Masturbatory Ethics, Anarchic Objects: Notes on Decolonial Love

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Decolonial Love and the Thingly Future

> there will be a time when you bring yourself to a crossroads. you will have the choice to return back to your body. toxic, inhabitable or otherwise. take it. take it and don't stop fighting. in the same way the land can heal, our bodies can heal, they can become sites of love, and they can become our home.
>
> - Alexa Lesperance[1]

For Anishnaabe activist Alexa Lesperance, to be okay in a body that is Indigenous is "the fucking hardest thing you can ever do." In her formulation, settler colonialism is absolutely murderous, a sturdy structure that makes mere existence – the state of being alive in a body – too exhaustive to handle. Some of us, she laments, "may not ever be able to return there." Note the temporality of her "there." According to Lesperance, we have "bioaccumulated the trauma that was and wasn't ours" such that the body itself is like a prison, a kind of carceral architecture that not only restricts the ontological becomings that indigeneity as such can launch, but also points to renderings of 'the body' – a body to be dispossessed of sovereignty, studied, experimented with, abused, raped, incarcerated, and sometimes even murdered – is not always ours to inhabit. Lesperance gets at a uniquely colonial affect, one whose expressivities almost escape language's representational form – that is, a state of non-being where the fact-ness of the body itself apportions specific forms of structural withering in the battlefields of settler states. But, Lesperance also brings into focus a kind of optimism constitutive of the turn to decolonial love: our bodies, though sometimes inhabitable, are still workable. In fact, she hopes that "they can become sites of love"; our bodies, like the land, can be repatriated too. Lesperance invests love not with a kind of utopian power, one that could remedy the social and its citizens, but, instead, with a deeply affective charge – that is, love, a

decolonial sort, can energize the work of survival: the fight for life when the colonial odds are stacked against you.[2]

Like Lesperance, Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe) theorizes the emotional rift in settler states whereby Indigenous peoples rarely know what love, or what José Muñoz called an intimacy "beyond the synchronous presence of" the flesh, looks or feels likes.[3] In her beautiful and painful collection of stories and songs, *Islands of Decolonial Love*, Simpson writes:

> we're all hunting around for acceptance, intimacy, connection and love, but we don't know what those particular med'cines even look like so we're just hunting anyway with vague ideas from dreams and hopes and intention, at the same time dragging around blockades full of reminders that being vulnerable has never ended well for any of us, not even one single time.[4]

The evocation of "med'cines" is telling: that love contains a reparative force of sorts is symptomatic of a social world that produces Indigenous bodies as bodies that bear the likeness of colonial contagions and infections, ones that do their dirtiest work in the domain of the affective itself. In other words, Indigenous peoples, having been wrenched into histories and presents of colonial harm, bear relations to love that are stunted in their future-bearing power and fantastical in their spectral form. Perhaps we are not talking about love when we talk about love. Indeed, Simpson suggests that to have to experiment with what love might be is to have to enter a lethal and deeply racialized geography of vulnerability, one that we feel in the now vis-à-vis the traces of the pain our ancestor's once felt. For Simpson, ours are bodies that are tethered to blockades, blockades constitutive of the materiality of settler colonialism's monopolization of love, a monopolization that traps some more than others in the thick of

things, so to speak. It is precisely through the passage of time – the very moment at which colonialism paradoxically announces itself as over and as the way things are – that indigeneity morphs into something incompatible with love's world-building force. Hopes and dreams are not enough to keep us in this world anymore.

For Karyn Recollet (Cree), "radical decolonial love [thus] requires a shift in conceiving of love from a holding space of permanence" – Simpson's blockade, like the prison house Lesperance unearths, cannot sustain us and our attachments to life. Recollet wants decolonial love, in its capacity to shore up articulations of differentiation that do not collapse into violence, to be something of a future-making project: "Radical decolonial love can be perceived as an ethical way of life, whereby we acknowledge each other's differences and gifts and let those manifest into creating new world(s) of possibilities."[5] Ours is a world that cannot reckon with those emergent forms of life whose modes of being escape the affective pull of the present. I would say that Recollet positions decolonial love at the nexus of 1) existence – of being in a body in ways that do not wear you down; 2) intimacy – radically erotic ways of connecting with other bodies, to use Simpson's language, without losing parts of yourself in the face of it all; and 3) ethics – ways of being with through which the world not only holds out for difference, but also shifts its topographies in order to throw into sharp relief the gifts, to use Recollet's language, that we breathe into the now. Decolonial love therefore promises not only to chip away at the corporeal and emotional toll of settler colonialism as such, but also to gestate a wider set of worlds and ontologies, ones that we cannot know in advance, but ones that might make life into something more than a taxing state of survival. Decolonial love is thus an ideality that "propels us onward,"[6] a mode of wanting or longing that ratchets up a

particular kind of relation to futurity, one that promises to keep us in this world, even if that is just until tomorrow. Like queerness in Muñoz's formulation, decolonial love reminds us that something is missing, that the lives we have lived are not necessarily of our own making and that there are liberatory feelings we have yet to carry in our bones. Decolonial love is not merely a state of feeling,[7] but also a kind of performativity insofar as one does for oneself and/or for another and, at the same time, toward the future.[8]

In this paper I hunt for forms of erotic life that might do the world-building work of decolonial love, taking up Lesperance's call to return to the body by way of the ethical potentiality of masturbation. This is an attempt not only to flesh out decolonial love's provocation – that is, to pin point "moments of action"[9] that might illuminate the horizons of Indigenous feminist worlding – but also to theorize the entanglement of indigeneity, the autoerotic, and thing, a triangulation that I suspect holds out for new forms of humanness and sexual life in the near-queer future. Like Recollet, who expands the uses of "love-making" to the domain of relationality without abandoning its sexual connotations,[10] I want to theorize the ways in which the sexual, invested with a kind of revolutionary power and displaced from its normative valences as an allo-sexual form, can animate decolonial worlds. [11] I thus take argumentative cues from Sara Ahmed and Kathleen Stewart about those willful actions or ordinary happenings that, because of their capacity to anchor us in the non-normative or the astray, allow us to maintain our alterities and our desires for a futurism that does not resort to violence in order to substantiate the so-called good life, to point to Lauren Berlant's oeuvre.[12] Said differently, I seek to interrogate the epistemic and identitarian limits of the sex we have inherited and to instead turn to a genealogy of feminist thinkers whose commitments to their

bodies and to bodies like theirs in the face of structural attrition has much to offer us in an age of global crisis and in the wake of neoliberal forms of settler-colonial governmentality.

