Bad Apple Collective

Editorial Team:
Nora Ziegler, Henrietta Cullinan, Ghazal Tipu
Original artwork: Sam Garrett, Della Rainbow, Johnny Cullinan and Rev. Daniel Woodhouse
Layout: Henrietta Cullinan
Contact:

badapplemagazine@protonmail.com

For submissions write to..

badapplemagazine@protonmail.com

Website:

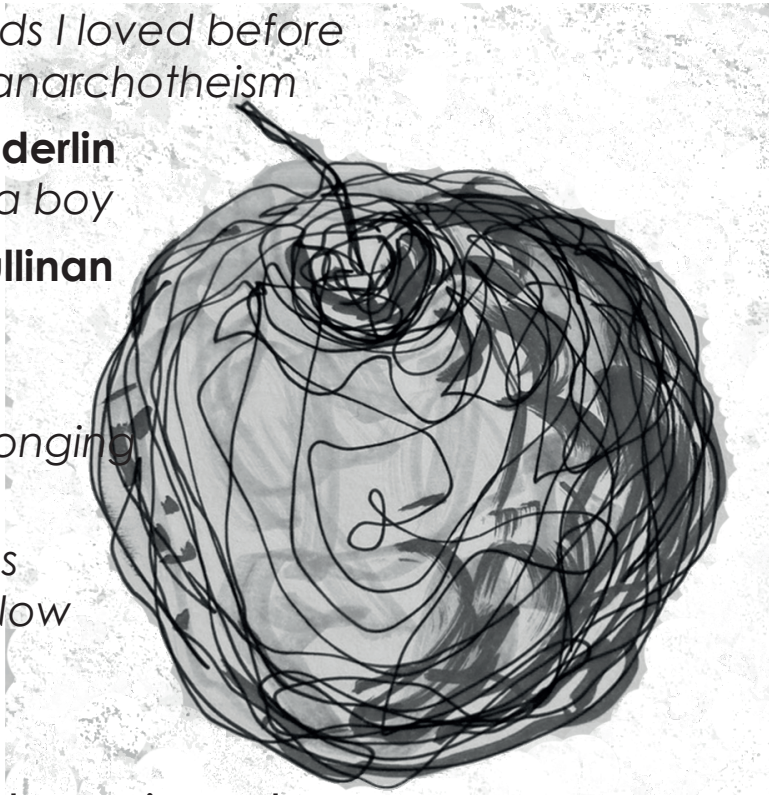
badapplemagazine.wordpress.com

website: badapplemagazine.wordpress.com
Twitter: @BadAppleZine Instagram: @Bad.Apple.Zine

Bad Apple

Second Issue 2022

Interfaith Blasphemy Activist Spirituality



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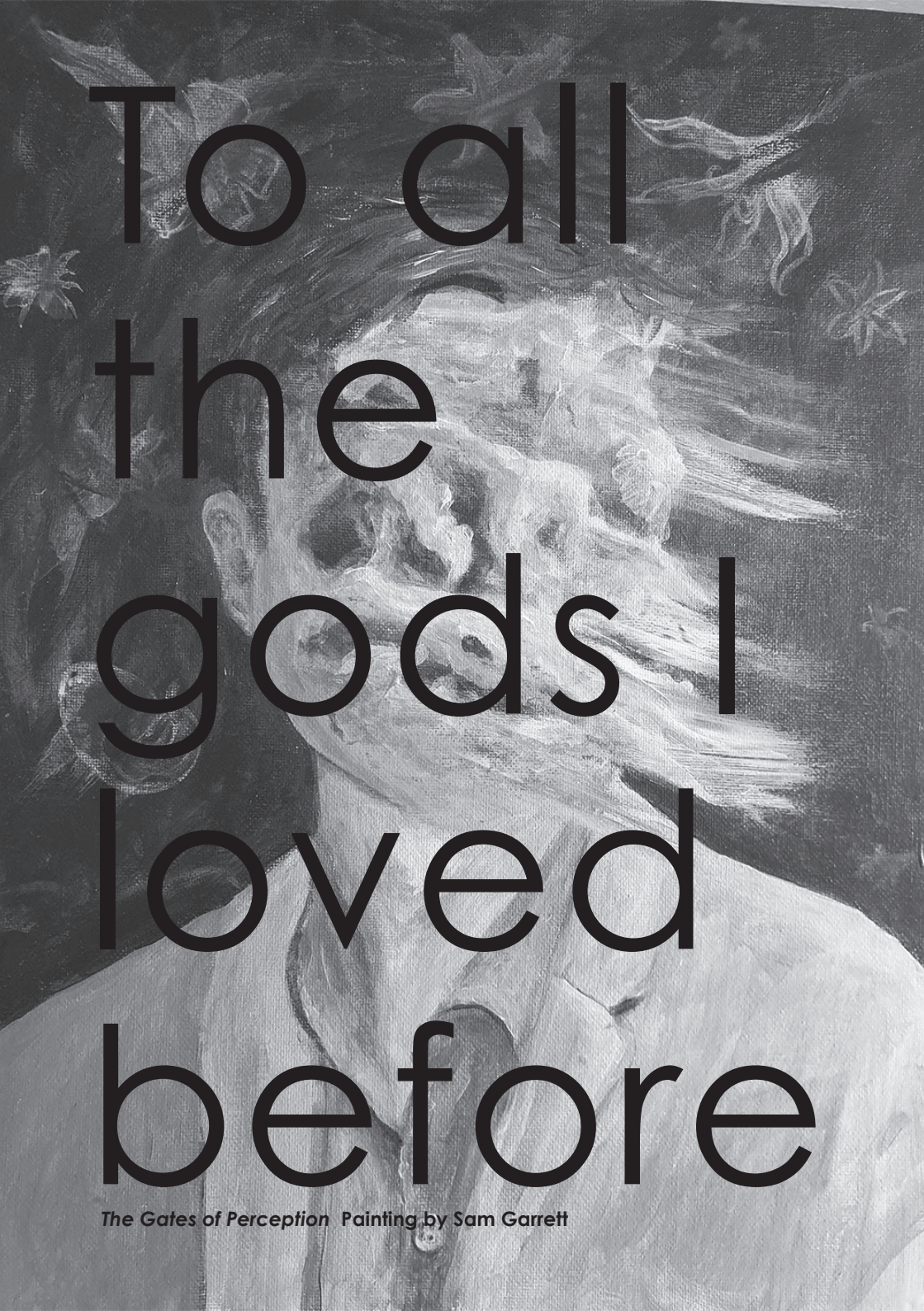

