Enlightened Reactionaries: Progress and Tradition in the Thought of Christopher Lasch, Paul Goodman and Jane Jacobs

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ENLIGHTENED REACTIONARIES: PROGRESS AND TRADITION IN THE THOUGHT OF CHRISTOPHER LASCH, PAUL GOODMAN AND JANE JACOBS

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The most important political fault line in American politics today is marked by the postwar liberal consensus itself. What is often overlooked, however, is that both liberals and anti-liberals assume a modern, progressive view of history in which the world is growing up to become more secular, technologically advanced, and egalitarian. Liberals celebrate this trajectory as they see themselves "on the right side of history." They consider their opponents backward holdouts or, more generously, those not yet enjoying the goods of modern life. Anti-liberals on the right see the world according to liberalism proceeding apace to undo traditional morality, globalize economies, automate jobs, replace the nation-state, and undermine cultural norms. A nostalgic politics of reaction aspires to reverse the course of history and return to an unmolested golden age. In the words of one recent variation on this theme, only such a reversal can "Make America Great Again."

This dissertation offers intellectual portraits of three American social critics: Christopher Lasch, Paul Goodman, and Jane Jacobs. Each was a critic of progressive habits of mind in different ways, but all three offer an alternative to the progressive optimism and nostalgia for the past at work in today's debates. If, then, these thinkers were reactionaries in resisting progressive programs of their times, they were enlightened reactionaries insofar as they rationally resisted the deeper assumption of inevitable progress that animates both left and right. While I address a specific concern in the work of each writer, I draw out three points common to their thought.

First, each thinker dissolves the dichotomy between past and future that is central to progressive history. The progressive view of history shared by liberal and anti-liberal alike points

toward, alternatively, an inevitably improved future or a past that is slipping away. Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs, however, point to the continuity of past and future and resist subsuming the present in a deterministic account of history.

Second, the thought of each embodies a defense of tradition – historically conditioned ways of knowing, as opposed to supposedly trans-historical universal reason. That defense is expressed not only in each thinker's view of the past as a resource for the present, but in his or her resistance to the very idea of an Archimedean point that is assumed by claims to have seen the end of history. Indeed, each thinker's arguments are presented explicitly as part of a tradition, and the work of each points to the importance of tradition as an indispensable lens on the world. Each author shows how the assumption of progress, despite progressives' claims to have escaped tradition, does not reflect an inescapable law of history but is itself part of a modern tradition that we are free to modify. This in turn points to the political possibilities of recovering tradition as the basis of common discourse. To the extent we are conscious of the decisive role of tradition, we will be aware of the degree to which we are responsible agents: responsible for the contingent way we see the world, and for the contingent choices made by the light of our traditions.

Finally, I argue that Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's use of tradition stands in contrast not only to transcendent, objective reason but also to an understanding of traditions as closed language games, coherent in themselves but rationally inaccessible to one another. Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs present a view in which traditions are dynamic, self-correcting, ongoing arguments within and between themselves. Their use of tradition-bound arguments to develop counter-traditions against dominant progressive perspectives exemplifies the way in which traditions might confront and correct one another.

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INTRODUCTION
Roads Not Taken

It is a commonplace that we live in an age of political extremes. Academic political scientists measure deepening partisan polarization, which the media chronicle in real time. Voters perennially express disgust with "partisan gridlock."[1] Sophisticated analyses of political life recognize the degree to which partisan polarization is just the "epiphenomenon" of larger cultural and social divides in American life. Not just the political class, but Americans at large have settled into warring camps; and party identity is increasingly tied to differences in income, education, religion, and one's basic outlook and prospects. These differences are more and more reflected in a very real geographic sorting that is captured by the terms "blue state" and "red state" and their connotations.

All this said, party is no longer a reliable proxy for the most significant divisions in American life. The most important cultural divides parallel instead growing and well documented forms of inequality between groups that are best described through a kind of bricolage: elite and non-elite, the professional and working classes, those with a college degree and those without, workers in the knowledge economy and those outside it.[2]

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[1] A sampling of recent treatments of polarization by political scientists includes: Morris Fiorina, *Unstable Majorities*: *Polarization, Party Sorting, and Political Stalemate* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2017); David Hopkins, *Red Fighting Blue: How Geography and Electoral Rules Polarize American Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*: *How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); John Sides and David Hopkins, eds. *Political Polarization in American Politics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[2] I have in mind here trends documented by Charles Murray in his *Coming Apart*: *The State of White America 1960-2010* (New York: Crown, 2012). Deepening economic inequality has also been documented in Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2008; Joseph Stiglitz, *The Great Divide* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015); and probably most fashionably in the work of French economist Thomas Piketty. Whatever else can be said for or against it, Murray's work has the virtue of highlighting and measuring not only economic inequality but social and cultural stratification. These cultural divisions are best depicted in journalistic accounts like George Packer's *The Great Unwinding* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), as well as: Brian Alexander, *Glass House*: *The 1% Economy and the Shattering*

These camps represent at bottom two responses to the political and cultural bundle of modernity that goes alternately by the names enlightenment, globalism, liberalism, progress. Any one of these terms defies easy definition, but taken together they nonetheless describe a familiar orientation: individual rights and equality and the pursuit of peace and plenty. To its defenders, the institutions of the liberal order offer the dignity of legal equality and refuge from violence and poverty. Importantly, they also represent a halting perfection of politics that goes hand-in-hand with the progress of human knowledge generally. To its critics, liberalism has always represented the fracturing of deep organic ties, be they of church, family, or nation. Where liberals see freedom, critics on the left and right see a lonely autonomous self at the mercy of the market. Where liberals see emancipation from poverty and disease, critics see the enervated bourgeois sensibility that is calculating, timid, and materialistic. Where liberals see emancipation from superstition, critics see a world stripped of wonder and of cultural and moral inspiration.

These dichotomies are intimately familiar to us, so much so that it is hard to see the degree to which liberalism has set the terms of political debate. The partisans of progress can find a home on the American left as easily as can they on the American right. The mainstreams of the Democratic and Republican parties are, for now, fundamentally liberal. Their disagreements concern only which liberal principles are most important and how best to effectuate them. But in the present political context, not party but liberalism itself forms the most important political fault line. The most important political question is one's view of the liberal consensus that has prevailed since

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of an American Town (New York: St. Martin's, 2017); Amy Goldstein, *Jonesville*: *An American Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); and J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy* (New York: Harper, 2016).

the end of World War II. This is true of issues that range from the pedestrian to the existential.

In foreign policy, Americans now question the perennial confidence in "American leadership" and the role of the United States in sustaining international institutions. They likewise question free-trade and market-driven globalization. But the roots of anti-liberal disaffection run deep. On the left, anti-liberalism takes the form of self-avowed socialism that considers the liberal agenda insufficiently egalitarian. Underwriting anti-liberalism on the right is a new nationalism that is driven by economic displacement as much as it is by spiritual displacement. The rising toll of so-called "deaths of despair" in the hollowed-out industrial hinterland attests to the connection between meaning at work and meaning in life that, however haphazardly, the reaction against liberalism aims to restore. The same can be said for the much darker directions taken by the young, mostly male adherents of the so-called alt-right, which offers its own kind of meaning.

The question of liberalism separates elites from non-elites, but the divide is not exclusively one of class as anti-liberalism gains a foothold in academia, the media, and governments on both sides of the Atlantic. What is overlooked in virtually all contemporary maps of the political landscape, however, is that each side acts a as mirror image of the other. Both liberals and anti-liberals assume a progressive view of history in which the world is growing up to become more modern: secular, scientific, technologically advanced, and liberal.

Liberals themselves, of course, celebrate this trajectory as they see themselves on "the right side of history." They consider their opponents reactionaries whose day is done or, more generously, those not yet enjoying the goods of liberal society. The liberal

prescription for inequality and marginalization is – more liberalism. Nowhere is this more evident than in familiar calls to extend equal opportunity to all citizens. It is especially relevant that the opportunities in question are more often than not educational opportunities that would train and assimilate citizens to the "fast-paced," technological, cosmopolitan world that liberals see as an historical inevitability.

For their part, anti-liberals willingly play into liberals' characterization of their opponents as firebrands. Left anti-liberals promote their agenda under the banners of (peaceful) "revolution" and "systemic change." Their reliance on historical trajectory becomes clear as anti-liberals on the left implicate liberalism in a story of "late capitalism" that must be undone by wholesale change. Even when not couched in explicitly Marxist terms, left anti-liberalism positions itself over and against liberalism as the vanguard *truly* on the right side of history, ushering in the humane, egalitarian world liberalism promises.

Even more interesting than historical theorizing by either liberals or their opponents on the left is the theory of history at work on the anti-liberal right. Rightwing anti-liberals too play into liberals' charge of radicalism. Indeed, anti-liberals on the right are reactionaries in the truest sense of the word. They see the world according to liberalism proceeding apace to undo traditional morality, globalize economies and automate jobs, replace the nation-state, and undermine previously given cultural norms by allowing high levels of immigration, legal and otherwise. The only solution is to create an equal and opposite political reaction to reverse the course of history and return to an unmolested golden age. This line of thought found modest expression in William F. Buckley's famous line that conservatives must stand "Athwart history, yelling 'Stop!'" It

finds fuller expression in a political movement to "Make America Great Again." Indeed, genuine reaction is of more recent vintage in American politics, as right populists insist that it will take upheaval, a dramatic reset of the sort offered by a candidate like Donald Trump, to undo our present course and restore what once was (or is imagined to have been).

Yet to the extent that liberalism is clearly in need of justification to a new generation of skeptics, the contemporary ideological parameters are inadequate to make the case. Even more seriously, to the extent anti-liberals are, however imperfectly, reacting to real, perhaps fatal, defects of liberalism, the present terms of debate are inadequate to chart a new direction.

In coming front and center, cultural and political divisions have only hardened, as if each camp, having been better defined, now knows to play its role in the unfolding "narrative." The script, tropes, and characters have all been defined in advance. Liberals know to portray their enemies, insofar as they are anti-liberal, as benighted, xenophobic or worse, just as they know to double down in their defense of Enlightenment and expertise. And anti-liberals know how to play good foils by defining themselves against, that is, in terms of, liberalism. Left liberals define their agenda in opposition to liberal "moderation." So too does the anti-liberal right define itself as a movement to undo liberalism, and has, in some corners, devolved into a spectacle of "owning the libs."

Apart from the way they style our politics, these terms of debate also reflect seriously defective habits of thought. In the liberal, progressive version of history, the past simply slips away as it is replaced by a new more enlightened world. In both progressive and reactionary tellings, we are on a course in which the future is free from

the "dead hand of the past" – in the words of that great liberal Thomas Jefferson. In this frame of reference, one alternative is to accept our promethean future that winds its way ever closer to peace, prosperity, and a culture that is itself open to change. The other is to seek an idyllic golden age that is shaped entirely by everything that one finds objectionable in the present, and indeed, can be imagined only as a photo negative to the present. This way of thinking is problematic, at one level, because it fails to justify the progressive vision of the future to skeptics as anything but "the way of the world." But it is also problematic because it totally excludes alternatives that would transcend this whole modern concept of history. Those alternatives would be based in the conviction that the past – conceived as more than a cardboard cutout pageant to foil the present – remains a living influence on the present, that the present emerges not through the workings of History but through countless events that could have been otherwise. In this light, the future would appear not as an historical *given* but as the open-ended output of our own choices. Indeed, the deepest problem with the modern, progressive view of history is that, in presenting itself as a "scientific" worldview, it obscures that material and scientific progress and the progressive view of history are themselves contingent features of a particular worldview.

This dissertation is a study of three thinkers who, writing from the heart of modern life, dissolve the categories of modern historical thought and point the way to alternatives that transcend the familiar dichotomy between past and future: Christopher Lasch, Paul Goodman, and Jane Jacobs.

These thinkers are not obvious bedfellows in intellectual history. At first glance, they share the superficial connection that each came of age intellectually in the 1960s,

and that each contributed during that period to criticism of the comfortable postwar liberal consensus. This dissertation does not argue that the three can or should be systematically related to one another, much less that they "cooperated" in some sort of shared school or movement. But it does take seriously the thinkers' shared intellectual milieu to identify a common thread in their social criticism. It offers each as an independent example of a certain line of criticism not just of the liberal consensus but of modernity itself.

Specifically, each confronted crises of modern life that they took to be the result of, and insoluble in terms of, the modern, progressive view in which the present acts as a mere waystation between the buried past and an inevitable future. Each developed in response to a dominant line of thought a counter-tradition that insisted on the continuity of past, present, and future, and offered a view in which we are not subject to History but responsible for it. If, then, these thinkers are reactionary in resisting the trappings of modernity, they are radical reactionaries because their prescriptions cut to the deepest assumptions of modern thought. Their critiques highlight the way in which lines of modern thought, despite modernity's claim to escape tradition and reach the realm of science, do not function as inescapable laws but instead as traditions that we are free to modify. Indeed, each thinker points to the importance of traditions as such. To the extent we are conscious of the decisive role of traditions or "paradigms" in structuring our maps of reality, we will be aware of the degree to which we are responsible agents: responsible for the contingent way we see the world, and for the contingent choices made by the light of our traditions.

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Chapter 1 deals with these themes as they are found in the thought of the historian and social critic Christopher Lasch. Lasch was first a neo-Marxist before he turned, by way of the Frankfurt School, to psychoanalysis, the perspective from which he wrote what is probably his most famous book, *The Culture of Narcissism*. However, by what turned out to be the end of a life cut short by cancer, Lasch had come home, so to speak, to reanimate American sources of social criticism, most notably American Populism. Once inclined to highlight the psychic costs of modern life and to emphasize the effect of bureaucratic institutions and mass media on personality, Lasch in his late work spoke in a different idiom. In his long, somewhat discursive *The True and Only Heaven*, the last book Lasch would live to publish, he points not to the psychic but to the spiritual costs of modernity. And his critique is not a left account of the individual's fate in capitalist society, but a prophetic warning of the toll exacted by the belief in infinite material progress that Lasch situates at the heart of modernity itself. Lasch considered this modern faith unsustainable in the face of increasingly obvious environmental limits on material growth. But his real concern was the spiritual need for limits. Indeed, insofar as Lasch identified narcissism as the longing to be without longing, the theme of limits unites his later concerns with his earlier cultural criticism. Where the way out might once have been analysis to reconcile the self to its limits, Lasch's latter-day prescription is articulated in a counter-tradition of anti-progressive thinkers, poets, and religious ranging from Thomas Carlyle, William James, Georges Sorel, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Populists. Over against dominant traditions that saw a future of boundless progress, these thinkers, wary of the crooked timber of humanity, insisted on the need for an almost religious sense of

limits. They pointed not to modern optimism – the belief that things are can only get better as the program of prosperity marches on – but instead to what Lasch called hope, the belief in the inherent goodness of life quite apart from the course of material progress.

Drawing primarily from *The True and Only Heaven*, I focus on Lasch's effort to historicize the belief in progress. In particular, I address Lasch's argument that nostalgia and the progressivism are mirror images of one another in that each relies on the belief that we are on an unending approach to a more advanced, comfortable future, that the past is being replaced by a more sophisticated world. While nostalgia "sheds a tear" at what has been lost, it assumes along with progressives the inevitability of the modern world. The past, for both, is imagined as a simpler time that has been outgrown, rather than as a persistent influence on the present. Building on Lasch's critique, I elaborate why this is an implausible view of history, which must be taken to emerge *ex nihilo* from a sleepy pre-history where nothing happened. Against this view, Lasch's counter-tradition asserts, in Carlyle's words, that "'nothing is lost' – that the 'sum-total of the whole Past' lives on in the present."

This view would allow us to see ourselves as past generations saw themselves: not carrying out history's orders, but doing our best with the resources we have, conceptual and otherwise. So too would it require us to understand past generations as they understood themselves, by seeking the "rational core" of their histories, rather than reducing those histories to epochs or interludes in the march of progress. The thinkers Lasch calls upon resisted the idea of historical trajectory by calling into question the progressive verities of their day. But the idea that nothing is lost, the connectedness of past and present is reflected in Lasch's use of supposedly obsolete figures – the losing

critics of progress – to imply that history's direction is not immutable, and that it is possible to strike out in a new direction. Lasch believed that an impending age of limits, as well as our collective spiritual life required a new direction, and I elaborate new reasons, amid contemporary social and cultural disintegration, to jettison the categories imposed by the modern faith in progress.

The availability of the past, and not reverence for it, is the basis of Lasch's tradition-making. His ultimate reply to the progressive tradition is to have historicized it and shown that it too is a tradition whose viability and usefulness can be questioned, as opposed to a scientific law of history. In so doing, Lasch also historicizes the progressive understanding of tradition as an outmoded form of knowledge opposed to science. Lasch calls into question what he calls "the illusion of disillusionment": the false progressive confidence that the world is growing up, graduating from a past that was home to tradition – understood as comforting illusions – and gradually replacing tradition with scientific truths. For Lasch, not only is progressive history itself a tradition, but tradition itself is an inevitable lens on the world, one that he embraces by making his argument against progress through readings of an anti-progressive canon.

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Lasch is a formative influence on this project. Following the 2016 presidential election, Lasch has been revisited in some corners as a prescient observer of the divergence between elites and the white working class. But Lasch was equally penetrating in his deeper analysis of the progressive faith and the way that politics in America, right and left, pivots around it. In this way, Lasch orients the project by identifying basic habits of mind that need to be overcome. Progressive historical

consciousness as it applies to the prospect of modernization and material progress is a paradigmatic case of habits of thought in which the future is continually escaping the past as History winds its way to an inevitable denouement. Paul Goodman and Jane Jacobs confronted this line of thought as it appeared, respectively, in the burgeoning resistance to modern centralized institutions and in the ideas about cities that informed the "Urban Renewal" of the 1950s and 1960s. In this light, Goodman and Jacobs can be read as models of precisely the sort of thinking Lasch urges.

