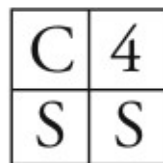


AGENCY AND OTHER ANARCHIST THEMES IN PAUL GOODMAN'S WORK

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STRUCTURAL PREEMPTION

In *Growing Up Absurd*, we see the first statement of a theme that continues to reappear throughout Goodman's work.

...people are so bemused by the way business and politics are carried on at present with all their intricate relationships, that they have ceased to be able to imagine alternatives....

...[T]he system pre-empts the available means and capital; it buys up as much of the intelligence as it can and muffles the voices of dissent; and then it irrefutably proclaims that itself is the only possibility of society, for nothing else is thinkable.¹

In *People or Personnel*, similarly:

...[T]he inevitability of centralism will be self-proving. A system destroys its competitors by pre-empting the means and channels, and then proves that it is the only conceivable mode of operating.²

So even though the system is the result of deliberate human action and serves the interests of one group of human beings at the expense of another, it is treated as an inevitable fact of nature.

As an example of such "pre-empting of the means and the brains by the organization," he cites higher education, where

only faculty are chosen that are "safe" to the businessmen trustees or the politically appointed regents and these faculties give out all the degrees and licenses and union cards to the new generation of students, and only such universities can get Foundation or government money for research, and research is incestuously staffed by the same sponsors and according to the same policy, and they allow no one but those they choose, to have access to either the classroom or expensive apparatus: it will then be claimed that there is no other learning or professional competence....³

1 Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York Vintage Books, 1956), x.

2 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 70, in *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968). Note: When "Goodman" appears in a footnote with no given name, it will always refer to Paul Goodman and not Paul and Percival.

3 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, xi.

The public education system is just one component of an interlocking system of bureaucracies that have each other for clients, with the students as a raw material that's processed to order: "a few great corporations are getting the benefit of an enormous weeding-out and selective process -- all children are fed into the mill and everybody pays for it."⁴

The classic example of such preemption, in which the beneficiaries of a system hide its coercive character behind a facade of naturalness, is Thomas Hodgskin's of the capitalist, in *Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital*:

 Betwixt him who produces food and him who produces clothing, betwixt him who makes instruments and him who uses them, in steps the capitalist, who neither makes nor uses them, and appropriates to himself the produce of both. With as niggard a hand as possible he transfers to each a part of the produce of the other, keeping to himself the large share. Gradually and successively has he insinuated himself betwixt them, expanding in bulk as he has been nourished by their increasingly productive labours, and separating them so widely from each other that neither can see whence that supply is drawn which each receives through the capitalist. While he despoils both, so completely does he exclude one from the view of the other that both believe they are indebted him for subsistence. He is the middleman of all labourers..... Not only do they appropriate the produce of the labourer; but they have succeeded in persuading him that they are his benefactors and employers. At least such are the doctrines of political economy; and capitalist may well be pleased with a science which both justifies their claims and holds them up to our admiration, as the great means of civilising and improving the world.⁵

Goodman treated the managerial classes' rise to dominance over all aspects of life in the 20th century as directly analogous to Kropotkin's account of the rise of the absolute state and its co-optation of all previously independent power centers. He directly quoted from *The State*:

 With these elements -- liberty, organization from simple to complex, production and exchange by guilds, commerce with foreign parts -- the towns of the Middle Ages during the first two centuries of their free life became centers of well-being for all the inhabitants, centers of opulence and civilization, such as we have not seen since then.... To annihilate the independence of cities, to plunder merchants' and artisans' rich guilds, to centralize the foreign trade of cities into its own hands and ruin it, to seize the internal administration of guilds and subject home trade as well as all manufactures... to a swarm of functionaries -- such was the State's behavior in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶

In our own time, similarly:

 Looking at our colleges and universities, historically and as they are, by and large one must say of them what Kropotkin said of the towns that gave them birth.

4 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, p. 57.

5 Thomas Hodgskin, *Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital* (1825). Hosted online at Marxists Internet Archive <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/hodgskin/labour-defended.htm>>.

6 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, p. 162, in *Compulsory Mis-Education and the Community of Scholars*.

It is impossible to consider our universities in America without being powerfully persuaded of the principle of anarchy, that the most useful arrangement is free association and federation rather than top-down management and administration. Nowhere else can one see so clearly the opportunities for real achievement so readily available -- for the work is teaching-and-learning and *there* in the school are the teachers and students themselves -- and yet so much obstruction, prevention extraneous regulation and taxation, by management and the goals of management.⁷

Goodman saw through the lie of "meritocracy," rightly arguing that "mobility" is beside the point if the structure of the system people are moving through -- and the standards established to move through it -- are evil.

There is plenty of social mobility, opportunity to rise... but the statuses and channels are increasingly stratified, cut and dried. Most enterprise is parceled out by feudal corporations, or by the state; and these determine the requirements....

We do not have an open economy; even when jobs are not scarce, the corporations and state dictate the possibilities of enterprise.... Even a department store requires a diploma for its salespeople, not so much because of the skills they have learned as that it guarantees the right character: punctual and with a smooth record.⁸

And once such systems are established they tend to achieve lock-in, and suppress further change -- both through path dependency and through the deliberate efforts of those in charge. In industry, for example:

Three or four manufacturers control the automobile market, competing with fixed prices and slowly spooned-out improvements.... Over the years, progress in design has been determined entirely to maximize profits, rather than to reduce price or improve the product....

Radically new design is impossible, for, even with good intentions, the groups controlling a market will advance according to their own expertness, patents, and previous tooling and will pay no attention to other directions.⁹

At the same time, the dominance of this one complex gives rise to other complexes like sprawl and car-centered urban layouts, which in turn reinforce the dominance of the automobile industry and transform it into a necessity.¹⁰

And having thus locked itself in, the hegemonic system's response to all problems is more of the same -- intensifying the very factors that caused the problem in the first place. For example:

When economic expansion begins to produce a glut of goods more and more dubious in value and threatening unemployment, our recourse is to increase the rate of expansion

7 *Ibid.* pp. 162-163.

8 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, p. 20.

9 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 58.

10 *Ibid.* p. 59.

and to step up the advertising, though the goods become even more useless and the jobs that provide these goods become even more meaningless.¹¹

As an example of how a system suppresses alternatives and makes its own "inevitability" a self-fulfilling prophecy Goodman mentions Urban Renewal:

...in order to batten on Urban Renewal and other money, promoters will get a perfectly salvageable neighborhood classified as a slum for demolition. The residents protest, but because of the classification, owners are discouraged from making improvements, banks will not finance renovations, excellent but timid residents move away. So by the time the protest drags through the hostile administrative procedure, the neighborhood is certifiable as a slum and is demolished.¹²

The people in charge of the system respond to criticism by claiming that "we give the people what they want, we cannot impose higher standards on them." But this argument, Goodman says, is disingenuous. What the people "want" is hardly a spontaneous and free choice, given "the sheer quantities of messages and objects with which they swamp the public, ...the pre-emption of space and resources, ... the monopolistic exclusion of alternatives..."¹³

Goodman notes that proposals for "utopian" alternatives -- i.e., fundamental changes in the basic structure of the system -- are treated as demands "that a foreign or 'advance-guard' way of life be imposed." But in fact the system we live under now "has superseded the old with great suddenness; and it has certainly had the effect of being imposed..."¹⁴

Goodman's structural critique closely coincides with Ivan Illich's, in particular with the latter's concept of attempting to "solve a crisis by escalation" -- i.e., the attempt by policy-making elites to solve problems with more of the same, by adding still more of the same inputs or doubling down on the process that created the problem in the first place.¹⁵ As Goodman describes the same phenomenon:

Typical American behavior is to solve a problem of traffic congestion by creating a parallel system that builds up new neighborhoods and redoubles the traffic congestion; but no effort is made to analyze the kinds of conditions of work so that people commute less. With generous intent, Americans clear a slum area and rebuild with large projects that re-create the slum more densely and, on the whole, sociologically worse, for now class stratification is built organically into the plan; but rarely is an effort made to get people to improve what they have, or to find out where they ought to move.¹⁶

11 Goodman, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), xi.

12 *Ibid.* p. 11.

13 *Ibid.* p. 10.

14 *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

15 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 8-9.

16 Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947, 1960), p. 6.

ORGANIC SOCIAL LIFE, AGENCY AND ALIENATION

One of the main themes of *Growing Up Absurd* is the shortage of "manly" work for youth moving into the adult world. It's an unfortunate choice of language, and displays an acceptance of existing social gender roles unworthy of Goodman's critical intelligence. But if you take this concrete description of the kind of work that's missing, give it a less cringeworthy name like "worthwhile work," and apply the generalization to everyone regardless of gender, it's a valuable insight:

The conclusion must be that workmen are indifferent to the job because of its intrinsic nature: it does not enlist worth-while capacities, it is not "interesting"; it is not his, he is not "in" on it; the product is not really useful.... My guess is that a large factor in [the preference for job security] is the resigned reaction to not being able to take into account whether the work of one's hands is useful for anything; for in a normal life situation, if what we do is useful, we feel secure about being needed.¹⁷

...a manly job that is useful and necessary, requiring human energy and capacity, and that can be done with honor and dignity.¹⁸

The problem is the lack of an organic connection by which one's work is felt to be a meaningful contribution to the community.

Production workers in manufacturing feel they're making substandard goods that are designed to fall apart. And white collar work -- "salesmanship, entertainment, business management, promotion, and advertising"¹⁹ -- overwhelmingly amounts to what David Graeber calls "bullshit jobs." Not to mention, in an economy where privilege artificially separates effort from reward, and directs them to different parties, the need for guard labor to protect the propertied classes in their ill-gotten gain.

In *People or Personnel*, he gets the same point across by saying that the independent craft producer has become "personnel."

