

**Humanist, radical, his own man**

# Paul Goodman: Mentor to a generation

MICHAEL ROSSMAN

**O**N MY DESK NOW ARE THE BOOKS BY Paul Goodman that have touched my life—one text each on psychology, education, youth in society, urban community planning, political philosophy (as if the single subject of all could so be divided!); collections of public letters, of essays, of his journals from “a useless time,” concerned also with the natural world, with art, sexuality, love, the spirit, and their associated gifts and pains; and two novels, three books of poems, and a collection of stories, each expressing integrally his concerns.\*

He touched my life as he touched my generation, our time: persistently, with blunt grace and small hope of heed, always with more than we could readily digest—some deep integrity of vision and purpose as a social man, more radical than each particular flood of his opinions and ideas. In each field of his writing, his contribution was significant; in none alone was he a truly major figure (save perhaps for a passing time in education). Yet overall he was a major presence in our time—and is still—for the particular character and spirit bodied forth through all his work. And for some of my generation he was more—a parent of a rare sort, deeply needed.

As many did, I found his writing rich in those bell-like passages that ring in one’s mind for years. I recall coming upon *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) in college in 1962. We had yet to venture our first angry revolts against paternalistic institutions, or to dream of a revitalized and affirmative culture, when I read the indictment that formed the basis of this text, and indeed of most of his social writings:

*\* Of these the fifth is Drawing the Line (1962), and the last Adam and His Works (1968); the rest are mentioned in the text.*

MICHAEL ROSSMAN is an educator and social critic living in Berkeley. He is the author of *On Learning and Social Change*, and his book on the politics of the consciousness/human potential movement will be published by Dutton this fall.

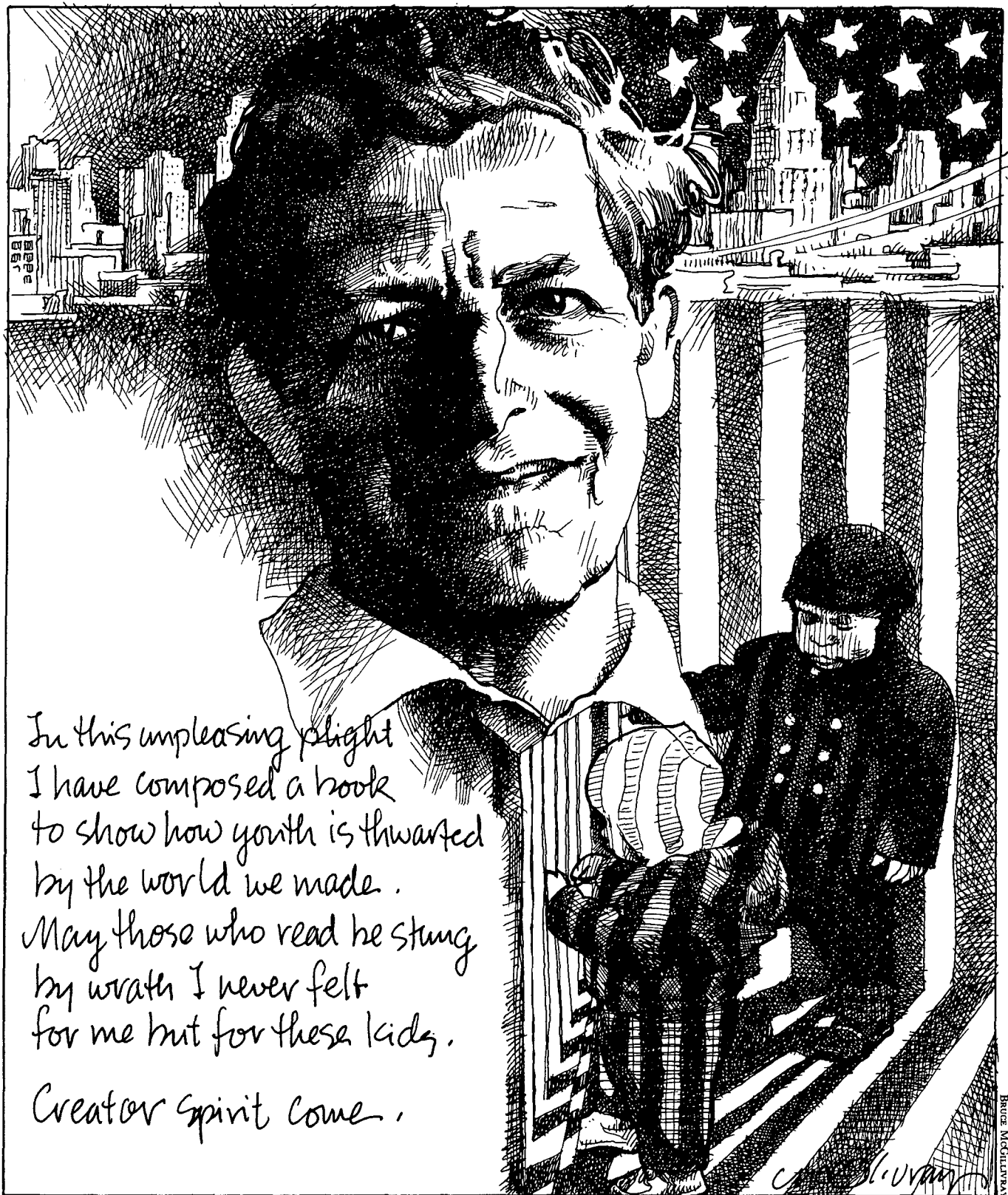
I intend to show . . . that our abundant society is at present simply deficient in many of the most elementary objective opportunities and worth-while goals that could make growing up possible. It is lacking in enough man’s work. It is lacking in honest public speech, and people are not taken seriously. It is lacking in the opportunity to be useful. It thwarts aptitude and creates stupidity. It corrupts ingenuous patriotism. It corrupts the fine arts. It shackles science. It dampens animal ardor. It discourages the religious convictions of Justification and Vocation, and it dims the sense that there is a Creation. It has no Honor. It has no Community. . . .

These are the things that *everybody* knows. And nevertheless the Governor of New York says, “We must give these young men a sense of belonging.”

Here I met the character consistent in Goodman’s writings—the quality of his prose, his practiced and subtle craft of saying plainly what is, in a language yet his own; the scope of his concerns, and his refusal to segregate them from each other. But what struck me more deeply was his very stance, that it was *appropriate* to say such fundamental and obvious things about our condition—not as a yawp of adolescent pain, but as the ground of serious analysis that might lead us beyond them, while returning us ever to the meaning of our lives.

Soon after, my friends enlivened our parties with experiments in Gestalt perception, tales of beating off in pillows, full body jerking in release; and introduced me to *Gestalt Therapy* (1951) and Goodman’s other psychological writings. Here I found, in its most private and scientific focus, the concern for the wellsprings of psychic and physical vitality, a concern that permeates and illuminates all his more social work. Yet the stance was the same. “No, you’re not crazy,” he was telling us again. “It’s okay to see what you see, feel what you feel; it’s useful to express it.” For person as for society, his modes of analysis and therapy were grounded in the present moment, in the existential truths of our experience.