This paper may at times appear messy or chaotic, staging its narrative at the intersections of seemingly disparate histories and stories, labouring to connect the dots across multiple objects. I am less concerned with trying to tie up all the loose ends then with gathering together bits and pieces of cultural texts in order to offer speculative developments in how we conceptualize the work of masturbation in the face of what I consider to be settler colonialism's drive to sever the ontological and erotic bond between Indigenous flesh and its self. My archive is cluttered, as if my objects were chosen at random, showing up at unexpected times and in unexpected places, brought into dialogue with one another to mark a nascent kind of interdisciplinary research method that dissolves the otherwise staunchly surveilled boundaries between disciplines and their methodologies. My formulation of a "cluttered archive" is indebted to the work of 1) Jack Halberstam and his concept of "low theory": deliberating choosing to read texts that are quickly collapsed into the monolith "low culture" and thus abandoned outside the purview of academic concern; 2) Ann Cvetkovich's radical move to think both with texts that "made [her] feel better on so many occasions" and with ones that are not stunted by stubborn disciplinary boundaries – an archive she perhaps coyly calls "impossible"; and 3) Sara Ahmed's "unhappy archives," archives assembled precisely to disrupt conventional notions of happiness from various identity-based standpoints.[13] What I take from these rhetorical and methodological interventions is a kind of knowledge-making practice that is fundamentally political, one that endeavours to think outside the big worlds of Statistics and

Demography and, instead, inside the smaller, much more precarious worlds of the ordinary and the ephemeral.

For José Muñoz, ephemera is the stuff of queerness, the traces or remains of goings-on that, because of their slippery attachment to public memory, sometimes escape our optics for making sense of the political.[14] It is here – in the ephemeral – that I suspect masturbation does its most radical work; and, this paper argues that this is especially apparent when the thingly – here, sex toys – becomes decolonial love's condition of possibility. I thus take up what we might call a new materialist interest in the thingly in order to think about not only the ways in which matter and things thought to be inanimate, dead, or politically neutral significantly shape Indigenous peoples' experiences of their bodies and their relations to the world., but also the ways in which things make some untapped forms of decolonial love possible.[15] In short, I ask: what happens when things resist the meanings we give them and instead do the work of decolonization?

The concept of *thingly futures* refers to a particular kind of teleology – a way of surviving the now such that we can imagine what a decolonial world might look like without the traces of its colonial pasts, something of a utopian politics that takes literal things seriously. *Things*: the stuff that usually figures in the public imagination as inanimate matter, matter distinct from living sentient beings, or objects that we do not necessarily have to name because they are supposedly bereft of symbolic purchase. But, things also necessarily and paradoxically traffic in semantic possibility, not necessarily attached to any one item or concept, standing in for an infinite combination of materials that are said to be quotidian and, when put bluntly, boring. *Thingly futures* is a slowed and precarious process of dwelling in the present, hinting at the

worlds we might actualize if we brought into focus the ways in which things intervene in our politics and our oppressions, oftentimes helping us get through the day or to complete the hard labor contingent upon maintaining the intimate topographies of the ordinary. I suspect there is a thingliness to masturbation, that sex toys like dildos and vibrators have ontological effects despite the moralizing claims that make up our understandings of this particular sex act. Although (but also perhaps precisely because) masturbation carries a stubborn stigma and negative affects like shame and guilt, I turn to it to analyze and dream up scenes of ethical relationality insofar as we live in a late capitalist age marked by a multiplicity of gendered and racialized forms of violences that alienate us from our bodies.

In what follows, I read a few cultural histories of masturbation, popular films and television episodes that represent masturbation, feminist theories of self-care, and theories of affect to make perhaps contentious claims about the ontological and ethical potentiality of the Indigenous body that not only loves itself, but also masturbates. The point, then, is to take up masturbation as a point of entry into the sexual politics of the urgent present and its still creatable futures. Said differently, I do not intend to tease apart the substance of the autoerotic for the whitened average joe (although we are all average joes in some form or another), but, instead, to take up masturbation as a staunchly ordinary strategy for maintaining one's life in the face of racialized forms of structural attrition, especially in those moments when we feel like our bodies do not belong to us anymore. Particular attention will be paid to sex toys in order to think about the thingly entanglements that make Indigenous life possible in the crosshairs of a murderous settler state. My thesis is two-fold: 1) I argue that masturbation evidences something of an ethical rupture under the rubric of self-care and that it is a form of

decolonial love vis-à-vis late capitalism's alienating scenes of life; and 2) that the use sex toys for masturbatory purposes in particular points to episodes of ontological fusion and worlding. This project thus rests on a mode of knowledge acquisition beyond the human senses, a markedly imaginative and narratological project that starts with the presupposition that "things and humans are… entangled with one another in complex and unexpected ways."[16] In sum: things matter.

The Cultural Life of Masturbation

Masturbation is an object charged with a particular kind of promiscuity; it is nested inside an interpretive horizon, to use Robin James' term,[17] that veers into the perverse, the ordinary, and, as I hope to prove, the loving and the liberatory. It has many discursive lives, sometimes colloquially referred to, on the one hand, as 'jerking off,' 'wanking,' and 'beating off' or, on the other, as 'flicking the bean.' For Thomas Laqueuer, masturbation has a cultural history, one whose modern iteration begins in the Enlightenment, a time in which masturbation emerged in the public imagination through the domains of the ethical and the religious. Laqueuer writes:

> Modern masturbation is profane. It is not just something that putatively makes those who do it tired, crippled, mad, or blind but an act with serious ethical implications. It is that part of human sexual life where potentially unlimited pleasure meets social restraint; where habit and the promise of just-one-more-time struggle with the dictates of conscience and good sense; where fantasy silences, if only for a moment, the reality principle.[18]

Masturbation, mostly solitary in practice, is lopsidedly subject to mass surveillance precisely insofar as its pleasure takes an indefinite form, tethered to a moralizing project bent on

narrowing the sexual such that it becomes puritanism's sinful discontents. In fact, Laqueuer tracks masturbation's surveillance under the Christian rubric of *onanism*. According to the anonymous author of *Onania; or, The Heinous Sin of Self Pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences, in both SEXES Considered* (approx.. 1712), masturbation was an "abominable practice" that resulted in "moral corruption" and "willful self-pollution." Derived from the Genesis story of Onan, who "spilled his seed upon the ground rather than into the wife of his dead brother and was struck down," onanism glued masturbation to death, a "secret sin" whose cure was both moral and medicinal.[19]

