Art, Time, & Power: Temporal Resistance and Autonomy in the Artwork of Cannupa Hanska Luger and Ken Gonzales-Day

Holly Filsinger

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This research explores how contemporary artists Cannupa Hanska Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* series (2019-ongoing) and Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* series (2002-ongoing) respond to the intersection of temporality and power. Luger and Gonzales-Day’s visual and temporal strategies question and effectively subvert dominant visualizations of the past, present, and future. This paper outlines the development of the Western structuring of time as a linear, progress-oriented scale with a particular focus on how time has and does serve as a weapon of control to exert and perpetuate various social hierarchies and biopower. *Erased Lynchings* addresses the history and ongoing legacy of lynching and racialized violence in the United States. *Future Ancestral Technologies* is a work of Indigenous futurism that radically reimagines the future and centers Indigeneity. The series share similar inquiries and facilitate experiences for viewers to address issues of time connected to social justice, memory, and identity. Using theories of visuality addresses how visualizations of power are manifested. This research argues that both artists use a macroscopic temporal perspective to engage with temporality. In doing so, their resistance and worldmaking embody and create plural temporalities that inherently de-visualize and deconstruct authority’s claim to the right to control.

**KEYWORDS:** Temporality; Futurisms; Archival Photography;
ART, TIME, & POWER: TEMPORAL RESISTANCE AND AUTONOMY IN THE
ARTWORK OF CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER AND KEN GONZALES-DAY

HOLLY FILSINGER

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ART, TIME, & POWER: TEMPORAL RESISTANCE AND AUTONOMY IN THE ARTWORK OF CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER AND KEN GONZALES-DAY

HOLLY FILSINGER

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Elisabeth Friedman, Chair
Byron Craig
Melissa Johnson
Bjorn Krondorfer
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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the ways that Cannupa Hanska Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* (2019-ongoing) and Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* (2002-ongoing) express and claim temporal resistance and autonomy. Both artists question, resist, and counter the use of time as a tool of authority. In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, a multimedia Indigenous futurist and speculative fiction series, Luger envisions post-capitalist and post-colonial life in the future. In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, Luger creates his futurist vision for the world through speculative fiction, narrative video installations, and through objects, such as regalia, made for future descendants. Luger focuses heavily on the destruction of colonization and capitalism that those in the future contend with while also centering the survival and resiliency of Indigeneity.

*Erased Lynchings* by Ken Gonzales-Day is a series of over sixty photographic copies of archival photographs of lynchings where the victim has been removed from the image. As a means of preventing revictimization, Gonzales-Day focuses the viewer’s attention on the lynch mob to confront the perpetrators. In *Erased Lynchings*, Gonzales-Day uses the technique of erasure to bring attention to historical narratives that omit or minimize racial violence and, in doing so, the series serves as a warning for futures that may or may not learn from these past atrocities.

I bring *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings* together because while they differ from one another in materials and subject matter, they both compel viewers to consider how distinct conceptions of temporality influence our sense of self and community. On the surface *Future Ancestral Technologies* addresses the future and *Erased Lynchings*, the past; however, they both represent the flow between artificial divisions in time. Luger and Gonzales-Day employ visual and temporal strategies to demonstrate that constructions of temporality
contain enormous social and political implications. Both artists emphasize that time must not be used as a means to create distance from atrocities of the past or justify destruction for future endeavors. They ask: how can we re-envision the past, present, and future?

I would like to take this opportunity to note that my position as a white scholar limits my ability to fully describe and represent the experiences and knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) I discuss in my thesis. In discussions about Future Ancestral Technologies and Erased Lynchings, I recognize my own implication in the arguments I engage with as I respond to Gonzales-Day and Luger’s work. This articulation of my positionality is in effort to acknowledge that as long as oppressive systems are in place, so too is the privilege I hold. I take up the call to action that Gonzales-Day and Luger urge their viewers to pursue.

Time, Identity, and Power

In discussing Cannupa Hanska Luger’s and Ken Gonzales-Day’s work, I explore how we situate ourselves and our relationships with others in time. Future Ancestral Technologies and Erased Lynchings guide us to consider the notion of time itself. Why is time constructed and measured as linear and universal? In an effort to avoid confining time to a single definition, I draw on Giordano Nanni’s explanation in The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine, and Resistance in the British Empire (2012). He states:

Time, being above all an idea, is embodied in the various rituals, routines, calendars, discourses and devices which provide a sense of regularity and rhythm…but the ways in which that experience is measured, perceived and conceptualised can vary widely from culture to culture. (6)

Nanni’s intentionally broad description of time makes space for the presence and value of temporalities cross-culturally. Ultimately, time resists a set definition, measurement, or structure.
In my discussion about *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings*, I look at how the Western structure of time that developed over several centuries, in accordance with religious, scientific, and philosophical models, became the global standard by the end of the nineteenth century because of imperialism, industrialization, and capitalism. This notion of temporality perceives time as a forward-moving, linear timeline with incremental units of measure ranging from an atomic second to an epoch. Western temporality abstracts and mechanizes life around the clock, positioning itself as the time, rather than a time (Nanni 2012, 1). Luger’s practice in *Future Ancestral Technologies* involves re-Indigenizing time, in order to counter temporal values assigned by colonization and capitalism. Luger prompts viewers to consider that colonization is a conquest of both space and time (2). Both Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* and Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* emphasize the destruction and harm to people and land caused by actions associated with progress. An ideal of modernity, progress is temporally forward-facing. Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* questions and resists historical narratives constructed around the Western idea of progress that are connected to racism and white supremacy. In “Placing Time, Timing Space: Dismantling the Master’s Map and Clock” (2018), Rasheedah Phillips asks “what unspoken agreements, understandings, contracts, social constructs, and negotiations are embedded in the map or clock?”. Following Gonzales-Day and Luger, I also ask: what is the time of authority? Of colonization or white supremacy? What are the temporalities of resistance? Both Luger and Gonzales-Day compel viewers to consider the social dynamics, values, beliefs, and ideologies that accompany our perceptions of time and history. In doing so, rather than being perceived as definite and objective, the Western structures of time and history can be understood in their connection to identity and power.
Future Ancestral Technologies and Erased Lynchings embody the dissolution of strict boundaries between past, present, and future. In effect, viewers interact within and beyond their present moment. By defying the rigidity and standardization of chronological clock time, both series aesthetically represent and create distinct temporalities or durations (Bretkelly-Chalmers 2019, 4). In Future Ancestral Technologies, viewers witness Luger’s futurist vision taking place at multiple points in the future. Luger’s futurism brings attention to the impacts of colonization and capitalism by imagining the world after these systems of power are gone. The absence of oppressive systems in the future positions viewers to reckon with their current-day presence. Erased Lynchings, on the other hand, focuses on the notion of our individual and collective relationships with the past. The altered lynchings photographs confront viewers about the erasure of historical violence and draw parallels between past and present-day racial violence. Under the immense weight of these histories, Gonzales-Day shows that the systems of power that enable this violence of the past do not remain far away in time but rather continuously shape and inhabit the present. Future Ancestral Technologies and Erased Lynchings evoke similar temporal experiences in the ways they ask viewers to engage with pasts that have already happened and futures that have yet to come. In our present moment, looking outward towards the many directions of time, we may feel as if we are static observers, but Gonzales-Day and Luger urge viewers to connect with temporality as active participants.

I argue that the temporal dynamics of Gonzales-Day’s and Luger’s series position viewers to understand the larger structural systems of power that use time as a mechanism of control. Future Ancestral Technologies and Erased Lynchings offer a macroscopic temporal perspective for viewers to engage with time as a tool of authority to center its dominance. Marilyn Frye uses the term “macroscopic perspective” to explore how systems of oppression are
networked together and rely on each other for their meanings (Frye 1983, 3-5). Frye explains how structural forces, barriers, and double binds are features of oppression that work to “immobilize, reduce, and mold” individuals or groups of people (7). Systems of oppression prohibit and complicate the ability to access macroscopic perspectives to examine and resist interconnecting power structures. I adapt Frye’s term to address how Luger and Gonzales-Day bring attention specifically to temporal structures of power. Importantly, *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings* convey that temporality itself is not inherently harmful but is manipulated to create belonging or unbelonging around identities such as race, gender, citizenship, national identity, and class. Time can therefore be used as a tool of isolation and disconnection. As a tool of authority, the abstraction of time forms oppressive social hierarchies and enables individual and collective dissonance about history. Who and what is memorialized versus erased from time? Who lays claim to the future?

**Thesis Overview**

The field of Visual Culture provides a methodology that allows me to ask questions about the social conditions and social constructions of the visual. In “Major Theoretical Frameworks in Visual Culture” (2012), Margaret Dikovitskaya describes methods of this field by noting “objects of visual studies are not only visual objects but also modes of viewing and the conditions of the spectatorship and circulation of objects. One can conclude that visual studies goes far beyond its constituent object-oriented disciplines of art history, anthropology, film studies, and linguistics.” (64) This framework offers insight into the artworks and artmaking processes of *Erased Lynchings* and *Future Ancestral Technologies*. I argue that both series work to subvert dominant modes seeing and therefore impact viewers’ consideration of the artworks.
Dikovitskaya also notes that “one of the main questions that visual culture addresses is: What is it that you learn when you learn to see?” (57). Through Luger’s and Gonzales-Day’s work, I explore how we learn to both visualize time and people in it.

As Ken Gonzales-Day and Cannupa Hanska Luger question the supposed objectivity of Western temporality, they demonstrate the connection between structures of vision and time. They question both the supposed neutrality of dominant modes of seeing and the role of the visual in constructing identity. In an analysis of artmaking using Visual Culture methodologies, Sydney Walker argues that contemporary artists necessarily occupy a position of awareness regarding vision, visuality, and the implications of artmaking in an increasingly media-saturated world (Walker 2004, 73). I use Nicholas Mirzoeff’s theories of visuality in *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (2012) to discuss visuality and its use by authority to visualize its power in and across time (2). Mirzoeff’s notion of visuality is an argument that the visualization of history and time is an imagined construct. As a time-based medium of authority for self-authorization, visuality is thus essential for understanding Western imaginings of itself in history, particularly modernity (2). However, I argue that Luger’s and Gonzales-Day’s practices also use temporality as a medium. Both *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings*, in their embodiment and creation of plural temporalities, practice active resistance against constructed narratives of history that are dictated by visualizations of authority. Both series work to challenge modalities of visuality by countering perceptions that systems of power and oppression are naturally occurring rather than constructed. Mirzoeff’s term “the right to look” describes a personal and shared look with another that expresses mutual recognition and claims the right to existence, especially in the face of dehumanizing, hierarchical systems (1). I suggest that Luger and Gonzales-Day argue for the necessity to claim temporal autonomy in favor of “the right to
look”. Neither Luger nor Gonzales-Day offer visualizations of temporality to create a utopic world in which the past is free from harm. Instead, they acknowledge the necessity for those histories to connect with a future built on reciprocity and radical empathy.

Chapter II introduces Cannupa Hanska Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* and offers an overview of the series. As Luger’s work is a blend of Indigenous futurism and the genres of speculative fiction and science fiction, I provide an overview of these terms and movements. Luger describes his use of science fiction as a practice to inspire collective thinking for the future (Luger 2023, n.d.-c). I discuss those pieces from *Future Ancestral Technologies* that establish Luger’s futurist narrative and practice. Grace Dillon coined the term “Indigenous futurism” in her book, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012) as she describes the art and cultural movements that “envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes and dreams recovered by thinking the past in a new framework” (Dillon 2012, 2). I draw upon Dillon as well as other recent scholars including Suzanne Kite, Joy Sanchez-Taylor, and Shelley Streeby, who write about futurisms, speculative fictions, and science fictions by Indigenous and other authors and artists of color. These scholars emphasize how the genre of science fiction has traditionally centered on Eurocentric narratives and has overlooked Indigenous contributions that defy the parameters of the genre (Dillon 2012 Sanchez-Taylor 2021; Streeby 2017). In the second section of Chapter II, I examine the development of Western temporality, focusing on the connection between colonization and temporality. I draw upon the scholarship of Giordano Nanni, Jay Griffiths, and Kate Bretkelly-Chalmers to explore how the West established a dominant temporal culture visibly and materially associated with the clock (Bretkelly-Chalmers 2019; Griffiths 2004; Nanni 2012). I also discuss how colonization suppresses other temporal structures and measurements to mechanize life around a hegemonic Western temporality.
In Chapter III, I explore how *Future Ancestral Technologies* employs visual and temporal strategies of resistance to counter “controlling images” of Indigeneity. “Controlling images” is a term used by Patricia Hill Collins to describe harmful representations that function to dehumanize or “Other” someone based on identities such as race and gender (Collins 1991, 68). As I engage with theories of visuality, I discuss how the many controlling images of Indigeneity that Luger contends with in his work, stem from temporal hierarchies that seek to classify people along what Paul Gilroy calls a “temporal evolutionary ladder” (Gilroy 2000, 329). Using the photographs of nineteenth-century American photographer Edward Curtis, I establish how temporal identities and hierarchies created controlling images of Indigeneity that Luger’s practice counters. This chapter additionally explores how *Future Ancestral Technologies* prototypes futurist mythology. Luger combines mythology and futurism to address the destruction of capitalism and colonization. I put Octavia Butler’s futurist novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993) into conversation with Luger’s work to explore common themes of resiliency amidst a climate crisis. Highlighting the necessity for community building, I look at *Future Ancestral Technologies* as an embodiment of temporal autonomy.

In Chapter IV, I introduce Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* and discuss the context that led to the series. The first part of the chapter explores Gonzales-Day’s photography series *Searching for California Hang Trees* (2004). This work preceded *Erased Lynchings* and offered an exploration into Gonzales-Day’s retrieval and visualizing of histories of racial violence that had been ignored or erased. Examples from *Erased Lynchings* allow me to draw from Gonzales-Day’s research in *Lynching in the West: 1820-1935* (2006), Amy Louise Wood’s *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2009), and Ersula Ore’s *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* (2019) to provide the historical context on
lynniching. I am particularly concerned with how lynching became a performance rhetorically associated with national identity, citizenship, and whiteness (Ore 2019, 19). The latter part of this chapter delves into the connection between racial violence in the Western United States and extralegal frontier justice vigilantes. Gonzales-Day’s research found that lynching victims in the Western were Latinx, Black, Indigenous, Asian, Jewish, and white. Gonzales-Day’s work disrupts the romanticized and mythical status Wild West vigilantes had as symbols of righteousness and patriotism.

Chapter V first examines lynchings photographs and postcards as objects of spectacle. The photographs Ken Gonzales-Day used in *Erased Lynchings* bring viewers’ attention to the roles the photographer and the camera played in creating perpetrator images that intended to perpetuate the violence and public spectacle of the lynching. I examine “Without Sanctuary”, an exhibition of lynching photographs that traveled around the United States in 2000, to talk about Gonzales-Day’s archival practice of uncovering histories of violence. Jacques Derrida’s concept of “archive fever” (Derrida 1995, 12) and Hal Foster’s concept of “archival impulse” (Foster 2004, 3) help me speak to the temporal potentiality of archival materials to transform the future. I draw from the scholarship of Shawn Michelle Smith and Amelia Groom to discuss how *Erased Lynchings* not only teaches viewers about forgotten histories but actively challenges perceptions of truth in photography and time. I put Kerry James Marshall’s piece *Heirlooms and Accessories* (2002) in conversation with Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* as they employ similar tactics of blurring or erasing the lynching photographs to avoid revictimization and focus attention on the crowd of perpetrators. The technique of erasure calls attention to the violent capacities of photography that Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Nicole Fleetwood discuss relating to the hypervisibility of suffering in images (Fleetwood 2011, 16).
The last section in Chapter V is grounded in Michael Rothberg’s theory of implication and Alison Bailey’s theory of the weight of whiteness to guide the discussion about temporal distance and historical amnesia. *Erased Lynchings* compels viewers to consider their potential status of what Rothberg called “implicated subjects” in the history and legacy of lynching as present beneficiaries of white supremacy (Rothberg 2019, 1). Bailey provides a framework to hold the weight of whiteness to avoid numbing ourselves to the realities of the past and present (Bailey 2021, 79). *Erased Lynchings* compels viewers to claim temporal agency, so the past is not kept at an artificial distance. Otherwise, we deny ongoing racial violence and collective traumas and, in doing so, we distance ourselves from our own humanity.
CHAPTER II: CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER: TIME AS A MEDIUM: INDIGENOUS FUTURISM & WESTERN TEMPORALITY

“For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed…” – James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (1964, 50)

“How will we dream of our collective future?” Cannupa Hanska Luger poses this question as the basis for his Indigenous futurist series *Future Ancestral Technologies* (2018-ongoing) (Luger n.d.-c). *Future Ancestral Technologies* is a multimedia project that radically reimagines a post-colonial and post-capitalist future by centering Indigeneity in narrative and practice. Luger describes the series as “an approach to making art objects, video, and land-based performance with the intent to influence global consciousness” as he transforms science fiction from a literary genre to a methodology (Luger n.d.-c). *Future Ancestral Technologies* emphasizes the interconnectedness of the land and the humans who share space with past ancestors and future descendants. Luger is of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, and Norwegian heritage, and is an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold (Luger n.d.-b). Originally from the Standing Rock reservation, he was born in 1979: one year after the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 made the practice of Indigenous religious and knowledge traditions legal in the United States, following centuries of suppression, genocide, and displacement (McKenzie 2022, 32). Luger weaves these histories into his work to call attention to the devastations of colonization, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the
resistance and adaptability of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, Luger reclaims, envisions, and asserts the continuum of his ancestral knowledge, technologies, and culture.

*Future Ancestral Technologies* is an ongoing series that develops a futurist narrative, prototypes new mythologies, and generates future rituals alongside the creation and reconfiguration of the series’ components. The multimedia project consists of, but is not limited to, regalia made from repurposed materials, equipment for nomadic campsites (such as a collapsible and lightweight TIPI and a Syncro van), ceramic tools, and ceramic “monsters”. These objects are placed into and/or used in installations and land-based performances shown on virtual reality headsets, multiscreen video installations, and social media (Luger n.d.-c). Through these objects, Luger’s science and speculative fiction story imagines the world someplace in the future, after a large portion of the population abandons the planet. Those who leave take the concept of colonization with them. Remaining on the planet are primarily Indigenous populations or those unable to afford to go (Luger n.d.-c). Unlike other sci-fi stories that involve the depletion of resources or an apocalyptic event, *Future Ancestral Technologies* focuses on those remaining rather than those in search of new worlds. Luger refers to his present as “post-apocalyptic” to highlight that for Indigenous peoples, the apocalypse has already occurred from centuries of colonialization, genocide, and the actions of oppressive industries (Luger 2022d, 25:45). His vision of the ancestral future imagines the absence of colonialist and capitalist systems that exert domination over people and land. As a result, restorative and equitable connections flourish. By envisioning the end of oppressive systems in the future, their dominance in the present day is more viscerally felt.