Such consonances rang throughout his work, or rather were the fibers of its integrity. Thus, scanning the urban scene, he saw its ground as figure, and with his brother in 1947, in *Communitas* (rev. ed., 1960) proposed banning the private automobile from Manhattan. As with so many of his



In this unpleasing plight  
 I have composed a book  
 to show how youth is thwarted  
 by the world we made.  
 May those who read be stung  
 by wrath I never felt  
 for me but for these kids.  
 Creator spirit come.

proposals, time—or rather the slow contagions of attitude that he helped to initiate—has dimmed the sheer surprise of this one, made its pertinence clearer, and brought us not noticeably nearer to its realization.

I cite it here as emblem of the self he brought consistently to play in his social critique. He was the radical child, questioning with fresh eyes the assumptions undergirding massive constructs of social experience; he was equally the therapist, seeking the key feasible intervention. Indeed the

title under which he later included this proposal describes the pieces as *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals* (1962)—not one or the other, but both simultaneously. It was this stubborn practicality—his insistence on grounding vision, like critique, in the real situation, in the actually possible—that gave his public dreaming its bite upon the time and its hold upon our imaginations.

In this vein, as the massive urban school systems grew unworkable, Goodman proposed (in the *New York Review of*

**In each field he was significant, though not a major figure. But the character and spirit of his work, and a deep integrity of vision and purpose, touched me and my generation.**

*Books*) their reconfiguration as it might be begun in his own city, in small neighborhood facilities and arrangements that made parental participation and local self-determination the organic concomitants of community education rather than merely rhetorical slogans. Here, as usual, his simple inspiration was no isolated potshot, but rather the corollary of a well-developed line of thought and a full social perspective. In *Compulsory Mis-education* (1966) he had applied the social-developmental critique of *Growing Up Absurd* specifically to public education; in *The Community of Scholars* (1966) he had deepened it by taking the colleges as "the only important face-to-face, self-governing communities still active in our modern society," and arguing the historical case and present prospectus for their revitalization on this basis.

**S**UCH WRITINGS HELPED TO INSPIRE THE movement for student-initiated educational reform that stirred the campuses of the late sixties; and it was fitting that Goodman found himself in turn, for a time, playing some real version of a role of his dreams, employed as an independent scholar by my friends in San Francisco who had organized the first successful "free university." Though we took him as an "educator," for lack of a better title, and because he was indeed our mentor, the triumph involved was political, as were his essential teachings.

For Goodman was not flip in calling *The Community of Scholars* "a little treatise in anarchist theory . . . [after] Kropotkin." Though only in his formal political writings did he dwell on this theme explicitly, it is the ground of intention that unifies all his social writings. His grasp of his own role as a modern bearer and shaper of this tradition left him little need to defend it as such, as he inquired into what might be the perceptual and artistic modes, the intimate psychologies and therapies, the orderings of urban civilization that might be useful in developing self-governing communities of self-governing persons—not only democratic and libertarian, but exploring anew all the psychic and social territory colonized by the state's operations.

Yet to describe the spectrum of Goodman's teachings does not catch the rarer and more integral way in which he taught our time. The lesson lay less in his conclusions than in the mode, the stance, the self of inquiry. In a word, though

Goodman was often dismissed as just an original thinker, he was something deeper—*his own man*, anarchist to the core. Not simply "not the state's," but stubbornly uninstitutionalized, against the social grain of the age itself; and committed thereby to making his own versions of sense and moral meaning, each time arguing them anew from what he could grasp of first principles and the rich heritage of our culture.

It is this knotty spirit, this self-owned integrity at the perpetual task, that bites at one from every page of his work—in the intimate textures of his prose and verse; in the grand scope of *The Empire City* (1964), his tormented hymn to mid-century urban life, which Norman Podhoretz admired as "more extreme in its stubborn individuality than any [novel] in a long, long time"; in his observations as a lay therapist, citizen, and seeker of sex; in the potent idiosyncracies of his attentions and deductions; and in those thoughts and allegiances of his which remained partly indigestible by every current whose fancy he caught, saving him from the role of patron saint.

**A**ND IT IS THE FULLNESS IN WHICH HE conceived himself, as his own good man, which made him more than just another sharp individualist on the make—which gave his bite its force and him his stature. For he knew himself as an animal of nature, throbbing with vital energies not to be repressed; as an agent in the mysteries of the Spirit; as a cognitive and emotive being capable of self-insight and self-governance; as a social being, a citizen responsible for each scale of community from dyad to the whole; as a craftsman in art and in intellect, transforming his culture's heritage. Each dimension actively claimed his energy and allegiance; each in turn became a fundamental ground of his expression in the world. He did not manage quite to express them all in each single piece he wrote, but he was always trying—not for ideology's sake, but as his way of being in the world.

In this light Goodman was a rare father to my political generation. During an age when the landscape and our imaginations were impoverished, he modeled for us a way of being as a political man. He said that it was possible to be, not a party-member, but an autonomous citizen of revolutionary tradition; that it was possible to digest Marx with respect in a larger understanding of the conditions and relations of human production; that it was proper to see each dimension of our being as a fundamental ground and determinant of our political condition in the whole, useful to sink one's roots in each consciously, and necessary to speak in one's own voice.

His model was not an ideal to imitate, but an example—graced with enough cantankerousness, weakness and contradiction to be real—of what ways of growing up as whole political persons, as full social beings, might be possible and make sense. It gave us a great permission to find ourselves in the moment, which we were mostly too timid or rash to use well. But if, from this chaotic age in which swell so many diverse currents of politicized thought and action (several through his efforts), there in time condense among us new models of political wo/manhood appropriate to the situation, Goodman's act will no longer seem so *sui generis* or merely ornamental; and his parental influence will be then more clear.

One more orthodox grace of his political integrity bears mention. Though Goodman's work is rich in theory and theorizing—so much so that it forms in a sense most of the



stuff of his stories and novels as well—this arises always from particular problems of practice, is phrased in their terms, and returns to express itself through them. In this regard his journal *Five Years* (1969) and his subsequent flurry of public letters and reviews, *The Society I Live In Is Mine* (1962), are of a kind with his more focused works of literary and social critique, and are as meaningful, despite or because of their grab-bag quality. *Five Years* is so because it shows Goodman in the pits, in a double sense. “I wrote this book when I had no one else to write for or to talk to,” he says, in a “useless time”—and it is candid in revealing his self-pity as he struggled with the blues, the fruitlessness he felt in his career, his sex-life, his aging. And, simultaneously, inseparably, the book shows him in the pits of praxis, transmuting the crude ore of experience into ideas to be applied—exposing him in the intimate act of making sense as he accumulated the drifts of thought that would cohere in *Growing Up Absurd*.

