Paul Goodman: Prefiguring the past

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

https://shop.wki.it/libri/diritto-e-potere-nel-pensiero-anarchico-s706831/

PUBLISHER

Wolters Kluwer Italia / CEDAM

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This book chapter was published in Kinna, Ruth; Chiarella, Paola (2020): Paul Goodman: Prefiguring the past. in: Chiarella, P. (ed.) Diritto e potere nel pensiero anarchico, © Wolters Kluwer Italia / CEDAM, Milan / Padua (Italy) /, 2020

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Kinna, Ruth, and Paola Chiarella. 2019. "Paul Goodman: Prefiguring the Past". figshare. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/11617986.v1.

RUTH KINNA

PAUL GOODMAN: PREFIGURING THE PAST

Over forty-years since this death, Paul Goodman remains a controversial figure, his critical engagement with the countercultural and student politics of the 1960s provoking admiration and revulsion by turns. Goodman's ability to polarize opinion can be explained by the unorthodoxy of his political thought. He described himself as both conservative and anarchist but unlike George Orwell, who coined the epithet Tory Anarchist to express his politics, Goodman sidestepped discussion of synthesis, preferring to leave the relationship undefined. In Goodman's political writings Jefferson, Coleridge and Calvin happily rub shoulders with Kropotkin, Thoreau and Malatesta, but not obviously pulling in the same direction or exercising the same force. Goodman was also an unabashed utopian and his treatment of utopia is not only, therefore, an appropriate lens to examine his thought, it also helps to illuminate the distinctiveness of his anarchism. His utopianism anticipates the pre-figurative politics of contemporary anarchist activism and it is not surprising that his admirers and critics alike acknowledge this relationship. Yet his utopianism is peculiar because Goodman abjures the blueprint he sketches and he offers countless practical proposals for social change whilst remaining profoundly pessimistic about its achievement, finding neither an agent capable of delivering social transformation, nor a route for imaginative escape.

1.   About Paul Goodman

Paul Goodman was born in 1908 and died in 1972. Working with his elder brother Percival he published one of his most highly regarded works, *Communitas*, in 1947 but by common consensus he rose to the height of his fame in the 1960s as a "spokesman for war

resistance and student rebellion, and iconoclastic reformer and broad-ranging social gadfly"[1]. For Susan Sontag the reputation he acquired as the guru of 'rebellious American youth' – largely as a result the influence of his book *Growing Up Absurd* - belied his real importance. Lacking Sartre's theoretical brilliance or Cocteau's imaginative flair Goodman was nevertheless, she argues, America's equivalent intellectual genius, possessed of "a genuine feeling for what human life is about, a fastidiousness and breadth of moral passion"[2]. He expressed these feelings in a vast body of literature which extended from poetry and fiction to the elaboration of Gestalt psychology, as well as numerous political texts in a variety of formats: books, essays, pamphlets, interviews and lectures. He also expressed it in his person. Goodman's rebelliousness, Kingsley Widmer remarks, "was to conceive himself as an Artist"[3].

Goodman was an ecological writer, often recycling ideas, and rather than deeply probing or developing his original insights, he persistently re-examined the same questions from different perspectives. In Isaiah Berlin's terms, he was a hedgehog rather than a fox. He confronted the world he inhabited as an uncompromising critic; the hollowness, fraudulence, plasticity and unworthiness of American culture permeate his writings. Two years before Goodman died Richard Drinnon remembered late '50s America as "a time of the loyalty mania and McCarthy, the lonely crowd and the organizational man, of students and faculty members who seemed to believe they had been born into a prefabricated universe even less open to change that [than] the suburban split-level fulfillment which awaited them"[4]. These themes are also close to Goodman's heart. The "climate of modern times", he argued, was "over-urbanized, over-technologized, too tightly organized"[5]. One of Goodman's preoccupations was the effects that canned, trimmed-lawn suburban living exercised on children and youth – delinquents, beats, hippies, students. Across the Atlantic, Colin Ward voiced similar concerns and in *The Child in the City* he endorsed Goodman's view that "the

---

[1] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1980, p. 17.
[2] S. SONTAG, *Under the Sign of Saturn* [1972], London, Penguin Books, 2012, p. 177.
[3] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit., p. 38.
[4] R. DRINNON, *Anarchy*, London, Freedom Press, 1970, p. 230.
[5] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1994, p. 40.

