



feral feminisms

Autistic A/Genders,
A/Sexualities, and A/Socialities

issue 17 · spring 2026

We Who Are Not Innocent: On Autistic Girlhood, Sexuality, and Worlding

Cara-Julie Kather

This piece moves in trans-genre ways to explore the common attribution of “innocence” to autistic women. This work forms an autotheoretical exploration and writes a poem throughout the piece. Innocence, this piece argues, is a label applied to autistic women because their modes of being in the world are unrecognized by systemically common standards. This label of innocence relates to how perception and sexuality interrelate in general and how autistic women may experience sexuality in a neurotypical world on different grounds—with different risks and possibilities—than allistics do.

Content Warning: While this is not a text about sexual violence, there are two parts that take up the topic: “The Worthiness of Innocence” and “Fantasies of Violating Innocence.” There are no graphic depictions of violence, but there is a first-person narrative on experiencing sexual violence continuously throughout one’s life.

Tales of Innocence

How does it taste
to be
unrecognized

Two contrasting tendencies appear within the discourses around Asian diasporic femininities: Knowing myself to be autistic, getting to know my very own shades of being-autistic and how they have always already moved through my life is a journey, a traveling. This travel departs at the station where I recognize the intensity of the masculine code embedded in common understandings of being-autistic.

So, the “I” that is speaking here is one instance of the “we” of autistic-woman-beings: Both the “I” and the “we” are beings of radical difference, the radical difference of diverging from the scripts of the neurotypical man. And diverging from the masculine-coded scripts of being-autistic too. So, the autistic-woman-being is a being of radical difference in relation to the interwovenness of neurotype and gender.

It is my recognition of the depth of masculine codes in understandings of being-autistic that makes me realize I have to travel to the places where I can meet more modes of being autistic than those prescribed by the masculine scripts. So, I travel to meet with one of my favorite genres of texts: lists. I meet lists of “autistic traits in women,” often authored by other autistic-woman-beings.¹ And what I will meet in each one is the word “innocence” as a description of how autistic-woman-beings might be perceived or feel.



Innocence tastes salty, warm, and very familiar. So, this text is a report of sorts on my journey through the notion of *innocence*. This journeying is not a merely autobiographical endeavor, but rather it is an encounter with phallogocentric scripts of innocence, with different flavors of violence, and with the multitudes of being-touching and being-touched, the multitudes of being-in relation. Journeying innocence is a deeply political endeavor; it is an encounter, an event that is personal-political-theoretical-artful. It is never only one of the four, but always all of them together.

In encountering the word *innocence*, I encounter dating experiences, compliments of men – compliments on “seeming innocent.” As I recall this distinctly masculine interest in my alleged innocence, I attempt to feel-with this notion in a way not authored by those men, by their compliments, their interest, their words. Maybe I have felt innocent, naïve even in my tendency to read words literally, in my nonknowing about the social codes to “inviting someone upstairs” or in my nonknowing about how bedrooms to many people are not simply “one of the rooms” of a house. And still, I cannot shake the many men who have authored the idea of innocence when I encounter the word. I cannot quite shake the sexual undertones of the notions and of those compliments that I keep re-meeting on my journey.

I think *innocence* only seems like a word, but really it is a tale. A tale of womanhood, a tale of sex, a tale of a male fantasy and a tale of a body that goes untouched and untouching.

I dreamed of
words
but they will only
feed me
tales

Tales of Creatures Untouched

How
was I to know
that those
babies
are me?

When meeting the word *innocence* one is meeting a tale: a tale of a creature untouched. It seems *touch* and the *absence of touch* are part of the fabric of the tales of innocence, of the lives those tales live. So, the creature of innocence, the autistic-woman-being is named the *untouched* when she is named the innocent—untouched by the world, untouched by man, untouched by how the bedroom is apparently not just a room. *Innocence* is the tale of a creature *untouched* and *untouching*: for being untouched is to be untouching too because the two are interwoven. Touching is a continuum of passivity and activity, and if you are not touched, you cannot yourself touch. So, she who is named the innocent, inhabits what the tales of innocence make into a *nonrelation*.

How was I to know not knowing the dances of the neurotypical man makes me *untouched*, *innocent*, makes me a story of the man once more?

Those tales of innocence come in a spider web with other tales, for tales are creatures of entanglement. I travel the web, and I find the tale of the autistic being as the being *detached*



from the world: the tale of the autistic being as a solitary creature, living untouched by others and the world.