As for *The Society I Live In Is Mine*, only here and in the brief reprint credits prefacing his other books does one get a sense of the actual enmeshment of Goodman and his writings in the practices of the time. By letter, by proposal, at hearings, on commissions, in public forums, in the streets, with reason he besieged the president and every lesser order of civic and professional official and spokesman, as a proper citizen of each community he took as his. In that he was a teacher, too, he brought his researches from print to life, not only in this way but on the faculty of several colleges; as a lecturer at many more; at conferences and conclaves of many sorts, wherever would abide him. And though for much of his life much of his work never found print, by virtue of its individuality and the time’s tempers, from the time of my adolescence in the New Left till his death shortly after the Movement fell apart, Goodman’s articles were powerfully present in the progressive journals of politics and culture that nourished our minds.

His engagement in these three streams of discourse weaves throughout all his writing, his poetry as impartially as the rest, providing much of its occasion, accounting for much of its tone. To see it thus is to see Goodman in a light I have skipped over—as a true *man of letters*. The role is rare in our age, and doubly so for the remarkably full and consistent way in which he fleshed it out. Yet also, I think, it is different neither in kind nor in content from the roles of educator and of political man, which he similarly fulfilled; for he operated in a realm where the distinctions among these roles dissolve.

If I have neglected the literary emphasis, the blunt fact that a third or more of his published work is in novels, stories, plays, and poems, and that he wanted, I think, first to be remembered as an artist rather than as an artisan, this is perhaps proportional to his literary influence on my generation and his own; and in his novels’ case is as much a reflection of his character and my own as of their quality. Reading *Making Do* (1963) and *Empire City* (1959) at a time when I still looked for the usual literary graces and a kind of romanticizing of our condition, which Goodman was neither good at nor approved, I found their images of the struggles of our lives to be meaner and plainer than I cared then to read of or to face in my own—and indeed, I don’t know that anyone has yet done for my generation the story of a war and its aftermath that Goodman did for his.

Also I found their forthrightness about homosexuality unsettling, both from my own anxieties and because it seemed then (as it would not have, had I seen him as *littérateur* only rather than as a political man) an extraneous aberration, a nagging distraction to my interests and, or so it

***It is anarchist theory that links all his social writings. He was a shaper of that tradition, exploring anew the psychic and social territory colonized by the state’s operations.***

appeared, his own. Such attitudes as mine were, of course, themselves among the cruel distractions he continually faced, and no doubt kept the candidness of his pen somewhat in check beyond his fictions and journals. Only on rereading him do I now appreciate how broadly and consistently his more objective writings still managed to concern themselves with Eros, with uncolonized sexuality, with manly love, with their social preconditions—a theme as integral as any I have named him by. Though he died before gay liberation got well under way, that movement—male and female alike, despite the predominantly male focus and the often sexist phrasings of some of his work—and the general androgeny that beckons beyond may well claim a piece of Goodman as forbear (though he would surely have declined paternity of the latter).

**A**S FOR GOODMAN’S POEMS, I HAD NO such guards up. I have always liked plain stuff *Homespun of Oatmeal Gray* (1970), as he titled his last collection; and admired besides the enormous discipline involved in his crafting, from so deep and complex a perspective on the general madness of life, those measured lines of simple speech which poetry’s commissars dismissed as pedestrian. In *Hawkwweed* (1967) and *The Lordly Hudson and Other Poems* (1962), too, his poems reflect the fullness of his concerns, private as public, and how it felt to bear them in rejoicing and lament; and it is to his poems most often of his work that I return, as history and my flesh make me ready for their meanings, as if he were a father still.

Near the end there appeared, to my segment of Goodman’s broad family, through the *New Schools Exchange* newsletter (Oct. 31, 1971), between one heart attack and his last one, his suite of “Poems Bed-Ridden,” to share his goodbye to his body, his dead and living loves, the world. His last touch on our lives was as pure and sure as the classical Chinese activist-scholar-poet tradition it echoed; but what brought me to tears was the voice I had heard from him throughout, there encoded less as epitaph than as blessing:

*I am obsessed by the plain facts:  
writing them literally down  
is all the poetry I can.*



**NATURE HEALS: The Psychological Essays of Paul Goodman, edited by Taylor Stoehr. Free Life Editions, 41 Union Square West, New York, N.Y. 10003. 259 pp., \$11.95.**

## The ways of nature

GEORGE DENNISON

**I**N RETROSPECT, PAUL GOODMAN seems better than ever: We sorely miss such a voice today. He was the preeminent social critic of the late fifties and the sixties, but the truth behind that somewhat absurd term is that he was humane and wise.

The essays in *Nature Heals*, which span a period of more than 25 years, present a fascinating picture of Goodman's development. His important themes appear at the very beginning and persist to the end. Preciosity and mere cleverness are shorn away. There is much evidence of suffering and endurance. Principles that appear first in fiercely polemical forms end in the commodious attitudes of a man who is not afraid to keep enemies and suffers no need to despise them. And all along there is a visible creation of self, role, identity, and of practical labors (critic, therapist, etc.) as well as a body of thought. Goodman's late essayistic style, although it is not without faults and lapses, is remarkable in recent American letters. It is sometimes colloquial, sometimes grave and lofty; it is impeccable in its discriminations and so swift and sharp in its identifications and references as to be at times uncanny.

The essays of the late sixties are acutely analytical, but by this time Goodman is so secure in his meanings that he strikes notes of sweetness and pride, and sometimes of hilarity. These qualities appear most informally in "The Politics of Being Queer," an essay of such candid good sense that one looks aside at other works, even those of

a near-great like Genêt, with a new awareness of the portentousness and insularity with which these themes have been treated. "When I give talks to the Mattachine Society," Goodman writes, "my invariable sermon is to ally with all other libertarian groups and liberation movements, since freedom is indivisible. What we need is not defiant pride and self-consciousness, but social space to live and breathe." There are passages in this essay that are, on the one hand, nothing but the conversation of an unusual man, truthful and humorous. On the other hand, they are without precedent in American writing. Goodman goes on to talk of politics, education, schools, literature. His being homosexual, he writes, "seems to inspire me to want a more elementary



ELLIOT KATZ

humanity, wilder, less structured, more variegated. . . . That is, my plight has given energy to my anarchism, utopianism, and Gandhianism."

Except for the taped interviews and selections from notebooks, "The Politics of Being Queer" is the most informal essay of the present collection. Yet its insights, concerns, and recommendations are all of a piece with Goodman's most formal addresses to educators and psychoanalysts. This unification of public and private things was one of the triumphs of his life. Whatever its peculiarities, it gave him a centeredness and freedom that few people achieve. And it was no mere intellectual matter. It required that he take many a costly stand on public issues, lose many a friend, much income, and opportunities for publishing and teaching. But the lived quality of his thought gave him subjects of wide relevance and a voice of philosophical authority. Now that the period is receding, Goodman is beginning to emerge as a discernible

historical figure. Taylor Stoehr, who was his friend, has selected and arranged the materials of these volumes to stress the unity of life and work. His insightful, highly detailed biographical introduction—which is perhaps a foretaste of the long biography under way—is superb.

**T**HE EARLIEST ESSAYS IN *Nature Heals* were written in the mid-forties, a time of enormous activity for Goodman. His reaction to the Second World War had been as intense as D. H. Lawrence's to the First, and he needed work upon work to discover the ethics and politics of his revulsion. The role of psychology in these investigations can be seen especially in his early defenses of Wilhelm Reich.

