

**Here Now Next:
Paul Goodman and the Origins of
Gestalt Therapy (1994)
and
Crazy Hope and Finite Experience:
Final Essays of Paul Goodman (edited, 1994)
By Taylor Stoehr**

Paul Goodman at 100

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I should begin this essay by saying right off that Taylor Stoehr is one of my dearest friends, and that I had a key, though hardly core, role in these two books. Not in their writing, which is all Stoehr, all Goodman, but in their publication. Here is how these two books and that friendship came about.

It was at the beginning of the 90s that Stoehr, Paul Goodman's literary executor and the editor to date of over a dozen collections of Goodman's rich and varied opus, called me with a request. We had never met, but I knew of course who he was, and that he had long been at work on a major biography of Goodman. Now, he told me, he had been invited to keynote at an upcoming Gestalt Journal Conference in Boston, on the subject of Goodman and Perls's collaboration on their seminal two-volume work, *Gestalt Thera-*



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py, some forty years earlier—of which Goodman was the authorial voice of Volume 2, the theoretical heart of the book, *Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*.

Not being a therapist himself, Stoehr had contacted Goodman's and the Perlses' student Isadore From to get the name of a "well-read" (his word) Gestalt therapist in Boston who could read over his Conference paper and comment on it from a clinical perspective. Isadore, imagining correctly that Stoehr and I would have a lot in common, gave him my name. "I should tell you," Stoehr warned over lunch, "what I've written is about 250 pages. Way too long for even my own manuscript of Paul's life, which is up over 1000 pages now and counting, and I'm nowhere near the 60s yet. And Gestalt therapy is only one chapter in Goodman's life and work! In other words," he shrugged ruefully, a gesture I was to come to know well—"in other words, I've just spent three months on a project that has no further purpose whatsoever, once this conference is over."

I read the 250 pages—more or less in one long sitting, I believe. And I was blown away. After all, no reader of *Ego Hunger and Aggression* in 1942 or 1947 could possibly have imagined *Gestalt Therapy*, four years later. And while a knowledgeable lefty intellectual in New York of the 40s could surely have identified Goodman's distinctive *voice* in the new book (his unique brand of urbane superiority and down-to-earthiness that often danced an edge, as much of Goodman's work had, somewhere between a lofty or truculent condescension and brilliant flashes of assertion and insight), no one could have quite predicted how Goodman's familiar themes, sources and tropes, his own special *pot-au-feu* of Aristotle, Kant, James, Dewey, Freud, Reich, Rank, Kropotkin, with just a *soupçon* of Whitehead, Goldstein, Lewin (misattributed here), and a few others, could possibly have been stirred once more so deeply from the bottom, under the stimulus of Perls's initial manuscript, to yield such a rich and amazing new banquet. In other words, how on earth did either man, Goodman or Perls, get from where they were, in their respective (and significantly different) understandings of human nature just a few years earlier, to the radical and sometimes magisterial synthesis of the new vision represented in Volume 2 of this new book? It defied reduction and begged for history, in the deep genetic sense.

Here was that history, both in the lives and (fairly brief) intersection of these two remarkable, magnetic, off-putting, and deeply territorial men—and in the rich, fermenting brew of ideas they were steeped in, and were stretching to synthesize. And even more than that—here was not only a blow-by-blow of the genesis of *Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* itself, but also a unique and invaluable portrait of the indelible New York cultural moment: that post-War period, when the center of intellectual ferment migrated

from an exhausted and traumatized Europe to a hyper-dominant (and also traumatized) America, took on new energy in New York City, and began to brew a whole new infusion of innovative ideas and forms in the culture, now Euroamerican in a rich new sense. Over time, this new energy would burn through the nervous, neon cheer of the 50s with the genuine, cauterizing sunshine of the 60s soon to come. And certainly Goodman's great achievement, viewed now from sixty years on, can be seen clearly today as one of the most illuminating, lasting, and broadly influential of those bright new lights.

Stoehr, it turned out, is a master storyteller, with a filmic eye for the telling scene, the revealing detail (if you doubt it, just turn to his rollicking description—recreated here at second hand—of the infamous “eulogy” delivered by a dying Paul, at Fritz's funeral).

Getting back to my story, I put the book down at dawn, or something like that, waited a decent interval, and rang Stoehr up. “It's not true that your manuscript has no purpose and no destination,” I opened. As director of GestaltPress, I had recently become an outside editor with Jossey-Bass, charged with developing a specifically Gestalt list, the first ever with a major commercial publishing house. I was excited about this, and naively expected Stoehr to be excited as well, maybe even a bit grateful.

Ha! “That's no use,” came the dry reply without a moment's hesitation, “because I won't write down for the Yahoos” (at the time that word had only its original satirical meaning). I'd already gathered that Stoehr's opinion of the intellectual level of our profession as a whole (among whom he numbered some very dear friends, but still. . .) was not wholly positive. I dutifully promised to push the book through with my higher-ups at J-B (though an outside editor, I already knew, has about as much actual clout with a publisher as a piglet with a pork-monger, but there is almost always something people want that you can trade for something else. I was not the youngest child of an alcoholic family for nothing. . .).

