school, and I didn't necessarily know why, you know, but I felt very much different and I think that there was this longing to fit in, there felt like this need to be like other peoples and not

feel different and not feel outcasted or what not. But you know, there's like kind of always that like... yeah, sometimes you just don't fit in. You know, like no matter how much you want to or try it's like -no I was the little brown queer kid, I was never gonna fit in with the blonde-haired, blue-eyed white girls, you know.

Silverman: And how did the, I don't know if you were old enough, or had returned to the reservation while you were coming into your queerness but how did that experience evolve for you?

Dioganh dih: Well that was basically just a few years ago. So, my family lives on a different reservation, *Ahkwesahsne* and that's where my dad's family's from. So that's where I like, yeah, I speak with a lot of pride coming from there and being... yeah, just being somebody who is from that community. But being an adult and being queer at home is definitely challenging. I don't see visibly queer people at home. And I say that to my siblings and they're always like, "No, but, this pers..." And I'm like, no coming from *my* queer perspective I don't see any other queer people. Like maybe you know them in the community, but I don't see them. So that's challenging. Um...yeah.

Silverman: And how is like queerness or and tranves... or two-spirit myth discussed at home?

Dioganh dih: I'd say it's not really discussed. I'm able to find spaces you know with my therapist to talk about being queer or I can talk with my sister who's a mental health therapist and drug counselor. She has students that she works with, Native youth that are at the neighboring high school. She works with different trans youth, so there's resources she'll ask me about and there's different things she'll talk to me about. And a lot of times, it's just that same feelings of isolation that I have as an adult but magnified because it's youth who a lot of times, may be suicidal, or may feel really disconnected and may feel... experiencing a lot of different, like, body dysmorphia and not having community. So, it's definitely an intention, the more time I'm able to spend at home, to like, help create a safe space for youth. Discussing maybe that's just like a once a month social hour at the rec, or something, you know?

Silverman: Are there questions that they ask you that you have trouble answering or is there like, I don't know experiences that you've had that feel— I don't know, intense about when you're with children or kids that haven't really like reached a certain kind of like, level of a community when they're still living in communities that are kind of like isolated? I don't know, like, what are the differences when you're around, yeah, the youth in a place like that where it's not like New York city or whatever?

Dioganh dih: I would say that I don't unfortunately, I don't get to work with queer youth at home as much as I would like, but working with different youth... I work with youth at home. And, a lot of times I think it's just one of the most surprising things is just instilling the pride that I have into the youth and kind of like seeing, and sharing in the excitement being Mohawk, and being *Ongwe Honwe*. Being *Ongwe Honwe* is to be Mohawk. Being *Ongwe Honwe* is just like, one of the greatest feelings as well as achievements. There's a lot of resilience in our ancestors' actions that

have led to today and to me to being able to share these words and to be able to sit here. A lot of us, we come from lineages like that where it's, our ancestors literally had to fight for our survival. So being able to share that with youth is a sense of joy and pride.

Silverman: And this is kind of a leading question which I probably shouldn't ask, but like, do you feel a sense of exhaustion when other people outside of the community want you to narrate or explain your Nativeness?

Dioganh dih: Oh, 100%, yeah, I think on a daily basis. And as of lately, that is one of the major reasons why I stay in my home community. Because it's not worth being triggered. It's such a large part of my identity, that I don't want to feel misunderstood at that level. And a lot of times, even though I don't have a queer community at home, it's like, I kind of just... yeah. I'll be more solitary at home to relieve some of the triggers around my culture.

Silverman: And have there been certain workplaces or communities that you've had to interact with outside of the community that either supported you feeling more connected through your multiple identities or like, I don't know also, more alienated from them? I'm sure there's a few, either or or both.