In this formulation, masturbation was not only imagined as a new kind of sexual disease in the eyes of the church, but it was also something of a "willful pollutant." For Sara Ahmed, "willful" also has a history: in stories – like that of the Brothers Grimm's "The Willful Child" – the charge of willfulness is an interpellative one, wrenched onto the bodies of those who compromise something, especially "the capacity of a subject to survive," especially when survivability is defined through the very structures to which willfulness reacts. Here, willfulness marks a subject's specific relation to the world: she has abandoned the normal and, in this, her persistence becomes an "act of disobedience" itself.[20] Willfulness, then, doubles as the rubric through which one's moral worth is gauged. In other words, it is the supposed intentionality and illegality of the body that is willful that relegates it to the space of immorality, a body that acts defiantly and without regard for the putatively deleterious work of willfulness. Ahmed writes: "to be identified as willful is to become a problem. If to be willful is to become a problem, then willfulness can be understood as the problem of the will."[21] Onanism, then, not only tries to demarcate the borders of the sexual as it is radically attached to the moral, but to

point to those subjects that, because of their masturbatory desires, need to be rehabilitated or eliminated as such because their wills have gone wild. This is a wilding whose consequences are toxic: the body that masturbates is a body being polluted. Judith Butler's reading of Mary Douglas' *Purity & Danger* points to the work of discourses that seek to demarcate the limits of the body vis-à-vis the naturalization of certain taboos regarding "appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange." The body that masturbates thus locates itself outside the boundaries of the social as such, if we agree with Butler's contention (and I do) that the social is made analogous to the corporeal (i.e., that the limits of the body double as the limits of the social itself). That is, the body is not merely mechanically transgressive, but also symbolically threatening to the social and legal orders that rest on the deeply surveilled domain of the sexual. To be a body that masturbates is to be a body in danger. In short: to masturbate is to wander astray.[22]

For Laqueuer, this sort of religious interdiction gave way to a new regulatory and disciplinary ethos, one that emerged insofar as masturbation was thought to trouble the very foundations of the fantasy of the good life, a fantasy paradoxically premised on the reification of a winnowed kind of sociality, one that buttressed enlightenment conceptualizations of the autonomous, but nonetheless collectively bound individual. In particular, Laqueuer argues that there were three things constitutive of "the horrors of sex with oneself": 1) that "it was a secret in a world in which transparency was of a premium"; 2) that it was supposedly "prone to excess" unlike any other sex act – the "crack cocaine of sexuality"; and 3) that it didn't seem to be grounded in reality – a "creature of the imagination," he writes.[23] Masturbation, then, muddies modernity's episteme, and its repudiation evidences, in part, the very constitution of

"the morally autonomous modern subject."[24] Again: the body that masturbates is a body whose desires are out of line, one whose interpretative horizons reach far beyond this world, into ones that might not even exist or ones that have yet to be mapped out.[25]

But, there is a third line of flight (the first two being onanism and the good life) that makes up masturbation's cultural and semantic substance: psychoanalysis. For Freud, 'autoeroticism,' which he notes was coined by Havelock Ellis in 1910, is "striking" because there is no sex object; instead, satisfaction is obtained from "the subject's own body." Here, autoeroticism is not limited to genitalia but to pleasure derived from "sensual sucking," a pleasure made possible at the moment that the infant's erotogenic zone shifts from the mouth, connected to the mother's breast, to her own body, precisely because this is "more convenient" than seeking out a secondary body and because it evidences her independence from "the external world" which she "is not yet able to control." For Freud, this marks 1) a shift in the capacity of the erotogenic zone from one of life-preservation to self-pleasure; and 2) a glaring lack insofar as this second region is inferior in relation to the mouth, which Freud considers "the reason why at a later date [she] seeks the corresponding part – the lips – of another person." [26]

What I think we inherit from Freud's narrow description of the autoerotic is a form of masturbation nested deeply inside the infantile, one encroaching on the perverse such that a delayed third shift toward an erotogenic zone located on a secondary body signals that things have run amok. The weaned child turns to her own body only insofar as she will turn to another in the future, when her sense of independence and control are not directly mediated through the mother. Important here is the assumption that this third erotogenic zone will be similarly

life-making in its heteronormative teleology: that is, the production of a child. But, Freud's formulation also refuses to set up anything akin to a subject-object relation in the wake of autoerotic wanting; instead, for him, the subject becomes both the agent and the source of pleasure without disavowing her subjectivity. What this suggests is that the subject never relates to her own body as an object of desire, but as a mere means to an ends, a neatly bordered encounter with the self that does not feel like an encounter at all.

These three seemingly disparate ways of conceptualizing masturbation are quite telling: to masturbate is to generate a mode of being in the world that, in its wild temporality, registers a sexual, psychological, developmental, and/or immoral excess or failing, one that blocks the epistemologies we have used to relate to the self in ways that elevate it to the universal. The masturbating body throws a wrench into things, so to speak, hinting at different ways of being in a body and of experiencing the sexual.

But, because of these stubborn histories, multiple publics continue to relate to masturbation in ways that foreclose its radical potentiality. Jake Schreier's *Paper Towns* (2015),[27] for example, gives us the figure of the 'chronic masturbator,' a figure whose obsessive-compulsive attachment to masturbation results in social ostracism and illness (here, a blood disease). In addition, in an episode of the popular sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, Howard Wolowitz (Simon Helberg) is mocked by his friends and colleagues because his penis gets stuck in a robotic arm he was using to simulate a hand job.[28] In another scene: Wolowitz masturbates in his bathtub to the image of Battlestar Galctica's Katee Sackhoff, whose spectral form pushes him to have sex with an actual woman (Bernadette) and not a fantastical one[29] (these plot devices reify a character whose cheapened sexual purchase is repeatedly evoked to elicit

laughter). And, in an infamous scene from *American Pie* (1999), Jim (Jason Biggs) is caught using a warm apple pie to stimulate vaginal intercourse, the negative affects of which are embarrassment and shame.[30] What these cultural texts tell us is that masturbation is tethered to specific affects and forms of sociality (shame, exclusion, perversion, and secrecy), and that, in the latter cases, masturbation always-already brings into focus the absence of a proper sex object; that robots, spirits, and pies produce sexual pleasure and, in most cases, orgasm points to the separation of sex and sexuality from the human (sex's stubborn object). Here, sex as such is not only anthropogenic in form, but also grounded in what I want to call "compulsory allo-sexuality": a way of conceptualizing love and desire such that they become bound up in fleshy others, as if the sexual were always-only eventful, magnetizing different bodies to each other, *ad infinitum*. In short: masturbation is not sex per se, but a cheap and false imitation of it, one that dreams up an immaterial or perverse sex object that is meant to stand in for a secondary body that the subject couldn't acquire itself. When masturbation becomes the sole source of pleasure its subject signals a stubborn psychological and sexual lack. Here, masturbation is semantically narrowed inside the domain of the awkward, and it is denied the liberatory possibilities afforded to other sex acts whose subjects and objects are supposedly manifold.

