This essay is an account and analysis of my performance piece “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy.” When I create a performance like “Drawing While Black,” there are parts that are fun. Not just fun, but also transformative. When I am making the piece, I don’t feel like I am a marginalized viewer in society anymore—I carve out my own space. Based in my artistic practice, my performance explores how Black queer people such as myself have implemented and created a means of survival through Black performance art, creating a mode of active radical resistance. This mode draws upon performative traditions including call and response, improvisation, reading, throwing shade, and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE).¹ Like my piece “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy,” these Black traditions combine to form what I call a set of quare technologies. My project extrapolates theories from queer of color critique, synthesizing different dialects of an innovative visual language. Exploring both the tactile experience of drawing and the role of ecstasy in artistic creation, my piece transforms my Blackness and queerness in the otherwise toxic and violent spaces usually inhabited by people with diasporic identities like me. Mixing elements of Black Aesthetics into my art practice has broadened my sense of what it means to reconstruct while simultaneously deconstructing the Black body. The performative aspect of drawing unconsciously allows me to be vulnerable and channel a range of energies. As I perform, I become a living

¹ Craig Werner, A Change is Gonna Come (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 11.
drawing in both an archival and non-archival senses. In my work, lines that literally intersect and overlap make fluid many of the diasporic identities that colonial powers would have me believe are fixed. By doing this work I reimagine ways to fight homo-antagonism, the erasure and the deafening silences caused by colonial powers. In short, these processes of making renew the vitality of queerness and Blackness in both my current artistic practice and in my scholarly pursuits.

The present study seeks to cover wide ground; I will consider theoretical ideas such quare technology, queer diaspora, and disidentification. Along the way I will also discuss the development and performance of my art, and I hope to articulate the effects of my performative work on me personally as well as the effects I hope to see in the audience and the larger society for whom my performance takes place.

* * *

A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE often faced by Black queer individuals is that, far too often, the terms and structures that are used to analyze queerness are predominantly White in their formulations. E. Patrick Johnson’s essay “Quare Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” for example, uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a technology to challenge the prevailing whiteness and erasure of Black experiences within “queer” or “quare” spaces:

“Quare,” on the other hand, not only speaks across identities, it articulates identities as well. “Quare” offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledge. As a disciplinary expansion, then, I wish to “quare” “queer” such that ways of knowing are viewed both as discursively mediated and as historically situated and materially conditioned. This reconceptualization foregrounds the ways in which lesbians, bisexuals, gays, and transgendered people of color come to sexual and racial knowledge. Moreover, quare studies acknowledges the different “standpoints” found among lesbian, bisexual, gay, and
transgendered people of color—differences that are also conditioned by class and gender.²

Johnson’s reconceptualization of the word “queer” to “quare” pulls from “the vernacular traditions such as performance, folklore, literature, and verbal art” (i.e., technologies that evoke a tradition of resistance that Black Americans have employed to push back against domination for decades).³

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ONE OF MY CONCERNS involves the relations between visual and verbal, between image and language. In “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy,” visual language functions as a battle cry, my weapon of choice in war—a war over identity. Gradually, I have expanded from traditional visual frames, especially drawing, to performance art. Just as there were many bumps along the road to becoming fluent in the act of drawing, I am now facing new challenges that require new resources too. I was formally trained to draw with both my hands and my eyes, using my eyes to draw from direct observation and moving the information I collected with my eyes to my hands to render figures onto a surface. As I encountered new theories, like synesthesia—defined as “a concomitant sensation; especially: a subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of color) other than the one (as of sound being stimulated),”⁴—I started to wonder what it would mean to draw with my whole body, including all of my senses. My awareness of this was heightened because many quare Black folks have always been at war in some form or another. Black people don’t get breaks! We are constantly fighting to defend ourselves against the weapons used against us such as microaggressions, bigotry, and physical violence. Just walking while Black in this society could mean losing your life because someone felt scared of you wearing a hoodie in