*Future Ancestral Technologies* resists the dominant Western philosophical and scientific modeling of time that has been central to colonial regimes of power. The series prompts viewers
to consider how colonization is a conquest of both space and time. Luger’s envisaging of the future world is radical because colonization centers the Western configuration of time as the universal truth, suppressing any contrasting temporal configurations and timekeeping methods. Time is manipulated in an attempt to fix Indigenous peoples in the past, denying them a contemporary presence. The classification of people into the temporal categories “primitive” and “civilized” reinforces false dichotomies of power and relies upon visual profiling to reinforce these mechanisms. Perpetuated by early anthropologists and ethnographers, the myth of the “vanishing race” fueled the settler colonialist belief that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (North America) would eventually disappear. The use of time as a tool of exploitation dehumanizes Indigenous peoples by attempting to control their temporal autonomy. Luger likens his artistic work to that of a social engineer as he invites viewers into a space that devisualizes and dismantles social hierarchies (Luger 2020, 7:45). The space Luger creates visualizes a new social formation.

As an Indigenous artist, Luger contends with perceptions and the commodification of his identity that are deeply embedded in Western, settler beliefs. At the core of his artistic practice, Luger transforms art into a verb, rather than regarding it as a noun or static object (McKenzie 2022, 33). His creative process is active with futurism as a movement. The reconfiguration of materials, meanings, and ideas in different installations and performances reflects the multiplicity of temporalities that cannot be sequenced linearly. Viewers engage with how colonization and capitalism objectify what they seek to control: people as “Other”; land as property, maps, borders; time as clocks, calendars, minutes, seconds; and art as a noun, object, commodity. Through futurism, Luger explores the possibilities to collectively reimagine our world. In Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies*, time is active. Though we may not exist in the
same moment as our ancestors or future descendants, we can exchange reciprocity, empathy, and courage. What is owed to us is what we owe to each other.

**Futurisms**

_Future Ancestral Technologies_ is an important work in contemporary Indigenous futurism, speculative fiction, and science fiction movements. Luger’s series embodies a blend of these genres, and these terms are used interchangeably to discuss his work or to describe certain elements of it (Luger, n.d.-c). Indigenous futurism bears no resemblance to the Italian or Russian futurist art and social movements of the early twentieth century. Luger has described his familiarity with and interest in science fiction growing up but did not see himself reflected in those stories except as negative caricatures of Indigenous peoples (Luger 2022d, 25:45). Of his interest in transforming science fiction for his own vision, Luger explains that “science fiction has the power to shape collective thinking and serves as a vehicle to imagine the future on a global scale” (Luger n.d.-c). Centering Indigeneity, Luger seeks to aesthetically visualize an imagined future that engages the past and present. Viewers reckon with the destruction occurring in the present and what and who will or will not remain.

The video _We Live_ (2019) (Figures 1, 2, and 5), is a three-minute-long “entry log” audio that Luger describes as a “land-based performative action” similar to a site-specific performance piece. The numerous land-based performative action pieces in _Future Ancestral Technologies_ involve figures in the future developing ceremonies and rituals based on their interactions with the landscape (Luger 2019c). The entry log in _We Live_ introduces the viewer to the narrative premise of the series as well as land-based performative actions. The first few seconds of the video are accompanied by a black screen until Luger’s voice begins the entry log. He narrates:
Eighty cycles ago, half the population left this planet. They created huge ships and, in the process, mined massive chunks of our planet to develop the raw materials into these arcs. They left a lot of devastation behind but what they took with them was this notion of colonization. The colonizer has left. What remains here are the Indigenous populations and those too poor to afford a seat on that ship, those who work the earth, those who remember still the songs that ring out and tell us that we belong to it rather than it belonging to us. We are developing new cultures from that space. There are new ceremonies that are being created. These ceremonies, they start off as rituals, individuals going to locations of heavy extraction. Going to places that have been corrupted and injured by the efforts of the colonizer to leave this planet. And we go there in our human form and apologize. We say we are sorry. We are sorry for the human species. And with these ceremonies, new regalias are developed. Regalias that blind us and make us deaf and prevent us from talking. They remove all the senses that we invested in as human beings and force us to feel once again. Where the land itself becomes the choreographer of elaborate songs and dances, dances in these places that need our apologies; that before they heal, need to feel as though we recognize our folly. These are offerings. Offerings we leave stretched out across this planet in many different forms. All of the notions of land ownership are gone. We Live nomadic. We Live simple. We Live. (Video Transcript Shared with Author via Email with Ginger Dunnill, January 26, 2023)

Figure 1. Cannupa Hanska Luger, We Live (Future Ancestral Technologies Entry Log) 2019, Single Channel Video with Audio. We Live art direction, regalia design/construction, poetry and sound composition: Cannupa Hanska Luger. Videographer/Video editing: Dylan McLaughlin. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
Entry logs are a science fiction storytelling device in which characters narrate or report the story through journal-like entries. The entry log audio of *We Live* centers Indigeneity in developing non-destructive ways of life. The opening lines situate the viewer as Luger speaks to them from a future that has not yet happened. Luger voices the futurist entry log as if it were a poem, his tone is even and resolved. The cadence of his voice aligns with the rhythms of the video as he narrates to the viewer about the future world that has been met with extreme destruction.

The future world appears familiar—there are no retro-futuristic metropolises that resemble a *Jetsons* cartoon or an alien world with spaceships. Because of this, viewers can relate to the familiar environment. As the video of *We Live* plays, the viewer follows the two figures who travel through desert-like landscapes. In keeping with the entry log’s notion of humans belonging to the earth, the video’s visual focus is ultimately on the land and the subsequent movement of the figures in response to it. This is evident in the land-based performative actions of rituals and ceremonies where Luger shows that the land directs the movements of the figures. In the ceremonies, for example, there are a few moments amidst the figures’ swaying and gestural choreography that the camera goes slightly out of focus. Luger blurs them into the surrounding landscape. The subtle visual shift suggests the interconnectedness between the figures and the earth. The entry log explains the regalia developed along with the ceremonies intended for apologizing to the land. As the viewer witnesses these ceremonies, the visual and auditory texture is heightened in the sound of wind and detailed images showing the adornments of the regalia move swiftly around in a blur of bright colors. In one scene of *We Live*, the video cuts from a tight shot of the strips of felt on a regalia headpiece to lines of jagged rock crevasses,
scarred by mining extractions. The lines of felt on the regalia echo the qualities of the land, speaking to the creation of the regalia from the ceremonies themselves.

Luger titles the regalia *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances* (2018) (Luger n.d.-e). The full-body regalia is made from crocheted and knitted afghans refashioned into the main body pieces. Beadwork by artist Kathy Elkwoman Whitman, hockey gloves, shin guards, and headpieces, all adorned with industrial felt and beads make up the accessories (Luger n.d.-e). The materials used in the regalia and throughout *Future Ancestral Technologies* are scraps from industrial production and repurposed from thrifted items, which may be recognizable to viewers as everyday objects they themselves use. In an Instagram post, Luger explains his process of sourcing materials reflects his displacement as an Indigenous person from his cultural and ancestral practices as he does not have access to traditional resources and materials (Luger 2023). Luger likens looking for and finding second-hand materials as hunting and gathering Americana. He chooses handcrafted blankets as the primary material of regalia because of the love and dedication that goes into creating them, often as gifts (Luger 2023). However, Luger has also expressed his use of other materials, such as the old sports equipment and scraps of industrial felt, are mass-produced “detritus of capitalism” (Luger 2022b) The handmade blankets are therefore juxtaposed with mass-produced items in the regalia. In imagining a post-capitalist future, Luger’s materials reflect the logistical process of how future generations would repurpose whatever is available. Even though the regalia is made from a variety of recycled or thrifted materials, they are crafted in matching sets for different performance and installation pieces. The matching sets of the regalia, such as *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances* in Figure 1, visually display shared identity and connection between the wearers even if the viewer cannot discern their facial features.
Indigenous Futurism, Science Fiction, and Speculative Fiction

*We Live* demonstrates Luger’s practice of subverting narrative tropes of the science fiction genre that can reinforce harmful power dynamics. The concept of Indigenous futurism was popularized by Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) in the introduction of her edited anthology *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012). Dillon describes how Indigenous science fiction has long existed in a range of art and cultural production but has been overlooked by the genre that emphasizes Euro-American literary and artistic traditions (2). Dillon notes that science fiction is a “genre that emerged in the mid-nineteenth-century context of evolutionary theory and anthropology profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology” (2).

Written from a colonial gaze, science fiction historically depicted non-Western cultures represented as “Other” or “alien”. This othering extends into the dismissal of Indigenous knowledge and technologies by Western sciences. Indigenous futurists work to decolonize the future by decolonizing a genre that has historically worked *against* them.

Indigenous futurism exists in many fields, but as a contemporary artist, Luger navigates reductive stereotypes and the commodification of Indigeneity. The art historical canon, structured through Western aesthetics, has historically excluded, and misrepresented the work of Indigenous artists. More specifically, Indigenous art is critiqued through the lens of a false binary for being either *too traditional or not traditional enough*. Like science fiction, artmaking can be a double-edged sword for Indigenous artists. Luger contends with the dilemma of infusing his Indigeneity into his art which is then capitalized on by artistic institutions. As Suzanne Kite (Oglala Lakota) in “Dreaming a Sovereign Indigenous Future” (2019) describes,

> It should not need to be pointed out that Indigenous artworks are political. Indigenous artworks are not political in the reductionist, vaguely relational sense of “all artwork is political”; Indigenous artworks are political because they challenge fundamental differences between Indigenous and Western
understandings of being (ontological differences), which foundationally disrupt not only understandings of sovereignty in the political sense but the way the entire world is formed, reformed, and sometimes destroyed, upon ontological foundations. (Kite 2019)

Similarly, Luger has expressed of his experience as an Indigenous person in the United States that he is a “political entity” but also as an artist, he is a “social engineer” (Luger 2017a). Throughout *Future Ancestral Technologies* Luger compels viewers to contend with their biases. These biases are the results of whitewashed educational accounts of the history of the United States that impact viewers’ perceptions of Indigeneity, Blackness, and other peoples who have been disenfranchised. In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, Luger centers Indigeneity and undermines negative stereotypes of his identity. He explains, “A lot of my work really plays with those tropes. You don’t get my culture as a commodity. But what I will do is regurgitate your impressions – if only to destroy them” (Luger 2017a). Luger uses Instagram as the primary method to communicate information about his work, often calling for participation in socially engaged art projects such as *Mirror Shield Project* (2016) and *Every One (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Queer and Trans Relatives Bead Project)* (2018). Luger’s use of social media to share about his practice is a strategic and radical means of artmaking because, as a free virtual space, it democratizes communication and removes traditional barriers to art access. Indigenous science fiction and futurisms resist fixed definitions. Dillon explains that “writers of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably change the parameters of science fiction” (Dillon 2012, 3). This challenges the idea that only one future can be determined. Indigenous futurists are driven by the question of what can be rather than by what
will be. This distinction allows an ever-open dialogue and a multidirectional flow, in which past, present, and future overlap.

Protopia Futurist Visions

The entry log of *We Live* (Figures 1, 2, and 5) makes evident that Luger does not imagine a utopic future given the fallout from oppressive social systems and extractive resource industries. Instead, his future is working through what remains of colonization and capitalism.

Figure 2. Cannupa Hanska Luger, *We Live (Future Ancestral Technologies Entry Log)* 2019, Single Channel Video with Audio. *We Live* art direction, regalia design/construction, poetry, and sound composition: Cannupa Hanska Luger. Videographer/Video editing: Dylan McLaughlin. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 2 shows the opening shot from *We Live* where the figures dressed in *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances* regalia are seen walking along a path between green shrubs and a mountain in the far distance, presumably heading towards areas of resource extraction to perform the ceremonies of apology to the earth. The figures are small compared with the
expansive land and skyscape they inhabit. While *Future Ancestral Technologies* imagines the possibilities of life after colonization and capitalism, it ultimately concerns the processes to restore connections and community. In the *We Live* entry log, Luger notes this approach includes the shift from land ownership to nomadic living as informed by “those who remember still the songs that ring out and tell us that we belong to [the earth] rather than it belonging to us” (Luger 2019c, 0:45). This detail demonstrates Luger’s emphasis on the continuum of his ancestral epistemologies as the basis of building a better world. In the last scene of the video for *We Live*, rather than an aerial view, the viewer is positioned just above the ground and sees the figures walk the same path, this time headed back towards the direction they started from. In *We Live*, Luger’s narration is spoken consistently, without interruption, for the entirety of the three-minute video until the final twenty-five seconds. With pauses between each sentence, Luger speaks the last three lines: “We Live nomadic. We Live simple. We Live.” (Luger 2019c, 2:34). Luger takes great care in emphasizing the final message of the entry log, providing the time for the viewer to consider the weight of each word.

Luger’s message in *We Live*, while idyllic sounding, is not without tension. The futurism contends with the internal and external remnants of oppressive systems. Luger confronts that moving towards a “post” colonial and capitalist world involves a process of transformation as paradigm shifts do not occur all at once. In his earnest vision for the future, rather than showing a perfect system that has already been achieved, Luger offers what is possible. Similarly, in the short story “History of the New World” (2020) by Two-Spirit author and artist Adam Garnet Jones (Cree/Métis/Danish), a family of three faces the choice of whether to leave Earth due to the effects of resource depletion and conflict. The protagonist, Em, who is Two-Spirit and Cree, tells the reader “By the time I was born, most governments had stopped believing in the
possibility of saving the planet and moved on to serious explorations of potentially nearby habitable planets” (A. Jones 2020, 40). Em initially agrees to the one-way trip to the new planet for the sake of their child but feels discouraged upon learning news that intelligent life had been located there. Em grapples with the reality of colonization expanding to new planets and life forms. Their partner, Thorah, who is white, offers justifications to excuse the conquest of the planet. Ultimately, Thorah leaves for the new world, while Em and their daughter, Asèciwan, remain. They both travel to and join a newly formed camp of Indigenous peoples in the city. The reader learns the new world eventually failed to succeed, leaving those who traveled there without the option to return. The story ends with a description of the future “of course, the cycles of war and peace, love and heartbreak, hunger and feasting roll on, but with the understanding that we must always strive for balance” (A. Jones 2020, 60).

Both We Live and “History of a New World” construct futures that do not feel far removed from current events—the depletion of natural resources, global conflicts, climate change, mass migrations, and the prospect of the “one percent” jetting off into space in the hope of colonizing other planets. The stories use the science fiction element of the fallout, commonly associated with future stories about apocalyptic or nuclear fallout events. Instead of the fallout being from a single catastrophic event, Luger and Jones think through the consequences of present systems and events occurring over time. Going forward in time and rebounding back to the present, Jones and Luger’s futurisms raise the question of where the viewer or reader would be—on the ships that are transporting people to colonize new worlds or remaining on the planet rebuilding community. Critically, those who abandoned the planet are still dominated by authority and its detrimental effects. Drawing a stark parallel between the conditions of these imagined futures and current realities, the desire to leave revolves around the trauma of
unbelonging. As Luger explains, “If you don’t have that relationship [of] belonging to place, you’re sure as hell not going to stay on the planet” (Luger 2022d, 24:10). In thinking about belonging to place in both futurisms, there is a focus on the survivance of Indigenous peoples in the past, present, and future. Author Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) coined the phrase “survivance” to describe a practice that “creates a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihilility, and victimry…[it] is an active sense of presence over historical absence” (Vizenor 2009, 1-2). Luger acknowledges the importance of survivance to his work and his practice and artworks to constantly imagine a better world and future.

In this way, Jones’ and Luger’s stories do not fall into either the dystopia or utopia genres. While the genre of utopia can effect positive change and powerful reflections, such future visions can run the risk of making audiences recoil from facing the realities of the present. Neither futurist imaginings can be considered a dystopia either, as the world, while dealing with the impacts of harmful systems, is not represented as beyond repair. Resisting a utopic versus dystopic binary, Future Ancestral Technologies and “History of the New World” embody a protopian future. “Protopia” was coined by editor Kevin Kelly in 2011 but researcher Monika Bielskyte explains “protopia is a continuous dialogue, more a verb than a noun, a process rather than a destination, never finite, always iterative, meant to be questioned, adjusted, and expanded” (Bielskyte 2021). Protopias welcome a plurality of futures, temporalities, practices, and visions that co-exist and contradict. This framework echoes Luger’s own in his philosophy about his practice. By conceptualizing art as a verb rather than a noun, Luger foregrounds the process of active creation. Luger’s and Jones’ protopic stories create a powerful and nuanced opportunity for viewers and readers to consider change, not only out of anxiety for what could happen to themselves, but to pursue transformation with a sense of empathy and agency for better futures.
Indigenous futurism and speculative fiction work alongside and often in collaboration with other movements such as Afrofuturism, Latinx futurism, Asian futurism, and Palestinian futurism. In a podcast conversation with futurist artist Léuli Eshraghi (Seumanutafa Sāmoan, Persian, Cantonese), Luger explained:

I consider myself an Indigenous futurist just honestly so that I can engage with other futurists from other cultures, you know? Where I'm like yes, let's figure out how our cultures would inform one another...the diversity of culture is developed [with] complexity. And complexity is so much better at handling problems than homogeny. (Luger 2022d, 21:30)

Futurist movements commonly share themes of resiliency in the face of colonization to address racial futurity (Sanchez-Taylor 2021, 20-21). Focusing on Afrofuturism, Mark Dery in his essay “Black to the Future” (1994) first used the term to describe a genre of Black speculative fiction that addresses the future of the world centering the African diaspora (180). Octavia Butler, a pioneer of Afrofuturism, redefined science fiction in her books such as *Kindred* (1979) and *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Butler’s novels center Black women as the protagonists in narratives that transport readers, along with the characters, to pasts and futures. Exploring themes such as racism, social injustice, violence, community, and resiliency, her stories transcend and ground themselves in time. As Butler moves her readers through time, fiction does not seem far from reality. The power of Butler’s work is felt in its continual relevance to contemporary issues, and I will continue to discuss Octavia Butler’s novels in later sections alongside *Future Ancestral Technologies*.

**Time, Identity, and Power**

*Future Ancestral Technologies* allows Luger to imagine the future and reimagine the present by relying upon jumps in narrative time. In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, narrative
time jumps, and the presence of multiple durations defy a strictly linear chronology. This movement across temporal boundaries exemplifies how clocks do not tell the time but rather a time (Nanni 2012, 1). The time associated with the clock is not objective but was constructed by Europeans in the fourteenth century for religious purposes and later reconfigured in connection with philosophical and scientific models. Luger asks viewers to consider how the mechanization of temporality is connected to identity and power. Time is an idea that holds tremendous social power. Structuring time, even linearly, is not inherently harmful. However, systems of oppression manipulate temporality as a weapon of control.

In the entry log of We Live, Luger narrates that half the population left the planet “80 cycles ago” (Luger 2019c, 0:02). It’s unclear how long 80 cycles translate to in standard, hourly increments of time, and this ambiguity allows viewers to witness a future world that could exist in 10 years or 100 years. In effect, Luger offers alternative ways to experience and measure time beyond the standardized “clock time” that developed in Europe. Through Western imperialism, time became synonymous with only one temporal system, and, by extension, the Western measurement of time came to seem inherent and natural.