The Gates of Perception **Painting by Sam Garrett**

On dual belonging

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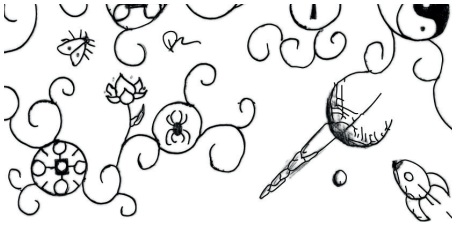
The limited 'God is on the side of my religion' or belief system, incites the kind of certainty that tends toward violence - either as exclusion or actual physical violence - or a combination of both - toward those deemed to be outside of or a threat to "the truth".

There is something in being able to cherish or be comfortable with uncertainty and 'not knowing' in these matters. I am rather fond of the late Raimundo Panikkar, Jesuit priest and philosopher, who features in some of my current work and who has referred to himself as a Catholic-Hindu-Buddhist. He speaks of a cosmotheandric reality in which the ultimate / God (the 'Theo' part of the phrase is to be encountered within world 'cosmos' and human ('Andric') experience rather than an 'out there' somewhere.

But being a dual belonger isn't the be all and end all of these things. Whether simply a Christian or a Buddhist or a humanist with no religious inclination, a mindset that is welcoming and open to a range of possibilities for living compassionately in the world is a boon to our capacity to resolve conflicts or learn to live with differences among human beings. It can be quite healing.

Such capacity makes us more human and humane. If any belief or faith causes you to live with love and compassion toward all beings - whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish or secular humanist, that faith is the true faith, however we name it. But if your belief creates and causes a sense of superiority, contempt for others, and fear, whatever name it goes by, is false.

Ghazal Tipu is a comunications professional, MSc Psychology student and writer



'Our Time is Now'

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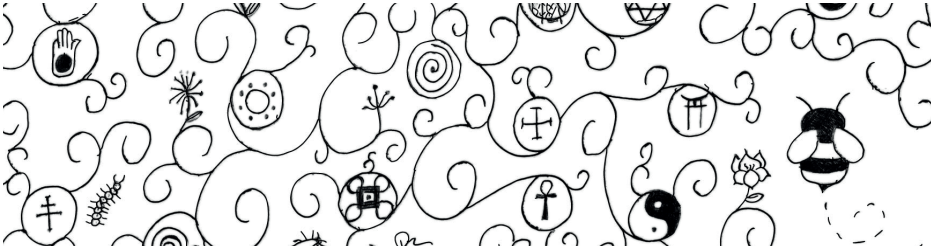
Demanding money is only reactionary to those who already have it. Following sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, I think the demand for money can seem a "twice-told tale" to the rich, while the practices by which the rich try to disinvest themselves from capitalism (veganism, nonviolent direct action, voluntary poverty etc.) can seem like 'Greek' to the poor. I think, like all demands to governments, there is a danger that a care income could potentially undermine grassroots movements if people become invested in the structures that empower them and accept the authority and exploitation inherent in those structures.

But as James and López powerfully illustrate, the people doing the hard work of caring for human and non-human life understand these dangers and contradictions very well and are experienced in trying to balance them: 'on the one hand, you want your children to "do well", but that means accepting authority and competing with others. On the other hand, you want them to be happy and true to themselves, which often results in standing with others against authority'.

I think it is hard for individuals to balance this contradiction on their own. Capitalism divides and dominates us by forcing us to choose, sacrificing material wins for a "pure" radical perspective or sacrificing our radical vision for material wins. However, working together in coalition, across differences of power, we can have both: a vision for a future beyond capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy, and the power to bring that future into being.

Nora Ziegler is an anarchist organiser and writer.