² Patrick E. Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” Text and Performance Quarterly 21, no. 1: 3
⁴ ARIAPPEL, Synesthesia and Writing (blog; 2016). whitmanwriting.wordpress.com/author/ariappel/
the rain. These instances seem like war to me. In the end it is a war for which no one willingly signed up. My sense of that war draws on the reality that I don’t live in a post-colonial society any more then I live in a post-racial one. I’ve learned that if I just stop talking about the isms they will not somehow magically go away. Snap! You know the isms, right? Racism, sexism, and queer-antagonisms, aka heteronormativity, all of which I battle on a daily basis. To be honest, I’m quite tired of fighting in this fucking war. As I write these words it is embarrassing to admit how tired I am, that most of the time I just want to give up and let go. I want to go home like the flying Africans. I don’t give up of course. This is why I am still here fighting, working, trying, writing, and crucially making art.

Nevertheless, it seems as though it’s never enough, no matter how hard I try to fight “it”: the combination of silence and the erasure that comes along with being a fat, Black, queer, differently-abled person in the 21st century. To be young Black and gifted is hell most of the time, at least for me. Making this piece, “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy,” has granted me a sort of safe freedom and joy, respite from some of the toxic tropes that surround Black queer men. The piece functions as a reprieve from the destructive faux-Blackness and gender binaries that were constructed for me through a gaze that was not of my own making. Like many Blacks, I have been cast in roles and expected to perform in them, even to my detriment. My chosen performance allows me to fight the tropes that say that I am not supposed to smile, act femme, or experience ecstasy within my own gaze. Black boys are taught that we have to be tough motherfuckers at all times, ready to destroy anyone who gets in our way. We are told to act out these roles at the expense of women, especially Black women. “Drawing While Black” allows me to reimagine my Blackness in a healthy way through the joy I experience when I am performing.

Hence, I am an artist at war. I have always been at war with myself in some form or another. Or at least that is how it feels deep inside my soul—if I still have, or have ever had, a soul to start with. It’s a complicated battle though, a mind-fuck most of the time, really. With me, it is becoming something of a whole-body-fuck too. I am not always sure whose side I am really on. It’s either a battle fought against a society that wants to destroy me from the inside-out or vice versa. Most of the time I feel as if I am battling myself, that I am contributing to my destruction. As queer Black folks, we face a
war over our authentic selves. And there’s no easy time to begin to imagine, much less develop, a language to define an “authentic self.” One of the first blows we suffered comes when we’re asked “Are you gay or Black first?” This question strikes me in the gut like a sucker punch. All the air leaves the room. You’re forced to choose between your Blackness and your queerness, asked to choose between things that come as naturally as breathing, to choose first and foremost through a single binary lens at the expense of the other equally important parts of your identity. As queer Black folks we’re led to believe that one can’t accept numerous things identity-wise, while standing firmly grounded in our Blackness. My research and the making of this performance piece have allowed me to understand more fully how and why queer Black folks, myself included, can create novel ways to resist our circumstances, resisting violent questions and reimagining new homes in a queer diaspora.

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ANOTHER PERVERSIVE, FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE to queer identity is finding the place wherein such an identity “fits in” or belongs. A common link between Marlon Riggs’ film Tongues Untied and the subjects of Jennie Livingston’s film Paris Is Burning is that they undergo a “queer diaspora” as a result of experiences of racism, queer antagonism, and community ostracization. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz define queer diaspora as follows:

[the] denaturalizing of various origin narratives, such as “home” and “nation,” queer diasporas investigate what might be gained politically by reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation and biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency.5

In both films mentioned above, the subjects reimagine the stagnant ideologies of conventional households and family ties lost as a result of their sexual identities and their subsequent creation of spaces wherein they could thrive. For instance, Riggs joined the group Gay

