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Bad Apple Collective

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Friend or servant, servant or friend, what am I? Henry_ [continued from Page 9]

who was in bond slavery, lent to a rich master to pay off a family's debts. However good at serving, we too are blind and enslaved, tied to wage slavery or housework. People even talk of 'giving back to the community' or 'repaying their debt to society'.

It's as if Jesus is saying, I'm the cheat code! In this 'farewell' discourse he says: You can bypass all the work of caring and serving. No need to slog your guts out. No need to be in debt, no need to pay anything back. Your debts have been cancelled.

In our lives and relationships, we wander cautiously between the desire to help and be helped, and the freedom of friendship, between notions of duty and true compassion. From singing this friend and servant song, I learn, there is a playful swing between friend and servant, a charmed lens through which to see even the closest and most intimate relationships: family, children, parents, partners, mates and friends. This puzzling dance is what sustains us. Jesus is teaching us to hold these contradictions in our heart.

Contributors

Reham Bastawi comes from a North Sudanese Muslim background, and grew up in Brighton and Khartoum. Currently based in Pembrokeshire Wales.

Nora Ziegler is a writer and community organiser. She is currently training as a local preacher in the Methodist Church.

Henry_ is a poet, writer, teacher and peace activist.

Black Sheep is a baby millennial, raised a Catholic but still yet to have that confirmed.

Susan Clarkson, 78, lives in Bradford, her home city. She spent several years in Catholic Worker communities in the US and Britain. She continues to resist all forms of war and war making, despite age and infirmity!

Bad Apple

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About Us

We are a collective of women and non-binary activists and writers based in London, Wales and Merseyside. We create this zine as a space for conversations about faith and social justice organising. We are inspired by anarchist, queer, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist practices and thought. We want to nurture dialectical thought that challenges the boundaries between the secular and the mystical, the personal and the political.

In these desperate times it's important that we sustain interfaith and intersectional conversations and collaborations. We invite you to contribute ideas, artwork, poems, essays and stories on our themes of activism, spirituality, radical social change, building relationships across difference or anything that might be interesting for this project. We are interested in collaborative writing and are happy to work with you to bring your ideas into print.

Let's Play!

Reham Bastawi

Play is not a luxury. It's essential for life, something we are entitled to carry throughout every moment of our waking lives.

I am aware this is easier said than done, especially considering the deep grief I carry for the destruction of my homeland Sudan, and the violence inflicted on my people, and my white-hot anger for the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. When I experience joy, there's a heavy weight of guilt that looms over me.

'How can I experience joy while people, my people, suffer?' I become stifled. Coming from a place of suffering, however, I have found radical power in play. Through play I gain the resources and inspiration needed to show up in solidarity.

This summer I went to the Glastonbury Festival for the first time ever, on a working ticket with Kidzfield, taking pictures and videos.

Despite the commerciality of the shops, food concessions, the world famous acts, despite the expense of Glastonbury, being there felt amazing! In particular, I found a hidden gem in Kidzfield. I was blown away by the abundance of it all. I was amazed at how much effort was put into building a space for a childhood dream.

I found it awesome and radical that Kidzfield held the space in such a way. With the ever-encroaching monster of the commercialisation of what was once a free party, Kidzfield fights against it with love and play. During the opening meeting of the crew of Kidzfield, the organisers gave a speech about why Kidzfield was there, and the part we were to play in it.

They emphasised anarcho-syndicalism, meaning the opposition to unjust, unnecessary hierarchies and transferring ownership of the means of production to the workers. In other words, we were to be responsible for ourselves and responsible for each other.

Spending time with the crew of Kidzfield got me wondering why they were so willing to put this much effort and heart into a space for kids.

I came to understand that it's not just about keeping kids entertained so that the parents can have a break; it's about keeping all our childhoods alive. It's about encouraging parents too to relive their own childhoods with their kids and seize the opportunity to connect as a family. This is important because our dysfunctional society under the gaze of capitalism and the unsustainable nature of the 'nuclear family' doesn't really allow for parents to have opportunities to spend time with their family in that way.

