

On Paul Goodman—and Goodmanism

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One does not live forever—maybe that was something Goodman did not understand. When he spoke of death, it was purely statistically, in a manner that nonplussed me, as if, when it came to nature, he considered himself merely another number: death would seize him at the average age, sixty-five or sixty-seven. Yet in some distorted fashion statistics represent an acknowledgment of nature. In the late fifties, steaming at the neglect of his work, he said, holding out his hands in a gesture of futility—which wished to appear simply helpless—so that they appeared suddenly twisted about themselves: “How much longer have I got to live? Ten, fifteen years.” There would not be much more time now, almost as if looking at his watch. In this he hit the mark almost to the year.

For me too his disappearance amounted to a statistic, I noted almost with relief. For he added greatly to the confusion and I knew his influence in the political sphere to be largely destructive, especially since he feared the consequences of his ideas and the responsibility they entailed—and moreover asked questions and stirred up problems he had no intention of dealing with.

My real desire here, other than to attempt a farewell to a man whom I did not like because too plainly destructive, but from whom I learned something important, is to consider him as an artist. For although I am not sure he deserves the laurel crown, his work is good enough to make a serious judgment in that regard necessary—no small accomplishment in these times and in this country.

With his loyal friend Meyer Liben, another artist who has not yet received the recognition he deserves, Goodman invented a prose style. Its chief characteristic is its sharp—and classical—distinction between word and action, and, as a consequence, the extremely minor role unacknowledged phantasy, brooding and thought plays in it. (Since, Jean-Luc Godard and Gunter Grass have also succeeded in calling phantasy by its proper name and thus fashioning something approaching myth—but their reference to works of the past is much more haphazard than Goodman’s and therefore without his telling scope.)

In part Goodman achieves this by taking thought (mostly in distinction to phantasy) literally—that is, seriously, not merely as somebody’s opinion. For instance, in *The Grand Piano*, the first volume of *The Empire City*, Goodman actually describes a world functioning in Marxist terms. In the later volumes, especially in the *State of Nature*, he does something similar with psychoanalytic insights, translating them back into the reality from which they arose. They do not entirely fit. In fact, part of the tension of the work arises as one senses this lack of fit. Although in the later volumes of *The Empire City*, in contrast to *The Grand Piano* where the Marxist framework pretends to coincide with the world entirely, Goodman acknowledges this discrepancy between thought in the world

and the world which is bigger than it, he manages only intermittently and partly to face it. For his thoughts appearing in the world like the gods in Homer served always in part to protect him from it by pretending they were the world.

In some sense similar to the specificity of the painters of the Lowlands, this not-at-all-pedantic literalness represents a respect for actual thought (an ability to distinguish it from brooding, propaganda and phantasy) and for reality—and for the relation and the place of thought in reality. Goodman never imagined, as novelists now often appear to, that the world occurs in a person's head, and that in consequence a novelist's job is to persuade the world that what occurred in his head has actually occurred in the world, or could—an attitude that by confusing thought and reality, denies both. (For an important discussion of the significance of similar distinctions in the history of the West, see Arthur Collins, "The Objects of Perceptual Consciousness in Philosophical Thought," *Social Research* 40, 1 [1973], 153-176.) Goodman could tell the difference between living thought and mere obsession and thus knew that what occurred in him was a part of nature and could be found in the world. All the more remarkably—since there appeared to be no subject his tongue respected in silence—he never spoke about it, merely acted upon it as an artist.

As a result of this capacity to grasp the proper place of things, no one predominates in unacknowledged narcissism in his fiction. This means his works can be read, in fact often ask to be read, aloud in company. No implicit demand here that his work be read in the darkness of silence where thoughts, phantasies and the taste of the world are barely distinguishable from each other. He does not, as many contemporary writers do, invite the complicity of his reader, partly because, I think, he sees always they are more than one: his works are social and know in their very movement—this is their grace—that their life presupposes at least the survival of society, if not its life, and of language, its breath.

In this they contrast with much contemporary scribbling ("good spelling" Goodman used to call it) which with preposterous vanity assumes it came before society and even before creation. No wonder it is often so dim and unintelligible! And although it often fancies it exalts the individual, putting him as it were before the constitution, it actually fears for his life, for it cannot conceive of him living in the face of his fellows.

In Goodman's prose narrative (it is not "fiction") what people do is more important than what they think about what they do. In part as a result of this, their actions have some relation to what they think, and are, therefore, intelligible, in fact, too intelligible. For Goodman had little sense of what he did not understand: his hand was always up with the answer. That is why perhaps his worlds were finally little.

In this factuality, in this unassuming insistence on reality, Goodman's work mirrors in some way the American pragmatic bent. Not for nothing did he choose as hero Horatio Alger—and how he used to talk about him: you could hear the history of the country, certainly the city, in his voice and his love of it! At its best, at its deepest, *The Empire City* desires to answer, or at least understand,

the question of who Americans are now. Goodman did not consider the inheritance of the Constitution in its exercise from generation to generation something that could be taken for granted.

In contrast, Goodman's insistence on the place of reason and delight (a delight sometimes a trifle programmatic) in reality and, therefore, nature does not correspond to recent American experience, although it would not have been out of place in the eighteenth century. For pragmatism when not outright mind-destroying can be mind-denying. Sometimes it clings to the facts, because it will not understand them. As if it knew that the way to lie is to dare one to see what is going on before his eyes. It fears unwitting thought—lest it stir up memories of unfulfilled love and the sweetness of desire. In plain grimness it leaves out “the human factor” as the “social engineers” put it—and allows one to think without being aware of it, with the result that a man lives neither on heaven nor earth—and fears values.