Dioganh dih: Yeah, I think like in Oakland. Oakland is a place that I found really can hold my intersections. So that's like my queerness, and my two-spiritedness, my many spiritedness and my indigeneity. So even though I'm far from home, I'm able to connect with a lot of different people. Indigenous folks from the south, from the west coast, from the north. Like Salish and Yurok, and Blackfoot, and then Aztecs, and different people who speak Nahuatl in the south. That's like a whole other level— I don't know. It's like a connectedness- connectivity with like a whole other side of your family you almost didn't even know existed. So, it's like, "oh hey cousin, we don't speak the same language, but hey cousin, you look like my cousin!" So, I like being on the west coast for that because of like, the amount of brown folks that are there, and the amount of Indigenous people that are there. And it took me a second to realize that, oh, we got colonized by different people, we got colonized by the French. Like Mohawks in Canada, in Aquasusnee, that's a French speaking area, and English obviously, but. And in the south, people got colonized by Spanish. We're all Native, Indigenous people. So, I like Cali for that, and the warm weather. Allows me to be in my body, in a different way because I don't need to have so many layers on, I don't have to cover myself up in the same way.

Silverman: What else allows you to be in your body in terms of gender stuff? What makes you feel embodied generally?

Dioganh dih: Well, stretching. Stretching is something that really allows me to connect to how I'm feeling. And then focus on different areas of my body that are hurting and then just be gentle with myself as I work to ease the pain. And then it's something where if you, it's like, repetitive, you can see results, and that feels really good.

Silverman: And, um...just as like a broader question, how would you describe your gender or your relationship to two-spiritedness?

Dioganh dih: I always say my gender is “everything and nothing.” So, yeah, I feel like I embody masculinity, femininity and then what’s not defined between that and then beyond that. Cuz I know that within our Indigenous culture, within *Haudenosaunee* culture, there were people, there’s always been people throughout time, that didn’t have genders or maybe embodied several genders. And I’m still searching to find out who those queer ancestors were within my own culture. But I know that these people exist because they exist today. And there wasn’t the language, you know, so that’s why I always say everything and nothing. Cuz...yeah.

Silverman: When you say there “wasn’t the language”—the language to speak about the specific identity category now? Or, what’s that mean?

Dioganh dih: Yeah, I guess we have all the language now, to define like, “oh I’m non-binary.” Or, we are even defining binary. We’re able to define that I’m gender non-conforming, or that I feel like I’m two-spirit. And everything that I’ve done my research on, there’s no language to define that, even in my own language. You know what I mean, so it’s just new terms that we’ve come up with for things that have always, people that have always existed.

Silverman: Have you drawn any models or people that you can reflect as predating you?

Dioganh dih: Yeah, and I cannot remember the name. There’s a Zuni person. But there’s a lot of different instances. Like in Navajo and Zuni Pueblo culture, where two-spirit people were highly revered— in certain cultures and just like, held in high regard. So, I like to think of that too as like the fluidity, that our...like... I know that based off of how my ancestors were, they were likely accepting of people within their community who were born in their community. Like, there was a place for everyone, you know?

Silverman: And do you feel that way presently with your family?

Dioganh dih: In my immediate family? Yeah. I think there’s a lot that they don’t, maybe understand yet about gender. But they’re really loving, kind and I think just maybe just need more articles, or, you know? Cuz they’ve accepted me and my queerness and they have a lot of love for me, they just don’t read the same books as me, which is fine.

Silverman: Totally. And I wanted to ask you how you came to rap?

Dioganh dih: Oh, ok— hip hop? So, I started, I guess it kind of came out of, like, writing and using poetry as a means of expression, but (*excuse me*)...but it evolved when I got into college and I took this class called “Hip-Hop as a Philosophical Discourse,” and the class was really amazing. It was taught by Noelle Paley and T.A. Mike Lane and we basically learned about hip hop culture and the roots of it and it being an act of resistance stemming from Jamaica. Moving to the Bronx and continuing to be this fight against oppressive forces but also unifying in celebratory and...

provocative and... it was like— I guess out of—what’s the word? Out-of-the-box? Out-the-box? (laughs)

Silverman: Yeah, you can just say that! (laughs)