One balloon animal artist said that, in their adult years, Kidzfield was the first time they got to experience a childhood, and it helped them feel happier because they finally felt comfortable enough to play. Most believe that the kids who visit Kidzfield learn a lot during the four days of the festival, through play, the arts, and the invitation to be curious. The impression I got from the crew is that there's a moral obligation and responsibility to prioritise childhood, with the hope that this will encourage the development of secure adults, human beings. A gentle approach to act against capitalism's impact on childhood.

Small group discussion (30 minutes):

What could a better collective spiritual practice look and feel like?

Could be material things, but also groups should be encouraged to think about how spiritual practice can help us to assert our values/ ask questions/ support critical thinking and reflection/ reassert our commitments to total liberation.

Some examples could be:

Holding and reasserting the value of 'mindful indulgence not mindless consumption' during the holidays we celebrate together like Christmas/ solstice because we are anti-capitalist and recognise that this is a time of year where we are expected to overconsume.

Using language that reflects our values and is inclusive during speeches/ ceremony/ greetings

Pointing to N/S/E/W as a part of ceremony is often done to 'call in' some other-worldly power, but instead we want to take a moment to think about our siblings in struggle at every corner of the earth because we are internationalist, and keeping those in struggle in our minds is a way to make sure they are not forgotten.

Collectively planning how we want to celebrate / hold ceremony, not just leaving it to the person who is most enthusiastic? Maybe people have been put off from engaging in this stuff cos of the experiences they've had. Having a space to air that is important, also cos the most enthusiastic person might be hippy-pilled.

Give time for each group to feedback.

How do people feel in their bodies? What thing will they be taking away from the workshop?

A Four Square

Direct action on the Feast of the Holy Innocents

(the activists)

We creep up silently
Bolt cutters in hand
Placard and plant pots
For our peace garden.

(the witness)

Oh no, look there
Those scruffy, pesky protesters
Are cutting a hole
In the fence again!

(the PC)

A call from Northwood
'Intruders on the base!'
She turns the corner
And shouts in recognition.

(the base commander)

They come every year
On this same date
Our business as usual
Held up for hours.

Susan Clarkson

Eco-spirituality

a workshop

The following is based on a workshop my partner and I (both white english) ran at the Earth First winter moot in Manchester in 2023. At the time we had been living at Stonehenge (SHAG Camp) protesting a planned road tunnel, for almost two years.

Being so close to this island's biggest symbol of pre-christian paganism we had felt somewhat obliged to engage in the practice. We came to feel that there were aspects of it that had the potential for strengthening us politically whilst also being infuriated by a lot of apolitical hippy nonsense.

I personally hate it when people 'smudge' me – I don't know where those herbs you're burning came from and my energy is fucking fine thank you very much!

The Workshop

(timings and precise wordings are suggestions only)

Name and pronoun circle with ice-breaker question: What really annoys you about the way you've seen spirituality being practised?

Pair discussion (10 minutes):

What is your relationship to the eco/political/spiritual – think about personal experiences, cultural contexts, upbringings, places, systems?

Small group discussion (20 minutes):

Have you ever felt uncomfortable with something about the way someone/ a group is conducting spirituality? Was something harmful going on? Something that felt appropriative or disingenuous? Have you ever felt the need to intervene or interrupt a ceremony? Did you? How did it go? Is it okay to intervene or interrupt ceremony/spiritual practice?

Give time for each group to feedback afterwards, what were things people in the group generally agreed, were there any disagreements within each small group?

General group discussion (10 minutes):

How can we intervene/educate in a way that means people won't double down in their beliefs/feel alienated? How can we do better/be more effective, while not downplaying the difficult emotions that this stuff can bring up for us, especially if we are fucked off with people for appropriating our culture or doing things that are harmful?



Everyone involved was very passionate about the importance of nurturing one's childhood throughout one's lifetime.