city, under inevitable modern conditions, can no longer be dealt with practically by children" because "concealed technology, family mobility, loss of the country, loss of neighborhood tradition, and eating up of the play space have taken away the real environment"[6]. Goodman believed that the loss of tradition pinpointed by Ward was felt by all generations, differently and incompatibly, though by men more acutely than women. Consequently, while his remedy for the ills he identified in modern education pointed to a set of general principles that he described as "biological, psychological, aesthetic", his political dreams were not forged by the elevation of those values that he sought to protect for children: "neoteny, animality, fantasy, and wildness"[7]. Moreover, while he admitted that his utopian ideal was rooted "in the child-heart of man"[8], a description that echoed William Morris's wistful deliberations on utopia and childhood in *News From Nowhere*, his utopianism was neither a regression nor a fantasy – no more than Morris's was. As Ward's reference to "inevitable modern conditions" indicates, Goodman did not believe that it was possible to return to any condition, childlike or otherwise, not unless one imagined "a virgin territory with new people"[9]. His utopianism had a different character and was simultaneously a response to the constraints that synthetic America imposed and a defense of the cultural aspirations it had failed to embed in social practice.

2.   Utopianism

Widmer argues that Goodman's utopianism extended from his sense of displacement and "personal despair". In common with other anarchists and libertarians, he was acutely aware that his demands on the social order were completely out of step with current realities. As Goodman put it: "I invented a different and practical world than this world that made no sense and took the heart out of me"[10]. Whatever its motive force, Goodman admitted that he was a

---

[6] C. WARD, *The Child in the City*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, p. vii.
[7] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit, p. 40.
[8] P. GOODMAN e P. GOODMAN, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*, 2nd ed., New York, Vintage Books, 1960, p. 220.
[9] *Ibidem*.
[10] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit., p. 38.

'notoriously a "utopian thinker"'[11]. Like many anarchists, he was also wary of adopting this label without qualification and he explained his conception by locating his anarchism at an intersection of two continuums. The first (contrivance-nature) provided a benchmark to evaluate social design and the second (idealism-pragmatism) offered a way of thinking about implementation. Goodman's utopia leaned towards natural design and pragmatic execution, a combination that was unusual because the design was ideal and prescriptive and the planning acknowledged the necessity of compromise and the impossibility of perfection.

As Richard King argues, Goodman's naturalism extended from his psychology. Specifically, his commitment to Gestalt therapy led him to the adoption of principles of organic adjustment and symbiosis to assess human and environmental well-being in social analysis. His conclusion was that some social conditions were better suited to human flourishing than others. There was an echo of Kropotkin's principle of mutual aid in this finding, yet for Goodman, unlike Kropotkin, natural society also evoked a strong set of values: community, simplicity, authenticity or, as he put it, "green grass and clean rivers, children with bright eyes and good color whatever the color, people safe from being pushed around so they can be themselves"[12].

Modern America epitomized the contrivance that he associated with unnatural living. Scrutinizing its conditions and effects in *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman diagnosed the central problem of American life as one of public debauchery. Social life was characterized by "synthesized demand" and "made taste" and this prevented "the emergence and formation of natural taste"[13]. Goodman was not blind to issues of social and economic inequality, or injustice, racism and exploitation in public life. But his overwhelming concern was with the health of the community. His verdict on American community was damning. On the one hand, popular culture stupefied the poor, turning them into "suckers and

---

[11] P. GOODMAN, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, New York, Random House, 1962, p. 12

[12] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, New York, Random House, 1970, p. 193.

[13] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, New York, Random House, 1960, p. 34.

sheep" for useless things they could not afford. On the other, it milled the middle classes through an education system that prepared them for jobs that would pay them for "working as clowns", in order to keep the poor entertained and everyone stupid, compliant and credulous[14].