“Well okay,” came the dubious reply, “but no rewrites, because I won't rewrite it.” I was soon to learn with Stoehr to assume the ellipsis “can't help but” in place of the words “can't” or “won't” in almost any context—though in fact there was not much change needed in the story as it stood. (“Too much Kafka,” I believe was my only real editorial contribution to the final manuscript in the end. “It's interesting, but it doesn't advance the story. Trust me on this, it's not a Yahoo thing”—by this time we were fast becoming trusting friends—“I'm a good benchmark, on your Kafka digression kind of thing: if it's too much Kafka for me, it's just plain too much Kafka.”) Of the 30 or 40 manuscripts I have worked on over the years at GestaltPress, through four different commercial publishers, with nearly 50 books published so far, representing the work of close to 200 Gestalt authors, there actually never has been one

I have had less work or less input on. Or one I am more proud of publishing. "Oh, and one more thing," came the kicker. Really, this disarming, offhand way of putting forward incredible entitlements—well, let us just say I noted it as something to study. "I won't do it unless your publisher will also bring out *Little Prayers and Finite Experience*, Goodman's last essays, along with it, in a new expanded edition I have in mind. It's only been privately printed in a limited edition after Paul's death, so it's never actually had a commercial release. It's the two books, or nothing." And he went on to outline his concept for the book: two additional late essays, to augment the three last thoughts Goodman had intended for the project. In place of Goodman's original layout of a poem on every verso page, to set off the essay text running through the rectos, he would use just five or six favorite poems in all—since Goodman's *Collected Poetry* already been brought out by Random House, in an edition Stoehr had of course overseen.

There was no question of the cultural value of his dual proposal—which after all was what our little *pro bono* Press was all about: creating and supporting projects that take the transformational insights, the methods, and the philosophy of Gestalt therapy to a wider therapeutic and personal/professional development community of readers, practitioners, and people living and working with people. And Stoehr's editorial vision for the second book was, as always, beautifully clear, naturally aesthetic, visionary in its way. As for *Here Now Next*, there was no question about the case for publishing that one. The only question was selling Jossey-Bass on the idea of adding to it a slender volume of previously-published material, itself already issued once, years ago, in a private edition, by a long-dead, widely forgotten author. Not, as they say, their core brand profile-*cum*-market demographic (arguably, this would be the broadest-market commercial house ever to have brought out a book by Goodman, at least as a first edition). I just sighed, trying to think about what the hell else I could conjure out of my non-existent stock of sweeteners, to offer my J-B editors in trade.

So that is the story—or the beginnings of it, to me (Stoehr's and my story went on, as it still does). I was in a state of bitter heartbreak and marriage failure as we got to know each other; he listened and counseled, and then I took a turn later, when the situation was reversed. When I remarried in Boston, some years later, he was there with his then-wife Nikki, at a table with Sonia and Edwin Nevis, Iris Fodor and her late husband Harry, and several other Gestaltists (I know this through one of those visual memories that are themselves created after the fact, from the photo album). Not long after that, when I was advised I was dying rapidly, he took a turn driving me to Star-Wars machines in lead-vault treatment rooms in the Harvard hospitals downtown, while also plying me for months with organic veggies from his giant urban garden proj-

ect in Somerville. We would also spend years together in a men's book group, till I left Cambridge for the West Coast a few years back. More books of our own followed, for each of us. He has twice had a very popular stint as Visiting Scholar at Esalen. My writings about Goodman (and about his writings about Goodman) have always been deeply inspired and informed by his books. At this writing his *magnum opus*, the great Goodman biography, is still pending. In recent years he has devoted more and more of his creative energies, in addition to tireless teaching and writing, to his alternative-sentencing literacy project with parolees, which is now a national model. His watercolors hang on my walls, his works of poetry and translation grace my shelves. To me he remains a mentor and a model of a complete citizen, a complete artist, and a full man—rich in friendships, children, and grandchildren, learning, productive and worthy work, and great heart. In all these ways he has lived his own creative version of the authentic, public-spirited life Goodman holds out to us, by implication anyway, as a model: great-hearted like Goodman himself, but without those qualities of truculent embattlement, defensive superiority, off-putting condescension that could sometimes mar Goodman's best works, and undercut his impact.

And then what about this work—Stoehr's work, I mean—*Here Now Next* (the first two of those terms being meaningless, potentially self-indulgent, in Goodman's living, pragmatic philosophy of action-commitment, without the third, the "next" that gives the rest meaning and direction)? Well, most important is to say that the tale spun so masterfully in this book, along with the rich history, has the character development and moral dimension of those great plays and novels of the literary tradition of which both Stoehr and Goodman are a living part. And the heart of that moral has directly to do with Gestalt therapy.

When Goodman met Perls in the late 40s, as Stoehr makes clear, he was at a watershed in his personal/professional life. And like many "watersheds" (a retrospective term, after all), this one, at the time, looked more like a cumulative, recurrent impasse—potentially a kind of endemic failure. His literary career, despite some critical interest, was mostly a stack of unsold books in his own closet. His career as essayist/editor on cultural and political topics was effectively stymied by the partisan splits on the left, combined with the abrasiveness of his own personality. His teaching career likewise and fallen (or been thrown away) as victim, not so much to his free-thinking and to his scandalous sex life, as to his own version of what we might call the Oscar Wilde syndrome: a self-destructive insistence on being public and "in your face" about things that others might be doing with impunity (whether rightly or wrongly, but with impunity), but doing with greater discretion.

A dozen years later would see Goodman positioned as a best-selling author, a leading voice (in some ways *the* leading voice) on the left for the new movements that were beginning to stir what would soon be called the “youth culture,” and rocking the culture at large. It was not that his writing style had softened, exactly, or lost its challenging edge; but he seemed to have matured at last out his old compulsion to square off and do battle with his reader, more or less daring him/her to be foolish and downright stupid enough to disagree with the most sweeping assertions—often far from fully explained or backed up. (You can definitely still see some of these off-putting, seemingly compulsive habits in *Gestalt Therapy*—though they are already moderated to some degree by the end of the 40s, perhaps through the experience of a different kind of pushback from those early Gestalt group explorations, or just the anticipation of collaborative review of the text.)