Western temporality is visualized as a chronologically linear, universal, and ever-forward moving timeline. Public clocks first emerged in Europe in the mid-fourteenth century and incrementally included hour, minute, and second divisions as the mechanisms grew more precise. These clocks were associated with the sound of bells ringing throughout the day to indicate the time, much like the canonical hours in monasteries that used bells to signal the times for prayer (Nanni 2012, 36). During this period, temporality coincided with Christian imagery, visualizing the universe as a clock and God, as the clockmaker (Griffiths 1999, 183-184). The secularization of time occurred over several centuries corresponding to mercantilism,
industrialization, and the Enlightenment, although Christian values continued to shape Western Europe’s temporal culture (Nanni 2012, 39). In the seventeenth-century scientist, Isaac Newton and philosopher, Immanuel Kant both greatly influenced conceptions of time as they theorized temporality as a rational certainty. Described by Newton as a “river of time” that flowed linearly, temporality was thought of as absolute with distinct divisions. Mapped onto a timescale, the present is situated between the past and the future. Rather than ever-changing, time was conceived of as deterministic—the future could be predicted by those with the tools to understand it (Brettkelly-Chalmers 2019, 21). Kate Brettkelly-Chalmers explains that even as twentieth and twenty-first-century scientists discredited this Newtonian notion of time, such as with Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity (1905) for example, “the philosophical premise of a universal timescale still underpins the contemporary authority of the 24-hour time standard. Time exists like a great 'clock in the sky' that unites all differences and divergences under a single temporal umbrella” (20). In this temporal system, time became increasingly abstracted from natural rhythms and moved instead towards a mechanical system with incremental measurements. Perceived as an objective instrument, the clock both visualized and became a stand-in for time itself.

Situated between Kant and Einstein, the nineteenth century saw time globally synchronize to a Western linear clock time due to changes in transportation and communication. Steam-powered trains and ships meant that traveling and shipping goods became more accessible and affordable. To coordinate the arrival and departure of trains, the implementation of a centralized time replaced local times. Local times had been determined by specific towns relative to the daylight they received. In effect, with this shift, time was even more contained (Nanni 2012, 50). As Giordano Nanni states in The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine, and
Resistance in the British Empire (2012), “temporal synchronicity would indeed become a defining feature of a sense of ‘modernity’” (50). The invention of electric communications such as the telegraph, along with train travel, contributed to the literal speeding up of life—the West lived with a sense of temporal precision, and a preoccupation with knowing “the” time. In 1884, the Western structure of time that imagines itself as universal was realized in a global context. At the height of the British Empire, international time zones came into being, with each time zone defined by its temporal distance from the universal standard of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) (Griffiths 1999, 189-190). Holding the reins of temporal power, so to speak, the “master” clock that all clocks calibrated themselves to resides at the Greenwich Royal Observatory in London (189-190).

The Colonization of Time

Moving across land and sea, the globalization and regulation of time rhetorically positioned non-Western temporalities as “illogical” in the eyes of the West. Luger’s methodology in Future Ancestral Technologies counters the temporal hegemony of colonialism. As Luger narrates in the We Live entry log, the future includes new land-based rituals and ceremonies that develop post-colonization. These rituals and ceremonies can be thought of as expressions of Luger’s own perceptions of time. In a lecture about Future Ancestral Technologies in 2021, he explains:

“For Indigenous people, time goes in both directions. We’re not a point with a ray going in one direction but rather it splits in multiple directions. So even the title of the work is called Future Ancestral Technologies and it’s an acknowledgment that our positionality in a temporal space is that the only reason I’m here is because of the efforts and the sacrifices, and the knowledge gleaned and shared from my ancestors. They’ve passed that to me and my responsibility here is to acknowledge the fact that I’m only borrowing this place from future generations who do not exist yet. And so, our protocols are developed through that concept.
that time doesn’t exist with your life but rather like three generations in every
direction— your children, your children’s children, and then children you will
never meet is who I must be accountable to in my practice.” (Luger 2022b, 30:35
emphasis added)

The West’s intensive measuring of time as cause-and-effect does not reflect heterochronic
temporalities like the structure of time that Luger describes which reflects multiple forms of time
unfolding at different paces, directions, and places (Moxey 2013, 27). Luger’s land-based
performative action video, Shadow Holding Shape to Experience the Energy of the Sun (2021)
(Figure 3), includes the figures Muscle, Bone & Sinew (Luger 2021). Muscle, Bone, & Sinew
(2021) (Figure 4) is a regalia set made from repurposed materials similar to The One Who
Checks & The One Who Balances worn in We Live.

Figure 3. Cannupa Hanska Luger, Shadow Holding Shape to Experience the Energy of the Sun,
(Future Ancestral Technologies) Featuring Muscle Bone & Sinew regalia, 2021, Drone Video
Still. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
Along with close shots on the ground, the video is shot from a drone, looking directly down at the figures who stand in a large metal circular structure surrounded by brush in the landscape. The figures coordinate their movements with each other, raising and lowering their arms, forming shapes with their shadows. Luger’s voice, manipulated as a robotic AI voice, speaks throughout the video, sharing information about technologies and culture in dialogue with the past, present, and future. Luger makes statements, including “By traveling into the future / We survive you” and “Nothing is, it only seems to be / We must recognize the brutality of the present” (Luger 2021, 0:01). In Luger’s futurist practice, time is a medium for artmaking and the transmission of information. In imagining future rituals and ceremonies, the temporalities of the speculative fiction are both before and after the clock. Giovanni Nanni notes “not all embodiments of time are of the material and mechanical sort. Rituals, whether sacred or mundane, are another manifestation of a collective time sense (Nanni 2012, 6). The rituals that Luger performs in the series can therefore be understood to embody temporal autonomy. In “Black to the Future” Dery asks “isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers…who have engineered our collective fantasies?” (Dery 1994, 180). His question alludes to the ways in which white supremacy, colonization, capitalism, and other systems of power entrench themselves by serving as architects of temporality. In Future Ancestral Technologies viewers engage with how colonization is a conquest of space and time. As Meryem-Bahia Arfaoui describes: “colonization draws spatial borders on geographical maps while totally ignoring existing social realities. In a similar way, colonization draws subjective temporal borders across the world that impose a rhythm and social formations that ignore pre-existing realities” (Afraoui 2021). As European colonization expanded geographically, timekeeping objects, such as the clock and chronometer,
were a material extension of the temporal culture of Europe. The chronometer, invented by the British to measure longitude, is a direct correlation between colonization and instruments used to measure time and space. The chronometer led to the British control of the seas and its subsequent exertion of power over land and people. The ability of colonizers to materially bring their time with them helped facilitate the colonization of the space and temporalities of Indigenous peoples.

The same Muscle, Bone & Sinew regalia recently became part of the Midéegaadi (2022-ongoing) installation which features seven unique pieces of regalia, each with distinctive horned headpieces that cover the figures’ faces. Meaning “buffalo” in the Hidatsa, the Midéegaadi “exist throughout time maintaining a pledge of accountability to the land and waters that have sustained the Buffalo Nation and in turn the human beings” (Luger 2022e).

Figure 4. Cannupa Hanska Luger, Muscle Bone & Sinew (Future Ancestral Technologies) 2021, Film Still, Cinematographer Lucas Mullikan, Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
The figures of *Midéegaadi* are shown in videos and each dance with different virtual landscapes behind them. Through their regalia and dance, *Midéegaadi* figures show reverence for the buffalo and acknowledge the history of the slaughter of millions of buffalo by settler colonialists in their effort to eradicate Indigenous peoples through starvation (Luger 2022e). In the mid-nineteenth century, there were an estimated thirty to sixty million buffalo that roamed the Great Plains and by the end of the century, there were only around five hundred (2022e). In Chapter 4, I discuss how Ken Gonzales-Day’s series *Erased Lynchings* calls attention to the minimization or erasure of violent histories of colonization and white supremacy in the United States. Gonzales-Day and Luger both bring attention to how the past and the future are not mutually exclusive. Luger asks both who has the most to lose from being disconnected from their pasts and how the suppression of future imaginings is a function of control. As colonized peoples, Indigenous futurists recontextualize knowledge and culture they have been denied access to. In his assertion of temporal autonomy, Luger claims pasts that have been systemically suppressed. Indigenous futurisms emphasize that the presence of the past is essential for claiming agency over the future. Infusing the history of his ancestors into his practice, Luger embodies a similar role to Octavia Butler’s notion of the “Histofuturist”. Butler coined this term to describe how her practice as an archivist and historian is infused with her speculative fiction writing (Streeby 2018, 72). The past is not behind but rather present in the future. Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* engages the viewer with the flows of time that resist the confines of clock time.

*The Value of Time*

In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, Luger’s futurist narrative speaks to the destructive relationship between temporality and capitalism. In the next chapter, I will discuss how Luger
uses mythology and the archetypes of monsters to visualize corruption, but here I want to discuss how Luger’s imagined world after capitalism involves moving past the artificial value systems placed on time. In the video *Shadow Holding Shape to Experience the Energy of the Sun*, the narration states, “A time-machine is needed to abolish capitalism and colonialism / To move past the pain of global collapse…In the future, we will have an economy built on emotional exchange” (Luger 2021, 1:35 and 3:26). In the Western temporal culture, as units of time grew more precise, each minute and second could be imbued with value. The Western imagining of time is embedded with attitudes and morals about how time can be “spent” or “wasted.” These beliefs fluctuate with the cultural landscape but are fundamentally attached to identity and power. As Nanni observes “collective obedience to the clock was not so much taught as imposed, upon the masses” (Nanni 2012, 42), and “the ruling classes developed methods of enforcing its dominance and policing its use…Children’s time had to be disciplined, women’s time had to be domesticated, and workers’ time in general had to be counted” (44). Central to this is the connection between the value of time and monetary worth. As Western temporality developed in Europe over many centuries, economic systems incorporated and reinforced the structure of time. The clock became a measurement of social capital and labor. The industrial revolution and capitalism altered where and how work was done and in what time. Those who own the means of production hold the power to determine what a worker’s time is worth. In effect, time could be possessed but “belonged” only to those in positions of authority. Time became a form of currency (41). Jay Griffiths states that during the industrial revolution, the use of watches helps to illustrate the increased awareness and personal measure of time (Griffiths 1999, 201). The rhythms of life grew more mechanical as society ordered itself around a singular temporal metronome. Many of the pieces in *Future Ancestral Technologies* are physical
representations of Luger’s imagined future. Devoid of capitalism, the value of time can exist without the constraints of economic gain or loss. Instead of someone’s worth being based on their labor, Luger asks the viewer to consider how living can be an equitable exchange. In embracing endless imaginings and possibilities, Indigenous futurism exercises resistance in the present for better tomorrows.
“They spend their tomorrows today.” – Octavia Butler (Quoted in Streeby 2017, 70)

Futurist movements are one way for those impacted by colonization, white supremacy, and other harmful systems of power to claim their own temporal cultures, exercising forms of temporal resistance to the centuries of the abstraction and globalization of Western hegemonic time (Nanni 2012, 20). In *Future Ancestral Technologies*, Cannupa Hanska Luger’s temporal autonomy is simultaneously an assertion of Indigeneity through the reclamation of his ancestral knowledge and histories and an act of resistance against controlling images that enact social othering. Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins uses the term “controlling images” to refer to the use of negative images, stereotypes, and depictions as a tool of domination to define someone as “Other”. Othering ostracizes people as a justification for oppression based on identities such as race, gender, and class (Collins 1991, 68). Collins focuses her analysis of controlling images on Black women and girls, but this concept can be applied to other groups who are subject to marginalization caused by harmful representations.

The positive and nuanced representations of Indigeneity in *Future Ancestral Technologies* counter controlling images and demonstrate the importance of diverse image production. Luger has stated “I’m Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, and Lakota, I am not Native American” (Luger, 2019a, 1:25:00) to assert the aspects of his identity that are otherwise erased by a single identifier. Even the terms “Indigenous” and “Indigenous futurism” should be acknowledged as grouping diverse cultures together with a concomitant loss of specificity.
Returning to the piece *We Live* (Figures 1, 2, and 5), the entry log explains that in the wake of resource extraction caused by those who left the planet, the remaining peoples ritualize going to sites of destruction; they develop ceremonies and regalia that reflect futurized forms of their ancestral technologies. Luger goes on to note that *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances* regalia is designed to “remove all the senses that we invested in as human beings and force us to feel once again” (Luger 2019c, 1:45). The video still from *We Live* in Figure 5, demonstrates that the regalia is essential to the figures’ embodied ceremonial processes as the materials exaggerate their movements and are designed to connect them with the landscape, which in turn acts as the composer to their ceremonies.


In his Instagram post regarding the land-based action pieces, Luger refers to the regalia as “activated” rather than “worn” to emphasize its transformational purposes for the ceremonies.
that act to express humility and mend connection (Luger 2023). Through these futurist ceremonies, Luger explores how in our current paradigm, instead of making us more present and in tune with the world, sensory experience has been exploited to be numbing and disconnecting. As Collins’ notion of controlling images exemplifies, sensory experience is not entirely asocial and can be manipulated with harmful intent. Controlling images, for example, exploit vision to codify someone as “Other”. *We Live* communicates that a paradigm shift reconnects with how sensory information structures inform our relationships with one another and with the land. The name of this regalia, *The One Who Checks & The One Who Balances*, is a reference to the “checks and balances” system of the United States government that distributes power amongst various branches, so it is not concentrated within any one group or place. *We Live* brings attention to the detrimental impacts on the planet that were caused by an excess of power and the figures who activate their regalia practice accountability to ensure that power is with, not over others.

**Vision, Visuality, and the Construction of History**

In *We Live*, Luger’s practice to “remove the senses that we invested in” is a message to the past and present about harmful social constructs that are reinforced by sensory experience. While Luger’s regalia is designed to remove or muffle all of the senses, vision and hearing would be the most impacted as the regalia makes all sensory experience more proximate to the body, closer to the senses of touch, taste, and smell. Caroline Jones explains that within Western thought, sight is considered objective because it is the “the most [distant] and far-reaching of our senses” (C. Jones 2010, 88). The maxim “seeing is believing” signals how vision is equated with the truth. However, seeing is not neutral—it is informed by social relationships, beliefs, and
ideologies. I focus on how Luger’s practice calls our attention to how the structures of time and vision have been used to exert power and create social hierarchies. Jay Griffiths illustrates this when she states: “on a far larger scale, time is aligned with power, so rulers, governments and priesthoods have always used it to create or confirm their authority…the calendar is an ideological, political and religious weapon” (Griffiths 1999, 179). Western temporality’s perceived universality and objectivity are reinforced through various mechanisms including visuality. Vision and visuality are related terms, but they differ in their precise functions to each other. Vision describes the sensory and ocular processes of eyesight whereas visuality resides at the “intersection of power with visual representation” and therefore can be a form of social control (Mirzoeff 2002, 4). Visuality was coined by nineteenth-century historian Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) to describe how the narrative of history is visualized and constructed, distilling the world into a legible, aesthetic order. Nicholas Mirzoeff explains that visuality is an imagined practice rather than a perceptual process because it is “too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images, and ideas” (2). However, as a temporal medium, visuality is a tool for the powerful to exert and maintain dominance through fabricating visualizations of the past, present, and future. The power to visualize belongs to those who have the privilege and access to information to “see” the world. Thomas Carlyle crafted the visualization of the “Hero” as a mystical figure of the state to sustain autocratic leadership, thereby delineating who had the authority to visualize history and time (3). Authority seeks to divide people along social hierarchies and maintain power for those at the top.

Mirzoeff explains that the visuality of authority involves three key processes that dictate social orders: classifying, separating, and aestheticizing (3). These materialize as a society structured through social divisions that group people according to categories such as gender and
race. Intersecting social hierarchies divides power and so those who are in positions of authority or privilege navigate the world with fewer constraints. Categorizing people along lines of hierarchy isolates groups from one another and limits both their connection and shared imagining for a world without the dominance of authority. In effect, power differentials seem naturally occurring rather than socially constructed. Elizabeth Kaszynski (2016) points out that “anemic visuality” is the rhetorical exploitation of sight that leads to the exploitation of vision for racial profiling (64). The domination of social groups appears as “the way of the world” and seemingly traceable throughout history. Visualities of authority, therefore, rely on a shared belief in a singular standardized time and the presence of a dominant temporal culture.

Imperialism and Temporal Hierarchy: The Timeless “Other”

The title We Live and its accompanying entry log firmly assert the presence and survivance of Indigenous people in the future as Luger ends his narration in the entry log with: “We Live.” (Hanska Luger 2021, New Myth 2:39) As such, Luger considers his futurism radical because “[with the] model of isolation integral to the system of colonization…it’s hard to navigate our current circumstances because of the fixedness in time and in space. And the only way to have a kind of truly honest conversation with my ancestors and the technology is to bypass now” (Luger 2022d, 15:55). With its focus on temporal fixedness, Western chronology is central to the framework of colonization, capitalism, and white supremacy. Mirzoeff names the plantation complex (1660-1860), the imperial complex (1860-1945), and the military-industrial complex (1945-present) to trace how the visuality of authority developed to the present day (Mirzoeff 2011, 3-4). The colonial model of temporality that Luger references developed during the imperialism complex as it established a colonial history from a centralized authority (14). As
Western temporality became the global standard by the end of the nineteenth century, scientists, and historians, such as Thomas Carlyle, constructed narratives of history that reflect authority’s power in and across time. Imperial visuality, for example, is reflected in anthropologist Edward Tylor’s (1832-1917) definition of culture that centered European knowledge and customs (15). Mirzoeff states that Tylor’s framework for measuring the “amount” of culture across the world had an immediate impact on colonial beliefs. This idea was especially disseminated by Christian missionaries, many of whom perceived their aims to convert Indigenous peoples’ entire ways of life as a “humanitarian” cultural effort (Nanni 2012, 15-18). Time itself became a means of determining culture, for, as Mirzoeff explains imperial visuality:

…was an abstracted and intensified means of ordering biopower. It understood history to be arranged within and across time, meaning that the “civilized” were at the leading edge of time, while their “primitive” counterparts, although alive in the same moment, were understood as living in the past. (Mirzoeff 2011, 196)

Imperialism’s visualization of history temporally distinguished the colonizer from the colonized. Within a linear timeline, the “civilized” embody future-facing progress. The experience of temporal fixedness, noted by Luger, refers to how Indigenous peoples have been classified as “primitive”. As a result, Indigenous peoples are subsequently and continuously denied a contemporary presence. In Time and the Other (1983) Johanne Fabian refers to the imperialist effort to temporally separate the “West from the rest” as a denial of co-evalness, or the denial of time to non-Westerners (Fabian 1983, 28 and 32-34). In the nineteenth century, social Darwinists applied Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to frame and reinforce racist and classist social orders. Philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” to theorize that different races represented phases of human evolution and would inevitably lead to the extinction of specific groups of people (Johnson 2014, 155). The
arrangement and categorization of racial groups as units of measure on a timescale is a mechanism of dehumanization that Paul Gilroy refers to as a “temporal evolutionary ladder” (Gilroy 2000, 329). The primitive versus civilized taxonomy visualized people in time through the ascription of temporal value. In the last chapter, I explained the development of the Western structure of time and the timekeeping objects such as clocks and calendars accompanied settler colonialists to the places they colonized. With these timekeeping objects the “civilized” European colonizer had the ability to keep the time, literally and figuratively, regardless of where they were. The notion that someone could possess time became intertwined with social hierarchy. As Nanni (2012, 10) explains, “time thus contributed to the construction of an evolutionarily distant ‘Other’; for the gulf between the mechanical rationality of clocks and the nature-oriented calendars of Indigenous societies was perceived to be as vast as the epochs separating the Stone Age from the steam-engine”. In other words, white European and settler colonialist identity became defined by their negation to the timeless “Other”. Clock time both mechanized the rhythms of life and divided people along lines of belonging or unbelonging in linear time. The perceived “timelessness” of Indigenous people served as justification for colonizers to exert their control and domination under the guise of progress.