Dioganh dih: Yeah, so it just broke the mold. I like that. I like that a lot. And I like hip hop’s impact throughout time of getting messages across and being a voice for different communities. Being a proud voice, a celebratory voice, speaking on real issues that may not have had the same platform had they not risen through people’s speakers. And also like, hip hop being, um... like, technically it was something new, right—like I was saying it was out-of-the-box, it was like... it changed the game in the sense of, like people were engineering audio and cutting audio live in a way that people had never done before. And cutting edge—that’s the word that I’ve been looking for! So, we learned all of this stuff in class and—obviously I’ve done my own research since and continued to be interested in the topic. But we also performed in the class, we had notebooks, and we would write rhymes, we would write bars. We had to introduce our self to the class with like four bars, and I remember being like “Easy! Done! Like *so* ready!”

Silverman: Do you remember your bars?

Dioganh dih: No, I have the notebook somewhere. But...and then we also would battle each other, which got *really* out of hand and like it was so bad-slash-good! People were crying, people didn’t want to come to class, people were getting really anxious. I remember somebody had red hair and they made, somebody said the curtain matched the drapes and we just lost it, you know! Somebody was in a sorority, somebody bringing up “*you buying your friends,*” like—we went in! That was one of the most entertaining classes that I had!

Silverman: So, it’s kinda like group therapy too, like, people kinda have to process to rap and how they felt.

Dioganh dih: Yeah, and it was like “Oh shit, I can take shots at this person right now?” And I don’t think my teacher meant for it to go in that direction, but like with the teachings of what battle rap was, it went there. But then we ended up segueing into like, ok let’s freestyle, or let’s cypher. So, we learned a lot of different elements, and that was really just the spark that I needed to ignite, ignite the medium in me. Because I remember after that, I would just be freestyling, like all the time. I’m like, “this is fun!” I ended up, that was my last semester at Cortland, SUNY Cortland and then I moved to New York City and then I started working at the working families party in Brooklyn, but I had already worked with them. But I had a couple friends there and we would rhyme together and rap all the time. And we had a little crew, you know. And one of them was queer so, a lot of what came out too, was just like, you know, this little... Hip hop is an art in general, it kind of allows you to explore different sides of your personality, you know? And at that point, it just needing to be this sense of bravado, or this, this opportunity for me to tell stories and tell, and speak on different parts of my identity that never had exposure, like my queerness.

Silverman: Is there like a particular song that you've wrote that you've performed that's scared you or scares you still? That you're just like, "Woah, I did that!"

28:01

Dioganh dih: Yeah, the pussy vortex! (laughs)

Silverman: (laughs) Could you explain -slash- perhaps say some of the bars if you wanted to?

Dioganh dih: Sure, yeah. So, the first line ... and my friend brought this up to me, they're like... I wrote this when I was twenty...one. Yeah, I believe I was twenty-one, maybe twenty-two cuz I was, that was like the summer that I got out of college. And my friend and my little hip-hop crew asked me why I wasn't ending the relationship. And I was like ...mumbles... I gave all the reasons *why* it sucked like... things were *not* going smooth. And then I talked about the euphoric, like, orgasmic exploration of body, mind, and spirit or whatever was happening, you know. And my friend's like, "You're in the pussy vortex!" and I'm like oh my god I am! So, the first lines are like

Got me flippin' through my phone

Got me flippin' through your phone

Got me playin' Love Jones

Got me in the anger zone

Got me fearin' to be alone

Got me up all night wonderin'

Is that smell his cologne?

Is that his ringtone?

Is you really on your own?

Is he givin' you the bone?

Is he makin' you scream and moan?

Is he droppin' his seeds and makin' his clones?

Is he tryin' to wife you and take you home?

Is he, is he, is he preppin' your hand for a ring and a stone?

Cuz any other situation...

So basically, you get it, though right? And then that scenario, like, came up again recently. And my friend was just like, "D—You've been through this! First verse, *Pussy Vortex!*" And it was just so telling to me, yeah, yeah. Cuz I already had been there so I felt very appreciative of my former self for making this song as like a timestamp, you know?

Silverman: And what, so kind of like sends you off guard when you hear it or think about it?