What was the difference? What accounted for the growth in his fifth decade, that had seemed to elude him, and considerably defeat him, in his fourth? Stoehr argues persuasively that the difference, in a couple of words, was Gestalt therapy. However aggressively “confrontive,” “encounter”-like, or even at times ugly those early study groups, therapy groups, and individual sessions could be which Goodman participated in or led during the late 40s and all through the 50s, still the living process and application of the *theory of contact* which he had articulated, and now was practicing, had had the effect of moving him into a different kind of relationship with his reader. His reader was now granted, at last, something like the larger human respect one owes, and is forced to grant, to one’s clients and group members and process peers.

The result, of course, was *Growing Up Absurd*, a kind of mirror and bible to my generation, a book that seemed to take us beyond the jejune and dead-end adolescent sullenness of *Rebel Without a Cause*, to the kind of creative effusion that can follow, as we know, from the experience of being *seen, heard, and known intimately*, from the inside of our own experience and concerns. (I remember so well, a few naïve years later, trying to wrap my mind around the discovery that the Paul Goodman who had given us that liberating gift, and later their companion volumes, the novel/memoirs *Making Do* and *Five Years*, was the *same* Paul Goodman who had written so formally in the “bourgeois” field of psychotherapy! Thus does the world “destructure” and “complexify” our ideas, and we grow in understanding—if we have the supports for it). To me and to many of my friends, Goodman was a prime figure among those supports.

Now all that, for me, was 40 or 50 years ago, in a series of worlds which seem to me now, in retrospect, not so much points on the 60-year line separating today from 1950 on the calendar, as they are a scattering of whole different islands, in some archipelago of history, a series of distinctly sepa-

rated eras, in the culture and in my own life memory. First, a nation at war, criminally and pointlessly (and in the context of the "Cold War," so-called); then a return to uneasy peace and a withdrawal from any sense of direction beyond production for production's sake (Goodman's insistent insight); then finally really at peace, more or less, if still rudderless, in the brief decade between the end of the Cold War and the declaration of the "Axis-of-Evil" as the new substitute for meaning, that window of incredible prosperity (or so we thought in the 90s). And at the same time, arguably, a resumption, more or less on a worldwide scale, of something like the thousand-year arc of material and social-rights progress so celebrated by progressives of just a century ago. That historical progression had been jump-started again in the 60s (or so it seemed to us at the time, anyway), powerfully if fitfully, by Goodman among a host of others. Islands, all islands to me now, in the restless sea of an emergent world culture still struggling, violently as ever, to be born.

And now here we are today, on the left, in the first teens of a new millennium, seemingly perched once more in our old historic niche of criticizing the moderate progressives in power (for not being progressive enough, which is of course all too true!), between and during renewed and world-threatening horrors around us. To say that today's world is radically, utterly different from those earlier worlds—60 and more years ago, when Goodman was synthesizing concepts and constructs, 40 years ago, when Goodman was penning and editing the last essays of *Crazy Hope and Finite Experience*, and around 20 years ago when Stoehr was preparing these books—is to make an observation that is both blindingly obvious, and still dark with unknown, unfolding implications. Our world today, with wireless access bypassing the physical electric power grid worldwide, and technology as always driving human evolution itself—is now rushing heedlessly down the road to some sort of whole-world consciousness and communication, a web of fractious belonging, or at least contagion—with consequences, as ever, that we cannot foretell.

And yet human beings are still born helpless and desperately attached to their caregivers; we still experience the world through our individual, acculturated embodiment, still have to process an ever-growing, overwhelming barrage of "stimuli" through the same potential cortical structures and pathways (though perhaps with new pathways, new network complexity, in a still-evolving brain); still we wrestle to reconcile the now with the next, the "me" with the "we," the "What Is" with "What Ought to Be." And still we have our unique, individual voices as the only vehicles for shared expression of what that world is like, where it has value, and most of all, where we imagine and choose it to be heading.

What does Goodman offer us today, for dealing with this brave new world? Where do we find that deeper understanding of ourselves that in

some sense we always seek in “literature” (and note that Goodman never seems to distinguish, with that term, between the conventional categories of “prose” and “poetry”—let alone between negligible niceties like “fiction” and “non-fiction”—in his own work or that of others. Thus it is appropriate here that Stoehr retain a nod in this essay collection to Goodman’s own alternation of essay and poetic forms; no doubt these categories would still strike him as more of those neurotic dichotomies he cites in *Gestalt Therapy* and elsewhere).

We know—and this is one of the most fecund insights of the Gestalt model, fully developed—that new insight, new creativity are unleashed by the new support of deep receptive listening, dialogue, and resonance in their truest sense. When I feel mirrored, seen, “gotten” at last (not *agreed with—heard*), my habitual coping adaptations relax, and new combinations of thought/feelings, new insights to new solutions, emerge. What messages does Goodman offer us now, in the way of that kind of deep mirroring and energetic empowerment, that can lead us to dealing with, responding to, and perhaps even contributing creatively, to those new orders we are reaching for so desperately today?