Black Men United, many of whom appear in the film *Tongues Untied* as performers alongside the director. The House of Ninja in *Paris Is Burning* functions as a technology just like the Gay Black Men United group did for Riggs. The group provided much needed support, family, and resources to all parties involved, thereby reimagining, or *quaring*, notions of home and community and disrupting the gay mecca myth, which states that if small-town gays make it to cities like New York or San Francisco they would finally find an accepting community. Unfortunately, much mainstream media center around White gay male aesthetics and experiences. When queerness is framed only through a White lens, this queerness is presented as the *universal* experience of all queer. This is precisely why many Black queers choose to refer to themselves as studs or same-gender loving people—by doing this they can bring attention to the intersections of race, class, and gender in our lives. For instance, it is often believed by many White LGBTQ+ people that systematic racism isn’t an issue, proclaiming that they can’t be racist on account of being minorities also because of either their sexuality and/or gender identity. Yet, in that same breath they may say things like “No Fats No Femmes” or “No Blacks No Asians,” claiming these sentiments as merely harmless preferences and -ism free. Yet they fail to realize that their Whiteness still grants them many privileges and protections from which they benefit in comparison with their Black and Brown counterparts.

Often individuals facing these kinds of questions believe that, once grown up and “out of the closet,” all of their problems would be solved. Many queers from small towns such as myself think that escaping to big cities will free them from persecution over their sexuality. They think that the LGBTQA+ community is progressive and will not have any discrimination. These expectations are often a response to, a hope to get beyond, all the trauma they faced growing up. Yet Riggs notes in *Tongues Untied* that when he was in White gay spaces, this did not erase his Blackness. He realized that he was seen as “just another nigger,” just like his straight counterparts.

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IN CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST CULTURE, the idea of making use of everything at one’s disposal has been prominent;
however, this prospect has only dimmed for many Black people. It certainly seemed that way for me before I started this project and my research. What happens when all life has dealt you are scraps, or even nothing at all? For many, this unequal distribution leads to bitterness, but “Drawing While Black” and my research have helped me to recover the ancestral practice of making the most out of your parts, no matter how unsavory they may seem, in order to survive being “in the life.” Working with chalkboard paint has opened new possibilities, expanding my sense of where the piece can be performed. I am blindfolded when I perform because it helps me accentuate my vulnerability by grounding the performance in the moving body. Some of my reasoning here comes from the experiences of Black people in North Carolina where I was born and raised. I was taught that you have to find a use for the scraps, or if you don’t have any scraps you will have to create something out of what may appear to be nothing.

Consider the importance of the pig in the Black southern community. In order to survive, Black people had to repurpose the pig, including parts others might consider unsavory. In that same vein, my piece creates something nourishing form elements of myself that some reject. I create a quare identity from pieces often erased, misplaced, and fractured into a million shameful parts. Growing up, because of the erasure of quare folks in the Black community, it seemed that parts of me held no value, were nothing. Quare folks’ talents and technologies were rarely recorded in the archives or openly passed down. Trying to trace a Black lineage is hard enough; adding a queer one can make it feel impossible, erased entirely. As my work progressed, I found that looking through a food-lens, to make connections with my queer Black ancestors, was the most successful way to create this piece, allowing me to trace my lineage and gather more ingredients for a performance I think of as an artistic “gumbo.” Just as my ancestors used the scraps of the pig, I reimagine using my varying identities to feed my artistic process and performances and to resist the art world’s status quo.

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WHEN I PERFORM, I have butterflies in my stomach. No matter how many times I perform a piece like “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy,” I still get nervous beforehand. That all changes when I start setting up for the performance. I have
typically worked on chalkboards in classrooms in the past, at first creating multi-layered chalk drawings in a call and response with the audience and with music. The performance involves several steps. First, I make a short playlist on my phone. I usually do this on the bus when I am heading over to the performance space. I pick songs almost at random, giving room for the thoughts and feelings that inhabit my body at a particular time. I enjoy Mozart’s “Requiem in D Minor” as a warm-up song. Other songs that appear on the playlist are Stevie Wonder’s “Superstition,” T-Rex’s “I Love to Boogie,” Jamiroquai’s “Canned Heat,” and Elvin Bishop’s “Fooled Around and Fell in Love.” Together, the list functions as a “sound gumbo.” One of the main Black musical practices I draw upon in the performance is call and response. My performance creates calls through the sound of the music I play while I perform. These sounds make my whole Black body move. Depending on the speed of the song, this can affect the line weight as I move through space. Disco music really synchronizes and ties the whole piece together. Songs like “I Will Survive,” from Gloria Gaynor, awaken something in me. It’s not only the sound of the music I am responding to, so much as it is the nostalgia and ghosting that the song creates. For me disco music represents a direct link to my quare ancestors—something created by the outsider/underground folks in society.