It is precisely this cultural history and present of masturbation that doubles as the point of departure for this paper's turn to the autoerotic for developments in how we make sense of the ethics of sex in settler states. These conceptualizations of masturbation are of a piece with forms of biopower that strangulate bodies and the political orders instantiated through them. That masturbation is at once perverse and shameful, humorous and awkward suggests that there are ways of being attuned to our bodies that the moral forecloses, that a more intimate

and accessible sexual politics is being stalled from taking shape in the normal. My goal here is not to swap a few conceptualizations of masturbation for a better one, but to point to the ways in which our relation to masturbation as an object, like all other objects we attach to, is fundamentally open such that we can do different things with it for different purposes. I want to make it into a better object, one that might help us escape the arenas of the bad life.[31]

Masturbation and The Work of Self-Care

> So it is better to speak
> remembering
> we were never meant to survive.
>
> - Audre Lorde

In "A Litany for Survival," Audre Lorde writes, as Sara Ahmed put its, "for those for whom survival is politically ambitious."[32] She writes for those for whom the labor of maintaining one's life is too hard to keep up such that dying is more probable than flourishing. Pointing to gendered and queered forms of anti-blackness, Lorde reminds us that we need to nurture a now that can give way to futures that do not result only in dead dreams and lost hopes.[33] For Lorde, to be black and woman and alive is to be public enemy writ large, to bear witness to worlds being ripped apart, over and over again.[34] In the wake of a string of murders at the hands of police officers whose jobs are done at the expense of people like Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Sandra Bland, Lorde's words still sting. For Lorde, a black body that breathes is a body in protest. What happens when a body written off as undeserving of life persists, when it refuses to do the one thing it was meant to do: die? Lorde brings into focus the precarity of life for those who live in the face of genocidal drives to eliminate them, hinting at the intimate and quotidian work of resistance in settler states like the United States that are

confederated through black suffering. What might love look like for subjects marked as undeserving of life?

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." We have heard these words, again and again. Sara Ahmed, in a blog post titled "Selfcare as Warfare," calls them revolutionary; an "extraordinary sentence," she opines.[35] For Lorde, self-care is not only about the stubborn refusal to breathe in a colonial world that wants you dead, but it is also a call to arms: survive, we must. To survive is not merely to keep going, but to live through in the most harm reductive way; to be in your body in ways that feel sustainable such that we might, one day, build flourishing worlds. In Ahmed's reading of Lorde's oeuvre, this sentence sticks out because it points to the lopsided distribution of survivability: some more than others will have to struggle to stay in this world. Self-care, then, emerges as something of a sore point, a putatively self-indulgent turn to the self that disturbs forms of governmentality that require our docility and slowed decay in order to exist as such.[36] To refuse to die – indeed, to take care of yourself – is to prolong a colonial war you never wanted to begin with such that you can build the conditions for life beyond it. In sum: for Lorde, the turn to the body is a turn away from and, in this, a political response to the hegemonic work of macropolitical structures like capitalism, heteropatriarchy, anti-blackness, and settler colonialism.

I would say that self-care best conceptualizes the ethical work of masturbation. That is, self-care, at once a heuristic and practice, is a politics of survival: it urges us to attune to the affects of living through and to our bodies in ways that do not require the resilience putatively contingent upon getting through things. What we inherit is a charge to love breaking or broken

bodies: that fragility need not be the event of our undoing. Ahmed points out that fragility is "the quality of being easily breakable," asking: "what does it mean, what does it do, to break or be broken?" For Ahmed, "we learn making from breaking": it pushes us to see what it is that is breaking us in the first place.[37] But, this also produces a kind of queer or feminist fatalism: "some are assumed to be inherently broken as if their fate is to break."[38] If we die, things go on as if nothing happened. In other words, those forms or entities that do not neatly or properly enflesh the human as such arrive in the social as if they were missing something, as if they were breaking or already broken beyond repair. What might it mean, then, to be with feelings of loss in a world where losing things is our relation to almost everything? What of a politics that looks like last-ditch efforts to stay alive? How do we persist when the future does not seem workable or livable anymore? I think self-care, when practiced by minoritarian subjects, holds the possibility of dwelling long enough to world,[39] to bring about affects and feelings that do not slowly wear us down.

But, self-care is indeed nested inside a particular and absolutely neoliberal history, a history that foolishly splits the liberatory from the governmental even though the former oftentimes emerges from within the latter. Maja Holmer Nadesan, for example, argues that self-care is of a piece with forms of governmentality that permit the neoliberal state to divulge "paternalistic responsibility for its subjects" while simultaneously holding those subjects "responsible for self-government." For Holmer Nadesan, self-care becomes the event of the neoliberal state's absolution, a kind of ethical exoneration and, in this, divestiture that presupposes that the individual's well-being is hers to alter and that the national body itself is somehow divisible from the subjects it must brings into its folds.[40] In this formulation, self-care

shores up 1) a national fantasy of immunity that separates the state from bodily collapse and other forms of slow death that its statecraft produces in the first place; and 2) a fantasy of agentiality that sets up free will or an entrepreneurial work ethic as constitutive of the good life itself. We often hear this articulated as such: self-care allows us to take time for ourselves in order to later become better, capitalist workers. Said differently, social behavior is articulated "along economic lines" such that choice itself is instantiated "with a rational calculus of costs and benefits."[41] Here, the individual, deprived of the state's or an employer's fiduciary responsibility, assumes the task of "rational risk management."[42]

Though I empathize with this kind of macrosociological approach to thinking about self-care, an approach that teases apart the ways, à la Foucault, biopower forces us to not only live, but to live in a particular and winnowed manner,[43] I think there is more to the story. Whereas social justice activism and revolution, broadly construed, are located firmly inside the spectacular or the political, the subversive workings or potentiality of the ordinary can be missed in a split-second. I suspect that critiques like Holmer Nadesan's 1) take the subject – a subject who is whitened into citizenship – that can breathe with impunity as their referent; and 2) presuppose that the state – a utilitarian and democratic one – is responsible for meting out the good life, a state that should create the conditions of possibility from which we could better inhabit the present. Not only are there life-forms – namely, Indigenous peoples – that have already and necessarily been abandoned outside the state's moral reach, but that very state comes into murderous being through the prior and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous life, land, and sovereignty. Some of us were and still are not the subjects of the state's neoliberal turn to social welfare or care, broadly construed; in fact, we are the very things whose juridical

erasure or absorption into the whitened space of citizenship necessitates statecraft in the first place. What I am trying to get at is that self-care, as Audre Lorde was bent on politicizing it, is a matter of life or death for some more than others. It is a specific way of relating to your body and to time when the contours of time itself are the source of your exhaustion and decay.