He becomes personnel when the style and skill are built into the machine that he operates; when he no longer understands the process as a whole and does not decide the method and schedule; and when he has no control over the utility or price of the product, nor over his own hiring and firing.²⁰

Goodman readily concedes the point of critics, that "people in *fact* don't think of their jobs in this way at all. *Nobody* asks if a job is useful or honorable.... A man gets a job that pays well..., and [has] good conditions." The question, Goodman says, "*is what it means to grow up into such a fact as: "During my productive years I will spend eight hours a day doing what is no good."*"²¹ The fact that nobody views work in terms of its intrinsic worth is not just a

17 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, p. 22.

18 *Ibid.* p. 26.

19 *Ibid.* p. 25.

20 *Ibid.* p. 131.

21 *Ibid.* p. 29.

spontaneous product of nature. It a state of affairs created by deliberate human action. It is a *change* from the state of affairs that prevailed in previous, less atomized societies. It is fair to call it a *pathology*.

Even in childhood, there is a great contrast today with earlier societies in which children were physically present to see the work their parents did, as part of the functional roles they played in their families and community, and could use imitation and play to grow into similar roles themselves.²² Perhaps it was such societies Goodman was thinking of when he said "there is no right education except growing up into a worthwhile world."²³

"Now, on the contrary, the man and perhaps the woman of the house work in distant offices and factories, increasingly on parts and processes that don't mean anything to a child. A child might not even know what work his daddy does."²⁴

I can confirm that from my old childhood. At age three or four, being told in response to my queries that my dad went to work "to make money," I imagined him turning a crank and periodically pulling money out of a slot in the wall. What useful function this could serve, I had no idea. Compare that to a society where home and village social life is coextensive with "production," children grow up in the midst of adults going about productive activity, and much of their play centers on the imitation of such adult activity.

And the alienation exists to a considerable extent even in fields involving skilled or knowledge work, thanks to the managerial revolution.

We are so out of touch with the real work in the field that, in America, a dean is superior to a professor and a board of trustees or regents is superior to a faculty. The editor knows better than the author what should be in a book, and the publisher knows better than either.²⁵

The same process has affected technology, with a similar alienation from competence over the things that we use in our everyday lives. People "use machines that they do not understand and cannot repair." From observing this state of affairs children draw the lesson "that competence does not exist in ordinary people, but in the system of interlocking specialties."²⁶

The same alienation of competence, from something widely exercised in everyday life to the professional preserve of bureaucratic specialists, has occurred in politics.

The democratic revolution succeeded in extending formal self-government and opportunity to nearly everybody, regardless of birth, property, or education. But it gave up the ideal of the town meeting, with the initiative and personal involvement that alone could train people in self-government and give them practical knowledge of political issues. The actual result has been the formation of a class of politicians who

22 *Ibid.* p. 79.

23 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, p. 59.

24 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, p. 79.

25 *Ibid.* p. 147.

26 *Ibid.* p. 78.

govern, and who are themselves symbolic front figures.²⁷

The Enlightenment conception of citizenship at the time of the American Revolution, of the citizen as "society-*maker*," has been replaced with a view of the citizen as "one 'participating in' or 'adjusted to' society."²⁸

Regarding problems of youth alienation and juvenile delinquency, Goodman views it as telling that in mainstream public discussion of such things

the others, the delinquent boys, are not taken seriously as existing, as having, like oneself, real aims in a real world.... Instead they are a "youth problem" and the emphasis is on their "background conditions," which one can manipulate; they are said to be subject to "tensions" that one can alleviate. The aim is not to give human beings real goals that warrant belief, and tasks to share in, but to re-establish "belonging," although this kind of speech and thought is precisely calculated to avoid contact and so makes belonging impossible. When such efforts don't work, one finally takes some of the boys seriously as existing and uses force to make them not exist.²⁹

The "helping professions" are dominated by a mindset that refuses to treat human beings as subjects with agency, and instead treats them as raw material to be processed. The accounts of marginalized people negotiating institutional gatekeepers -- poor people dealing with welfare bureaucrats, transgender people seeking approval for hormone treatment or surgery -- universally report dealing with functionaries who attempt to impose a reality on them and treat them as objects to have things done to them, and only listen to their own accounts of their lived experience as a last resort (if that). Functionaries in gatekeeper bureaucracies expect the human beings they exercise control over to accept a narrative that's handed to them from above over the evidence of their own senses. There's something fundamentally wrong with a system that refuses to accept the validity of people's own perception of the world, or to respect their equality as human beings and the equal worth of their own values and aims. Tom Joad summed it up well:

Preachin's bein' good to folks when they wanna kill ya for it. Las' Christmus in McAlester, Salvation Army come an' done us good. Three solid hours a cornet music, an' we set there. They was bein' nice to us. But if one of us tried to walk out, we'd a drawn solitary. That's preachin. Doin' good to a fella that's down an' can't smack ya in the puss for it.

Rather than using social services as support platforms as tools to pursue their own ends, people are transformed into passive clients of institutional bureaucracies, for whom -- or to whom -- things are done. Ivan Illich describes it, in the context of the public schools, as teaching people

to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed:

27 *Ibid.* p. 220.

28 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, p. 19.

29 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, pp. 37-38.

the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby "schooled" to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is "schooled" to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question.³⁰

* * *

Rich and poor alike depend on schools and hospitals which guide their lives, form their world view, and define for them what is legitimate and what is not. Both view doctoring oneself as irresponsible, learning on one's own as unreliable, and community organization, when not paid for by those in authority, as a form of aggression or subversion.³¹

In the case of public school dropouts, Goodman describes a similar disrespect for agency. The public educationist experts take the existing system as given, and treat dropping out as an undesirable deviation from the norm -- much as a quality control specialist views "defects" in industrial production. The question is how to correct the defect and push the undesirable behavior back within specified tolerance limits.

Curiously muffled in these conferences is the question that puts the burden of proof the other way: What are they drop-outs from? Is the schooling really good for them, or much good for anybody? Since, for many, there are such difficulties with the present arrangements, might not some better arrangements be invented? Or more bluntly, since schooling undertakes to be compulsory, must it not continually review its claim to be useful?³²

One of the central purposes of the public education, in the words of the New York Commissioner of Education, is to "handle constructively [the students'] problems of adjustment to authority."³³ It was, Goodman argues, "a watershed in American philosophy of education" when Serious Person James Conant "mentions a possible incompatibility between 'individual development' and 'national needs'..."³⁴

Finally, another form of alienation Goodman denounced was the modern view of culture as a material byproduct of the historical era rather than an expression of human agency.

30 Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 1.

31 *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.

32 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, in *Compulsory Miseducation and The Community of Scholars* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962, 1964), pp. 15-16.

33 *Ibid.* p. 18.

34 *Ibid.* p. 18.

Consider the following of C. Wright Mills: "The ideals that we Westerners associate with the classic, liberal, bourgeois period of modern culture may well be rooted in this one historical state of this one type of society. Such ideals as personal freedom and cultural autonomy may not be inherent, necessary features of cultural life as such." This is like saying that tragic poetry or mathematics was "rooted" in the Greek way of life and is not "inherently" human. This kind of thinking is the final result of the recent social-scientific attitude that culture is added onto a featureless animal, rather than being the invention-and-discovery of human powers.³⁵

In contrast to all this, the only form of genuinely productive or meaningful activity is that which grows directly out of human agency.

In contrast to the understanding of "reading" conveyed in the public schools -- "a means of communicating top-down decisions and advertising" -- authentic literacy, seriously reading and writing the English language, results from self-direction.

...having picked up the rudiments either in cultured homes or in the first two grades, we really learned to read by our own will and free exploration, following our bent, generally among books that are considered inappropriate by school librarians!

If anything learning to read is a spontaneous reaction that is impeded by forced schooling: "for many children, it is precisely going to school that prevents [reading] -- because of the school's alien style, banning of spontaneous interest, extrinsic rewards and punishments."³⁶

People learn much more readily and effectively when their learning is motivated by their own needs and interests. A beagle, Goodman observes, can be trained to walk on its hind legs with a ball balanced on its nose. "But the dog will show much more intelligence, force, and speedy feedback when chasing a rabbit in the field."³⁷

Goodman argued similarly that disrespect for agency, in the form of forced exercise under humiliating conditions in physical education classes, resulted in "a distaste and shame for the use of one's body altogether" for the rest of students' lives. The specific instance he had in mind was the "President's exercises," an initiative by JFK to promote physical fitness in the schools, in which students were forced to do calisthenics like taking medicine and those unable to complete the tasks were publicly shamed before their peers. He compared this to other experiences of students engaged in enjoyable physical activity as a spontaneous part of their own play.³⁸

Goodman uses the term "reactive stupidity" -- "stupidity in self-defense" -- to describe childrens' passive-aggressive response to having anything shoved down their throats that others, unaccountable to them, have decided is "for their own good."³⁹

Throughout their academic careers, children and young adults are taught to passively accept

35 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, p. 226.

36 Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education*, p. 26.

37 *Ibid.* p. 89.

38 *Ibid.* pp. 38-39.

39 *Ibid.* p. 39.

the goals of the system as their own goals. An assignment from the teacher -- as, later in life, from the boss who likewise sits behind a desk -- is "important." Something pursued for its own sake, on the contrary, is a "hobby."