After I make my way into the classroom I check to see whether I have all of my supplies, hoping my excitement hasn’t led me to forget something at home. I can’t tell half of the time whether I’m more nervous or just excited when I am about to perform. I locate a place to change out of my street clothes into my performance attire, usually old white shorts and a sweatshirt, nothing special. I don’t concentrate on my costume because that’s what my body becomes as the performance develops. When I arrive in the space, I set a timer for 35 minutes to warm up my body by stretching. After the 35-minute warm up, I fold the bandanna I use for the blindfold three or four times. I close my eyes, and then I place the bandanna over my eyes, tying it tightly in a knot in the back of my head so it doesn’t fall off my face while I am drawing. I set a timer for an hour. Then I put on the headphones as the music of the playlist from the bus ride starts. The audience can’t hear this music, it’s just for me to hear as I

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7 See, e.g., Werner, 11, 14.
perform. It is soft and slow like the line I begin on the wall as well as the lines I am making as I swerve my hips to the rhythm of the music. The song “Requiem in D Minor,” like my body, starts off moving slowly and builds off of itself like tiny explosions. I have added ankle and wrist weights to the piece to better feel other parts of my body, usually idle, because I’m often seated at a desk when composing my drawings. I start to feel serious when I begin putting on weights, powerful and hidden at the same time. I can feel my physical strength with the weights added to my body, more aware of my physicality. It’s not really a masculine or feminine strength, but I feel powerful in a different way. I pick up the chalk and start off by moving one arm at a time to one song. Soon, I move to the next arm doing the same thing, building a rhythm, which means that first I have to find the rhythm my body makes naturally. I start trying to figure out ways to incorporate my other body parts into the piece after the first five songs, moving my hips, legs, neck, and eventually my whole body is participating in the piece.

Sometimes I find that I’m not feeling the music, and that the piece just doesn’t feel real. Nothing I am doing is working. It’s like I am still in my head, that I am overthinking everything. I’ll start doing things which would normally embarrass me to do in public or private, to get me out of my own head or let what’s inside of me out into the space I am trying to create. Often I find myself humming although I am afraid to sing in public, but there is something freeing about this act. It feels right. So, I do it. It’s not about sounding good to others. It’s about the experience of creating art with all that my quare, Black, differently-abled body has to offer. I can feel the sweat and feel myself getting out of breath and tired. I want to keep going, but sometimes my body won’t let me. This can be frustrating. The weights are useful, but they constrict the movements I make and make it harder for me to draw. This is both good and bad but I want it to be hard to create the piece, just as it’s hard to live out my full self.

Although the heart of the work is completed in the performance, the drawings themselves retain importance as “leftovers,” so to speak, of the performance (see Figures 1–4). Note especially the names of these images; I named the images after various musicians because I want to celebrate them by speaking their names into existence. These people sometimes don’t garner attention or representation in the mainstream. This naming is my
Figure 1. Ray Charles. In Progress. 2017.

Figure 2. Sylvester. 2016.
way of remembering them and passing on their legacies and works to future generations of Black queer folks.

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THIS WAY OF MAKING has allowed me to disidentify in my work, as José Esteban Muñoz describes:

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance.

I disidentify my White, Western formal arts training. Although my formal arts training is an important ingredient in the gumbo of my performance piece, helping me explore the many intersections of my queer identities, it doesn’t allow me to find healthy ways to reimagine, reprocess, or rearticulate the complexity of my quare Blackness. I think of my performance as a way of changing the recipe to disidentify. “Drawing While Black” complicates my formal training. This purposeful indirection of my senses allows me to articulate a drawing of my Blackness, to reconstruct my Blackness my quareness as part of a healthy dish.