Again: masturbation, a sex act performed with and for ourselves, might be its own form of self-care. For me, masturbation is about a strange encounter, to evoke Sara Ahmed's term,[44] between the self and the flesh whose form and outcome we cannot know in advance, but one that occurs vis-à-vis but also in contrast to a prior and sometimes ghost-like history of colonial rupture that blocked and still blocks our relation to the psychic and the corporeal. In a deeply radical passage in *A Dialogue on Love*, Eve Kosofosky Sedgwick hints at masturbation's capacity to world in the face of other world-shattering encounters. In a conversation with her therapist, Shannon, she confesses: "I was somebody who, given the opportunity, would spend hours and hours a day in my bedroom masturbating. Really. Hours and hours." She continues: "It's something that I could

> yearn toward and be
>
> lost in the atmosphere of.
>
> To me, a whole world."[45]

For Sedgwick, masturbation generated something of a "fantasy world," a geography of possibility within which she could quell her anxiety and momentarily experience her wildest desires, particularly S/M fantasies.[46] Here, the body dwells in the fantasy long enough to feel like something, creating an atmosphere whose affects and borders align with the subject's desires and modes of wanting and becoming, an alignment that our current worlds, limited in

their political reach, cannot instantiate. For me, Sedgwick's musings point to the kind of masturbatory practice that might link sex to a world-building politics not tethered to what Lee Edelman called "reproductive futurism" – wherein children are prepared for a future, heteronormative in its telos, bent on reproducing itself vis-à-vis procreation, a politics of the universal against which queers are marked as antisocial and, in this, for death.[47] If only momentarily, I suspect masturbation, when performed by the Indigenous body, signals a rupture that gives way to openings or portals to worlds we have not yet finished imagining. Sedgwick's memoir thus points to a more capacious masturbatory ethics, one that makes life livable for those for whom that fantasy has hitherto been outside arm's reach. If self-care is a practice through which one – a subject made vulnerable or breakable as an effect of histories of violence – slows things down to remedy or prevent further physical, mental, and/or emotional damage, masturbation, in its capacity to generate states of euphoria via endorphins, to momentarily ward off or cancel other feelings like pain, discomfort, or sadness, and to produce a kind of hyper-attenuation to the body, for examples, should be included within its semantic folds. This wayward practice – how it opens up new kinds of temporal forms – might be a life-line for those who are not meant to survive the ordinary, who are forced to live wretched forms of sociality that always-already generate scenes of premature death.

For Lauren Berlant, "slow death" refers to "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence." As an effect of capitalist histories of violence and alienation, effects that are felt "at an extreme and in a zone of ordinariness," slow death renders life-building and "the attrition of human life" indistinguishable such that persistence looks a lot like dying and vice versa. Writing

against a genealogy of political theorists who elevate sovereignty to the domain of the eventful and the juridical, Berlant points to those scenes of living through in which mere existence is itself tiring, the product of forms of sovereignty that work on the body of a people day in and day out.[48] These are bodies that do not die spectacularly; instead they succumb to illnesses, stressors, and wounds that have accumulated over time. In my formulation, self-care and masturbation (as one of its practices) do not completely halt the work of slow death. Instead, self-care not only makes life liveable in moments when the wear and tear of the ordinary is especially taxing, but also reduces the severity of attrition's toll such that we might be able to attack its sources: the sexual politics of settler colonialism. To take time for ourselves – to masturbate – might mean to hold out for a future – to wait and not become undone by that waiting – in which we can live and love in ways that do not stand in opposition to the modes of living through we have painfully inherited.

Toward a Politics of Sex Toys

> Today I masturbated with the lights on and this was a victory. No longer leaving the lights off pretending there was someone else there to justify this. I am damn good in bed. That fact does not change just because you are not there to be good for. Every arch, toe twitch, and curl is just as much a dance when I am alone. This is the one-woman show, rehearsal with no opening night needed, no audience necessary for me to applaud.
>
> - Anna Binkovitz[49]

For Binkovitz, masturbation evidences a kind of feminist politics: a way of refusing the patriarchal forms that monogamous sex and relationships repeatedly take. It is a victory of sorts: to want your body in a world that tells you not to love it – in one that shores up femininity and femaleness as geographies of patriarchal violence, as radically narrowed signs in an economy of desire inside which some bodies more than others will be locked in the space of

objecthood – is an act of resistance. Here, masturbation finds its conditions of possibility in the solitary: "this is the one-woman show," one that doesn't need to be justified by the presence of someone else, to use Binkovitz' language. For her, it is a dance with the self.

A politics of masturbation is not only about being with or loving your own insurgent body, but also about wanting or desiring it; a kind of erotic encounter whereby you become both the subject and object of sex. If settler colonialism does its work on a national body and the peoples not entirely its own, those for whom the incorporation into citizenship doubled as the moment of political decay, then the body – both social and literal – is a geography of anxiety, collecting the negative emotions of those for whom sovereignty rests either on that body's surveillance and unabated continuity or on its breakages. For settler states to build nations atop older ones, the bodies of Indigenous peoples – particularly Indigenous women – had to be rendered violable, to evoke Andrea Smith's formulation, bodies that are made up for grabs by the colonizers who would do the construction project that is settler colonialism. For Smith, this works not only in the domain of the law – whereby the dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples doubles as the settler state's sovereign right to live and govern on the territory it names as its own – but also corporeally and psychologically such that 1) Indigenous women will repeatedly live in the face of or die in the wake of sexual violence; and 2) the bodies of Indigenous peoples become stubborn reminders of our ontological lack, sites of our own hatred and disgust. [50] In Rachel Flowers' reading of Lee Maracle, the bodies of Indigenous women are absolutely entangled in our forms of political will; to be in a body as an Indigenous woman is to take command of "the sacred right of choice."[51]