In Future Ancestral Technologies, the resiliency of Indigenous peoples in the future dismantles the “vanishing race” controlling image rooted in social Darwinist belief in their inevitable extinction. The “vanishing race” is a racist and colonial narrative popularized and visually reinforced by American photographer Edward Curtis (1868-1952). Following its invention in the nineteenth century, photography became an apparatus of what Timothy Mitchell refers to as the West’s “world as exhibition”, the obsession with the spectacle of the “Other”, the object of colonial fantasy (1998, 413). Curtis is known for his photographs of Indigenous tribes
and considered his photography an effort to document them before they “disappeared,” and he framed subjects from this perspective. This is clearly evident in the image *The Vanishing Race* (1904) which depicts a group of Navajo horseback riders seen from the back, fading into a hazy background (Gonzales-Day 2016b, see reference for a link to the image). Curtis’ portraiture played to tropes of the “noble savage” a fictitious image of Indigenous life as “uncorrupted” by civilization and in harmony with the natural world. Per Joseph Herring, the rhetoric of the “noble savage” developed from European colonization and was perpetuated by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). The stereotype aligned with ideas central to the nineteenth-century movement of Romanticism, a reaction against modernity in favor of nature and an idealized past (Herring 2006, 228). Edward Curtis and the Romantic movement tokenized the “uncivilized” perception of Indigenous peoples as embodiments of a glorified natural world. The controlling image of the “noble savage” persists today as a common trope in media and is especially prevalent in Eurocentric science fiction stories. Disguised as heroic adventure stories, these narratives romanticize and justify colonial fantasies. As noted in the previous chapter, Luger has felt isolated from the science fiction genre, he describes “I never saw myself in that genre and if I did it was only to reinforce this ‘primitive’ Indigenous-kind-of-knowledge. You know, there was always some sort of ‘spirit entity’ or you know, ‘holy earth person’, who was the closest thing that I could identify with science fiction” (Luger 2022d, 15:35). The degree of the visual codification of Indigenous people as the “timeless Other” can be seen in Edward Curtis’ photograph *In a Piegan Lodge* (1910). It is documented that Curtis removed a modern clock from the image that was on the ground in between two Indigenous men (Gonzales-Day 2016a, see reference for a link to the image). Such images exemplify that the construction of controlling images was so deliberate that it went beyond the framing of an image to altering it to
fit the desired narrative. Ken Gonzales-Day writes that Curtis’ choice to blur the traces of modernity is a form of violence (2016a). By comparing the original negative and doctored print of *In a Piegan Lodge*, the colonial gaze and fixation of Indigeneity as “primitive” is clearly seen. Luger’s *We Live* and *Shadow Holding Shape to Experience the Energy of the Sun*, both depicting Indigenous people in the landscapes, contrast starkly with Curtis’ photographs because the figures exist and move in their time not with the framing of disappearance but instead, of their decisive presence.

**Future Ancestral Technologies and Future Mythology**

Luger’s practice in *Future Ancestral Technologies* most recently includes prototyping mythologies that exist in a future space. *New Myth* (2021) (Figure 6) is a recent addition to the land-based performative action pieces in *Future Ancestral Technologies* featuring the monster slayer regalia, *mirí aráda and awá ahbáaxi* (Luger 2023 n.d.-d). These are Hidatsa names that describe elements of the land, water, and sky. In his artist statement, Luger communicates the power of mythology as a call to action.

> As living beings, we all have myths and tales that describe our lives being abused by monsters. These monsters are out of natural order and human beings rise from their torment to defeat them. Monster Slayers found in every culture set out and sacrifice their life for the continuation of existence. Today, we are once again plagued by monsters. It is time to be the human beings, each of us must be aware of what we can do in the place that we stand…The monstrosity of the oppressive systems which we have been forced to function within are monsters. One way these toxic systems may be destroyed is bit by bit. (Luger n.d.-d)

In the *New Myth* video, viewers are introduced to a vast desert landscape of white sand dunes. We see no discernable marker of time aside from the daytime and nighttime. The camera cuts from the landscape to a small puddle of water from which one of the two monster slayers
collects water into cylindrical, glass containers. The figures wear full-body outfits made from recycled crocheted blankets and other materials similar to the regalia from *We Live*. Only the eyes of the monster slayers are visible through the headgear; in their belts are held large bow-shaped poles. Making their way through the desert, the two figures fight to survive against unseen monsters. Viewers witness the monster slayers stop to kneel and pour their water in lines; they dig into the sand along these lines to find ceramic blades.

![Image of the monster slayers in full-body outfits](image)

Figure 6. Cannupa Hanska Luger. *New Myth (Future Ancestral Technologies)* 2021, Single Channel Video. Videographer/Photo Credit: Gabe Fermin, Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of Garth Greenan Gallery and Artist.

The land provides them the tools to confront the forces that curator Gabriel de Guzman explains “reflect a discordant relationship with the environment… [they compel us] to face our own actions and fears, while creating a context for dismantling time” (Quoted in Luger 2022a,). As the monster slayers continue through the desert, they wield their newly acquired tools. The
video ends with the two sharing a moment of looking at one another. The focus on bringing water to the dry desert landscape offers commentary and performative action about the depletion and contamination of water resources.

Human Monster Slayers: Mythology, Technology, and Sustainability

*New Myth* utilizes mythological archetypes to visualize oppressive systems of power and the detrimental effects of capitalism as monsters. Within the larger *Future Ancestral Technologies* project, *New Myth* explores sustainable technologies and ways of life in a futurist world. Joy Sanchez-Taylor explains that many futurist artists and authors of color juxtapose technology and myth to resist the Eurocentricity of science fiction (Sanchez-Taylor 2021, 20-21).

Breaking down the title *Future Ancestral Technologies*, Luger discusses his thoughts about Western perceptions of technology:

“[Western society does not] even have new technology. You have really old technology with really new mechanisms for it. That's what you consider technology—I see no difference really between like a bird song and my iPhone or you know, a satellite. Like, this is communication. This is a really old technology, but the mechanism is advanced and it's like you need to pay attention because there are technologies that you've deemed primitive”. (Luger 2022d, 24:30)

By incorporating his ancestral technologies into pieces like *New Myth*, Luger prompts viewers to consider their own perceptions about how some forms of science and technologies are considered advanced and objective, whereas others are deemed primitive. In *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism* (2017) Shelley Streeby comments on how authors and artists of color “use science fiction and other speculative genres to remember the past and imagine futures that help us think critically about the present and connect climate change to social movements” (5). Octavia Butler’s speculative fiction novel
*Parable of the Sower* (1993), set in Los Angeles in 2024, powerfully imagines the effects of the climate crisis of the near future world. The story is told from the journal entries of protagonist Lauren Olamina as she travels with others seeking safety and a better life after her family is killed. Throughout the novel, community building between characters mitigates the chaotic instability that has been caused by wealth inequality, greed, and climate change. As one of the most influential contemporary speculative fiction authors, Butler compels the reader to assume an active role in fighting for and envisioning a better future. Butler’s novel depicts a harsh world but stresses that taking action against complacency is essential to create something better. Lauren Olamina is not exempt from constant threats and experiences of explicit violence in the story, but she nevertheless writes in her journal: “the weak can overcome the strong if the weak persist” (Butler 1993, 134). Luger and Butler insist that, even if it seems impossible, the fight against these systems is not in vain. Much like *Parable of the Sower*, *New Myth* asks viewers to consider the destruction and exploitation that capitalism and colonization have wrought upon land and people. As the monster slayers traverse the land to retrieve water, they restore connection. The act of giving and sharing provides the monster slayers with what they need to defeat the forces that destroy their belonging in the world. In Luger’s speculative fiction, he deviates from mythologies that follow a hero’s journey to overcome hardship. The monster slayers are not emphasized as heroes but as *human beings*. Oppressive systems of power, such as the ones Luger constructs as monsters, are designed to dehumanize. Authority maintains its power by disconnecting people from their humanity.
Monsters: Visualizing Systems of Power and Harm

Discussing New Myth, Luger explains the monster slayer and monster archetypes reflect mythologies from and beyond his own heritage (Luger n.d.-d). Luger’s mythos emphasizes that the “progress” of civilization is wounding; it destroys the planet for profit and disconnects people from one another in time and space. In the New Myth, the monsters are not seen but are nevertheless, sensed as omnipresent. The monsters’ invisibility functions like the visuality of authority—constructed to be hyper-visible so that it is perceived as normal and in doing so, operates as largely invisible in society. Even though the monsters are not depicted in the video installation, the threat of harm and the consequences of their existence are perceived. Luger has depicted the monsters outside of the video in his exhibition New Myth (2021) held at the Garth Greenan Gallery (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Cannupa Hanska Luger, New Myth (Future Ancestral Technologies), 2021 exhibition photograph at Garth Greenan Gallery, New York. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Garth Greenan Gallery.
The exhibition revolved around the narrative moment in the aftermath of the monsters’ defeat; it featured the monster slayer regalia, a three-channel video installation of the monster slayers walking through the desert, and ceramic monstrous figures. Luger aptly titled the various monster pieces and limbs with names such as *Greed*, *Corruption*, *King*, and *Ruin*. The ceramic piece *Greed* (2021) (Figure 8) represents a monster’s severed head. The vibrant-colored three-eyed head takes the form of a cyclops-like creature. Luger puts a face (or limb) to greed to explore where these monsters originate. Rather than being great cosmic forces that are inherent to the world or universe, these monsters reference oppressive systems and are unnatural and
constructed. *Greed* and *Corruption* describe characteristics that reside in many of us as a result of living under capitalism and settler colonialism. Luger asks the viewer to consider what we give up when we embrace these monstrous qualities. Perhaps more than anything else, the monsters of *New Myth* embody forces of destruction: of community, belonging, humanity, space, and time. In their article “Time and The Colonial State” (2021) Meryem-Bahia Arfaoui writes:

> To say colonization is a part of history is to give it constructive value. In actuality, colonization is not a moment in history but a process of destruction…If we highlight the fact that colonization is an anti-history that aims to annihilate everything that exists outside of it then we can return it to its marginality, to its violence, we denormalize it and call it what it really was: the destruction of history. (Arfaoui 2021)

*New Myth* makes visible the anti-history of colonization by emphasizing the effects of its devastation in the world. Luger’s futurism offers a macroscopic temporal perspective to inspire viewers to imagine the possibilities beyond their present and from visualities of authority. In bypassing the now, colonization and capitalism no longer appear natural to history but, as Afraoui notes, as its antithesis. I argue that visuality, as the visualization of history, extends to mythology to point out how *New Myth* challenges the mythos of authority. For example, the myth of American Exceptionalism, the American Dream, the myth of meritocracy, or of rugged individualism, all demonstrate how through visuality, mythologies can be constructed around systems and figures of authority. However, in his exhibition and the video installation *New Myth*, Luger’s practice to re-Indigenize both time and mythology denaturalizes authority’s stronghold.

_A Futurist Vision: Indigenous Visuality & Counter Visuality to Authority_

Luger’s emphasis in his *New Myth* series on Indigenous-centered approaches to transform ways of living embodies both a countervisuality to authority and Indigenous visualities. Per
Mirzoeff, countervisualities, like visualities, are not necessarily visual but take the form of “visualized...goals, strategies, and imagined forms of singularity and collectivity” that undermine visualities of authority (Mirzoeff 2011, 5). Luger describes the futurist goal of *New Myth* as “a far future that remembers this era of monsters can sing the songs and dance the stories of our ability to come together and become Monster Slayers” (Luger n.d.-d). The mythic time of *New Myth* exists somewhere in the future but not at any one point. In the present, viewers experience Luger’s mythology as a call to action but in the future, it may become a story that is passed down generationally. In dialogue with the past, present, and future *New Myth* rebounds through time. It does not follow a linear sequence but instead embodies heterochronic temporalities that flow multi-directionally. In the previous section, I stated that visualities of authority require a dominant temporal culture to operate in and across time. The standardized system and shared belief in the Western measure of time are needed by systems of power to divide people and culture along lines of temporal hierarchy. The pluralistic temporalities of *Future Ancestral Technologies* counters clock time and therefore, authority’s visualities. This also represents colonialization’s failed project of time. Even though colonialism maintains Western time as the global standard, other temporalities still exist and prosper. As a countervisuality, Luger’s futurist speculative fiction visualizes human connectivity and autonomy.

Up to this point, I have discussed Mirzoeff’s theory of visuality connected to Western power and countervisualities as a means of undermining them. Tina Campt lays the groundwork for thinking about new meanings of visuality, particularly as she questions authority’s claim to visuality (Campt 2018). Campt asks how our understanding of visuality is transformed when associated with Blackness or Indigeneity, for instance. Compared to whiteness, Blackness and
Indigeneity do not occupy normative positions in society. Therefore, Campt argues, Black visuality and Indigenous visuality cannot be and are not constructed to exert and maintain power over others. Denise K. Cummings explains in *Visualities: Perspectives on Contemporary American Indian Film and Art* (2011), that Indigenous visualities can act “as both a mode of representation and means of resisting as it pertains to the constructs, discourses, and practices of the colonial and postcolonial” (xiv). *Future Ancestral Technologies* visualizes temporality and Indigeneity together. As it negotiates its own imaginings that are resistant to authority, it claims autonomy in time. Luger’s methodology in *Future Ancestral Technologies* positions the continuum of his ancestral epistemologies in the future in effort to be in simultaneous dialogue with his ancestors and descendants. In effect, the series asks viewers to acknowledge there was life before and imagine there can be life after oppressive systems. However, this is not to romanticize the past and insist on it as a utopia either. Imagining the after, while sharing in Luger’s vision or your own, is a claim to autonomy.

**The Future**

In *Future Ancestral Technologies* Cannupa Hanska Luger deconstructs temporality to rehumanize our relationships with ourselves and with one another. Afrozuluturist artist and writer Rasheedah Phillips asks: “what can be created communally when the master’s clock is dismantled?” (Phillips 2018). A nod to the writing of Audre Lorde, Phillips’ question conveys the idea that communal relationships can flourish beyond the temporal power of colonization, white supremacy, and systems of domination. *Future Ancestral Technologies* engages with a similar framework to cultivate belonging. *Transmission Fluid* (2019) (Figure 9) is a filmed
performance piece and audio transmission that encapsulates Luger’s dreams for a future in which connected relationships reverberate across time.

An audio recording of Luger’s grandfather, Carl Whitman, captioned as “Ancestral transmission of Carl Whitman, MHA NATION circa 1984”, is heard between the sounds of static, singing, and drums (Luger 2019b). Transmitted from the past to the future, the recording details a call to action to create a better future in the face of a national debt crisis from 1984. In his message, Whitman stresses the need for collective action and he ends his message by stating “we all have the responsibility to make a happy and more meaningful future for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Don’t let them down” (Luger 2019b, 4:30). The video starts by showing an expansive, grassy plain that glows under the warm sunlight and a hazy, blue sky. Two figures, an adult and child, barely visible on the far edge of the field, make their way

Figure 9. Cannupa Hanska Luger, Transmission Fluid (Future Ancestral Technologies series), 2019, Video Still. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
toward the camera. The taller figure carries a long metal pole across his shoulders. As they walk, he sets it down to adjust the other’s headpiece. The video still in Figure 9 shows the moment the two hold and share a look with each other. Luger’s grandfather’s ancestral audio transmission underscores how this interaction represents Luger’s commitment to celebrating multi-generational relationships. Transmission Fluid exemplifies the temporal autonomy of Luger’s claim to his personal and collective histories to assert the survivance of Indigeneity in the future. Temporal autonomy aligns with Mirzoeff’s notion of the right to look. Like the exchange between the futurist figures in Transmission Fluid, the right to look does not describe the act of seeing but rather a personal and shared look between people that expresses mutual recognition, amity, or reciprocity. It is a claim to autonomy, the right to existence, the refusal of authority’s reach. As such, it does not claim individualism or voyeurism but is an expression of compassion and solidarity (Mirzoeff 2011, 1-4). The right to look is the antithesis of the visuality of authority and as Mirzoeff asserts, came before authority. Future Ancestral Technologies resists the exploitative visuality of authority in favor of Indigenous visualities that restructure reciprocal ways of being.

Speculative fiction constructs a world where difference is celebrated rather than viewed as threatening. The “Other” is granted empathy and autonomy rather than being othered. Luger, along with other futurists, emphasizes that difference is necessary; survival depends on collective action and community. Luger centers Indigeneity but his futurist imagining, he accommodates and welcomes others. The future is not created alone, so to privilege only one singular vision would negate the goals of the work entirely. Luger’s work to deconstruct controlling images demonstrates how oppressive systems homogenize identity to perpetuate their power. The diminution of cultural nuance operates as a control mechanism in an attempt to
enforce social hierarchies and exert the authority of biopower. This is echoed in Luger’s sentiment that “unity does not have to come at the cost of hegemony” (Luger 2019a, 1:52:07). Sharing space and sharing time for Luger is based on reciprocal exchange, even, and especially if, dreams for a better future contradict each other. In an effort to create something better, differing visions and frameworks are vital to counter the hegemony that fuels oppressive systems. Dwayne Donald (Papaschase Cree) describes this mutuality as ethical relationality,

“Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisibilize the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences living in the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference” (Dwayne 2009, 6).

The right to look embodies the dynamics of ethical relationality as the right to existence. Future Ancestral Technologies stresses the importance of restoring bonds to reconnect with our humanity; to be human, to feel, to cultivate belonging instead of ownership. As New Myth conveys, because the monsters that have enacted harm and destruction do not exist outside of us, it is up to us to fight them. Luger visually constructs a speculative fiction, a futurist world for viewers to witness what is possible collectively.