It is this tale of being-autistic as being-untouched that meets *woman* in the web and then the tales of *innocence* are made. The autistic-woman-being is named the innocent because her touch is not the touch prescribed by the scripts of the neurotypical man. How she touches the world and others and herself is unaccounted for and yet she lives and touches—differently. The tale of innocence displaces her touch, takes it from her by negating it ever existed, and gives her a place in the phallogocentric orders of sex.

How was I to know speaking with the winds does not count as touching the world?

How
was I to know
I'd never
been touched?

Relations to the World

I am
feeding the world
with the
honey
I can find

I am a little numb as I stumble out of the web. It seems many men live in the web and many men live in the tales of innocence. And I suppose woman lives there too, but she is never heard as loud as he is—there are tales that make sure of that!

I make my heart nestle against the blue of my apartment walls as I begin speaking to the icicles that make their way from the roof towards the street. They tell me all their stories, and I hear them out, my heart stretched out from the blue walls towards the tip of the roof across the street, my mind curled up against the spine of the longest icicle. The icicles touch me as I touch them and it is a touching of the world, a relation with the world never to be witnessed by the scripts of the neurotypical man.

After getting off the web, one requires rest. And so, I rest so that I can find the next stop of my travel, so that I can recall the guide of my journey. I travel to other autistic-woman-beings. It is a long travel for they live far beneath the web and widely across the web. They have written themselves diagonally across the web and into their very own worlds.

The tales of innocence turn the autistic-woman-being into a creature in nonrelation with the world. The scripts of these tales, the meanings of innocence and the tales authored by the neurotypical man cannot quite recognize the relations to the world that autistic-woman-beings fashion. So, the tales of innocence do what tales authored by the man tend to do: They negate the relations and the ways of relating they do not know how to recognize. They fashion the label of innocence to give an aura of eroticism to the relations they have just turned into nonrelations—and so the tales of innocence are fashioned as the tales employed to tell the autistic-woman-being, to tell her stories, her bodies, and her non-/relations.



I am
telling bedtime stories
to the
icicles

Histories of Touching

Who
authored all those
stories
about all the
touches?

The tales of innocence are tales of touching. They fashion what is counted as touch and they fashion what is counted as nontouch. I would ask who authored all those stories about what touching is, but I feel I know the answer as well as I know my own bones and as anciently as I know many things.

The tales of innocence have sculpted the histories of touching. My sisters and I have always written across the scripts those tales have offered, have always carefully and lovingly *touched* the margins and the edges of the man-made stories.

How were we to know the touching of those stories is not counted by man? After all, it is the touching that we always do already. Our touching bears the histories that exceed the tales of innocence and the scripts of touch authored by the neurotypical man. I close my eyes as I touch the icicles and rest and rest—and rest, because it is rest that makes us remember all the histories of all the touching.

How
was I to know
that
speaking
with the icicles
is unaccounted for?

The Worthiness of Innocence

They have
placed me on a
pedestal
hemmed with
glass

The place of the innocent woman is the place of the woman worthy by an account never hers to make and never hers to choose. The innocent woman is the woman that lives in the terrarium to be watched over by man. She is the woman that was counted as untouched because her touching is unaccounted for.



Hélène Cixous writes that in the phallogentric world woman “always occupies the place of the guilty” (1976, 880). In encountering the tales of innocence, I wonder if the place occupied by the autistic-woman-being is always the innocent and always the guilty. She is never knowing and yet she always is. She is the “manipulative woman,” the spiteful one and the “innocent girl.” She is written into existence by the neurotypical man through the simultaneity of both narratives—through the world in which he chooses one of those two narratives for her. Because the woman whose relations are unaccounted for will be counted as operating in secret (vengefully) or as not operating at all, as being the shy-innocent being behind the glass.

The tales of innocence are worthy to the neurotypical man because he gets to tell them, and he gets to change them. The *innocent woman* is worthy because he can fantasize about touching her. The worthiness of innocence always lies in his power to break the *innocence*. The scripts of innocence are the scripts of phallogentric violence that are the scripts of neurotypical violence too. People classified as “innocent” might also experience being taken advantage of partly or solely because the perpetrator considers himself safe, because of her presumed innocence, because he believes himself safe in taking advantage, because “she will not know.” I do believe this sort of logic is part of the patriarchal appeal of innocence and attributing innocence to someone. However, this essay-poem is invested in how the phallogentric authorship of *innocence* is a) shaped through the interwovenness of masculinity and neurotypicality and b) comes with phallogentric eroticism that is the what I understand as “the eroticism of narrative control” – a sexual air that lies in having a man-authored narrative control over the situation.