Dioganh dih: The fact I was so hurt and so sad and confused about my relationship but I was still able to, um... I was still able to make a song that slaps! Like, cuz that first part of the verse, it sounds really heavy but when it's matched with the beat and then the chorus and then the rest of the song, cuz the song kind of takes a more uplifting pickup. Um, yeah I just feel really proud of my former self for capturing that moment, speaking and writing on my pain, turning it into a song, making a beat for it, recording it, getting it mixed, getting it mastered, putting it on Spotify and then being able to listen to it ten years later!

Silverman: Yeah.

Dioganh dih: (laughs) Yeah!

Silverman: Have you had other experiences of other expressions that are like that where you're just like, in it, for that kind of dedicated effort where then it gives you that kind of satisfaction?

Dioganh dih: I guess not outside of my music, I haven't really felt that same like, linear, yeah that linear thread like that. But I get that feeling a lot with my, the production on my music. That's not something that I really speak to, speak on too much because it's not my um... yeah, it's just not a talent that I'm boastful about. Cuz I feel like sometimes imposter's syndrome is real, but then we can also, if we surround ourselves, we're with people who are like, really incredibly, talented musicians, it's not like the thing that I'm putting out there the most. You know, if I'm like, freestyling or jamming with people, I'll use my voice rather than me being on the keys or me being on the drum pad. But, actually, Tygapaw was somebody who taught me how to use a digital/audio workspace and that has really pushed my creativity. That was at least like, seven years ago, six years ago. But that's allowed me to continue to translate my creativity into composing music and composing sounds. And then, when I go back and I listen to these sounds and this music that I made that I'm not necessarily rapping on, I get that same feeling like, "Woah, I am so proud of myself for doing this!"

Silverman: What's the album you're working on now, or the song you're working on now

Dioganh dih: The album I'm working on, it's going to be called Rezbian. And, it's about my return to the rez. I was gonna call it Born Again Rezbian. It gets a lot of laughs, but the religious undertones are just so real on it, that I'm like, I don't know. So, I'm gonna, I think it'll just be called Rezbian. And it's gonna to have ten, eleven tracks on it. And they're all recorded... um, they're...all the tracks are made by Native producers. I've co-produced some of them. Recorded most of it on the rez, and like all of it in Canada. (laughs)

Silverman: Is there a song you really love that you've written?

Dioganh dih: Well, since this is a gay talk, I did write another Pussy Vortex 2.0 essentially! (laughs) I had to, you know, like I said, it slaps, still ten years later. I was at Stanford performing for their students out there, they're so amazing. But, when I was on stage, they were screaming they're in a Pussy Vortex, like screaming! And I was like, I love this reaction! That's so amazing, there's no other song of mine where people are screaming in the front row! So, I wrote a Pussy Vortex 2.0 called Puff Puff Passion, and I think that it's very clever and witty and amazing and...

Silverman: Can we get a preview?

Dioganh dih: Yeah, sure, why not? It's um, it's about consent. And this verse is about, um... yeah, it's just about consent. I'll leave it at that, and you can figure out the rest. So, it goes
Do ya mind if I smoke up in that bedroom

Get me little strength when I get that head room
Get me little focus when I get that bed move
Either way okay we can write our own rules
Gifted when I dip it then we get it now we livin'
Ask you if you wit it be your mans and your girlfriend
Never miss the kissin' on the way to lick the kitten
If it's spittin' or it's whippin' 'em in-to lotsa givin'
Pillow princess winnin'
Power bottom wishes
Drippin' and we strippin' it's a lifestyle and a move-ment
Yeah, you was delicious like I'm all up in the kitchen
I'm always down to listen and help you wash the dishes
That Puff Puff Passion! (laughs)

Silverman: (laughs) Who else do you collaborate with?

Dioganh dih: I collaborate with Chhathu Maiya, Beto Guapoflaco, Purple Cats in Slacks, Mose Beats, Mr. JOC., my niece, Peaches Blanco, Zebe Wan, Exquisite Ghost, yeah. And then Rezboy Beats. Those are some of the people who are going to be on my album, the next one.

Silverman: Damn, that's a lot of people.