...[T]he "serious" activity of youth is going to school and getting at least passing grades; all the rest -- music, driving, friendships, own reading, hobbies, need for one's own money -- all this is treated by the adults as frivolous.... In fact, of course, these frivolous things are where normally a child would explore his feelings and find his identity and vocation, learn to be responsible; nevertheless, if any of them threatens to interfere with the serious business... it is unhesitatingly interrupted, sometimes with threats and sanctions.⁴⁰

Goodman describes a hypothetical college junior:

...[H]e has been in a classroom environment for fifteen continuous years.... Schooling has been the serious part of his life, and it has consisted of listening to some grown-up talking and of doing assigned lessons. The young man has almost never assigned himself a serious task. Sometimes, as a child, he thought he was doing something earnest on his own, but the adults interrupted him and he became discouraged.⁴¹

It follows that the American ideology of "Education" should be critically and systematically taken apart with regard to whose goals it serves. "It is time that we stopped using the word 'education' honorifically. We must ask education how? where? for what? and under whose administration?"⁴²

And more broadly, agency is central to people doing and being their best at anything. As Goodman said of the top-down agenda of rigorous scientific education in the post-Sputnik panic, "they will eventually find that also [democratic community] is essential, for it is impossible to do creative work of any kind when the goals are pre-determined by outsiders and cannot be criticized and altered by the minds that have to do the work..."⁴³

It's telling that, in Kennedy's 1993 message on education, he mentioned the "vast areas of the unknown... being explored for economic, military, medical, and other reasons" -- in other words, with human curiosity being subordinated to the power needs of institutions. "The 'other reasons,'" Goodman remarked, "include those of Galileo and Darwin."⁴⁴

The other side of lack of agency, in a centralized bureaucratic society, is the inability to assign blame for what goes wrong in any coherent way. Individuals making criminal policies in their capacities as officials of organizations can hide behind the "corporate veil," so that institutions engaged in monstrously destructive activities are anonymous entities, perceived as forces of nature. When individuals -- especially lower level functionaries -- are caught in egregious wrong-doing, the blame is assigned entirely to them as individuals and not to the

40 *Ibid.* pp. 117-118.

41 *Ibid.* p. 131.

42 *Ibid.* p. 55.

43 *Ibid.* p. 44.

44 *Ibid.* p. 93.

systemic character or incentives of the organizations they work for.

In short, the pattern is as follows: 1. The organization reduces its agents to personnel who carry out the organizational goals and policy 2. If something goes wrong and an agent is publicly exposed in an outrageous act, he suddenly becomes an individual person again and is so penalized. 3. The organization takes no responsibility whatever, saves face, makes no public apology, makes no amends, does not look retroactively into similar past outrages that it has committed. 4. Nevertheless, the organization blandly comes before the public as a morally responsible agent, with a right to regulate itself.

"...[T]he 'real' morality, of persons, has an increasingly limited sphere of effectual public operation; corporate organization has now invaded every aspect of life..."⁴⁵

As with his proposals for decentralized production and administration (about which more below) the kind of humanly appealing community Goodman proposes is not a return to the pre-modern, but rather a post-modern version that incorporates advanced technology and contemporary ideas on individual human dignity and self-actualization. Like decentralist philosophies of the past, Goodman's model of organic community still prizes

stability, "rootedness," subtle awareness of the environment, as a means to the integration of the domestic, technical, economic, political, and cultural functions of life, and to prove a physical community in which the young can grow up.⁴⁶

The difference between the organic societies of the past and of the future is that the latter will, while avoiding anomie, atomization and alienation, will also avoid the cultural authoritarianism of the past and its tendency to subordinate the individual to the collective.

Finally, in regard to human agency, I should mention Goodman's areas of commonality with thinkers like David Graeber and Elinor Ostrom when it comes to faith in the open-ended possibilities of human face-to-face interaction, if people are left to themselves. The development of face-to-face community, in our present atmosphere of atomization, will inevitably lead to serious conflict. But Goodman argued that

such conflict is not an obstacle to community but a golden opportunity, *if the give-and-take can continue, if contact can be maintained*. The continuing conflict cuts through the character-defense of people and *defeats* their stupidity, for stupidity is a character-defense. And the heat of the conflict results in better mutual understanding and fraternity.⁴⁷

Like Graeber, he believed that the important thing was for people facing a common problem to deal directly with each other until they had worked something out -- and above all for them to deal with one another as equals under circumstances in which they had to take each other seriously as human being and listen seriously to each other's concerns, without anyone in a position to use armed force as a trump card.

45 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 192.

46 *Ibid.* p. 13.

47 Goodman, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, pp. 20-21.

THE FEASIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVES

Goodman points out that there's nothing in the nature of our production technology, as such, that makes existing institutional arrangements necessary. Speaking of the "sole-prerogative" clauses in union contracts (which give management "the sole right to determine what is to be produced, how it is to be produced, what plants are to be built and where, what kinds of machinery are to be installed, when workers are to be hired and laid off, and how production operations are to be rationalized"), he says: "There is *none* of this that is inevitable in running a machine economy...."⁴⁸

Rather, most of our institutional forms for organizing production and distribution exist to serve the needs of the system, rather than because of any particular technical necessities for producing a given standard of living. "In a centralized enterprise, the function to be performed is the goal of the organization rather than of persons (except as they identify with the organization)."⁴⁹

The way things are done is not the result of technical necessity, or the natural or inevitable way of doing things, but of human will and the exertion of power. It is, rather, the view of them as inevitable that makes them inevitable, and limits our efforts in response to a set of parameters defined in terms of the present system.

I have been trying to show that some of these historical conditions are not inevitable at all but are the working-out of willful policies that aggrandize certain interests and exclude others, that subsidize certain styles and prohibit others. But of course *historically*, if almost everybody believes the conditions are inevitable..., then they are inevitable. For to cope with emergencies does not mean, then, to support alternative conditions, but further to support and institutionalize the same conditions. Thus, if there are too many cars, we build new highways; if administration is too cumbersome, we build in new levels of administration....⁵⁰

Goodman speculates that half our work hours (and this was in the 1950s) are waste production that would be replaced with leisure in a rational society:

Suppose we would cut out the boondoggling and gear our society to a more sensible abundance, with efficient production of quality goods, distribution in a national market, counterinflation and sober credit. At once the work week would be cut to, say, twenty hours instead of forty.⁵¹

Goodman's most dedicated argument for decentralism and self-organization was his 1963

48 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, p. 22.

49 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 3.

50 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, p. 337.

51 Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, pp. 30-31.

book *People or Personnel*, in which he analyzed the style of the large, hierarchical organization and proposed the small ad-hoc organization as an alternative. "In a centralized enterprise" (to repeat),

the function to be performed is the goal of the organization rather than of persons.... Authority is top-down. Information is gathered from below in the field and is processed to be usable by those above; decisions are made in headquarters; and policy, schedule, and standard procedure are transmitted downward by chain of command. The enterprise as a whole is divided into departments of operation to which are assigned personnel with distinct roles, to give standard performance.... The system was devised to discipline armies; to keep records, collect taxes, and perform bureaucratic functions; and for certain kinds of mass production. It has now become pervasive.

The principle of decentralism is that people are engaged in a function and the organization is how they cooperate. Authority is delegated away from the top as much as possible and there are many accommodating centers of policy-making and decision. Information is conveyed and discussed in face-to-face contacts between field and headquarters. Each person becomes increasingly aware of the whole operation and works at it in his own way according to his capacities. Groups arrange their own schedules. Historically, this system of voluntary association has yielded most of the values of civilization, but it is thought to be entirely unworkable under modern conditions and the very sound of it is strange.⁵²

But in fact, as Goodman went on to show in the rest of the book, the centralized style itself is directly counter-productive to the ostensible human ends the organization exists to serve, and actually functions to exert effort from people engaged in tasks they do not see as in their own interest. Self-organization, on the other hand, is the common sense method by which people organize tasks in their own interests.

Centralized organizations treat their members -- or their personnel, rather -- as means to the organization's end. Decentralized, ad hoc organizations are vehicles for the agency of their members.

...[I]t makes an enormous difference if it is directly society that uses the schools to train youth for its needs, or if it is directly the scholars that use the schools to learn or teach what they practically want to know or profess.... [When schools are created to generate human output that meets "national needs" -- James Conant's insufferable phrase], the social needs exist in the school as "goals of the administration" and this adds many complications: the scholars must be motivated, disciplined, evaluated. But when students who want to be lawyers or doctors find themselves a faculty, or masters with something important to profess attract disciples, the case is simpler; the goals are implicit and there is no problem of motivation.⁵³

52 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, pp. 3-4.

53 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, pp. 212-213.

People whose work and other efforts are controlled by large organizations instinctively perceive that they exist as means to the organization's ends, rather than the other way around. Goodman observed that when, in a lecture to college students, he mentioned in passing that "some function of society which is highly centralized could be much decentralized without loss of efficiency, or perhaps with a gain in efficiency, at once the students want to talk about nothing else." And it only stands to reason that they would react in this way.

From their tone, it is clear that in this subject something is at stake for their existence. They feel trapped in the present system of society that allows them so little say or initiative, and that indeed is like the schooling that they have been enduring for twelve to sixteen years.⁵⁴

One illustration of the way existing institutional forms serve the needs of the organization rather than being technically necessary to produce its ostensible output: job descriptions and standard operating procedures exist mainly to deal with the conflict of interest when the people doing the work are doing it to serve the ends of someone besides themselves. Organizations operate with many times the level of overhead and ratios of administrators to line workers, and restrict the initiative of those in direct contact with the situation in solving problems, because the organization is not a response to a felt need of the people doing the work, or their own cooperative vehicle for coordinating their efforts. Since the interests of the administrative classes directing their efforts are fundamentally opposed to theirs, those doing the actual work cannot be trusted to use their own common sense despite being best qualified to judge what needs to be done. On the other hand we have the kinds of rigid union work rules that right-wingers make fun of because workers know that management will, under the guise of promoting "rationality" and "common sense," take advantage of its discretion and attempt to sweat maximum output from workers if it can get away with it.

Subordinates... are restricted in both initiative and self-expression and their motivation is likely to be merely extrinsic....