For this we turn to the selection of Goodman’s late and last words that make up *Crazy Hope and Finite Experience*, likewise one of my own proudest “godchildren”—and our worst seller, to date—in these first 25 years of Gestalt-Press’s young history. Here (as so often) it is hard to do better than to start with quoting Stoehr’s (1994b) words:

Goodman, . . . celebrated as a social critic [by] the young radicals of the New Left, . . . considered himself primarily an artist rather than a political thinker or a sociologist, and many of his books, even during the sixties, were works of poetry, drama, and fiction. . . . Psychotherapy, community planning, linguistics, literary theory, philosophy, sociology, politics, education, media criticism, as well as poems, plays, and fiction—thirty or forty books, [counting] posthumously published works. (pp. 1-2)¹

Out of all this reach and range, hard to find a match for in the modern era, we have here five late essays, each one representing different “slant” or “moment” (but in a field-theory, not a temporal sense) of a not-to-be-differentiated whole, of attitudes, values, work, passions—life-as-lived.

First comes “Within My Horizon,” in which he writes of being tethered to the “actual,” unable he says (this may surprise many of us) to deal with any-

¹ All quotations not otherwise attributed in the discussion of Goodman’s final essays are taken respectively from the essay being discussed. (Page numbers are not always included.)

thing abstract. Ideas, detached from actualities, he characterizes as a kind of masturbation: nor is this the first time he uses that latter term in a curiously (to me) negative sense—as if erotics, like athletics or contemplation, or for that matter reading, cannot be a satisfying, soul-enhancing play or practice that justifies itself, even without an immediate here-and-now encounter with another person. (Nor is it true, as the old saw has it, that the trouble with masturbation is that you do not meet any interesting people that way. On the contrary, potentially at least, you meet-yourself! In my own experience over the past 50+ years, the depth of experiential richness and satisfaction of that self-meeting, erotically, is at the same level as my own capacities for erotic meeting with others, as they have developed over the years. And vice versa. If I were prescribing for Goodman today, I think I would recommend exploring a real, spiritually-based practice of tantric studies, as an enlargement and opening to his compulsive cruising pattern, which he himself recognizes as unsatisfying and unjoyful. And by “real,” of course, I mean as opposed to all the popular knock-off versions of “ten-minute tantra” that are out there today—though as for that they may still be actually better than nothing, and may lead to something deeper, much as a limited or “one-person” Gestalt therapy, or the yoga craze and pop-market versions of meditation, can function as a starting point for something deeper.)

“Since I stick so close to concrete experience, I cannot really write fiction,” he goes on a bit later. Hmmm. And yet what are our desires, the “next” of the situation that gives it meaning and drive, if not fictions, trial or hopeful narratives of what might satisfy us more, what might or ought to be? He is exploring something here, and while I could say this or that obvious thing about his distaste for Platonism (a distaste I share, vigorously), it eludes me exactly what he is writing *toward* here—or writing against. This is not the first or last time, in reading Goodman, that I am struck by the fierce dichotomy between “right here” and “not right here”—as if the former were really immediate, a kind of uninterpreted experience, which is an oxymoron in Gestalt (including Goodman’s Gestalt), as I understand it. As best as I can express it, my own “here-and-now” experience and my own imaginal process flow in and out and through each other, rather than through that simplistic distinction, and in and out and through other people, present and remembered.

It does occur to me that he is reaching here in a sense for a state we might call meditative, but seemingly without the tools—or perhaps the temperament, the teacher, the Sangha, or any real release, beyond a deep sense of fatigue, from some ever-shadowing but not-quite-identifiable demons. Hungry ghosts, once kept at bay by compulsive cruising, which formerly drove him forward, but now at the very end of his too-brief life he is learning, perhaps, to let them range freely in the room. I am left unsettled by the essay—an un-

settlement I take it to be at least majorly in Goodman's own state of mind, apprehensive of death and grief-stricken by the recent death of his own son—at the time of its writing. Stoehr highlights this ambivalent, self-quizzical mood with his selection of the epigraphic lines for this essay: “. . . Lord / I am justified / by the beauty of / the world and my love / of your animals, though I / haven't been happy thereby.”

“Politics within Limits,” the next essay, takes off from the same point: in particular, the meaninglessness of the abstraction, “society.” But here the discomfort with general terms cited in the first essay comes more into focus: abstractions are *alienating*. They may be necessary, but they deaden. Still, “it is the devil to try to invent a phenomenological language that avoids them.” Language, he feels, fails us in capturing the lived as felt, and the felt as lived.

My own reaction to this is, it is much more than “the devil”: it is completely impossible, and not just because of this or that idiosyncratic turn of mind or lazy generalization. Rather, language—prose at least—cannot be completely phenomenological because that is not what language is *for*, or how it works (“for” in the evolutionary sense, of how and why it arose, what adaptive problem it was a response to). Language evolved for getting things done, in groups. As Bakhtin has it (in a point which I actually find Goodmanian): we never “say” anything, *tout court*—non-prepositionally, so to speak. That is, we only say something *to* somebody, *in* a situation, *at* a given time, *for* some reason or purpose. Language did not co-evolve with the human brain to be a perfect rendering of anything (who has the *time?*), and lamenting that is to miss the point. Language evolved, like the brain itself, to be *good enough to get the job done*—and no more. That is the brilliant insight of Lewin's “lifespace” Gestalt, after all: we map, act, adjust, act, remap—and then discard or deep-file the map itself, because we have moved on to the next situation. (If we do not discard or deep-file that old map, then *that* is when we're likely to have a problem, and a therapeutic issue.)