Goodman's confidence in the place of reason, of words—for he tended to consider thought, in the contemporary use of the word, mere inhibited speech—to the extent that it was learned drew support from Aristotle—the Aristotle of the University of Chicago in the days of its splendor where, it is my impression, Goodman lived happy and crucial years for the development of the understanding and the consciousness of reason and its relation to nature which is at the heart of his style in his work as an artist. The departure from Chicago and with it from the academic world must not have been easy, especially when one realizes that in several crucial respects Goodman was one of the truest academics in America: he spoke of it rarely.

Aristotle supported Goodman's own sense of the palpability of nature, of the world of men and thought. For Aristotle, he once remarked to me, thinking was like eating—by which he did not mean that thinking took the place of eating, but that the apprehension of the world in thought and perception nourished his growth and his delight as much as food and in as necessary a fashion. Goodman's delight is not as deep as Aristotle's, nor as sure of itself. At times it is more wished-for than self-evident and its outlines are not so clear. For there is often more than a touch of vengeance or hate in Goodman's reason. But there is the same basic confidence in the existence of the universe and pleasure in it as in Aristotle and the same accurate, neither brash nor over-modest experience of the self. With this difference, however, that Goodman assumed the universe only as an artist—indeed railed against it as a man, as if it would not give him ground enough to stand on.

Such confidence has place for tragedy, for it must know that actions have consequences. In Goodman's work this space, clearly marked—for its shape was overwhelming—was, for the most part, left empty, with a kind of grace which he fiercely denied in his “personal” life, for those to move in who could and dared. His art touches upon tragic subjects but does not have the strength of heart to face them full in the face, except in plays like *Abraham and Isaac* and *The Cave at Macapelah* and stories like *Bathers at Westover Pond* and perhaps *The Life of Richard Savage* where it stops just short enough of nobility to allow

the reader to make the leap on his own, if he will. It is comic because it cannot be entirely tragic. Because it cannot weep but only speak about weeping, it laughs, more often smiles, at times condescendingly.

But this leaves one uneasy, oppressed, for the subject matter, once raised, is too serious to be brushed aside with laughter. In this, in its inability to experience its tragedy and in its inability to dismiss it, it is an art unwittingly congruent to its times.

Its importance lies in its assumption of the importance of facts, in its clear distinction between what can be denied and what cannot. That is why Goodman's characters do not chatter. In fact, at the times they do speak, they often sing. As a result of this respect for what actually occurs, Goodman's art points to the present's continuity with the past—how else could Goodman have written a play about Abraham and Isaac—as well as to its break with it. This means it will occasion something approaching dread when it does not evade it in the laughter of those who fear to weep.

In its distinction between thought and actuality and in its knowledge of their relation it points to the place of man in nature. For only when thought is made to substitute for nature can one entertain the illusion it is coterminous with it—and that man is a master of it and in consequence his own slave.

But the place of nature in Goodman's art, though distinct, is in the distance, as in Flemish painting, to be seen from a window, from the inside. I am thinking of the beautiful description of the ocean (worthy of Homer) in *The Empire City* and of the setting of *Bathers at Westover Pond*. Nature in his work does not move or grow as his men and women do not move or grow but wait for the reader to give them life. In fact it is men's distance from nature one feels in his work—and their restlessness at it—as if the plants were objects behind a window-pane.

This too is a tragic theme, not tragically realized, with the result that the distance holds and one does not suffer the terror of its overcoming (something Goodman consequently, and characteristically, thought was much easier to do than it actually is—as if it were only the stupidity of others which kept us from it). One does not move to touch what one beholds—although one knows, vividly, it could be touched. But one cannot move. Maybe Goodman dares one to move—but not entirely in good faith, for he does not countenance the consequences of his challenge. In full tragedy instead you would hear the plants grow as in the *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, and know what it costs to hear them.

In a sense this remoteness from what he will nevertheless know is there grows most tangible when one contrasts it with Goodman's beautiful descriptions of works of art, for instance, the account of a performance of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Here there is no distance, but sweet intimacy. He allowed himself an ease and closeness in experiencing art which he did not touch in living.

In Goodman's art there are clear beginnings. For he does not have to discover what he is about as he goes along but seems to have known it all along (if anything, he is too sure of what he is doing)—and so his endings are authentic. That is, they allow one to turn with renewed appetite to another work—or to life

itself; they do not keep one returning to what has not been concluded because not really begun. In his art there is always space for something—for other trouble and other pleasure and above all for the world, more lucid and distinct to the touch, always after art as after rain. I think of Breughel—without the assurance in the living god and, therefore, with more caution and more recklessness and more dread.

In contrast, the notorious inability of contemporary art to bring things to fitting conclusion, to a conclusion one can apprehend in the joy of veracity, is actually a difficulty in really beginning. It is only at the last word—which makes for no end—that the poet discovers he has not really begun at all.

His art does not pretend to do the living for you. Nobody flatters the reader less or shows his intelligence, his ability to see and hear, more respect. In this I think he was truly aristocratic: he knew men to have been intelligent before they grew stupid, free before they grew servile, freespoken before they guaranteed the abuse of their right of free speech.

This means, of course, also that he set standards for his readers. He hardly thought of entertaining them or of educating them; he assumed they were educated and, therefore, had learned that pleasure springs from activity. Any reader of his work has to put a good deal into it; it is sparse and does not attempt to do what it cannot. As a result one feels one has a part in fashioning it as one reads—but in a very different way, almost opposite to the current fashions of “audience participation” which have led to a confusion of art with life, and inevitably the debasement of both, as if one could live works of art, and art could be made to substitute for life.