Reich held that the social causes of neurosis demanded a social-political role for the analyst. He believed that the human orgasm served an immediate physiological function, and that behind every psychoneurosis could be found an actual neurosis, or anxiety, brought on by instinctual, especially sexual, deprivation. This last idea, which had been Freud's, was carried by Reich to the wonderfully logical conclusion that the cure for sexual deprivation was sex, and not mere insight. When Goodman presented these ideas to American readers in reviews and essays, he stressed that continence in itself was damaging to the young, and urged that teachers provide sexual facilities for children and adolescents, and step out of the way. These recommendations came at a time when progressive educators were teaching that Sex Is Beautiful. The Goodman-Reich defense of Ugly Sex shocked them deeply. In "The Political Meaning of Some Recent Revisions of Freud" (1945), which served Goodman almost as a manifesto (as did much that he wrote at this time), he combined his praise of Reich with an attack on the assimilationists, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, whom he saw as technocrats of a nature-less, spiritless *sociolatry*.

Reich had been drummed out of the psychoanalytic movement for insisting on the political meaning of psychoanalysis, and out of the Communist Party for insisting on the sexual meaning of politics. Goodman took up both positions and began to suffer accordingly. At this time he made enemies who remained faithful for decades.

Reich was a link between insight and conduct, psychology and politics.

GEORGE DENNISON is the author of *The Lives of Children and other works*.

Goodman respected him, too, as a pioneer. But it would be a mistake to overestimate the importance of Reich for Goodman. Goodman thought his theory of nature simplistic, and believed that his ideas of self and neurosis ignored the dialectical vitality these phenomena possessed in life. Freud far more than Reich influenced his thought, and the psychoanalytic habit of mind antedated the war by many years. His earliest stories had been psychological. Looking back in 1965 on his apparently complex career, he indicated its unity when he wrote:

I am a writer, and certainly the writer must present his own life-view . . . rather than explore or impose a psychologist's theory. But it happens that my life-view, the way I do see things, and therefore the way I write,

*Social Nature* . . . plus poetry, plays, uncollected essays, and unprinted stories and novels. He was a figure in the radical wing of the avant-garde, and although he was boycotted by the avant-Establishment around *Partisan Review*, he did in fact command more real praise than all but a few contributors (some of them Parisian) to that periodical.

There now occurred a grand synthesis of themes he had worked with for years. His labors on volume one of *Gestalt Therapy* seem to have been exclusively editorial. The second part, however, *Novelty, Excitement, and Growth*, although strongly indebted to ideas of Perls, was largely Goodman's own; in any event, it is of a kind and order to set

also—and perhaps especially—in such structural insights as this:

. . . to put it in a way that must seem odd, the contact-boundary—for example, the sensitive skin—is not so much a part of the organism as it is essentially *the organ of a particular relation of the organism and the environment*. Primarily, as we shall soon try to show, this particular relation is *growth*.

In an important and peculiarly modern way *Novelty, Excitement, and Growth* served as an ethics for Goodman. The purpose of therapeutic method was to remove “blind spots,” compulsions, trivial fears, and wasteful conflicts within the self. The hope of the therapist, however, was not merely to replace misery with good feeling, but to liberate a whole person independently possessed of the possibility of right action. There is a powerful ethical tendency in this book. One senses it always. The immediate concerns are usually self and nature, but the commonweal is never wholly out of sight. Goodman referred to this linking of therapy and ethics once in a fanciful way as recruiting the crew of the Argo. If each patient represented to some extent a rescue, and if the method was in that sense compassionate, the more important motive was that there be a crew . . . and more important still that there be an Argo. Goodman's familiar presence in the sixties was the public projection of functions he conceived and fulfilled at this time. He became the physician-philosopher of the immanent community.

**Goodman believed that the human animal seeks its own good and does not need to be constrained by external authority. Of each innovation he asked whether it had to exist at all, whether nonintervention—which amounts to trusting nature—was not the preferable course.**

has been immensely qualified by Freud, Sullivan, Wilhelm Reich, Karl Abraham, Rank, and Groddeck. Presumably these irrelevant theories have become second nature to me; they are not theories, but part of my growth in experience. So I see the psychosomatic, the fantasy, the unexpressed interpersonal act or avoidance, almost as I see red and blue.

**G**OODMAN WAS ALMOST 40 when he collaborated with Fritz Perls in the writing of *Gestalt Therapy* (1949–1950). With his brother Percival he had written *Communitas*, destined to become a classic of city planning; he had written the first three volumes of *The Empire City*, the third part of which he had just printed at his own expense; he had written the stories of *The Break-Up of Our Camp* and *The Fact of Life*; had written *Kafka's Prayer*, which drew heavily on Freud and his own Reichian therapy; had written the first version of *The Structure of Literature*, an extended bravura feat of Aristotelian structural analysis; had written the political and literary essays of *Art and*

it well apart from other productions of this school. While writing it he entered therapy with Lore Perls, who was not only a broadly experienced practitioner, but a cultivated and philosophically gifted woman. She became his friend and mentor, and provided guidance when he launched his own career as a lay therapist.

Stoehr has wisely included selections from this often difficult book, which was pivotal in Goodman's life. One discovers, as its theory unfolds, that it is not “value neutral” but radical and a search for value. The underlying concept is stated at once: “Experience occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment”—and Goodman adds a thought that was Aristotle's and that remained centrally important: “It is the contact that is the simplest and first reality.”

Goodman's philosophic training, which had been arduous and first-rate, is evident everywhere, not only in the synthesizing of several traditions, but

**T**HE ACT OF ANATOMIZING or analyzing anything is largely an intellectual act, yet close, responsive noticing over a wide range of detail implies concern, even passionate concern. Just this is one of the finest qualities of Goodman's prose. His style is abstract and analytical, yet it generates this quality of passionate caring, and vivifies life while it explicates it. Of the present essays, “Designing Pacifist Films,” “The Psychology of Being Powerless,” “The Children and Psychology,” and “The Politics of Being Queer” are noteworthy. The masterpiece of the collection, however, is “Reflections of Racism, Spite, Guilt, and Non-Violence.” It appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1968, a time of high-tempered and slogan-ridden factionalism. Important political truths were being obscured in all quarters. The Kerner report, which—in the somewhat fashionable terms of extreme black militancy—maintained that “white racism” was the cause of certain



social and economic ills, had just come out. Goodman responded with this essay.

To account for the explosive mixture one does not need fancy new concepts like white racism; the old story of criminal neglect of social costs for private gain is more to the point . . . what is evident is a *general drive* to dispossess, control, and ignore human beings who are useless and bothersome, whether small farmers, displaced coalminers, the aged, the alienated young, the vastly increasing number of the insane . . . [or] unassimilable racial minorities.

After a brief psychological and historical description of racism, Goodman suggests that the dominant northern middle class is subject to maladies perhaps even more disastrous.

Meantime we must live with the immediate problem: what to *do* when some are hurting and others, who have power, don't care? *How* to make narrow, busy, self-righteous people understand that other people exist? It was exactly for this problem that Gandhi, A. J. Muste, and Martin Luther King devised and experimented with the strategy of active massive non-violent confrontation. . . . In my opinion, this is the only strategy that addresses all aspects of the situation. . . . We will have to live together in some community or other. How? In what community? We really do not know, but non-violent conflict is the way to discover and invent it.