To all the gods I loved before

[continued from page 13]

The real and the immaterial

In T.M. Luhrmann's recent anthropological account of "real-making" in How God Becomes Real, Luhrmann observes that the post-Enlightenment "faith frame" of the Western world stripped the natural world of agency, leaving a real and material world to be freely despoiled, whereas in most other cultures this duality is collapsed into a continuum between the multiple realities. By an immaterialist analysis, therefore, I mean less the unlocking of the door that separates the real and non-real, but rather the opening up of this continuum, where the real can exist with multiplicity. A similar ontological turn is taking place within the realms of cultural studies, where the categories of human and nonhuman are interrogated, which at its best represents a return to Indigenous cosmopolitics, an approach not far removed from the one I am proposing here.

This reminds us that our grasp on reality reaches only so far as our ability to interpret it, and a horizontalism of the immaterial is not so much an assertion that all gods are equal — far from it, if the spiritual were as rich and wild as the natural — but rather that we ourselves can make no absolute claims of supremacy. A radical agnostic theism, perhaps.

Perhaps then the expansiveness of the nonhuman world of my childhood is not so strange. As children we sat in the dark in lonely places and told ghost stories to scare each other, and at other times we listened to adults talk about fengshui or angels or shamans. So all the gods that we've loved before can still inhabit our world. There is no exorcism or demystification necessary, though perhaps a perpetual revision and recalibration of our beliefs and practices as one is led. We are always in process, lest we forget. In the present time, it is perhaps more urgent than ever to seek to ground spirituality in politics that does not lean to the far right and ask how it might be in harmony with radical politics. The deep questions remain, to be sure, as to what all lies beyond what the eye can see, but perhaps these thoughts can begin to validate our searching and loving, perhaps our hearts will not lead us so far astray, and we can be together in love and struggle.

1 A Sanskrit epic poem
2 https://tiwong.github.io/theory/2019/03/21/to-the-archives.html
3 Christoyannopoulos, Alexandre, and Matthew Adams. "Anarchism, religion, and the religiousness of political ideologies." (2020).
4 Further afield in the study of consciousness is the proposal that all of life is simply "dissociated alters of cosmic consciousness," wherein the universal consciousness manifests itself multiply in each conscious being in a manner similar to dissociative identity disorder. See Kastrup, Bernardo. "The universe in consciousness." Journal of Consciousness Studies 25.5-6 (2018): 125-155.

An plays with numbers sometimes, words sometimes, but mostly tries to be soft and warm.

Above and opposite: drawing by Rev. Daniel Woodhouse

To all the gods I loved before: towards a theory of anarchotheism

An

I used to talk to plants. I have a distinct memory of when I was about seven, holding the leaves of a flowering bush at school, talking to them. I would imagine that the plants had emotions or even sentience, would hurt when they were plucked or harmed. This might sound a little silly, the sensitivity of a child that didn't know better, but that is also the point: what lives and moves and has its being beyond our empirical world, beyond the grasp of cold rationality and naturalism, is also often what is lost in our induction into modern society. As a part of our social contract, we agree that the ghosts and gods that live with us and others conform to a narrow selection of orthodoxies and heresies. The remainder—the bodies, the beings, the dreams—that do not fit are exorcised, repressed, or starved. Those who retain the same level of imagination and wonder in adulthood are labelled misfits or mentally ill. Among these, the ones that are still able to 'function' as 'productive members of society' are celebrated in capitalist society.

This is a letter to all the gods I've loved before. Whether the nature of my childhood, or Gautama Buddha introduced to me by my father, or my deceased grandfather introduced to me by mother at the temple, Jesus Messiah introduced to me by my friends, Allah introduced to me by my school textbooks, and all the other gods I've read and heard about but never quite got to know, I write this to mark the way in my journey so far. If the last few decades of my life are anything to go by, I expect my relation to the world and beyond to continue changing, growing, maturing, and I hope this can be helpful to others who are searching, too.

Towards liberation (theology)

Most of all, I spent a lot of time with Jesus. Growing up in what some might call a Buddhist or Daoist household in a majority Muslim country, I didn't have much exposure to begin with. But I was introduced by a friend in high school and learned from books my brother owned by C.S. Lewis, Max Lucado, and others. I learned about a foreign god who made a lot of sense, but also a god who loved me, who walked with me, who died for me. It was all very personal, very moving, very dramatic. For a long time, I took this evangelical 'personal relationship with God' very seriously. This Christian god and I, we would talk almost every day, go on walks, laugh, cry, worry about all things big and small. It was a very sweet relationship with I don't know, the ceiling above me, the wall in front of me, the air I was breathing. This isn't to say all that was bullshit, or at least to me it wasn't and still isn't, but rather that I've come to a place where I know things aren't exactly what I used to believe, but also I don't quite know what things are, if they should be anything at all. For the time being, we were really close, and it was really nice. Moreover, throughout this entire period I was surrounded by faith communities that I deeply loved, with whom I share many cherished memories.

But somewhere along the way, things changed. There wasn't any watershed moment of disillusionment or loss of faith. In fact, I would argue that I have more faith now than ever before.