Nearly ten years before he published *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman captured the difference between natural and unnatural society in *Communitas* by outlining two modes of living, both predicted on material abundance. The first, "The City of Efficient Consumption", exhibited all the shortcomings that Goodman identified in post-war America and imagined the metropolis as a gigantic department store, "zoned according to the acts of buying and using up"[15]. The Goodmans called the second paradigm "The New Community". This displayed a "community tradition of style that allows for great and refined work, and each man has a chance to enhance the community style and transform it"[16]. Goodman later described it as an illustration of anarcho-syndicalism[17], but the aesthetic and ethical values add another flavour of Kropotkin and also Morris, awkwardly placed in this category. Anarchist in structure, the new community is a democratic, decentralized federal society, based on a regionalized subsistence economy made possible by the integration of agriculture and industry and the abolition of unattractive labour: piecework, divided labour and production for the satisfaction of market demand. Unlike the city of efficient consumption, which requires continuous economic growth to function, creating endless surplus but struggling nevertheless to meet everyone's basic needs, the new community is a functional system where expansion is valued for what it can support and preserve: "liberty, personal concern, responsibility and expertness"; artistry in production, the reduction of labour time, the transparency of the production process, the accessibility of adult-free areas for children, the attraction and conviviality of public spaces and the clean, elegant comfort of the home[18].

---

[14] *Ivi*, pp. 65 e 32.
[15] *Ivi*, p. 128.
[16] *Ivi*, p. 220.
[17] Cfr. K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit, p. 45.
[18] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd*, cit., p. 160.

The character of Goodman's utopianism was burnished by the placement of utopia on a second plane, running from revolution to pragmatism, which he used to discuss his social goals. Confusingly, Goodman used two different concepts of revolution to describe this positioning. In one sense, revolution involved sudden, traumatic socio-economic or cultural shifts. In another sense, it meant gradual adjustment or re-adjustment. Goodman's understanding was Burkean (an influence he was happy to acknowledge): the relevant distinction was not between revolution and evolution, since the latter might also include periods of rapid, abrupt change, but between changes that respected principles of community and those which did not.

Goodman noted that the first conception was commonly associated with political radicalism and he accepted this connection up to a point, using it to critique Marxism. "To Marxists" he noted, "revolution means the moment in which a new state apparatus takes power and runs things in its own way"[19]. However, Goodman not only denied that political radicalism was necessarily revolutionary in this sense, he also believed that the concept captured a particular kind of political aspiration rather than an ideological commitment. "In an important sense", he argued, "the present bandying about of the word *revolution*, in its usual connotations (...) seems to assume that there could be such a thing as a Good Society or Body Politic"[20]. In these terms, Goodman decried revolution as counter-revolutionary, described himself as anti-revolutionary and applied the epithet equally to the friends of post-war America and its adversaries including, paradoxically, anti-utopian, anti-totalitarian liberals. In both "liberal and Marxist usage", Goodman observed, "the word *revolution* has meant (...) that a new regime establishes itself and reorganizes the institutions according to its own ideas and interests"[21]. By this reckoning both ideological positions could be categorized as forms of revolutionary or utopian politics and they were differentiated by the diverse cultural impacts each had made.

---

[19] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, in "The New York Times Magazine", July 14, 1968, p. 4.
[20] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 23.
[21] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 17.

In a modern massive complex society, it is said, any rapid global "revolutionary" or "Utopian" change can be incalculably destructive. I agree. But I wish people would remember that we have continually introduced big rapid changes that have in fact produced incalculable shock. Consider, in the past generation, the TV, mass higher schooling, the complex of cars, road, and suburbanization, mass air travel, the complex of plantation, government subsidies to big planters, chain grocers, and forced urbanization, not to speak of the meteoric rise of the military industries. In all these there has been a big factor of willful decision[22].

Goodman contrasted this kind of revolutionary politics with an anarchist principle of change. "In anarchist theory" he argued "the word revolution means the process by which the grip of authority is loosed, so that the functions of life can regulate themselves, without top-down direction or external hindrance"[23]. For anarchists, revolution referred crucially to the spontaneity of action. It emerged from the development of social relationships. Direct action, grass-roots activism and bottom-up organization were all examples of anarchist revolutionary forms. In contrast, the exercise of revolutionary power was directed towards the destruction of existing social ties and fellow-feeling. To illustrate, Goodman contrasted the organization of cadres, which he aligned with revolutionary change, and guerrilla groups, which he associated with anarchism. The cadre was Jesuitical and connoted "the breaking down of ordinary human relations and the transcending personal motives, in order to channel energy for the cause". Guerrilla organizations, were entirely different – akin to an affinity groups in contemporary language. They were 'self-reliant (...) and bound by personal or feudal loyalty'[24]. They represented a germ of community. The cadre was a virus.