...Conversely, management feels no loyalty to the subordinates, for the group is bound together not by a common enterprise but only by extrinsic rewards.⁵⁵

When workers are subject to unaccountable management that has an incentive to shift effort and blame downward and shift rewards upward, seemingly irrational red tape like union work rules may actually serve the interest of fairness. "Workmen who are not engaged in their own intrinsic enterprises, whether in capitalist or state-socialist societies, must protect themselves by union scales and even featherbedding."⁵⁶

The most egregious example of irrational restraints on initiative Goodman cites is a regulation in the New York City school system, which meticulously defines the specifications required for any door catch installed within a public school building. Of course the specifications are so exact that the school system is the only customer for catches of that

54 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, pp. 4-5.

55 *Ibid.* p. 81.

56 *Ibid.* p. 124.

design, the sole vendor follows a pricing model reminiscent of Pentagon seats, and there is a backlog filling orders.

When the social means are tied up in such complicated organizations, it becomes extraordinarily difficult and sometimes impossible to do a simple thing directly, even though the doing is common sense and would meet with universal approval, as when neither the child, nor the parent, nor the janitor, nor the principal of the school can remove the offending door catch.⁵⁷

The fact that management is "chosen for systematic rather than functional reasons," and is so removed from actual productive activity that it doesn't "know what *is* a good job of work," means that "merit" within the system is judged based on all sorts of extrinsic metrics that serve as proxies for actual competence: "testing, profiles, publications, hearsay among wives, flashy *curricula vitae*."⁵⁸ Another metric, in organizations where the Pointy-Haired Boss has only the vaguest idea what production workers are actually engaged in, is "face time."

The organization and its work rules couldn't systematically thwart good work more effectively if they were deliberately designed to. "...[O]ne is rarely allowed to do one's best or use one's best judgment. Proofs of success or failure are not tangibly given in the task, but always in some superior's judgment."⁵⁹

At my own employer, a hospital, employee nominations for "Employee of the Month/Year" are vetted based on whether the nominees adhere to or "live" the "Community Cares Values" -- the latter being an utterly dishonest and demeaning, not to mention stupid, reincarnation of Taylorism emanating from the Studer Group, which is mightily resented by most nursing staff. It was only with great reluctance that management approved a nurse who was caring and excellent at her job for Employee of the Year, an overwhelming favorite of the nursing staff, because they suspected her of not quite having her mind right on Studerism and Community Cares.⁶⁰

Because management is too blinded by its own power and the distorting effects of that power on information to have any reality-based metric for judging what good work is, and because those doing the good work cannot tell management what good work is lest they abuse the knowledge, most of management's actual criteria for performance amount to "signaling functions" of the same sort as a college degree.

Compare this to an endeavor like a small shop in a craft guild, where the person doing the evaluating is a master craftsman and the one being evaluated is an apprentice or journeyman.

In decentralized enterprises, where a man [sic] knows what goes on and engages in the whole enterprise, an applicant can present a masterpiece for examination and he has

57 *Ibid.* p. 88.

58 *Ibid.* pp. 83-84.

59 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, p. 351.

60 Which she did not -- a fact no doubt closely related to both her competence as a nurse and her esteem by the staff. Having been required, as a night shift nursing supervisor, to attend one of Quint Studer's glorified Amway rallies, she quietly informed us that Studer was "one slick son of a bitch" and the Studer Group was "a fucking cult."

functional peers who can decide whether they want him in the guild.⁶¹

Yet another way in which the needs of the organization interfere with the needs of the people it serves is the imposition of unnecessary overhead costs and capital outlays ("the needs for amounts of capital out of all proportion to the nature of the enterprise"⁶²), thus inflating the cost of living and the amount of waste labor in the economy.

What swell the costs in enterprises carried on in the interlocking centralized systems of society, whether commercial, official or non-profit institutional, are all the factors of organization, procedure, and motivation that are not directly determined to the function and to the desire to perform it. These are patents and rents, fixed prices, union scales, featherbedding, fringe benefits, status salaries, expense accounts, proliferating administration, paper work, permanent overhead, public relations and promotion, waste of time and skill by departmentalizing task-roles, bureaucratic thinking that is penny-wise pound-foolish, inflexible procedure and tight scheduling that exaggerate contingencies and overtime.⁶³

In fact, taking the example of schools, Goodman speculates that "the more 'efficiently' the academic machine is run, the more expensive it is per unit of net value, if we take into account the total social labor involved, both the overt and the covert overhead."⁶⁴

Just the opposite holds true in small, ad hoc and decentralized organizations that are built up around the needs of the work itself and guided by the judgment of those doing it.

But when enterprises can be carried autonomously by professionals, artists, and workmen intrinsically committed to the job, there are economies all along the line. People make do on means. They spend on value, not convention. They flexibly improvise procedures as opportunity presents and they step in in emergencies. They do not watch the clock. The available skills of each person are put to use. They eschew status and in a pinch accept subsistence wages. Administration and overhead are *ad hoc*. The task is likely to be seen in its essence rather than abstractly.⁶⁵

For Goodman, the distinction between centralized and decentralized organizational style transcends whether an organization is nominally "public sector" or "private sector," or a private sector organization is "for profit" or "non-profit." In his typology of organizations, the single category of "Enterprises extrinsically motivated and interlocked with the other centralized systems" included both large for-profit corporations like NBC, and institutional non-profits like big universities and the Peace Corps.⁶⁶

In theory, government and non-profit bodies are supposed to act as a countervailing check against big business. And according to the "interest group pluralism" model, the centralized,

61 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 84.

62 *Ibid.* p. 88.

63 *Ibid.* p. 113.

64 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, p. 241

65 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 113.

66 *Ibid.* p. 114.

bureaucratic hierarchies that represent the respective interest groups will check each other's power and bargain with each other as equals. In fact the large, centralized organizations, both profit and non-profit, are more likely to form coalitions with each other:

the industrial-military complex; the alliance of promoters, contractors, and government in Urban Renewal; the alliance of universities, corporations, and government in research and development.⁶⁷

...[T]he genius of our centralized bureaucracies has been, as they interlock, to form a mutually accrediting establishment of decision-makers, with common interests and a common style that nullify the diversity of pluralism. Conflict becomes coalition, harmony becomes consensus, and the social machine runs with no check at all. For instance, our regulatory agencies are wonderfully in agreement with the corporations they regulate. It is almost unheard of for the universities or scientists to say Veto, whether to the pesticides, or the causes of smog, the TV programming, the military strategy, or the moon shot.... When labor leaders become labor statesmen, somehow the labor movement dies.⁶⁸

Again, in theory, non-profits should be lower in cost because they are not out to maximize the profits of shareholders. But in fact "status salaries and expense accounts are equally prevalent, excessive administration and overhead are often more prevalent, and there is less pressure to trim costs.... This is the great domain of cost-plus."⁶⁹

Even further towards the decentralist end of the spectrum than ad-hoc enterprises is direct production for use within the informal sector, outside the cash nexus altogether: "the utterly decentralized production and servicing that is done by families and individuals for themselves, and by friends, folk, and amateurs." Goodman speculates that even in our commoditized society, "the majority of valuable goods and services, e.g. housekeeping, home cooking, child rearing, shaving oneself, friendly games and parties, affectionate sex, hobbies, etc.," are still produced in this sector. And the extent to which production takes place in the un-monetized informal economy, rather than the cash nexus, is "a powerful index of social and economic health."⁷⁰

Goodman argues that the size of the cash nexus economy (i.e. GNP) is meaningless in itself, because it's simply the total measure of all things that carry a market cost -- even when prices are unnecessarily inflated through grossly wasteful use of inputs, or the monetized costs reflect rents on legal monopolies, paying the wages of "guard labor" and "bullshit jobs," or fixing what Bastiat would call "broken windows."⁷¹ Basically the less efficient the economy, the higher the ratio of labor, capital and raw material outlays to unit of output, and the higher the level of administrative bloating and overhead, the higher the GNP.

And the vast majority of the GNP, in Goodman's view, is waste production or wasteful use of inputs for necessary production. And this renders impossible what he calls "decent poverty"

67 *Ibid.* p. 115.

68 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, pp. 357-358.

69 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 115.

70 *Ibid.* p. 117.

71 *Ibid.* p. 117.

(imagine cottagers subsisting outside the wage system on the common waste and pasture before Enclosure, and you get the general idea).

Everywhere one turns... there seems to be a markup of 300 and 400 per cent, to do anything or make anything. This is an intolerable drag.

Consider it simply this way. One visits a country where the per capita income is one quarter of the American, but, lo and behold, these unaffluent people do not seem four times "worse off" than we, or hardly worse off at all.⁷²

We can see this even more clearly in a case like British East Africa or some other colonial regime, where traditional peasant tenure rights are nullified and a major share of cultivators are evicted from land on which they were previously feeding themselves and their families. In such a case the country's GDP will explode by the amount which the evicted peasants are forced to earn in the wage labor market, in order to buy the commoditized food which previously they produced for themselves. The total amount of production may be the same, and the peasantry working harder and eating less -- with vastly reduced control over their own lives. But by the neoliberal measures of "growth" used by the international aid bureaucracies and apologists for globalization, this represents an enormous increase in wealth.

On the other hand, if you imagine a revolution in post-scarcity technologies like the replicators on Star Trek, by which most of our material needs can be met without limit for free, the result would be a total or near collapse of GDP that would indicate disaster by conventional metrics.

In modern capitalist economies "growth" has become an imperative for its own sake, in a circular process by which people are guaranteed "full employment" at waste production and creating surplus value for rentiers, so that they may earn enough money to buy goods at the inflated price resulting from inefficient production and the embedded monopoly rents, so that in turn the wheels of production will continue to turn and keep them employed so they can keep consuming stuff designed to fall apart and keep the wheels turning. World without end, amen.