[continued on page 12]

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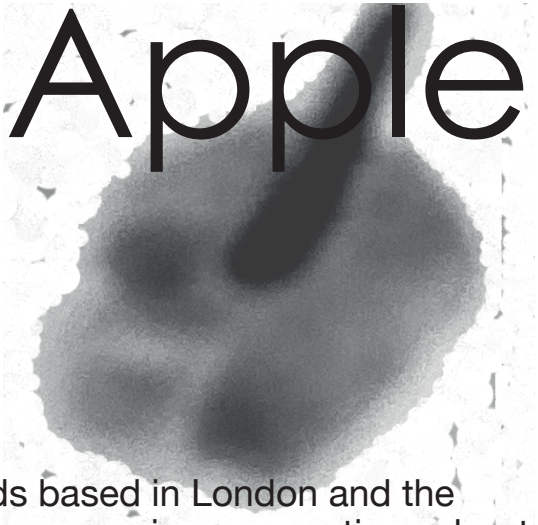

About us

We are a group of friends based in London and the South East who want to engage in conversations about faith and social justice organising. We are Muslim and Christian women, writers and activists.

We are inspired by anarchist, queer, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist practices and schools of thought. We believe these perspectives create possibilities for spiritual transformation. However, we also recognise the limitations of pure 'isms' and encourage dialectic thought that challenges the boundaries between the secular and the mystical, the political and the personal.

We hope this new zine will inspire you and give you something to think about. We welcome anyone who would like to join our collective or contribute articles, illustrations, cartoons, jokes, whatever. If you've been a bad apple, we want to hear from you!

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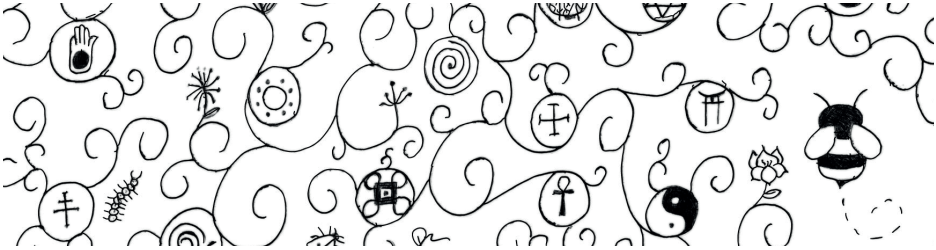
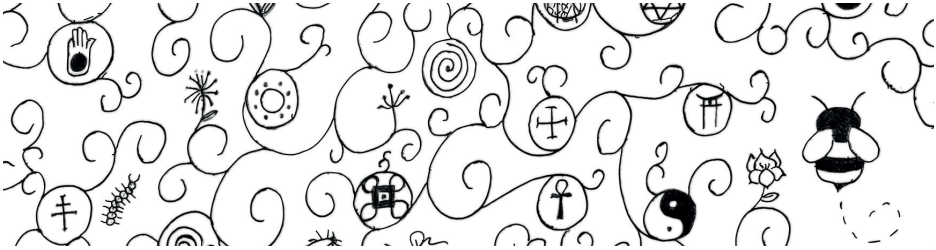


socialism, some of which I may be able to resolve because I just needed to know more or live longer, and some which are inherent contradictions that precipitate crises of various kinds, like holy wars, perhaps. Anarchotheism is not only a horizontal, nonhierarchical approach to spirituality and religious practice, but it is even more also a deep consideration of the immaterial in the present — an immaterialist analysis. We can hold both these things. It allows for us to carry the richness of other dimensions, ranging from the metaphysical to the psychological, into revolutionary politics and praxis. An immaterialist analysis is necessarily dialectical, because it must take into account the passage between worlds material and immaterial, an incredibly busy two-way street.

I remember sitting in class on the first day of a course on Islam, being completely scandalised when the professor established the following ground rule: there is no orthodox Islam. Having grown up with the backdrop of Sunni Islam, enshrined by the state and prevailing racial order, and as a practising Christian then, I had not quite come to terms with it the entire semester as we discussed communities like the Nation of Islam and punk Islam. But now I understand better: orthodoxy is a power relation. As with the construction of white and hetero-normativity in the United States and 'the West,' more broadly, so is orthodoxy constituted through power and hegemony in interpretive communities. Anarchotheism, on the other hand, as a horizontal approach to both politics and religion or faith, easily naturalizes this rejection of orthodoxy. And, importantly, the lack of orthodoxy also implies the lack of heterodoxy.

Whereas other theisms like pantheism or polytheism or monotheism regard one's belief in the existence of gods, anarchotheism situates ones (anarchist or anarchist friendly) politics in the frame of the existence of gods and other beings. It points to the blurred boundary between religion and political ideology, as Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams describe in the context of anarchism. Indeed, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that ultraleft folks long for revolution like the second coming of Christ. More than a political theology, anarchotheism is liberation theology par excellence. And of course, by 'gods' here I also mean djinn, devas, ghosts, nature, spirits, ancestors, and all manner of things that no eye has seen nor ear has heard. Anarchotheism takes seriously every spectre that haunts us, every spirit that visits us. Indeed, as John Currid points out in Against the Gods, the theology of the Old Testament was not a strictly monotheistic one: it understood the existence of other gods that belonged to other peoples, and the Hebrew god only demanded absolute loyalty from the Hebrew people: you shall have no other gods before me. How petty would the Hebrew god have to be to be jealous of made-up gods that are not gods? It is easy to see that the cosmology of the Old Testament is far richer than that of the New, and also that of orthodox Islam, populated as they may be with angels and demons and djinn.