In his art he followed the old wisdom of freedom: to set an example others might follow. Here he did not tell others what to do: how to teach when he did not teach; how to heal when he did not heal; how to love when he did not love; how to get angry when he rarely fell into a rage except at absolutes which do not exist. Quietly, he imitated the masters.

In consequence of its live relation to the work of the past, his art, even in its failures, could show the path out of the present preconceptions in “art” which make it hard, for me at any rate, to believe the words in the novels and poetry I read. I mean the sense that art and knowledge are somehow at odds—and that, therefore, one can believe neither. For Goodman knew the slow ascent to the heights or, at least, the foothills from which the great works of the past (works which do not draw such antitheses between art and knowledge) can be imitated rather than adored—if, as he once put it, the Americans would ever dare learn to read.

He knew, I think—although perhaps he would have objected to putting it this way—that the Western tradition belonged not to those who wrote about it in the manner of tourists on the packaged tour from the outside looking in; it belonged to those who dared imitate it. This attitude meant you did not have to discover everything yourself (“research”)—that had been God’s work, and it had been well done.

The point was rather to let what had been done teach one—to dare to look

at what lay to hand. He defined his own work in terms of the work of his predecessors (whom, incidentally, he did not hope to equal). That is why he simply did not give a hang about fashion. From him you could learn the relation of independence to knowledge.

As far as I know he was not self-conscious or even conscious about the originality of his art, although certainly aware of its merits. The measure of these merits he took with a soberness not to be found in his evaluation of his own social criticism or, generally, in his thirst for glory. This is because the "novelty" of his work, its strangeness, lay precisely in its traditional character. Also, he was at heart probably modest about what he really did well.

But this style he took so for granted never ceased to set me to wonder—and to provoke cries of illiteracy from editors more cocksure than literate. "When they think it's wordy," he told me once of editors, "it's an unmistakable sign they don't know what you're talking about." Certainly, the difficulties he suffered in getting his art published occurred because, when editors and publishers did not understand his work, they *would not admit they did not understand* (such was their ignorance) but preferred instead to take their astonishment for Goodman's ignorance. He wrote like nobody else they had ever read, therefore he must be illiterate.

In the two years or so I spent trying to get *The Empire City* published, it was hardest simply to get editors to sit down and read the book; they would not do it. In the rare instances when they did, they would often simply answer that the man obviously could not write.

The real problem was that publishers are interested in writers, but Goodman was an author, a minor author but an author. This meant he set standards, and knew his work to be fresh from his own hands—all of which unnerved editors, for it showed them their place. He was not to be their creature. He did not attempt to hide it.

In his dealings with the writing of his contemporaries, he was quick to ferret out whatever was of merit and accord it its due—something he did not readily do to living people. His criticism of unpublished work was generous and constructive; he did not make excessive demands and was ready with his support—a very rare quality. His artistic view was so broad and deep—and built on real intimacy with a small number of masterpieces he could call to mind at will—that he was quick to sense the limitations and parochialness of much that was published. Here too he was hard, cold, given to an infuriating arrogance, biting hard on his pipe with an assumed look of wisdom—which served often to veil his here and now. But the basic experience was real; he cared about letters. He was a much better citizen in that Republic than in the one in which he was native born.

He had known a living sweetness once—that is what one has to learn from his art. He had been in the Garden of Eden. You can tell it perhaps most in his evocations of childhood, which he treated like a prehistoric age. Buried under the superficial coldness, the experience of primordial delight stirs in his stories, novels, poems, plays. There was an unearthly innocence about it all—and it was frightening, for it promised to give no quarter. As a person a great deal of his

agony and some of his ferocity seemed to spring from a knowledge of the existence of that world and an inability to touch it in life—although in his art he moved in it with a certain sureness and a softness, like Adam naming the animals. But alas, he was rarely fierce, most often simply desirous of ferocity or crudely cruel, just as he was more often insulting than frank.

Lucky is he who has let the sweet and, on occasion, harsh taste of reality dispel his youthful phantasies—rather than give in to them. But Goodman insisted on fidelity to them. In their name he would, it seemed, betray almost anything else. As a result in his company sometimes difficult but possible actions, like leaving home, appeared beyond aspiration's compass. It was not easy to hope in his presence—one felt oneself incurably naive if one did. There was a dead note of cynicism at the heart of his apparent confidence in the accessibility of a better world which winced and dreaded, most of all, the simple movements of freedom it pretended so much to herald.

I do not like his New York in *The Empire City*. But it is a city as opposed to a dormitory, a place in which people have some relationship to each other besides mere economic exchange, where they experience their lack of relation to each other—which makes for its harrowing emptiness. At least it knows it is empty. In his city there is little real work, pleasure, education—and citizenship amounts to kidding around, although it yearns for seriousness.

His work raises the most fundamental of political questions: how do you fashion art in an “urban environment” in which citizenship is difficult of exercise, which is administered rather than governed (and whose politics is, therefore, incomprehensible), where the constant storm of strangers tends to make friendship and intimacy appear odd and exotic, where a man hardly knows how to greet another. In fact by attempting to fashion art (instead of merely pretending to) in such a world, he uncovers whatever there is of a city—that is precious little, and often the part of the city one would like to forget or ignore.