The transactions that measure the GNP can be anything at all, so long as money changes hands and the shelves are cleared. Employment means keeping people busy. Education means training in a marketable skill.⁷³

Goodman argues that a shift to decentralization can result in great cost reductions and increases in efficiency, especially in cases where "staff and overhead are the chief costs" and where "the cost of distribution or servicing outweighs the savings in centralized production"⁷⁴ (i.e. "Borsodi's Law"). Similar efficiencies from decentralization can be achieved when bureaucratic rigidity destroys the ability of institutions to respond quickly and appropriately to feedback on the effects of their policies.⁷⁵

72 *Ibid.* p. 120.

73 *Ibid.* p. 136.

74 *Ibid.* pp. 120-121.

75 *Ibid.* p. 121.

The comparative efficiency of small scale and decentralization is compounded by the knowledge problems of bureaucratic hierarchies. Goodman's critiques are familiar to anyone who has read R.A. Wilson's or Kenneth Boulding's commentary on how power distorts information flow.⁷⁶ Even leaving aside the role of power in filtering out what those at the top don't want to hear, information is distorted for purely cognitive reasons. Senior management "does not have enough mind" to process the relevant information from the organization below them. Information is abstracted and lost at each stage of upward transmission, so that the information received at the top is "often useless or false." The senior executive "becomes objectively stupider about his business." Simply moving relevant information horizontally between bureaucratic stovepipes and aggregating it in the relevant places involves prohibitive amounts of time in meetings. "Best practices" and standardized procedures hamper initiative in the great majority of cases where policy does not exactly fit the situation.⁷⁷

Goodman applies the same principles to public services, reversing over a century's trend towards professionalization and centralization in the name of "good government." For example, rather than the liberal proposal of "civilian review boards" ("a new level of administration, in which the neighborhood is 'included' and has a voice") to address policy brutality in minority neighborhoods, he argues that "a more direct remedy would be, as far as possible, to *give back* the administration and personnel of the police to the neighborhood itself."⁷⁸

He suggests, similarly, neighborhood school boards and other city institutions devolved to the neighborhood level, with the power to hire and fire officials.⁷⁹

Rather than high schools and universities testing and grading students as a service to corporate Human Resources departments, he recommends scraping grading altogether and letting the corporations test their own prospective employees for job-based skills. And the schools and colleges themselves could be "run by their faculties and staff"⁸⁰ (the central argument of *The Community of Scholars* is for a stakeholder governance system in the universities based on the medieval model of self-governing scholars' guilds).

The universities began as "medieval teaching-learning companies, guilds of either the students or the teachers" and, as Goodman quotes Hastings Rashdall, "the spontaneous product of that instinct of association which swept over the towns of Europe in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries." They illustrated the two possible types of schooling:

*Either a youth says Show me How, and finds a teacher who will show him -- this is in principle the professional school of Bologna; or a thinker professes a truth he knows and a fascinated youth latches onto him and asks What and Why -- this is in principle the school of liberal arts in Paris.*⁸¹

76 See Kevin Carson, *The Desktop Regulatory State: The Countervailing Power of Individuals and Networks* (Center for a Stateless Society, 2016), pp. 21-28.

77 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 78.

78 *Ibid.* p. 157.

79 *Ibid.* p. 158.

80 *Ibid.* p. 161.

81 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, p. 174.

The student's defense of a thesis or delivery of a lecture was literally the submission of a masterpiece for examination by the master scholars, in order to qualify for admission to the guild as a master. And the internal culture of the university was like other guilds.

The guild, whether of students or masters, is the home and brotherhood of its members. As a model, here is a statute from Bologna...: The students swear to each other "fraternal charity, mutual association and amity, the consolation of the sick and support of the needy, the conduct of funerals and the extirpation of rancor and quarrels, the attendance and escort of our *doctorandi* to and from the place of examination, and the spiritual advantage of members."⁸²

In a thought experiment much like the one above for secondary education, he imagines a university consisting almost entirely of faculty and students, with "only a handful of unpretentious administrators -- a rector unwillingly elevated from the faculty for a short term, a typist, and a couple of janitors."⁸³ Meanwhile a great deal of education could be shifted out of the classroom altogether, with young people instead participating directly in the functions of society they're being educated for.⁸⁴ By dispensing with administrative salaries altogether, and renting cheap classroom space from existing buildings in the town or buying cheap buildings in the country, such an institution could operate with tuition less than half that of the typical university in the 1960s.⁸⁵

Like Ivan Illich, Goodman proposed decentralizing agendas in education and communications that are many times more feasible today than forty or fifty years ago, thanks to advances in technology.

In primary education, he proposed reforms like decentralizing schools "to tiny units of thirty children and three adults" that could be located in places like "store fronts on the child's own street," and continuously use "the city itself as the educational background, its transit, its museums, homes, colleges, restaurants, business offices, etc." And such decentralization would make it possible to "dispense almost entirely with administrative costs and sharply diminish capital costs. Thus available money can be spent on teachers." Much of the job of teaching could be done by recent university graduates who "like children, will pay attention to them, show them things, and answer their questions."⁸⁶

Goodman proposed replacement of the mass broadcast media with the local generation of content for local consumption, and the replacement of mass publishing with local cooperative publishing houses.⁸⁷ It would be interesting to see what he would make of the Internet's many-to-many architecture, the feasibility of instant digital duplication and transmission of data at zero marginal cost, and desktop technologies for desktop printing and podcasting.

82 *Ibid.* p. 182.

83 *Ibid.* p. 169.

84 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, pp. 161-162.

85 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, pp. 241-242.

86 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 205.

87 *Ibid.* p. 164.

He also wrote in the tradition of many other proponents of "guaranteed minimum income," "Basic Income," "Citizen's Dividend" and the like, arguing that "giving money directly to the urban poor" would be far cheaper and far more effective than the \$10,000 cost per household (in 1960s dollars!) spent by the welfare bureaucracy.⁸⁸ He also proposed elsewhere, as an alternative to a guaranteed minimum money income, the creation of a moneyless sub-economy that would cheaply produce standardized, modular subsistence goods of simple design but high quality -- housing, food, clothing and so forth, maybe ten percent of total economic output -- directly for use, and allow an unregulated market function for all other purposes. In return for the right to drop out of the wage system and retire on this free housing and goods, everyone would spend a year or two out of school working in the industries that served the subsistence economy.⁸⁹

Many of the areas in which Goodman himself conceded the need for centralization, back in the '60s, were actually either a "need" artificially generated by the imperatives of the system (which even he failed to question deeply enough), or have since been rendered obsolete by changes in technology.

For example his catchall category of "emergency," which temporarily necessitates "the concentration of all powers in a concerted effort."⁹⁰ He himself admits that emergency centralization is dangerous because "the central organization tends to outlive the emergency." But more important, the "emergency" and its urgent "necessities" are themselves questionable. Whose necessities are they? Centralized, blockbuster efforts like Stalin's development of producer industries in the early Five Year Plans, the Manhattan Project, or Kennedy's moon program, are very good at achieving goals when the goals are simply *given*, set by authority and not questioned, and where cost is not a consideration. Centralization is "efficient," that is, in achieving objectives of the system that are imposed on those forced to cooperate, and are funded at the expense of unwilling "contributors."

Goodman in fact lists the space program as something that would be better centralized on an international level.⁹¹ The U.S. space program is especially ironic because, in retrospect, it was arguably an abject failure *because of* the centralized, top-down nature of its goals. Rather than organically building an entire technological ecosystem from the ground up, with infrastructures that were immediately useful in their own right at each stage, and then using the previous stage of infrastructure as the jumping off place to build the next stage when it became necessary for the needs of the existing system, Kennedy chose an arbitrary goal for its symbolic value -- and the moon has since gone unvisited for forty years while the U.S. space program atrophied.

Goodman's "uniform modular standards in building materials and fixtures" which would be used as a support infrastructure for decentralizing the actual design and construction of

88 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, in *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province*, p. 266.

89 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 167; Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas*, pp. 188-217.

90 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 9.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

buildings and neighborhoods at the local level,⁹² is the kind of thing that decentralized open-source hardware designers are actually ideal for. Decentralized module-platform architectures became standard for the personal computer, and are the basic model for most open hardware design as well.

His observation that "automatic and computer technology is by nature highly centralizing, in its style and applications,"⁹³ is especially dated. It's a view of cybernetics that might have come from Jacques Ellul. The development of small-scale CNC machine tools suitable for job shop production, in the 1970s, is at the heart of today's movement towards industrial relocalization and garage factories. Since then tabletop manufacturing technology has pushed the necessary scale of capital investment and production down even further by an order of magnitude or two. And the author of these words on "by nature highly centralizing" computer technology would no doubt be astonished at what the file-sharing movement has done to the music and movie industries, what Wikileaks and Anonymous have done to large institutions of all kinds, and phenomena like the Arab Spring, M15 and Occupy that swept the globe and rocked the old hierarchies to their foundations.

Goodman himself, in the tradition of Kropotkin and Mumford, understood the decentralizing potential of electrical power, in *Communitas* speaking of "combin[ing] town and country in an agrindustrial way of life" in language that might have come from *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.

In large areas of our operation, we could go back to old-fashioned domestic industry with perhaps even a gain in efficiency, for small power is everywhere available small machines are cheap and ingenious, and there are easy means to collect machined goods and centrally assemble them.⁹⁴

And he recognized, with Mumford, that the original reason for industrial concentration--to economize on steam power--was obviated by electricity.⁹⁵ He simply failed to foresee that integrating cybernetic technology into production would turn out to have the same decentralizing effect as electrically powered machinery (Goodman should have realized that "perhaps even a gain in efficiency" was a gross underestimate, based on his own reading of Borsodi and the inefficiencies of batch-and-queue production and supply-push distribution).