Poetry, more like dance and even music itself, then takes that basic creative evolutionary adaptation and releases it into a kind of free play—and, in the process, offers the deeper communication, the mirroring relief of loneliness that provides the essential enabling field condition in the ongoing evolution of greater consciousness. So does storytelling, “for its own sake”—which is to say, for the sake of deepening the connection between us and the world, which means primarily us and each other.

But all that is my own response. Back to Goodman, here I get a sense of a small boy, adventuresome yet profoundly lonely, never having been deeply affirmed pre-verbally, in that embodied, held way that can never be completely compensated or healed, later on. All this I identify with. And thus the restless sexual yearning, often the closest way we have, as embodied adults, to

feeding those ghosts, making that convincing contact, healing that wounded heart/spirit. This too I identify with.

"[A] small child," Goodman then names here as the very source of his anarchistic politics, "There is no father. Mother is away all day at work. He is self-reliant because he has to be. It is lonely, but nobody bugs him, and the sun is pouring through the window" (p. 72). What to do? All politics, he tells us, is remedial. And what is it remediating?—the intrusions of the state, authority and *planning*, into people's lives and affairs, in ways which interfere with their own taking up of this precious, elusive, *spontaneous* contact with each other. (I put the word in quotes just to indicate that this idea as well needs to be, as the "pomo" [postmodern] academics like to say now, "problematized.")

This is likewise the whole burden, it seems to me on rereading it now, of Goodman's (1960) *Growing Up Absurd*—though not necessarily the message my generation took from the book at the time. Back in those pre-Vietnam days, when the deceit and destructiveness of our own government were not yet so in-our-faces as they soon would be, we still looked to our anointed prophets like Goodman to give us broad sweeping social solutions—for "Society" in the abstract, if you will—not yet taking in the full import of Goodman's larger, deeper suspicion of "programs" and "the system" in general, or his smaller, much humbler, yet more deeply troubling and radical vision. It was some time, I think, before I fully appreciated that more troubling, anarchistic vision: I applied it, to be sure, to intimate relations and to therapy, but only with difficulty and more reluctance to organizations and societal programs and reforms. Nor, I think, did Goodman give us much help here: plainly he does believe in the necessity and legitimacy of the state, to secure the kind of fairly-safe space in which the life he values can unfold. But he has little that is helpful to say, here or elsewhere, of where and how you determine what degree of intrusion, what level of ground structures may be useful or even essential, and at what point those structures become deadening. (To be sure, this is an endless conundrum in a way, since any kind of rule or rubric for thinking about that would then become another one of those dead-hand abstractions.) But without some discussion, at least, of this, where are we left? What do we have to go on?

Switching the terms and level of the problem, Goodman then goes on to say in the next essay, "Beyond My Horizon—Words," that once all the above doubt and deflation are given and noted, there still remains—what? Hope? Possibility? Hope, Goodman would have us know right off, is inherently "crazy." By which he presumably means not "right here," not within "finite experience" (and here again I cannot quite get inside this sharp dichotomy between the "concrete" and "here," and the "imaginary" or "not here." Or finite, and infinite or transfinite—which is where he is now heading. To me,

those experiences of my own that I would call "transcendent" do have fully present noumenal/phenomenal value and weight, much like those of my own body, or yours, or the immediate face of a child. Otherwise I would not call them "transcendent": I would just call them "daydreams" or "imagination." Again here, Goodman's experience is quite different, and far more cautious in this direction. For all his brilliant writing about "middle mode," he seems not to know that state as one of sustained, embodied spiritual ecstasy. And thus, perhaps, the endless cruising, here seen in a spiritual perspective).

Roland Barthes, Goodman says here (to pick a then-contemporary writer he resonated with), resolves this abstraction and is sustained by a "substantial love affair with Jesus." Goodman envies that state in some sense, or the happiness it brings; yet, for many reasons, it is not available to him. Thus, he will have to opt for a "negative theology": one constrained, much as his social proposals are constrained, by limiting propositions. For example: "Whatever we say, is not true of God, nor is the negative true." Again, to me this is a different slant on the word "true," and carries echoes of a positivist system of knowledge and language which Goodman himself, at least in his Gestalt mode, is generally at pains to deconstruct.

Over against this is the mode of poetry—which Goodman recognizes as inherently, if still cautiously, reaching "beyond"—however much his poetic style tends to eschew adjectives, symbols, and even metaphor itself (though metaphor, as inherent to all reference and representation, is surely the essence of language itself, and the closest we get to that phenomenological clarity whose absence he was lamenting in the earlier essay). Prayer, which Goodman offers to someone/thing he chooses to call, prudently, "Spoken-to" is just that: an offering, something small and perhaps edible you leave at night by a shrine, and check in the morning to see if it has been taken (by a god, possibly, or maybe a nocturnal rodent. Or, I would add, a god in the form of a nocturnal rodent). In the offering, Goodman tells us, we "disown" the experience, in the literal sense of ceasing to hold it as ours, offering it "up" (again, the suggestion of, or reaching for, the "middle mode" of meditative/ecstatic states).

Alas, the enactment seems to leave him with an emptiness, and of a kind which is itself not full (there are different kinds of emptiness, to be sure). Again, something which fills and at times thrills me, leaves him, if I understand him, all the more alone.