Courage and Collective Futurist Visions

In Future Ancestral Technologies, Luger explores how futurism can move us forward, but he never promises utopia. Viewers are asked to consider their own present positionality to contend with how we are always actively creating our futures. The presumption of progress in the future is appealing but it masks destruction, and an always-forward-moving timeline suggests the possibility of a linear end. By asking where we are going in time, Luger provides us with a
vision that extends beyond an end. In his futurist narrative, the colonizer has left. In reality, the colonial project failed in its goal to totalize all of time. While this project’s effects on Indigenous and marginalized peoples have been detrimental, anti-colonial Indigenous resistance, in its resilience and survivance, has endured. While, in the face of oppressive systems of power, it may seem futile to dream of something better, Luger’s work reminds us that those very systems rely on maintaining a feeling of hopelessness. Future Ancestral Technologies expresses the idea that hope, while an important tool, is not the only way to counter hopelessness. In a podcast conversation, Luger explained: “I’m afraid of hopelessness, or really, I don’t even like hope so much but [I’m afraid of] no courage or effort to consider something different. (Luger 2022d, 29:40) The courage to imagine something better contains potential. Leopold Lambert summarizes this point by explaining “but futurisms are not always about hope. Their visions are not wishful thinking or dreamy fables about the possibility of ‘better’ futures. They are instead a manifestation of tactical optimism; a constructivist envisioning that gives itself the means to exist through its very own formulation” (Lambert 2019). This is not to say that Future Ancestral Technologies is not without hope or visions for better futures, but rather that hope can be generated from the courage to act. Luger urges us to consider that the courage to envision collective futures is not likely without feelings of hopelessness. Luger’s series is not a fight against time but a fight for time. At the core of Future Ancestral Technologies is the recognition that those who have the courage to dream of our collective future and take action will not live to experience it. As Luger says, “even if you do only live once, you don’t live alone…it’s going to take a while, it’s going to take a few generations but let me die trying” (Luger 2022d, 29:45). We may not share the same moment in time with those in the past and future, but we can engage in dialogue with them. Luger may not, and likely will not, see the full impact his and our futurist
imagining. A lesson of *Future Ancestral Technologies* is to consider that what we owe to each other cannot be contained within the parameters of a single moment or life.
“The past has a future we never expect.” – Raoul Peck (2021, 1:51)

In the early 2000s, while researching nineteenth-century portraiture of Latinx people in California’s history, Chicanx photographer Ken Gonzales-Day found a photograph of a young Latino man with a handwritten caption on the back, reading: “the last man hanged in Los Angeles” (Gonzales-Day 2021c). While the man, Rodolfo Silvas, was publicly executed in the 1880s, this was not the last hanging in California, yet this image held a great deal of power for Gonzales-Day (Gonzales-Day 2006, 124). Gonzales-Day suggests that the photograph of Silvas, a studio portrait of him wearing a three-piece suit, was likely made after Silvas’ arrest, and used for publicity in the time leading up to his execution (124-125). As Gonzales-Day continued to comb through archives, he came across more portraits of Latino men who, he learned through research, were eventually hanged. This sparked many questions for Gonzales-Day about the lesser-known history of lynching in California and what he refers to as “the history before the history of lynching that we all know” (Gonzales-Day 2020a). Gonzales-Day sought to understand the difference between lynching, vigilantism, frontier justice, and public execution to explore the circumstances around Silvas’ death. Gonzales-Days’ interest in this history coincided with the rise of violent and aggressive vigilantism at the border between the United States and Mexico in the early 2000s motivated by explicit anti-immigration rhetoric from George W. Bush’s administration. The parallels between historical and present-day violence subsequently inspired Gonzales-Day’s publication *Lynching in the West: 1820-1935* (2006) and various
artistic projects all of which address the history, legacy, and erasure of lynching in the United States. These include Searching for California Hang Trees (2002-2006), Erased Lynchings (2002-ongoing), and Another Land (2020-present).

I focus on Gonzales-Day’s second project, Erased Lynchings but contextualize the series within the broader scope of Gonzales-Day’s projects related to the history and legacy of lynching. Erased Lynchings is comprised of over 60 archival photographs of lynchings that were taken by the perpetrators and intended for circulation (Gonzales-Day n.d.-b). Gonzales-Day altered the original lynching photographs by digitally removing the victims and the evidence of the hanging rope. In effect, Gonzales-Day diverts the gaze and focus from the victim onto those in the crowd, facilitating the visualization of whiteness. This strategic erasure calls attention to the systemic erasure of racial violence, particularly lynching, from mainstream historical narratives. The removal of the victims from lynching photographs prevents revictimization and thereby disrupts the continuation of harm that such photographs intended to normalize. Gonzales-Day’s images prompt the viewer to ask: who or what is missing from the image, and by extension, from history?

Erased Lynchings questions how narratives of history and progress have been constructed and how they conform to the temporal ideal of Western modernity. Progress, in all its linear forward-moving momentum, has shaped how past figures and events are remembered in the historical narrative. The photographs in the Erased Lynchings series urge the viewer to explore the rhetoric of lynching as it relates to temporal imaginings and performances of race, gender, citizenship, and national identity. The focus on the lynch mob compels present-day viewers to recognize their potential implication and complicity in this history of racial violence. Erased Lynchings highlights how time can be used as a tool of control and domination by those in
positions of power to create a sense of temporal distance that places racism and racial violence in the past. This fuels notions of a post-racial present and attempts to dictate the idea that collective traumas for victims of racism and racial violence do not persist. The desire to leave behind past atrocities fails to account for the persistent interconnectedness of memory, time, and affective experience. The temporality of white supremacy creates a self-authorized visualization of history. In other words, time is manipulated by those in positions of privilege to engage or disengage with histories of violence. Viewers may recognize they are implicated in the history of lynching and racial violence, and so, as implicated subjects, although not the original perpetrators, recognize how they benefit from and hold privilege in a society of systemic racism.

Gonzales-Day’s series is also an examination of photography as a medium, exploring the role of the camera as a tool of white supremacy, spectacle, and violence. Photography itself is often regarded as a medium to capture moments in time and maintain the presence of the past in perpetuity. While Gonzales-Day’s work may initially seem to address the past, his series challenges the distinction between divisions in time. Nothing is fixed or frozen in a moment in time; rather, temporalities are entangled with one another. By ignoring the distinction between time and space, Gonzales-Day's work expresses how time is both experienced and felt. The altered photographs explore the renegotiation and resignification of trauma, memory, and identity.

Erased Lynchings elicits initial questions: what causes and contributes to historical amnesia and erasure regarding racial violence and trauma? How is it that the United States pays tributes to its origin and history but does little more than footnote, if not erase entirely, the harm this history also causes? While these questions could be answered in many ways, I position these questions through a framework that analyzes how white supremacy and colonization have been
organized by an insistence on the construction of time as universalized and linear and so produces erasure, dissonance, and historical amnesia. I will discuss how Erased Lynchings confronts a temporal manipulation of racial violence that fuels a disregard of both traumatic experiences and the creation of temporal distance towards historical racial violence.

California Hang Trees & Erased Lynchings

I start my study of Erased Lynchings by discussing the first of Ken Gonzales-Day’s artistic projects that addressed the topic of lynching, Searching for California Hang Trees. In this project, Gonzales-Day photographed trees and landscapes in California that were at or near the sites of lynchings. Gonzales-Day started this project in 2002 when searching through newspaper microfilm in a Sacramento library. His goal was to research and document cases of lynchings in California’s history that were unrecorded or unrecognized in official records at the state and federal level (Gonzales-Day 2021c, 27:40). As he worked, Gonzales-Day discovered a case that had happened near the library. This motivated him to travel to the location and photograph the site. As he worked, he became aware of how he and the landscape were acting as witnesses to violent histories. Most of the historic “hang trees” in the state no longer exist; they were cut down after the lynchings, for real estate development, or they suffered Sudden Oak Death, a disease that has largely impacted trees in California (Gonzales-Day n.d.-c). Searching for California Hang Trees takes on an additional resonance as the search can never be fully realized due to the destruction or death of the historic trees and the omission of cases of lynchings from official records. For these reasons, some cases will remain forever unknown.

In 2006, Gonzales-Day published Lynching in the West: 1820-1935 in which he compiled his research about lynching in the Western United States with a focus on California. The book
documents over 350 cases of lynchings in the state’s history; only 50 had been previously recorded. Because of Gonzales-Day’s book, it is now known that California had one of the highest rates of lynchings in the United States (11). Lynching victims in the Western United States were Latinx, Black, Native, Asian, Jewish, and European (Gonzales-Day n.d.-c).

Many of the photographs in Searching for California Hang Trees have a tone of eeriness, due to lighting and angles. Nightfall II (2006) (Figure 10) shows a tree that is illuminated by an intense light source positioned behind the camera against a dark night sky. The effect of the image is startling, as the limbs of the tree fade into the stark black of the night, they reach and extend beyond the edges of the frame.

Figure 10. Ken Gonzales-Day, Nightfall II, 2006. (From Searching for California Hang Trees series), Archival ink on fiber rag paper, 22.5x46 inches. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.

Nightfall II recalls the history of photography in the Western United States as well as the production and commodification of lynching photography. Depicting a tree in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, Nightfall II symbolizes the trees that no longer exist and the lynching cases that were, for so long, omitted from official records or forgotten (Gonzales-Day n.d.-c). The light
source behind the camera mimics the flash bulbs and headlights that were commonly used to
capture images of nighttime lynchings (Gonzales-Day n.d.-c). Gonzales-Day purposefully sought
out and used a Deardorff camera, the same camera used by photographers associated with the
that these early photographers helped create and perpetuate the visual mythology of the
“untouched” Western frontier that, to a great degree, erased the presence of Indigenous peoples
(Gonzales-Day n.d.-c). Such depictions of the Western United States reinforced Manifest
Destiny, the belief that the Westward Expansion of settlers was divinely destined. In an
interview, Gonzales-Day states:

[I] used the master’s tool to rethink the California landscape. We are used to
thinking of it as an empty space that is ready to be explored, conquered, exploited,
farmed, mined, or whatever. I was trying to get at the idea that there was a history
before history, invisible in the landscape, of people that were here before. I tried
to create images that spoke to that without doing any triggering. I wanted to create
a photographic meditation on this idea of history. (Gonzales-Day 2020a)

Gonzales-Day’s use of the Deardorff camera disrupts the idyllic notions of the West that
indelibly persisted throughout the twentieth century, and well into the twenty-first. Gonzales-
Day positions the Deardorff camera as the “master’s tools” to acknowledge the role of
photography in reinforcing power dynamics. In the next chapter, I will expand on the perceptions
of truth in photography. In Nightfall II, Gonzales-Day seeks to reenact certain performative
elements related to lynching photography, such as photographing at night. However, the color
print intentionally sets it apart from historical images. As a result, the photograph simultaneously
visualizes yet reimagines the history of the landscape in the present-day.

Nightfall II and the other photographs in Searching for California Hang Trees ask
viewers to reconsider the California landscape or the landscapes with which they are familiar.
Gonzales-Day prompts viewers to reflect on how learning about the history of a landscape shifts or disrupts its meaning; and how if, the landscape, now layered with its history of violence, has a different resonance. After Searching for California Hang Trees, Ken Gonzales-Day developed a walking tour of Los Angeles lynching sites (Gonzales-Day n.d.-d). The tour is led by Gonzales-Day for public events and is also accessible in a self-guided format. The tour provides context and information about known lynching cases in the city that, with few exceptions, have no historical marker. In addition to providing information about the lynching cases, the historical context describes communities who once lived in the areas and calls attention to the shifts in architecture over time. Walking to each location allows participants to better visualize histories that are otherwise invisible in the present-day city. The walking tour includes stops such as: the intersection of Alameda and Aliso Streets where a mob lynched Francisco Cota (age 15) in 1861; the 300 block of North Los Angeles Street where a mob lynched an estimated 18-24 Chinese people including Ah Wing, Dr. Chee Long “Gene” Tong, Chang Wan, Leong Qaui, Ah Long, Wan Foo, Tong Won, Ah Loo, Day Kee, Ah Waa, Ho Hing, Lo Hey, Ah Won, Wing Chee, and Wong Chin during what’s known as the Chinese Massacre of 1871; and the intersection of N. Broadway and Temple where at mob lynched Miguel Lachenal in 1870 (Gonzales-Day n.d.-d). Searching for California Hang Trees and the Los Angeles walking tour explore how the history of lynching haunts the California landscape through both its presence and absence. Gonzales-Day described this project as a “performative act—a witnessing through image-making” as he traveled to each site to consider to what extent histories remain present in a landscape and intentionally recovering them (Gonzales-Day, n.d.-c).

Around the same time Gonzales-Day created Searching for California Hang Trees, he started to work with archival photographs of lynchings found during his research. Unlike
Searching for California Hang Trees, where Gonzales-Day photographed the present-day landscape, in Erased Lynchings he altered already-existing images of lynchings. His artistic intervention into archival materials refuges them for the past, present, and future. Gonzales-Day obtains and uses lynching photographs that were commonly reproduced for circulation as postcards or newspaper images, opting not to use any reproductions found in books or online (Gonzales-Day 2010c, 42:35). Archival photographs offer a direct material connection to the past, as they were put into circulation before and after the lynchings. As seen in the installation shot of the exhibition at the Tarble Arts Center (Figure 11), after digitally altering the photograph, Gonzales-Day printed the image to match the dimensions of the original photograph, often the size of a postcard. The smaller photographs on the gallery wall require viewers to stand in close proximity to view them. For such installations, Gonzales-Day enlarged some of the photographs to be life-size, as seen on the wall on the right side of Figure 11. Whereas the postcard-size photographs mimic the original size of lynching photographs, the enlargements create an immersive experience; viewers may feel as if they are walking into the life-size images.

Figure 11. Ken Gonzales-Day, Erased Lynchings series, exhibition photograph at Tarble Arts Center, 2016. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
For first-time viewers, and particularly for white viewers, of *Erased Lynchings*, it may be unclear what the scenes unfolding in the photographs depict. Without the presence of the lynching victim, viewers may surmise that these black-and-white photographs, populated by people in period clothing, are historic. The photographs primarily show nighttime scenes with crowds that are nearly always entirely white. The images may not initially feel confrontational if a viewer is unaware of the context of the photographs. Gonzales-Day provides historical texts for the exhibits, and both the title and the accompanying histories lend the images immense weight. Gonzales-Day asks viewers to experience the weight of the horror of the explicit evidence of racial violence, a history that otherwise goes largely unacknowledged in the United States. The potential initial unawareness of the viewer is a crucial space to explore. The lack of awareness as manifested in the unknowing viewer reveals the historical erasure and amnesia that accompanies histories of racial violence in the United States. By erasing the victims to foreground the perpetrators, the series asks contemporary viewers to look at what they may not want to see, particularly those viewers who are unwittingly privileged beneficiaries of historical racial segregation and violence.

**Lynching as American Tradition**

In *Erased Lynchings*, Gonzales-Day’s work with the archives prompts viewers to question where lynchings photographs come from. *Tombstone, 1884* (2004) (Figure 12) shows the large crowd looking directly into the camera. This photograph, as with many others in *Erased Lynchings* demonstrates that lynchings were a public event. Yet, these visible, public spectacles became subject to historical erasure. To understand the functions of lynching photographs, it’s
important to trace the origins of lynching as they are deeply interwoven with the racial fabric of the United States.


Lynching in the United States can be traced to the American Revolution in the eighteenth century. What became known as “Lynch law” refers to the American revolutionary, Colonel
Charles Lynch. Lynch, along with others he appointed, established an ad-hoc court system to quell the Tory Conspiracy of 1780 (Gonzales-Day 2006, 43). Presiding over his form of justice, Lynch and his posse handed down various sentences for accused Tories or British loyalists. Even though Lynch and his accomplices acted in an unofficial and unlawful capacity, they were later exonerated and appointed to positions in official court systems. This history is essential for understanding the rhetorical power of lynching as it relates to the rhetoric of American citizenship and national identity. Ersula Ore, in *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* (2019), explores the rhetoric of lynching historically and traces its evolution into contemporary issues of police brutality and policies of anti-Blackness. Ore describes the effect of Colonel Lynch’s extralegal punishments: “under these conditions, lynch law became an expression of national loyalty that made the lyncher, justices, and supporters of Lynch’s court synonymous with the American loyalist and facilitated a sense of collective identity among ‘the people’” (12). The rulings of Lynch’s Law fostered an “us versus them” public mentality that sought to eradicate a supposed threat from within the nation’s borders while intrinsically tying these acts of violence against the enemy to American civic responsibility, identity, and pride.

Following the American Revolution, over the next century, lynching continued to target individuals and communities considered “threats” to public safety and national values. In a white supremacist society, lynching became a way to exert racial dominance and reinforce racialized notions of citizenship. Following the period of Reconstruction (1863-1877) after the Civil War, harsh laws such as the Black Codes (1865-1866) followed by Jim Crow and Segregation laws (1870s-1965) sought to limit the power that Black people had temporarily gained after the abolition of slavery and during Reconstruction (Ore 2019, 40). As Ore notes, these laws were “the first line of defense against black citizenship. Lynching was the second” (16). As Gonzales-
Day’s work focuses on lynching in California, there are comparisons with similar racist legislation that increased in the mid to late nineteenth century in the Western United States. The Anti-Vagrancy Act of 1855, known popularly at the time as the Greaser Act, targeted “greasers” by making unfair arrests and incarceration legislatively supported. The term “greasers” was a racial slur directed towards so-called “Spanish” individuals—who, at the time, included Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Gonzales-Day 2006, 24-25). The federal Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1952) greatly impacted the Western United States with the ban on the immigration of all Chinese laborers. Additionally, the Foreign Miners Tax of 1851 singled out foreign-born miners to pay taxes that, in effect, drove Latinxs from their mining claims (25). Like those in the South, these laws functioned solely to target specific racial groups, actively removing their rights altogether. Racially motivated laws criminalized Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other communities of color. Much like the Tories that Colonel Lynch targeted, Black and Brown peoples’ existence in the United States was perceived as threatening “enemies from within”. Lynching was also inextricably connected with gender, as exemplified by the many allegations that often centered around false narratives of Black men threatening white women. Black men became associated with brutishness and violence, whereas white women were symbolically associated with virtue and innocence—the rhetorical embodiment of America. These controlling ideas became a rhetorical tool for white men to justify their acts of violence against Black men and other men of color (Ore 2019, 18).

Race and Lynching

It is necessary to analyze the social functions of whiteness and the temporality of white supremacy in connection with lynching in the United States. In putting time and whiteness in
conversation with one another, I analyze how the temporality of white supremacy functions to reinforce social hierarchy and exert biopower. Biopower refers to how power is asserted over people and can take many forms such as policing or surveillance. Lynching was predicated on the white supremacist beliefs of racial superiority and the exertion of biopower (Ore 2019, 16).

According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, race is neither an essence nor illusion but rather “a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant 2015, 110). Race and racial formation therefore remain in flux and therefore are “always historically situated” (112). In the previous chapter, I discussed how social Darwinists, such as Herbert Spencer, reinforced the colonialist fantasy of a racial evolutionary hierarchy (Gonzales-Day 2006, 29-30). Gonzales-Day notes that Spencer’s theories were instrumental to the perception of race in the Western United States and theorized that the Indigenous and Latinx peoples would eventually vanish (30). Racist pseudoscience was used to justify slavery and genocide; this reality of American history is often absent from stories about the country’s origins.