To his credit, Goodman understands that decentralization cannot be a return to pre-industrial ways (as suggested by a Marxist student of his, sneeringly dismissing decentralism as "reactionary" and "petty bourgeois"). It will, rather, be post-industrial and high tech. Rather than being a return to the old ways, it will be a higher synthesis of old organic and artisan models with the most advanced ephemeral technologies.

...[T]here have always been two strands to decentralist thinking. Some authors, e.g. Lao-tse or Tolstoy, make a conservative peasant critique of centralized court and town as

92 *Ibid.* p. 10.

93 *Ibid.* p. 11.

94 Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas*, p. 13.

95 *Ibid.* p. 84.

inorganic, verbal, and ritualistic. But other authors, e.g. Proudhon or Kropotkin, make a democratic urban critique of centralized bureaucracy and power, including feudal industrial power, as exploiting, inefficient, and discouraging to initiative. In our present era of State socialism, corporate feudalism, regimented schooling, brainwashing mass communications, and urban anomie, both kinds of critique make sense. We need to revive both peasant self-reliance and the democratic power of professional and technical guilds and workers' councils.

Any decentralization that could occur at present would inevitably be post-urban and post-centralist; it could not be provincial.⁹⁶

And in fact the overwhelming direction of technological advance since the invention of the electrical dynamo in the late 19th century has been towards decentralized production, as developed in the thought of Kropotkin, Lewis Mumford and Ralph Borsodi. It has been only through massive efforts by the state, in league with centralized capital, to coopt and enclose this decentralizing potential within the archaic institutional framework of mass-production industry, that the natural tendency and optimal use of these technologies have been thwarted. And even so, the technology began to "burst free of its mass-production integuments" in the 1970s, with increasing shares of production shifting from the shop floors of mass-production factories to job shops in Emilia-Romagna and Shenzhen. All that remains today is corporate control over the distribution of goods which are actually produced on a decentralized basis; and even this monopoly will soon be destroyed by pirated CAD/CAM files as the old corporate institutions succumb to the terminal crisis tendencies of capitalism.

Perhaps Goodman's most ambitious venture into speculation on alternatives is in the area of urban design and the geography of economic planning, in *Communitas* -- a book he co-wrote with his brother Percival. He begins with an analysis of existing models, using a three-class typology of plans that subordinate economic production to consumption, those that subordinate consumption to production, and those that integrate the two.

Although Ebenezer Howard's Garden City model was originally proposed as an integrated and diversified local economy, the Goodmans included it with the models in which production is subordinated to consumption because as actually put into practice Garden Cities are typical suburban monoculture bedroom communities.

When Ebenezer Howard thought it up to remedy the coal slums, he did not contemplate Garden Cities without industry; he wanted to make it possible for people to live decently *with* the industry. Yet, just when the conditions of manufacture have become less noisome, it has worked out that the Green Belt and Garden Cities have become mere dormitories for commuters....⁹⁷

Raymond Unwin, a planner in the Garden Cities movement, started from the assumption of zoning, with industry strictly segregated from residences. Despite an appreciation for

⁹⁶ Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 12.

⁹⁷ Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas*, p. 8.

community life, and the liberal use of plazas and squares and common services like libraries in his plans, and a desire to foster the instinct for social cooperation, it was a sterile and artificial community:

From the start he has isolated his community from the productive work of society. The initiative to cooperation does not arise from, nor reach toward, political initiative that always resides in the management of production and distribution. How far would that cooperation get?⁹⁸

Both the subordination of production to consumption and of consumption to production amounted, in reality, to the subordination of human beings to other human beings' priorities. Neither model started from the perspective of the human agent, and built a world from the ground up based on the perceptions and ends of human beings. Goodman, in contrast, proposed the to make humans the measure of all institutional projects. His one test was an ethical one:

Is the *function* good? Bona fide? Is it worthwhile? Is it worthy of a man to do that? What are the consequences? Is it compatible with other, basic, human functions? Is it a forthright or at least ingenious part of life? Does it make sense? Is it a beautiful function of a beautiful power?⁹⁹

In the case of both models that subordinated production to consumption, and models that subordinated consumption to production, it was the planners themselves who were the agents, and their perspective and their ends from which the system was designed -- not the human raw material actually engaged in production and consumption. But for Goodman, the community is not rightfully the thing acted upon by planners. It is the subject, not the object of action. "[T]he problem of community planning is not like arranging people for a play or a ballet, for there are no outside spectators, there are only actors; nor are they actors of a scenario but agents of their own needs..."¹⁰⁰

Models that attempt to create "community life" and promote human values in an artificial zone separated entirely from livelihood and material creation pursue a mutilated vision of human life. And the presupposition that we become fully human in the realm of consumption, of community life divorced from consumption, necessarily entails that we are alienated from our humanity during the portion of life we spend in production. In Unwin's vision of the countryside,

[a]ll conspires to the spiritual unity of the soul and the cultural unity of mankind...--all except the underlying work and techniques of society on which everything depends not only economically but in every big political decision and in the style of every object of use: these have no representation....

...When the suburbanite or Garden Citizen returns from the industrial center, it is with a physical release and a reawakening of cowering sensibilities. But the culture-

98 *Ibid.* pp. 33-35.

99 *Ibid.* p. 19.

100 *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

townsman has raised his alienation to the level of a principle. What reintegration does he offer? The culture-townsman declares that we must distinguish ends and means, where industry is the means but town life is the end. Trained in his town to know what he is about, the young man can then turn to the proper ordering of society.... The only bother is that one cannot distinguish ends and means in this way and the attempt to do so emasculates the ends.¹⁰¹

Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, similarly, treats the individual residential cell as a "unit of living" completely segregated from the industrial centers of the city and separating the individual's life as producer and consumer into two separate geographies. The cell is

standard in construction and layout and arranged for mass servicing. Its furniture, too, is standardized, so that it doesn't matter in which cell a person lives, "for labor will shift about as needed and must be ready to move, bag and baggage." The standards are analyzed, however, not only for efficiency but for beauty and amenity...¹⁰²

But in Le Corbusier's world consumption of leisure is equivalent to the consumption of feed by a draft animal. Happy consumers make docile, compliant workers and citizens in a world where the overall shape of society and its guiding purposes are determined, not by ordinary people dealing cooperatively with one another as equals, but by Le Corbusier's "captains of industry."

In both the Garden Cities and Ville Radieuse, it is simply assumed that the average person has no agency in their life as producer, and that the rest of life is either an escape from it or compensation for it. The only difference is that Le Corbusier hopes, with the help of enough Centrifugal Bumblepuppy, to jolly people into enthusiastic rather than merely resigned compliance on the job.

The Garden Cities, we saw, were based on the humane intuition that work in which people have the satisfaction neither of direction nor craftsmanship, but merely of wages, is essentially unbearable; the eager is eager to be let loose and go far away, he must be protected by a green belt.... Le Corbusier imagines, on the contrary, that by the negative device of removing bad physical conditions, people can be brought to a positive enthusiasm for their jobs.¹⁰³

Goodman cites Adam Smith's maxim that "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to only so far as may be necessary for prooting that of the consumer." "As a general moral maxim," Goodman observes, "it is certainly false."¹⁰⁴ And indeed it is. It is ridiculous to even try to separate "production" and "consumption" into separate spheres of life, given that the great bulk of consumers are producers, and their hours of productive effort are a major portion of their waking life. The satisfaction, the sense of meaning and worth involved in production are a significant part of

101 *Ibid.* p. 38.

102 *Ibid.* p. 45.

103 *Ibid.* pp. 48-49.

104 *Ibid.* p. 125.

the total pleasure-pain calculus of their lives as a whole. To the extent that a life as a whole is experienced as a satisfying one based on the feeling of having made a meaningful contribution to the world, the question of alienation from our function as producers is central to overall happiness. It follows that our lives as producers should be as fulfilling as possible.

Right-libertarians who start from Smith's maxim justify stagnating wages, increased precarity, speedups and loss of autonomy as an acceptable price for a greater variety of cheap goods -- as if forty hours a week of leaving our souls at the door when we enter our workplaces were compensated for by the ability to walk into stores and restaurants and play King for a Day as consumers, and make other workers miserable in their turn.

Men [sic] like to make things, to handle the materials and see them take shape and come out as desired, and they are proud of the products. And men [sic] like to work and be useful, for work has a rhythm and springs from spontaneous feelings just like play, and to be useful makes people feel right. Productive work is a kind of creation, it is an extension of human personality into nature. But it is also true that the private or state capitalist relations of production, and machine industry as it now exists under whatever system, have so far destroyed the instinctive pleasures of work that economic work is what all ordinary men [sic] dislike.... Mass production, analyzing the acts of labor into small steps and distributing the products far from home, destroys the sense of creating anything. Rhythm, neatness, style belong to the machine rather than to the man [sic].

The division of economy into production and consumption as two opposite poles means that we are far from the conditions in which work could be a way of life. A way of life requires merging the means in the end, and work would have to be thought of as a continuous process of satisfying activity, satisfying in itself and satisfying in its useful end.¹⁰⁵

Industrial plans, in which consumption and community life are built around production, are more blatant in their treatment of human beings as raw material. Such models tend to appear in rapidly industrializing societies like the USSR under Stalin, or factory towns like Robert Owen's planned community of New Lanark.

Both residential and industrial community plans, as we have seen, treat humans as a means to an end chosen by somebody else. Goodman's third category, integrated plans, in contrast, are human-centered: a reaction "to the loss of well-rounded humanity in modern civilized life."¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the most attractive kind of integrated plan -- certainly the one that springs to my mind -- is Kropotkin's picture of agro-industrial villages in which the distinctions between town and country and between head and hand work are erased. But most of the actual integrated plans Goodman considers, under this third heading -- Soviet regional development plans for "eliminating the difference between the city and the village," for example, and the Tennessee Valley Authority -- are quite ugly. The Soviet model envisioned building one-industry Satellite

105 *Ibid.* pp. 153-154.