The glass
is
a creature
of many many
counting
eyes

Fantasies of Violating Innocence

His
finger traces
me
as if to
map
a territory

I am still being sheltered by the blue walls as my mind travels back to those “compliments of innocence” that I have encountered. I remember the look of intrigue with which this name of the innocent woman was given to me—as if it were a gift to be found innocent, and to be found intriguing. I remember the sexual nature of those words, which was so heavy even I could recognize it despite not yet knowing about the bedrooms being different rooms and about the man-made scripts in inviting someone home.

I cannot quite recall how many of those men who gifted the name of innocence to me had later touched me against my will. I know it was many of them, maybe all. Maybe my blue walls keep me from remembering the number. Maybe my blue walls summon me to stop



counting and to start feeling. I tell them how it is one of the movements integral to my living that I feel all those unwanted hands again, that I see the faces of the men bestowing innocence and taking it away, that I relive and recall how hands and eyes and words have traced my body. I tell it to the blue walls that I try to always remember and always forget all the different parts of bodies that entered mine against my will. I keep forgetting and I keep remembering what I said and did not say how I moved and did not move. I tell it to the blue walls that I am stunned by the number of unwanted fingers inside of me without recalling the number. My walls do not answer for what is there to say? But they are still very blue and still right here—around me, enveloping me as I travel without moving.

My lips
are sealed
My fate
is too
His hand
inside of me

Touching Perception

I summon
the honey
I summon
the blue

Many hours pass before my blue wall taps on my shoulders. I count the hairs of my cat as I am slowly coming back, as I make my way back into those bodies of mine that do not host unwanted fingers. Those bodies of mine that only host my cat in my lap and the arms of friends and blue walls and icicles.

I get lost in the blue wall and in the glimmer of the icicles. I remember how a string of intense, clear, bright sunlight would fall into the bedroom of my old apartment. I remember how my eyes would settle on this string of lights in those months I did not know how to live because yet another man had entered everything. Then I entered the string of sunlight, and I still can, even now.

I am touching my worlds as I bring myself back. I travel my apartment, and I travel myself. I can feel myself touching the world in all of my ways. I can feel myself being enveloped by the sun and by my blue wall and the icicles sing to me as my cat teaches me to sleep.

I see
the icicles
I see
the ghosts



Touching Bodies

It
might just
make the news
 a hand
 was
 bitten off
 by icicles

I learn to touch myself. I teach the icicles to bite because my throats are sore from screaming. I write to some of the men with unwanted hands. Many of them turn to tales of craziness after my writing. But I know how to breathe because my worlds have taught me, and because I am still talking to my walls, and I am still learning to write.

I love the touching of bodies. Yet, as with my touching of the world and the ways my perception touches—my touching of bodies too is largely unaccounted for. But I do not mind reinventing sex, and I do not mind reinventing consenting and speaking too.

I trace
my bodies
I sing
them to
sleep

Touching the World

I am
a
little
yellow buzz

I travel deeper into my ways of touching my worlds, into my practice of touching where there is no separation between *body* and *world*. This is the touching of radical difference for it is the touching of radical relationality: The touching that is not an act of putting body one on body two, but the touching that is a devotion to being a being-in-relation. It is this touching that makes my blue walls hug me, that makes me speak to the icicles, and that makes me dream of blouses being unbuttoned as an event in itself. Because touching is the event and in the sexuality of radical relationality the touch is the event that is always already there and that is being creatively and lovingly shape-shifted together.

The phallogocentric scripts of touching are about power while the touching of radical difference is about the relationship with the touching itself.

I do not meet the words of innocence, and I do not meet any tales. I only meet my touching, and I find that I have always known how to touch the world, how to be in-touch and touched by the world. From speaking with the winds on the swings to summoning the icicles now, I have always known.



I am
the longest
icicle

Worlding

I am
looking for
the time
that bears the
air
that I can
breathe
and chew

I travel deeper into my worlds—those worlds that come into existence as I come into existence, that come alive under my ways of touching and knowing and perceiving. Making the world you inhabit by your ways of relating to the world is what I have come to name *worlding*: a practice of being touched by and touching the world, a practice of accounting for body and world in relation.

My touching is the practice that makes my many worlds: as I speak to the icicles, I touch the world and make it; as my cat teaches me to speak, we make a world; and as I feel the relations I am living, might be living, will be living, and have lived, all the worlds are emerging. The phallogocentric world makes a world of scripts authored by the neurotypical man. But the worlding of the autistic-woman-being is the worlding of relationality, the world-making of touching by being-in-touch in a continuous, shape-shifting movement that loves the relationality of body and world and world and world and body and body.

I have never slept but my worlds are teaching me; I have never taken a breath, but my blues are teaching me.