In Chapter 2, I offer a cross-section of Goodman's criticism of life in postwar America as it is found in his most famous work, *Growing Up Absurd*, an important influence on the early New Left. Like Lasch, Goodman confronted a crisis whose solution he took to require new ways of thinking. Specifically, Goodman confronted a crisis among American youth, and in particular American men, concluding that the most serious charge against what he calls Organized Society is the resignation it inspires in its youth. I examine the danger Goodman saw in resignation by considering his understanding of human nature as open-ended creativity. The resignation inspired by modern life squelches the potential of the young to creatively engage the world and stake a claim in its past and future, the essential condition of growing up. In response, Goodman offers a new understanding of modernity, which he identified with the recognition of human potential to shape history and culture. Once a hero of the New Left, Goodman became increasingly wary of the student movement, especially in its approach to the past and the cultural and scientific achievements it inherited. The students, Goodman saw, were unable to see the past except as a series of impositions on freedom, leading invariably to the modern world they could only resent. Drawing on *Growing Up*

Absurd as well as later works, I argue that Goodman's understanding of modernity embodies a view of history in which the past merges with the present as the continuous output of human freedom. Far from making Goodman a progressive, his view of history cuts against precisely the teleological thinking that is central to the progressive view. Moreover, such a view requires us to take responsibility for the past as our own inheritance in order to make a home of the present.

Like Lasch and Goodman, Jacobs too wrote in response to a crisis of dominant thinking. Jacobs confronted dominant schools of urban planning that were oriented toward cities as planners would like them to be, cities that reflected a social and political order of some future utopia. Jacobs's point of departure, by contrast, is cities in the here and now, as they are. In Chapter 3, I trace Jacobs's exploration of the "real world" – her analysis of what makes real cities work and why, given what they accomplish, they are worth saving. I first outline Jacobs's conditions for a successful city, which, by Jacobs's standard, is one that supports a robust diversity of uses and enterprises. I then consider how urban diversity underwrites a unique social order by fostering formal and informal mechanisms of self-government. For Jacobs, the city draws out the full range of diverse human faculties, including the capacity for self-government, and the organization of cities as Jacobs understands them is therefore an expression of natural human tendencies. In this way, Jacobs dissolves conventional dichotomies between the natural and artificial, and by extension, between nostalgia and progress that would force us to situate cities in a progressive vision of the future.

If Goodman and Jacobs's insistence on the continuity of past, present, and future parallels Lasch's own, so too does their thought parallel Lasch's reliance on tradition. As

noted, Lasch gives a history of the progressive view of history to show that it is not the view from nowhere it claims to be. The progressive worldview includes a view of tradition as an artifact of a simpler past, a view Lasch calls into question by historicizing the whole progressive conception of history. For their part, Goodman and Jacobs do not confront a view of tradition as such. But, like Lasch, they identify the dominant traditions they confronted *as* traditions – historical, contingent, and so questionable. For Goodman and Jacobs, the dominant traditions' claims that they offer objective lenses on the world as it must be appear merely as features of those impeachable traditions. This is what is at stake as Goodman insists – against resigned students and end-of- ideology liberals alike – that the System is not a given but the outcome of a long history of good intentions and missed opportunities. Likewise Jacobs's claim that progressive urban planning has its own history, one that reflects not the discovery of what cities must be, but the planners' own debatable social and political values.

Like Lasch, Goodman and Jacobs arrive at their traditionalism through the view that history cannot be flattened into a neat narrative that would bring the end of ideology or the city of the future into view. For all three, the idea that the dominant traditions are anything but traditions – the idea that they have reached a new plane of knowledge – is belied by the fact that history does not move in a given direction to reveal a final destination. In this view, tradition is inevitable: we are left not with science (a perspective that has discovered the final destinations) vs. tradition, but a whole array of traditions and their histories, including, where they are made, histories of traditions' claims to have transcended tradition.

The view also re-opens the past as a source for the present. The idea that the future does not simply take leave of the past explains these thinkers' reliance on a mode of knowledge that relies on what has come before -- or rather, given the persistence of the past, a form of knowledge that relies on what *is*. Their belief in the persistence of the past is reflected above all in the specific sources on which the thinkers' counter-traditions rely. As with Lasch's recovery of discordant voices, Goodman's view of the past revives long-forgotten alternatives, which re-emerge as correctives to the supposedly inevitable present. For Jacobs, sound planning must look at what already *is*, cities as they are. The evidence of the free, organic activity that should orient planning is to be found in cities as they are in the here and now, not as they exist in an imagined future.

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Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's reliance on tradition, indeed their resistance to the idea that we can rely on anything else, raises obvious and important questions. How can such a view avoid a self-referential problem: is the claim that tradition is an indispensable view on the world not a universal, scientific claim of the sort that the claim excludes? In other words, how are we to know, on traditional grounds, that the claim about tradition is true? More fundamentally, doesn't the resort to tradition exclude the possibility of rational agreement over not only the inevitability of tradition but over *any* of the claims a tradition makes? I take up these questions in the Conclusion, where I contrast Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's use of tradition with contemporary forms of neo-traditionalism and postmodern defenses of solidarity.

The whole notion that tradition cannot supply a rational basis for argument – and agreement – depends on the modern idea of tradition in opposition to science. Against this view, I align the three thinkers with the neo-traditionalism of Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre outlined a view in which traditions engage each other not as hopelessly alien perspectives but as rival theories that can rationally attract defectors. Specifically, a crisis of a given tradition might be solved in terms on offer only in a rival tradition. The clearest examples here come from the history of science. The geocentric system could define a whole range of phenomena that it could not explain. The Copernican system could define and explain those same phenomena. In this way, the Copernican system proved its superiority and demonstrated the exhaustion of the usefulness of the view that the earth is at the center of the solar system. Nonetheless, the Copernican view remains a tradition in the decisive sense that, in order to make use of its resources to explain what they could not, the geocentrists had to enter into the Copernican system fully, as converts.

I argue that a similar dynamic is at work in the three thinkers' confrontation of dominant traditions. Each thinker identifies a crisis that the dominant tradition is unable to escape on its own terms and offers in response a new tradition that would reorient us. Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs identify their rivals as traditions, and frame their own responses as traditions. Moreover, they adopt an understanding of tradition as a dynamic common ground of debate, as opposed to a precious ground of solidarity or community. They advance agonistic traditions subject to change, and this framing invites just the sort of contestation that MacIntyre envisions.

The success of the counter-traditions examined in this dissertation can be weighed only in a process of long argument and experimentation. But one advantage they hold

over the dominant traditions is the view they take of tradition itself. The most fundamental way in which the dominant traditions have exhausted themselves is in their insistence that they have uncovered the way things must be. But the idea that things must proceed apace is increasingly questioned as the crises that the thinkers identified have only deepened. Where Lasch saw a hollow faith in progress that impoverished American civic life, the progressive faith now forms the deepest fault line in American politics. The party of progress, the partisans of the liberal order that took hold in the last half of the twentieth century, now faces a resistance in the form of a populist movement that, for all its potential to correct progressive optimism, too often takes the reactionary view that an inevitable loss of American greatness can be recovered only through a politics of the extreme. Where Goodman saw the encroachment of centralization, technology, and easy abundance on the individual's creative energies, young American men increasingly find themselves at loss to find meaning. Where Jacobs feared the effect of contemporary planning on cities' capacity to harbor a rich diversity of talents and undertakings, American planners today are confronted by a model of urban growth that privileges mega-developments for an increasingly affluent, transient, and uniform class.

One does not need to accept the reality of these crises to appreciate that a growing number of citizens *do*. The dominant traditions need better defenses than inevitability of their triumph and the backwardness or the asserted naïve dreaming of their opponents. The advantage of the counter-traditions is not necessarily that they would in their particulars solve these crises -- although they might begin to. Rather it is precisely that they would have us argue from within traditions. Traditions, unlike the presumptive position of progress, need not be conclusive but can instead be the basis of ongoing

arguments. Moreover, arguments cast in terms of tradition open the full range of alternatives before us. They do so because traditions are, in the best cases, self-conscious of their own histories and changeability, and of their rivals. In such cases, they make us aware of our own responsibility for the lens we take on the world, and therefore, of our ultimate responsibility for decisions that have been or will be taken as we look through that lens – decisions that otherwise seem fated, imposed, or necessary.

CHAPTER 1
Christopher Lasch's Discordant Voices

In September 2016, on the eve of that fall's presidential election, the *Claremont Review of Books* published an online essay by longtime political operative and operator Michael Anton. The essay began

> 2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway. You -- or the leader of your party -- may make it into the cockpit and not know how to fly or land the plane. There are no guarantees. Except one: if you don't try, death is certain. To compound the metaphor: a Hillary Clinton presidency is Russian Roulette with a semi-auto. With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances.[1]

Writing under the grandiose pen name "Publius Decius Mus," Anton (who until recently directed communications for Donald Trump's National Security Council) urged his reliably conservative audience to take stock of their dire position: "the whole trend of the West is ever-leftward, ever further away from what we all understand as conservatism." The only choice was to override one's reservations and support Trump's candidacy in order to disrupt that trend and an inevitable future of "open borders, lower wages, outsourcing, de-industrialization, trade giveaways, and endless, pointless, winless wars."

In the view of Robert Jones, a sociologist at the Public Religion Research Institute in Washington, white evangelical Christians were one of the most important groups to treat 2016 just as Anton hoped. Writing for the *Atlantic* in July 2017, Jones concluded that Trump voters were hopelessly nostalgic: "Trump's campaign -- with its sweeping promise to 'make American great again' -- triumphed by converting self-described

[1] "The Flight 93 Election," *The Claremont Review of Books* (online), September 5, 2016: https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-flight-93-election/.

'values voters' into what I've called 'nostalgia voters.' Trump's promise to restore a mythical past golden age -- where factory jobs paid the bills and white Protestant churches were the dominant cultural hubs -- powerfully tapped evangelical anxieties about an uncertain future."[2] Like Anton, Jones saw the election as a last chance for such voters. But their gamble would come too late: "At the end of the day, white evangelicals' grand bargain with Trump will be unable to hold back the sheer weight of cultural change, and their descendants will be left with the only real move possible: acceptance."

Without considering the extent to which evangelicals in 2016 were in fact "nostalgia voters," Jones is right to implicate nostalgia in the all-or-nothing thinking that characterized some evangelical leaders' assessment of the race, an assessment which obviously echoed Anton's own. Nostalgia can underwrite political desperation because it only appears as the antithesis of ideologies of progress. In fact, nostalgia and progressive history share the fundamental assumption that change is inevitable. For all their obvious differences, Anton and Jones share the premise that "progress" is everywhere proceeding according to some predictable trend, a fact that Jones celebrates and Anton laments. Hence the only option left is to shatter the trend, to "storm the cockpit" and risk everything for the sake of a disruption after which the past can be restored.

Jones and Anton's shared assumptions would not have surprised Christopher Lasch. Lasch, the prolific social critic and historian perhaps best known for coining the "culture of narcissism," identified the kinship between nostalgia and progressive history

[2] Robert Jones, "Trump Can't Reverse the Decline of White Christian America," *The Atlantic* (online), July 4, 2017: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/07/robert-jones-white-christian-america/532587/.

in his magnum opus, *The True and Only Heaven*.[3] While nostalgia is usually connected to reverence for the past, Lasch's insight was that "nostalgia evokes the past only to bury it alive" (118). At its core nostalgia is a forlorn hope for a bygone past that treats the past as a place and time that is dead and gone, rather than a living presence.

Lasch's assessment that nostalgia shares with progressive history "a disbelief in ghosts" resonates at a time when dogmas of progress, for and against, distort our collective approach to past and present. When progress is taken for granted, the past – all that progress has replaced – becomes a discrete place and time to be revisited, forgotten, or restored.

As Lasch argued, if the past is dead and gone then it can only be recreated or simulated for amusement. The ironic nostalgia of today's hipster and the monetized nostalgia of recent movie re-boots attest to this impulse.

So too is an assumption of progress at work in American politics. On one hand, the party of progress would rename buildings and remove statues in order to somehow save the present from the pain and complexity of the past. On the other, nostalgia has been politicized in powerful ways to condemn the present, driving a right-populism that seeks to restore the past by reversing the present.

Lasch did not explicitly address the political consequences of the progress-nostalgia dichotomy. But his analysis of nostalgia clarifies the role it plays in Flight 93-style politics. Because nostalgia imagines the past as a distant place and time opposed to the present, it weighs past and present in a balance sheet of history. Such a view can easily lead to the temptation to exchange one for the other by massive disruption, by

[3] New York: W.W. Norton, 1991. All parenthetical citations are to this edition.

interrupting the course of time that's carried us far from home and happiness. The political danger of nostalgia is not just that it can foster destructive political impulses. Even more fundamentally, nostalgia undermines our collective self-understanding by treating the past as if it has simply been replaced, by obscuring the persistence of the past in the present.

It was Lasch's goal to identify this tendency and to contrast it with a genuine sense of history. Such a view would take seriously the endurance of the past and therefore regard the present as something more than either the latest advance of the species or the result of some corruption that must be undone, whatever the cost. In recognizing the persistence of the past, genuine history would call into question the whole binary view of past and present and the effort to weigh the costs of one against the rewards of the other. For this reason, Lasch's analysis points beyond old habits of relying on the idea of inevitable progress as savior or villain, away from the poles of past and future and toward a new collective responsibility for the present.

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In what follows I first outline Lasch's description of nostalgia and its imagination of the past as an innocent idyll that runs on the life of custom, emphasizing to a degree Lasch did not the ways in which the idyllic past is imagined as time without and outside history. Next, I turn to the idea of progress, apparently nostalgia's polar opposite. I elaborate how, for Lasch, nostalgia and the belief in progress were mirror images of one another. Both emerge from the same progressive tradition in which history is the story of sophistication – the world's growing up into modern, efficient, rational, comfortable life.

Building on Lasch's critique, I then offer a set of criticisms of the progressive tradition, starting with its need to see history as a process of disillusionment and the past, by extension, as a placid time that ran on illusions from which we have graduated. Indeed, we have graduated only magically because, as I emphasize to a degree Lasch's does not, the imagination of a static past makes it incapable of producing the changes that are the stuff of history. The past is thereby conceived not as part of history, but as a timeless pre-history that can be ended only by some revolution *ex nihilo* that starts history down its inevitable path. Alongside this imagination of the past, the tradition's mechanistic view of history can only leave modern generations resigned to the project of modernity and lacking the capacity to question the meaning of history. The tradition's flattening out of the past and its imposition of historical laws divide us from past generations: imagining the past as a changeless time before history exonerates its inhabitants from history. Likewise does imagining more recent forbears merely as actors in the pageant of progress exclude them from responsibility for their histories. In neither case can we understand past generations as they understood themselves, innovating and questioning to muddle through the problems of their day, even as they would leave new problems to the next generation. Moreover, the modern perspective robs our own generation of such an innocent self-understanding as was enjoyed by past generations. While they earnestly muddled through and could puzzle in wonderment at the meaning of their histories, we cannot but experience our projects from the end of history as part of some great predestined unfolding.

These spiritual defects of the progressive view are compounded by the view's claim to have escaped the history of history – to have transcended the ways in which the

history we tell ourselves is itself the product of history, not an omniscient view from nowhere. Lasch historicizes the progressive tradition and debunks its claim to scientific inevitability. But Lasch also believed that we are in urgent need of a new tradition because the progressive tradition could not survive a coming "age of limits." The dream of unlimited material progress could not survive, and, even if it succeeded, it would not be desirable. Moreover, the progressive tradition's alternatives of optimism and nostalgia will hardly equip us to chart a new course. For these reasons, Lasch offered a counter-tradition that in place of material progress offered civic virtue, and in place of optimism offered a more durable confidence in the goodness of life, a disposition that Lasch called hope. Finally, in place of historical teleology, Lasch's return to past critics of progress as guides implies that history need not take any one direction. His tradition would free us from the lens of history to conduct political deliberation in terms of notions of the good life rather than those of historic destiny – but do so consciously from within a tradition that is historically conditioned and subject to debate. Such an outlook would allow us to see ourselves as past generations saw themselves: not carrying out history's orders, but doing our best with the resources we have, conceptual and otherwise. So too would it require us to understand past generations as they understood themselves, by seeking the "rational core" of their histories, rather than reducing them to epochs or interludes in the march of progress.

The Nostalgic Imagination

One advantage of reading Lasch on nostalgia is that his criticism is far more sophisticated than the predictable knowing insistence that nostalgia merely romanticizes

or misremembers the past. Lasch appreciated the powerful cultural current nostalgia represents, tracing its appearance across time in a range of disciplines and aesthetic forms. His treatment of nostalgia's influence on Romantic and Victorian images of childhood is particularly useful for beginning to understand how nostalgia shares with progressive history a belief in the inevitability of change.

Beginning in the late eighteenth-century, childhood became regarded less as a time of preparation for adulthood than a unique, fleeting moment of human life when, in the words of Rousseau, "laughter is always on the lips and when the spirit is always at peace." Thus understood, "Childhood provided Rousseau, Wordsworth, Blake, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Dickens, Hardy, Lewis Carroll, and innumerable lesser talents with a haunting vocabulary of loss…." This admittedly diverse group is, according to Lasch, united by an emphasis on childhood as a time of innocence, which was first understood "as an expression of man's potential integrity" but eventually imagined instead "as something statically juxtaposed to experience" (88-89). What makes this view of childhood decisively nostalgic is its implication that childhood and its blissful innocence *must* end. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth-century, authors leaned increasingly hard on melodramatic deathbed scenes: children were better off as martyrs to innocence, spared the inevitable disillusionment of adulthood.

Lasch's attention to the nostalgic projection of childhood highlights how nostalgia infantilizes the past and cuts it off from the present. The hope of Peter Pan, perhaps *the* embodiment of the nineteenth century ideal of childhood, to "'always to be a boy and have fun'" is "a wish that only jaded, embittered adults could have conceived" as a relief from the harshness of grown-up life (92). Such a wish assumes both that childhood is

merely for having fun, that its experiences cannot "inform adult perceptions" and that adulthood, by contrast, is a rather dismal experience whose photo negative could be nothing other than a carefree life of play.

At work here are the crucial features of the nostalgic imagination when applied not just to an individual, but to the species and the sweep of history. The past is fashioned as the mirror image of a supposedly inevitable present; it is imagined, in order to condemn the present, as a time of simplicity and innocence over and against modern sophistication and disillusionment; and it is radically disconnected from the present, having had no hand in shaping "adult perceptions" now that the species has outgrown its childhood.

Consider the most common venue of the nostalgic imagination: the countryside. Nostalgia's idylls are invariably pastoral because the country is a natural foil to the city, which represents commerce, industry, learning, and luxury, "progress, in short, the other side of which appeared to lie in the loss of an earlier simplicity." Nostalgia takes its bearings from an assumption of progress and thereby fashions a specifically rural idyll as an image of what has been lost. As Lasch points out, the enjoyment of "imaginary visits to Arcadia" depended on "a world the sophistication of which alone made it possible to appreciate untutored simplicity" – that is, as a kind of release or tonic to modern ills (84). Rural life is charming as an escape only and precisely because of the assumption that it has been or is being replaced by something else.