In “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric” (1995), authors Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek explore the rhetoric of whiteness as a social construction and note “the majority (‘white’) position is not universal, rather it is particular to whites” (298). In other words, whiteness centers itself as a universal norm by which all other races are defined by their exception to that norm. Byron Craig and Stephen Rahko state that “…within the hegemony of anesthetized whiteness—where its positionality and centrality is maintained precisely because it remains unspoken and invisible—the vernacular visuality of blackness comes to be recognizable by virtue of its very negation of a racialized normativity that takes whiteness as its dominant symbolic reference” (Craig and Rahko 2016, 289). In other words, whiteness asserts its authority in hierarchies of
power because of its centrality, operating both visibly and invisibly. As result, many white people lack a self-identification with race. If white people do not recognize themselves as racialized, how can they begin to understand their actions and words as performances of their whiteness? Erased Lynchings challenges the invisible culpability of whiteness by focusing attention on the white lynch mob. Gonzales-Day brings the viewers’ attention to whiteness as an essential component of understanding the history of lynching. Gonzales-Day describes this as “a way of inviting viewers to see whiteness – by drawing attention, not only to what is missing, absent, erased but also to what is present, or becomes visible” (Gonzales-Day n.d.-b). The visualization of whiteness is made possible due to its visible centering in the reconfigured lynching images.

As race is conflated with identities such as citizenship, white supremacy dictates belonging in society. Participating in performances of group identity delineates who is or who is not accepted. Ore observes that lynching as an act of white civic identity functions to deny the rights and due process to Black victims, reinforcing the exclusivity of citizenship for the white population only (Ore 2019, 19). News of lynchings were commonly disseminated by newspapers, publicity photographs sold as souvenirs, and word-of-mouth and consequently drew large crowds of spectators. Even accounting for those who may have been opposed to or disturbed by the violence, the presence of the crowd created a sense of community and belonging amongst lynch mobs (Wood 2009, 9). As noted, false accusations were common in lynching cases. In examples where there were convictions, due process was denied to lynching victims. The visual coding of BIPOC as “Other”, combined with laws that criminalized them, created a society of surveillance that persists today.
It is important to acknowledge that the exact number of lynching cases is impossible to know. As exemplified by the *Tombstone* photograph, Gonzales-Day, when possible, includes identifying information such as names, locations, and dates in the title of the images. However, in some cases, the names of the victims and locations are unknown. This highlights how many cases have no discoverable information and can only be estimated. Organizations such as the Tuskegee Institute, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the *Chicago Tribune*, and The Equal Justice Initiative employ researchers to document and compile an official record of the number of known lynchings in the United States. While dates may vary, much research about lynching focuses on the period following the Reconstruction Era in the South up through the first half of the twentieth century. Important leaders in the anti-lynching movement in these organizations included Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), Monroe N. Work (1866-1945), W.E.B Dubois (1868-1963), and Walter White (1893-1955). Ida B. Wells-Barnett specifically was a major catalyst in shaping the anti-lynching movement through her published essays in pamphlets such as “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases” (1892) and speeches such as “Lynching, Our National Crime” (1909) (Wood 2009, 186).

The statistics of lynching cases recorded by organizations in the United States have their own definitions of lynching that guide their documentation. Gonzales-Day followed the Tuskegee Institute’s definition to record lynching cases in California for his book *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935* (11). The Tuskegee Institute defines lynching as an event in which “there must be legal evidence that a person was killed. That person must have met death illegally. A group of three or more persons must have participated in the killing. The group must have acted under the pretext of service to justice, race, or tradition” (Quoted in Gonzales-Day 2006, 11). Lynching, while commonly associated with hanging, included many forms of violence and
torture such as shooting, burning, and stabbing (Ore 2019, 24). Gonzales-Day’s research varies from other scholarship on the history of lynching because it goes back further into the nineteenth century and covers a longer period of time because lynching in the Western United States increased during the mid-nineteenth century with Westward Expansion.

The statistics about lynching cases vary across the organizations due to focusing on different geographic areas and time periods combined with the difficulty in uncovering cases of lynchings from archives. For example, a 2020 report by the Equal Justice Initiative, “Reconstruction in American: Racial Violence after the Civil War, 1865-1876”, reported over 6,500 cases of lynchings between 1877-1950 (Tuskegee Institute n.d.). What can be ascertained from organizations, scholars, and researchers is the clear fact that lynching was an act of racialized violence that terrorized communities of color during its height from the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Critically, this violence is not a thing of the past; lynching continues in the United States today. While recent legislation, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act (2022), finally made lynching a federal hate crime, this law comes after the ongoing violence and lynchings of people of color, particularly towards Black men. The murders of Trayvon Martin in 2012, George Floyd in 2020, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 are only a few examples in a list of many that demonstrate how lynching continues to terrorize communities of color in the United States.

*Lynching in the Western United States*

Gonzales-Day’s research into the history of lynching in the Western United States reveals a history that complicates what he refers to as the “false binary of race” about the history of lynching (Gonzales-Day 2006, 13). He explains,
…no one has acknowledged that racial bias may be as integral to the study of Western lynching as it has been to the study of lynching nationwide. This historical erasure has been heightened by the fact that lynching has become conflated with white racism against blacks. This is not intended to diminish the significance of lynching to the history of African Americans; it instead attempts to acknowledge that the history of lynching has touched other racial and racialized communities in other historical moments. (12)

As noted, Gonzales-Day found over 350 cases of lynching in California using the Tuskegee Institute’s definition. His research documented cases of African American, Latinx, Asian (primarily Chinese), Jewish, Native American, and white victims of lynching in the Western United States (26). Most victims in known cases of lynching in California were Latinx. The Tuskegee Institute’s records for example only list the number of lynchings of Black and white victims. This contributes to the ongoing erasure of important cases and statistics in all non-white communities. As Gonzales-Day explains, his work to expand lynching research into the Western United States and document victims’ races and ethnicities does not reduce or negate the irrevocable connection between lynching as having predominately targeted Black Americans. Rather, what Gonzales-Day’s expansion does is add more complexity to the history of lynching. Ore also stresses that defining lynching too narrowly contributes to historical erasure and denies that lynching continues in the United States (Ore 2019, 6). Gonzales-Day’s research draws attention to a greater number of victims who faced racialized violence and erasure from official historic records. The history of lynching in the United States, taking into account broader geographic areas, illuminates how white supremacy functioned in different localities but is undeniably tied to the rhetoric of national identity.

The statistics of lynching in the Western United States reveal much about the racism and xenophobia that underlay Manifest Destiny and what became known as frontier justice. In the photograph *Double Lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales aka Hanged at the Water*
Street Bridge, Santa Cruz, 1877 (2006) (Figure 13) the identifying location and date geographically situate the lynching in California. The photograph is printed in an oval vignette—a detail that will be discussed in the next section—and is one of the earliest known lynching photographs (95).

Figure 13. Ken Gonzales-Day, Double Lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales aka Hanged at the Water Street Bridge, Santa Cruz, 1877, 2004. (From Erased Lynchings series). Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.
The dense crowd depicted in this image directly faces the camera. The lynch mob, despite the blurring of many faces, is discernable enough to show both adults and children. In this instance, Gonzales-Day was able to document the names of the victims: Francisco Arias and José Chamales, both Latino men. The photograph of the double lynching of Arias and Chamales was taken the morning after it occurred, as flash bulbs had not yet been invented to photograph at night (57). Frontier justice refers to acts of vigilantism which describes individuals or groups of people who act on their own volition to enforce punishment against alleged criminals (Gonzales-Day 2006, 10). Vigilantes are often associated with the mythology of the “Wild West” that painted the Western United States as an untamed, lawless, and crime-filled landscape. It evokes imagery of miners, rugged cowboys, and sheriffs riding horses through ghost towns in the vast desert. Accompanying these stories are bandits who commit nefarious crimes such as bank robberies, train heists, or murders. The criminals in these stories are commonly portrayed as Native and Latinx peoples. These stories have been popularized, immortalized, and marketed through items and media of popular culture such as Western films, toys, costumes, television shows, and novels. The idealization of frontier justice that vigilantes “take the law into their own hands” encourages the justification of violence in the West because of its rhetorical association with bravery, heroism, and patriotism. The romanticization of the Western United States centered around taming both the landscape and its people, which was shorthand for the communities of color. These communities consisted largely of Indigenous peoples whose lands were forcibly stolen or immigrants whose labor built the infrastructure of the West. As a result, vigilantes hold a mythological historical status within larger ideas and tales of the nineteenth-century Wild West, regardless of the harm and terror they enacted.
Gonzales-Day’s research overwhelmingly found the actions of vigilantes in the West to be racially motivated, targeting Latinx peoples and other BIPOC (Gonzales-Day n.d.-c). While some scholars do not view frontier justice and vigilantism as lynching, Gonzales-Day argues for its inclusion in the history of lynching. Lynching cases in California overwhelmingly occurred in places with the highest presence of law enforcement (Gonzales 2006, 6). This demonstrates that while the lack of law enforcement may have motivated vigilante efforts in some instances, the presence of law enforcement did not act as a deterrent to lynchings. The fact that lynch mobs, even though working extralegally, did not face convictions for their actions demonstrates the correlation between vigilantism, lynching, and the justice system. This was the case for the lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales who were forcibly removed from jail by a lynch mob while awaiting trial (94). In some cases, officers worked to protect the lynching victim from the mob but often law enforcement allowed or even participated in lynchings. Gonzales-Day wants viewers to notice the striking resemblance that the photograph *Double Lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales aka Hanged at the Water Street Bridge, Santa Cruz, 1877* and others in the series bear to the ongoing crisis of police brutality and the criminalization and convictions of BIPOC that continues today. I argue that the while a strong consensus around a definition for lynching is important because it provides data and testimony, varying definitions allow researchers to uncover as many cases of lynchings as possible. If only one definition for lynching dictates all research, the ongoing problem of erasure will continue.
“Beware, my body and my soul, beware above all of crossing your arms and assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, and a man who wails is not a dancing bear.” - Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* 13-14

Lynching Photographs and the Rhetorical Power of Spectacle

With the context of frontier justice in mind, the lynch mob in the *Tombstone* image may change for viewers as the myth of benevolence is no longer maintained and destabilizes under the pressure of scrutiny. Viewers consider the functions of lynching photographs as souvenirs of spectacle, evidence, or some combination of both. When these men in Tombstone, Arizona looked into the camera, in that moment they did so with the steadfast belief that they would be forever met with respect for their extralegal actions and that the victim deserved to be lynched. What they likely could not have anticipated is that they are now met not with admiration but, overwhelmingly, disgust. Today, most viewers cringe or want to look away from these images as opposed to engaging in the spectacle they were intended to celebrate. Historian Amy Louise Wood in *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* explains that “the cultural power of lynching—indeed, the cultural power of white supremacy itself—rested on spectacle: the crowds, the rituals and performances, and their sensational representations in narratives, photographs, and films” (Wood 2009, 3). At its core, lynching was inseparable from the performance of identity, belonging, and spectacle for white communities.

Lynching photographs are considered perpetrator photographs, meaning they were taken by those who committed the crimes depicted. Perpetrator images seek the perpetuity of the
spectacle of violence. Professional photographers were often the culprits who photographed lynchings and produced copies for distribution (Gonzales-Day 2006, 56-57). At the time the *Tombstone* photograph was taken in 1884, photography was still a recent invention; the earliest documented photograph was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 but the invention of photography is credited to Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in 1839 (Belden-Adams 2022).

Looking closely at *Tombstone, 1884* and *Double Lynching of Francisco Arias and José Chamales aka Hanged at the Water Street Bridge, Santa Cruz, 1877* the oval-shaped vignette was a feature of professional studio portraiture. Following the invention of the Kodak camera in 1888, amateur photographers participated in photographing lynchings, but it was the professional photographers who were responsible for creating postcards for circulation (Wood 2009, 77).

Lynching postcards, made available for purchase, functioned as souvenirs. In fact, Gonzales-Day states that following images of presidents and celebrities, images of lynchings, or those condemned to public execution were some of the earliest mass-produced postcards and view cards in the Western United States (Gonzales 2006, 95). The circulation of lynching images extended the act of witnessing to those who were not physically present at the lynching and memorialized it for those who were. In doing so, they sought to both prolong and fix the spectacle in time.

Handwritten messages on the backs of the postcards display how perpetrators maintained their connection to the lynching after it was over. *Erased Lynchings* includes a selection of the backs of postcards to illustrate the popular format the images were reproduced for. *This is What He Got* (2004) (Figure 14) depicts the verso of a lynching postcard with a handwritten note that also serves as the title for the piece. In doing this, Gonzales-Day asks the viewers to think about photographs beyond two-dimensional elements and instead as what he calls “skinny sculptures”
Thinking of a photograph as a sculpture, rather than a two-dimensional flat image, asks the viewer to consider their interactions with it as an object that takes up space in the world. I argue that the sculptural consideration of a photograph shifts how photographs can communicate. Displaying some postcards reversed brings viewer attention to the disturbing, performative nature of lynchings. As Dora Apel urges “the verso sides of lynching postcards also reveal the exultant state of mind of the senders, the sense of participation in a historic moment worthy of commemoration, and the proud enactment of white masculine power defending the old order” (Apel 2004, 30). *This is What He Got* exemplifies how the commemoration of lynchings through the circulation of lynching postcards functioned to promote pro-lynching beliefs and terrorize communities of color.

![Figure 14. Ken Gonzales-Day, *This is What He Got*, 2004. (From Erased Lynchings series). Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.](image)
While images depicting scenes of torture during lynchings do exist, most of them, as in *Tombstone, 1884*, depict the aftermath with the crowd milling around. This intentional choice is described by Wood: “these conventions of lynching photography—keeping the actual violence outside the frame, the mob’s posing for the camera—became instrumental in creating and perpetuating images of orderly, respectable mobs” (Wood 2009, 86). The stillness of the crowd seen in *Tombstone, 1884* feels incongruous with the aftermath of violence that Gonzales-Day has erased. As Wood explains, the deliberate reserve of the members of the lynch mob worked to rhetorically situate themselves as civilized and to justify their vigilantism (206-207). The conventions of lynching images evoke visual associations with hunting photographs in which hunters pose with their successful kills or trophies. Wood makes this connection and notes that this symbolism reinforced the white supremacist and hypermasculine ideologies of lynching (97). The posing of the mob in this way perpetuates the dehumanization of Black men and other men of color as “animalistic” and “uncivilized”. The white mob in these photographs work to visually codify themselves as the opposite of the lynch victim in an attempt to be identified as virtuous citizens. As lynching drew increasing criticism and fell out of favor in the mid-twentieth century, lynching photographs would eventually be discarded or tucked away in private photo albums, away from public consumption (Apel 2004, 7).

Addressing *Erased Lynchings*, Gonzales-Day notes “no artwork can address the horror of Lynching in the United State, nor the lasting trauma of lynching on African Americans and their families, but this project was created in solidarity with a range of new scholarship on lynching that began to emerge in the early 2000s” (Gonzales-Day n.d.-b). Gonzales-Day’s visual strategies in *Erased Lynchings* should be considered alongside the scholarly, artistic, and cultural attention to lynching in the early 2000s. *Erased Lynchings* was produced when other artists and
scholars increasingly addressed the history and legacy of lynching in exhibitions, artworks, and scholarship. The popular exhibition “Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America” (2000) introduced many audiences in the United States to the history of lynching by displaying original lynching photographs and postcards. These images had been largely forgotten by the public because, by this point, many lynching photographs had either been discarded or shamefully kept away from sight. “Without Sanctuary” had an immense impact in introducing lynching photography to the public and inspiring a wave of education and awareness. It is essential to acknowledge “Without Sanctuary” both for its work in raising awareness about the history of lynching but also for its significant flaws. The exhibition was heavily critiqued for displaying the images in decontextualized gallery settings which perpetuated the spectacle of the photographs. As scholar RM Wolff notes: “the exhibition neither asks for viewers to claim responsibility nor fully addresses its own participation in the further circulation of these images to be a re-iteration of violence” (Wolff 2017, 143). Displaying perpetrator photographs risks eliciting responses of pity rather than empathic reflection. Scholars Elena Stylianou and Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert emphasize that there is no singular answer for the ongoing dilemma of how museums should display photographs of violence or death but without mindful approaches, gallery spaces may unintentionally normalize atrocity (Stylianou and Stylianou-Lamber 2017, 13).

The Archive and Time

The critiques of “Without Sanctuary” arguably inspired new approaches for artists and scholars to educate about lynching—approaches that actively sought not to reproduce or perpetuate harm. Many contemporary artists since the 1990s, including Mariel Hasbun and Kerry
James Marshall, who will be discussed in this chapter, have turned to archival materials to address issues of social justice or histories of racial violence. This reflects what art historian Hal Foster calls the “archival impulse” (Foster 2004, 3) or what philosopher Jacques Derrida refers to as “archive fever” (Derrida 1995, 19). In working with archival materials, artists not only reconfigure those materials but also reconceptualize archives themselves. Instead of archives being regarded as static, objective, repositories of information about the past, Derrida describes archives as containers for “the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (27). Imbued with potentiality and force, archives are active spaces for artists to encounter and transform both narratives of the past and possibilities for the future.

Ken Gonzales-Day’s work with archival photographs is a form of empowerment against forgetting and erasure. As noted, Gonzales-Day initially started his research in California photography archives to locate historical Latinx portraiture. Speaking on his experience growing up in the United States, Gonzales-Day has stated,

You’re used to being called names and being treated differently growing up. I always felt bad about that and never understood why or how that was happening. I felt like it was my fault. The project helped me to work through that and realize, ‘No, this isn’t my fault. We’ve been here a long time. We were part of the country. We helped build the country. (Quoted in Arzán-Montañez 2021)

Importantly, not only has the violence against Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color been suppressed or erased, but so have histories of accomplishments, survival, resiliency, and joy. Claiming temporal autonomy is to access and be in dialogue with your histories. Identifying as a queer, Chicana artist of mixed-ancestry, Gonzales-Day’s drive to uncover and make visible forgotten histories reflects the archive as a site of potential for multidimensional representations of Latinx peoples (Alemán 2021, 28-29). Artist Muriel
Hasbun’s (1961-) series *Santos y Sombras (Saints and Shadows)* (1990s) similarly engages with historical photographs using her own family’s collection. Hasbun was born and raised in El Salvador, following multiple wars (Ferrer 2020, 122-123). *Santos y Sombras (Saints and Shadows)* is a series of 38 photographic prints in which Hasbun creates layers of family photos, documents, and letters (Hasbun n.d.). Hasbun engages her identity in the wake of the various displacements, particularly the generational displacement, testified to in her familial archive. In *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas* (2019) author Kaitlin Murphy notes that memory and materiality may seem oppositional because memory is fluid and subjective, whereas material objects seem fixed in permanence (67). However, as Murphy notes of their interconnection with one another: “objects become tools through which to visibly and tangibly bring the past into the present, to vitalize and promulgate memory narratives, and to render physically tangible the link between past and present” (67). The photographs in Hasbun’s and Gonzales-Day’s work mediate between the past, present, and future. The archival materials used by Hasbun and Gonzales-Day resist fixed meaning or fixed time. As Murphy explains, materials represent textured, affective, lived experiences—they are active in the way they carry and transform meaning as temporalities overlap and emerge.