Faith, in this prudent world-experience, is then not a given, but rather the "crazy hope" of the essay's title. But he would have us know that faith is also practical, and in a sense inevitable: it is what enables you to give yourself to the "next" of the situation, to follow the arc of one moment, one gesture into the next. Erotically (and Goodman is never far from the erotic, or at least the

sexual), faith is yielding into the orgasm, daring to let go of control at last, out of mounting tension or excitement. The contrary of this—to bring it back to our Gestalt terms—is Goodman's own distinctive addition to Perls's catalog of "resistances": namely, "egotism," the arrival at the very edge of the pool of mounting desire, of confluence, of flinging oneself into the non-bound—only to hold back, to be unable or unwilling to let go. (This of course is Goodman at his most fully relational, his least resistantly "individualistic"—his truest, to me, to the basic terms of his own holistic contact model. Curiously, this is also the point his student Isadore From singled out as the "one flaw" in Goodman's great opus. Which makes sense, from an ego psychology perspective, if not at all in a field and relational model. But then From also said that Gestalt, as a theory/methodology of contact, had "nothing to do" with relationship (personal communication, on a number of occasions). I not only cannot follow this, I cannot find it in Goodman, though I do know that apparently some others have.

Here again I cannot help thinking—since Goodman brought up the topic of sex—of the tantric practices of "the left hand": specifically, the cultivation of *staying with* that "egotism," that "resistance" to letting go—neither yielding to it, nor "getting over it." Just as in Goodman's formulation of propositions about God (neither this is true, nor is the opposite of this true), this Gestalt/tantric staying with the resistance then transmutes itself, into something "beyond." That something is then neither the normal letting go of the ego-boundary (as in, say, ejaculation—I can only speak here out of male experience, of course), nor is it the resistance of *not* letting go—but rather a "middle," or transcendent state. Goodman himself writes around and around this state, which he finds, as I understand him, in art but not, sadly, in sexual or spiritual practice.

To steady himself, Goodman grounds himself again in the present: the "burning bush" of the prophet, which gives heat yet is not consumed. That reality which is not consumed, he suggests, *is* God—whose other name, I believe I understand here, is "possibility." This again becomes in itself a kind of act of faith, if still one which is doubly prudent: first, in that it hardly lends itself to crusades and jihads (which is surely a good thing); and second, in that it protects the seeker (or seeks to) against disappointment. Hope, yes—but *crazy* hope, hope discounted before it is "cashed in" (since James, as always with Goodman, is never far from us here). The outcome, to me, is to keep him/us more or less safely hedged against the disappointments of counterfeiting, just in case they should turn up. In this way, Goodman's faith is likewise profoundly deflationary, in exactly the same way and sense as are his anarchistic politics. Here, as with the programs of the state, less may not after all be more, as it is in (some) readings of Buddhism; but it is surely safer.

Next comes the first of the two essays Stoehr has added here, from Goodman's later work, onto the three that comprised (with the poems) the original edition: "Being Queer." Note, first of all, the defiant use of the word—long before the term was re-appropriated by a politically self-conscious "identity group" which Goodman could barely have imagined, when he first penned the title, "The Politics of Being Queer," at the end of the 60s, when the idea of "gay pride," while nascent, was still a healing act—and a provocation.

Here Goodman makes his now-famous claim, a commonplace today even if much squabbled-over by different identity groups now, that "my homosexual needs have made me a nigger." He also claims—surely disingenuously—that he has been "fired three times because of my queer behavior." (But this would seem to imply that if he had confined his cruising of students to females, it would have been tolerated. Hard to believe, though perhaps it might, to a degree anyway in the university settings of the day—provided it was pursued with more discretion than he would likely have shown. But not, even in those days, at a secondary-school level.)

In any case, even the oppression, he notes, is to be celebrated, in that it sensitizes you to others who are oppressed (freedom, he insists, like reality, is indivisible). Clearly if he were alive today, he would not be with the separatists of our time, insisting that each particular nature, each behavioral or diagnostic category is a world apart, essential and unbridgeable to the other (equally arbitrary) categories. Love is love, sex is sex, he tells us again and again—wonderfully messy, unpredictable, and savingly dirty as well. We are all born of and as bodies; we all seek other bodies.

At the same time, there does seem (to me) something distinctively, well, different (at least from a point of view outside the "queer" identity) about the compulsivity of the cruising he recounts. Whether that difference has to do with something particular or even essential about male homosexuality, or male homosexual cruising, for Goodman is unclear here (he has so little to say, here or in his poetry or fiction, about the quality and experience of heterosexual desire or experience, much less heterosexual compulsivity). To me, you can read Goodman either way on this, taking the whole of his work. Perhaps any difference in the end just comes down, as E. O. Wilson has observed trenchantly, to the fact that when men have sex with men, they are free, at least, to act out of whatever biologically "essential male nature" they may have, unconstrained by having to make any adjustments to the "essential nature" or styles of the other gender.

In any case, by his own account his cruising is only rarely a success, even in its own terms. If anything, he seems (to me, anyway) at least as "addicted" to the failure, the disappointment, as to the cruising and the object itself. Stoehr himself suggests here that this sense may itself be an artifact of the

fact that while waiting for sex-dates that did not show up, Goodman was likely to occupy himself with writing poems of unfulfilled desire. We might turn this around, and speculate that in some way the whole cruising quest was in the service of waking that ephebic muse to give birth to the poem.

"Crazy hope," indeed, and with it, deflationary expectations, to be sure. And yet, to close this part (as Goodman does) with something positive and beautiful, here is a lovely stanza on the subject. Plainly the love object here is male: "Today you gazed at me, that spell / is why I choose to live on. / God bless you who remind me simply / of the earth and sky and Adam."