Parallel to dialectical materialism, which interrogates the social relations between objects, dialectical immaterialism allows for an accounting of social relations between metaphysical objects: how do gods and other beings relate to one another, and how do they mediate relations between humans? **continued on page 14**



To all the gods I loved before

It was a slow process, beginning somewhere between Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and reading the Mahabharata for political science class a decade ago. I wasn't much conscientised in those days, nor did I see myself as a stakeholder in the US racial and capitalist order, being an international student, so I found myself more a spectator of the deadly circus that is US politics than anything else. But by the time Trump had been in office for some time, I realised that somewhere along the way my politics had radicalised, and my theology needed to catch up. (Becoming housemates with an anarchist Muslim by accident probably helped.)

Without quite knowing what it was, I reached towards liberation theology, which instinctively felt like the right path to take from where I was. Theologians from outside the fold of white normative theology forged their own ways: Black, feminist, womanist, Latin American, Native American, Asian American, Third Worldist, and so on, absorbed the righteous zeitgeist of the mid-to-late twentieth century, drawing inspiration from the Black power movement, second-wave feminism, and anti-colonial movements around the world. The world seemed to be throwing off its chains, waking up from the nightmare of colonial domination. Liberation theology was theological reflection on praxis, characterised by the mutually reinforcing cycle of praxis and reflection. It was grounded in the faith and suffering within its own communities. The same that is needed today, fifty years on.

At the same time as I was attempting to forge an updated Asian American theology of liberation, I found certain points that I could not quite resolve. Liberation theology is generous in its approach to people of other faiths, be it a matter of coexistence or syncretism. But this is hard to accept for a mathematician like myself: one is either wrong or right. The competing claims of many religions are often mutually exclusive: they negate each other in their truth claims. Bahái supersedes Islam, which supersedes Christianity, which supersedes Judaism, for example. We may have calm interfaith dialogues with each other, but at the end of the day we still think we're right and they're, well, let's just say less right. Secondly, in the heat of the George Floyd rebellion, the world learned about abolition. But if the Christian god were an abolitionist — and they'd better be — there definitely can be no hell. And eternal or not, the Jesus of the canonical Gospels definitely talked about suffering in the afterlife. Can abolition make sense on earth if not in heaven? Could I be forgiven for loving too much?

This was all very disconcerting. And as it happened, God and I hadn't been talking much for a while, at least not verbally. Not that we're not on speaking terms, but more that I have not found a faith community I could truly feel comfortable in anymore, and that deeply affects my private practice. While my politics is advancing ever onward, looking for the most authentic and revolutionary ways of being in the world, my faith is still playing catch up. It is to that end that I propose anarchotheism as a way of making sense of where I find myself.

Anarchotheism: after liberation

Anarchotheism makes room for all the gods I've loved before to remain in my life, as full of contradictions as capitalism or

When I was a boy

Friedrich Hölderlin,
translated by David Constantine

When I was a boy
A god often rescued me
From the shouts and the rods of men
And I played among trees and flowers
Secure in their kindness
And the breezes of heaven
Were playing there too.

And as you delight
The hearts of plants
When they stretch towards you
With little strength

So you delighted the heart in me
Father Helios, and like Endymion
I was your favourite,
Sacred moon!

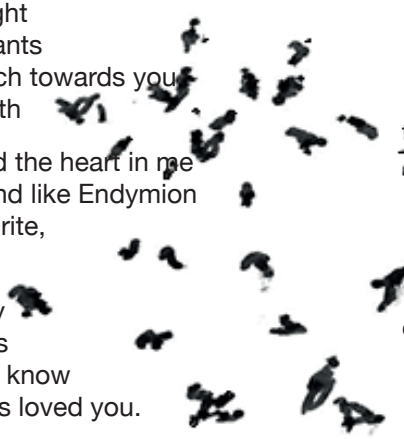
O all you friendly
And faithful gods
I wish you could know
How my soul has loved you.

Even though when I called to you then
It was not yet with names, and you
Never named me as people do
As though they knew one another

Yet I knew you better
Than I have ever known them.
I understood the stillness above the sky
But never the words of men.

Trees were my teachers
Melodious trees
And I learned to love
Among flowers.

I grew up in the arms of the gods.



Friedrich Hölderlin: the revolutionary power of poetry and religion

Nora Ziegler

Last summer, while visiting family in Germany, I was sharing with them that I felt torn apart by a conflict between my ability to express myself and my ability to feel. Whenever I feel truly connected to my inner life, my lived experiences, joy, and grief, I despair because I lose my power to think or speak clearly. When I speak and think in abstract terms, I feel cut off from myself, lifeless and hollow. My uncle then told me about the poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), who had wrestled with the same dilemma.

Hölderlin tried to reconcile this dilemma by expressing himself through poetry, myth, and mysticism. He claimed that 'all religion is in its essence poetic'[1]. Poetry and religious imagery allowed him to express an intuitive awareness of the wholeness of life, the unity of the material and spiritual, without reducing this wholeness to sterile homogeny. This is the revolutionary power of poetry that Audre Lorde insisted on: 'poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought'[2].