**The Truth and Time of Photography**

Image production and representation have long served as a means of controlling time and shaping narratives. Since the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century the camera has been used to frame perceptions of reality and memory. Gonzales-Day’s practice raises questions about how photography reinforces temporal identity by exploring what meaning, if any, a lynching photograph takes on as an object that recorded a moment of the past that
continues to haunt the present. *Erased Lynchings* explores photography as a medium of memorialization and power. Photography plays a critical role in the narrativization of history, identity, and ideology. Engagement with photography is driven by nostalgia and by a sense of necessity to make memories tangible so they are not forgotten in time. The perception of the camera as an objective, unbiased, instrument to document reality is aptly summarized by Wood:

> Since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, photography had been vitally linked to modern rationalism and empiricism, which invested vision with an unquestionable capability to uncover truth and validate knowledge. The photograph, in its irrefutable, indexical representation of reality, came to embody modernity’s scientific and objectifying gaze (Wood 2009, 75)

The perception of truthfulness in photography is partially due to the mechanical nature of the camera. Skepticism about the manipulation of photographs certainly persists for contemporary viewers, but these doubts are much more heavily directed towards digital images than analog photographs, due to the relative ease of digital editing (Gunning 2008, 42). The limited framing of the camera and the power of the photographer is essential for understanding how photographs reinforce identity and shape memory. Instead of being distinct from the photographer, the camera must instead be considered as an extension of the photographer’s vision.

As I explained in Chapter 3, structures of time and vision are connected. The mechanisms of visuality that visualize a photograph as objective assign the same value to temporality. As Amelia Groom observes,

> The myth of objectivity has usually depended on a denial of temporality, and becoming more attentive to the temporal complexities of photographic images inevitably involves complicating long-held assumptions about the medium’s special capacities for truth and transparency... But when we attune ourselves to the multiple temporalities that photographs participate in and evoke, we can find more to see—and other ways of seeing. (Groom 2013, 243)
The belief in the objectivity of photography is directly related to the privileging of sight over other senses in Western society. As Roland Barthes notes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) “a paradox: the same century invented History and Photography” (93). In effect, photography is regarded as a vital tool of history-telling, but it does not escape conventions of power. Key here is how the photograph reinforces visualizations of temporality and history. For example, in the photograph *With none but the omni-present stars to witness* (2004) (Figure 15) from the *Searching for California Hang Trees* series, Gonzales-Day’s use of a Deardorff camera confronts how early photographs of the Western United States both reinforced and justified Manifest Destiny. In *With none but the omni-present stars to witness*, the trees, rather than seen up close, are seen at a distance across an expansive field, silhouetted by fog. The dense fog blankets the sky in a hazy, greyish-white, almost entirely obscuring the hills at the far edge of the field.

![Figure 15. Ken Gonzales-Day, *With none but the omni-present stars to witness*, 2002. (From *Searching for California Hang Trees* series). Archival ink on fiber rag paper, 36x46 inches. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.](image-url)
The photograph is taken through a barbed wire fence with thin bands of wire running horizontally and vertically at slightly jagged angles. Gonzales-Day presents the viewer with the same Western landscape that has been romanticized since Westward expansion but in complete contrast to early photographs of the West. Taken at face value, the idyllic and expansive landscapes in early photographs of the Western United States constructed the illusion of the “untouched” frontier. Combined with the perception of truth value of photography, nineteenth-century photographs visualized the mythology of Manifest Destiny. In doing so, the supposedly objective photograph rendered the ideology as reality and later, history. Gonzales-Day challenges the histories of the West using the same medium (and camera) that shaped and reinforced how white colonial settlers visualized themselves progressively in time. White colonial settlers saw their beliefs about the Western frontier reflected in part by how photographers framed their images with a colonial perspective. Gonzales-Day’s intervention in history restages the landscapes themselves. The landscape in With none but the omni-present stars to witness is expansive but kept at bay, behind a fence that restricts full access. In Gonzales-Day’s journey to witness the sites of lynchings in California, a photograph taken from behind a fence reminds the viewer of the power dynamics involved with the right to look, the right to access.

As a visual record of history, photography is inherently connected to ideas of progress as it relates to identity. In A Sideways Look at Time (1999) Jay Griffiths states:

Progress is a specific idea; Western, money-oriented, technologically-biased and racist in its history and its effects, but it pretends to a universality, so that all peoples must be made to define and embrace progress in exactly the same way…Progress pretends to be an absolute good because it is defined by those it serves well: the rich, the politically powerful, all types of colonialists and ideologues. Ask those whom it serves badly and they will tell you that the engines of “progress” have justified the destruction of lands and peoples of the land, from racism to land thefts, from pollution to genocide. (238)
Progress is a feature of Western temporality and a tool for the self-authorization of institutional power. Organized along a linear timeline, progress offers a limited scope of who or what constitutes worth in Western society. Erased Lynchings examines how even with the visual documentation of lynching photographs, the fact of lynching remains unknown or unacknowledged by many today. The series prompts reflection about how and why some images become part of the visual record of history whereas others are omitted. Gonzales-Day scrutinizes the systemic erasure of racial violence from history by asking viewers to question who and what is deemed worthy of memorialization. As Griffiths explains, progress benefits the powerful.

When photographs are used to reinforce ideals of temporal progress, images that are beneficial to dominant narratives become well-known, sometimes even iconic. Whereas images that represent something unfavorable or elicit negative affect remain outside collective awareness. This insight helps us understand how and why lynching photographs went from being circulated as commodities to later being considered shameful and largely forgotten. As support for anti-lynching grew, perceptions of progress shifted as well, and lynching images were excluded from this story of progress.

Photography paradoxically represents specificity in time and transcends it. As Shawn Michelle Smith notes in Photographic Returns: Racial Justice and the Time of Photography, “The photograph is a record of a moment and its many possible receptions, and in this way it is always of pasts and presents and futures” (Smith 2020, 5). As a medium, photography is anachronic, representing and capturing the ebbs and flows of time and memory. In his book, Gonzales-Day brings attention to blurred movement in photographs to demonstrate how images resist fixedness in time,

[M]ost of the faces in the crowd are discernible, if slightly blurred. Some might interpret these blurry figures as a technical flaw, but the juxtaposition of the living
against the dead may actually serve the same symbolic function as the extended display of the lynched body itself; it transforms the photographic instant into something more. It smears time; it acknowledges that time is passing and bodies are moving. It is uncanny, a photographic stutter, that extends the photographic instant to infinity, and reveals the most chilling truth of the lynching photograph—that this scene will never end. It is the unpleasantness of this reality, which cannot be undone. (Gonzales-Day 2006, 98)

Like Tombstone, 1884 (Figure 12), in The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park) (2007-2013) (Figure 16) the blur of some individuals in the crowd captures both the passing and unfolding of time. The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park) depicts a nighttime scene with a large crowd of people spilling out the edges of the frame. The bright flash against the jet-black sky obscures some of the faces in light, but much of the crowd is discernable, even down to their clothing and facial expressions. People stand about in the image; most of them pay no attention to the camera, except for some who look directly toward the photographer and by extension, the viewer.

![Figure 16. Ken Gonzales-Day, The Wonder Gaze, St. James Park, 2007-2013. (From Erased Lynchings series). C-print, 45x40 inches. Reproduced with Permission and Courtesy of the Artist.](image)

Most people in the scene are milling about and appear to be engaged in conversation with one another. Aside from the incongruity of a well-dressed, large, crowd being outside in the middle
of the night, the source of the spectacle is not initially apparent. A close look at the image reveals a crowd looking upwards, circling the base of the solitary tree. The slightest bit of rope is visible around the base of the tree. The blur disrupts the notion that an image captures a single moment in time that can be mapped onto a linear timeline. Photographs often function as units of measure to index temporality. The perception that a photograph freezes a moment forever in time maintains the spectacle of violence. The creation of lynching photographs and postcards testify to the lynch mob’s desire to forever “keep” and prolong the victim’s pain. Perpetrator images seek to fix the permanency of the spectacle of violence in time. As Gonzales-Day notes, the painful truth of a lynching photograph is that the violence cannot be undone. But, if the time of the image is denied, the violence of the photograph persists. Gonzales-Day brings attention to the blurs or “smears” of time in the photograph to illustrate how it resists temporal fixedness. If photographs are used only as measures of time rather than embodiments of time, the accumulated pasts, presents, and futures of images are ignored.

Revictimization and the Violence of Photography

Gonzales-Day’s central concern in *Erased Lynchings* is to prevent revictimization. Contemporary artist Kerry James Marshall’s piece *Heirlooms and Accessories* (2002) resonates with *Erased Lynchings* as both artists utilize archival lynching photographs to confront generational legacies of violence. *Heirlooms and Accessories* is comprised of three framed ink-jet prints of Lawrence Beitler’s 1930 photograph of the double lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith (Studio Museum, n.d.). Marshall, who is best known as a painter, digitally alters the photograph, almost entirely fading the image except for highlighting the faces of three women in the crowd (Marshall 2012, 0:20). The women’s faces are framed by lockets to
metaphorically situate the crowd as accessories to the murders. This also frames the power to inflict violence itself as a generational heirloom. The photograph that Marshall uses bears striking resemblance to Gonzales-Day’s *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)*. In *Heirlooms and Accessories*, Marshall asks viewers to think about the familial and communal legacies of violence by highlighting specific faces in the lynch mob. The many faces in the crowd in *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* are discernable. The lynching occurred close enough to the present that viewers today could potentially see their grandparents or great-grandparents in the photograph. Crucially, both Marshall and Gonzales-Day want to focus viewer attention away from the victims. They do this not to minimize their importance, but rather as an indictment of the crowd for their involvement in the lynchings. Both pieces are shocking and confrontational, yet do not depend on the suffering of the victims to convey those affects. In speaking about erasure, Gonzales-Day states “to erase something can be seen as a form of displacement or destruction, but in my work, I have tried to turn erasure into a site of production and absence into a constructive presence that critically engages viewers and creates new meanings” (Gonzales-Day n.d.-b). Recalling Gonzales-Day’s statement about Edward Curtis’ photographic manipulation in Chapter 3, I find it essential to make an important distinction. Gonzales-Day’s series, much like Edward Curtis, also participates in a form of photographic manipulation. However, as Gonzales-Day indicates in the quote above, the technique of erasure in *Erased Lynchings* is intended to be a “constructive presence” and a means of taking control of narratives of violence. Whereas in *In a Piegan Lodge*, Curtis’ erasure of the clock in between the Indigenous men was in service of colonialist fantasies to construct and reinforce dehumanizing controlling images of Indigeneity. Curtis’ manipulation is an act of violence, whereas Gonzales-Day’s is an act to *counter* violence.
Roland Barthes considers the connection between death and the photograph as a referent of the “that has been” (Barthes 1980, 96). Recalling the photograph of Rodolfo Silvas that Gonzales-Day discovered, captioned “the last man hanged in Los Angeles,” prompts a consideration of the photograph as a signifier of death. In Camera Lucida Barthes discusses Alexander Gardner’s 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne taken in jail before his execution by hanging. Payne was charged for his involvement in the Lincoln assassination and the attempted assassination of Secretary of State W.H. Seward (96). Barthes captions the photograph of Payne: “he is dead, he is going to die” to express the temporal dilemma all photographs embody (95). Like the photograph of Payne, the image of Silvas was taken before and because of his scheduled execution. The eerily similar contexts and captions of the photographs speak to Barthes’ notion of the photograph as a fact of death. These men are alive in the image but are dead in the present. Their portraits not only foreshadow their deaths but determine it for their future and past.

Gonzales-Day’s and Marshall’s works actively resist photography’s capacity to objectify people and to allow a voyeuristic view of their suffering. As Gonzales-Day has noted “you can kill somebody only once, but if you want to make it a lasting thing for them, take a picture of it so you continue to inflict pain” (Quoted in Arzán-Montañez, 2021). Gonzales-Day has cited inspiration from theorist Susan Sontag’s analysis about the symbolic and real violence of photography in her essays On Photography (1977) and Regarding the Pain of Others (2003) (Gonzales-Day 2020b). Sontag notes the association between cameras and guns—capturing an image requires aiming and shooting (Sontag 1973, 14-15). These verbal connections continue as the word “snapshot,” originally a hunting term, described a gun that went off too quickly (Wood 2009, 97). These descriptors connote objectification, domination, and degradation. Sontag argues the violent rhetoric surrounding the camera and the photographs made with it often resonates
strongly with the images made. She takes this further stating, “photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed” (Sontag 2003, 81). Perpetrator images exist for this expressed purpose—to objectify the victim and make their pain into something that can be seemingly kept.

Lynching photographs reinforce racist stereotypes by making harmful representations hypervisible. Nicole Fleetwood discusses the relationship between hypervisibility and Blackness in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (2011); she explains that hypervisibility refers to the overrepresentation and production of negative images of Blackness which simultaneously produces invisibility (16). Someone or something can be both hypervisible and invisible for the same reasons that there can be a prevalence of lynching photographs and images of racial terror and yet these histories can remain unknown to many. In the exhibition “Unseen: Our Past in a New Light: Ken Gonzales-Day and Titus Kaphar” at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (2018-2019), Gonzales-Day focused on the lack of Latinx historical representation in the National Portrait Gallery. His work created “a room about absence; about the missing bodies from our national history,” and “the first portrait [in the National Gallery] of Latinx bodies in America is of them hanging” (Gonzales-Day 2021c, 38:30). As Gonzales-Day points out, even with the presence of images the gallery is a space of absence. The frequency and normalization of BIPOC suffering in the media act as a catalyst for the normalization of violence. The processes that facilitate hypervisibility establish this suffering as normative in a white supremacist society. These controlling images create ongoing pain while rendering that pain invisible. Recalling Craig and Rahko’s point, at the same time whiteness itself is simultaneously visible and invisible (Craig and Rahko 2016, 289). The visibility of whiteness establishes it as the norm, while its invisibility reinforces power through its supposed
universal status. In consequence, visuality in a white supremacist society self-authorizes by dictating the visible or invisible. Gonzales-Day demonstrates how visibility functions for different social groups in maintaining social hierarchies. *Erase Lynchings* offers an example of countervisuality and serves as a site of resistance. The photographs are conscious of the interplay between absence and presence; visible and invisible.

Through Gonzales-Day’s work, he considers how artists and viewers combat voyeurism with atrocity images and the agency of the viewer. Various scholars have proposed theories of active and affective seeing such as Jill Bennett’s “empathic vision” (Bennett 2005, 21) or Wendy’s Kozol’s “Ethical Spectatorship” (Kozol 2014, 209) to engage thoughtfully with traumatic and violent art. In photographs like *Tombstone, 1884* and *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* from *Erase Lynchings*, the mob looks directly at the camera, photographer, and by extension the viewer. The viewer does not occupy a neutral position in this dynamic. Gonzales-Day shifts the gaze, so the viewer does not have the opportunity to participate in the lynching spectacle. As Mary Trent observes of *Erase Lynchings*: “it is almost as if [Gonzales-Day’s] photographs have respectfully taken down and properly buried the bodies, while exposing the crowds to the viewers’ gaze” (Trent 2022). I will discuss further in the next section the potential implication and complicity of present-day viewers. Returning to an earlier discussion, the functions of lynchings photographs change depending on the audience. They can function as commodities and spectacles, or evidence of unlawful vigilantism driven by hate and white supremacist ideologies. Viewers confront how they receive these images and whether they fulfill the above functions or as something else altogether. As Gonzales-Day asks the viewers to consider the complex functions of these photographs, there is not a single correct answer. Critically, even considering the violence of perpetrator images, they do not become less essential
to view and learn from. In her comprehensive study of lynching imagery, Dora Apel takes the position that:

This work is also an argument for the need to study these traumatic photographs. Despite the residue of sadistic voyeurism they carry, which may feed the appetite for sights of mutilation and degradation, they also powerfully evoke revulsion and outrage, which not only remind us of what horrors people are capable of visiting on each other, but of a specific history that must not be forgotten…The loss to historical understanding incurred by refusing to see them would only serve to whitewash the crimes of white supremacy.” (Apel 2004, 2, emphasis added)

For museum and gallery spaces, Gonzales-Day removes the victim as a spectacle so the photographs can be engaged with differently. This is not a “refusal to see” or to never look at original lynching photographs, as that, Apel notes, would reinforce white supremacy. Rather, it raises the question about the role of artists in addressing past atrocities, for which there is no one best method. To refuse to engage with lynching photographs and images of racial violence also ignores the ways in which perpetrator images have been central to multiple anti-lynching organizations, journalists, and publications. Photography has been a powerful tool of resistance for BIPOC people to produce their own visibility and create oppositional aesthetics. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was the first activist to publish and use lynching photographs in lectures for anti-lynching activism (Wood 2009, 186). As Wood explains “by removing the photographs from the context of their white southern localities and by bringing them into national consciousness…activists undermined their power to substantiate white supremacy” (183). Activists used lynching images to significantly change the rhetoric and public perception of lynching (202). Anti-lynching activists were so successful in their efforts that communities would attempt to limit the circulation of lynching photographs to keep them from anti-lynching activists and journalists who would publish them nationally (220-221). Perhaps one of the most well-known examples is Mamie Bradley, the mother of Emmett Till, who insisted on circulating
photographs of her son’s body after he was lynched in 1955. This case differs from the others I’ve discussed because rather than taken by perpetrators, Mamie Bradley had photographs taken and published of Emmett’s body alongside a smiling portrait of him. The photographs side-by-side are unrecognizable as the same person. Mamie Bradley recognized the power of using photographs as proof of what happened and the brutality that her son had suffered. The shocking photographs and open-casket funeral for Emmett Till garnered national attention for a crime that otherwise would have likely gone unacknowledged.

Contemporary artists working with archival photographs of lynchings follow a long history of activists and artists who have shared the same goals of reconfiguring the power dynamics of lynching images. Gonzales-Day’s Another Land (2020-present) is a recent series of drawings, paintings, and prints where he recreates artworks that were featured in the 1935 exhibition, “An Art Commentary on Lynching” organized by the NAACP (Luis De Jesus Gallery n.d.-b). In this series, he engages with anti-lynching artists and activists who came before him and the ways in which they fought for the end of lynching. Gonzales-Day is conscious of the dynamics of perpetrator images. Gonzales-Day never refers to his artistic series addressing lynching as a documentary project. Rather, the series is an artistic reappropriation of archival photographs and postcards of lynchings. This distinction is important because it does not rank the artistic or documentary approach as more effective than the other. Instead, it brings attention to the different capacities and potential functions of art and documentary work. Erased Lynchings is a testament to the tremendous power of art to confront and transform perceptions about the past which inevitably impacts the present and future. Gonzales-Day’s practice allows viewers to engage with the history and legacy of lynching without repeating the violence of the past in the present.
Temporal Distance and Historical Amnesia

Throughout my analysis of Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynching*, I have called attention to one of the artist’s primary goals: his work asks viewers to confront their own relationship to the history and legacy of racial violence in the United States. Centering my discussion on how temporality functions as a tool of control to construct and enforce social hierarchies, in this last section I will explore the position of the viewer in relationship to *Erased Lynchings*. Far from being distant witnesses, present-day viewers of *Erased Lynchings* must contend with their potential implication and complicity. I focus on two theories, Michael Rothberg’s implicated subjects and Alison Bailey’s the weight of whiteness, to guide the discussion.