Notwithstanding anarchism's reputation for heroic collapse – "[u]topian dreams and a few bloody failures" - Goodman identified a number of historic 'bread-and-butter' anarchist revolutionary successes. "Winning civil liberties, from Runnymede to the

---

[22] *Ivi*, p. 24.
[23] *Ivi*, p. 15.
[24] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, cit., p. 6.

Jeffersonian bill of Rights; the escape of the townsmen from feudal lords, establishing of guild democracy"[25]. Participatory democracy, 'the town-meeting, congregationalism, federalism, Student Power, Black Power, workers' management, soldiers' democracy, guerrilla organization' were other examples of the sort of pragmatic revolutionary methods he applauded[26].

Goodman characterized the utopianism that anarchist revolution supported as 'dumb-bunny expedients'. But he recognized that his proposals were far-reaching and radical and that assuaging perceptions of 'impracticality' was itself a revolutionary act[27]. There was a distinctive '*style*' to his approach to revolution which was out of kilter with political orthodoxy and with accepted norms and values. "[W]e who are beguiled by the sirens of reason, animal joy, and lofty aims', Goodman commented, "fail to notice how far out into the left field we sometime stray; but we are most out of contact in naively believing that, given simple means and a desirable end, something can be *done*"[28]. The habit of associating utopianism with complexity, enforcement and violent upheaval meant that "the simpler and more easily effected the ideas we suggest – the less "utopian" they are – the more they are *really* impractical for these people"[29]. He continued: «If we recommend an old-fashioned, straightforward procedure, we seem to be asking that a foreign or "advance-guard" way of life be imposed». In the sense in which Goodman recommended utopia, change was in fact fully achievable by individuals. Yet the demands it made of people, to act in ways that were advantageous because they supported natural ways of living, were enormous precisely because the burdens fell on directly on their shoulders and could not be delivered by state conquest or market saturation.

In summary, Goodman's utopianism had a double aspect. Imagined as the new community, it provided a model for natural living. As a principle of change, it encouraged adjustments in everyday life to build community relations. In Goodman's work,

---

[25] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 15.
[26] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, cit., p. 4.
[27] P. GOODMAN, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, cit., pp. 14 e 5.
[28] *Ivi*, p. 9.
[29] *Ibidem*.

these elements operated conjointly. The model illuminated the ways in which current organizational design and socio-economic practices created barriers to well-being, experienced in repression, external regulation and coercion[30]. The concept of revolution outlined the kinds of remedial actions that individuals might take to address the shortcomings of real life. As Ward argued, the new community was presented as a paradigm, not as a concrete plan, and it served as a catalyst for change. Readers were invited "to conceive alternative solutions for themselves"[31]. For critics, Goodman's community appeared to be a paradigm without a strategy. This was Kingsley Widmer's complaint: "the Goodmans don't consider the depressing issues of how we might get to such an organic ordering from our highly bureaucratized and otherwise elaborately arbitrary money and power structure"[32]. However, Goodman did ask questions about how to move from one condition to another, adopting an approach to change that would now be called prefigurative.

3. Prefigurative Politics

Anticipating developments in contemporary anarchist politics, Goodman placed the means-ends relationship at the heart of his understanding of anarchist revolution. His conception had three dimensions. In the first, he presented a critique of instrumental action in the context of a principle of function. In the second, Goodman scrutinized the morality of individual action and, specifically, the weight attached to the intentions of activists. The final aspect was about the character of anarchist action and the political virtues that it demanded.

Goodman's concern with the first of these elements, the legitimacy of separating the means from the ends of change, dovetailed with politics of contemporary critiques of instrumentalism or, as Benjamin Franks argues, the rejection of the idea that the "the success of a plan is determined by its efficiency in meeting the objectives"[33]. The critique he presented of Marxism-

---

[30] R. KING, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1972, pp. 93-95.

[31] C. WARD, *The Child in the City*, cit., pp. 121 e 129.

[32] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit, p. 46.

[33] B. FRANKS, *Rebel Alliances*, Oakland, AK Press, 2006, pp. 13 e 101.