1 https://orgrad.wordpress.com/a-z-of-thinkers/friedrich-holderlin/
2 Audre Lorde "Poetry is not a luxury"

Pigeoncote

Henrietta Cullinan

Pigeons are the first 'critter' guides in Staying with the Trouble, Donna J. Haraway's exploration of cross species survival in the time of the chthulucene[1]. Pigeons are her 'urban neighbours.' They appear in her writing as creatures of the Empire, spy pigeons, carrier pigeons, pigeons that recognise themselves in the mirror.

In Haraway's story, racing pigeons and their trainers are put to work measuring air pollution in Los Angeles while in Australia artists build nesting towers to help bring pigeon manure to the rewilding of a piece of ancestral land. In Caudry, France, Matali Crasset, an industrial designer, is commissioned by the local authority to design a pigeonnier.

She tells of pigeons that have worked with humans, trained to spot people and ships at sea from a helicopter. As potential rescuers. My pigeons have been my rescuers of late. They have rescued their human. Which brings me back to a story I told several years ago that began when Extinction Rebellion founder, Roger Hallam, came to give one of his famous seminars at the London Catholic Worker. A newly born grandmother, I was horrified to think that my grandson would be only twelve when, according to Hallam, the sea would be suffocating and our planet would be an impossible place to live. This doomsday narrative seemed too huge to absorb. It filled me with dread .

I decided to start observations of survival in my own street. As Haraway writes, it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with. Her writing, though difficult to read, works across disciplines, making connections between art and science. She uses words like 'cum terra' and 'cum panis' reminiscent of the Latin language of the Catholic Eucharist, She reminds us of the necessity of abandoning the lonely super hero, man at the centre of the universe and draw from Asian cultures, where animals and people and nature come together in Guman, similar to Adam of the creation story, the man of the soil.

Tagging along after Donna, pigeons are my neighbours too, building nests yards from my window, importing fleas, bringing manure into my garden. I wake to the rattle flap of wings, the pinkish sigh of feathers whiffling the air, throats bubbling like the sound of a coffee pot.

Five, six, twelve, seventeen pigeons are roosting, preening, courting, billing and cooing, turning circles on the corner of the empty cinema next door. On their favourite parapet, where the mortar's worn away, and the bricks look like teeth, they perch like Batman, head and shoulders against the sky. Or they roost in the blocked up windows, like dollops of grey paint, that also come in cream, mauve, brown. The biggest male makes a train of his tail, jerks his green neck feathers back and forth along the back wall of the disused Savoy Cinema.

A shapeless hangar of a building, it's not possible to tell how big it is from the outside. Its Art Deco canopy has been destroyed. The foyer has been home to

and Caring for People and Planet

The aim of autonomy is to stop more powerful members and groups from dominating the campaign, giving space to all the different skills and perspectives that enrich each other and the campaign as a whole. This means that groups can draw from the social and material power of white and middle-class members as well as the leadership, tactics, and experience of the less powerful members. In this way, 'the power of each sector becomes a power for all'.

This involves a constant and simultaneous battle of two fronts: against domination by the more powerful groups, and against claims to "special status" by those who are particularly vulnerable to persecution and violence. For example, James describes learning to oppose the racism of white women as well as the use of anti-racist rhetoric by people trying to advance their own careers. She also recounts how a group of sex workers were reluctant initially but then agreed to be accountable because they felt more powerful and protected as part of the campaign.

This example shows how the organising strategy James describes is based on trust that has to be built and rebuilt again and again. Mutual relationships across differences of power are difficult to balance and maintain. According to James, learning how to do this was 'an important part of our political education'.

Campaigning for a care income might at first seem like a limited or even reformist demand. In the chapter, 'An income to care for people and planet' Selma James and Nina López show how a care income would give power to oppressed groups and communities to radically transform society. They argue that 'even considering a care income opens the way for all genders to rethink how we relate to each other and to the natural world, what we produce and what we may want to refuse to produce'.

[continued on page 15]

Below: Nora Ziegler with Selma James and activist Jacob Berkson

Class barbers and a tattoo and piercing parlour.On the corner, now the Dukkah restaurant, a Rastafarian couple once sold records and knitting wool. The basement, variously named the Snooker Lovers Club, the Magnolia Banqueting Suite, Epic Dalston, has been used for club nights, Hindu weddings, Afro-Caribbean wakes, bar mitzvahs, Turkish circumcision parties and a Sunday flea market. To the rear is a flat, a recording studio, an electricity sub-station. The last film to be shown, in 1984, was Scarface.

One afternoon, a slight figure in orange duffle coat and striped scarf knocks on our door and introduces himself as Auro. 'I've just got the lease for the old cinema,' he croons persuasively. 'We're talking to all the neighbours.' He gives me his number and says to text him day or night. 'If you're unhappy about anything ….. no trouble at all.' The local paper reports a budget of several million; the new venue is to be as important as the Roundhouse.

Auro invites us to an open weekend. A small group of local enthusiasts, we climb up and up the emergency stairs, picking our way over drinks crates, spare bar stools, lost umbrellas, arriving at the very top of the old cinema's balcony.