106 *Ibid.* p. 86.

Towns like Magnitogorsk, spread throughout the country, and industrializing agriculture on something very close to the American mechanized monoculture model.¹⁰⁷

The most Kropotkinian example Goodman presents under his third heading is the Kibbutz, with agriculture and a wide variety of kinds of small industry integrated into the daily life of the community and individual communities engaged in horizontal exchange of specialties or surpluses with each other.¹⁰⁸

The main problem with Goodman's treatment of the Kibbutz in my opinion is his emphasis on its intentionality and on the planning aspect, with every aspect of social life governed by majority consensus based on the values which inspired the initial formation of the community. Intentional communities, as Goodman acknowledges, come under intense pressure from the surrounding society and are prone to break up over personal fallings out, ideological disagreements, disputes over property and the like. It makes far more sense to think in terms of how new technologies and prefigurative institutions will influence existing communities of regular people, as society as a whole evolves in a post-capitalist and post-state direction.

The material and technical basis for self-sufficiency in the Kibbutz would apply in any similarly-sized community or neighborhood, even if it was less insular and single-minded in its social arrangements. And in a society where centralization was no longer subsidized, technologies of small-scale production for local use would cease to be relegated to self-ghettoized communes and be diffused within existing communities.

In the final part of the book, having surveyed and classified existing systems for organizing production and consumption, Goodman presents three model schemes of his own design: the first a mass-production economy of "planned luxury consumption," with urban areas built directly around industry to maximize efficiency of consumption and minimize distribution costs; the second a decentralized Kropotkinian society; and the third a largely unregulated market economy, but one in which minimum subsistence is guaranteed through a separate system of production (amounting to 10% of GDP) producing cheap, standardized housing, food, clothing, appliances and medicine for those who want to live on them. Goodman obviously prefers the second, and recoils from the first.¹⁰⁹

And his second, Kropotkinian model--"The Elimination of the Difference between Production and Consumption"--is quite attractive.¹¹⁰

He starts from the assumption that all aspects of life, rather than being segregated into artificially separated spheres of production, consumption and socialization, must be built up around the unitary nature of the human being as agent and subject of her own life. That means a social model with "closer relation between the personal and productive environment," in which a greater share of activity is shifted into "home and small-shop production," workers have a say in the production process, the process itself is "designed on psychological and moral

107 *Ibid.* pp. 97-100.

108 *Ibid.* pp. 106-107.

109 *Ibid.* p. 121.

110 *Ibid.* p. 153.

as well as technical grounds, to give the most well-rounded employment to each person, in a diversified environment."¹¹¹

As to its technical feasibility, Goodman mentions the tendency of critics of modern alienated mass-production to "want to turn back the clock" to handicraft and guild production that "allow the master craftsmen a say and a hand in every phase of production, distribution, and consumption." The question is, "[c]an we achieve the same values with modern technology...?"¹¹² His answer, like that of Kropotkin, Morris, Mumford and Borsodi, is unambiguously "YES!!"

Like the earlier apostles of decentralized production technology, Goodman notes that "the change from coal and steam to electricity and oil has relaxed one of the greatest causes for concentration of machinery around a single driving-shaft." And "the idea of thousands of small machine shops, powered by electricity, has become familiar; and small power-tools are a best-selling commodity."¹¹³

So what's the big picture? We've seen, sector by sector, Goodman's speculation on what would replace the existing bureaucratic hierarchies. But what kind of architecture would the system as a whole have? Goodman paints it, in broad strokes, as "medieval pluralism" in which small, functional and democratically controlled institutions compete like guilds in a medieval commune. Rather than theoretically countervailing bureaucracies existing in de facto harmony within an interlocking system, "[f]or a pluralism to work democratically -- like a guild socialism, a syndicalist system, or a medieval commune -- it must proceed in just the opposite direction than that envisaged by our orthodox sociologists."

It must try to increase class consciousness, craft-pride, professional autonomy, faculty power in the universities, cooperative enterprise, local patriotism, and rural reconstruction.... What would such a medieval pluralism entail?

In the first place, there would be conflict and not harmony. At present, labor and capital can come to an agreement on wages, hours, and benefits, and pass on the costs; but the situation is much more electric if workmen ask, as they should, for a say in the work process and the quality and utility of the product on which they spend their lives. In an authentic pluralism, a teachers' union will want to determine the curriculum, method, and class size in the public schools; but neither the administrators, the mayor, nor the parents will agree to this.¹¹⁴

Such a shift would entail abandonment of the representative idea of "government by consent of the governed," and its replacement by genuine democracy -- *i.e.*, "government *by* the governed."

This neo-medieval model amounts to a reversal by which the sovereign state acquired regulatory authority over the previously existing corporate bodies and associations, and claimed the fiction by which their very existence derived from its constituting and licensing power. The

111 *Ibid.* p. 156.

112 *Ibid.* p. 154.

113 *Ibid.* p. 156.

114 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, pp. 359-360.

claim, dating back to the doctrines of the civil lawyers in the early modern period, is that "a corporation must have a charter of powers from the sovereign, otherwise it is nothing at all." In the words of John Marshall in the *Dartmouth College* case, the corporation is a "mere creature of law, [which] possesses only those properties which the charter of its creation confers upon it." Nonsense, Goodman responds. The "unchartered nothing at all" that became the University of Paris existed with its own internal bylaws and customs before its right to exist was ever recognized by royal charter.

A functioning corporation is neither fictitious nor intangible, and is artificial only in the sense that its persons associate to produce it; it is a joint effort, like the community of scholars, that institutionalizes itself with customs and rules in order to carry on more securely and permanently. To say it darkly, the sovereign horns in on a going concern to put a stamp on it and collect a tax.... As Maitland put it in 1910: "It has become difficult to maintain that the State makes corporations in any other sense than that in which the State makes marriages when it declares that people who want to marry can do so by going, and cannot do so without going, to church or registry."¹¹⁵

...If teaching-and-learning is importantly going on, somebody will jealously take it over like any other profitable territory, no different from licensing procreation or protecting work and trade. Then, of course, it is given out that without the benevolent sponsorship of these pirates, the natural or social function could not possibly be performed, and the public would not be safe.¹¹⁶

This trick by which the state, by the simple act of permitting or not obstructing an activity, claims an integral productive role in enabling it to happen, is directly analogous to the pretension by the owners of artificial property rights that by not obstructing production, they themselves deserve payment for "productive services."

But even more destructive than the claim of the central state to legitimize pre-existing social functions, Goodman argues, is the process by which the internal structure of the university and other organic corporations comes to mirror that of the centralized, sovereign state: "the imitation within the corporation itself of the styles and motivations of the extra-mural powers. The college itself becomes a big power and eats up as much as it can, with a galloping multiplication of administrators to co-ordinate the dinner."¹¹⁷

OPTIMISM ON THE POSSIBILITY OF WORKING THROUGH EXISTING INSTITUTIONS

Goodman's proposal above for decentralizing primary education was presented as a "Memorandum to the Ford Foundation," as a serious suggestion for policy reform by the

115 Goodman, *The Community of Scholars*, pp. 191-192.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

117 *Ibid.*

education establishment.

And that's typical of Goodman's approach. Several of his major works are riddled with appendices including letters, memoranda and proposals to foundations and government agencies of all sorts, of the same basic type as his school proposal. His Memorandum to the Poverty Program proposed boarding groups of three to six "slum kids" with a "marginal farmer in a depopulating area" and sending them to the country school.¹¹⁸ To the Office of Education he proposed the diversion of new school funding into funding "non-scholastic educational environments for bright under-achieving youth. *E.g.* community radio stations, local newspapers, little theaters, design offices."¹¹⁹ He proposed, along similar lines, a graduated tax on newspapers and broadcast media, based on audience size, the proceeds of which would be distributed retail to subsidize "countervailing small media" (what we would call the alternative press): "local newspapers, little theaters and magazines, unaffiliated broadcasters."¹²⁰

If nothing else, his estimation in the education proposal that administrative costs could be entirely eliminated because of the physical decentralization display his lack of realism about the potential to achieve anarchist goals through official channels. Physical decentralization wouldn't change the imperative that school boards and administrators keep track of what those little units of children were doing all over town, set guidelines prescribing and proscribing teacher behavior in great detail, specify the precise size, building materials and ambient temperature of the store fronts, and create hours worth of daily paperwork for the teachers to fill out to verify their compliance. That's what administrators *do*, after all.

Had Goodman's proposals been adopted at all, they would have been unrecognizable by the time the bureaucrats got done working out the details. In fact smart bureaucrats throughout history have known that the perfect way to permanently dispose of an idea they don't like is to praise it effusively and then submit it to the bureaucracy to work out the details in exactly the way Goodman did.

We can see the same thing in other anarchist attempts to play Aristotle to the official Dionysius by acting through established institutions. [Borsodi's colonies, Howard's Garden Cities]

A perfect illustration of the general phenomenon, on a small scale, is the manager who saw that the employee break rooms had cluttered little bulletin boards covered with notices of stuff for sale, requests for rides and the like, and decided it would be nice to facilitate such communication with an official bulletin board. So the company got a centrally located bulletin board in a part of the building not convenient to anyone's work area, with a locked glass casing and a process for submitting notices for approval. And the manager wondered why people went right on tacking notices on their messy little break room bulletin boards.

At least Goodman seemed to have learned the futility of such projects from his own experience working within the system. As he wrote to the director of the Ford Foundation in 1965,

118 Goodman, *People or Personnel*, p. 199.

119 *Ibid.* p. 202.

120 *Ibid.* p. 212.