Leninism and cadre organization was an endorsement of this rejection. Goodman objected to vanguard politics and to the hierarchical, coercive principles associated with historical materialism and the struggle for class domination because it sanctioned the entrenchment of power relations, not their transformation:

Marxists show how in changed technological and social conditions, the class conflict between the dominant and exploited classes erupts: the old dominant group is no longer competent to maintain its power and ideology, the system of belief that gave it legitimacy ... Agitational Marxism, Leninism, works to make the old regime unable to cope, to make it illegitimate and to hasten its fall; it is then likely to take power as a minority vanguard party which must educate the masses to their own interest. In this stringent activity, any efforts at piecemeal improvement or protecting traditional freedoms are regarded as mere reformism or tinkering, and they are called "objectively counter-revolutionary". After the takeover by the new regime, there must be a strong and repressive administration to prevent reaction; during this period (indefinitely prolonged) anarchists fare badly[34].

However, Goodman's approach to the relationship between the means and ends of transformation was shaped by principles of design not questions of praxis. Although he was concerned to resist the separation of means from ends, he was also keen to reflect on efficiency as revolutionary principle. As King notes, his starting point was the principle that form followed function[35]. From this perspective, the compatibility of means to ends was secondary to the analysis of the relationship between social arrangements – or ends – and conceptions of purpose. In *Communitas*, Goodman presented the issue precisely in terms of efficiency, explaining some of the significant structural differences between the city of efficient consumption and the new community by the social goals that underpinned it. As a model for social organization, he argued, the department store was highly efficient. The Goodman's labelling left no room for doubt: it provided a superabundance of private goods. However, judged by standards "in which invention will flourish and

---

[34] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 17.
[35] Cfr. R. KING, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom*, cit., p. 89.

the job will be its own incentive" it was hopelessly inefficient. Only the new community met this "different standard"[36]. Questions of efficiency, then, had two aspects, the first was narrowly about the choice of one process over another whereas the second probed the worth of pursuing the process in the first place. The implication was that a society open to radical transformation asked both questions, not just the first.

Efficient for what? For the way of life as a whole. Now in all times people have used this criterion as a negative check: "*We* don't do that kind of thing, even if it's convenient or profitable". But envisage doing it positively and inventively: "Let's do it, it becomes us. Or let's omit it and simplify. It's a lag and a drag"[37].

For as long as the value of the ends of action remained unexamined, all political action was likely to replicate established practice. It was not surprising that defense of the integrity of the means-ends relationship and rejection of the instrumentalism, of cadre organization and coercive revolutionary action, played as well for defenders of the status quo as it did for political radicals. Indeed, reflecting on the politics of the post-war period, Goodman argued that the bloodless, technical alignment of means and ends defined the limits of America's social ambition. The potential for meaningful change came only with the radical appropriation of the idea of pure function, in which the means selected for the achievement of any end, were the most straightforward, simple and direct.

A decade ago it was claimed that there was an end to ideology, for the problems of modern society have to be coped with pragmatically, functionally, piecemeal.…the pragmatic, functional, and piecemeal approach has not, as was expected, consigned our problems to the expertise of administrators and engineers but has thrown them to the dissenters. Relevant new thought has not been administrative and technological, but existentialist, ethical and tactical. Pragmatism has come to be interpreted to include the character of the agents as part of the problem to be solved; it is psychoanalytic; there is stress on engagement … Functionalism has come to mean criticizing the program and the function itself, asking

---

[36] P. GOODMAN e P. GOODMAN, *Communitas*, cit., p. 160.
[37] *Ivi*, p. 172.

who wants to do it and why, and is it humanly worth doing, is it ecologically sound[38].

The second element of the means-end relationship, Goodman's contention that principled individual action was a central tenet of anarchist transformation, is also well established in contemporary anarchist literatures. According to Franks, anarchist actions "embody the forms of social relation that actors wish to see develop"[39]. In more formal terms, prefiguration guides anarchists towards the adoption of a position which ground morality in character, behaviour and the intentions of actors[40]. Goodman developed a similar position, but qualified it, and whereas Franks draws on normative theory to analyze the concept, he stuck to political argument.