The terms Goodman uses in this essay are psychological. They are related structurally to remedial action, and they prevent the process of analysis from creating spurious archetypes. But in a larger sense the essay is political and seems actually to be one of the finest short commentaries of that decade.

**S**OMETHING SHOULD BE SAID of the title of this collection: *Nature Heals*—*natura sanat non medicus*. When Goodman is theorizing, as in the selections from *Gestalt Therapy*, this motto, or rather any action that might conceivably be harmonious with it, is conspicuously absent, but naturally so, since the motto applies precisely to the cessation of intervention. It was not really the motto of Goodman as a therapist per se, but an attitude discernible at all stages of his life. Its literary manifestations resembled Coleridge's belief in universal "fountains" of creativity that energized literary forms and were released by them. In Goodman's early political thought it was the belief that the human animal seeks its own good and does not need to be constrained to it by external authority. The same attitude was expressed later in his many versions of Reich's idea of organismic self-regulation. In *Communitas* it took

the form of asking of each social innovation whether it needed to exist at all, that is, whether nonintervention—which amounts to trusting nature—were not the preferable course. *Natura sanat* is apt, certainly, for this collection of psychological writings, but it is worth saying (as Stoehr mentions in his introduction) that it was the poet-philosopher who handed on the motto to the therapist. □

**DRAWING THE LINE:  
The Political Essays of  
Paul Goodman, edited by  
Taylor Stoehr.  
Free Life Editions,  
272 pp., \$11.95.**

## Freedom and community

---

LEWIS PERRY

---

**T**HE LIVELIEST AND MOST inventive of the social critics who rose to prominence in the 1960s was Paul Goodman. Equally critical of the "military-industrial complex" corrupting the schools and professions, and of Leninist cadres engaging in their periodic expeditions to "organize" the new left, Goodman captured the mood of independent indignation that sparked so much protest not long ago. But he made a point of never criticizing without offering a practical alternative. These essays often catch him in his favorite role of proposing little changes through which families and neighbors could gain control over schools and fields, streets and workshops, museums and airwaves. His proposals were "mostly made off the top of my head," he confessed. "But they are quite clever," he added, and perhaps the listener who didn't like them would concoct better ones.

Goodman loved to describe his work as anarchistic. But his was an off-the-top-of-my-head anarchism that could take in the guaranteed annual wage, certain Republican politicians, and nationalized utilities. It is more accu-

---

LEWIS PERRY is the author of *Radical Abolitionism* and co-editor of *Patterns of Anarchy*. He teaches history at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

---

rate to think of him as typifying a stubborn American conviction that tightly centralized solutions, even when modern problems seemingly required them, just do not work. Although it is fashionable to describe the sixties as dead, I suspect Goodman's gritty, decentralized approach continues to influence citizens' movements concerned with such problems as ecology, education, and the revival of neighborhoods.

Yet these essays constantly remind us that Goodman is no longer a living presence. He is a historical figure. Taylor Stoehr's valuable introduction shows how Goodman's politics took their bitter edge from efforts to define a course of independent radicalism in the late thirties and from struggles to retain an artistic voice while conscientiously opposing World War II. The occasion for the title essay, "Drawing the Line," was a 1945 order to report for an Army physical; and two interesting pieces from the late forties are addressed to war resisters tempted to go to jail, and to high school graduates tempted to join the Army. These pieces give a glimpse of an important, unwritten chapter in recent history: how old pacifists, whose careers were sidetracked or wrecked because they opposed a "popular" war in the forties, encouraged and aided C.O.s, draft-card burners, and deserters during an "unpopular" war 20 years later.

**S**OME ESSAYS SHOW GOODMAN in lonely gestures like the Worldwide Strike for Peace (1962). But his belligerent pacifism clearly found an audience in the sixties; many Northern students found it more compelling than the black Christian variety. When I first met Goodman, he was carrying from campus to campus the idea of refusing deferments and straightforwardly fighting the draft itself as well as the Indochina war. This idea initially shocked young men who were discussing the zaniest measures—even feigning psychosis and homosexuality—to elude conscription. In a short while, partly through Goodman's influence, draft resistance became a major tactic of young radicals. An evocation of the power of the draft to shape young lives is "A Young Pacifist," Goodman's beautiful eulogy to his son Mathew who died in 1967. Mathew's gravestone (surrounded, Stoehr tells us, by others with familiar insignia of war and patriotism) still displays the slogan that he carried on his

placard during a famous antidraft demonstration earlier that year in Central Park—"Twenty Years Unregistered." Today, of course, there are students to whom draft cards and classifications mean absolutely nothing, and who could not understand the slogan.

Stoehr's introduction also reveals that Goodman felt his work in the sixties drove him from his true calling, literature. As the student left became increasingly violent and manipulative, and as old friends went along uncritically, he felt he had accomplished nothing. Now that his articles appeared in *Playboy* and other glossy magazines, he probably realized that the bright revolution he promoted had turned into a commercialized fake. Though not in any ordinary sense a Marxist, he had read *Capital's* analysis of commodities too deeply not to know what was going on. And he felt that the sixties, the decade that made him, had ruined him.



ELLIOTT RUDWICK

This feeling of being wrecked by success, of being distracted from great work, is one clue that Goodman's life belongs outside political history and fits instead into familiar traditions of American writing. It is remarkable how many American writers have worked through autobiography, making their self-exhibitions emblematic of America's failures, successes, and standing in this world. The literary historian Sacvan Bercovitch traces the origins of this stance to the Puritans' endeavor to find in individual lives the links between divine purposes and national events. The autobiographical stance, at worst, can result in priggishness. But at best it uncovers unconventional truths in the shared experiences of Americans.

Throughout these essays, it is Goodman's life that tests the meanings of American experience, that measures

the lifting of repression and the freeing of the spirit. Dozens of sentences that begin "In my opinion . . ." (or a similar phrase) reflect Goodman's assurance that his opining was the historical moment's essential feature. The publishing of ostentatiously unrevised notes and drafts made the same point. Rallies, confrontations, and other public events were absorbed into his life history; at the same time, private experiences, as in the case of Mathew's death, were turned into public events through his writings. To his fans Goodman was not merely opinionated: He dramatized the openness of a time when society could apparently be changed by candid self-assertion. But his I-centered stance also courted the kind of biographical attack that is normally irrelevant. Twice Marxists asked me, as the clinching argument against taking him seriously, "Did you ever meet anyone who knows what he's *really* like?" And in *The Conflict of Generations*, Lewis Feuer dismissed his campus performances as manifesting the problems of an aging homosexual.

**G**OODMAN STATES IN SEVERAL essays that most worthwhile human activity is collective. This may sound like a paradoxical claim from such a self-avowed eccentric, but it cautions us against reducing his message to the asocial mottoes of contemporary pop culture—"Do your own thing" or "Different strokes for different folks." To resolve the paradox, we should recall that Goodman's writing was not simply autobiographical; it was religious. Nor was it Judaism that interested him. He identified his interest in good professional work with Calvinism. And he was intrigued by archaic Protestant strategies for merging individual and group histories and living blamelessly during a sin-ridden epoch.