The mantra for Kidzfield is Freedom, Magic, Joy. As Bob would say, FMJ. Freedom to be yourself, Magic to imagine a world full of wonder, and to sincerely enjoy yourself! That's my interpretation of FMJ.

I thought of the impact Kidzfield could have on someone who's visited it. When being there you see and feel the excitement, it's almost like electricity, and the level of engagement in various activities that children had was like nothing I've seen before. Hearing the laughter and sounds of amazement, seeing the bright colours of décor and outfits hugging around you with a sea of welcoming smiles, and a holy view of the bright pink castle, was very healing for me. The inner child felt seen and felt given a sense of belonging and safety to play.

The experience highlighted to me the significance of play. I felt a change in me. I felt lighter, and even silly!

When we play, our nervous system is in ventral vagal, which in neurology means we feel safe and social, most regulated, and not acting from a fear state. We get curious, we become imaginative and that's vital for revolution.

An example of why play is a useful tool in revolution is that systems of oppression have a sinister way of becoming assumed as a part of culture. As we work toward breaking down these systems of oppression, I draw inspiration from visionary feminism. Its foundation is the power of imagination, to envision a world where there is genuine equality for people of all genders. To imagine is to be curious, and curiosity is best friends with a cat called 'play'.

In the face of rupture or conflict, getting curious and playful can provide such beautiful solutions to a difficult situation, whether that be a misunderstanding with a partner or friend, or conflict within yourself, or the world. The solutions are beautiful because they are not coming from a place of fear, rather from love and compassion. Don't get me wrong, ignoring fear is not what I'm suggesting; it's important to acknowledge it. Our fear is trying to do its job to protect us, even if it means protecting us from ourselves. Trying to resolve a problem and aiming for an outcome that is rooted in love and compassion starts with recognising where you are at and being honest about where you're coming from. Of course, recognition is not an easy task, and on top of that having the tools and resources to get out of a state of fear is even harder. But I wonder if we were to get curious, we'd at least make the first step toward recognition. A friend once told me, 'Being human is a lifetime project', but I like to add my own twist to it, 'Being human is a lifetime story.' So be playful, ask why and learn your story.



Autistic Dialecticians a phenomenology of exhaustion

Nora Ziegler

I'm exhausted. I'm so tired I can't speak. I can't look at people or even heat up leftovers in the microwave. When I'm this tired I have a rare opportunity to find out what I'm like when I'm not masking. What things can I do? What do I enjoy? Which mental processes still work, and which ones are out of order for the time being? Like many autistic women, I have been masking my entire life and I've forgotten how to turn it off. I welcome these periods of exhaustion as a blessing.

I can still cook a meal if it's something I've cooked a million times before, but I can't multitask. I assemble the ingredients, I chop, I cook one dish at a time, washing up after each step, before moving onto the next. It takes ages but I am calm, my mind wanders, I hum a tune and laugh out loud at something funny I said to myself.

Why can I cook but not heat up leftovers? Maybe because it feels as if I am skipping too many steps. The process doesn't make sense somehow. I don't trust microwaves.

I can write down some thoughts and express what I'm feeling at this moment, but I can't gather my thoughts together into a coherent argument. I'm supposed to be working on the layout of Bad Apple Issue 9, and I can do little bits. I cut out some images from newspapers to use as stencils, I paint some flowers, but I can't think about where they will fit, or how it will all tie together as a final 'product'.

I can't make these bigger connections. Which is interesting, because I find I am very good at making other kinds of

connections, which seem to elude other people while appearing glaringly obvious to me. The connections I make are not systematic or coherent. They jump about between seemingly unrelated things.

The first time I was asked to complete a screening test for autism, I was confused by the question, do you, 'usually concentrate more on the whole picture, rather than the small details?' First of all, nobody can see the whole picture, that's just ridiculous. But also, there are many ways of seeing the bigger picture. One way is to use systems and concepts such as 'woman' or 'intersectionality'. To me those can feel both too vague and too rigid. My preferred way of seeing the bigger picture is by looking for patterns between all the little details.