Goodman's concern with personal motivation was central to his estimation of legitimate transformation and it extended from his belief, outlined in the May Pamphlet of 1945, that coercion could be explained by obedience and conformity. According to King, Goodman's basic thesis, "that "a coercive society depends upon instinctual repression" owed a considerable debt to Wilhelm Reich[41]. Its corollary was that natural society or community could only be realized through acts of refusal initiated in the present. These acts might appear quite trivial, but in authoritarian societies it was a mistake to estimate their potential costs in terms of the actions themselves. Singing punk in a cathedral carries the risk of incarceration. Goodman was equally sensitive to the tyranny of the American way of life. Not long before he died he remembered that his son Matty had risked rejection from Cornell by refusing to comb his hair for his application photo and his defiant response to the cajoling of his father: "If they don't want me as I really look, they can keep their lousy school"[42]. In fact the sentiment was Goodman's own. His open bi-sexuality was one marker of his commitment to pre-figurative politics; and the reputational damage that flowed by

---

[38] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 24.
[39] B. FRANKS, *Rebel Alliances*, cit., p. 114.
[40] *Ivi*, pp. 17-18.
[41] Cfr. R. KING, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom*, cit., p. 86.
[42] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 176.

some of his other acts of refusal was considerable. Widmer records the "sloppy dress, missing teeth (...) ill-fitting glasses (...) offensive mannerisms (drooling down a pipe-stem, scratching his backside, sexual leering and groping), and by unfastitious personal habits"[43].

Goodman described the principle that Matty embodied as "dismissing fear, and acting as he ordinarily would" in a world that was extraordinarily harsh and repressive[44]. Yet while he embraced this precept Goodman argued that acts of refusal, even multiple acts, were insufficient to bring about social transformation. His analysis of the Beats, and the subsequent generation of dropouts, hippies and Yippies illustrate the point.

On the one hand, both groups were self-consciously counter-cultural. The Beats did not merely disregard convention, they defied it. However while they withdrew from bourgeois values they failed to articulate any 'worth-while' alternatives[45]. Their art was creative and expressive, but their experimentation was defined by self-cultivation and stopped short of the "creation of culture and value or making a difference in the further world"[46]. The dropouts were also deeply immersed in the counter-culture though, notwithstanding the drugs, more outward-looking than the Beats. "Make Love not War" Goodman argued, was full of "color and (...) deep meaning"[47]. Hippies, Yippies and Provos, likewise, "improvise ingenious improvements to make society better as a means of tearing it down"[48]. Still, none of these groups, not even the less "drug-befuddled", was able properly to extend their political activity. Their vision of "a society in which all will sing and make love and do their own thing" was irrelevant to the predicament in which they found themselves. And his prediction was that they would be "colonized like Indians on a reservation" by the powers of technocracy[49].

---

[43] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit, p. 17.
[44] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 176.
[45] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd*, cit., p. 156.
[46] *Ivi*, p. 160.
[47] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, cit., p. 6.
[48] *Ibidem*.
[49] *Ivi*, p. 8.

Whereas Goodman encouraged others to live "in the present society as though it were a natural society"[50], counter-cultural groups appeared to construct alternative ways of living in the body of existing society, ignoring the corruptions of American consumer culture. Borrowing Stanley Cohen's terms, they were "fleeing the demands of everyday life, from the suffocating press of routine and ritual, from the despair of the breakfast table and the office"[51]. For Goodman, this strategy was less about transformation than escape; and escape, he argued, was not transformative. No matter how engaged or well-intentioned individual actors were to find "meaning, novelty, progress and a sense of their true identity, their true selves", radical action was about changing social conditions and coming to terms with the limits of escapology[52]. Evaluating the means of action was crucial to the prospects of realizing change.

Goodman's distinction between patient and desire impatient captures the difference between this own stance and the position he attributed to the counterculture. The desire he had in mind was a political, utopian motivation, typically felt by sensitive, intellectual people and one that lacked fulfillment. Goodman described the psychological impact. The desiring were grief-stricken because they able to access an idea of paradise lost through "something of pure and simple beauty". They were bored with feeling only adequate in the world and by their failure to exercise powers that might be "dangerous or destructive". And they were angry about the conditions in which they found themselves[53]. In the impatient, the predicament encouraged "desire without its object" and, where the condition was chronic, a desire to desire. Impatient desire, Goodman argued, "abstractly anticipates its object, it exhausts itself in an idea, whereas desire would normally rise in the actual or imminent presence of its object". Unlike the patient, the impatient failed to "regard what is present as possibly interesting". With patience, came

---

[50] R. KING, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom*, cit., p. 86.
[51] S. COHEN, L. TAYLOR, *The Theory and Practice of Resistance of Everyday Life*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 4.
[52] *Ibidem*.
[53] P. GOODMAN, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, cit., pp. 98 e 103.

genuinely felt desire, the abandonment of the idea of paradise lost and the commitment to "make a present effort for paradise"[54].