Goodman was asking what Horatio Alger would be like now—an authentic historical question. His answer was not reassuring—Horatio was on the fringes and the upward way was not as clear as it once was. He was poor, because he could no longer feel enthusiasm for exchange or perceive its rationality. The poverty Goodman describes is of a country that does not know how to be rich; it has little to do with need—in fact it conceives of itself in terms of need only because it fears to know itself for what it is. It is the poverty of people always in a hurry. It is a poverty that has little to do with lack of money—but with the lack of relation of money to value. That is why his people are unsettling; they do not let you forget this inability to experience value, to live at the heart of the city. They would be better forgotten—except that they have been written.

Had our politicians read *The Empire City* (that that is inconceivable points to what is wrong), they would have known an urban crisis was upon them before *The New York Times* announced it as reflected in the latest MIT studies. But that would have meant trusting an artist and, more importantly, one's own eyes.

It is a startling artistic assertion to be brought up face to face with the fact

that one lives in New York, for it amounts to experiencing that one has no sense of measure or proportion—and has attempted to exult in it. That is why, incidentally, it is extremely difficult to make art out of New York—art as distinguished from confession and political propaganda masking as art. For it means lending proportion and perspective to something without it—and that with hardly any tutelary deities to address! Such measure cannot be discovered without turning New York inside out, upside down, as Goodman did disconcertingly—but for solely artistic reasons, for reasons of sight—in order to see what he was looking at.

Simply, Goodman called attention to the way it feels to walk down a New York Street—and not only to the way it feels but to the way it actually is. He told me of a piece of fiction I was working on, “You describe the way you think it is, not the way it actually is. Go out and look. Do they look the way you say they do, the bums in Madison Square Park?”

But if Goodman could solve these problems in his art, he had little sense of how to solve them or even encounter them in life—although he claimed the contrary, loudly. He lost his head to his magic. It was as if he assumed he could act in the world in the same way he fashioned works of art. When he tried it, as he kept on trying it, he suffered rude blows of disappointment. Even in his art he did not so much resolve these problems as refuse stoutly to obscure them by attempting artistically what they made it impossible to do without sham.

As an artist he knew these limits and loved them, for he realized they had relation to the shapes of things and therefore allowed him the freedom he desired and was capable of. But in politics it was another matter. Here he savaged all limits, as if they constrained him “personally” even when he did not know of their existence. In his social and political writings—in contrast to his art—he went with deceptive—and to some of the young, seductive—ease way beyond his depth. Here seemingly there were no problems one could not lightly attack and resolve. The price for that spurious confidence came higher than I think he realized: distance from the searing tragedy of the times—a distance nearly endemic to them (for how else could international communism have survived?), but in the instance of Goodman treated as almost desirable.

But on another level, not on the level at which he spoke but rather at the level at which he simply breathed, in the words which broke from him of their own, in the things he did not say but acknowledged with a sign, he was deeply serious—so much so that I feel his writings on politics amounted to an effort to deny what he really knew but would not suffer knowing. Almost as an aside once, referring to the division of the West between the United States and free Europe and the Soviet Union, he said, “It’s done too much damage to all of us already.” He uttered it softly, as if he would not hear himself—and turned immediately to another subject, as if he would forget. Or once, with an emphasis I rarely heard from him—“The Soviet Union can’t stand psychoanalysis, because it’s the truth.”

His anxious insistence on persuading others of his political views probably arose from his own sense that he was denying something he knew. Strangely, in the name of telling it all, he appealed, I suspect, to individuals who sensed

they dared not acknowledge something they knew. That could be practically everybody.

He appealed to the desire in perhaps almost everyone to say out what is on his mind and heart—but especially to those who had been silent in their youth and regretted it—and would take an impotent vengeance on it by espousing doctrinaire radicalism, mysticism, etc., and who would thus, incidentally, deprive themselves of the first fruits of their maturity—a maturity they took for granted in a way that never ceases to amaze me; no wonder our poetry is so tame when it does not gripe or bitch—and joy stirs so unwillingly in it.

I knew him when I was at Harvard and in the years when I was fresh out, a hard time in which ideals and illusions had to be shed, or, at least, put aside, in order to see what was really there or would be there in their absence—to see if they would spring up of their own in life when not expected. The risk had to be taken that there would be nothing inside which would come to life of its own, that the ideals were mere shields against an inner emptiness and an inner desert in which nothing would stir, and against entering the world in all its beauty, a world I sensed would (and could but) drive home in stinging, even burning recognition whatever incapacity for life there was in me.

I was trapped in my ideals—in a society which has superstitious regard for them, especially in the young, whom it fears to address critically, to get angry with and finally to love, whom it enshrines in glass cages—in the absence of saints.

I needed someone to tell me firmly, with some confidence in the ebb and flow of life, to drop my ideals, that is, to stop using them as a way of keeping things and myself at a distance. Otherwise I might resort to desecration in desperation. For that was the closest I could get to telling myself to drop them.

Goodman appealed to me, because I hoped he would help me free myself from some of these illusions I could not distinguish from ideals and at the same time strengthen me to act on my own in the spirit of the ideals. But he broke the illusions only to substitute his own ideals for them, more intractable and more destructive and just as much illusion as those they replaced.

He used to call me Kid, to my enduring resentment. But now as I remember, I realize, he taunted me with this address, because he could not bring my age home to me simply in his presence. In retrospect the situation is comic; I was eighteen or nineteen and editor of a magazine I had founded, and one of the few people at that time who would publish him. For him to have made me feel my age without subjecting me to his contempt would have entailed assuming the responsibilities of a man and an adult, something in my judgment he was always ambiguous about—and that is putting it mildly.