Seeing the bigger picture through connections between little pieces is what theorists call dialectics. Theodor Adorno described it as 'subterranean passages' between bits of knowledge, that illuminate the whole. I would argue that dialectics is not a theory, it is a tendency of thinking; a way of seeing the world as full of odd, quirky, and deeply meaningful relationships.

Dialectic theory is the attempt to translate this magical way of seeing and feeling the world into a method. When autistic theory bros do this, it is called masking. When neurotypical theory bros do it, we could call it appropriation. But I feel like the parts of me that mask also appropriate ideas from other parts of me without giving them recognition or love. Maybe this article is a step towards internal epistemic justice.

Fostering understanding, tolerance and appreciation of our similarities over our differences. Hell, I guess I'm a romantic.

To me, the shutting down of Omegle felt similar to God destroying the tower. Like God who thought They knew best how the earth should be inherited, this legal team thought they knew best how to protect young people. Omegle was one of the few places on the internet that ironically didn't exploit users. Your intimate details were not being data mined to sell you coffee, nor did you have to put up with endless junk mail after being forced to subscribe. Sadly, places like this cannot go on forever. Places like this are only as good as the people who use them.

I can't talk about this romantic ideal without taking into account the other very prevalent, very despicable part of this: online child abuse and exploitation. As I am a victim of such abuse, you should probably ignore what I have to say. Alternatively, perhaps I'm the very person you should listen to. I'm not going to tell you Omegle was a haven, and it should still exist; just that we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking Omegle was the cause of CSE. It was merely a symptom of a wider sickness. Was it a threat vector for child abuse? Yes. Is the internet a safer place now it's gone? Not really.

The debate between freedom and safety, autonomy and control, has no easy answers. Young people need protecting, but they also need to be given more credit. They need to be heard. One of the reasons I visited Omegle was so that someone might listen to me. I wanted to feel accepted by someone else for who I was because that security was missing in my real life. That is sad as fuck. We need to get away from protecting young people from themselves, they are not masochists, or lost causes. When one reason young people become vulnerable

to this type of abuse is from a feeling of powerlessness over their own lives, we don't fix that by tighter control.

Personal autonomy is a huge puzzle piece of what puts young people at risk. Although we're talking about CSE, we're not talking about children, are we? They sure as shit don't consider themselves children. When young people in care are recognised to be at higher risk of exploitation, yeah, there's an issue here.

The discussions about what should be done are too often held without hearing the voices of those affected. They often get decided arbitrarily by all-powerful entities hoping to solve problems without having to understand them.

Omegle wasn't to blame for the evil out there, evil is just out there, and I hate to break it to you, it is still out there. We cannot rely on easy solutions or deny the complex nature of the reasons these issues exist in society. Gods' destruction of understanding to force people to do it Their way, or the shutting down of Omegle as an almost tokenistic disapproval of online grooming don't tackle the causes, and like weeds they will keep sprouting until we root them out. It is simply reductive to blame tools because of how they are used. Banning hammers because they break thumbs ignores the real problem of not looking where you are swinging.

Caring for each other is everyone's responsibility and will require all our efforts, sharing some hard truths. We need to examine and tackle the motivations not just the means behind these situations with equal vigour. From legislation, education, within the home and, vitally importantly, in social care.

If you have been affected by the content of this piece, it is not your fault, you are not alone, help is out there.

The Tower of Omegle

Black Sheep

The Tower of Babel story always confused me. Far from teaching me how wonderful God is, it just left me concluding that God sounds pretty shitty. I don't know, maybe I missed something?

This is how I remember the story:

In Old Testament times, everyone spoke the same language, there was no separation or barrier between nations or cultures - sounds pretty good so far. Given that everyone spoke the same language, collaboration was easy, someone gets the bright idea to build a tower to the heavens. But this angered God because, I don't know, they're that insecure? Or was it because 'go forth and multiply' was meant horizontally and these builders were thinking vertically? Regardless, God destroyed the tower and to make sure nothing might rival the Almighty's power in this way again, created different languages. People could no longer work together but instead would be isolated, separated and divided.