From Goodman's perspective, escape was an example of impatient desire which found a release for boredom, anger and grief through the attempt to re-create lost paradise. The misjudgment it concealed was about the potential of the power of resistance to the revolution that liberals had achieved in the post-war period. Pragmatism led Goodman to believe that change was a continuing rather than an oppositional process and that rejection was not a solution to consumerism. The danger of resistance was that it "ceases to be justice and reconstruction and becomes simply the prevention of business as usual"[55].

Goodman noted that the integrity of means and ends might be understood as a reason to prioritize the motives for action over any consideration of their consequences. This was the position he son had adopted. Given the choice between 'single act of moral purity and courage, and the prudential and tactical considerations of effectiveness', Matty would choose the first. «Considerations of the future did not weigh heavily with him. The important thing was to be moral, thoroughly moral, now»[56]. Goodman took a different view, and distanced himself from what he termed the 'embarrassingly Kantian ethics' of the youth movement[57]. Widmer observed that 'Goodman was not brave or militant, and there was little of the rebel or martyr or revolutionary about him'. As disparagingly, he noted that Goodman 'was apparently never fired, beaten, jailed, prosecuted, or otherwise made to suffer for his dissent'[58]. But as Widmer also notes, Goodman was not interested in taking punishment for political actions unless he had to and did not, therefore, subscribe to the ethics of civil disobedience[59]. Instead of evaluating action by the purity of the motivation, he wanted to take account of their effects. 'Ultimately', he argued, 'if our methods

---

[54] *Ivi*, pp. 107-108.
[55] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 136.
[56] *Ivi*, p. 173
[57] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, cit., p. 6.
[58] K. WIDMER, *Paul Goodman*, cit., p. 100
[59] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., pp. 137-138.

of protest can be effective, their chief importance is that they are positively good in themselves'. What was required was not moral commitment, but 'ordinary prudence and reasonable casuistry' – ridiculed by purists as 'thinking'[60]. This casting of the means and ends did not automatically open the door to the possibility of justifying morally dubious means to achieve good results, but it did require that those who refused to separate means from ends also consider the helpfulness of particular tactics in the advancement of their goals. Mere action, in the absence of such evaluation, was not pre-figurative by Goodman's reckoning. It simply confused the action with the end.

Goodman described the final element of his conception of the means and ends as a form of conservatism and it highlighted the virtue he attached to anarchism. He found his inspiration in Coleridge's *On the Constitution of the Church and State*. In a passage that seemed to dovetail with Goodman's thinking Coleridge argued:

all social law and justice being grounded on the principle that a person can never, but by his own fault, become a thing, or, without grievous wrong, be treated as such; and the distinction consisting in this, that a thing may be used altogether and merely as the means to an end; but the person must always be included in the end: his interest must form a part of the object, a mean to which he by consent, that is, by his own act, makes himself [61].

Goodman's pithy summary of Coleridge's argument was: 'In order to have citizens, you must first be sure that you have produced men. There must therefore be a large part of the common wealth specifically devoted to cultivating "freedom and civilization", and especially to the education of the young growing up[62]. This recasting dramatically altered the cast of Goodman's anarchism, for his call for manly community was not an instance of gendered discourse but of a desire to outline the parameters of a biologically determined natural society. In *Growing Up Absurd*, he explained that the problems he wanted to examine belong primarily, in our society, to

---

[60] P. GOODMAN, *The Black Flag of Anarchism*, cit., p. 6.
[61] https://archive.org/stream/cu31924105501906#page/n49/mode/2up
[62] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, cit., p. 211.

the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, "make something" of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act[63].

Apart from illustrating how out of touch Goodman was with feminism, his conception of manly virtue also pointed to a malaise that had its roots in modernization and an approach to prefiguration that was rooted in the past. In post-war America, Goodman argued, men had lost their function. Understanding the nature of their predicament, by showing what had been lost through a process of social change, thus provided a route to the restoration of that function through revolution. In other words, the possibilities for shaping the future required an appreciation of the ways in which the present had been moulded by the past and discriminating action in respect of the findings.