It became clear to me that the Foundation could not be of much use in furthering enterprises of modest scale and unpretentious auspices. Yet, with a few other giants in the field, the Foundation has preempted most of the social seed-money available to further necessary noncommercial enterprises....

I dimly understand your administrative difficulties. But what is the good of a system of things in which to be direct and thrifty is to be unacceptable?

...I have just spent six months of my life in Washington trying to serve the country by pushing half a dozen useful small projects in several Federal agencies and in your Foundation.... Yet these efforts of mine have gone for nothing."¹²¹

This bears a close resemblance to Illich's "Second Watershed" in *Tools for Conviviality*, in which technologies or organizational models continue to be adopted beyond the point of diminishing returns.

As Goodman puts it

There is a new technological instrument of Political Economy that, ideally, could follow up some of the bewildering remote effects of innovation and detect the contradictions before they occur. This is computing costs and benefits. But it would have to be used authentically, focusing on what happens to people rather than on the convenience of the programmer or the aggrandizement of his system.¹²²

And as I have argued elsewhere, it is possible for a society to move to Illich's Second Watershed only when the coercive power of the state is used to shift the actual costs and benefits of a particular technology to different parties.¹²³

SELF-ORGANIZED INSTITUTIONS

In Goodman's defense, however, he devoted a major part of *Like a Conquered Province* -- the chapter "Counter-Forces for a Decent Society" -- to the kinds of autonomous counter-institutions that Colin Ward later celebrated in *Anarchy in Action*.

"[T]he traditional American sentiment," he writes -- apparently in direct contradiction to his approach in all those memoranda cited in the previous section -- "is that a decent society cannot be built by dominant official policy anyway, but only by grassroots resistance, community cooperation, individual enterprise, and citizenly vigilance to protect liberty." The forces for decency he describes "seem weaker and, except for court decisions, they do not constitute official policy or control technology. Yet they are wonderfully stubborn and show flashes of power."¹²⁴

121 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, p. 373.

122 *Ibid.* p. 311.

123 Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy* (Booksurge, 2007), pp. 279-280.

124 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, p. 273.

Echoing this observation on the comparative weakness of the counter-movements and their lack of control over technology, he also described, in the Preface to *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, the "characteristic moral dilemma" of his time: "It is only by the usual technological and organizational procedures that anything can be accomplished. But with these procedures, fresh initiative is discouraged and fundamental change is prevented."¹²⁵

First off, let me note that, whatever the state of affairs in the 1960s, the decentralizing forces today absolutely *do* control the technology, and are not dependent on "the usual technological and organizational procedures." If Goodman saw the tendency of technological development in his day as being towards the kind of centralizing totalitarianism envisioned by Ellul, the situation today is very much the reverse. The tendency of technological progress today is overwhelmingly in favor of decentralized counter-institutions. Self-organized networks are having an effect on the old hierarchical institutions very much like that of a school of piranha skeletonizing a cow. Rather than decentralized institutions engaging in holding actions or occasionally rallying against all odds, what we are seeing today is a fundamental shift from hierarchies to networks.

One of the few exceptions Goodman notes, in dismissing government policy as a source of promising developments, is the Supreme Court's record under Earl Warren of reining in the power of police and prosecutors and securing the due process rights of defendants.¹²⁶ Of course we today can see this for what it's worth. The trend from the 1970s on has been to reverse these precedents and turn the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Amendments into toilet paper. Even so, Goodman notes the tendency in practice for theoretically countervailing government institutions like civilian review boards to form coalitions with the institutions -- i.e. the police -- they are supposed to keep in check, and instead finds it preferable that "disadvantaged groups, like Negroes, ... police their own neighborhoods according to their own mores."¹²⁷

In his discussion of decentralizing tendencies, Goodman focuses on the role of increasingly radicalized college students. And more important than their attacks on existing institutions, he sees their efforts to build counter-institutions based on participatory democracy as the significant development.

In principle, there are two opposite ways of decentralizing: either by dividing overcentralized organizations where it can be shown that decentral organization is more efficient in economic, social, and human costs -- or at least not too inefficient; or by creating new small enterprises to fulfill needs that big organizations neglect or only pretend to fulfill.¹²⁸

The first approach requires a great deal of indirect effort through existing institutions to convince them that there are better ways of doing things, and push through policies that entail doing things differently. That's basically what Goodman's memoranda in the previous section

125 Goodman, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, xi.

126 *Ibid.* p. 274.

127 *Ibid.* p. 275.

128 *Ibid.* p. 292.

amount to. The second approach is the more promising, and Goodman is encouraged by the new generation's actual efforts in this direction.

The opposite way of decentralizing, by creating new enterprises, better suits the student zeal for direct action, and they have applied it with a lot of energy and some inventiveness. It has been called "parallel development." Typically, students have set up a dozen little "free universities" in or next to established institutions, to teach in a more personal way and to deal with contemporary subjects that are not yet standard (*e.g.*, "Castro's Cuba," "The Psychedelic Experience," "Civil Liberties" "Theater of Participation").... Students have established a couple of neighborhood radio stations, to broadcast local news and propaganda, and to give poor people a chance to talk into a microphone. They have set up parallel community projects to combat the welfare bureaucracy and channelize real needs and grievances.¹²⁹

Goodman goes on to dismiss "such parallel projects" as "pitifully insignificant and doomed to pass away like little magazines."¹³⁰ But at the same time, he praises the parallel institutions as "a remarkable survival of a classical American movement, populism, that seemed to have been dead." And in getting out from under the thumb of the barons and doing it yourself, he says, "[t]here may be hope in bringing to life many of our routinized institutions if we surround them with humanly meaningful enterprises...."¹³¹

Goodman himself seems to have repudiated Ellul's assessment of technological progress as inherently centralizing and totalitarian, and instead treated the apparent centralizing tendencies as a product of the institutional forces -- political, military and economic -- that harnessed its development for their own purposes.¹³² "If they were organized in their own terms science and technology would be very differently organized."¹³³ As he argued elsewhere, "a more useful property of our technology is its plasticity, the opportunity it offers for alternative choices of power, raw materials, location, tooling, and a surplus for transition and retooling. Thus, we could decentralize instead of centralizing, with probably equivalent efficiency."¹³⁴

Nevertheless, whatever the alternative possibilities for technology, he still seems to have seen it as a macro-question to be dealt with by persuading the centers of power to adopt one grand system rather than another. When he said that "we" could do this or that, he was speaking of a collective political decision. The idea of decentralism as something that could be done on the initiative of the counter-institutions themselves, through the kind of high-tech secession Toni Negri and the autonomists later wrote of, doesn't seem to have occurred to him.

But wherever Goodman's considered opinion lay, in this ambiguous trail of commentary, we can at least know that the situation today is radically different from that of the time in which he wrote.

129 *Ibid.* p. 293.

130 *Ibid.* p. 293.

131 *Ibid.* p. 294.

132 *Ibid.* pp. 298-299.

133 *Ibid.* p. 299.

134 *Ibid.* pp. 4-5.

GOODMAN AS AN ANARCHIST WITHOUT ADJECTIVES

Perhaps the most important characteristic Goodman shares with the other "anarchists without adjectives" in this series¹³⁵ is his high regard for human agency, and his primary focus on the way actual human beings assert that agency in interacting with their environment.

In starting from his observation of the life situations of whole human beings, rather than separately considering them from the perspective of the dissected aspects of their selves that various disciplines divide them into, he set himself up for criticism as "an ignorant man who spreads himself thin on a wide variety of subjects, on sociology and psychology, urbanism and technology, education, literature, esthetics, and ethics." Having never seen actual human beings "in fact subdivided in ways to be conveniently treated" by these separate disciplines, he responded, he preferred to write about "the human beings I know in their man-made scene," going on to say "I prefer to preserve the wholeness of my subject, the people I know, at the cost of being everywhere ignorant and amateurish."¹³⁶

And may I say this? -- if to many people my thinking seems always to have a kind of surprising optimism, a foolish optimism, my hunch is that it is because I keep trying to see people whole and beginning -- still growing -- and then they seem less limited than they do to sociologists or psychologists, politicians or journalists.¹³⁷

He also bears some resemblance to other figures like William Morris, Pyotr Kropotkin and Colin Ward in his affection for the pre-modern as a model for post-capitalist society:

In planning, as elsewhere in our society, we can observe the paradox that the wildest anarchists are generally affirming the most ancient values, of space, sun, and trees, and beauty, human dignity, and forthright means, as if they lived in neolithic times or the Middle Ages, whereas the so-called conservatives are generally arguing for policies and prejudices that date back only four administrations.¹³⁸

135 Carson, *Legibility and Control: Anarchist Themes in the Work of David Graeber*. C4SS Paper No. 12 (Winter-Spring 2011) <<http://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/James-Scott.pdf>>; *Governance, Agency and Autonomy: Anarchist Themes in the Work of Elinor Ostrom*. C4SS Paper No. 16 (Second Half 2013) <<https://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Anarchist-Themes-in-the-Work-of-Elinor-Ostrom.pdf>>; *David Graeber's Anarchist Thought: A Survey*. C4SS Paper No. 17 (Winter-Spring 2014) <<http://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/graeber.pdf>>; *The Anarchist Thought of Colin Ward*. C4SS Paper No. 18 (Summer-Fall 2014) <<http://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/colinward.pdf>>; *Anarchists Without Adjectives: The Origins of a Movement*. C4SS Paper No. 21 (Spring 2016) <<https://c4ss.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Anarchism-without-Adjectives2.pdf>> (this paper treated Voltairine De Cleyre, Dyer Lum and Joseph Labadie). There may be further papers in this series, covering (for example) Ivan Illich.

136 Goodman, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, xiii.

137 *Ibid.*, xiv.

138 Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas*, p. 10.

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