The smell of pigeons is so overpowering, I can see its colour, a chalk white grey. In the gloom that filters through holes in the plaster ceiling, the original proscenium arch looks truncated, as if flooded by the floor below.

The one empty space left, the largest, is the space for film projection itself. The void left by the projection of heroes, heroines and villains onto the screen has always been unusable, it turns out. The lonely individualist, the hunter gatherer hero, remains trapped in his pyramid of light.

There are thumps in the street, van doors banging. Auro books parking spaces. Articulated lorries deliver thick cables, scaffolding, sound equipment. Security men guard the vans. Sound checks begin at three. He tells the local press that he has cleared out six hundred pigeons and a sea container load of manure.

Of course on my street, sealed under tarmac and paving stones, there's not much opportunity to imagine the chthulucene, the time of the soil that Haraway calls on us to envisage. Years on, sitting in the garden each morning these days, post pandemic, but not post COVID, I watch the few remaining pigeons strutting up and down the parapet. They are living on the outside, at the mercy of cats, crows, passing seagulls, nesting kestrels. There have been sightings of a peregrine falcon. Wing claps like a carpet beating, a call to order. The flock takes off, circles the nearby blocks, swoops back up again, onto the roof.

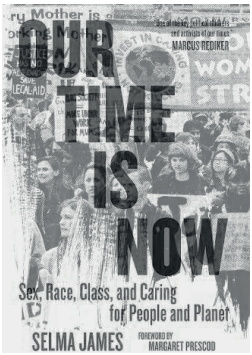
I can even tell them apart, give them names. There's an all white pigeon that stands in for a dove, a piebald but mostly the others have oily feathers. In Donna Haraway's formulation pigeons have been my constant companions. I have been their human.

1 Chthulucene, an impossible to spell made up word of two parts, chthonos meaning 'of the earth' and 'kainos' meaning time. We are nearing the end of the 'anthropocene' and the 'capitalocene'.

Henrietta Cullinan is a writer, teacher and peace activist

Above and previous page: pigeon drawings by Johnny Cullinan

Our Time is Now: Sex, Race, Class



Selma James Our Time is Now: Sex, Race, Class and Caring for People and Planet

P M Press, 2021
256pages
ISBN: 978-1-62963-838-6

Nora Ziegler

Selma James is a founder of the Wages for Housework (WFH) campaign which later became known as Global Women's Strike (GWS). James' new book 'Our Time Is Now: Sex, Race, Class, and Caring for People and Planet' includes articles, press releases and essays from 50 years of grassroots organising against poverty and violence. James is based at the Crossroads Women's Centre which is home to a radical coalition of feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist groups including Women Against Rape, English Collective of Prostitutes, All African Women's Group, Queer Strike among many others.

I first got to know members of GWS and other groups organising together at Crossroads when I joined them in observing the trial of the G4S guards who killed Jimmy Mubenga during a deportation flight. Over the years that I was living at the London Catholic Worker, a house of hospitality for migrants and refugees, we collaborated on a number of different events and actions. For example, we organised a conference about care work and a week of protests and teach-ins bringing together different groups resisting borders and deportations.

I am inspired by the radical perspective and practice of GWS which has formed through decades of experience in navigating difficult contradictions: fighting campaigns to win without leaving anybody behind, embracing diversity without losing collective vision and purpose. The groups organising at Crossroads seem to be able to endure and make productive a level of messiness and uncertainty that many groups tend to avoid. 'Our Time Is Now' shows how the GWS' organising strategy developed through decades of experience and shares this learning with others.

In the chapter, 'The organizational strategy of autonomy'James describes how the WFH's structure developed, unplanned, as the campaign developed. The campaign started out as an international network demanding money for unwaged mothers and caregivers. Over time, different groups joined the campaign or formed within it representing various 'sectors' of grassroots movements, including lesbian women, sex workers, women of colour, women with disabilities, farmers. Each autonomous sector represents itself and at the same time represents and contributes to the international movement.

Autonomy here is the opposite of separatism. It isn't about doing whatever you want, putting your needs above others. Autonomy is fundamentally relational. It is about maintaining mutual relationships between different groups: 'each of us had to be accountable to all of us'.

On dual belonging

Interview with Christopher McDermott

Ghazal Tipu

Christopher McDermott is an ordained Anglican priest and a Zen Buddhist. He has a background as a community mediator, facilitator and in conflict resolution working with young people. He is now a university chaplain, leading an interfaith team of chaplains, a workplace mediator, a regula r practitioner of Zazen and PhD researcher at the University of Sussex. His research examines Buddhist Christian belonging from the philosopher Gillian Rose's Hegelian perspective.

How and when were you inspired to become a Buddhist?

In the late 80s I began to practice meditation from a Christian context. A Jesuit priest put together a book on meditation from a Buddhist perspective – Anthony DeMello is his name. At a community in East Ham in Newham the interest in the contemplative approach began.

In the late 90s, I was inspired by the Buddhist practice and philosophical perspective. I began practising with the Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green. My practices of mindfulness of breathing and meta bhavana were honed. I was then really drawn to Zen Buddhism. I eventually began attending a Zen Dojo in North London. Words like 'right' and 'wrong' and the language of judgement began to fall away from the moral universe I was coming to inhabit and I began thinking more in terms of 'skilful' and 'less skilful' ways of being, ignorance, rather than 'sin', and compassion rather than blame.