Some – namely, Indigenous women and queer Indigenous peoples – are not only locked in the pre-colonial past as relics of an ancient order we might never get back, but are also made to live in the present only insofar as our dying signifies the ongoingness of the settler state as such. Our bodies, the obdurate traces of a governmental enterprise that desired and still desires our obliteration, point to other social worlds, always conjuring up a future in which settler states cannot politick in the murderous ways constitutive of the historical present. Which is to say that settler colonialism works, in part, by making Indigenous bodies into bodies that are always-already dying. Binkovitz' epigraph hints at what it might mean to be in a worn-out body such that it feels like it belongs to you, a body not of or for a stubborn male or colonial gaze, but one that reminds you that you are not "the negative space" whose occupying evidences someone else's existence.[52] Sex, always to be done with an other, an other for whom the bodies of women or queers or Indigenous peoples is the site of a hard fought Hegelian struggle,[53] is a lopsided encounter whereby some and not others remain stunted in the non-ontological state of object. We need to imagine new forms of sexual life, ones that double as the event of our flourishing and not our undoing.

In particular, what might it mean if sex toys generated scenes of intimacy within which life could be lived otherwise? In the infamous opening sequence of Joel Gallen's *Not Another Teen Movie* (2001), Laney Boggs (Chyler Leigh) pulls out a bedazzled vibrator from underneath her pillow. Glued to her television, watching what looks like a romantic moment between a heterosexual couple, Laney, with hyperbolic mannerisms, begins masturbating shortly before her family members enter her bedroom to celebrate her birthday. The viewers, attuned to the vibrator's humming, know that something will go awry. Soon, a priest joins the group, and

suddenly the family dog pulls the blanket off of Laney and her vibrator gets launched into the air, falling directly onto her birthday cake. Icing, standing in for vaginal ejaculate, gets splattered everywhere, including onto the faces of the grandparents and the priest, a splattering that not only satires the shame with which publics make sense of masturbation, but also the way it signifies in opposition to the sacred.

In "On Treating Things as People," Jennifer M. Saul tracks the vibrator's medicinal history: introduced in the late-nineteenth century as a labour-saving method for preventing what was then called hysteria in unmarried women, vibrators were used to induce a "hysterical paroxysm" – or orgasm – which would then allow the woman to feel "much better." As such, the vibrator was, for a brief period, "a perfectly respectable household device." Then, in the 1920s, Saul notes, vibrators started appearing in pornography and, in this, were given staunchly sexual meaning. For Saul, this history offers a clear example of the use of a thing – a vibrator – as a synecdoche to stand in for or fulfill the function of a person – a person with a penis or midwives and doctors.[54] While Saul limits her argument to women who used vibrators to elicit orgasm instead of turning to doctors for assistance, I suspect that this turn to the vibrator-cum-person makes up at least one popular conceptualization of the vibrator. In *Not Another Teen Movie*, for example, Laney's vibrator marks her nascent sexuality, attached to an object that stands in for the male actor on the television. Later, having been made into a sex object worthy of the star football player's desires, Laney becomes deeply allo-sexual; the vibrator does not appear again. What Saul and *Not Another Teen Movie* point to is how sex toys – particularly dildos and vibrators – become objects, for the normative public, that women attach to in ways that are cruelly optimistic, to evoke Lauren Berlant's term: they attach to sex toys because they

provide immediate sexual gratification, but this attaching is also the moment at which the good life is put further outside arm's reach; the good life being a heterosexual coupling whereby the husband's penis becomes the source of one's flourishing.[55]

The sex toy, like all objects we attach to, is semantically open; but its knowability is oftentimes contingent upon a psychoanalytic reading of sorts that glues it to the phallus.[56] It is my contention that sex toys are thus not mere replicas of the penis or objects that register its lack, but, instead, are vehicles for world-building in the event of masturbation. Masturbation via sex toys is not merely about quickened orgasm, but a kind of joint kinship between human and the mechanic or the synthetic, a mode of being with the non-human that evidences a potent fusion, if only temporally, that throws us into a web of otherworldly entanglements. This kind of unity is monstrous and illegitimate, to use Haraway's language, one that makes the boundary between the physical and non-physical stubbornly imprecise, instantiating something of a boundary crossing we might want to explore as part of our decolonial work.[57] Like the cyborg about which Haraway writes, I think the masturbatory body, armed with a dildo or vibrator, is "a kind of disassembled and reassembled" self, one that troubles sex's anthropogenic desires.[58] This not only hints at ways of being in this world that are not tightly mediated by settler colonialism's death-grip on the bodies of Indigenous peoples, but also demands we think harder about what the political work of decolonization looks and feels like in the bedroom. Decolonization, as Tiffany Lethabo King puts it, is a messy process that not only requires that we are unmoored by "the idea of living in a way that requires mass death," but also a departure from the modes of thinking, feeling, and desiring that keep us stuck in the deeply colonial present.[59] It is a teleology of the elsewhere whereby new strategies for survival

and wanting replace the ones we have inherited in a world bent on our disappearance, literally and juridically.

We might turn to the thingly, then, to conjure up this kind of political transformation. Note Jane Bennett's claim that things are recalcitrant, that they feature a negative power of sorts whereby their absence is felt as a resistant force. Bennett calls this "thing-power": the ways things not only escape human knowledge or modes of perception, but also the thing's independence from subjectivity, a power, she insists, that *must be there* because things have the capacity to affect bodies for better or for worse. This is something of "an earthy, not-quite-human capaciousness" that absolves matter "from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism."[60] I would say that sex toys are thus but one character in Bennett's "onto-story," our interactions with which evidence "the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other."[61]

In fact, we might say that the vibrator is an anarchic object. Like the willful child about whom Sara Ahmed writes, the arm is resistant, attached to the vibrator to conjure up new forms of erotic life. Note the animacy of Laney's bedazzled vibrator in *Not Another Teen Movie*: it is as if the vibrator were sentient, wildly buzzing and then momentarily responding appropriately to Laney's hushes. One could ask why Laney did not quickly turn off her vibrator when her father entered the room, but perhaps the vibrator refuses to be turned off. Its buzzing engulfs the space inside and outside the frame, demanding to be heard. It is as if it launched itself into the air. For Sara Ahmed, a willful object is one "that does not allow a subject to carry a will;" a means "that demand to be ends rather then means to an end."[62] An anarchic objects is thus one that not only ratchets up its own kind of agency, but also resists the

meanings we give them. Laney's vibrator, interrupted from doing its work, rebels, and, in this, prevents its subject (Laney) from maintaining a normative sexual identity. It calls attention to itself, coming alive and, in this, becoming more than just an object. We not only use it, but it intervenes into our worlds too. To say that things like sex toys disrupt the world's continuity is to abandon the anthropogenic episteme – which rests on what Mel Chen calls an "animate hierarchy"[63] – from which not only the humanities and social sciences emerge, but also the ontological limits of the human as such.