The joy in the process of drawing is ecstasy in and of itself. The drawing aspect of my piece doesn’t have to be rendered perfectly. The goal of drawing in this piece is not to make a photorealistic representational portrait of myself, but to expose the messy, slippery, and complicated person I have been and am still becoming. I get to show the viewer, even if the viewer is just me,

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8 José Esteban Muñoz. Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11–12.
the ecstasy of being and becoming the embodiment of a line not tied down to the constraints of having to exist solely on a White two-dimensional plane. I create a set of lines that move and sway to the rhythm of my hips. Not the rhythm of music that I am listening to at the beginning of the piece, but the rhythm I create. My own personal rhythm. The music that I listen to is just a way that I have found to distract myself. The music functions much like the blindfold, causing an oversaturation and suppressing my heightened senses, allowing me to not only dance to my own beat, but to find and experiment with my Black body's natural rhythm/line/beat. A line that can feel the cool concrete of the floor. A line that sweats and breathes. This line is alive, allowing me to discover through the act of making what it is like to be Black on my own terms. I am not just filling in some role or playing some caricature of my Blackness/queerness. I am making my own Black quareness with this piece.

The White framework does function as an ingredient in my process, another ingredient in the gumbo. Like my performance, cooking for me is a meditative experience, cooking my Black body or Blackness, pulling in a lot of flavors. If you have ever prepared gumbo yourself, you know the end results can vary greatly depending on the ingredients used, which is a great thing in my case; I don’t have to worry about getting bogged down with one way of cooking my performance.

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PATRICK JOHNSON uses his lived experiences with his grandmother to wrestle with and reimagine the paradox of having to advocate for someone who is problematic, and is simultaneously another marginalized person within the Black community as, for instance, with his grandmother’s homo-antagonism toward his own sexuality. Johnson advances Muñoz’s idea of “disidentification,” stating that it reflects the process Black people have continuously held to survive in a supremacist White society, “working on and against” oppressive institutional systems. He uses disidentification as a way of reimagining his relationship with his grandmother, giving access to the wealth of knowledge his grandmother provides. Here, I argue that AAVE is a quare technology that Johnson uses to

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9 Johnson, 12
Figure 3. Sister Rosetta Tharp. 2017. Detail.

Figure 4. Black Power!. 2017.
Confluence

disrupt colonial projects and logics. By changing the spelling/redefining the term “queer” to “quare,” Johnson disrupts how Whiteness is constantly being centered, thereby erasing, or not even acknowledging, the intersections of race, gender, and class in the LGBTQ+ communities.\(^\text{10}\)

Like Johnson, Qwo-Li Driskill questions assumptions about how we label things and concepts in society. In their presentation “Cultured Queer / Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness Symposium,” Qwo-Li Driskill identifies the labels imposed on Blacks and queers as colonial projects. Separating parts of individual’s and group’s identities and putting them into little boxes discourages intersectional work and revision of past theories and technologies. Driskill writes:

> Within queer studies, critiques examining the intersections of race, sexuality, and empire—what Martin F. Manalansan IV names “the new queer studies”—have at once held promise, and then disappointed, those of us concerned with bringing Native studies and queer studies into critical conversations, or what Malea Powell calls “alliance as a practice of survivance.” Our hope for these emergent critiques lies in the thought that perhaps a turn in queer studies to articulate more carefully issues of race and nation will open up conversations about ongoing decolonial struggles and the relationships between sexuality, gender, colonization, and decolonization.\(^\text{11}\)

Driskill investigates similar ideas in “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies.” For example, he illustrates the use of traditional native technologies such as doubleweaving as a metaphor:

> Instead of seeing decolonization as something that has a fixed and finite goal, decolonial activism and scholarship ask us to radically reimagine our futures. For Native Two-

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), *Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 70.
Spirit/GLBTQ people and our allies, part of imagining our futures is through creating theories and activism that weave together Native and GLBTQ critiques that speak to our present colonial realities.¹²