It is important to note that nostalgia presents rural life wistfully, as an escape, not as a real alternative to urban life. That modern people do not enjoy the pastoral on its own terms but instead idealize it as a foil to their own lives was not lost on the literary critic

Raymond Williams, an important influence on Lasch's own discussion of the pastoral theme in nostalgia. Having grown up in the English countryside, Williams bristled at condemnations, by those who had not lived a rural life, of modern innovations that were thought to destroy the idyllic life possible outside cities. "I will not listen with patience to any acid listing of them – you know the sneer you can get into plumbing, baby Austins, aspirin, contraceptives, canned food. But I say to these Pharisees: dirty water, an earth bucket, a four-mile walk each day to work, headaches, broken women, hunger and monotony of diet."[4] Nostalgia can exclude such ugliness from its presentation of rural life because real rural life is thought to be slipping away, freeing us to reimagine it as a retreat from modernity, as opposed to something that must persist in all its complexity. By situating a happier past in a pastoral idyll that is simply being replaced, nostalgia succeeds in closing off the past from the present.

The particular character of nostalgia's pastoral settings shows why the country is an ideal place for imagining a past that can be excluded from the course of history and exonerated from any responsibility for modern afflictions. The countryside is the focus of nostalgia's search for a idyll frozen outside history because the supposed consistency and predictability of country life make it radically ahistorical. Whereas the bustling city thrives on change, the countryside is home to consistency and predictability. This dichotomy finds its purest expression in "the elm-shaded small town" of works by the likes of Sherwood Anderson and Thorton Wilder. Such places offer a "world where nothing happens." People are born; they marry and raise families; year in and year out they work the fields according to the knowable rhythm of the seasons; they spend their

[4] "Culture Is Ordinary," in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), 10.

nights at home (or the tavern) with friends and fiddle; they die; and are succeeded by a generation raised to live as their fathers did.

As Lasch notices, the nostalgia for small-town country life feels more like sociology than history. It is telling, for example, that Wilder's *Our Town* is set in three acts entitled "Daily Life," "Love and Marriage," and "Death" – titles that recall the sections of *Middletown*: "Getting a Living," "Making a Home," "Training the Young." As Lasch saw it, depictions of small town life that relied on such categories presented places dominated by behavior, as opposed to action: "Whereas every action is unique and idiosyncratic, behavior falls into patterns that repeat themselves in a predictable fashion." The "exclusion of incident" in nostalgic idylls or in the idyllic small town makes such places islands from history: because they are free from action, they are free from the kind of dramatic episodes that are the stuff of history.

Most importantly, they are free from conflict, especially conflicts over the meaning of the common life and individuals' responsibility to it, from conflict over a given community's balance and management of human fundamentals. Like the idealized childhood of the Romantics, nostalgic idylls are free from the sort of conflicts that continually change individuals and their communities and that, at the same time, make it possible to see oneself and one's community for what they are: not frozen in perfection outside time, but persisting through time as the sum total of a continuous, ongoing history, continually evolving but never free from their past.

In the nostalgic countryside, there are no rivalries, and no wars, no plagues or calamities that would force innovation. Never is there an impulse to build a better mousetrap. No Whitneys, Fultons, Edisons, or Fords. No turns of the moral imagination.

No prophets, no saints or reformers. Nor is there even the ordinary tension between individual and community. There are none of the inevitable idiosyncratic interpretations that constantly reshape shared culture, no particular grievances, no youthful boredom with the way things have always been. In short, there are no innovations; nor, therefore, are there any conflicts over the wisdom of change, over its consequences for the community's shared way of life, or, in turn, over the meaning of shared traditions.

Much less can there be conflict and debate over the origins of those traditions. That is because, just as they are absolved of having participated in the conflicts and dialectic that have made the present, nostalgic idylls have no history of their own to debate. No conflicts delineate the development of their community and self-understanding. The origins of their way of life are lost to mists of time; it is as if their inhabitants' behavior and expectations from life and one another dropped from the sky fully formed, and have existed as they are practiced now since, literally, time *immemorial*.

Memory and history operate in the realm of action to remember and explain specific events, and especially the "extraordinary and unexpected." But the communities fashioned by nostalgia replace memory with custom, which "concerns the ordinary and unexceptional. Custom surrounds itself with silence, a hushed air of veneration; memory, with oratory, disputation, dialectic" (131). Lasch identifies the reliance on custom over memory with Edmund Burke's famous arguments against "the evils of inconstancy and versatility." Burke is "the sociologist of oblivion" because he feared precisely the effect of *remembering*, of penetrating the mists of time to expose or debate the origins of prejudices that enjoy a salutary illusion of timelessness (ibid.). The prejudice in favor of

consistency depends on a collective forgetting of contingency, on a collective forgetting that things might have been and indeed once were otherwise, that they evolved at some point in the past to become what we cherish now. Only by banishing its own origins from memory can a community's own way of life, which itself was once new, assume the reverence of ancient custom and the authority of timeless wisdom.[5]

The rustic villages and idylls that nostalgia imagines to be totally devoid of action run entirely on custom. Such places reflect nostalgia's idea of the past as a place oblivious to its own history and therefore full of pleasant illusions, illusions that had to end once the world grew up and began to put away childish things. Moreover, the sleepy countryside sustains nostalgia's idea of the past as a far-off place frozen in time. In locating the past in places that cannot remember their own histories, nostalgia succeeds in severing a particular moment in time from the flow of history that brought those places in to being. At the same time, in locating the past in places that are apparently without histories of their own – without innovation and conflict – nostalgia also succeeds in disconnecting the past from the present. The past is thus permitted to persist as an ageless "simpler time" with no connection to the ugly dispiriting present from which it provides escape.

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[5] Horkheimer and Adorno remark in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that "all reification is forgetting." Although I'm wary of invoking the well-known line outside its own complicated context, it clearly enough on its face captures Lasch's presentation of custom as an attempt to present things as "they have always been," as part of the order of things. That is precisely the effect of reification, which elevates the human and contingent into something natural and certain. See *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 191.

The Progressive Faith

But from what exactly is nostalgia meant to offer an escape? Many takes on nostalgia emphasize that it takes hold during periods of rapid change. Yet nostalgia need not be an acute response to sudden upheaval. At its core, nostalgia holds out the past as an escape from a present and future that are imagined to be increasingly sophisticated and so uninviting – whether because greater sophistication portends atomization, the demise of social forms and customs, or simply the need to contend with a more complex and exhausting world. But whence comes the assumption that the world is becoming more complex?

That such an assumption is fundamental to the nostalgic impulse cuts to the heart of Lasch's critique of the world nostalgia imagines for itself. Lasch recognized that nostalgia is in fact parasitic on the central assumption of the progressive worldview to which it is apparently opposed. That assumption is precisely that the world is growing up – becoming more sophisticated and complex as human beings become better and better at controlling their environments and freeing themselves from natural and material constraints. In a slogan, nostalgia is modern because it relies on the modern understanding of history that sees the species continually expanding its powers to make the world healthy, wealthy, and wise: the nostalgic and progressive are divided not by whether this is the trend of history but whether the modern project has in fact been to the good.

Before elaborating Lasch's conclusion that the nostalgic and progressive share the belief that the world is continually remade in an ongoing promethean project, however, it

will be useful to describe the progressive confidence that that project points the way to a better world.

As Lasch saw it, "The idea of progress, contrary to received opinion, owes its appeal not to its millennial vision of the future but to the seemingly more realistic expectation that the expansion of productive forces can continue indefinitely" (39). The progressive dogma of material expansion dominated both right and left. Whatever their differences, socialists, liberals, and the new right shared a belief in the "desirability and inevitability of technical and economic development" (23). Indeed, these ideologies all answer to a political philosophy of plenty that Lasch traces from Adam Smith, through nineteenth century theorists like Simon Patten, to its twentieth-century version in the thought of John Maynard Keynes. Lasch's account here is the familiar one in which modern political life is founded on the twin ideals of peace and prosperity that require the loosing of human acquisitiveness. Lasch's twist on this history, however, is to emphasize that consumption, not heartier bourgeois virtues like thrift or industry, was primary in the trajectory of modern thought. Smith's insight that "it was not 'luxury,' after all that fueled the modern productive machine but the more modest expenditures of ordinary consumers" would culminate not only in Keynesian economics but in a progressive vision of citizen as consumer, free to "find relief from otherwise intolerable conditions in higher wages, more leisure, better recreation" – and eventually from labor itself as work would be "lifted up from a menial necessity into a free man's dignity" (71).

But there are two features that make the modern project progressive. First, the progressive holds not only that improvement is possible but such improvement is a good – that is, material expansion would be genuine improvement. Secondly, material

improvement is taken to be historically *privileged*: the arc of history is long, but it bends toward a better world, where better means more prosperous. The progressive view of history thus licenses optimism, a faith that the future will be better than the past.

No Epoch An Island

This allows us to see just how progressive and nostalgic views of history function as mirror images of one another. Both are sustained by a flattened view of the past that Lasch called the "illusion of disillusionment." This is precisely the illusion that history is the story of lost illusions. Progressives celebrate this process not as disillusionment but as freedom. Nostalgia, on the other hand, sees in history not triumph but loss: past generations enjoyed a salutary but naïve innocence that could not survive the progress of critical reason and our disillusionment is the price of modern intellectual emancipation. Both selectively decide when history begins, a date that progressively advances with each generation[6] – isolating the amorphous past in a kind of pre-history, as a time of innocence or ignorance that can be held up to condemn or celebrate the present; and radically separating the present generation from its forebears. History, begins with innovations or challenges to benighted authority that come about as creations *ex nihilo*, for what resources of change could be found in the placid past? History is then told as a pageant of ideas, events, struggles and controversies whose ultimate meaning – as steps on the way to disillusionment– could not be known to past generations themselves.

Lasch's critique of the progressive-nostalgic narrative begins by highlighting how it fundamentally misrepresents the past. Consider how the past is represented in the

[6] On this point, see Lasch's discussion at *True and Only Heaven*, 108.

tranquil small towns of the nostalgic imagination. In fact such places are full of conflict and their social life revolves less around custom than it does memory: "Anyone who has ever come to a small town as a stranger…knows that such towns are not interchangeable and that what the outsider finds hardest to penetrate…are not its customs but its memories, it lore, its highly particularized narrative history, its hotly contested accounts of that history, its feuds and factions, its smoldering enmities and apparently irrational alliances" (104).

If the past was not a placid, timeless place, if all real communities undergo changes that become the stuff of their history and self-understanding– their alliances, feuds, and dialectic – then no age can simply be excised from the stream of history. The supposedly idyllic or stagnant ages of the past are themselves the result of change; every age evolves from something that came before. And past ages evolved precisely because they were not beguiled by the sort of comforting illusions that we imagine they were. The alliances, feuds, and arguments that animate the supposedly tranquil past emerge because no time has ever enjoyed "a set of comprehensive and unambiguous answers to ethical questions, answers completely resistant to skepticism…that…forestalled speculation about the meaning and purpose of life…."[7]

If no age of illusions can be found, then history must be something other than the story of disillusionment. If our ancestors were subject to the same pressures of change and conflict that we are, it becomes harder to see why we, vis-à-vis the past, are not the inheritors of those changes and conflicts, rather than distant observers of a time that our

[7] Lasch, "The Soul of Man Under Secularism," in *Revolt of the Elites* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 243.

own has simply replaced, for better or for worse. In terms of the analogy between the past and childhood, the child *is* the father to the man after all.

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But if the progressive view traps the past and its inhabitants in a kind of pre-history, it also produces a kind of mechanistic understanding of history, and of individual lives. It removes the sense of mystery surrounding the purpose of human effort: it all tends toward the greater rationalization of life and expanding material production. The point here is not that progressives misunderstand how people *really* view their own lives. Rather the point is precisely that the progressive view is coherent even if people do not understand their life projects as contributions to the great meta-narrative of human progress: it reduces the search for intrinsic meaning to a perhaps helpful, harmful, or simply puzzling externality amid the pursuit of utility.

Even if it does not at first, the progressive understanding of life really might begin to describe how people understand themselves, to the extent it succeeds as a culture and people adopt its view of their motives and goals. And it is not as if evidence is lacking that modernity *has* succeeded as a culture – not only in the pursuit of material goods (this is now a trite criticism) but in the pervasive logic of the market and a way of life that is increasingly transactional and rule-bound.

More deeply, however, adopting the progressive view would thwart our ability to experience our lives directly, so to speak, and instead require us to see them as part of some pre-determined order. One would be forced to contort one's hope for meaning into a kind of false-consciousness that must simply be overcome or else accepted as a kind of nagging if comforting holdover.

So too would one have to accept the basic fact of being under a law of history, knowledge that robs us of the capacity for awe or curiosity at the world around us. It prevents us from developing narratives that could explain the events of the past – the history we inherit and make – by reference to something other than the workings of historical process. Past generations' ways of giving the world meaning, as well as the contingent events that made up their lives, are flattened into a science of history that vindicates modern historical teleology.[8]

It might seem that the discovery of a law of history would make progressives keenly conscious of history as all events take on cosmic significance in telling the story we all know history is telling. But in fact, just because events take on that significance, the nostalgic-progressive view of history positions us at the end of history, having graduated both from ways of seeing the world as something other than fixed on progress, and from the possibility that events could upset that expectation. We no longer make history; rather we are simply *in* history and are made by it.

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Thus the progressive tradition, which includes its nostalgic shadow, separates us from past generations in two respects. First, it prevents us from understanding past generations as they understood themselves. The past is conceived as a kind of pre-history that deserves to be revered or only forgotten, and its inhabitants are radically unlike us. They lack our sophistication and the challenges it presents. They were benighted (or simple) people in a simpler (or benighted) time. Moreover, the past was a time when

[8] So, on the progressive view, not only has history revealed us to be utility maximizing rational animals – leaving us to explain away or ignore other motives – but this fact about us is not a changeable choice or an inherited culture. It does not operate independently of history but rather to fulfill history. Indeed, the point here is that there are no human forces that operate independently of history and its ends.

nothing happened; its inhabitants lacked the conflicts and curiosity that are the stuff of change. We are also separated to the extent that our sophistication extends to our knowledge of history's master plan. This separates us from the inhabitants of the frozen past, to be sure. But it also separates us from those generations living after the big bang that set history running on its long ascent or decline. Those generations could not understand themselves as we understand them. From the end of history, those who preceded us *in* history look like pageant actors, contributing as willing accomplices to the triumph of the modern world. Yet these generations acted, as all generations do, only to muddle through the demands of their moment. It is only through our modern lens that their lives and projects are smoothed into the story we tell ourselves about the course of history.

Our supposed knowledge of history's destiny adds a second dimension to our division from past generations. The view we assume robs our own generation of such an innocent self-understanding as was enjoyed by past generations. While they earnestly muddled through and could puzzle in wonderment at the meaning of their histories, we cannot but experience our projects through a glass, but clearly -- as part of some great unfolding, and one that disregards our real motives and the sources of meaning at that. We may not, and probably do not, understand our lives and projects in these terms from day to day. Indeed, we may do so only rarely. But the fact remains that, should we look around the present for meaning, to situate our lives in a larger narrative, the modern narrative offers only a story of emancipation and the quest for rational control of which we are part whether we know it or not.

Transcending History

Yet the real problem with this view of history is not that its presentation of the past is inaccurate in the simple sense that it distorts what things were really like – although that is true – or even that it puts us all too consciously at the end of history. Rather, the most basic problem with progressive history is less that it misses the rich texture of past life than it is the perspective such omissions betray. The progressive-nostalgic dichotomy presents the past as if it were "out there," frozen in time for us to discover; in the words of David Lowenthal's important study of nostalgia, the past becomes like a "foreign country." This divorces us from past generations and prevents even garden-variety historical consciousness, the knowledge of our dependence on the past that it is history's aim to make conscious – it obscures that history is the water in which we swim. But the past's supposed isolation is in turn built on the assumption of our knowledge of history's laws, an assumption which obscures that the way we interpret history is itself a product of history. The view of the past as a far off, simpler time depends on a perspective that claims to transcend history to see the whole trajectory of time. To repeat, the past may not have been such a simple time – and progressive-nostalgic presentations of it as such blind us to the dynamics of change that have made the present. But we begin to run up against the deepest problem with nostalgia when we ask how progressive-nostalgic history can present the past as a time immune to history without adopting an omniscient view from nowhere.

That the view relies on omniscience is clearest in the case of nostalgia. This is why the pastoral genre invariably features, in the words of literary critic Anthony Channel Hilfer, a "narrator or spokesman who speaks from outside the village

perspective." "The village, in order to be appreciated, had to be seen from the outside. After all, one of its virtues was its supposed lack of self-consciousness" (103). It would defeat nostalgia's purpose to enter into a perspective internal to the idyll: the pleasure of nostalgia comes from an experience of the past as an antidote to the present. This is necessarily unavailable to a genuinely first-person account offered from within the past. Such an account would be unable to convey the past as a "simpler time" devoid of incident. The past can play this part only when we know, standing at the end of history, what the past stands for, namely the time before progress.

Nostalgia savors the past for a modern audience by saying: "look how un-self-conscious they were of their myths, of their rustic virtues, of their way of life as a 'way of life.'" Giving such a perspective to a citizen of the past, to a villager instead of a knowing narrator, would be impossible since recognizing how un-self-conscious one is would immediately make one self-conscious. More to the point, the villagers cannot offer the perspective nostalgia craves because they are not aware of their simplicity, of their myths, or their "rustic" virtues as such. Precisely because the villagers *are* self-conscious in the way that all generations are, because they know and debate their own history and experience their culture with all its tensions and conflicts and ambiguities and not as a self-contained rustic vacation, an account of their lives from their perspective would fatally undermine nostalgia's narrative of the past. It's only our imposition of distinctly modern dichotomies – rustic vs. urban; credulous vs. skeptical; innocent vs. self-conscious – that reduce the cultures of the past to mere foils of modern experiences.

The modern tendency to situate epochs in the sweep of history and to see history as a relentless process of disenchantment is *our own* inherited mode of historical

interpretation – one of modern generations' ways of muddling through. It is a story we tell ourselves, and one much less about the past than it is about us. And it is a story that alienates us from ourselves by reducing our projects to the workings of impersonal forces that can take no account of our real motives; blinding us, at the same time, to the fact that they are so reduced not by real immutable forces, but only by a lens on history that we ourselves have chosen.