Goodman's answer to Theodor Roszak's sociological question, about how 'the natural and healthful unity of the organism/ environment field becomes undone', clarified the nature of the discrimination he required[64]. Goodman pointed to a series of 'missed or compromised fundamental social changes'. His long list, which included liberalism, syndicalism, class struggle, technology and democracy, was intended to illustrate how well-intentioned principles had been perverted, diverted or negated in practice[65]. History not only demonstrated the irresistibility of contrived intervention, it also showed that human interaction in the environment had resulted in continual structural and ideological change, opening up new vistas for constructive change but also limiting others. While Goodman treated nature as good, putting him on shaky philosophical and political ground, his observations of historical failure indicated that he did not understand it as a pristine condition that might be recovered – or to which one might escape. Nature was a benchmark for goodness, against which improvement

---

[63] *Ivi*, p. 21.
[64] T. ROSZAK, *The making of a counter culture: Reflections on the technocratic society and its youthful opposition*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, p. 195.
[65] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, cit., p. XI.

might be gauged and, insofar as it was recognized as a goal which defined purpose, the object of transformative desire.

In any cultural context it was possible to identify what was natural and, moreover, to use the concept to assess the moral and aesthetic worth of existing practices and policy proposals. To give two examples, Goodman described the natural society as one that fosters creativity. Unnatural societies, in contrast, search for creative people and commission psychological studies to find out how to foster "an atmosphere of creativity"[66]. Equally, anarchism was natural, 'connoting voluntary labor and free appropriation operating by community spirit'. Unnatural and inauthentic was the attempt 'to do community development in order to "politicize" people, or to use a good do-it-yourself project as a means of "bringing people into the Movement"'[67]. Using nature as a kite mark for social change allowed Goodman to recommend principles of design for social well-being. At the same time, his understanding that nature could only be protected, not preserved, discouraged him from recommending the abandonment of everything that occupied a place in the cultural mainstream. High art, poetry, music and Western philosophical tradition were some of the elements he believed compatible with nature and which should, therefore, be defended against the onslaught of would-be cultural revolutionaries interested in rejecting the totality of American civilization[68].

Goodman's conservatism erected an unbridgeable gap between his own anarchism and the anarchism of the radical movement. Since, as Goodman argued, the student movement 'only know going to school', the distance between radical politics and natural community was hardly surprising[69]. As products of a hopelessly debased education system designed to turn-out workers coded by colour of their collars, they were not well placed to act in ways that

---

[66] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, cit., p. 174.
[67] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 23.
[68] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 116.
[69] T. STOEHR, *Here, now, next. Paul Goodman and the origin of Gestalt Therapy*, cit., p. 20.

prefigured the good. Youth was alienated, but undiscerning about nature.

The problematic character of youthful anarchism at present comes from the fact that the young are alienated ... It was the idea of Bakunin in his younger years that it was especially among the alienated, the dispossessed, the lumpen, the outcasts and criminals, those who have nothing to lose – not even their chains – that the impulse to anarchy would arise. But I think he was wrong ... Among revolutionary political philosophies, anarchism and pacifism alone do not thrive on alienation ... They require a nature of things to give order[70] [...].

Goodman adopted a pre-figurative approach to change but one that required actors to comprehend that the cultural context in which they had been socialized was likely to have skewed their ability to appreciate what was good. This conclusion was suggestive of Weber's iron cage. Yet Goodman did not believe that social transformation was impossible. His understanding of the means-ends relationship was that social transformation was always subject to the action of intentioned beings, driven by their self-regulating, felt desires. As he argued in *Communitas*, the proper object of this desire good was the society 'where every part of life has value in itself as both means and end', where even in 'technology and economics the men are ends as well as means'[71]. Closing the gap between desire and nature demanded that rebels must be reformed as part of the process of transformation. The idea had a republican tinge: education through empowerment to forge citizens from peasants[72]. But in Goodman's schema, it also gave direction about the apparently absent cause. Goodman's dream, to turn beatniks, delinquents and drop-outs into men, was deeply conservative, not least in its assumption that "female delinquency", "incorrigibility" and "unmarried pregnancy" would vanish once men found release from 'running the rat race of the organized system'[73]. His distinctive brand of anarchism was simultaneously radical in ambition,

---

[70] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 145.
[71] P. GOODMAN e P. GOODMAN, *Communitas*, cit., p. 220, 155.
[72] P. GOODMAN, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, cit., p. 155.
[73] P. GOODMAN, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*, cit., p. 21.

traditionalist in its aspirations, rich in possibilities and gloomy in outlook.