These strategies underlie the notion of "drawing the line." The "libertarian," as Goodman defined him, was "rather a millenarian than a utopian." (A 1960 version, which Stoehr does not use, substituted "free spirit" for "libertarian," thus strengthening the religious drift.) "He does not look forward to a future state of things which he tries to bring about by suspect means; but he draws now, so far as he can, on the natural force in him that is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society. . . ." Another essay falls back on theological distinctions between "the Old Law and the New" in order to

cry out, "Brothers! the slave within the heart is dead"; the time is auspicious for "positive natural acts" to leaven the earth. Except for favoring "nature," Goodman's distinctions resemble those of Adin Ballou and other mid-nineteenth-century Protestant communitarians. What it all meant to mid-

**He typified the American view that centralized solutions do not work, and was equally critical of the military-industrial complex and of Leninists out to organize the new left.**

twentieth-century readers is a puzzle.

Goodman's interest in Protestantism grew with his fame. He told a Berkeley mass meeting in 1965 that "it took only 250 years for the University revolt of Wyclif and Hus to bring on the University-led Reformation." By his own report, the students "didn't much relish the thought of Hus at the stake, but they were crazy for the Wyclifites at Oxford standing on the ramparts and fighting off the King with bows and arrows." The moment brought out the two-sidedness of his identification with youth. On the one hand, he plainly enjoyed imagining them at the barricades, and his praise made their acts seem legitimate. On the other, only a compact sense of centuries—one that urgent young people couldn't understand—authorized the praise. Here, too, he reminds me of Adin Ballou, who ended up something of a pessimist, waiting out his days. In the later essays Goodman asks less and less of the present: Human nature is too "lousy" to permit far-reaching reforms.

**T**HOSE WHO SAW GOODMAN as a nutty utopian, impatient for easy solutions, overlooked the religious basis of his thinking. They also missed the extent to which he was not a reformer at all, but a demodernizer. His central wish strikes me as having been to dismantle modern institutions and restore the strict life of peasant communities. It is a truism



about Goodman that he disliked refrigerators, cars, and other luxuries when they got in the way of "natural communities." Before reading this collection, however, I was not aware just how far he went in defining the natural as the premodern. He looked back to a community in which coercion arose from neighborly pressures rather than "the law"; the shame of exposure in the stocks may have hurt less than the guilt that attends modern repressions. In the old days, children picked up education naturally, while working, and had no need for imprisoning specialized institutions. Goodman even counted the "face to face" dealings between eighteenth century squires and commoners as a version of "community anarchy."

This side of Goodman's thought has not worn very well. For one thing, he exaggerates the material well-being of premodern folk (and does some gingerly footwork around servitude). For another, his demodernizing pose rests inconsistently beside his confidence in the modern "prudent" middle class, who won some measure of freedom by abandoning old-fashioned habits. (The case is strongest with regard to women, whom Goodman ignores almost totally.) It is clear, in any case, that the sexual behavior he recommended would not have escaped punishment in the customary villages to which he looked for models of community anarchy.

**N**OSTALGIA FOR THE OLD days is hard for a radical to avoid. The feeling that we have "gone astray" (as Stoehr puts it) may contribute to the radical's inspiration. Furthermore, to believe that the good life of our dreams is somehow attainable in the future, we must find some grounds in the lives of people who have already lived. The alternatives are mindless incendiarism or the kind of blueprint utopia that leads, as Goodman saw so clearly, to tyranny. My point is not that Goodman shouldn't have offered a version of history, but that his version would look better if it did not so often fall into rather conventional hostility toward preceding generations of middle-class Americans. It also suffers by comparison with the discoveries of E. P. Thompson and others who find in working-class cultures lively traditions that run in opposition to the official histories of governments and ruling classes. A different kind of libertarianism could be built on their work.

I have deliberately not discussed the views of sex and psychology that some readers may believe are fundamental to Goodman's politics. My reasons are several. First, psychology is the subject of a companion volume; here his views are mostly taken for granted. Second, sex evidently declined in political significance for Goodman over the years: While early essays demanded the sexual liberation of children, the older Goodman sounded more charitable toward parents and treated his own exploits simply as an example of inexpensive human activity that will go on in the "mixed system." Third, the psychological passages are the least impressive parts of his political writings, versions of the kind of psychologizing Feuer turned on him.

Libertarians have a way of writing history so that their heroes lose all flaws and inconsistencies—and also lose any audience. I hope Goodman will be spared that treatment. He was a serious, reflective writer in a time that valued activism, and this useful collection repays close reading. □

**CREATOR SPIRIT COME! The Literary Essays of Paul Goodman, edited by Taylor Stoehr. Free Life Editions, 284 pp., \$11.95.**

## Literature as a way of being

EMILE CAPOUYA

**I**N HIS INTERESTING INTRODUCTION to his selection of Paul Goodman's literary essays, Taylor Stoehr gives a lively account of Goodman's career as a man of letters, which was long, productive, and varied. Naturally enough, Stoehr is not much concerned here to take issue with his

EMILE CAPOUYA teaches English at Baruch College, The City University of New York. He served as Paul Goodman's editor for the novel *Making Do*, and for his poetry collection, *The Lordly Hudson*.

author—he has quite enough to do simply to sketch the general lines of Goodman's intellectual development, to describe in orderly fashion the composition of his chief works, and to recount their fortunes in the world. And yet, reading Paul Goodman is a heads-up affair. Every reader will want to make his own judgment about Goodman's special excellencies and his characteristic foibles. The premise, of course, is that Goodman was so unusual and so valuable a writer on literature that his views are worth taking seriously, as it would be folly to take seriously the views of most writers on the subject.

Goodman was well aware that science is the religion of our time, and even more the superstition of our time. Nevertheless, he was a sucker for science himself. Or, more elegantly put, he delighted in the elegance of scientific demonstration—or any demonstration that imitated the beautiful tautologies of arithmetical reasoning. For him, the conclusion of any argument so designed was as satisfying as a chord happily resolved.

It is, of course, a matter of luck if science and reason, so conceived, do not end by slaying whatever subject they contemplate. Some 15 years ago, I heard Paul Goodman speak at a public meeting whose general theme was nuclear disarmament. Goodman's contribution to the discussion was to rebuke the young collegians who were going to the South to take part in the early phase of the integration movement. He thought their impulse was inauthentic. His view was that their real interests were the relaxation of parietal rules in the dormitories and the legalization of marijuana. He recommended that they fight for those goals—and also perhaps for nuclear disarmament, since that issue might be regarded as everybody's business—but maintained that their interest in full civil rights for their black fellow-citizens was a callow displacement of emotional energies. Now, how could this remarkably humane and imaginative man have been brought to make so muttonheaded a pronouncement? By the influence of psychology, the science that he himself practiced. Current psychology happens to hold infantile theories about the motions of the soul, and Goodman had deduced from its jejune categories that young whites in the North could not possibly feel an authentic passion for the rights of blacks in the South.