Besides my yearning for sensible advice, his evident education and his security in it drew me to him; he made intelligible statements. I never had a teacher at Harvard—with the exception of John Conway, who, I felt, was educated—who could point confidently to the nature of things, and it had driven me to a kind of despair. Goodman contrasted to all this. He breathed a kind of intellectual confidence—like a man who could take the view from the mountains—that would

not be brushed aside. In part it was a confidence assumed like a fine suit—but that was only because he could not approach his genius with entire directness and trust to it; he always mediated between it and himself. He did not confuse critical questioning with neurotic doubting—in contrast to many of my professors who encouraged me to doubt, because they did not believe what they said—which is not to doubt at all.

The fact of the matter—and I stress it because it throws plain light on the present ruin and dishonesty of the universities—is that it was extremely difficult to learn solid and *significant* facts at Harvard, as opposed to unintelligible information, of which there was plenty. No one dared affirm them, because it would have meant taking responsibility for distinguishing between the important and the trivial and more importantly giving the past its own due—and, therefore, acquiring some sense of the shape of the present, of its limitations. For the limitless aspirations of the present—for instance, for eternal peace—and also incidentally its limitless fears—for instance, for the destruction of the planet—point out its own inability to know itself, to distinguish between definitions and restrictions.

The kind of facts I mean are: how many republics were there in Europe in the nineteenth century? When did full suffrage come in the democracies of the West? What were the arguments against it? How many people did Stalin kill in his purges? How did one get to speak in the Athenian Assembly? What office did Pericles hold? How did you become a Roman senator?

With a strange variation on the prudery of the Victorians, which strikes us as so inapt, it was assumed one knew these things already “from high school” (I’d like to hear about that high school), and it would, therefore, be graceless, even impolite to question students about them. As a result, one rarely came face to face with one’s ignorance—a harsh but in the end strengthening experience—without which, in any case, any real learning is impossible. Instead of the basics, one learned the latest, new-fangled theories which, often, made contempt for predecessors substitute for conviction. When one should have been treated like a kid one was treated like an adult in fawning elaboration—and when one should have been treated like an adult, one suddenly realized, one was not taken seriously at all. Too soft to be hard and too hard to be soft, such attitudes could but incite general exasperation, apathy, and violence—as they have. For they made it impossible to conceive of growth—let alone to feel it.

To all this Goodman provided refreshing contrast. It never occurred to him to doubt the elementary facts he had learned in all areas of knowledge—and he would present them casually in conversation with a lucidity of understanding, let one perceive the pangs of one’s ignorance—and in them, one’s appetite for knowledge. And he would not truck with insults to the old masters, although he would on occasion indulge in something approaching them himself, as when once he remarked (on reading the *Inferno*), it’s all gripes, all, all gripes. (To which I should have answered one did not suffer exile and die in it for the sake of griping.) When I remarked arrogantly that the *Aeneid* was boring because it lacked genuine feeling, he countered swiftly and with a decisiveness at which

I smarted: "Don't you see how sad he is, how very sad he is." You could feel Vergil's presence starting in the room.

He knew better than most professors what a dissertation is, explication of a classic text—in which mastery is called for, not brilliance or originality. A mastery whose modesty—for it implies respect for the past—stirs shame in many students who have been encouraged from childhood to be Titans lest they discover they are sons of Adam. For it requires actual courage rather than swash-buckling and occasions actual pride rather than blustering vanity.

He taught because he learned—rather than learned because he had to teach. As a result one had in his presence an almost unearthly sense of the accessibility of great works which were as much a part of his daily life as food and drink. He did not study them—but he let them teach him. He set me to reading many wonderful things: Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, *Tasso*, *Egmont*, *The Elective Affinities*, Franz Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Kropotkin's *Memoirs*—and he would hit the ceiling in something faintly but distinctly reminiscent of a noble rage when he ran into a "political scientist" who did not know Aristotle's *Politics*.

It was the works which made you serious. I think he believed it was the company of great works which ennobled. In any case he struck me as noble most of all when he spoke of them—and defended them from the foolishly irreverent—or reverent.

When he spoke of his student days and especially of his teachers (to whom his important work *The Structure of Literature* is dedicated with words that tell more of education than many books), a warmth and a firmness flowed in his voice which I rarely heard otherwise, as if this were one time of his life he had known to its depth. You could actually feel the presence of the classroom and his teachers' voices as he remembered. The respect he held for his teachers seemed to be the closest he reached to an absolute in his living; I never heard him question it—although at the same time he ferociously criticized the educational system. He felt this respect, I think, because he had not hesitated to disagree with them and to question them until he was satisfied. In contrast we—or, at least, I—although encouraged, until our ears split, to criticize, had in my experience rarely raised our hands to question—and then never on fundamentals. He called that in me, too: "You kids are afraid to be wrong. We, we were always up with our hands. Many was the time, when on the Seventh Avenue subway on the way down from the City, I had to admit to myself, I had been wrong in the argument"—on his face the memory of his acknowledgment as if he had been reexperiencing it—"but you kids never take a chance." He was right about that.

Even about painting and sculpture, arts with which in my impression he held little relation—besides poetry, drama, and narrative, he appeared closest to music: I came upon him once composing—he taught me something, when he pointed out that Mark Rothko's pictures were not really to be looked at but made people look better against them and repeated Jackson Pollock's comment about desiring people to come into the pasture with him. It is true that those pictures tend to lead one's eyes to the people in the room and clear one's vision of them. And it

helps to explain how it is that the Museum of Modern Art with its cafeterias and movie theatre, with its rooms rambling on forever as in a deserted mansion, is perhaps our closest approximation to a city square, windowless and blisteringly lit.