Is it just me or does it sound like the message here is we must separate people to prevent them achieving what they want instead of what power wants? God forbid people actually start working together, they might just be able to change the world. It feels like the 'sin' here is some kind of superiority belief that we mere mortals could ever know better than God. I suppose this is where I find issue, I despair at anyone's autonomy being restricted by people who think they know best. Punishing people for working together with like-minded motivated individuals to create that better world. Where is the sin?

It probably doesn't help that the people telling me this story were hardly likely to give the original, arguably anti-imperial interpretation. That this was not punishment at all but liberation. Sure, one big tower is well and good for people who like towers, but for everyone else, it's just dogmatic enforced conformity. Diversity is far more exciting than uniformity. What even is collaboration if everyone thinks the same? The Hebrews writing this story, constantly facing enslavement, had to fight conformity to protect their own distinctiveness. Fighting conformity doesn't often get taught in Catholic schools, for obvious reasons. In fact, schools in general enforce the opposite. It's no wonder teenagers rebel.

I can hear you wondering how this relates to a notoriously predator-rich online talk to strangers website? Don't worry, I'm building up to something here.

Omegle was a website that randomly connected two strangers from anywhere in the world to converse. It was founded in 2009 and shut down in 2023. Unlike most of the internet where the first thing that people do online is try to find ways to fuck, in the early days it was mostly filled with isolated souls looking for connection in a place that felt safer to them than the outside world. You could communicate about anything without fear of rejection, so it became a 'safe' place to get away for many young people. A way to cope when there were few options. You could understand different points of view or get unbiased, unfiltered opinion through simple discussion with someone who owed you absolutely nothing and to whom you owed nothing in return.

The results of dialectic masking/appropriation are increasingly dense and convoluted but never quite manage to grasp what they are trying to express. Something tickles my brain. I get out of bed and find the book, and this quote I underlined four years ago by Edward Said:

'It is finally Western ignorance that becomes more refined and complex, not some body of positive Western knowledge.'

However, within that refined and complex tangle of theory, we can still see little glimpses of what they are trying to understand and communicate. There is a shadow of something radical lurking under the surface. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney speculate whether Karl Marx

inherited his radical insights from 'Hegel's weird auto-eroticism or just being ugly and dark and fugitive'. Excuse me, but why is auto-eroticism weird? I get up and grab another book from my shelf. Audre Lorde says: 'The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings.'

Maybe G.W.F. Hegel, one of the famous dialecticians, was an autistic nerd trying to find a way to unify his mask and his inner self. Maybe he was able to reveal some of himself in his description of the

'unhappy consciousness' that knows itself to be split and contradictory, and longs for reconciliation. Maybe he was inspired by his school friend Friedrich Hölderlin, the bisexual poet, who is said to have gone mad through a devastating rupture between his ability to feel and his ability to express what he felt.

Audre Lorde says that poetry

'can help give name to the nameless so it can be thought'

and allows us to play with radical and dangerous ideas that would frighten us if they didn't come through dreams and poetry. She says that, 'there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt'.

Poetry can be one of these ways, so can prayer, and painting flowers, cooking a meal with time to daydream and laugh at jokes I tell myself, and lying in bed writing prose when I'm exhausted.

I would like to propose a new diagnostic test. If you understand dialectics, not because you are a clever academic, but because it nibbles at your toes, opens little windows in your heart and sprouts out of your eyeballs, then you might be autistic. You can now use your powers to destroy your enemies and change the world.



Friend or servant

Servant or friend

Which am I?

Henry_

'I shall no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what the master is doing. I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.' John 15.15

'Houses of Hospitality to give to the rich the opportunity to serve the poor. Farming Communes where the scholars may become workers so the workers may be scholars' Peter Maurin, Easy Essays

Being a friend and being a servant are the names I have for how I take part in the world. They overlap like patio windows. When the window is wide open, the two panes fully overlap and the view through them is clear.