Dioganh dih: Yeah, I try, I try really hard to be collaborative but it's also like, yeah, that's just the nature of the art form. I don't know how to make all the beats. I don't know how to mix and master, completely on my own, yet. But, Do It Ourselves...gettin' there!

Silverman: Mhmm, but also, it's kind of beautiful not be able, not to have to do it all yourself.

Dioganh dih: That is true, I want to know how to, though.

Silverman: Definitely!

Dioganh dih: Yeah.

Silverman: This might be an exhausting question, you can skip but I just, because I know you were so active with Standing Rock, I just wanted to know if you— yeah, how that experience connects to the way you are feeling, like politically engaged now or have always felt or how it's changed the way you think about your engagement? Um, just like, any general thoughts, about what that did or what that experience was like for you?

Dioganh dih: Yeah, Standing Rock was a lot. I feel like it's still an experience that sits really close to me and it doesn't feel like it was three years ago. It's...yeah, there was a lot that happened in a short period of time, that felt like this continued genocidal reminder of the um... like this imperialist conquest, you know that's been set out on Turtle Island and against Native people. Just like watching police forces from seven neighboring states just run out to the Dakotas to spray

Natives with freezing cold water in freezing temperatures. You know it was like what the... and it was this reminder that this fight has been going on. It was literally those people's ancestors that sought to eradicate and erase and stole land from the Natives who are over here, fighting to protect water. And it was so clear, what our interests were rooted in, right? We were there to protect people's clean water and their ways of life that were dependent on the clean water. And then, you know, standing up for the earth, and then there were these cops from different counties, different states. There were people who were, what are they— the army reserve, they were there. So, it was all these different levels, county, state, national, but they were protecting a corporate interest. They were protecting a pipeline to be built, and you saw the lengths at which they went to protect land and property. And that was terrifying. And you saw the lengths at which they went to support the private security, cuz the private security is basically their ex-military, their paramilitary people who operate alongside of the law, but above it. Because they can do what they want, and we saw that happen there. So, it just was a reinforcement of this continued distrust in the government, on a state level, on a federal level and it was a reminder of the cooperation you see between all of these infrastructures. And how easily they form and bind together, like everyone from the F.A.A. creating a no-fly zone so that we could no longer send our drones up. And let F.A.A. doesn't—shouldn't even be able to make regulations like that, over a reservation. Over a very small piece of land, but you saw, everybody cooperated. Local farmers, you know there, we thought about it, we're like, where did these planes, why are there planes flying 24 hours a day, like—how, right? They must be at a local, nearby airport, where they go and get fuel, right? So clearly there's a cooperation. But it, also, in the same sense, solidified and bonded this strength of, this strength of resilience among Native people. But it created this sense of urgency. And I'm kind feeling that like, urgency just finally like simmering a little but it's still, it's still there, like underlying. Cuz I know how bad it can get. I know that they will turn on hoses and freezing cold water so that oil can move easier. Like I saw how little they, and when I say they, it's the nation, it's the state. I see how easily they mobilize.

Silverman: Hmmm. I think I asked you this a while ago, but I was wondering, you know, with, with so much um, precarity in this life with the status of our earth's health. Like how does your community speak about futurity and living with the earth, given the health of it and the status of where we're at with it?

DioganhdiH: So, I think that my people have always been futurists. There's like a seven-generation prophecy, or seventh generation teaching, we consider our actions for the next seven generations. And it kind of like, creates this mindset where you're just considering what would actually seven generations be. I have a family tree that one of my cousins is a genealogist and I recently went back and looked at what seven generations—that's a long time! So, to... If you move about the world considering your own kin and the next relation, and the next relation, and the next relation, I think that's like a really beautiful way to move. But I also think some really harsh realities that we have face like about our consumption. Especially with plastics. I think that most all consumerist, like capitalist societies, we take in a lot of garbage, produce a lot of garbage. There's a lot of throw away materials, and that's like in every community. I would love to see my own personal community do more but it comes with education and it comes with people being able to afford alternatives, you know. It's not by choice that we fuckin' drink out of water bottles,

it's because that's what we can afford, because our water's poisoned. It's not a choice that I drive my car, 20—30 miles to the grocery store, like that's where it is.