As I write it feels almost sweet—a tone which surprises me—for in reality Goodman was harsh, unseemly, cold and swelling with resentment—and most of the time spoiling for a fight. When he dropped his coldness (something which occurred among strangers who were not on to the vassal relationship he demanded of those who surrounded him—and which in that peculiar parochialness of Manhattan he never dreamt of reciprocating like a lord, for he would deprive even obedience of its pleasures) he simply smarted or burned—with an antagonism you could feel pierce the air. Had he been freer, the same warmth would have (rather than burned in confinement) radiated from him in soft enthusiasm which will bend but not break.

Simply, Goodman was not as much interested in helping as he pretended. In fact, his advice acted upon led to the very opposite of what he pretended. This is why he appealed to many kids, especially to kids not able to cope with the contempt flushed on them on all sides by teachers and adults whose lack of self-respect the untoward moves of youth could not help bringing to the surface for all to see. By ostensibly taking their side, he entangled them even more deeply in the web they sought to free themselves from. For the young's "radical" (so sad such a beautiful word should be made to serve such extortionary ends) demand that the world be made over before they please to enter it is also in part a concealed confession of fear of entering it, of leaving home. And although it speaks exclusively of the world's pains (its injustice), it fears its pleasure also—and its justice—that is, its freedom. By encouraging their righteousness and thus confirming their paralysis, Goodman often kept the young from taking the first step which would lead to the next and make it possible for them to discern the relation of action to desire. That is why he feared value and spoke compulsively of lust. For he would not stand their moving on their own; I saw him stricken by the simple firm "no" he so often "pointed out" people were incapable of.

The young went to him as to some wizard for weapons which would work against the adults without involving them *personally* (such a word! as if a man did not live or breathe except on express acknowledgment)—and they neglected the weapons which were theirs by inheritance but could only be inherited in the exercise: their hearts and minds, the words which rose of themselves to their lips but which they would not hear except from others.

We did fear error, above all—about that you were right, Paul.

And the magic worked wonders. At the spells the greatest educational institutions in the country tumbled down in a ruin, as if to say they had never stood at all—and only a fool would have dared think so. As if the way to keep privilege without shouldering its responsibilities in an egalitarian-minded society was to admit one did not deserve what one had. It needed no siege weapons, no trumpets, not even a sentence, a full declarative sentence as solid and as soft as a landscape, but just a word, "confront," which might sound like a command or a

hortatory injunction—which is what you do when you wish to look someone in the face and speak your mind (not what you think is your mind or what you feel you should think) but cannot. *And no one grew surprised.* For this too was to be expected. Had we not all imagined it at one time or another? And who would dare distinguish his dreams from reality?

The trouble was that the spells worked. At their beckoning notorious school-marms suddenly “confessed”: “We want to know what we have been doing wrong.” To have said “I” would have implied individual responsibility which was precisely what this kind of professor and the students “confronting” him both were bent on avoiding. Even when ostensibly opposed they colluded for a greater mendacity.

But these spells with all their wonders are not necessarily the truth. For unspoken thoughts often deserve to be denied, even though they cannot be dismissed. In any case the wonders of magic can wreak only destruction, for they enthrall not only those on whom the spells are cast but their casters as well.

Here, Paul, you were a pied piper—the pied piper all our school teachers had given us careful, detailed warnings against. How did they know so much about him? Had they also followed some magician repeating marvelous formulas into a dead end? But it did not work—we did not recognize you when you came.

I think when Goodman complained of lack of recognition, he meant also he desired his bluff to be called. For any genuine recognition would distinguish the good from the bad—and, thus, encourage the good. In terrible irony, however, it was the good in him, his work as an artist—not a great artist but a real artist, who really knew the liberty of creation, because he knew its limits—which received the least recognition. There are not many such artists around—and I thank God for them, for I never leave the presence of their work without tasting the sweetness of freedom and the palpability of nature and reason.

In his social and political work Goodman appealed to the yearning for change—and yet the unacknowledged ambivalence about it—and perhaps, even more deeply, to the inability or, at least, the insecurity in distinguishing it from mere evasion. He had a horror of those who believed or sought to believe in his own ideas and shook them off with a prudishness—as if in his eyes to take him seriously were unthinkable, an obscenity so lurid as to be inconceivable—which amounted to brutality. At the same time he looked for new converts or disciples. I think he wished to substitute them for peers. But that is the way of politicians, especially of politicians with contempt for the constitutions and the citizens who raise them high—not of teachers.

This ambivalence about change, probably most damaging because it could not experience itself as such, found its most superficial expression in impatience, haste and the gratuitous assertion that fundamental change for the better would be easy—if people were not so stupid or intractable. It was all so obvious even a fool could do it. But that is not the case and could only be maintained if you attempted to persuade yourself that history was of little importance, as Goodman did. At the heart of this ambivalence lay an inability on Goodman’s part when it came to social and political matters—for as an artist he was in earnest—

to mean what he said—and more importantly to know what he was talking about. He was simply too assured in addressing himself to matters which, however absurd they might appear to a first, abstractly-minded glance, had their complicated reasons—and could not be approached recklessly without danger. For instance, war—which, no matter how hateful, cannot be simply abolished at a wish without risking total confusion, the obliteration of the distinction between war and peace and friend and enemy and the drift consequent upon it which can but lead to the catastrophe the yearning for peace wishes most to avoid.