And finally, and most crucially, the "Apology for Literature"—remembering again that to Goodman, literature encompasses essentially all writing that is not something like academic articles, government reports, and the like. And remembering, too, that "man of letters" is *Goodman's identity*. Not just his professional identity, as he makes clear all through these essays, but his stance in life, his philosophy for living (or anti-philosophy if you will, in his sense of mistrusting the alienating abstraction). Thus an apology for literature, in Goodman's hands, necessarily becomes an *apologia pro vita sua*, with all the rich spiritual trappings carried by that choice of word and phrase in our Western literary tradition.

And what is "literature?" what is it *for* exactly? Literature is precisely *that which seeks to express the experience of human living*, as refracted by one human and offered in some sense to others (the literary man "speaks only in a community, for a hearer"—this point becomes important today, as Gestalt finds itself debating "expression" *per se*, as compared with a fully relational paradigm; you can find support for both these attitudes in Goodman).

This is the business of "men of letters" or "literary men" (making the allowance we can for the sexism of the times—though truth to tell, can we conceive in this discourse of a "literary woman," a "woman of letters"?). This differentiates them from specialists of every ilk, from physical scientists to sociologists, who for their parts are engaged in positive science, the amassing of data, "without style"—by definition, because they are not voicing the experience of an individual person. Again we register the intensely personal, the insistence that the whole of human scope is his domain, and again the deflationary note: "It is our use / that some of us / insist on how / it is from our point of view."

Is this deflation, this limit, a function of the deficiencies in our present society, or is it the human condition itself? Goodman cannot be sure: we have only the society we have; if we had another one we would be other beings, in ways we cannot know. At the same time, the *community of literary men* of all the ages is his proper community: it "cheers my solitude."

And what about the world around him, that human scene which he takes

as his literary task to filter through the lens of his own concrete experience? Is that not his real community as well, this present world where he has passed his sixty years, yearning, seeking, arguing, haranguing, cruising, playing pickup ball games, teaching the young, preaching to those who will listen (and those who will not)—and above all, writing, writing, writing? No, it seems, it is not. “I am in exile,” he tells us. “Like everybody else, I live in a world that is given to me—I am thankful for it. It is not made by me—and that too is very well. *But it is not my native home* (italics added)—therefore I write poems.” And then, quoting himself from his sweeping *bildungsroman* *Empire City*: “To fashion in our lovely English tongue a somewhat livelier world, I am writing this book.”

At the end of the day—the too-swiftly setting sun of a crowded, amazingly productive, and all-too-brief lifetime—his boonest companion, his most reliable love partner is finally the English language itself. Lively, sprawling, hybrid, organismic, ungovernable yet self-regulating, the very glass of the human and the mold of anarchism itself, sexy and dirty enough, and always, always ready for a vigorous tussle, a tender embrace, never holding back from that final orgasmic release that touches, timelessly, a lost paradise, the flow of life itself.

Finally, then, literature is prayer. In the end, “It is the way I pray to God. . . . It is legitimacy and rebellion.” His way of prayer, that is, will ever be that of Milton’s Lucifer, whose revolt against the imposed order is not so much a rejection of God, as it is the fallen angel’s *way of engaging Him*—his unique “mode of contact” if you will. And with this last line of the last essay Stoehr has placed in summation of Goodman’s living contributions, these essays are unified. The personal, the concrete, the reach or hope beyond, even the social marginality of queerness, are united in a life of the literary gaze, or glance—and all of it offered up as prayer, to “Spoken to,” whose other name is God. Faith, finally, is not an abstraction but an *act*: the act of taking a step, enactment of the crazy hope that there will be a ground for me to walk on—or of opening my eyes, on the crazy assumption there be a world there, for me to see. Paradise is lost indeed; and yet we go on.

Which leaves us—where? What legacy do we take from this fallen angel, this radiant Lucifer, for enacting that faith ourselves today, opening our eyes to a new world and taking another, necessary step? We know that the Paul Goodman who wrote these final, quietly yet searingly personal, essays was a spent man, worn almost to death from the years of battle (or his way of doing battle), from abuse of his own body (in all the normative ways of the times), and finally broken in heart and spirit by the tragic death of his only son. In his eloquent and useful introduction to *Nature Heals* (Stoehr’s edited collection of Goodman’s psychological writings), Michael Vincent Miller could write, viewing Goodman’s work as a whole: “He stubbornly held forth a vision of individual self-realization through love and work against the dehuman-

izing pressures that bureaucracy and technology were producing." All true and well-put, to be sure; but this is not the Goodman we find here. Nor is it the Goodman of Stoehr's remarkable masterpiece of cultural history *Here Now Next*—a man stymied if not yet broken by the heartbreak of throwing himself again and again against a wall of rejection (and worse, indifference), then importantly if only partially healed by his decade in the contact crucible of Gestalt (like so many of us, in our time), then famous and influential for a decade, only to find that his influence was not at all what he had meant it to be. And then all of it souring to ashes in his mouth, by the loss of one of those children who were perhaps the dearest things to him, finally, in his world. (And personally, how I wish he had written more about *that*—not the loss, but the experience of father love itself, a love he had never known as a child, and thus had to invent so richly, and spread so widely anew.)