Lasch's aim was to show precisely that nostalgia and progressive histories are themselves the product of history. The highest purpose of history is to reveal the ways in which the past influences the present, including the categories and biases that inform historical narrative. This kind of critical history adds to a generation's garden-variety awareness of its connection to the past and its own telling of history a higher awareness that its means of understanding the world and itself are themselves historically conditioned. Critical history is a history of history, so to speak, teaching that historical categories and the twists of historiography, like the categories and paradigm shifts of other disciplines, are historical.[9] Thus the best kind of history reveals to us that the past is not self-interpreting; in the words of Anthony Brandt, whose essay on nostalgia Lasch cites approvingly, history connects us to the past and teaches that "we are one of its terms." The point is not that such critical history pushes us up to the sunny uplands where we get an omniscient view above history. On the contrary, critical history makes

[9] That is, critical history also teaches that fields of inquiry other than history are also historically conditioned. For example, in offering a history of science (i.e., of the garden-variety self-understanding among working scientists), a critical history by the likes of Thomas Kuhn shows that scientific inquiry does reach all the way down to objective reality but is historically conditioned by the standards of evidence and validity applied to scientific theories.

conscious precisely *that* we are fish in water, it shows how our view of the past, categories of discourse, and principles of inquiry are creatures of given traditions.

The nostalgic-progressive view can aspire to neither garden-variety historical consciousness nor critical history. History told from the point of view of progress equates historical consciousness with knowledge of one's own age as one in a long story of improvement, not knowledge of the persistent influence of the past and the continuity of one age from the last. Because our own age is thought simply to replace what came before, there is nothing inherited from the past -- and this would include modes of interpreting the past. Oblivious to its lineage in the history of ideas, our contingent interpretive perspective becomes the objective view from nowhere. Thus does the belief in progress doubly undermine collective self-understanding: it obscures the ways in which the present is informed by the past. More fundamentally, it obscures that our tendency to see the past as a far off place is itself embedded in a cultural perspective that regards history as the long march of progress.

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The complaint, then, against the progressive understanding of history is that it is very costly and yet grounds itself in an implausible "scientific" point of view. It creates a radical discontinuity between past and present, divides us from past generations in how we understand them and ourselves, and underwrites a facile acceptance of the world as it is. These costs might have to be accepted if the progressive view had in fact revealed a law of history. But it is untenable in aspiring to step outside (its own) history. The whole premise of *The True and Only Heaven* is that progress is not a law of history; that the idea of progress is, rather, a particular lens on history that itself stands in need of

historical explanation. Progress is not axiomatic, but contingent, itself an artifact, object of "historical curiosity" (37). The first step to overthrowing this sort progressive determinism and the resignation that comes with it would be to offer such an explanation.

This is why Lasch traces the construction of the idea of progress from Adam Smith to John Maynard Keynes. It is also why he traces dichotomies dear to nostalgic and progressive alike to the history of sociology. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were formulated explicitly by nineteenth-century German sociologists to contrast the social life of the past with the emerging social life of modernity. Foremost in formulating this dichotomy was Ferdinand Tönnies, whose *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, first published in 1887, expressed a widely shared view of history among social scientists increasingly preoccupied with the movement from village to city, from preindustrial community to modern individualism and what another sociologist, Emile Durkheim, would soon call *anomie*. These contrasts recall nostalgic distinctions between the happy but simple past and the sophisticated yet alienated present. "Community" rests on feeling, appeals to imagination, encourages belief, and is an extension of the family. By contrast, Tönnies wrote that "family life was decaying" under "Society," which rests on intellect, appeals to calculating self-interest, and fosters skepticism. Indeed, the "Community"/ "Society" dichotomy even incorporates the nostalgic presentation of a pastoral past against an urban future. The sociological tradition sentimentalizes community as the photo negative of modernity, taking stock of progress from the perspective of a idyll. As Lasch said of Tönnies's book, "It embodied not so much a theory as a mythology of social change" (140). The "culture" of community was contrasted with the "civilization" of commercial society, the "custom, habit, and faith" of life in communities with the "cold reasoning" of

the metropolis. For his part, Tönnies saw a future in which society would become "one large city" and his dichotomies imply the same kind of determinism that informs nostalgia's lament for the bygone past (141-44). Just as nostalgia imagines that the goods of the past are not translatable to the present, the sociology of community assumes that real community – an organic, warm, orienting whole – cannot survive modernity.

Both nostalgic and progressive views of the past consider it dead and gone. Likewise, the sociology of community establishes a balance sheet of what has been gained and lost in the invincible march of modernization. Applying Tönnies's categories, Edward Shils asks whether the offerings of a traditional society -- clear social status, reciprocal obligations, and knowledge that the future will resemble the past -- are enough to compensate for its "immemorially old, clod-like existence."

The Case Against Progress

Yet Lasch's real goal is not so much to give a history of the progressive interpretation of history than it is to outline an alternative to the whole progressive tradition. Pointing out the dominant tradition's ahistorical bent was one thing. But an alternative would be important in what Lasch called an "impending age of limits." As Lasch saw it, the costs imposed by the progressive view of the world were becoming harder and harder to ignore. Yet these costs could neither be acknowledged, much less confronted so long as progress was regarded as a necessity.

At one level, Lasch challenged the possibility of realizing the dream of unbounded material progress. Here Lasch anticipated warnings that have only become more acute at a time of global climate change – "the earth's finite resources will not

support an indefinite expansion of industrial civilization." Though Lasch (all-too-characteristically) simply asserted that environmental and material limits will make indefinite material expansion impossible, he also presciently recognized the challenges the liberal tradition would face in making good on its promise of material equality.

It has become increasingly harder to deny that the benefits of an affluent society accrue to a smaller and smaller segment of the population. Indeed, the basis on which our society theoretically assigns those benefits – merit, usually in the form of advanced education – assumes and legitimates important forms of inequality. Of course, even if meritocracy institutionalizes class reproduction in practice, it is in principle compatible with a rising tide that lifts all boats, albeit some more than others: the worst off under meritocracy may be better off than the worst off of the previous generation, and the same might be true of the next generation of meritocracy's losers vis á vis their parents. So material inequality is compatible with material progress.

Material gains, however, are only one aspect of progressives' hope for greater equality; the democratization of comfort is meant to parallel a kind of social equality. But even the limited goal of democratizing comfort requires popular initiative: "If the many now enjoy some of the comforts formerly restricted to the few, it is because they have won them through their own political efforts…" (80). Yet if the current political situation has done anything, it's laid bare the cultural divide between meritocracy's winners and losers. The two groups have vastly different expectations from life, and the "losers" in the meritocratic knowledge economy are increasingly marginalized as the prestige and importance of the work available to them declines. If the progressive assumption is that such forms of labor will disappear on the way to an era when work is the creative stuff of

"free men's destiny," labor and the need for necessary but menial work appear to be dying hard, resulting in a creative class of highly-skilled elites and a new underclass of those carrying on more mundane but necessary jobs. The proliferation of on- demand drivers and personal shoppers illustrates this trend. Add to this that meritocracy's losers have thus far been unable to challenge the status quo except through the vehicle of a new populism that, for all its potential, is for now more cathartic and nostalgic than programmatic – a development which reinforces Lasch's point about declining popular initiative. All this should make us question how sustainable unlimited material progress really is, even apart from Lasch's environmental concerns. The forces of progress, at least insofar as they aim at social equality, seem to be self-defeating because they undermine the sources of popular initiative necessary to ensure equality. Today, fewer and fewer of the displaced in the knowledge economy are able to articulate their demands on the system, let alone effect change from within to make it more equitable.[10]

Greater and greater prosperity as a social goal requires a basis on which to allocate the benefits of prosperity, and in western democracies that basis will be personal merit – at least as it's come to be defined as a map of those qualities most necessary in an economy based on material expansion. The meritocracy is a necessary mechanism of the progressive ideal of continual growth and work as play. Yet the arrangement has run up hard against the minimum need for social solidarity, or at least the common dignity without which a system's losers will begin to lose the social resources necessary to ensure their equitable share in the system's goods.

[10] Michael Young describes just such a scenario in his prescient *Rise of the Meritocracy*.

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Writing before the full-blown crisis of meritocracy, Lasch for his part much more straightforwardly argued that the progressive ideal could not sustain the popular action necessary to its realization because "the democratization of comfort is an insufficiently demanding ideal, which fails to call up the moral energy necessary to sustain popular movements in the face of adversity." This brings us to a deeper level of Lasch's argument. Whereas it's possible, and I believe largely correct, to insist that indefinite material progress is unsustainable, it's equally important to ask what it would mean were such a goal realized. Lasch feared that the consumer ideal displaced more robust notions of citizenship, as well as its broader orientation toward a tepid vision of the good life.

Consider first what the world would look like if menial work really could someday be entirely automated, and those displaced in today's knowledge economy somehow assimilated to high-level cognitive work, overcoming the obvious reality that many lack and will continue to lack the talent and inclination to aspire to the supposedly more dignified work of the creative class. What would such a world look like? Are we confident that such work can possibly comprehend the full range of human talents that deserve outlets in meaningful work? Are we prepared, for example, to agree that physical labor deserves to be made a thing of the past and the talent or aptitude for such work denied rewarding social outlets?

In this vein, Lasch cites approvingly George Orwell's observation in a 1940 review of *Mein Kampf* that the prewar democracies, as opposed to fascism, are organized as if "human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security, and avoidance of pain" (79). Lasch likewise deploys Lewis Mumford's criticisms, made the same year, of the "sleek

progressive mind." Progressives see in "manual labor, the endurance of discomfort, and the nurture of the young" not the stuff of moral development but simple hardship to be obviated by the movement of history. Such an ideal cannot answer to the human need for purpose beyond the enjoyment of life. Indeed, the work of moral development, on the progressive view, just *is* the work of expanding plenty, since "human nature is deflected from its natural goodness only by external conditions beyond the individual's control." In this way, the progressive view defines out of existence sin, or, for that matter, any inherent obstacles to moral development that must be overcome. Lasch's worry here is not that an immoral people will abuse the largesse of material progress, making it unsustainable, in the way certain figures during the American Founding worried that a loss of virtue would make Americans unfit for free government. To repeat, Lasch here is concerned not with its possibility but with the feel of a progressive world come to fruition. Thus his fear is precisely that the progressive utopia could flourish despite its obliviousness to the possibilities of human vice and virtue alike. The progressive can do without a "form-giving discipline of the personality."

If Lasch is correct, then the progressive personality stands to be rather facile and enervated for having lacked certain spiritual payoffs that only hardship can provide. Lasch tended to develop this theme at the level of intellectual history – celebration of or resistance to the sort of personality molded by progress. But it's possible today to put the case against the "progressive personality" even more concretely and urgently. Rates of suicide and depression, especially among youth, have risen dramatically in the last decade. While this trend is surely overdetermined, it is impossible to ignore that comfort and material well-being have not made the latest generation happy – a painful irony

highlighted by speculation that youths' use of high technology may in fact be a principal cause of their unhappiness.

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So Lasch identified two, in his view, fatal, weaknesses of the progressive tradition. First, its central assumption of unlimited material progress is unsustainable. In fact, if material progress is meant to include something beyond rising incomes from generation to generation, such as equal access to a bourgeois way of life and the expectations of life it affords, then the progressive dream of democratizing comfort may be self-defeating as it saps the social resources that out-groups require to assert themselves. Second, the progressive tradition holds up an ideal that not only fails to inspire but whose realization may simply make people unhappy as it obviates the need for hard work and self-sacrifice and thins out notions of moral responsibility.

But these weaknesses are compounded by the tradition's confidence that material growth and the deepening of the modern project is simply the way of the world.

On one hand, optimism underwrites an easygoing obliviousness to the costs of the progressive program by fostering the assumption that whatever has come lately must be superior to what came before. But even if some progressives can see the costs exacted by the progressive order, their optimism requires that they see those costs as worthwhile tradeoffs; or it inspires a facile confidence that the costs and limits of the progressive ideal can or will or must be remedied in History's good time. This confidence is reflected in our own time by progressives' assumption that resistance to their ideals puts their opponents on "the wrong side of history." It is likewise reflected in progressive responses

that reduce opposition to pillars of the modern project – globalization, automation, open immigration – to the last gasps of reactionary holdouts. Yet, as Mark Lilla has pointed out, this response represents a kind of progressive reaction: history would proceed apace if not for "the occult workings of power and language, or more prosaically, the machinations of global capitalism, the military-industrial complex, and media conglomerates." Progressive reaction is usually but not necessarily of the left. Today's left, for example, most readily blames interruptions in history either on the force of power relations (which, for example, inform white backlash against immigrants and other "others") or on the post-truth marshaling of language. But it would be possible to imagine a progressive reaction of the right, in which history proceeds apace according to the laws of creative destruction until it is thwarted by the centralizing, bureaucratic forces.

Nostalgia, on the other hand, simply accepts the costs imposed by the march of progress and sheds a tear. Indeed, nostalgia proper is not usually a complete embrace of the past, but a rueful backward glance that contains an "admixture of self-congratulation" on having put away the childish things of the past. But nostalgia can also be a source of a reactionary politics of the Michael Anton variety. Nostalgia becomes a reactionary current when the past is thought not only to have been a simpler time, but a more virtuous or heroic one as well – a golden age. In this view, it is distinctly an anti-miracle *ex nihilo* that begins history, which is understood as a long story of decline that, as with nostalgia proper, divides the fallen generations from those of the past that are somehow exonerated from history.[11] The assumption of history's tilt in an unfavorable direction can push

[11] See Mark Lilla, "A Tale of Two Reactions," *New York Review of Books*, May 14, 1998 and "Republicans for Revolution," *New York Review of Books*, January 12, 2012. Lilla later developed the themes of these essays in *The Shipwrecked Mind* (New York: NYR Books, 2016). There are important parallels between Lilla's analysis of reactionary politics and Lasch's study of progressive history. Like

movements beyond mere pining for the past to inspire hopes for a dramatic showdown that would reverse history's direction, an apocalypse that would usher in a new golden

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Lasch he takes nostalgia (or reaction) and the belief in progress to share an interpretation of history, historicizes that interpretation, and resists the political uses of historical teleology.

Indeed, Lilla's image of "rips in time" that separate the past from history fits well with the progressive imagination of the past as a time when nothing happened: it really would take a miracle (or anti-miracle) for history to emerge from a time when nothing happened. Neither Lilla nor Lasch makes this connection. Lilla does not address the reactionary view of the past so much as give a typology of reaction, and he divides reactionaries between left and right, not as I have between progressive and nostalgic. But his account is consistent with the idea of a flat pre-historic past that gives way to history, for nostalgic and progressive alike, with a big bang. The nostalgic reactionary spends history lamenting that big bang as an anti-miracle that set off a long decline. History is the story of that decline, offset by a few rearguard victories -- and perhaps by a hoped for final reversal. Progressive reactionaries, on the other hand, must explain not how history began, ruining the nobler past, but departures from history's grand plan. History is the long march of progress occasionally interrupted by the counter-revolutions, which are explained by way of power and language, corporate greed, military aggrandizement, etc.

For Lasch, the flatness of the past in the progressive imagination is central. But he does not see the need for some event ex nihilo to jumpstart history. The reason he does not, I think, is that he does not adequately emphasize the degree to which the flattening of the past takes it out history, making the changes that are alternately celebrated or lamented dependent on implausible big bangs. This is suggestive of the way my own reflections, obviously built on Lasch's work, have departed from and modified his account.

According to Lasch, the progressive tradition imagines the past as a time outside memory that instead runs on custom; and the past is "buried alive" as it is remembered simply to be frozen in time like a museum relic, its living influence over the present forgotten. Moreover, Lasch rejects the facile view of the past as a time of comforting illusions, insisting that the inhabitants of the past were every bit as plagued by doubts and fears as are modern people. Yet none of this makes clear enough how the progressive view diverts the past from the stream of history to which it belongs, nor spells out why it belongs there. Lasch emphasizes the mistaken progressive imagination of the past as time devoid of incident, and therefore changeless and without a history of its own (TOH 104, 118-19, 133-34). But the past influences the present because the events of the past are not simply the stuff of action and memory, but the stuff of history and change. How else, except by miracles, did we get here from there? Making it a time when nothing happened excises the past from history and implausibly exonerates past generations from responsibility for history. This is the fuller sense in which the progressive imagination buries the past.

Once we recognize how the progressive tradition selectively "starts" history, we see that, from the progressive perspective, some generations are "in" history while others are "out" The narrative this imposes on those generations makes it impossible to understand them as they understood themselves. Take first the generation we put beyond history, the inhabitants of the sleepy past. Lasch of course resists the idea of the past as a time when nothing happened and implies that, precisely because things happened, past generations could not understand themselves in the terms and categories the progressive tradition uses to understand them – hence nostalgia's need for the outside narrator from the future, who can see the past for the "simpler" time it was. But it's not just that the past is in fact filled with action, or that the inhabitants of the past were not under the spell of illusions. The events of the past, as well as its tensions and ambiguities, made it a time of change as generations muddled through the problems they faced and left new ones to the next. The contingency they faced is why past generations couldn't understand themselves, as we do, in terms of a grand narrative of progress. The same goes for the generations we would like to implicate in history, those who lived after the emergence from pre-history: while they lived in the moment, responding to its challenges, we make them into pageant actors in the history of progress, or can only accuse them of carrying out counter-revolution. But if past generations did not understand themselves as we understand them, neither can we understand ourselves the way they could understand themselves. They *were* more innocent in the respect that they lived without a narrative that claimed to explain the direction history would take, whether they knew it or not.

age. Nostalgic reaction is easier to pin on the right than the left, but its possible to imagine a nostalgic reaction of the left. Environmentalists might long for a return to a pastoral idyll and work for its "return" either through eco-violence or simply by dropping out and returning to the earth, as did the more committed elements of the hippie New Left. Whether of the right or left, nostalgic reaction can hardly be a responsible challenge to the costs of the progressive tradition so long as temperance is one of the conditions of a worthwhile resistance. More to the point, it is hardly a competent response, offering nothing to replace what it would tear down except a past world that never was.