Nor did Goodman seek to hide his inability to mean what he said. Was there anything he sought to hide? But compulsive self-revelation can be a form of deception—since it in effect dares others to take one more seriously than one does oneself. In the instance of Goodman not many people took up the challenge.

Perhaps Goodman's fundamental ambiguity about change, his readiness to embark on it but not to take responsibility for it, was most evident in his outrageous (I use the word advisedly) activity as therapist. In the fifties, without any medical training, he started treating patients with the most powerful and dangerous techniques available, almost as a matter of course. It never seemed to occur to him that the most daring therapies would also require the most training and the most caution—and the best of souls. He seemed to assume the hardest to be the easiest—an attitude in which the implicit contempt is so overwhelming as to grow unnoticeable, if one has anything at all to do with it. In this as in almost all his social and political activity—in distinction to his action as an artist—he was a “forerunner” of the rampant fads of the sixties, in this specific instance of the plague of “primal,” “encounter,” “touch” therapies. All these therapies go back in one way or another to the discoveries of Wilhelm Reich—but not in serious fashion.

Where Reich was cautious, careful and daring, they are light-hearted, contemptuous of patients, sloppy, impatient, reckless. Where Reich knew there could be no feeling without content (without its proper object and occasion), they seek to separate the expression of emotion from feeling—as if they were training actors, no, marionettes. As a result, they cannot distinguish one patient from another, nor doctors from patients—and they seek to treat the world because they cannot heal themselves. This was the kind of freedom Goodman hawked when he forsook his art and took to the streets.

Goodman was, obviously, not as vulgar or as greedy as many of those who have come after him. No one who had ever really read anything worth reading could be. Although he mistook irreverence for necessary defiance and arrogance for courage, he was not greedy; I do not think he hungered for power over others. Also, he was too educated, and loved knowledge enough, to really whore on television and the rest. But, nevertheless, he was callous and contemptuous. He did plenty of damage.

Why did nobody take him to task openly and publicly for doing work he was so obviously unqualified for both in character and in training? Why did the professionals not speak up? How is it that at present hardly anyone speaks out against these wretched “therapies”? It would be an offense to freedom, the

saying goes. But this silence speaks more of a hatred of freedom than of a love for it, for it encourages its abuse.

Goodman was stricken by a mild remark of Lionel Trilling's which I repeated to him when he consented to the choice of *The Empire City* as a selection of the Readers' Subscription, to the effect that Goodman should stick to his writing and stop taking patients. To my knowledge it helped, perhaps decisively persuaded him to give up his activity as therapist. For this man who insulted almost everybody he met (perhaps because he feared above all to please), and wounded many deeply enough so they could not hear his name without pain, was himself deeply sensitive to *direct* criticism.

But he did not receive it. Instead he was isolated, first by ignorance, then by uncritical and self-serving acceptance of his least important work. His offensiveness represented an attempt to overcome this isolation—to refuse to be shackled in it—as it were, at one blow. But it served, sadly, only to provoke it anew. I often felt he was clamoring to get out.

But if Goodman ceased taking patients, he did not stop attacking people he met at parties or in public situations in the name of "psychoanalytic" insight and truth. In this activity he invoked the shade of Socrates, forgetting Socrates was a courageous soldier and respected the law—that he did not fear for his life in his truth.

He would "point things out" to people, tell them they obviously did not mean what they said, for he could hear the distraction in their voices; ask them why they smiled compulsively and sought to please; tell them about their relations to their wives. Often there would be an insinuation of unacknowledged homosexual tendencies. He once asked a friend of mine in Cambridge (about eighteen or nineteen years old), in front of some attractive girls, how many times a week he masturbated.

He looked for sexual troubles with a vengeance. When people were out to distract themselves, he would attempt to call them up short. In the name of health! For he felt the only way to better the world was to act on what you saw, instantly.

There are some individuals who cannot help doing this. They upset others because they *are* bigger than most. With them it is admirable, for one cannot help learning from them. But with Goodman it was forced and programmatic; there was always a theory behind it—you could practically spell it out. I think if he had let himself be, he would have shaken with fear. It is I think what he sensed when he once remarked that he was incurably sick—but he hardly meant it.

It was hateful. But nobody in my experience, including me, ever fought back directly. There would be embarrassed terror and weak smiles, a pallor, like pancake mix, stark on their faces, as he would talk on pretending he was a doctor making objective observations. Like an archaeologist identifying a just-discovered potsherd, he would then proceed with a melancholy, detached gaze to point out the person's helplessness, his inability to defend himself. He would turn to his disciples hanging around, for an "objective" confirmation of his observation. They would invariably agree in a dead cold tone which fancied itself to be the

voice of the nature of things. It was really a New York gang beating somebody up.

People put up with it because they were weak. He attracted people who were weak partly because he promised to make them strong—but only made them weaker, in just the way gangs destroy individuals—partly because what he said always had an unmistakable kernel of truth.

Wasn't this what freedom was supposed to be? The truth above everything else! Hadn't our teachers—for instance, I. A. Richards at Harvard—encouraged us to immerse in the destructive element, hinted that there was something genuine in Stavrogin, worthy if not of honor, certainly not of neglect? "I started out with the idea of unrestricted freedom and I have arrived at unrestricted despotism."

The brutal truth of the matter is that Goodman hated a lot and envied a lot. He sought to express this hatred and this envy without experiencing it as his own by using the truths of psychoanalysis as a weapon. This is despicable. (Needless to say, he thought so too.) When one remembers the prevalence of his political ideas, it is harrowing.