![Image of the exhibition](image-url)


Ken Gonzales-Day’s work in *Erased Lynchings* is a practice of acknowledging histories of racially motivated violence and questioning the systematic disregard and dissonance of those
histories. In Figure 17 *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* is shown as an installation at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* is consistently displayed in exhibitions as an installation piece printed on wallpaper to fit the dimensions of gallery spaces (Bishop-Stall 2017, 260). The enlarged, wall-size photograph is displayed in the corner of the gallery walls. Gonzales-Day creases the image in the corner to play with the sculptural qualities of the photograph and pull the viewer into the image. Viewers walk next to or stand at eye level with the mob. In the corner of the gallery wall, the photograph immerses the viewer on either side, filling their peripheral vision. As noted previously, *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* depicts a lynch mob in 1933—slightly less than a century ago. This means viewers realize they could recognize someone or someone in the crowd who reminds them of their own ancestors.

Ken Gonzales-Day wants viewers to explore their present positioning in generational legacies of racial violence. By removing the victim as spectacle, Gonzales-Day has eliminated the reaction to turn away from depictions of explicit violence. However, Gonzales-Day brings attention to the other violence in the photograph—the violence embedded in the presence of the crowd. For white viewers, the visualization of the crowd confronts these viewers with the pain of potential identification with the perpetrators. This is not to say that white viewers assume the position of perpetrators by engaging with *Erased Lynchings* or other atrocity photographs. Rather, Gonzales-Day stages the possibility for a recognition that the racial violence caused by perpetrators in the past continues to structurally benefit white people in the present. In *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (2019) Michael Rothberg describes those who occupy this position as “implicated subjects [who] occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes” (1). Implicated
subjects incur their beneficiary status through different structural or genealogical processes (60).

For example, inheriting generational wealth through home ownership is a privilege for white people in the United States, as owning a home has historically been denied to BIPOC peoples due to redlining, denial of home loans, and gentrification. As a systemic issue, white people have directly benefitted from racist policies that have allowed them easier access to home ownership and are thus more likely to inherit generational wealth in the United States. Structural processes operate more subtly as they are built into societal and institutional structures. However, Rothberg also explains, “people can occupy multiple positions at the same time (as victims, perpetrators, collaborators, for instance)—a multiplicity fundamental to ‘complex implication’” (40). It follows that there is power in naming the nuanced positionality implicated subjects occupy. Naming, in the case of implicated subjects, calls awareness to something that otherwise may function invisibly.

Whether someone wishes to be a beneficiary of structural racism or not, to acknowledge one’s implication recognizes the systemic structures that determine social power. This acknowledgment resists the impetus to unfairly reduce systemic racism to the beliefs and actions of only individuals. Systems of oppression reinforce a microscopic perspective of visualization. This manifests as those in positions of domination often not analyzing larger structures of harm that they are responsible for enabling. As Alison Bailey writes in *The Weight of Whiteness: A Feminist Engagement with Privilege, Race, and Ignorance* (2021): “the main reason most of us find it difficult to understand oppression systemically is that we are in the habit of focusing on isolated events, bad people, cruel intentions, and harmful actions, without placing them into their historical, social, or political systemic contexts” (3). If viewers of *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* perceive that only victims and perpetrators can be defined in histories of violence, it
positions the viewers to perceive themselves as neutral witnesses. By asking viewers to consider their positionality relating to historical events and people, Gonzales-Day compels viewers to adopt a macroscopic temporal perspective. As Bailey explains, there is a habit of explaining away systemic oppression by claiming those responsible and violent events as outliers. *Erased Lynchings* confronts viewers with their own potential implication and thus broadens the viewer’s temporal awareness of themselves in time.

Implication, while not absolvable, does not need to be a place where only guilt resides. Implication *should* be uncomfortable and painful, but it is also a call to action. Implicated subjects are *responsible* for using the social capital and power their privilege grants them to work to dismantle these regimes. Acknowledging one’s privilege does not mean that the necessary work is done. It is only the first step in using one’s power associated with one’s position to dismantle, decenter, and decolonize. For white viewers, not engaging with what Alison Bailey refers to as “the weight of whiteness,” damages our collective humanity. She explains,

> There is a deep wound at the heart of whiteness that people of color have witnessed, navigated, and written about for a very long time, but that very few white people have examined in any deep, sustained, and meaningful way. I’m not speaking about the *overexposed* side of white dominance as unearned power conferred systemically…*the underexposed* side of white dominance, the one white people would rather not reckon with because feeling that weight requires a radical vulnerability that is too painful for most of us to bear. Touching that weight means leaving the comforts of whiteness behind and learning to feel what we’d rather not feel. Privilege is designed to be invisible, but it is also designed to feel weightless. More accurately, privilege numbs us to the damage that whiteness does to our humanity. (Bailey 2021, 79).

Bailey’s text offers white viewers a framework and invitation for an honest and vulnerable practice. In the previous section, I noted that Gonzales-Day asks: what is the agency of the viewer of *Erased Lynchings*? The installation of *The Wonder Gaze (St. James Park)* feels heavy. It is weighty in how the past and present intertwine simultaneously with both ferocity and
fragility. The oscillation between feeling both the absence and presence of the weight of the past, is an ongoing struggle in the effort to negotiate identity. In the face of harsh and dehumanizing systems of power and what that means for the future. Erased Lynchings presents an encounter with the weight those in positions of privilege otherwise anesthetize themselves to. Numbing the weight of whiteness anesthetizes both the psyche and the body. Bailey insists on the necessity to hold and feel the weight. To resist numbing ourselves is a step towards reestablishing our humanity and disconnecting from whiteness (Bailey 2021, 94).

The continuation of white supremacy in the United States operates by evolving its rhetoric alongside the prevailing cultural and social landscape. Erased Lynchings calls attention to the past in order to confront the present and vice versa. Gonzales-Day has drawn parallels between the mobs in lynching photographs to the insurrectionists storming the capital on January 6, 2021, in the name of national identity (Arzán-Montañez, 2021). Lynching’s history shows how white mobs ritualize their identity, taking their rage to extremely dangerous levels with often little to no consequence. Additionally, Gonzales-Day’s observations of vigilantism at the United States-Mexico border in the early 2000s and conservatives’ efforts to build a wall at the border inflicts harm on Latinx peoples. The history of lynching speaks to that same region and the terror inflicted on Latinx populations. The crisis of police brutality targets and leads to the murders and criminalization of Black people and other people of color. The recent murder of Tyre Nichols on January 7, 2023, at the hands of five Black police officers exemplifies both internalized racism and ongoing issues of racism in policing. The history of lynching provides stories of the police officers who participated in lynch mobs and the presence of law enforcement in areas that held no perpetrators accountable. Placing historical and recent cases of racial
violence next to one another is an effort to illustrate the hold white supremacy maintains in the
United States.

*Time and Accountability*

*Erased Lynchings* offers a confrontation through which one can consider the transfer of
power through time. Those who occupy a position of privilege may feel passive in their
responsibility to histories of racial violence. Implication is an active space; so too is time. The
difficult and painful acknowledgment of one’s implication breaks down temporal barriers that it
otherwise created and maintained. Western, linear temporality with its incremental units of
measure, both abstracts and meticulously divides time, situating the past far from the present. A
universal version of history is presented as a linear story of progress – one thing after another
leads up to the present. When the story becomes painful or disrupts the barriers of sequential
progression, weight is felt. Employing Alice McIntyre’s concept of “white talk” Bailey explains
how white people consistently fall back on similar scripts designed to dissociate themselves from
challenges to their privilege (Bailey 2021, 35-36). White talk is a viewer, who in response to
*Erased Lynchings*, says something like, “these things happened in the past, they had to nothing to
do with me.” Or “the past is the past, so leave it there, there is nothing to be done”. White talk
solidifies our artificial, temporal distance from the past. These scripts reinforce Tina Campt’s
concept of the “right to look away” (Campt 2018). Campt introduces the right to look away as a
necessary addendum to Mirzoeff’s notion of the right to look, which I discussed in Chapter 3.
Campt describes the right to look away as a privileged act of power and the agency to “avoid or
be exempted from the affective labor of witnessing, and exposing oneself to the harm inherent to
witnessing harm done to others, and to black and brown bodies in particular…[it] is arguably the
The right to look and the right to look away are both an act of power but their function and consequences are diametrically opposed—the right to look counters authority whereas the right to look away is facilitated by and upholds it. The right to look away chronicles what Gonzales-Day’s work centers around—the power to choose to engage or disengage from witnessing, culpability, or implication from racially-motivated violence. The right to look away numbs the weight of whiteness in avoidance of reality. As James Baldwin notes in an interview from 1979: “The American sense of reality is dictated by what Americans are trying to avoid and if you’re trying to avoid reality, how can you face it?” (Baldwin 1979, 9:10). Time is a strategic tool for those in power to invoke history when advantageous and disregard it when not. This whitewashing of history is facilitated by the manipulation of time.

Temporal distance fuels historical amnesia. Time operates as a defense and coping mechanism for those in positions of power to numb themselves from the unforgiving and unrelenting pain of the past. However, an oscillating relationship exists between nostalgia and amnesia. Linear time and genealogical time function differently. The events of the past that reinforce positive affects of personal, communal, or national identity are memorialized and commemorated. We become observers of the past rather than active participants. As Kaitlin Murphy argues in *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas* closing lines:

A fight for the past is not an effort to change the events of the past. We know of no such possibility. Rather, it is the effort to remember, to engage with, and to learn from the past, with all the complexities that such an endeavor entails, in order to foment the conditions for more just and safe futures, futures in which such mass atrocity finds no fertile ground from whence to emerge (Murphy 2019, 157).
Gonzales-Day notes the painful truth of lynching photographs is the reminder of the violence that cannot be undone to victims. The suffering of the past cannot be altered but to disengage altogether in the present paves the way for further harm. Historical amnesia effectively positions people to be passive in relationship to time and to believe they have little temporal autonomy. *Erased Lynchings* is a plea for viewers to take an active agency in understanding history as a fluid space rather than a static discourse, written in stone.

*Collective Trauma*

Central to my argument is the idea that time has been imagined and structured to exert and justify hierarchal systems. The resulting violence from these social hierarchies generates harm and trauma which manifests as ongoing, haunting, and repetitive. Scholarship on the experiences of cultural trauma is increasingly ubiquitous in the humanities. Distinguished from medical trauma describing serious bodily injury, cultural and historical traumas arise from social conditions. As Bjorn Krondorfer explains “trauma definitions generally agree on two elements: Trauma is caused by a severe violation of integrity (often described as a shattering of self and the world), and it has a lingering, long-term impact” (Krondorfer 2016, 91). Collective traumas that persist across generations can be experienced intergenerationally within family systems, or transgenerationally in communal groups (92). Gonzales-Day’s archival impulse to uncover the erased history of lynching in the United States is not in an effort to aesthetically represent or even communicate the experiences of trauma. Rather, as Jill Bennett observes, trauma-related art is transactive rather than communicative (Bennett 2005, 7). The affective impact of *Erased Lynchings* transmits awareness and knowledge about the history and legacy of lynching in the United States that has been reduced to nothing more than isolated incidents.
In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe discusses ongoing and collective traumas in the wake of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and enslavement in the United States. She writes "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (9). Sharpe’s concept of the wake describes the temporality of trauma as a haunting, an echo—a paradoxical space in which absence and presence confound the self and extend generations beyond time. As Murphy explains “trauma is neither isolated nor temporally bounded. Trauma travels with bodies through place and time, adapting and unfolding in the nooks and crannies of sidewalks and psyches (Murphy 2019, 36). *Erased Lynchings* punctures divisions of time to highlight ongoing generational and cultural traumas that do not “fit” into the metronome of linearity. Of course, trauma continuously inhabits and shapes the present. To acknowledge the traumas of BIPOC in the United States resulting from centuries of displacement, genocide, enslavement, segregation, and violence at the hands of white colonists requires acknowledging one’s potential implication or culpability. In doing so, the multidirectional fluidity between past and present is engaged. The confrontation with the crowd in lynching photographs extends to the viewer’s own ancestors and the wounding that must occur for someone to inflict heinous violence onto another human and spectacularize it. How has that hatred and numbing been passed down? We sacrifice our collective humanity to numb ourselves and escape this pain. We must hold that weight in the hope for healing and the future.

Engagement with the complexity of the history of lynching enables the renegotiation and resignification of memory and identity. The boundaries between the past and present are ever-changing. Going beyond the rigid, chronological clock is not weightless. The process of un-numbing ourselves to the heaviness of the wounds of the past inevitably reveals the inheritance of that damage in the present. In *Erased Lynchings* Ken Gonzales-Day asks viewers who or what
is missing from the image? In doing so, he brings our attention to the weight of that absence. The past cannot be changed but not fighting for it gives in to processes that destroy our humanity, weaken our connections with one another, and prevent healing. *Erased Lynchings* asks viewers to shift their gaze and hold the weight of history. The past, present, and future depend on it.
“...the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.” James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (1964, 50)

In my initial research, I was interested in exploring why Cannupa Hanska Luger’s *Future Ancestral Technologies* and Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* consistently kept coming up together in my head in and on paper. The series seemed so very different from one another. However, it was by considering the questions they asked and affective experiences they elicited for me as a viewer that I was able to realize that while on the surface, Luger is addressing the future and Gonzales-Day the past, they both speak to the complexities and nuances of all of time; unbounded and non-descript temporalities, the constant shaping and reshaping of the past, present, and future that cannot be captured by mechanical clock time. Even more than that, they bring our attention to the relationship between time and the imbalance of power. They teach us that the writing and learning of history is not an equitable and shared act but rather, that many stories, some of the most important, have been intentionally minimized or erased altogether from mainstream historical narratives. Luger and Gonzales-Day remind us that while there remain histories we will never be able to uncover, the urgency and essentiality of knowing they exist are still felt. *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings* ask viewers to consider who and what comes at the expense of future progress. As Jay Griffiths (1999) states, “progress appeals to [the] future orientation, for progress—intrinsically an enemy of place—ever dislocates itself from the muddy, earthy today towards a tomorrow in the sky and in the imagination. That is why progress is still so appealing, even when the negative effects are everywhere” (258). The always
forward-moving linear timeline that has been the global standard, is not universal nor does it remain outside of us as if we are merely observers to time passing. Luger and Gonzales-Day stress that we cannot envision or create better futures without knowing our pasts; the effort to leave the past behind us creates temporal distances in all directions.

During my research, I came across artists and sources that led to new questions and ideas that exceeded the scope of this thesis. I am intrigued by Elizabeth Freeman’s book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) as she calls attention to how time has been an essential component in the development of gender roles and heteronormativity. While I was able to look at how the industrial revolution and capitalism created a hegemonic value system around “uses” of time, I was not able to analyze how this system particularly shaped perceptions of domesticity and the nuclear family and am interested in finding artists who work with these ideas. I included scholarship from various feminist scholars but would like to focus more on feminist and queer theory to explore non-sequential queer temporalities and histories. I am curious about artists who are working with archiving LGBTQ+ histories that are otherwise erased. One avenue for this would be to look at Ken Gonzales-Day’s series *Bone-Grass Boy: The Secret Banks of the Conejos River* (1993-1996, 2017). I discovered this lesser-known work during my research on Gonzales-Day’s archival practices. *Bone-Grass Boy* is a photography series where Gonzales-Day places himself as several characters, including one who is two-spirit, in a novel set during the U.S.-Mexican war (1846-1848). In a gesture toward Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, Gonzales-Day refers to this project as a “nevermade”: a fictional work about queerness in the nineteenth-century West that engages with the histories that existed but were not documented (Luis De Jesus n.d.-a). Luger’s emphasis in *Future Ancestral Technologies* on the plurality of temporalities and identities beyond rigid colonial binaries speaks to cultivating
futures around belonging. Similarly, artist Rasheedah Phillips’, who I cited earlier, project *Black Quantum Futurism: Time Zone Protocols* (2020-ongoing) is a socially engaged project in which Phillips asks participants to respond to prompts about their multisensory experiences of time as a way to explore temporal and spatial consciousness. I would like to explore Phillips’ project in depth, particularly her research on the harmful effects of Western temporality on the African Diaspora. The focus on exploring the interrelationship of space and time is taken up by many futurist artists. I am interested in expanding this into an inquiry into deep time and geological time in work such as with Katie Paterson’s *To Burn, Forest, Fire* (2021) – a project in which Paterson burns incense that mimics the smells of the first forests on Earth. Or *Future Library* (2014-2114) in which Paterson organized planting a forest in Norway that will supply paper for an anthology of books to which one author per year will contribute a text. I am curious to understand ways in which we consider ourselves in relation to epochs of time and how work like Paterson’s, while focused on astronomy and geology, also offers insights into the implications of social, political, philosophical, and religious beliefs on our experiences of temporalities. In my discussion of *Erased Lynchings*, I discussed the notion of temporal distance and I think about applying this concept to deep time in the ways in which Western clock time is mechanized and abstracted from the natural rhythms of the planet and of our bodies. Temporal distance in this way would emphasize disconnection, for, as Griffiths writes, “time is divorced from nature as plastic plants pretend to be a perennial summer they never knew” (1999, 18). The study of time proved to be vast, and it took me in many directions across a variety of different fields. While my research remained focused on *Future Ancestral Technologies* and *Erased Lynchings*, I consistently found new artists, ideas, and scholars who raised new research inquiries.
In my thesis, I have written about the responses Luger and Gonzales-Day’s work elicits for viewers. In this conclusion, I want to emphasize that there will be viewers who resist the ideas Luger and Gonzales-Day address in their work. Both series compel viewers to confront their own positionality in the past, present, and future relating to systems of oppression. Many will resist seeing themselves reflected in the lynch mob in *Erased Lynchings*, just as they will also resist considering themselves as a future colonizer in *Future Ancestral Technologies*. To engage in these ways means to attempt to absolve oneself of the responsibility and courage to hold the weight. However, Luger’s and Gonzales-Day’s work offer an opportunity for some who will first learn about and confront systems of power that they did not know of or do not know how to engage with. These systems are constructed to numb us to time, to one another, to place, and belonging. Oppressive systems rely on feelings of helplessness to maintain their positions as architects of the future. Luger and Gonzales-Day remind us that in fighting for humanity, we reclaim time in all directions and spaces. Crucially, our humanity connects us across time between those in the past and those in the future. It is not a weakness or a fault to rely on one another. Time is an opportunity for us to transform our connections with one another in the ways we commemorate, envision, and shape our shared pasts, presents, and futures.
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