Silverman: Can you just explain, since I... or maybe I don't know if this is ... should be on the record or maybe it's not a secret thing, but how you were saying that some reservations can only be accessed by plane?

Dioganh dih: Oh yeah, there's fly in communities in Canada, "*Clanada*." So, this is something that like, because I live in a border town like the "Clanadian/ United Snakes" border goes through my territory. I've moved home the past couple years, I have been very purposely learning more about Canadian, Indigenous people, because there's a difference, right? Between First-Nations folks and what folks have access to in the north versus what they have access to in the states. Um, and fuck borders, they're fake, but like I live with one going through my community and the distinction *has to* be made when you're dealing with the states, and Canada and sometimes. It's very real, and so the issues Native folks face in "*Clanada*," they're different. Being like, in the services, the desolation that some of these communities experience, just by pure geography. And so, there's some Native communities where they're only accessible by flying a plane in. I know sometimes there's folks from different neighboring communities that'll be in my community to receive different services. Or to have access to different jobs. Sometimes there's even random folks on the police force from other communities. It makes me feel a different sense of pride, I guess, to be from a community that's able to provide so much resources for its people. Like the dentist and the doctor and therapy and job programs and some job training. These are all like, things I definitely don't take for granted.

Silverman: And I guess, this can apply to both where you live now and when you lived here in the city. I wanted to know what you do, or still do or did for fun?

Dioganh dih: (laughs) Awe, thanks! Well, for fun, I've recently got into beading. It's really relaxing for my brain, it's like the type of productive chill that I like! This summer, I was really into gardening. I just love taking care of plants, little *plantitas*. I think it's a great way to just disperse the energy inside of me and just put it into plants, something living, put it into the soil. I also, yeah making music and making beats is like pretty top-notch idea of fun for me. And...

Silverman: Do you have groupies now that you... (laughs)

Dioganh dih: No.

Silverman: No? (laughs)

Dioganh dih: No, I wouldn't allow it. One time I had...over the summer after I had performed the Pussy Vortex in the, I think it was Ottawa, (laughs) somebody came up to me and told me, "I would like to kneel after that song!" And I was like- (laughs) "Huh! Well, I really appreciate your forwardness, but I'm gonna have to decline!" (laughs)

Silverman: Damn!

Dioganh dih: Yeah. I couldn't have done...I wouldn't have done that! But...

Silverman: Yeah.

Dioganh dih: Takes a lot of courage.

Silverman: Yeah.

Dioganh dih: (laughs) Know what you want, but no, no groupies. Just Instagram followers. And, yeah.

Silverman: That's a different kind.

Dioganh dih: Yeah, they're quiet, they would never call themselves groupies, you know?

Silverman: Mhmm. And, I wanted to know more, about like, yeah, I guess in your, in your experience being a queer person but in a place that's more isolated, if and how you feel like loneliness versus like aloneness? Like, and, perhaps where, I don't know, dating or some sort of social life fits in like how do you negotiate this? Or feel at home in this?

Dioganh dih: Hmm. Good questions. I think that loneliness I felt is like a longing, you know for I don't know, maybe the validation and the comfort of others, but it always passes. It's like a fleeting feeling. And then aloneness is like a sense of completeness or feeling of content with like, my plants, or with my art. Or being outside, where I don't feel like I *need* anything. I don't need anything else to feel good and just be in the moment. And, yeah, I think it's important for my own development. But I think it's good to be able to know how to be with yourself, like outside of having headphones on or music to relax us or white noise. I think that sitting with yourself will help to combat feelings of loneliness even though that may seem backwards.

Silverman: How do you feel being back in the city like what is that experience versus returning home?