Lasch's Counter-Tradition

Against all this Lasch proposed a counter-tradition of "discordant voices, which always accompanied the celebration of progress as a kind of counterpoint but were usually drowned out by the principal voices." Such a counter-tradition, he hoped, would "give us the courage to confront the mounting difficulties that threaten to overwhelm us" (39). Lasch's work can be read as an argument for a reexamination of prevailing habits of thought, from within a democratic political and poetic tradition, as Lasch defined it to include, among others, Puritan religious and early American republicans; Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle and Orestes Brownson; European syndicalists; John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, and William James; nineteenth century populists, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King.

Lasch's counter-tradition confronts the progressive tradition in three ways.

First, against the aspiration to unlimited growth, Lasch calls for a return to limits in the form of a new civic virtue. Lasch's tradition calls attention to the decline of civic

virtue to suggest what might be required for the revival of robust citizenship. To guide the revival of such an ideal, Lasch calls upon the morality of American populism. "The progressive conception of history implied a society of supremely cultivated consumers; the populist conception, a whole world of heroes." By this Lasch meant something much like Walt Whitman when he wrote that "democracy can never prove itself beyond a cavil until it founds and luxuriously grows" its own "religious and moral character." Central to the development of this character, Lasch thought, was the populist conception of "competence" – "a piece of earth, a small shop, a useful calling." Such could be the basis of a morally demanding definition of the good life: self-reliance, independence of mind and body, high standards and accountability to fellow citizens – all of which stands in sharp contrast to the progressive ideal of universal access to the abundance that technical advances would provide.

Second, whether limits are found through the rediscovery of civic virtue or imposed by the exhaustion of the progressive project, an age of limits will not be an age of optimism. In place of "a blind faith that things will somehow work out for the best" (81), Lasch proposed a disposition that he called hope. As opposed to optimism, the belief that the future will be better than the present, hope is the more durable confidence in the goodness of life despite its inevitable disappointments and hardships. Whereas optimism redefines sin as the pathologies of scarcity, hope acknowledges inherent limits to human moral perfection but trusts that the good and wicked will get their just deserts. Lasch identified hope as a "deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it" that, if not exclusive to believers, is unmistakably religious and could be found, in any

case, in traditions of American Protestantism, not least of all that which informed and sustained the American Civil Rights Movement (81).

The experience of the Civil Rights movement is instructive here. Lasch argued that "the democratization of comfort is an insufficiently demanding ideal, which fails to call up the moral energy necessary to sustain popular movements in the face of adversity." A progressive might reply here that the wheels of history are turned by an invisible hand: progressive optimism is warranted, if not because the progressive ideal inspires, then because it emerges organically from the orderly pursuit of natural self-interest. Progress is the way history points, regardless of its failure as an inspiring ideal. Yet to the extent that the invisible hand has failed to equally distribute the benefits of the progressive project, those deprived of them, like blacks in America, cannot afford such patient optimistic complacency – indeed, their cause is undermined to the extent they are simply optimistic that things will get better. They therefore have sustained their movements on the deeper stuff of hope, which counsels justice even as it disciplines us against resentment.

Together with a reanimation of civic virtue, hope promised a more spiritually robust public culture. Indeed hope counsels against striving and reinforces the sense of limits by teaching that happiness is threatened by the expectation of being happy. But hope also a new view of history. As opposed to optimism, hope can survive the realization that progress is not linear, indeed it derives from a perspective outside the dominant tradition's categories of progress and decline. In this respect it points toward the third and most important dimension of Lasch's counter-tradition, namely the way it confronts the progressive tradition's view of history.

Where the progressive tradition sees a law of history at work, Lasch's use of supposedly obsolete figures – the losing critics of progress – implies powerfully that history's direction is not immutable, and that it is possible to strike out in a new direction.

If there is no law of history, then there is no process by which the past is simply replaced by the present or in which the past can be remembered as a pre-history, a time radically unlike our own. This too is implied by Lasch's use of the past, in its "discordant voices," as a resource for the present. Yet the connectedness of past and present is also an explicit feature of the tradition Lasch would recommend. The thinkers to which he turned, simply in resisting progressive "inevitabilities" resisted the idea of an historical trajectory. Where the progressive tradition sees radical discontinuity between past and present, the voices to which Lasch turns insist on the continuity of the past with the present. One such voice, Thomas Carlyle, insists that "'nothing is lost' – that the 'sum-total of the whole Past' lives on in the present" (239).

Lasch notes that Carlyle resisted the Burkean reliance on custom not because he favored innovation but because custom stifled a sense of wonder, the willingness to look beneath the surface of things. The effect Carlyle describes here is the same one that I earlier extended to living under any law of history. When history is too easily explained, either by the law of progress or the prejudice of custom, we lose the capacity to wonder about our history and the world it has made. If, however, history were thought to be continuous, our own era could appear as neither as a perfect whole whose ways are lost to time nor as an epoch wise to history's destiny, that has shaken off the past. Instead we would take ourselves to inherit histories that stand in need of explanation. [12]

[12] Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn reflected on her father's life at a tribute held by the American Historical Association shortly after Lasch's death: "Perhaps the most constant thread joining all of his endeavors – his

Lasch's tradition both points out that history requires such explanation and begins to offer one as concerns our inherited historical categories. Whereas the progressive interpretation of history presents itself as a science of history, Lasch's tradition is an exercise in tradition-making and so a conscious argument from within tradition. Implicit here is that how we regard ourselves in history is not a law we've discovered and have to live with but an ongoing project. History is inevitably told from within a tradition. If we stand not at the end of history, but at the intersection of past and present, we are inevitably limited by the conceptual tools we inherit; and one way that we must confront our history is by recognizing and questioning inherited habits of historical thought.

But likewise at stake is the idea that traditions should be serviceable, in the sense that they afford opportunities to see the past, and so the present, differently. To the extent the way we see ourselves in time influences our political life, Lasch wanted historical interpretation to exert this influence consciously, as part of a larger vision. Thus Lasch offers a tradition that would act as an antidote to the dominant tradition's offering of boundless expansion *and* its view of history in which that offering is a foregone conclusion.

One defect in the progressive tradition that Lasch's counter-tradition would confront is the way in which progressive history subsumes political argument. [13] Standing at the end of history, political positions are staked out according to historical destiny --

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piano playing, his writing, his fatherhood, his many home improvements, his fine cooking, and [all] of the other activities he somehow squeezed into a day – was his natural tendency to make things grow." As Eric Miller remarks, "The whole point of political traditions, Lasch believed, was to make such growth possible." (See *Hope in a Scattering Time*: *A Life of Christopher Lasch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 314.) Miller's gloss describes well Lasch's efforts to build a tradition that would restore a sense of wonder about the histories we live.

[13] Importance of political argument to Lasch.

politics must either advance the progressive utopia or return us to the golden age that has been squandered or corrupted. Unlike past generations, we are unable to see ourselves except as actors in and for history. By offering notions of civic virtue and the need for limits, Lasch's tradition would re-frame the terms of political debate in terms of a notion of the common good that could be debated on merits other than its revolutionary or counter-revolutionary potential, apart from a historically defined ideal of what the community is supposed to be. Where the dominant tradition filters political argument through history, Lasch's counter-tradition would restore a sense of direct relation to the arguments we frame. At the same time, however, it avoids the suggestion that we have stepped outside history; offered consciously as a tradition, it would keep us aware that the notions of citizenship and the common good we debate are the product of history and so changeable.

Such a shift in the terms of debate would allow us to see past generations as they saw themselves. The dominant tradition would have us situate the political lives of the past in the drama of history. This is why the sleepy past does not have a life and history of its own but is simply forgotten in the wake of a big bang; it is likewise why we see in the innovations we resist either inexplicable anti-miracles or the machinations of dark forces. In either case, the relevant generations are not responsible for the history they make. Freed from the lens of historic teleology, however, we might see that these generations emerge as self-possessed actors carrying on changes and resisting others for reasons of their own that require examination. Rather than explaining them away as part of a historical drama, we could instead explain how the revolutions we celebrate or decry were the products of "implicit collective choice, arrived at in the obscurity of uncountable

small conflicts" (163). This in turn might allow us to see *ourselves* not as play actors carrying on history's script, but in the more innocent light past generations saw themselves: as the latest generation carrying on the responsibility to muddle through.

CHAPTER 2

Paul Goodman's Therapeutic History

American men are in trouble. Books that celebrate the *Power of Women's Anger* and ads for testosterone supplements that ask sports radio listeners when exactly the modern male "got so soft" announce, in different ways, a crisis of American masculinity. Leaving aside the significant fact that modern men apparently do have less testosterone than their forefathers, such hucksterish plying of the lowest hanging fruit belies a serious situation. Men have long been more likely than women to commit suicide, and recent studies now show that white men's life expectancy has fallen as so-called "deaths of despair" -- suicides and overdoses -- have increased alongside the epidemic of opioid addiction. Even more telling might be the finding that remarkably few of all American men are either working or looking for work, a fact attributed to everything from low wages, welfare dependency and criminality, to declining health and reliance on prescription pain medication.[1]

The situation has been long festering, and the contours of the popular debate on American masculinity took shape in the last decade. Many takes on men's position explain it as an equal and opposite reaction to feminism. Kathleen Parker's 2008 *Save the Males* argues against supposedly pervasive feminist men bashing, not least for men's sake, since men have become "perpetual adolescents" in a culture that expects too little from them. On the flip side, Guy Garcia argues in *The Decline of Men* that men have

[1] Alana Semuels, "Maybe the Economy Isn't the Reason Why So Many American Men Aren't Working," *The Atlantic* (online), March 22, 2017: https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/mortality-of-american-men-and-the-labor-force/520329/.

simply failed to negotiate a feminized culture that they should endorse, for their own good and the good of the species. As traditional masculinity has fallen by the wayside, men have responded with hyper-machismo, at the expense of taking on feminine virtues that they will need in a woman's world.

The election of Donald Trump offered the latest evidence of American men's waywardness. Like Parker and Garcia, standard explanations emphasized men's support for Trump as a reaction to their displacement in a feminized culture, amid women's advances in an economy that is less industrial and manual and increasingly professional and symbolic.[2] But, as with so much else, Trump's election clarified a dimension of men's situation. The rise of the "alt-right" – and especially its Internet bases of solitary, alienated twenty-somethings – has revealed that American men, especially young American men, are lost; their crisis is as much spiritual as political. Beyond the substance of these men's grievance with feminism and limp-wristed political correctness is the prospect of community and purpose that resisting these cultural trends offers.[3]

Yet since most lost boys are not very political, much less alt-right, perhaps the most influential figure among young men is not Donald Trump but Canadian psychologist and academic Jordan Peterson. Peterson, who taught psychology first at Harvard and now at the University of Toronto, has become a modern revival preacher. He was propelled to fame in 2016 by his opposition to since-passed Canadian legislation that made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity. Peterson resisted the law

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[2] Olga Khazan, "The Precarious Masculinity of 2016 Voters," *The Atlantic* (online), October 12, 2016: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/10/male-trump-voters-masculinity/503741/.

[3] Angela Nagle, "The Lost Boys," *The Atlantic*, December 2017. Retrieved online at: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/.

because it might require him to use alternative pronouns to refer to transgender students, making him, as he saw it, a "mouthpiece for language I detest."[4] Today Peterson is a YouTube phenomenon, attracting 1.5 million followers; in 2018 he began a speaking tour associated with his book *Twelve Rules for Life*, which has sold over two million copies.

Clearly Peterson has tapped into a strong current of discontent; there is real appetite among young men for his remarkably straightforward message: "You should do what other people do, unless you have a very good reason not to" – by which Peterson means young men must get back to manly basics, find it in themselves to "pick up a load" and accept some responsibility in life.[5] Part philosopher, part therapist, part showman, Peterson believes that men are increasingly lost because modern culture – of which his criticisms run deep, to include postmodern identity politics and "cultural Marxism" – has made a pathology of masculinity, denying men's particular drives and abilities in the name of equity, which for Peterson is post-modern code for "equality of outcome." "The people who hold that our culture is an oppressive patriarchy, they don't want to admit that the current hierarchy might be predicated on competence," Peterson told the *New York Times*.[6]

Peterson's diagnosis of masculinity, then, goes well beyond the feminism-run-amok hypothesis. On his view, feminism is just one manifestation of a crisis of masculinity with deep roots in modern culture, a crisis that he has dated to the death of

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[4] Kelefa Sanneh, "Jordan Peterson's Gospel of Masculinity," *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2018. Retrieved online at https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/05/jordan-petersons-gospel-of-masculinity.

[5] See, for example, the video posted November 4, 2017 to Peterson's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX2ep5fCJZ8.

[6] Nellie Bowles, "Jordan Peterson, Custodian of the Patriarchy," *New York Times*, March 18, 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/style/jordan-peterson-12-rules-for-life.html.

God ("the ultimate model of masculinity"). That so many men have responded to Peterson's prescription says something for his diagnosis. That prescription includes a flavor of Nietzsche with its emphasis on the importance of bearing loads, in Peterson's acceptance of hierarchy, and indeed in Peterson's own story, which saw him veer from religion as a response to the spiritual poverty of modern life. Yet Peterson is not obsessed with individual greatness; rather, in plainspoken language of which he would approve, his message to modern life seems to be something like *snap out of it*. He tells young men, as the first chapter of *Twelve Rules* has it, to "Stand Up Straight with Your Shoulders Back," and his advice could be boiled down to "grow the hell up, accept some responsibility, live an honorable life."[7]

But there is a serious tension in Peterson's message. As much Jung as he is Nietzsche, Peterson is a defender of tradition, not least of all myths and fairy tales (including famous Disney adaptations), as the embodiment of the hard-won wisdom of the species. Likewise, conformity to moral common sense and the regular patterns of maturing – acting like everyone else when there's no very good reason not to – apparently maps fairly neatly the conditions of our happiness. Peterson offers this advice with the implication that such an honorable life is still possible. Yet Peterson has an audience in the first place precisely because modern life has apparently made growing up so difficult. On the basis of Peterson's own diagnosis, it is not at all clear that ours is a society that can support earnest young men's efforts to *snap out of it*. And not just on the basis of Peterson's diagnosis. Peterson's psychological explanation emphasizes – to the exclusion of factors like the nature of modern work – the role of postmodern thought and

[7] Quoted in Bowles's profile.

its absorption by young men, thwarting their maturation. Suppose young men did manage to grow up the way Peterson wants. What kind of world would such serious young men find waiting for them? Would they find modern work at all rewarding? Peterson leaves one wondering how a young man who follows his advice and dedicates himself to honor and responsibility can make it in a world that pushes him in myriad ways to do otherwise.

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Peterson claims that young men haven't heard a message like his since the early 1960s. If he is right, it is hard not think that his most important predecessor is Paul Goodman, whose most famous book, *Growing Up Absurd*, was published in 1960. Goodman too was worried about honor and responsibility. Yet the subtitle of *Growing Up Absurd* immediately signals a crucial difference with Peterson. Goodman's book confronts "The Problems of Youth in Organized *Society*." Whereas Peterson's argument is explicitly non-political, Goodman's is radically political.[8] Young men could not self-help themselves out of their situation if its causes were not primarily psychological but social – or, rather, if psychology depended on politics. Peterson believes that responsibility and honor are still available in modern life, if only young men can overcome the zeitgeist to properly socialize themselves. But Goodman's social criticism goes much deeper to ask whether modern life itself is the problem, whether systems of routinized education, mass consumption, and empty, bureaucratic work are simply incompatible with an honorable, meaningful life.

[8] As Peterson stated in an interview with *Politco Magazine*, "this is what's being missed by the critical media coverage, even the positive media, for that matter—what I'm doing is not political. It's psychological, and focused on the individual, and it's working." "Q&A: "'What I'm Doing Is Not Political. It's Psychological … And It's Working,'" *Politico Magazine* September/October 2018. Retrieved online at: https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/09/04/jordan-peterson-interview-politico-50-219620.

Goodman infamously stated that the "youth" that worried him most were really "young men and boys," because the problem of organized society – "how to be useful and make something of oneself" – belonged primarily to them. "A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, 'make something' of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying. Like any other natural or creative act" (21).[9] It is easy (and at least partly true) to dismiss Goodman's dismissal as blatant sexism. But, perhaps because the times were sexist, Goodman's emphasis on the problems of young men only made sense in 1960; the problems of career and making it in a brave new world really were more acutely theirs. Today women are less insulated from the challenges of life on the make. But this does not mean that their problems are the same as men's. Of course, women today are confronted with the struggle of finding self-justifying activity. Yet that challenge is still inflected by the prospect of children, since children now are not immediately, "absolutely" self-justifying; whether and when to have children is part of women's larger puzzle of meaning – and, fairly or not, the question forms a larger part of women's puzzles than it does men's.

The state men find themselves in today suggests that Goodman was on to something in addressing the particular (not to say greater or lesser) burden they carry in modern life. Indeed, it is worth asking whether men's listlessness today is merely the latest generation's experience of the crisis that Goodman identified. Moreover, it is worth asking whether that crisis can be confronted through individual self-help, by converting men from postmodernism one YouTube video at a time. If not, then Goodman's thought is long overdue for revival, for confronting men's situation will require understanding it

[9] All parenthetical citations are to a reprint of *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: New York Review Books, 2012).

in his emphatically social frame of reference. It will also require seeking causes of men's situation beyond those presently on offer.

In what follows, I offer a cross-section of Goodman's criticism of modern American life by examining his treatments of work and patriotism in *Growing Up Absurd*. I then turn to Goodman's conclusion that the most serious charge against Organized Society is the resignation it inspires in its youth. I examine the danger Goodman saw in resignation by considering his understanding of human nature as open-ended creativity. The resignation inspired by modern life squelches the potential of the young to creatively engage the world and stake a claim in its past and future, the essential condition of growing up. I then consider Goodman's understanding of modernity, which he identified with the recognition of human potential to shape history and culture. I conclude that, far from making Goodman a progressive, his understanding of modernity embodies a view of history in which the past merges with the present as the continuous output of human agency. This view of the past revives long-forgotten alternatives, which re-emerge as correctives to the supposedly inevitable present. Moreover, such a view requires us to take responsibility for the past as our own inheritance in order to make a home of the present.