A vibrator vibrating or a dildo pushing against the walls of the anus or the vagina is an absolutely affective mess; a queer point of contact characterized by an infinite combination of size, pressure, and sometimes tone, a site of arousal both autonomic and mechanical in form. This is an encounter that not only "challenges the normative dimensions of bodily boundaries,"[64] but also the otherwise conservative fantasy that things and bodies never mix into each other. The sex toy not only leaves its trace on and in our bodies – traces that are both material and metaphysical – but also us on it, including but not limited to our anal fluids, feces, urine, and vaginal discharge. Where we end and it begins is a question we cannot successfully answer; the "we" and "it" merge and diverge in ways that the senses cannot record or study. In these moments we are not more-than-human, but something else: sometimes cyborgic, sometimes inorganic, but always nonhuman. We might think of this state of something-else-ness through the language of assemblage; for Jasbir Puar, "assemblages do not privilege bodies as human, nor residing within a human animal/nonhuman animal binary." Instead, they point to forms of earthly life that extend beyond the skin, ones in which becoming is open-ended – anything can happen.[65] Sex toys thus take us out of the anthropogenic worlds we have been

forced to think are the only geographies in which life can be lived; sometimes to an extreme – think of those instances in which the body goes into chaos and destroys itself because a dildo became lodged inside it. Which is again to say that sex toys are absolutely anarchic: not only do they resist the meanings we give them – as means to an ends, as stand ins for the phallus, as last-ditch efforts to experience orgasm – but they also erode the onto-existential boundaries within which the human emerges, instantiating an erotic that promises to take us elsewhere.

What might the sex toy's world-shattering potential mean for subjects for whom humanness has been the ideality we could never fully enflesh? How might this other-than-humanness brings about scenes of living that could keep us in this world? What if we dispersed the negative affects that masturbation and sex toys are thought to be suffocated by and instead think about them through the language of survival and worlding? These forms of auto-sexuality open up moments in which bodies meant to stay put or inert – bodies meant to be of and for an other – can feel and love and orgasm by and for themselves. Bodies that masturbate – bodies that are otherwise non-normative, or too queer or native to be held up by the world – are never neutral ones. Dildos and vibrators have stories to tell us about how those not meant to live life here are nonetheless doing it in raunchy and sexy ways.

Conclusion: Going Non-Sovereign

"I'm going to talk about it because EVERYBODY does it. And EVERYBODY loves it." This is Junior, the fourteen-year-old protagonist of Sherman Alexie's fictional novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, confessing, speaking about, and publicizing his love of masturbation.[66] I would say that it is not coincidental that Junior tethers masturbation to love and, indeed, to survival in a world in which he lives in the face of alcoholism, abject poverty, bullying, and other

forms of colonial violence. Junior points out, like The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, that most people masturbate at some point in their lives and that others do it every day.[67] Like Junior, I know there is more to the story. My turn to historical and to contemporary renderings of masturbation – as a sex act that is not really one, as a practice subject to institutional surveillance, as one to be disavowed or laughed at, and as one that attracts willful subjects – brings an aporia of sorts into focus: masturbation, though profoundly ordinary, is still too semantically promiscuous to safely attach to the ordinary. Perhaps we still do not know what to do with masturbation.

In this paper, I have argued that masturbation not only shores up a particular kind of ethicality – one that wants to repair broken and breaking bodies, bodies damaged vis-à-vis centuries of colonial trauma – but that it also coheres under the political sign of decolonial love. There is a figure of sorts materializing here: an Indigenous body – a body not meant to be here, in this colonial space-time – is wielding a vibrator (perhaps a bedazzled one) in the name of a different kind of erotic life, in the name of self-care, and in the name of love. This is a body that has left (but was never a part of) the narrow space of the human, a geography within which life is only livable for some – a juridical and whitened 'some.' Venturing into the domain of the other-than-human, into the cyborgic and queer, this figure is building new worlds out of erotic scraps. Like love, masturbation holds the potentiality to destroy and generate futures.

For Lauren Berlant, love is one of those rare places "where people actually admit they want to become different," a place where change happens without trauma, but not without instability and the not-knowing-ness constitutive of "entering into relationality." What might it mean if masturbation evidenced a lovingness, something of a bond or kinship with the body

that also, momentarily, makes you not know about your relation to temporality? Berlant writes: "The thing I like about love as a concept for the possibility of the social, is that love always means non-sovereignty. Love is always about violating your own attachment to your intentionality."[68] I would say that masturbation opens up this metaphysical space within which sovereignties are abandoned, sovereignties tied to the fantasy of the obdurate human subject, and ones that presuppose we know what we are getting into when we have sex or turn to the erotic. Like Junior, we might love to masturbate, but this is always-already about loss – about losing mythic forms of sovereignty and its human and about losing the worlds to which we have been tethered. Writing about heartbreak and grief, Zoe Todd (Métis) opines: "Sometimes, when your ancestors are all too familiar with loss, it may seem like these little losses are too much to bear."[69] Decolonial love might be about being with loss in ways that do not wholly undo us, in ways that orient us to a future that promises to keep all of us vis-à-vis the possibility of change in the name of other forms of affective life.

Like Lauren Berlant, I am more invested in thinking about "collective life as a problem of survival,"[70] than with thinking about Indigenous peoples as resurgent subjects when death is oftentimes the ghost that structures our ordinaries. I am not interested in living life in a political we have built such that the revolution appears as if it were within arm's reach; some of us are still trying to protect our attachment to life itself. The worlds we want are not congruent with the lives we live. We need to know how we can keep ourselves in this world despite knowing that it did not want us to begin with. We need to hold out enough hope to dream up an elsewhere. Perhaps a masturbatory ethics can get us there.