There are many clergy, like the Jesuit Fr. Robert Kennedy - other priests, theologians (like Paul Knitter, who wrote a book entitled 'without the Buddha I could not be a Christian' and lay people who self-identify as Christian and Buddhist. They engage with two faiths that feel contradictory - theistic / atheistic (or non-theistic) and take this adventurous perspective on ultimate reality.

I am coming to look at the notion of Buddhist Christian belonging through Gillian Rose's spin on Hegel's speculative philosophy. She provides a lens that is independent of either Christian or Buddhist agendas and allows a position that enables us to hold both traditions together in a way that doesn't reduce them to some third thing - a 'Buddhist Christian hybrid' - but rather holds each in their integrity while living with the dynamic of their difference, without prematurely seeking to resolve the contradiction. I would not say that the idea that you cannot be both Buddhist and Christian is 'totally nonsense', but the notion does challenge many of our assumptions. Rose's speculative philosophy enables us to see the possibility of such a dual religious belonging.

Abrahamic traditions (Jewish / Christian / Muslim) and their spiritual traditions recognise the inadequacy of language to fully express ultimate reality. Maximus the Confessor (7th century CE saint) intended something like this when he said that the contents of dogma transcend dogmas. It is similar to the zen metaphor about a finger pointing at the moon not being the moon itself. The medieval Christian text, 'The Cloud of Unknowing' puts it this way: 'God may be got by thought never, but by love alone.' The engagement with God or Nirvana, emptiness or ultimate reality (however you designate it) is grasped intuitively. In my practice I sit with the difference between the two traditions as far as their diverse conceptual expressions go. But those conceptual expressions are limited. Knitter uses absurd maths when he describes himself as 100% Christian and

100% Buddhist. I feel the same. I am at home with both and sit in the tension amid the two.

What do your family and friends think of this?

Most are chilled with it and fine. But one friend told me that others have said that I am 'backslidden, lost in error and deep in sin.' I laughed when I mentioned this to my wife and suggested that I commission a tee shirt that had those words on the front, with 'join me!' on the back. My wife approved. At least I have not gotten into trouble with my bishop. :) [A big reason why I am at home in the Anglican communion is that along side it's commitment to the historic formularies of the Christian faith, it also allows freedom to explore the deeper meaning of that faith as it unfolds in the context of new learning and understanding.]

How does it enrich your spirituality and you as a person?

Zen practice has become a daily routine in my life, spending at least 20-25 mins in Zazen at least once if not more often each day. This has been my habit from the early 2000s and at least since 2011 I have not missed a day of practice. It reaches a point where it is harder not to do it than to sit in Zazen. I think it has enhanced my ability to deal with life challenges - especially when life seems to shit on you. It affords a capacity to engage with all kinds of people - and situations - with equanimity. When I am mediating it helps me to sit with the conflict when people may be being bloody minded and obstinate, be comfortable with long silences and support people to get past impasses and move forward. Zen has been a big help in those circumstances.

Do you ever find it confusing?

Not confusing. I've experienced the dissonance between the two traditions. There may have been a time early on where I exercised myself rationally trying to find a [solution]. I no longer try to do that. I'm at home with the dissonance. People may ask: How can you do that? Are you just doing a Christian form of Zen? No, I don't think there is a 'Christian Zen' or perhaps even a 'Buddhist Zen. Zen is Zen. And I am happy to sit with the dissonance between the two venerable traditions. I am happy to leave things open. For me faith is how we live with questions rather than the answers we come up with. I think religious faith and tradition ossifies when you see it as mere dogmas to which we subscribe.

The word 'tradition' and its root 'traduce' carries two meanings: 'to hand on' (e.g., as when one passes on a traditional teaching or practice' and 'to betray' (e.g., as when Jesus hands over Jesus to his enemies.) Paradoxically we can only be true to the meaning of our traditions when we are able to 'betray' them in the light of fresh insights and knowledge. Christian teaching has always adapted itself to new contexts, cultures and times, betraying older outdated understandings of the faith.

The phrase 'deposit of faith' is often used as a synonym for 'tradition' in some Christian circles. That geological language of 'deposits' is too static to convey the dynamics of tradition. A better term than 'deposit of faith' would be the metaphor of a conversation. Conversations sometimes are loud and heated - occasionally becoming real shouting matches. This is a more accurate image for the evolution of traditions.

That is how tradition evolves and continues to do so: it is newly 'betrayed' by the next generation of believers – and so remains a living thing. It has perhaps evolved to the point where tradition is able to envision the possibility of the kind of dual belonging that we are talking about.

Would you like to share anything else about your dual faith?

If we are able to accommodate in our mindset possibilities for such expanded religious experiences as a 'Muslim Buddhist', a 'Christian Buddhist' a 'Jewish Buddhist' - or JuBu, as the latter has been called, - or a range of expansive possibilities for multiple belongings and identities - such a capacity to transcend barriers that up until today are sources of conflict, I think we enhance our capacity as peace builders in the world. **[continued on page 15]**