**T**O TOUCH UPON SOME LITERARY instances of the same impulse: In the remarkable essay, "An Apology for Literature" (which Goodman touchingly and appropriately concludes with an apology *pro vita sua*), he quotes wonderfully telling lines from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," and then remarks:

In my opinion, there is a lot of truth in this—it is grounded in Coleridge's post-Kantian epistemology. It is odd, however, that as a philosophic anarchist after Godwin, Shelley should end the *Defence* with the fatuous sentence, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." What does he intend? That they should be acknowledged? Then what would they do?

The answers to Goodman's three questions are (1) To state a proposition that the whole of Shelley's essay supports; (2) No, since the power of poets does not derive from formal authority but from a faculty to which such authority is irrelevant or pernicious—that of giving exquisite expression to the moral intuitions of mankind; (3) See (1) and (2) above. Reader, it is a safe bet that Paul Goodman was at least as intelligent as you and I. How was it that he misread Shelley? Psychology, again. I think he forgot for a moment that moral diseases are historically specific to a time and place, and that Shelley's century was, in comparison with our own, enormously self-confident and unselfconscious; that the swollen self-regard that gives the tone to social intercourse today would have been considered evidence of insanity in Shelley's time, an absolute inability to catch the social signals exchanged by civilized people; that Shelley was not talking about himself, but about a law that he considered to be outside himself and superior to himself—the way in which moral influence is propagated among human beings. These matters are so patent that I am sure that if you and I had delivered ourselves of so faulty a judgment, Goodman would have explained our mistake to us with his habitual air—at once intimate and impersonal—of invoking in the name of all of us a law outside of us and superior to us—the law that commands a just appreciation of the great-hearted dead. But our baby psychology misled him in this case, simply because it has no historical dimension.

In the preface to his novel, *The Grand Piano*, Goodman wrote:

Again, a certain abstraction comes from the style. I try to present only such surface appearances as are given with their social causes (or more rarely, their causes in the family constellation). The chief words of

vitality and color are thus "because" or "inasmuch as" or "the fact that . . . this made him"; or especially the divine formula of Proust, "Soit que (c'est à dire parce que)"—"Despite the fact (that is, just because)." I say especially this one because the explanation of the characters is dialectical and progressive thruout; perhaps the chief element of suspense is nothing but the question, "What will he be next?"

**N**OW, IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE that Goodman might want to claim that the development of his characters is dialectical—that puts him in good company, with Marx, Hegel, and Plato. But *soit que* does not come within a country mile of meaning "despite." Goodman's translation of the "divine formula" has a



ILLUSTRATION BY KAREL

charm that is foreign to the original, the charm of seeming paradox. Come to think of it, the dialectic probably owes a good deal of its popularity to its apparent ability to pull rabbits out of hats. Goodman's translation also has the brilliant glint of chiasmus: The power of that trope over the minds of men can be gauged by the fact that an otherwise unremarkable young fellow got to be president of the United States largely because his speech-writers minted for him such phrases as, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask rather what you can do for your country." Perfectly un-American, and perfectly ravishing.

In the instance we are dealing with, Goodman naturally mistranslated Proust out of an innocent fetishism for whatever could be made to seem dialectical. It was an offshoot of his general infatuation with form—which was sometimes fruitful for his criticism and sometimes rendered barren his own fiction. (In his poetry he paid far less attention to the intellectual elaboration of

structural systems; he was at his best an excellent poet, a real poet.) In this regard, what is particularly surprising in a man whose instinct and insight were true, immediate, and immediately available, Goodman's trust in a notional concept of form—was this the promised end, after Aristotle?—led him to employ an abstract vocabulary that, on analysis, frequently turns out to refer not to experience but to other abstractions. The effect is to make the reader feel stupid. But he has been balked in his expectation that the terms employed would describe and illuminate the features of a work of art.

Again, Goodman had Wordsworth's authority for cherishing colloquial speech, and like Wordsworth he used it in a way that sometimes lends him an awkward grandeur, no less touching and no less grand for being awkward. But when he theorizes about his practice, he says odd things, as here, in "An Apology for Literature":

When writing, I take my syntax and words from my colloquial speech; I strongly disapprove of the usual distinction between "standard colloquial" and "standard literary." I will write the slang that I consider worth using when I talk, for instance in the last few pages I have written "he comes on strongly," "their conversation sends me," "I am lousy at it," "he talked it up."

The distinction that Goodman points to and disapproves of is not to the purpose here. To begin with, the expression is "he comes on strong"; to alter the syntax makes about as much sense as monkeying with "How do you like them apples?" The force of the phrase evaporates if you tack on the adverbial ending. (Can it be that some of the awkward grandeur is the happy effect of the tin ear?) "Sends me" is kid talk of the era of the big bands. "Their conversation sends me" combines two very different levels of language and is worthy of Mrs. Malaprop. The principal feature of "I am lousy at it" seems to me to have had a short life, born when I was and dying at about the time I became an adult. "He talked it up" is the one expression in the bunch that sounds like grown-up English—the others are, or rather were, passwords of the young and the imitators of the young. "I take my syntax and words"—a phrase not identified by Goodman as proceeding from his colloquial speech—is another example of a forced marriage between incompatible levels of language. As for, "I will write the slang that I consider worth using when I talk," that use of "will" strikes me as not being English at all.

**A**FTER THESE GRIM DE-  
fects, what is left? In my opinion,  
one of the most interesting,  
most consistently useful literary men of  
my lifetime. (I speak of him only as a  
man of letters, in the straitened sense,  
so as not to go beyond my brief. Paul  
Goodman's political writings and his  
essays on psychology, collected in two  
companion volumes by the same  
modest and attractively enthusiastic  
editor, are memorials of further investi-  
gations for which their author would  
not have disclaimed the qualifier "liter-  
ary": to science he preferred the old  
term "natural philosophy," because he  
approved of the implicit ethos; to the

**Though a democrat,  
he detested the view  
that all ideas are  
equal—some he knew  
to be good, others  
to be bad, and with  
endless patience  
he would explain  
how one could tell  
the difference.**

modern university, where the disci-  
plines live in watertight compartments,  
he preferred the trivium and quad-  
rivium of the great age of universi-  
ties—not to say the conversation of the  
agora and the stoa; and in all things  
Goodman willingly harked back to  
times when every variety of intellectual  
pursuit was confounded with au-  
thorship and literature.) He described  
himself as an anarchist, and, appropri-  
ately enough, practiced the citizenly  
virtues. An instinctive democrat, he did  
what he could to prevent the further  
degradation of the democratic dogma:  
He detested the notion that all ideas are  
equal—some he knew to be good, and  
he advocated them; others he knew to  
be bad, and with endless patience he  
explained how one could tell. The busi-  
ness of making fine discriminations is ill  
paid and breeds bad temper, but  
Goodman's manners in debate were  
generally exemplary.