For Driskill, this is a way to reimagine ways that center Indigenous Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people while simultaneously disrupting colonial power¹³; Two-Spirit/GLBTQ critiques are the technologies that they use to disrupt colonial powers/projects, just as Johnson does with AAVE to center Black queer folks. In short, Driskill argues that traditional native doubleweaving technologies create unfixed sites, resulting in dissenting lines that reveal in-between spaces which foster radical active resistance.¹⁴

Films such as Paris is Burning, directed by Jennie Livingston, and Marlon Riggs’ documentary Tongues Untied represent new kinds of wealth and technology that can be used by those facing the various -isms. These quare aesthetics creates a wealth that isn’t just about money, but technologies that can be left for generations to come. Money, as Riggs notes, will not offer complete protection from the horrors of colonialism, although it may provide some much-needed shielding. Patrick Johnson writes:

> The performance strategies of African Americans who labored and struggled under human bondage exemplify this disidentificatory practice. For instance, vernacular traditions that emerged among enslaved Africans—including folktales, spirituals, and the blues—provided the foundation for social and political empowerment. These discursively mediated forms, spoken and filtered through Black bodies, enabled survival. The point here is that the inheritance of

¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid., 69, 89.
¹⁴ Ibid., 69. Driskill’s work mixes poetry, history, academic writing, and performance in what ze/zir calls a two-spirit critique double weav ing work, I can this as a theoretical call for what I am doing in “Drawing While Black aka Black Boy Joy.” Like Driskill, I seek the freedom to incorporate multiple theories and forms so I can experiment with new artistic practices, or technologies. Technology doesn’t mean a gadget with wires and touch screens, but a tool to use for a particular purpose.
hegemonic discourses does not preclude one from “disidentifying,” from putting those discourses in the service of resistance. Although they had no institutional power, enslaved Blacks refused to become helpless victims and instead enacted their agency by cultivating discursive weapons based on an identity as oppressed people.\textsuperscript{15}

Overall, \textit{Paris is Burning} is a film about legacy and wealth, although it is not necessarily completely focused on monetary forms of wealth. This piece focuses on the wealth gained from learning about queer Black and Brown peoples’ legacies, such as that of Dorian Corey. This is precisely what Dorian Corey means in Livingston’s film by saying: “If you get through it,” the “it” meaning life, “You’ve made your mark.” It’s the “mark” that is these subject’s legacy in the film. It is important to note that, in this context, “legacy” is generally \textit{not} about inheriting money or land in terms of wealth. The people depicted in these documentaries weren’t privileged, as a result of racism and/or queer-antagonism, and so they were often unable to acquire much monetary wealth which they could then bequeath to their descendants. However, what they were able to give\textsuperscript{16} was their ability to pass on their queer technologies created for their survival, along with their lived experiences to their many decedents. In short, wealth for quare folks is about the creation of innovative ways toward not just survival of the destruction caused by colonial powers; wealth for quares or queers can also be about leaving gifts such as technological inventions for use by later generations in continuing and furthering the disruptions to the oppressive systems fostered by colonial powers.

One way in which wealth has been queered is through Black quare diasporic technologies such as these in Cárdenas’ work. In “Excerpts from ‘Redshift and Portalmetal,’” Cárdenas writes: “We learn technologies of warmth, technologies of sustenance, and give them to each other as precious gifts.”\textsuperscript{17} This speaks to the how the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Johnson, 12.


\textsuperscript{17} Cárdenas, 105.
\end{flushleft}
wealth of queer technologies can aid queer folk in disrupting colonial powers in the form of a gift. If notions of wealth can be queered, then the same can be done for technology. In “Technology and State Government,” Read Bain states: “Technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them.”

Patrick Johnson, while referencing bell hooks, writes that these technologies or “homeplaces,” can also be used to dismantle colonial powers.