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In some sense, it is remarkable that Goodman's work should need a revival at all. *Growing Up Absurd* was a national bestseller and made Goodman an important early influence among New Left student activists. Following the book's success, Goodman was a frequent speaker on campuses. He became a public intellectual, writing widely and speaking often, frequently to national audiences on television and radio. When Goodman

appeared on *Firing Line*, William F. Buckley quipped "Paul Goodman is, roughly speaking, everything – except, as far as I know, a *basketball* player." Indeed, Goodman considered himself an all-around "man of letters." This says something for Goodman's traditional or, better, pre-modern cast of mind. Yet Goodman's position was paradoxical. If Goodman was traditional, his traditionalism sat uneasily alongside his open bisexuality, anarchism, and pacifism. Goodman's life was unconventional from an early age. Goodman never knew his father and he spent little time with his mother who worked to support the family. A gifted student, Goodman began writing fiction at fifteen; he spent most of his early twenties living with his older sister, who worked so that he wouldn't have to. After graduating from CCNY, he pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago, but was asked to leave after engaging in several affairs with his undergraduate students, men and women.

Goodman first attracted controversy after returning to New York to pursue his own writing. He was virtually blacklisted after submitting an article to *Partisan Review* opposing World War II. This was Goodman's first major statement as an anarchist thinker. As we'll see, anarchism for Goodman was not the rough stuff of the anti-government terrorism of the 1920s. Rather, Goodman's philosophic anarchism, in the tradition of Kropotkin and Bakunin, was rooted in his fundamental opposition to centralized power and mass organization and the deformities he believed such institutions inflicted on human creativity, initiative, and community. He developed this theme in *Communitas*, which he wrote with his brother Percy. Yet, true to form, Goodman was swimming upstream. *Communitas* was published in 1947, at the height of postwar clamoring for normalcy. At the same time, however, the end of the war opened some

space for Goodman's views among the New York intelligentsia. In the early fifties, he published widely for such respectable publications as *Commentary*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Dissent*. It was also around this time that Goodman began work with the German psychoanalyst Fritz Perls, contributing the theoretical section of Perls' influential *Gestalt Therapy*.

Although Goodman concluded the decade by publishing a ponderous novel, *The Empire City*, it was *Growing Up Absurd* that made him famous. By 1960, the postwar quest for normalcy had taken its toll on a new generation unscarred by war. Unlike *Communitas*, *Growing Up* had a wide and eager audience of disaffected youth. The book inspired youth leaders like Tom Gitlin, who reflected later that Goodman was for him the consummate "insider's outsider, the peripatetic freelance philosopher, enormously learned yet economically and socially a man of the margins." Goodman traveled widely to speak on the themes of the book and his personal involvement in the student movement deepened. He was invited to participate in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and in prominent anti-war protests and teach-ins. By the mid-Sixties, however, Goodman's relationship with the students began to sour as the New Left veered farther and farther from what Goodman considered a long tradition of Jeffersonian radicalism in favor of a total, cathartic but self-defeating break with the society they had inherited. Goodman's last major works can be read as retrospectives on the collapse of the New Left and final pleas with the arriving generation to correct course. Goodman himself would not live to see such a correction through, dying a young death in 1972.

The contrast between Goodman and his erstwhile followers was perhaps clearest when it came to the future of the universities. The ideals of liberal learning and the

autonomy of learned professions that Goodman championed were unlikely to survive students' cynicism. But the effect of the youth's cynicism went beyond universities. Goodman summed it up poignantly in his late *New Reformation*, a reflection from the end of the decade on the wasted potential of the New Left: "They no longer know what to claim as their own and what to attack as the enemy. Omitting Prometheus, Faraday, Edison, the longing of mankind for light and energy, they left with Consolidated Edison owning the field, and themselves saying, 'Shut it down.' If they cannot take on our only world appreciatively and very critically, they can only confront her or be servile to her, and then she is too powerful for any of us."[10]

As Goodman's plaintive reflection here shows, his grievance with the students was that they had abandoned any concern for the world as they found it, which not only betrayed a failure of discrimination but neutered any concern they might have for the world they might leave behind. "The young are quick to point out the mess we have made, but I don't see that they really care about that, as if it were not their mankind also. Rather, I see them with the Christmas astronauts, flying toward the moon and looking back at the earth shining below: it is as if they are about to abandon an old house and therefore it makes no difference if they litter it with beer cans. These are bad thoughts."[11] This sort of cynicism reflected precisely the diagnosis of youth alienation that Goodman had made in *Growing Up Absurd*: the young were growing up absurd because modern life made it *impossible* to "take on our world appreciatively and very critically." As Goodman put it in arresting terms: "The sense that life is going on and the confidence that the world will continue to support the next step of it, is called Faith…It is the evil

[10] *The New Reformation*: *Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 115.
[11] Ibid., 116.

genius of our society to blight, more or less disastrously, this faith of its young as they grow up; for our society does *not*, for most, continue to provide enough worth-while opportunities and relevant duties, and soon it ceases to take them seriously as existing" (129).

The Road to Resignation: Work and Citizenship

Perhaps the most important social failure behind American youth's loss of faith, according to Goodman, was the disappearance of meaningful work. As opposed to prevailing notions that are likely to equate meaningful work with the occupations of the creative class, Goodman meant something "so simple that it is clearer to ingenuous boys than to most adults": meaningful work, especially for men, was subsistence, "to produce necessary food and shelter" (25). It is no accident that Goodman's first topic in *Growing Up* is the scarcity of this sort of work. In a technological, affluent society work itself was becoming redundant; the achievement of a given task increasingly beside the point. Take the society's supply of food and shelter. "Production of food is actively discouraged. Farmers are not wanted and the young men go elsewhere" (ibid.). Although farming is more respected today, especially as demand has grown for local, organic, and farm-to-table agriculture, this emerging trend, still restricted to Bobos and their millennial descendants, has hardly shifted the industrial patterns of food supply that have made small-scale farmers obsolete. The provision of shelter, meanwhile, is divided among self-seeking constituencies, all of them necessary in massive building projects, but none of them straightforwardly interested in building homes: "The promoters are interested in long term investments, the real estate men in speculation, the city planners in votes and

graft. The building craftsmen cannily see to it that their own numbers remain few, their methods antiquated, and their rewards high" (26).

Goodman illustrates the pattern – in which technology and the sheer scale of modern markets either displace jobs altogether or put the job at the mercy of rent-seeking constituencies – by imagining the fate of a "youth who is alert and willing but not 'verbally' intelligent." Suppose that youth hoped to become an auto-mechanic, not least of all because the job is (apparently) useful. What he finds instead is that

> …the cars have a built-in obsolescence, that the manufacturers do not want them to be repaired or repairable…They have lobbied a law that requires them to provide spare parts for only five years (it used to be ten). Repairing the new cars is often a matter of cosmetics, not mechanics; and the repairs are pointlessly expensive…The insurance rates therefore double and treble on old and new cars both. Gone are the days of keeping the jalopies in good shape, the artist work of a proud mechanic. But everybody is paying for foolishness, for in fact the new models are only trivially superior; the whole thing is a sell (27).

Goodman's point is not simply that the mechanic is made obsolete by greedy car companies. Rather, his point is that the "Organized System" in which we find ourselves – the one in which the mechanic is at the mercy of insurance rates and auto companies' lobbyists – takes on a momentum of its own that is impossible to justify with reference to the objective needs of society. Consider the trivial case of the mechanic. It's not very hard to contrast the situation Goodman describes with an earlier period, when the automobile itself was new, when spare parts were not in such surplus, when cottage industries hadn't grown up around it, and to conclude that the work of a mechanic was much more straightforward: the car had to be repaired. It's only when technology and affluence seem to guarantee a serviceable car, when the repair itself is not in question,

that the industry can take on supposed enhancements that overwhelm what's objectively at stake: a reliable car that can be honestly repaired.

The point is even more clearly illustrated by Goodman's discussion of full employment, which Goodman called the highest priority in a system centered relentlessly on growth and expansion. A large number of young people were, as Goodman put it, "rationally unemployable": the work they will find is make-work, "boondoggling," answers to questions that no one (that is, no one a in a more rational economy would have) asked. In short, the economy is primarily the management of overabundance that must, to assure ongoing expansion, be dissipated through meaningless jobs, the creation of synthetic demand (which in turn is created by means of inane advertising), as well as artificial means of plowing back money to consumers, whether it be through "business expense" deductions or game show prizes awarded for outrageously simple contests. "The tail fins and built-in obsolescence might be called boondoggling. The $64,000 Question and the busy hum of Madison Avenue might certainly be called boondoggling. Certain tax-dodge Foundations are boondoggling. What of business lunches and expense accounts? … These jolly devices to put money back to work no doubt have a demoralizing effect on somebody or other…" (36). Most of all, Goodman knew, they had a demoralizing effect on American youth, who could discern the absurdity of the situation more clearly than their parents. Unlike their parents, these youth had to ask "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'" (35).

If work could not afford American youth something to grow up to, neither could the more general public life of the country. It is remarkable that Goodman would include

a chapter on patriotism at all, given his thoroughgoing criticisms of the American way of life. For the same reasons Goodman might well have, "highbrow journalists mention the American Way with scorn." But Goodman could not assume that posture because he believed that abandoning patriotism would concede too much. While he too rejected false patriotism and the American Way of "tail fins and TV commercials," Goodman could not concede that patriotism itself was not essential. "A man has only one life and if during it he has no great environment, no community, he has been irreparably robbed of a human right" (92). Indeed, this loss is particularly damaging for growing up, which requires the "chance of entering upon a great and honorable scene to develop in." Goodman illustrates the point by an analogy with speech. "Speech occurs at the stage of the developing of the 'I,' it is a forming of the image of the self, it is a self-appointment to one's ideal and a putting on its uniform" (93). Similarly, patriotism and the conventions of a common civic culture express ideals and a uniform to which the young might aspire and assimilate.

Goodman confronted a situation in which "For the first time in recorded history, the mention of country, community, place has lost its power to animate. Nobody but a scoundrel even tries it" (92). Why? For one, the only scene to which American youth might appoint themselves was that of the hyper-consumer culture. But the rot went deeper, insofar as more noble American ideals were at best imperfectly defended. Goodman cites American elites' hypocrisy in condemning Soviet censorship of *Dr. Zhivago* yet failing in the same year to defend organizers of an Irish theater festival when the Archbishop of Dublin refused to say mass at the event – effectively banning it – on account of its performance of O'Casey and James Joyce. It seems that Goodman might have found a more compelling, domestic example – perhaps the fairly recent case of

William Reich. But his point is clear enough. As Goodman saw it, "such behavior is patriotically disastrous; it teaches that our spokesmen are not earnest; they pick and choose when to stand up for freedom of thought. How then can a boy be proud?" (95).

The early experience of space exploration was a similarly squandered potential source of pride. While space exploration might have been – and was often enough claimed to be – about America's contribution to a great human endeavor, it had been corrupted by Cold War politics. Goodman cites the case of the US government's refusal to disclose the wavelength of a satellite, contrary to a public agreement with the Soviets. Equally troubling to Goodman was an American nuclear test carried out in the ionosphere. Though American news outlets knew about the test, they obliged government requests to keep it secret not so much for military reasons as to avoid public anger over fallout. But the space race was also corrupted by the banalities of the consumer culture too, as when the Mercury Seven, all of them white Protestants from quintessentially American small towns, agreed among themselves to split evenly the profits from media coverage of their missions.

Finally, Goodman feared what American youth thought of politicians themselves. As Goodman saw it, there was a dearth of the genuine article because statesmanship had simply become another role to be learned. Politicians were beholden to special interests (Goodman cites party bosses) and read speeches prepared for them "by a staff from Madison Avenue" (101).

These examples illustrate the combination of hypocrisy and banality that Goodman believed disastrously impoverished American civic life. In such a world, "The environment does not encourage public service, it does not esteem public goods. …

children do not take fire in reading about the great men of history and thinking 'Why not I?' as a plausible purpose." It is perhaps easy to criticize Goodman for expecting too much, especially when it came to the pressures of the Cold War. Perhaps a more robust civic culture could have weathered an occasional hypocrisy. Yet, on Goodman's view, American public life is *not* robust to begin with; his point is that there is practically no corner of American public life that would support an ingenuous young man – the subject he always had in mind – in his natural hope to belong to a society that aspires to lofty ideals. In short, American youth were unable to see themselves as part of a worthy common project.

So much of the American Way seemed base to begin with ("tail fins and TV commercials"), but even when it appeared to aspire to more, "noble things" were "made base" and "romance…turned into disillusion" (99). It is bad enough that the Mercury Seven so readily adapted themselves for the commercial packaging of their mission. Worse is that the spirit behind their easy accommodation is held up as an example of ideal character. Speaking of the astronauts, an Air Force psychiatrist urged their character as an ideal or uniform to put on, to use Goodman's imagery: "Knowing the qualities that made them this way, and working hard at applying those qualities in your daily life, can help you [too] to become closer to achieving what they have become: comfortable, mature, and well-integrated individuals. It's a worth-while goal" (ibid.). Every so often, Goodman quotes some passage that speaks, devastatingly, for itself precisely because he offers it without further comment. This is one such passage: in the absence of grander ideals and projects, this – mature life as "comfortable…well-integrated individuals" – is what awaited American youth.

The Early Resigned

Both the substance and the mood of Goodman's social criticism might be summed up in asking how it came to this, that young men's goal in life should be so – basic. In a subsequent chapter, Goodman quotes a young professional thus: "My highest aim in life is to achieve a normal healthy marriage and raise healthy [non-neurotic] children" (112-13).[12] As Goodman observes, "On the face of it, this remark is preposterous. What was always taken as a usual and advantageous life-condition for work in the world and the service of God, is now regarded as an heroic goal to be striven for." The absurdity of it, however, is that modern life makes a comfortable family life both a worthy, i.e., difficult, goal and, probably, impossible: Goodman sounds not unlike Peterson when he says, a normal family life "*is* a hard goal to achieve against the modern obstacles. Also it is a *real* goal, with objective problems that a man can work at personally, and take responsibility for, and make decisions about – unlike the interpersonal relations of the corporation, or the routine of the factory job for which the worker couldn't care less" (113).

But Goodman immediately wonders how it is possible that young men who do settle down in the suburbs with 2.5 children still consider themselves to be running the Rat Race. In Goodman's parlance, those running the "Rat Race" are those "succeeding" in the organized system, with "good jobs;" they are those chasing comfort and status by working meaningless jobs in the senseless economy of abundance. A self-proclaimed family man is still running the race because the goal of a happy family life either "does

[12] Brackets in original.

not justify itself, or indeed he is not really achieving it" (ibid.). Perhaps a happy family life cannot justify itself, since it is merely the basis for, or at least only part and parcel of, a man's true calling in the world. But Goodman's real point is that a truly happy family life cannot be achieved apart from meaningful work, since "It is not easy to conceive of a strong husband and father who does not feel justified in his work and independent in the world" (ibid.). In the absence of such work, however, young fathers can't but join the Rat Race. Yet if a genuinely healthy family life depends on meaningful work, then running the Rat Race will only put the life to which they aspire farther and farther out of reach. So while it is advantageous to the organized system if its personnel are married with family responsibilities (lest they "act up and quit"), "the smooth functioning of the organized system many not be advantageous to the quality of the marriage and fatherhood." In its perversity, the system co-opts the desire to start a family at a young age. As Goodman observed, "to take on such early responsibilities indicates an early resignation: the marriage seems partly to be *instead of* looking ambitiously for a worth-while career" – thus corralling young men into the Rat Race, but thereby defeating a condition of strong, fulfilled fathers and a truly healthy family life (ibid.). Indeed, Goodman's sad conclusion is that the Rat Race exerts a kind of attraction for otherwise bored young men. For some, the Rat Race fills the void of necessity, especially when it is amplified through taking on of debt and installment plans, which gives men "an artificial but then real necessity, something to do, paying up" (141).

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But this is only one possible response to the situation facing young men: "Balked, not taken seriously, deprived of great objects and available opportunities, and in an

atmosphere that does not encourage service – it is hard to have a calling, or win honor. But what then fills the places of these?" (ibid.). When Goodman is not describing the situation they face, he uses *Growing Up Absurd* as a taxonomy of unhappy American youth, organized around the various ways in which they fill the void of self-justifying activity. There are the junior executives and professionals, college-educated young men who go on to white-collar careers; they are the species truly running the rat race, working for empty reward "because they are afraid to jump off" (146). Then there are those not running the race. In this genus of "the Disqualified," Goodman includes several species. First, there are the so-called non-delinquents, those outside the professional middle class who will end up in factory jobs. Second, there are "ignorant and resentful boys who form the delinquent gangs" that had recently become a focus of concerned do-gooders like Nelson Rockefeller (147-48). Also among the disqualified are those whose once ran the race but have "broken down and flunked out, and fallen into the dreaded and ambivalently wished-for status of Bums" (149). Finally, there are the Beats, a group that gets considerable attention from Goodman, and whom he considers to "have more or less rationally balked in the race, or have not had the heart the start it" (150); and the Hipsters, who seek to co-opt the race in a desperate search for real experience, putting on the role of the organization man or junior executive, but doing so with knowing irony (152).

What these otherwise disparate groups have in common is that their activity is defined by the Rat Race. Take for example the non-delinquents. Although they have not been fast-tracked to the Rat Race by virtue of their class and education, "they are mesmerized by the symbols and culture of the rat race" (147). This reduces them to seeking "easy-going satisfaction" and eventually traps them, like their parents, in a

situation not unlike that of the junior executives: taking jobs for which they couldn't care less in order to chase the high life of suburbs and consumer goods. So too are the other groups defined by the rat race, even when they explicitly understand themselves as dropouts. For their part, the Bums are defined by their resentment of the system, and the Beats "are not merely going their own way, they also feel 'out'…" (150).The delinquents' aspiration for "publicity and glamour" parallels that of more respectable types running the rat race (148). In fact, Goodman believes that it is only the delinquents who "take the American way of life fully earnestly" – by which he means that they have most fully absorbed both the objects and tactics of the organized system (176). While middle class professionals running the race must appear to get ahead honestly, the delinquent understands perhaps even better than those on Madison Avenue that the object *is* getting ahead. "There have now been numerous reported cases of criminal delinquent acts performed to get a picture in the paper, just as a young man on Madison Avenue may work hard for a year to get two five-second plus on TV" (148). In this respect, the delinquents are like the hipsters, who get their kicks by pushing the organized system's fundamental orientation toward meaningless competition and status to its (il)logical extreme: "the short cut, the empty sensation, raising the ante, and contempt of honest effort and earnest goals" (176).