Dioganh dih: Well, being in the city is kind of my, it's like my social outlet. This is where I get to date, this is where I get to see friends, and socialize and like talk about issues that are really important to me. Talk about politics and...I may not be able to talk about Indigenous politics, or Mohawk politics, or *Haudenosaunee* politics on the same level but I think I'm doing a better job, of just also limiting myself, like to prevent burnout and not giving all of myself, my chi, or my essence, like away and just moving slower and not scheduling so many activities (begin singing) *the older I get, the wiser I get!* (laughs)

Silverman: What politics are like, emerging in this kind of environment that aren't necessarily tied to indigeneous rights politics?

Dioganh dih: Well, I think that like, the way, I mean— there's no real conversations on like, people back a lot of folks back home don't get... so much. I'll just say, at home there's a lot of homophobia and there's a lot of transphobia, there's a lot of anti-blackness. And a lot of in Native communities.

Silverman: And how does that manifest just like talking around? Like, how do you feel that?

Dioganh dih: Like, people will call each other a faggot. People will call each other the "n" word. And there's clearly no black people around. And, yeah, it's just extremely disheartening, I have conversations with folks and have conversations with people and educate them. But it's just disheartening, but it's like part of the work that I'm doing and that I will continue to do. It's not easy. But it's important to create safe spaces. I want my friends to be able to visit me at home but I need to do the work to make spaces safe so that they can come.

Silverman: And how does transphobia manifest on the rez?

Dioganh dih: Mmm, I don't think that I can... I think it's like... it's just a general misunderstanding of like trans identity, or, it's just yeah it's an ignorance. It's an ignorance and a judgement maybe off of like Caitlyn Jenner or like more popularized kind of sensationalized trans folks that create stereotypes or that allow people to you know jump onto a stereotype. And I feel like there's you know what's in pop or modern culture it's always so disheartening when there's like comedians like it was Arsenio Hall or what's his name... Dave Chappelle. You know, where they kind of like it's like you're still making these same like whack jokes. It's like that, you know?

Silverman: Mmm.

Dioganh dih: You're using someone else's identity for the basis of your joke? This isn't even clever, come on. So, it's just like dated jokes. Like insensitive jokes, I feel.

Silverman: Yeah. Um, I don't know if you want to go into this zone, but I want to know if you want to talk a little about your experience at Burning Man, just as a counterpoint of insensitive community contact?

Dioganh dih: Sure, yeah. It was something I had to live through and experience. I went to work on an art project, to build an installation and performed there. And that was interesting like, um, the, yeah, like I never had a stage that was a desert and where I felt like I could say anything that I really wanted and we burned an American flag during my set. And that was really beautiful at sunrise. So, like, there's moments that I'm like fuck yeah, like where else can this happen? Not to say that I think it's at the time that's how it felt, right? You know now, I'm like conceptualizing how there can be other places where those things can happen. That aren't exclusively done at Burning Man. But it definitely created this idea in my head of like oh, ok, we're allowed these different types of freedoms but the community was terrible. And that's why I couldn't participate anymore. I couldn't go again. I wanted to get headdresses banned because it was just, it was

terrible seeing these, like white Europeans in American flag bikinis wearing headdresses. And we'd try to talk to them, you try to create conversations sometimes they wouldn't even be able to understand you and then other times they just didn't give a shit and then sometimes it was like well who has the energy to keep having this conversation when you're tripping on acid and you wanna have a good time? So, it didn't, I don't think that it's a safe space for Native people like there's no anchor, there's no, I didn't see any community there. But maybe there's different Native folks who go, I wasn't plugged in. I don't want to erase anybody if they're there, but.

Silverman: It's interesting that on one hand, a platform for you to experiment and feel kind of like the wildness, of what, like performance can do?

Dioganh dih: Mhmm.

Silverman: And then for it to be coupled with a group of people that are completely outside of the landscape of your politics and the relationships.

Dioganh dih: Yeah, that was definitely confusing. But that's why I couldn't go back. It was just too much of a range of emotions and then like watching people defend the white folks wearing the headdresses was so disgusting to me. It's like if somebody was like talk about radical inclusion. I'm like, what?! You know it was just so...

Silverman: That doesn't make any sense!