According to hooks, homeplace “[is] the one site where one [can] freely confront the issue of humanization, where one [can] resist.” It is from homeplace that people of color live out the contradictions of our lives. Cutting across the lines of class and gender, homeplace provides a place from which to critique oppression. I do not wish to romanticize this site by dismissing the homophobia that circulates within homeplace or the contempt that some of us (of all sexual orientations) have for “home.” I am suggesting, rather, that in spite of these contradictions, homeplace is that site that first gave us the “equipment for living” in a racist society, particularly because we, in all of our diversity, have always been a part of this homeplace: housekeepers, lawyers, seamstresses, hairdressers, activists, choir directors, professors, doctors, preachers, mill workers, mayors, nurses, truck drivers, delivery people, nosey neighbors, and (an embarrassed?) “etc.” SNAP!

The legacies of colonial projects and logics continue to force many of the colonized into further subjugation because of post-colonial propaganda:

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18 Bain, 860. Responding to Bain’s, Cárdenas’, and Driskill’s calls, “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy” reimagines technology as anything created by marginalized queer people of color to survive their oppressive conditions.
19 Johnson, 19.
By using the term decolonization, I am speaking of ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation. I don’t see decolonization as a process that necessarily ends in the clearly defined “postcolonial” states of South Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world. Our colonial realities in most of the United States and Canada are substantially different, as colonial governments are still here and still maintain power and control over Indigenous communities.20

All in all, to quare the technologies is to fight the idea of a post-racial or post-colonial society; however, all efforts at quaring must also be critiqued to prevent the reproduction of systems of oppression while resisting the status quo.

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THE ACCOUNTS ABOVE address some of the issues I deal with in “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy.” The idea of cooking the Black body culminates in an amalgamation of queer diasporic identities—a gumbo. My performance is a dish that allows me to finally start cooking on multiple levels. It’s good to be working with better ingredients such as a pinch of queer of color critique, and a dash of what Riggs calls “negro faggotry.”21 I can finally begin to “put my foot in it,” as AAVE says it, and really “burn,” at least where my performance/art-making is concerned, where previously I took out my frustrations/anger mainly upon myself, enduring the never-ending violence my Black body seems to evoke and elicit through no fault of my own in this war. Grounded in these theories, my work allows me to combat the violent erasure in healthier ways, just as my queer Black ancestors did by using the arts as sites of resistance. I have all of this energy inside my body and my brain—it’s like fireworks going off inside of me. Some of this energy is positive and some of it is negative, but it is energy nonetheless. For instance, I

20 Driskill, 69–70.
was raised to mask my anger with a smile—I have to if I want to survive as a Black queer person in the states.22 I must police my anger. I believe that most Black queer people are always angry to some degree. Our anger is simmering as though it is in a crockpot. Sometimes this anger boils over. I process the anger so that I can express it in a healthy way, which is through my performance, so I don’t take out this type of energy on myself or other people. “Drawing While Black, aka Black Boy Joy” has helped me channel my energies and hone my artistic voice. The work allows me to possess a clarity that enables me to see through the bullshit-veils created by colonial powers. With this clarity, I now know that this war is not really about taking out my pain upon myself or other people anymore. It is about me using my art to fight the -isms and the continued erasure of my people.

However, I was not taught about the many contributions and sacrifices LGBTQ+ queer people of color have made until now. Yes, I was taught about the joy of MLK’s dreams, which are beautiful. But, I was not taught that LGBTQA+ queer people of color could also dream, and dream big; that our dreams are just as vivid, achievable, and warm as anyone else’s. Black queer-ass ancestors such as Marsha P. Johnson, Marlon Riggs, Dorian Corey, Audre Lorde, and Joseph Beam wanted their descendants to dismantle the many systems of oppression through our work. They wanted us to continue to pass on queer technologies to those whose abilities and parts, like theirs, weren’t valued. Ultimately, I believe that this performance, coupled with my research abilities, will help me change institutions to be more accommodating and accessible to people such as myself. I have found a fluid form of home—not merely as physical place but as an idea that can be molded and shaped to fit the needs of the queer community—just as my queer ancestors had done.

22 Werner, 11.