My friend or servant song comes from the discourses in John's Gospel. The discourses are about love, but also about the practical action of daily life. 'What a friend we have in Jesus' sings Aretha Franklin or 'Your own personal Jesus' sings Depeche Mode, 'Reach out and touch faith.'

In the Old Testament, we are commanded to care for widows and orphans. Widows and orphans are the only ones it is permitted to lend money to. In the Gospel, we are taught that in serving the poor, the sick, the hungry and homeless, we'll be serving Jesus. In London, from Lincoln's Inn to Edmonton, people of all faiths, religious or not, take part in food handouts, homeless shelters, community meals. Anarchist groups practise radical hospitality and mutual aid. An individual lets a friend stay the night, then strips and remakes the bed ready for the next guest. A spectrum from humanitarianism to mutuality, collectivism and communism. A spectrum from servant to friendship.

Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker poet and co-founder, says scholars and workers will learn from doing such work.

And yes, Peter Maurin, I do learn a lot, mostly about myself. But will I journey through service and learning to find friendship? In an English class for women asylum seekers, some of my students disrupt the confusing power dynamic, (Is she a teacher or a servant?) making me a cup of tea, saving me a packet of crisps. Others are content to sit back and watch me move the chairs and tables around in preparation for the class. They ask me to teach them pronunciation using my accent as a model. At first, feeling embarrassed, I resist; surely it's society that needs to change. But then I understand they are being practical. They tell me they struggle to make themselves understood. On YouTube, Tom Hiddleston, Helena Bonham Carter and the weather forecasters lend us their superpower.

There's certainly friend-li-ness if not friendship, especially as I get visibly older. In volunteering, that is in making oneself useful, it's important to be reliable and therefore healthy, which shoves any mutuality slightly off balance. One is in a position to give more than the other, one is able to receive more than the other. The question becomes: how to resist the injustice already present in such an unequal world.

My enduring experience of this dynamic, friend or servant, servant or friend,

comes from my life as one half of a committed relationship. David Graeber writes, in *Debt*, that mutuality, that is communism, is familiar to all of us in our relationships with family and neighbours. I lend you my bike when yours has a puncture and you're in a hurry. You take the car to the garage and I pick it up later.

I would like to say this mutuality is a path to the deep friendship, that says I would be able to lay down my life for my friend. John 15:13 . But what dangerous talk! 'That a woman lays down her life for her friends' doesn't sound the same at all.

A couple take it in turns to bring each other a cup of tea in the morning. If one partner hurts their leg, then mutuality gets a bit out of kilter. The more able one, who starts out feeling generous, then feels more weary and starts to feel resentment. They would like to be paid for this work. A debt is being accrued. Many cups of tea will need to be made in the future.

For a couple with a young family, the first falling in love bit quickly turns into taking things in turns. There are two pairs of hands, so it is sensible to share out the tasks: looking after children, earning money, having a career break. One is a janitor, the other a housekeeper. There's a disconnect between the chores and their life-giving results and

intimacy is lost.

A long relationship is particular to the individuals involved, but, especially if heterosexual, there is still a power dynamic built in, historically. As we were painfully made aware during the pandemic, care essentialism means that women do the bulk of the paid and unpaid caring work, which goes unrecognised. The labour of a stay-at-home mum would, according to Forbes last year, cost four to five thousand dollars a month if outsourced.

Women I have met who have had caring jobs, describe the compassion they feel for the elderly people they are paid to care for, and how they couldn't do the job without compassion. But equally there is the terrible vulnerability to cruel abuse. The humanitarian food handouts that are so welcome and benign on the streets of London, in Gaza have turned murderous and violent, have turned into necropolitics and weaponised starvation.

There are many parables in the Gospel about servants, faithful ones, lazy ones, cunning ones, clever ones and about the choice of whether to be one.

The Gospel says the servant doesn't know his master's business. The servant is blind (Simeon) or struck dumb (Zechariah). In those days, a servant was often someone

'No man has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends' John 15.13

'Martha, Martha, he said, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.' Luke 10.41

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