In this collection, three splendid es-  
says, dating from the late forties and  
early fifties, follow in quick succession:  
"Reflections on Literature as a Minor  
Art," "Occasional Poetry," and "The  
Chance for Popular Culture." The first

two are quite short and the third is not  
long, but all have room for a charac-  
teristic disclaimer—the note of false ob-  
jectivity, of elaborate calm. Elsewhere,  
Goodman analyzes literary naturalism,  
and decides that its tonelessness, its re-  
fusal to comment explicitly on the scene  
being displayed, is an expression of re-  
sentment and is meant to provoke the  
audience. I think there is a good deal to  
that. Goodman himself does something  
of the sort when he adopts his falsely  
objective tone. It takes the place of a  
pained outcry, and is about as convinc-  
ing as the claim of the child forsaken by  
his playmates that he doesn't care. But  
despite these instances of masquerade,  
the essays are wonderful—they raise  
the essential questions.

In "The Chance for Popular Cul-  
ture," Goodman writes:

Lastly, works of popular art have the follow-  
ing form: they present an important emo-  
tional situation, of love, danger, adventure,  
in a framework where everything else is as  
usual. The detailed routine of life, the pos-  
ture and speech-habits of the actor (and the  
audience), the norms of morality, the time-  
table of work, these things are not deranged  
by the plot; they are not newly assessed,  
criticized, X-rayed, devastated by the  
passional situation. Therefore the aesthetic  
experience remains superficial; the  
passional story releases a surface tenseness,  
but there is no change in character, habit, or  
action. One does not sink into these works or  
return to them, for what is there to sink into  
or return to? and therefore again there must  
be more and more. (In the popular music  
the form is that the outer limbs are moved,  
even violently agitated, but no visceral  
sentiment or tenderness of the breast is  
touched.) By definition art of such form can  
have no style, for style is the penetration of  
every least detail by character and feeling.  
Somehow the popular arts have won the  
reputation of having a "slick," professional  
style; but this is false, because the least  
scrutiny or attempt to feel the meaning with  
one's body or experience makes one see that  
the works are put together with preposter-  
ous improbability. It is a Sophocles or a  
Shakespeare who is professional and work-  
manlike; in comparison with the style of *The  
New Yorker*, Dreiser is slick and neat.

**G**OODMAN ASSUMES THAT  
the falseness of popular art, so-  
called, which he describes with  
such point and feeling, arises in large  
part from the way in which it is sold,  
and the character and interests of those  
who do the selling. And surely that  
must be a great factor, since among us  
art scarcely exists if it cannot satisfy  
market conditions that arise far less  
from the desires of producers and con-  
sumers than from the desires of inter-  
mediaries who, in the most active sense,  
are the market. A patent or a copyright  
does not protect an inventor or an

author—both are forced to dispose of  
their work to a corporation on terms  
acceptable to the corporation: In prac-  
tice, patent and copyright simply  
guarantee an exclusive right to sell to  
the entity that markets the work of an  
inventor or author. Nor does the con-  
sumer set the terms on which he buys  
the work of either. And certainly he  
cannot buy what is not being offered for  
sale by intermediaries.

Here is Goodman's modest proposal  
for giving popular culture a chance to  
be popular culture rather than a culture  
dispensed to the people. My guess is  
that it represents a very slim chance,  
and unless the future surprises us, the  
only one.

So we come, finally, to a hackneyed political  
issue. And frankly, as an unreconstructed  
anarchist, I still must consider the solution  
of this issue easy, easy in theory, easy in  
practice; if we do not apply it, it is for moral  
reasons, sluggishness, timidity, getting in-  
volved in what is not one's business, etc.  
The way to get rid of dummy intermediaries  
is by direct action. Concretely, in the  
present context of popular art (I am always  
fertile in little expedients): let actors get  
themselves a cellar and act and forget about  
the critical notices; let writers scrape to-  
gether a few dollars and print off a big  
broadside of newsprint and give it away to  
all likely comers on 8th Street; forget about  
Hollywood movies—they don't exist—and  
how surprising it is to find one can make a  
movie for a couple of hundred dollars and  
show it off in a loft. I don't want to lay stress  
on such particular expedients; but it is  
ridiculous to gripe about vast sociopsychol-  
ogical labyrinths when what is lacking is  
elementary enterprise and belief.

You see, I myself am waiting for my friends  
to open a little night-club where the talents  
that we know galore can enliven us, instead  
of our frequenting idiotic places that bore  
us; and where I myself, setting myself  
exactly to this task, with concern and love  
(and a little hot hate), can move an audience  
to the belly and be greeted by a roar of  
laughter, hushed attention, a storm of  
anger, gleaming tears.

"What's this?" he speaks of popular culture,  
mass-media, the state of society, and he  
ends up pleading for a little night-club  
where he and his friends and their hangers-  
on can display themselves!" Listen, here is  
my concern: I want to be happy; I am an  
artist, I'm bound to it, and I am fighting for  
happiness in the ways an artist can. If you,  
audience or artist, take care of yourselves,  
the intermediary somethings will get less  
take at their box-offices, and we'll have a  
popular culture.

Two further essays, "Kerouac's *On  
the Road*" and "The Sweet Style of Er-  
nest Hemingway"—the latter I re-  
member in its first incarnation, lighting  
up the not always incandescent pages of  
the *New York Review*—are certainly  
among the best examples of practical  
criticism of fiction that I have read. □



### ***The Common Preoccupation***

He was one of those guys who  
starts to prophesy, to prepare  
his own death from  
the minute he's told  
that he's also human, no  
better. Not exempt. Or  
rather — that being human is so  
much less than he felt it was.  
Never realizing how presumptuous all this is.  
Tolstoy, after being tortured daily  
by the thought for forty years,  
died, alone, quite triumphant and content after  
a week's mild illness. And take Villon. Villon,  
who predicted himself tortured, drawn  
and hung up young — a public, agonized  
spectacle — disappeared! He's  
never been heard from and  
for all we know, may have escaped.  
May be holed up hunched  
over a hotplate in someone's  
spare room. A strange  
luminous old man  
with his childhood intact.

### ***Ruth***

She says the most  
surprising part of  
getting as old as she is,  
is finding you haven't  
ever changed; that  
once the future's gone, the present  
intrudes itself daily, hourly, somewhat  
like the cuckoo on her wall, and

you find you're no  
longer startled  
by the ghosts

only curious  
about why they come and go  
and why  
they never speak,  
but linger  
softly around your bed,  
every night  
like parents.

### ***The Medium***

Be careful who you call  
for help, how loudly  
you complain. You might have  
simply wanted your young  
mother to hear you weeping, but  
the spirits in their ignorance  
may think it fit to send you the  
stern and tragic Madame  
Ulanov. She'll take your hand and  
walk beside you. Then you'll know  
it's no longer your game.  
You'll realize what you should have  
all along. The dead don't have any  
interest in keeping you alive.  
When they intercede in your  
life, it's with complete  
indifference. Notice how  
they never even speak to  
you directly. They only use  
your voice. So that you're  
constantly cultivating these neurotic  
circles of desperate friends, begging  
them to remember what you said,  
what inflection, what voice  
you used, what your face looked like when  
the spirit transformed you.

---

### ***ART BECK***

*ART BECK is the author of two volumes of  
poetry, Enlightenment and The Discovery of Music.*