This taxonomy begins to bring us to the heart of Goodman's concerns insofar as it illustrates the pervasive hold of the rat race on the culture, even supposedly dissident culture. The society, Goodman writes, is like a closed room whose occupants are singularly focused on the rat race at its center. And this is the most pernicious effect of the organized system: not its failure to provide self-justifying activity or worthy ideals

but its totalizing hold on the imagination. Goodman's aim is not merely to expose modern life for the spiritual desert it is, but to labor against the perception that the system has had the final word, that this is all life has to offer. Goodman hints at this problem very early in *Growing Up Absurd* when he comments critically that "contemporary social scientists are not interested in fundamental change. To them, we have apparently reached the summit of institutional progress…" (19). And now we have seen that it is this feeling of inevitability that forces youth of all stripes to define themselves in terms of the system's values. Believing that system is all life has to offer, "It then becomes necessary to stop short and make a choice: Either/Or. Either one drifts with their absurd system of ideas, believing that this is the human community. Or one dissents totally from their system of ideas and stands as a lonely human being" (124).

Goodman situates this belief in the inevitability of the organized system at the center of his concern, the problem of growing up: "The existence of the closed room of one pervasive system of cynical values is expressed by the prevalent proposition: 'There is no use of a fundamental change, for the next regime will be like this one.' Then it is hard to grow up" (154). We can unpack Goodman's thought here by noting the degree to which American youth come to their resignation slowly. Characteristically entering into the experience of young Americans, Goodman writes that they face their Either/Or only after they recognize the system's absurdity. "Automatically one begins to use their words and think their thoughts, although one *knows* that they are absurd. One feels depersonalized" (124). Indeed, the acceptance of the system – whether one joins it or not – despite its absurdity is the culmination of what, as we saw earlier, Goodman describes

as a child's slow loss of faith; it is the culmination of the feeling that the world is an inhospitable place that really can't support the next step.

If resignation is what makes it hard to grow up, then the essence of maturity for Goodman is a feeling of rewarded responsibility in the world. "This condition of meeting the world is called being in a state of grace…. The question, 'How am I justified? What is the meaning of my life?' is answered by naming the enterprise that one is engaged in, and by the *fact* that it is going on" (128). Yet it is hard to grow up for there is no reason to take any responsibility for a world that does not – and which one has concluded *cannot* – respond to the basic need to contribute with necessary, worthy enterprises.

Owning Up to Nature

To see how and why resignation, the failure of faith, is central to Goodman's diagnosis of American society it's necessary to consider the view of human nature at work in his thought. Goodman was not a systematic, nor always a careful thinker. Yet his works consistently situate social criticism in a larger constellation of ideas about the largest and deepest questions of social life, which are often broached with a frankness and simplicity that is at once refreshing and frustrating. A characteristic example comes near the end of *Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*, his last work of social criticism, where Goodman sums up that view:

> There is a human nature, and it is characteristic of that nature to go on making itself ever different. This is the humanistic use of history, to remind of man's various ways of being great. So we have become mathematical, tragical, political, loyal, romantic, civil-libertarian, universalist, experimental-scientific, collectivist, etc., etc… (193).

Strikingly, Goodman asserts that there is a human nature, only to add immediately that that nature is such that it's becoming ever different – which is to say there really isn't a human nature, after all. Goodman's formulation cries out for clarification that is not forthcoming. But his point becomes clear enough if we allow that he wasn't using "nature" rigorously (enough) when he states that nature is ever changing. What Goodman meant is that our nature simply is to continually take on new ways of being in the world. This puts Goodman in the company of modern thinkers who identify human nature with open-ended malleability and the freedom to make the world one's own through creative enterprise. American pragmatism is chief among Goodman's influences here, especially the pragmatist's view in which human nature is the sum total of our experimentation, adaptation, and acquisition of new tools for making a home of the reality around us. Goodman identifies human nature with the creative freedom to make the world our own; hence the achievements of the past are not simply useful, they are a reflection of the genius of the species, our "various ways of being great."

So much for Goodman's clumsy assertion that there *is* a human nature. What complicates this picture is Goodman's statement, in the same section of *Neolithic Conservative*, that the "right development" of human nature can be violated. If nature is defined by freedom and open-endedness, how is it coherent to talk about its "right" development? How can nature act as a standard for Goodman if the substance of nature is open-ended inventiveness? Confronting the issue requires acknowledging Goodman's limitations as a thinker who was anything but systematic. Indeed, his characteristically

breezy approach is especially frustrating when it comes to the question of nature given its centrality to his work.[13]

Fortunately, Goodman's position is not, I think, finally incoherent. Goodman himself raised the issue in an earlier essay: "I have been liberally using the terms 'nature' and 'natural,' and their contraries to attribute value and disvalue, as 'natural and unnatural institutions.' Do not these terms in this use lead to self-contradiction? For obviously the bad institutions as well as the good have come to be by natural process."

This helps to crystallize the contradiction. The confusion stems from the conclusion, which Goodman's writing leaves open and even seems to encourage, that Goodman really does think of nature as "good." But how can nature be "good" when nature itself is what gives us good (natural) or bad (unnatural) conventions and practices? Either the bad institutions aren't unnatural (so what then makes them bad?); or nature isn't *simply* good, given that its free play might thwart as well as realize what is ultimately good for us.

Despite his apparent naturalism, Goodman in fact took the latter view. This way out of the contradiction requires appreciating that Goodman used "nature" to describe what comes naturally – what we as a species do spontaneously, namely invent and reinvent ourselves in continual experimentation with the environment – and to describe what is good for us given our essential inventive energies. This distinction between nature as the spontaneous and nature as the healthful is hardly unique to Goodman; it's a distinction that must be applied to the great range of theories which invoke nature as a

[13] Some commentators have concluded, understandably but ultimately unfairly, that Goodman fails to advance a coherent definition of nature. See Richard King, *The Party of Eros* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1972) and, the more charitable but still critical, Kingsley Widmer, *Paul Goodman* (Boston: G.K. Hill, 1980).

standard even as they recognize that humans' innate capacities fall short of that standard, and so require social correction and support. Although Goodman failed to make such an important distinction explicit, applying it to his work is well within the bounds of reasonable charity. Indeed, doing so is the only way to make sense of Goodman's numerous statements that nature as a spontaneous force is not simply good. The baldest such statement in his repeated remark that "Anarchy is the only *safe* polity. It is a common misconception that anarchists believe that 'human nature is good' and so men can rule themselves. In fact we tend to take the pessimistic view; people are not to be trusted, so prevent the concentration of power."[14] It's in this light that we can understand Goodman's view that both bad and good institutions arise by "natural process" and his remark that the institutions of the organized system are "only the pale sublimations of natural powers."[15] Untutored nature is, it seems, given to old-fashioned vices of the sort that can be surprising to hear from Goodman if his naturalism is exaggerated. Far from naively celebrating a nature that is simply corrupted by society, Goodman recognizes, even as he makes peace with, our vices. Power concentrated in too few hands is such a risk precisely because "Men have a right to be crazy, stupid, arrogant. It's our special thing."[16]

If Goodman is not clear on the theoretical problem of an open-ended nature whose "right" development can nonetheless be violated, he is no less unclear when it comes to explaining how things have in fact gone wrong. But his emphasis on

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[14] "Freedom and Autonomy," in *The Paul Goodman Reader*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 31. Goodman makes the same point in a later essay: "Yet men have a right to be crazy, stupid, or arrogant. It is our specialty. Our mistake is to arm anybody with collective power. Anarchy is the only safe polity." See "Politics Within Limits," in *Reader*, 89.

[15] "What Must the Revolutionary Program Be?" in *Reader*, 42.

[16] "Freedom and Autonomy," in *Reader*, 31.

decentralization as a guard against our stupidity and arrogance is suggestive. The problem is that the vices which misdirect natural ability have become the basis of social organization, not least of all in the creation of centralized institutions themselves, which in turn only magnify the effect of bad motives. Goodman attributes the conditions of modern life that he criticizes to the organization of industry, cities, political growth, and technology "for the purposes of profits and aggrandizement."[17]

In short, our spontaneous but imperfect nature means that our inventiveness can, paradoxically, lead us down paths that ultimately undermine our ability to creatively engage the world. Nature can fold in on itself, so to speak, in as much as a "natural" (i.e., spontaneous) process leads to results that are "unnatural" in the sense of undermining the healthy conditions of our creativity.[18] As Goodman puts it, "an unnatural convention is one that prevents a human power from becoming a living act" – unnatural institutions are those that thwart creative freedom and the potential for creativity. Thus advertising is an unnatural convention because it is designed simply to build a connection between "certain words and the behavior of paying out money." A natural use of language would not be designed to create an automatic response reflex, but would rather express a genuinely felt need or desire, or communicate feeling between persons – all functions that Goodman identifies with "the creative power in speech." [19]

Another way of describing natural conventions is that they are those conventions that allow us to make a home of the world by loosing our capacity for self-initiated invention and interaction with the environment around us. The thought emerges clearly in

[17] "Social Criticism," in *Reader*, 79.

[18] In this vein, consider Goodman's remark that "Neurosis, too, is part of human nature and has its anthropology," "Anthropology of Neurosis" in *Reader*, 261.

[19] "Reflections on Drawing the Line," in *Reader*, 35-36.

Goodman's educational philosophy, where, as opposed to formal teaching, he was a champion of incidental learning, children's self-motivated absorption of the world around them. "Reality is often complex, but the young incidental learner, of whom not too much is expected, can take it by his own handle, at his own time, according to his own interest and initiative."[20] More often than not formal instruction thwarted learning, which could be "discriminating, graceful and energetic only if the organism itself creates its own structures as it goes along."

Politically speaking, natural conventions are the basis of taking responsibility for the world, the antithesis of the resignation Goodman diagnosed in American youth. Responsibility requires the sense that one is in the world but not really of it, that one is not simply a plaything of overwhelming forces but inhabits a world in which one can leave a mark. Natural conventions are those that preserve "faith" that the world will support the next step. Goodman believed that the young could dedicate themselves to a project – could find the responsibility necessary for mature well being – only through the expression of their own energies, inclinations, and talents. As he puts it in *Growing Up Absurd*, "…all value requires an *open* system allowing for surprise, novelty, and growth" (147).

But a sense that the world is one's home for which one has responsibility is not a natural, i.e., spontaneous, state of affairs. Rather, belonging and responsibility are achievements that require positive social support in the form of institutions and arrangements that allow the free play of our natural, inventive capacities and that keep us in touch with "finite, concrete experience." Indeed, if Goodman's were a simple faith in

[20] *New Reformation*, 86.

nature, it would be hard to explain his aspiration to correct social arrangements and conventions to channel our nature such that we get out of our own way, so to speak, and can carry on the work of making the world our home – from urban planning to his wide-ranging proposals concerning education and technology.

Thoroughly Modern Men

We're now in a position to see the full scope of the problem that Goodman took himself to confront. The world described in *Growing Up Absurd* is one in which nature has folded in on itself, in which institutions of our own making have finally destroyed not only our capacity to go on inventing but even our recognition that those institutions *are* our creations and could be otherwise. In this situation the world is simply a "brute given."[21] It is telling that Goodman often described the prevailing personality in these conditions as "neurotic." In Gestalt theory, neurosis refers specifically to the formation of a specific, defined self in place of the natural, adaptive, creative self. The creation of a rigid self represents the failure to integrate things into a reality that we can accept; it represents the emphasis of one or another dimension of the world to which the invented self will respond. The neurotic self is the final creation of individuals' thwarted inventive natures. In this light, it is not surprising that Goodman described the highest possibility of social criticism as getting people "to feel themselves differently than they do."[22]

For Goodman, even more than resisting the specific evils of the Organized System, this meant reminding people of the "various ways of being great" – by which, we've seen, Goodman meant reminding people of their creative nature and the social

[21] *New Reformation*, 75.
[22] "Social Criticism" in *Reader*, 82.

possibilities it represented. At bottom, this project meant a recovery of the spirit of modernity, which Goodman considered to embody the realization of human nature as the inventive source of history and culture. Goodman's view of modernity emerges clearly from his critique of C. Wright Mills. For Goodman, Mills stood for the position that "The essence of 'human nature' is to be pretty indefinitely malleable. 'Man,' as C. Wright Mills suggests, is what suits a particular type of society in a particular historical stage" (14).[23] "Man" enjoys scare quotes because Mills's view amounts to denying that there is a human nature. Against this view of an infinitely malleable human nature, Goodman argued that our nature isn't so malleable as to include situations in which our self-directed malleability is itself extinguished. Nature demands the ability to meaningfully create and make the world one's own. There is an objective difference between "'being socialized' no matter what the society" and "growing up and assimilating human culture" – that is, a culture that sustains a genuinely human, creative existence (17).

Goodman's critique of Mills comes into clearer focus in the final chapter of *Growing Up Absurd.* In this context, Goodman specifically rebuked Mills for writing that ideals like "personal freedom and cultural autonomy may not be inherent, necessary features of cultural life as such" (202-203). What is at stake here is twofold.

First, there is the issue of whether these ideals are arbitrary impositions on the blank slate of human nature or whether, as Goodman believes, they are like "tragic poetry or mathematics" in being "'inherently' human" (203). At stake is whether cultural artifacts represent activity of human creative powers and so show the agency of human

[23] Cf., Goodman's remark in "Anthropology of Neurosis:" "[N]ature is surprisingly malleable. Yet at the same time it is not so completely malleable that the nature can be disregarded, as some democratic sociologists and fascist politicians seem to assume…" in *Reader*, 260.

creativity in history, or whether *H*istory simply has its way with nature-less human beings.

Second, and perhaps even more important, is Goodman's more particular reflection on modernity itself as the recognition of human creativity as the source of history. Goodman writes that Mills's view is the culmination of "the social scientific attitude that culture is added onto a featureless animal, rather than being the invention-and-discovery of human powers" (ibid.). In a remark crucial for my purposes, Goodman asserts that this position is "to give up the modern enterprise altogether" (ibid.). "Personal freedom and cultural autonomy," then, are not only "inherently human" artifacts. They also reflect the distinctly modern consciousness of culture as an invention of creative and unfolding human nature; they are elements of the modern endeavor to free human agency, an endeavor which Goodman had the potential to bring social institutions into tandem with nature as he understood it.

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The historical problem Goodman confronted is that modernity has been only half-realized. Paradoxically for a critic of modern life, Goodman believed that "it is not the spirit of modern times that makes our society difficult for the young; it is that that spirit has not sufficiently realized itself" (206). The result is a society – the society Goodman describes – where modernity has taken hold but has failed any longer to inspire or liberate. In the final chapter of *Growing Up Absurd*, "The Missing Community," Goodman rehearses a long series of half-completed social revolutions – among others, technocracy and urbanism, liberalism and democracy, the Reformation and

Enlightenment, compulsory education and the sexual revolution – that form the "program of modern man" (202).

But Goodman's idea of a "missed revolution" is not simply a description of a historical situation. Rather, the idea expresses for Goodman the primary use of history itself.

Immediately following his assertion of a human nature near the end of *Neolithic Conservative*, Goodman elaborates on how that nature can be "violated": "An inauthentic solution complicates, produces a monster. An authentic solution neither simplifies nor complicates, but produces a new configuration, a species, adapted to the on-going situation." An inauthentic solution would be one that prevents a human power from becoming a living act, that cuts off prematurely an emergent creative enterprise. Cutting short the evolution that might have been, such solutions "produce a monster" rather than a species that has fully integrated and adapted to the changes it's brought about in its environment.[24] Documenting such cases, offering genealogies of a human project and exposing how its development had been artificially arrested, is the highest purpose of history, according to Goodman.

> My books are full of one paragraph or two-page 'histories'…In every case my purpose is to show that a coerced or inauthentic settling of a conflict has left an unfinished situation to the next generation, and the difficulty becomes more complex in the new conditions. Then it is useful to remember the simpler state before things went wrong; it is hopelessly archaic as a present response, but it has vitality and may suggest a new program involving renewed conflict. This is the therapeutic use of history.[25]

[24] *New Reformation*, 193.
[25] Ibid.

"The Missing Community" can be read as an exercise in therapeutic history to expose the Organized System as an "inauthentic solution" to the crises and opportunities created by the species' ongoing action within and reaction to its environment. Goodman's discussions of technology illustrate the point well. In his one-paragraph "history" of technocracy, for example, Goodman points out that while technocracy had succeeded in "making efficiency and know-how the chief values of the folk," it failed in "wresting management from the businessmen." The result has been the misuse of technology for the overproduction of useless "gadgetry," which in turn has spawned "new tribes of middlemen, promoters, and advertisers" (195). Rather than humanize the world by making it amenable to further discovery, technology threatens to overwhelm (a situation Goodman elsewhere essays to remedy with a new ethics that would make technology "humane"). So Goodman rehearses the history of a dozen other world-historical developments, identifying their original aims while exposing where they have led in fact.

These discussions hardly stand up as fully defended histories, as Goodman acknowledges by referring to his "histories" with scare quotes attached. But Goodman's intention is less scholarly than it is political. He aimed to mine modernity – to highlight and revivify the directions it might have taken – in order to furnish the creative spirit with new material. "[T]he point of history is to keep old (defeated) causes alive."[26]

At one level, the missed revolutions are problematic because the tradition they would have formed is incomplete, leaving the young with an incoherent moral community ("an inauthentic solution…has left an unfinished situation to the next generation"). Thus Goodman can describe his "stoical resolve" to see the revolutions

[26] Ibid.

through as a "conservative proposition" aiming for "stability and social balance" (207). But Goodman is not interested only in giving the young a tradition for the sake of coherence; he is interested in giving them the *modern* tradition as he understands it. As Goodman sees it, the incoherence resulting from the missed revolutions is such that modernity has failed to live up to its promise of encouraging the free development of human creativity.

As we have seen, Goodman's youthful audience lives in a culture of resignation that bottoms out in the Mills-like abandonment of "the modern enterprise altogether." To the extent Goodman uses *Growing Up Absurd* to point toward a political program, that program would be pursuing the modern Missed Revolutions, if not directly then in the ideals to which they aspire: "But we will not give it up. New conditions will be the conditions of, now, this kind of man, stubbornly insisting on the ideals that he has learned he has in him to meet" (203). As opposed to the "inauthentic" solution of modern revolutions, which has made it hard to find rewarded responsibility in the world, the "utopian" world in which the modern revolutions have been realized would be one in which "it would be very easy to grow up. There would be plenty of objective, worth-while activities for a child to observe, fall in with, do, learn, improvise on his own" (206).