We taste those ashes here, in every line of these final essays. Moreover, it is foreshadowed, we can see now, by a kind of pessimism—or better, a *willed hopefulness*—that pervades much of his work through the years. This is the analogue of what I have called here his deflationary politics: the anarchism which rejects sweeping social programs, in favor of a politics of minimalism, his "two per cent and four per cent," the proposals of a utopian, yet also of a "neolithic conservative." (Remember, too, that Goodman grew up in the lefty, Jewish New York which watched in horror and was haunted not only by the nightmare of the Holocaust, but by the dream-shattering horrors of Stalinism as well, the death of any sweeping programmatic faith on the Left.)

Finally, I want to submit, it is that anarchism itself that is Goodman's true legacy, and his particular gift to us now. Despite the fitful resurgence of fundamentalisms of every stripe, the dawning age we live in today is I think best called the "Age of Complexity," a whole-world field of such rich interfoldedness that no dreamed-up, imposed system can capture and organize it, and the very idea of causality is replaced by that of emergence. The analogue here would be that last and lifelong love affair of Goodman's just cited above: language itself. (And here we may think of the failure of all the various attempts to create/impose an "improved" language, such as Esperanto.)

Language is the ultimate—some would say the highest—creation of human beings. By definition this creation is social/relational, not individualistic; spontaneous/emergent, not planned; self-regulating, not legislated (despite the recurrent attempts by nationalist Academies to purge "foreign" influences—as if there were any other kind!); hybrid, not "pure"; pragmatic and beautiful, not one or the other (note the "false dichotomy"); alive and always changing, not static and embalmed; and "here-and-now"/mundane, and "next"/spiritual (I would submit) at the same time.

In other words, language, like any living process among people, is best

described by the Gestalt model itself, which is the realization of Goodman's anarchistic philosophy, in psychological terms. Here James and Rank, among Goodman's predecessor influences, finally take pride of place, along with Kropotkin, over and above (if still along with) Freud, Reich, Kant, and the whole rich host of others. (This is in contrast to Perls, where Nietzsche predominates, together with Freud. Here Nietzsche is nowhere to be found—a blessed relief, to me anyway, finding as I do in James a much richer and deeper response to Darwin than Nietzsche's Social-Darwinist take on that deepest revolution of modern thought. In the end, I believe this difference—the presence or absence of Nietzsche—perhaps best captures the key difference between the two rivalrous, sometime collaborators, Goodman and Perls.)

Do we seek a model for psychotherapy, for human relations, for society? We find that model here, finally, in the living, *organic anarchy* of language itself. It is *this* Goodman, this Gestalt-as-anarchism, *this* response to Darwin which finally stands, I believe, as Goodman's essential contribution, and his legacy gift to us today. Goodman's Gestalt offers us, like a prayer, a masterful response to Darwin's dazzling challenge to the post-modern age to come up with a new description of human nature, human adaptation and human process. Here we have the tools, after a round century of evolution and exegesis, for addressing the emergent issues of a new world order, and the emergent citizen/beings the world needs, to have a chance of carrying our evolutionary adventure forward.

To realize this gift fully now, we need a deeper understanding of the Gestalt model itself, with its full roots in a half-century of perceptual and social research and innovation, dating back at least to Exner in 1894, *before* Goodman and Perls came on the scene. (Goodman himself is only partially in touch with these roots, as when he writes of utopianism as a kind of social Action-Research project, without awareness that that modality itself is another of Lewin's many contributions and elaborations to Gestalt.) We need as well a deeper understanding of contemporary developmental and interpersonal neurobiology, in the context of evolutionary theory itself, to ground our Gestalt perspective on the key Gestalt dimensions of relationship and creativity.

The rest, as Wittgenstein famously remarked, what we cannot talk about, we must pass over in silence. But there are silences of many kinds, like voids, or "ground"—some supposedly empty, and some replete with energy and potential. After the sadness of Goodman's final essays, to me the silence is nevertheless filled with gratefulness. "Creator spirit come" Goodman writes; this too we can take in many ways—as a readiness for death, or as the evocation of a muse for further creativity, to offer just two.

As it happens, the year 2011 marks the centennial of Goodman's birth—and

also the centennial of the writing of Wertheimer's first monograph on the perception of motion, the paper generally regarded as launching the Gestalt revolution, in the wake of which we and indeed essentially all of psychology, applied and theoretical, seek and must *navigage* today. At the distance of a full century's remove, we are well positioned now to see the Darwinian roots of our own Gestalt revolution, and equally the deep kinship between our model and two other great contemporaneous response to the evolutionary challenge: James's writings, and Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, both of which were to influence Goodman so deeply. It is further our gift today to be able to advance the synthesis of these and other streams, which our own rich hybrid model represents, exploits, and realizes in practice.

"Creator spirit" came long and often to Goodman: are the grateful heirs. My gratefulness, offered here to "Spoken to," is for his perseverance (even or all the more so in "exile"), his fierce insistence on sex and the body, his dedication always to the young, his brilliant synthetic gifts which advanced our model so far, his voice which blessed (in his own cranky way) my generation in our own ephebic days—and the blessing, too, of his lifelong love affair with that brilliant, soaring, down-to-earth, ever-evolving, sexy, messy, dirty-dancing hybrid of all hybrids: the English language.

The last word is Goodman's. Bearing this love affair in mind changes my experience of the entrancing stanza below, which I first met with sadness, until I reread "Apology for Literature" and thought to reframe it. In this reading, I feel Goodman as the wandering poet, Rumi-like, always waiting for his lover—but now a lover who always does come and lead him home. The lover here, Creator Spirit, Spoken-to, is none other than the body of the English language her/himself:

The crazy man that you meet
Talking to himself on the street
Is I, please gently lead him home.
Creator Spirit come.

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