Dioganh dih: It just twisted the other way and that's why I'm like, ok, this is your community. These are the people that are in your Burning Man community, and that I'm just one person who's trying to talk to all of you who are defending each other and your "pillars of expression" or whatever they are.

Silverman: Yeah totally obviously this is a community of like the most kind of privileged elite like also Silicon Valley bros. That exist to be then whatever spending so much money on their survival shit and then truck in the desert but when you have connected with audiences or you have felt like you're um performing in a place that you feel more related to can you think of like I don't know a specific instance of that or um?

Dioganh dih: I guess no. I mean, I haven't connect...like that was a really beautiful way to connect with the land also while you're performing. Like Standing Rock actually. Standing rock was another place we had renegade parties, like we had parties where we would just concerts we would just throw up with speakers and this generator and a microphone and there was a show we did there "No Thanks, No Taking." And it was so amazing. I—there's footage of it. I'm still trying to get this footage. Kanahus has it. The women's media filmed it and there was a couple other people and Chhathi Maiya was there and the lights were car lights and people's flashlights. And we were—the pipeline is over here and we are like just directing all of our rage, like at the enemy. And then everybody was just like feeling your words! That was probably one of the most

powerful moments I had as an artist because everybody was just like, breathing with you and just like oh shit, this is why I make music, for moments like this.

Silverman: Mmm. That reminds me of like, during the election, what's it called when Trump was inaugurated- during his inauguration, and we went on this like, "queer witches" going to all these different like really violent centers around rural Manhattan, and we'd just cast spells, like what could one do when literally the entire country was celebrating or whatever, supporting, watching that moment in time so there's just like this (laughs) little tribe of queer people just trying to gather what energy, what kind of lifeforce you had and just try to direct it towards centers of the same sort of like evil whatever that connection it is, the state to that happening, anyway it just made me remember that part

Dioganh dih: Yeah.

Silverman: Um. (laughs) Yeah, I guess we're gonna wrap up soon but I wanted to know if there's any other stories that come to mind that would be important to share for the archives or messages that feel kind of urgent or, mmm...

Dioganh dih: Yeah, I mean free the kids in the camps. Free the kids in the concentration camps in the south. I think that we need to not forget that there's thousands of thousands of youth being taken away from their parents at the southern border. They're being lost, they're being displaced and it's a continued reinforcement of the genocide against our Native people. This happened before in the Sixties Scoop if you look it up it's basically the church and the government in Canada scooped up a bunch of Native kids in the sixties, put them into residential homes, similar to what is happening now in the south. Separating Native youth from their parents and indoctrinating them but also causing a fuckton of trauma. Causing assimilation, the loss of language. My dad— he was one of these people put into a residential school and lost his language. He went in fluent in Mohawk at the age of four and came out at seven and no longer could speak our Native language. He spoke English. And, my dad was really young and he's since passed and he didn't talk about the abuse that happened there other than his mouth being washed out with soap and being beaten. To the day he passed, he wasn't able to learn his language, he had a mental block because he was beaten when he spoke it. But I know that there's a lot of other abuse, and sexual violence that happened to people, you know because they've spoken about it. And this is a generation, at least two generations later and we still feel it right? It's impactful in our community— one, two generations later. And so, I watch what happens, is happening, right now at the border in the south, and my heart hurts because I know that this is purposeful— this separation of children from their parents. Because it's not just Spanish-speaking kids. The majority of the kids that are in the camps and they're in detention centers, they're speaking their traditional languages. It's not just Spanish. These are kids who are Native from the south. From the Yucatan, from —they're Mayan, they're Aztec, you know, they're from places that are now el Salvador. Or, you know, what's Mexico? But they are the same people who are inside of these camps. And I know what happens from experience. I'm still struggling to learn my Native language, to get that language back. So, free the kids and free the camps and do not stop putting

pressure on representatives. Do not stop putting pressure on different media outlets. We need to get these kids out of these concentration camps.

Silverman: Mmm. Thank you Dio!

Dioganh dih: *Naih weh - gonah, Ó:nen:ki'wáhi!* (Thank you and Goodbye for now then!)