Had he been able to mean what he said he might have died a hero's death—something he feared, probably, but not enough to relinquish all aspiration to it—for he treasured the memory of heroes and knew that they too had lived. You cannot say the kind of things he said *in earnest* without risking your life. And there were moments especially in his sprightliness and in his freedom of enterprise in art and in his brutal, awkward, mechanical thrusts at the truth—for he did sense that the truth lived like the sun and sky and that you could not behold one without knowing the other—when I winced at the sparks of greatness starting from him. But they quickly went out—as if he would not have them but yet would not forget them.

Something much deeper than the mere yearning to draw attention to his art impelled Goodman to turn publicist. He was blinded by a touching hope: he desired to bring his art into life. That was his magic: he would let his creations loose on life—where, alas, they would not be recognized for what they were, where they would cause distress, elation, court disaster—and betray those who did not know them for what they were. Even the government would come to think like Horatio—and take to the streets to learn the physics of the bouncing ball.

Leaving off the splendid robes of an artist, Goodman put on the mufti of the simple citizen. But for him it was a disguise; inside he remained an artist, at a remove (it helps to explain his iciness), never entirely in his voice of citizen, in some sense indifferent—as if the destiny he shared was not his—like Leonardo sketching an execution, there, but neither audience nor actor. This meant he would have to deny what he ostensibly said—and turn on his disciples (before, incidentally, they turned on him, which is what would have happened had he been the teacher he sometimes fancied himself).

By attempting to draw apart the transparent veil which distinguished, but which perhaps appeared to him merely to separate, his art from living, and to lead his creatures into creation—as if they too must be driven from the garden, if only to encourage the stirring within us which would lead us back to it—

Goodman attempted to face up to the implications of Thomas Mann's tendency to see the inability to live and the fear of life as close to the core of art. Mann posed the question: If the real task was living, what was then the place of art which appeared to know sweetness only at the price of not experiencing it here and now? If art were to survive and, for that matter, we were to live rather than merely exist, works which grasped the relation of art to life in different fashion than Mann would have to answer this question. Goodman made such works.

Most profound in Goodman's conception (which also had its trivial and ridiculous aspects) was his sure sense that art was a part of life, like a man rejoicing at the dawn, not opposed to it or a compensation for it. This sense enabled him to move with sprightliness and liberty and courage in his creation; one never knew what he would do next in his work. It also led him fatally to confuse life with art, to take life for art.

Had he had the critics he deserved he might have been spared the pitfalls of his success. He might also have had an audience. It is true he had numerous readers—but he never had, it is my impression, an audience that knew itself as such. For that is impossible without real critics—not men who read novels somewhat in the way of politically interested divines, to catch errors and distortions in secular theology, of which there are many, all too many—but critics who can distinguish between art and propaganda, both psychological and political—and who are big-hearted enough to risk error in good faith in naming the beautiful and the ugly.

That is perhaps the hardest test—precisely because it is no test at all—for an artist to function without an audience, that is, without serious criticism. Picasso lived with it by presenting non-works to his non-audience—and flattered them by not reminding them of what they had lost: better life in the ruins without Piranesi to show they could not be looked at without remembering. Besides, the loss of proportion could be ignored as long as it was clamorously asserted to be a form of ugliness which might pass for beauty. Who could in any case tell the difference? Goodman instead attempted to create, and when he saw he could not, to invent, an audience.

It led him—and I do not exaggerate—to attempt to refashion the world in order to find place for his art in it. That was at the heart of his grasp of the importance of community, of a society in which individuals could tangibly grasp their relation to each other. Without it the experience of art was impossible.

As I have already hinted, he knew his own time better than he let on. In a sense his outcries represented an attempt to deny this knowledge, pressing in upon him—as well as out upon him, as it were, from the inside. He knew he wrote in a bad period for art. He spoke of it, rarely, in a soft, matter-of-fact, almost casual tone that did not belie the quiet note of authentic suffering in his voice, almost lyrical, full of regret and burgeoning tears. This was probably his real voice—what he would have heard had he been able to listen to himself more than intermittently—strangely soft, fluid and firm. Had he spoken it always, he would have only sung. The righteous whining, the self-pity made up an outcry

against it, for he would not suffer himself entirely to live. When he spoke in it, I did not think to doubt him—or to impugn his motives.

He lived in the troughs of two world wars which with all their inebriated cries of the coming of a new age had to make do with a life among ruins, ruins whose overseeing presence grows palpable when one attempts to do a piece of work that does not attempt to define itself as something new, that is, as something justified by catastrophe.

This is, I think, his legacy: he kept up some connection with what had gone before and, therefore, with the liberty of creation, man's and, therefore, also God's.

In this he stands with W. H. Auden and Thornton Wilder, whose work also mediates between past and present and, therefore, makes it possible to look upon the future if not with confidence—without drunken expectation. With this one crucial difference, however, that Auden and Wilder know how to acknowledge the presence of the destructive element within them and yet keep it at bay and, therefore, do not confuse speaking the truth, as Goodman often did, with total self-revelation. In a world which stridently insists on its enlightenment (an insistence amounting really to a kind of unacknowledged prayer) because it fears its brutality, he insisted on its recognizability and its continuity with the past that it had inadvertently broken with. He could, therefore, not avoid hurting its vanity—although at times he did it willfully, in order to ensure himself he was indeed in touch with the past's strength.

When writers will again learn to read and, therefore, to learn from their only possible teachers, the authors of the past, Goodman will, I think, become the teacher he always yearned to be. For he shows how it can be done and he dared to do it.