I am
making a book
of
leaves and
tastes

We, Who Are Not Innocent

I recall
the stories
of
my trees
and mothers

My body is moved from all the travel, from encountering my being autistic. I have met the many tales of innocence, and I am meeting my touching.



The innocent woman is the harmless woman; this is what the scripts of the neurotypical man will speak. Little do they know that I know all the worlds and they know me. Little do they know I taught the icicles to bite, and they taught me to rest. Little do they know of all the touching and the screaming that is lived diagonally across their tales and names.

Dear man, you can think me innocent, for it will only be to your surprise. You will need to travel through all your many tales, and they will never make you touch the world when the only touch you know is authorship and we, autistic-woman-beings, have always known all the ways to touch and to be touched.

I always knew
an icicle could
bite.

Icicles and Yellows, a Poem

How does it taste
to be
unrecognized

I dreamed of
words
but they will only
feed me
tales

How
was I to know
that those
babies
are me?

How
was I to know
I'd never
been touched?

I am
feeding the world
with the
honey
I can find

I am
telling bedtime stories
to the
icicles



Who
authored all those
stories
about all the
touches?

How
was I to know
that
speaking
with the icicles
is unaccounted for?

They have
placed me on a
pedestal
hemmed with
glass

The glass
is
a creature
of many many
counting
eyes

His
finger traces
me
as if to
map
a territory

My lips
are sealed
My fate
is too
His hand
inside of me

I summon
the honey
I summon
the blue

I see



the icicles
I see
the ghosts

It
might just
make the news
- a hand
was
bitten off
by icicles

I trace
my bodies
I sing
them to
sleep

I am
a
little
yellow buzz

I am
the longest
icicle

I am
looking for
the time
that bears the
air
that I can
breathe
and chew

I am
making a book
of
leaves and
tastes

I recall
the stories
of
my trees
and mothers



I always knew
an icicle could
bite.

Notes

1. The terms *man* and *woman* are not employed as a gender-binarism but rather as names for how beings are personed—made a person—in relation to masculinity and femininity. The figure of *the neurotypical man* seeks to emphasize the interwovenness of neurotypicality and masculinity as socio-political figure. The neurotypical man is the alleged “normal human” and the figure of the *autistic-woman-being* marks a place of radical difference, of immense and blooming difference.

Note about References

This poem-essay came into existence differently than I planned, as writing often does: I had a more conventional air of theory in mind, but it did not seem this writing wants to be conventional theory—maybe it wants to be theory of worlding, theory that stays a little in the unaccounted-for. Still, many theories and works do move through these lines and verses and thoughts—they are just not referenced in a conventional manner. And yet, they exist in this text, so you will find them here.

Works Cited

- Ayase, Maru. 2023. *The Forest Brims Over*. Counterpoint.
- Cixous, Hélène, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen. 1976. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (4): 875–93.
- Cixous, Hélène. 1991. *“Coming to Writing” and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press.
- Fawn Montgomery, Sarah. 2018. *Quite Mad: An American Pharma Memoir*. Mad Creek Books.
- Flax, Jane. 2013. “The End of Innocence.” In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott. Routledge.
- Maltz, Wendy. 2012. *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*. William Morrow.
- Manning, Erin. 2006. *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Manning, Erin. 2013. *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance*. Duke University Press.
- Manning, Erin. 2016. *The Minor Gesture*. Duke University Press.
- Manning, Erin. 2019. *The Perfect Mango*. Punctum Books.



- Manning, Erin. 2020. *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. Duke University Press.
- Meiners, Erica, and Jessi Lee Jackson. "Innocence." 2023. In *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies Volume 2*, edited by Catherine M. Orr and Ann Braithwaite. Routledge.
- Miller, Jean Kearns. 2003. *Women from Another Planet?: Our Lives in the Universe of Autism*. AuthorHouse.
- Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. 2022. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Little Brown.
- Price, Devon. 2022. *Unmasking Autism: Discovering the New Faces of Neurodiversity*. Harmony.
- Yergeau, M. Remi. 2018. *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*. Duke University Press.

CARA-JULIE KATHER is a feminist theorist and writer, an autistic SA survivor and a firm believer in the possibility of different worlds. Her modes of writing and research include academic formats as well as literary ones and all the in-betweens and beyonds to these categories. Some of her writings can be found with *Fuente Fountain Books*, *Krisis*, and *transcript* and all of her writings can be found on her homepage: cara-julie-kather.com. Cara also co-organizes a collective support platform for survivors of workplace sexual harassment, which is open to anyone seeking or providing peer-to-peer support: against-sexual-harassment.com.