NOTES

[1] Alexa Lesperance, "azhegiiwe giiyaw// return to the body," *Zhaabwii (Survive)*, February 11, 2016, http://zhaabwii.blogspot.ca/2016/02/azhegiiwe-giiyaw-return-to-body.html.
[2] Ibid.
[3] José Muñoz cited in Lauren Berlant, "On Persistence," *Social Text* 32, no. 4 (2014): 36.
[4] Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2013): 85.
[5] Karyn Recollet, "For Sisters," in *Me Artsy: An Exploration of Contemporary Native Arts*, ed. Drew Hayden Taylor (Madeira Park: Douglas & McIntyre, 2013): 103-104.
[6] José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 1.
[7] But, it does not reify the neoliberal fantasy that oppressed peoples can love themselves out of structural oppression; rather, decolonial love is but one part of a larger insurgent struggle
[8] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
[9] See "Feminisms in the Digital Age Roundtable," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ghxvw9WKo_s.
[10] Recollet, "For Sisters," 103.
[11] I am aware of the corporeal and identitarian limits to this argument, that some just don't like sex, autoerotic or otherwise, that it doesn't work for them and never will. My paper, however, wants to widen the sexual, to bring into focus the less spectacular ways we take care of or get off through our bodies.
[12] See Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Robyn Wiegman, "What is the Subject of Women's Studies? The Possibility of Women's Studies"; and Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For Lauren Berlant's work on the good life, see *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[13] See Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[14] Muńoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65.
[15] I am thus indebted to the work of Mel Chen, whose *Animacies* meticulously parses out the humanist divide between animate and inanimate that blocks us from attending to the ways the cultural fails to tether only to the human. Hers are also theses that call attention to the ontological gimmicks through which raced, gendered, and queered technologies of violence unevenly dispossess some more than others of life in order to demarcate the limits of the human as such. Likewise, Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* is similarly as important here insofar as her thesis – that the world is parsed into "dull matter" and "vibrant life," thus stalling what she calls "vibrant materiality" from entering the political – gets at the epistemic pitfalls of ignoring the dull, of quarantining it from our academic curiosities. This paper therefore doesn't reify a humanist enterprise bent on privileging the human as an object and, as such, evokes non-human life or things as peripheral sites of study, ones that might give us insights into our anthropogenic world.
[16] Ashley Dawson, "Radical Materialism Introduction," *Social Text*, March 8, 2015, http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/radical-materialism-introduction/.

[17] See Robin James, "Hello From the Same Side," *The New Inquiry*, December 28, 2015, http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/hello-from-the-same-side/.
[18] Thomas W. Laqueuer, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003): 13.
[19] Ibid., 13-16.
[20] Sara Ahmed, *The Willful Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 1-2.
[21] Ibid., 3.
[22] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 178-179.
[23] Laqueuer, *Solitary Sex*, 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] It is, however, important to note that Laqueuer's referents – the European and cisgender male and female – do not share the same kind of intellectual purchase in this paper. I am, of course, thinking about the Indigenous body that masturbates.
[26] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000): 47-48.
[27] Based on the 2008 novel of the same name by John Green.
[28] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpCfLcMTebY.
[29] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnrUMfZjipw.
[30] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmXLeytgV54.
[31] See Berlant, "Interview with Lauren Berlant."
[32] Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warefare: Fragility, Militancy, and Audre Lorde's Legacy," Kent University, December 10, 2015, https://player.kent.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=9232575d-61dc-48de-8c4e-5e07b6a3a9d5.
[33] Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," accessed https://frankroberts.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/audrelordepoems.pdf.
[34] Audre Lorde, "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007): 46.
[35] Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare," *feministkilljoys*, August 25, 2014, http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/.
[36] Ahmed, "Self-Care as Warfare: Fragility, Militancy and Audre Lorde's Legacies."
[37] Sara Ahmed, 'Fragility," *feministkilljoys*, June 14, 2014, http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/06/14/fragility/.
[38] Ahmed, "Self-Care as Warfare: Fragility, Militancy, and Audre Lorde's Legacies."
[39] See Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space* 29, no. 3 (2011): 446.
[40] Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 32-33.
[41] Rose cited in Holmer Nadesan, *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life*, 33.
[42] Holmer Nadesan, *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life*, 33.
[43] See, for example, Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Violence), *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 756.

[44] See Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[45] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1999): 45.
[46] Ibid., 75; 45.
[47] See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[48] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011):95-96.
[49] Anna Binkovitz, "Masturbation," Button Poetry, YouTube video, June 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc2wSV8FyTI.
[50] Andrea Smith, *Conquest*: *Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005): 12.
[51] Rachel Flowers, "Refusal to forgive: Indigenous women's love and rage," *Decolonization: Indigenous, Education, & Society* 4, no. 2 (2015): 41.
[52] Binkovitz, "Masturbation."
[53] I suspect, à la Hegel, that scenes of sex are always about a kind of recognizing whereby the self is instantiated through the other, but that this becomes distorted when the bodies of women, queers, and Indigenous peoples are stunted in a non-ontological state of object whereby the other – a white male, for example – recognizes himself in the object-ness of the other.
[54] Jennifer M. Saul, "On Treating Things as People: Objectification, Pornography, and the History of the Vibrator," *Hypatia* 21, no.2 (2006): 51-53.
[55] This is, of course, a bit of a misreading of Berlant. She is concerned with those objects we attach to because we think we need them to survive the now, objects that are nonetheless damaging to us. In this formulation, heterosexual marriage might be a cruel object for many. I'm thinking instead about forms of cruel optimism that happen in the space of the normative such that our attachments disrupt or divert us from it. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.
[56] See, for example, June L. Reich, "Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo," *Discourse* 15, no. 1 (1992).
[57] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 2007): 318-319.
[58] Ibid., 326.
[59] Tiffany Lethabo King, "Interview with Dr. Tiffany Lethabo King," *Feral Feminisms* 4 (2015): 65.
[60] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2-3.
[61] Ibid., 4.
[62] Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 42.
[63] Chen, *Animacies*, 12.
[64] Krista Geneviève Lynes, "Object Attachments: The Indexical Form in Feminist Art," *Brooklyn Rail*, September 4, 2014, http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/09/criticspage/object-attachments.
[65] Jasbir Puar, "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *PhiloSOPHIA: A Journal of Feminist Philosphy* 2.1 (2012): 56; 60.
[66] Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007): 26.

[67] Statistics – How Common is Masturbation Among Males and Females," The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, *SexualityandU.ca*, accessed December 27, 2015, http://www.sexualityandu.ca/sexual-health/what_is_masturbation/statistics.
[68] Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, "No One is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt, http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/.
[69] Zoe Todd, "loss and movement," *Urbane Adventurer: Amiskwacî*, May 18, 2013, https://zoeandthecity.wordpress.com/2013/05/18/loss-and-movement/.
[70] Lauren Berlant, "Interview with Lauren Berlant," *Society & Space*, http://societyandspace.com/material/interviews/interview-with-lauren-berlant/.