An Anti-Progressive Progressive

It might be tempting at this juncture to situate Goodman alongside one or the other of two opposing camps. One temptation is to emphasize Goodman's criticisms of modern life and put Goodman in league with other critics of modernity who argue that the modern condition is one of displacement, and that the essential condition of

modernity is alienation. A similar gloss might adequately describe Goodman's diagnosis on its surface, but would obscure the spirit behind it. Alienation is often presented as fallout from the modern breakdown of the polestars, the customs and beliefs, which form the basis of common life, give individual life explanation, and allow persons to live meaningful, productive lives. Yet, given his emphasis on responsibility as the condition of mature well-being, being at home in the world for Goodman did not mean being secure in life, oriented by a healthy set of communal values. Rather, being at home in the world means having work and projects that allow us to feel we have contributed to, and so bear some responsibility for, the world around us. In this vein, we should also remember Goodman's doubt that domestic life could satisfy young men and his hope that patriotism could turn young minds less to obedience than to honor and noble deeds. These adventurous aspirations aim at more than simply rooting young men in stable communities. That Goodman aspires less to orient young men than to give them meaningful responsibility for the world they inherit shows that he was no ordinary traditionalist, pining for a new American *Gemeinschaft*. The community for which Goodman hoped did less to tell the young who they were and where they belonged than to encourage the belief that they were part of a great human unfolding to which they were called to contribute.

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Much more tempting, given Goodman's view of modernity and its potential to free human creativity, would be to portray Goodman as a progressive thinker for whom modernity represented a new stage of human development and the promise of liberation from a benighted past. As plausible as it may seem, reading Goodman as a progressive

misses the crucial importance of the past in revealing our creative nature. Goodman's understanding of modernity in fact depends upon an orientation toward history in which the past is *our* history, rather than the workings of an alien time and place from which the species has graduated. As the recognition that culture is the product of human inventiveness, modernity situates the current generation as merely the latest cast in the ongoing human pageant. It requires that we see the past as the work of the same human creativity that we can't but apply in our own time and which future generations will have to apply in their own. Goodman's break with student radicals by the end of the 1960s is instructive here. Goodman lamented precisely that the students were unable to see themselves as part of an ongoing human pageant. "It is impossible to convey to them that the deeds of the past were done by human beings, that John Hamden committed civil disobedience and refused the war tax just as we do, or that Beethoven, just like a rock and roll band, made up his music as he went along, form odds and ends, with energy, spontaneity, and passion – how else do they think he made music?"[27] On this view we become, individually and collectively, not the inheritors of some new revelation of Reason or dispensation of History or Providence, but nothing more or less than the sum total of our own creations. The present is not a new departure but is continuous with the past from which it continually emerges.

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[27] *New Reformation*, 75. It could be objected that Goodman's view of modernity in fact requires us to see certain inhabitants of the past as radically different from ourselves. Members of "traditional societies," after all, did *not* believe that their ways of life were the "invention-and-discovery of human powers." Goodman would not have soft peddled this difference between traditional and modern people; modernity is a real advance for its recognition of the human sources of culture. Goodman is an anti-progressive *progressive*. However, past generations' ontology, itself a human artifact, would merely change the way they experienced what were in fact their own creations. What we share with and have inherited from them, the ongoing effort to make sense of and influence the world around by the use of our creative powers, is far more important.

Thus, far from an invitation to free ourselves from the past, realizing the spirit of modernity – recognizing our responsibility for culture and opening institutions accordingly – rather requires that we confront and own up to the past as our own. Consider the alternative. If the past is not ours, it is because history is governed by forces outside our control that make the past and its inhabitants pawns in a great unfolding. Whether we cheer the unfolding it or lament it, Goodman's point is that, in such a story, we are no less pawns than the inhabitants of the past. We are not really the creative, responsible creatures Goodman thinks we are, but are passive subjects. Implicating ourselves in the past is key to avoiding such a conclusion. As Goodman puts it, "[W]e are not only free organisms but parts of mankind that has historically made itself with great inspirations and terrible conflicts. We cannot slough off the accumulation of it, however burdensome, without becoming trivial and finally servile."[28] Only by confronting the past and seeing in it our own handiwork, for better or for worse, will we come to full awareness of human agency in history, awareness without which the world becomes "too powerful for any of us."[29] Awareness of our connection to the past and the distinctly modern consciousness of our ultimate responsibility for history to which it leads is the antidote for resignation to a system that otherwise appears to have history on its side.

At the most basic level, Goodman believed that we must make the past our own if we're to be at home in the world; feeling responsibility for the past is necessary in order to feel any connection to, much less responsibility for, the present. In distancing themselves from the past by imagining it as either irredeemably corrupt or alien – populated by figures and makers radically unlike themselves – the youth Goodman

[28] *New Reformation*, 98.
[29] Ibid., 115.

confronted went beyond disaffection with wrong turns to live in the world as if it weren't their own at all. Here it is worth remembering Goodman's poignant description in which students joined the Christmas astronauts, viewing the world from afar -- or instead treated it as an old house that was about to be abandoned. In evading the past because it led to a present they despised, the students were avoiding just the sort of responsibility-in-the world Goodman thought necessary for real maturity. The students Goodman confronted were both the inheritors of what had been created and responsible for its survival. "[T]hey do not recognize that technology, civil law, and the university are human institutions for which they too are responsible."[30] They had abandoned hope for a better future because they had conceded the System's premise that the world is a finished project, take it or leave it – not a project to which they might contribute and which might change the only way it has ever changed. What was required was an owning up to what they had inherited, to see where opportunities for meaningful responsibility might still exist or how things might be changed so that they can exist again. As Goodman asked a wayward young hippie, "But if you're always escaping [society]…and never attentively study it, how can you make a wise judgment about society or act effectively either to change it or escape it?"[31]

But if awareness of our responsibility for the past allows us to make a home of the world, it also allows us to reopen the past in order to correct the present. Recall that the point of conveying history, for Goodman, is to keep defeated causes alive. The force of the modern insight into human responsibility is that things might be otherwise. If the past is our own creation, if it does not stand written in stone as the fossil record of invincible

[30] Ibid., 75.
[31] Ibid.

forces of History, then it becomes open to us as the long inheritance of contingent outcomes that themselves might have been otherwise and which remain susceptible to human agency.

The model here is Goodman's perennial metaphor, psychoanalysis and Gestalt. He assigned a "therapeutic" purpose to his use of history insofar as he believed that the vitality of the past derived not from its practical applicability but from its suggestion of "a new program involving a renewed conflict" that could confront unresolved tensions like those at that heart of the Missed Revolutions. Recall that Goodman stresses the danger of an incomplete, incoherent modern tradition: the latest stage in our self-directed development has been prematurely arrested, and the reasons for its undertaking obscured. The world youth encountered looked like a finished product, and a hostile one at that. Yet not only is the world they encounter incoherent, it is incoherent because a false sense of finality papers over unfulfilled goals. The conflicts Goodman hoped for would recover the reasons behind modern revolutions and force their reconciliation with the reasons for the revolutions' failure. Thus, for example, the perfection of technocracy would begin by opposing the original goals of technocracy with ongoing management by "the businessmen" to reveal how the latter has thwarted the goals at stake.

The resolution of the Missed Revolutions illustrates how the re-opening of the past, our confronting it as our own, works at once to resolve unfinished business and toward greater consciousness of the modern insight – our ultimate responsibility for history, the good and the bad. Beyond uncovering the specifics of a revolution's genesis and failure, the conflicts that Goodman hoped for will reveal more generally that the Missed Revolution at stake was both begun and arrested *by us*. A therapeutic history

allows us to realize a set of ideals and diagnose a general pattern in which innovation is followed by attempts to arrest open-ended experimentation. Such conflicts expose our own attempts to finish the world as just that, rather than the working of impersonal forces of History beyond our control.

It is important for understanding the anti-progressive dimension of Goodman's thought to appreciate that neither modern revolutions nor modern consciousness of human responsibility for history would change the general pattern revealed by the Missed Revolutions. The conflicts Goodman hoped to engender are the basis of a kind of dialectic, but one without an end. Modernity is not a new epoch of complete human self-realization: if incomplete revolutions like the Missed Revolutions Goodman identifies divided people against themselves, so to speak, modernity would not be a new era of unity. For one, incompatible modern ideals must be reconciled with each other. But Goodman describes modernity more generally as a state of ongoing conflict as the new will have to continually confront the tendency to stifle free creation: "There is no doubt, too, that in our plight new modern positions will be added to these, and these too will be compromised, aborted, their prophetic urgency bureaucratized and ironically transformed into the opposite. But there it is" (203). Goodman was no utopian, and there is a reason that he describes the would-be society of fully realized modernity as a "utopia."[32] In short, there would be future missed revolutions. Goodman stressed the difference between the culture of any given society and a human culture, like that which would

[32] A remark from Goodman's 1962 essay "Reflections on Drawing the Line" reinforces the non-utopian, agonistic strain in his thought: "The free spirit is rather millenarian than utopian. A man does not look forward to a future state of things which he tries to bring about by suspect means; he draws now, so far as he can, on the natural force in him that is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society, except that there it will have more scope and be persistently reinforced by mutual aid and fraternal conflict." In *Reader*, 35.

result from the realization of a fully modern society: the society in which youth were assimilated to such a culture "would have to be a remarkably finished product" (17). In other words, the freedom represented by modern revolutions is unlikely ever to be the basis of a new, finished society. In fact, just the opposite. Modernity will at best open new avenues for human creativity, even as those avenues will be foreclosed by the equal and opposite tendency to imagine society at a given point as a finished product, to be shored up with bureaucracies and other centralizing institutions. To draw out the parallel with Gestalt therapy, these institutions are "neurotic" insofar as they represent attempts to crystallize society at particular moment in time rather than foster free, open-ended adaptation. Just as the classic psychoanalytic setup assumed that there could never be a perfect harmony between individuals and their environments, Goodman assumes that the need for organic creativity will always compete with human tendencies to seek finality. The best we can do is seek collective ordinary unhappiness having recognized when such a pattern is at work.

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Goodman of course approved of modernity in many of its particulars: technology, the sexual revolution, urbanism. But it's important to distinguish these particulars from the larger spirit of modernity that appears in Goodman's thought. In Goodman's view, modernity was not the final stage of evolution to which humanity had graduated, it was precisely the frame of mind that would allow us, as would the patient in the psychoanalytic set-up, to painfully improve ourselves on the basis of our past. Modernity is the spirit of exposing and reconciling conflict. Goodman believed that the modern

tradition could be one that would expand the range of human possibility because its recognition of human agency as the source of history gave modernity the resources to recover unrealized possibilities instead of consigning them to a closed off time and place of what might have been. Pursuing such projects, in turn, offered an opportunity for the young to take responsibility for the world around them, rather than surrender to it as a "brute given."[33]

A New Adventure?

Jordan Peterson's latest venture is a partnership with the Acton Institute, a think tank dedicated to the quintessentially American project of justifying capitalism by Christian principles. Peterson will head up a new MBA fellowship. In Peterson's words, "the MBA's emphasis on individual responsibility and adventure parallels my work's focus on maturity, simultaneous service to the individual, family and broader community, and the relationship between meaning, discipline, and vision."[34] It is a sad reflection on our trajectory since Goodman wrote that the one public thinker who has, to anyone's notice, taken up the cause of mature well-being in modern life can recommend the MBA as a source of "adventure." Where Goodman hoped that the creative energies of the young would be poured into the development of a more humane culture, the modern maturity movement can associate maturity only with sophisticated participation in the economy of empty abundance. That the sights of those aspiring to service, responsibility,

[33] *New Reformation*, 75.
[34] "Announcing the Peterson Fellowship at Acton School of Business." Retrieved at: https://www.jordanbpeterson.com/opportunities/peterson-fellowship-acton/.

and meaningful work remain so low demonstrates that the resignation Goodman lamented is still with us: fundamental change is out of the question.

Yet everywhere there are signs that the system Goodman confronted is under strain. Whether seeking solidarity in the dark corners of the Alt-Right or looking to a YouTube guru, western men are, however haphazardly, looking for alternatives. More broadly, the populist movements in Europe and the United States have laid bare the costs of business as usual. Those movements are hardly countercultural on their surface, but they betray a deeper longing on the part of the displaced for a more meaningful existence. So far, big thinking about what alternative might offer that meaning has been in short supply. But those who would understand the deeper sources of listlessness in modern life – as well as those aspiring to an alternative – could do far worse than return to Goodman. His dogged faith that "the future will make more sense than we dared hope" is as urgent as ever (216).

CHAPTER 3
Jane Jacobs's Urban Arcadia

The City Triumphant?

The American city is making a comeback. If the last half of the twentieth century was the era of the suburb, the first decades of the twenty-first have belonged to the city. In the years following the Great Recession, the growth of urban areas accelerated overall, with the ten largest cities actually outpacing suburban growth.[1] But there has also been a more fundamental shift away from the idea of the city as an event venue and a daily holding tank for office workers between their commutes back to greener pastures. The city is the place to be in the knowledge economy, which relies on critical massing of money and talent – firms, entrepreneurs, researchers. This is why cities are the home of the so-called "creative class," and why they will dominate in what economist Enrico Moretti has called the "new geography of jobs."[2] More and more major corporations in recent years are relocating their headquarters from the suburbs to urban cores.[3] Boston lured General Electric from suburban Connecticut, while both McDonald's and Kraft-Heinz left Chicagoland for the city center. Meanwhile Pittsburgh has become a hub of big tech as the city now doubles as a working lab for driverless cars.

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[1] Connor Dougherty, "Cities Grow at Suburbs' Expense During Recession" *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2009: https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124641839713978195; Connor Dougherty, "Largest Cities Growing Faster Than Surrounding Suburbs" *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2009: https://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2009/07/01/largest-cities-growing-faster-than-surrounding-suburbs/?mod=article_inline.

[2] See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Enrico Moretti, *The New Geography of Jobs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

[3] Nelson D. Schwartz, "Why Corporate America is Leaving the Suburbs for the City" *New York Times*, August 1, 2016: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/02/business/economy/why-corporate-america-is-leaving-the-suburbs-for-the-city.html.

Yet urban population growth has levelled off, in part because cities have become victims of their own success. The suburbs beckon once again because cities have simply become too expensive for most would-be homeowners. This is perhaps the least dramatic cost exacted, if not by urban success itself, then by the way cities have failed to negotiate it. Much more dramatic are the effects on those who can't afford the city but who can't afford to leave it, either. In a long piece for the magazine entitled "The Death of a Once Great City," longtime *Harpers* editor and New Yorker Kevin Baker reports that the average New York household spends at least one third of its income on rent, and nearly 30 percent of households spend half or more. From 2014 to 2017, while median income among renting families increased only 10 percent, the rent for vacant apartments increased by 30 percent. Beyond pushing medium-income earners back to the suburbs, these trends have resulted in unprecedented levels of homelessness. On an average night in New York, more than 60,000 people are housed in the city's 547 shelters. The pattern has also played out in other destination locales: Boston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Seattle – all cities where average households spend more than a third of their income on rent.[4]

That cities are increasingly the preserve of the rich is not straightforwardly an effect of supply and demand. While it's true that demand has simply outpaced supply in certain western cities, New York, for example, netted 15,000 new buildings from 2002 to 2013. Part of the story there and elsewhere is the deregulation of existing rent controlled properties. In any event, cities are destination real estate. They are increasingly the scene

[4] Chris Glynn and Alexander Casey, "Homelessness Rises Faster Where Rent Exceeds a Third of Income" *Zillow* Research, December 11, 2018: https://www.zillow.com/research/homelessness-rent-affordability-22247/.

of "land banking" among the ultra rich, who buy up prime real estate as investments – usually in the form of impossibly expensive high-rise apartments that sit empty. The development of luxury living – (very, *very*) high rises, some complete with spas, bars, pools, and play areas for children (ball pits and jungle gyms) and adults (billiards, an "adult treehouse") – is one reason New York "continues to furiously tear itself down and build itself back up again." Beyond these projects, however, powerful local institutions like Columbia University or Cooper Union have been given free rein in expansion projects that have changed the complexion of entire neighborhoods. This is to say nothing of massive, publicly subsidized private developments like New York's Hudson Yards, a sprawl of residential properties, a hotel, a mall, and other amenities in Midtown, all adding up to the largest private real-estate development in the United States.

Hudson Yards was to be complemented cross town by another such project anchored by the Mets' new ballpark in Willets Point, Queens. The $3 billion plan would have featured an enormous mall and new housing. The development was thwarted when a court determined that the planned transfer of $1 billion in public land to private developers required an act of the state legislature, a decision that came too late for the dozens if not hundreds of small businesses in Queens' storied Iron Triangle that had closed under threat of eminent domain. Boston's Seaport and Philadelphia's Navy Yard are examples of similar development schemes.

The effect of these developments on the life of American cities are all too predictable. Longtime residents are displaced. The natural rhythms of neighborhoods, formed by steady populations of people and businesses, are disrupted. Whereas once the city housed an entertainment and commercial hub that suburbanities rented, cities' new

residents threaten to turn them into series of self-contained zones, which, at the extreme, can be identified with one glorious building's amenities and playplaces. Cities are being robbed of the sources of their social, commercial, and physical diversity, and of their natural capacity to facilitate cross-class sociability.

No one has done more to situate these elements as the definitive marks of successful cities than Jane Jacobs. It is no coincidence that Baker plays on the title of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. His report frames New York as having lost all the energy, charm, and strangeness that were the basis of Jacobs's love of the City and of cities. Jacobs spoke to the lure of the city better than any critic before or since: sometimes it is hard to tell whether she has simply expressed what urban dwellers feel in their bones or whether she has reimagined urban life in a whole new light to show us what there is to love about the city. That in part explains her enduring appeal, and why she is a hero for dispirited urbanists like Baker. Jacobs herself would hardly be surprised by New York's fate. In a 1997 interview she remarked, "I can't flatter myself that the book made a great deal of difference, or these things would have stopped in the early 1960's; but they didn't"[5] – "these things" being developments like the Lower Manhattan Expressway[6] whose defeat made her famous, as well as the use of what Jacobs called "catastrophic money" to remake great swaths of cities.

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[5] Anthony Depalma, "At Home With: Jane Jacobs, Urban Hero" *New York Times*, November 6, 1997. Retrieved online at: https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/06/garden/at-home-with-jane-jacobs-urban-hero.html.

[6] Jacobs was already an urban activist by the time she published *Death and Life*. Her most famous battle was with Robert Moses over a proposal to build an expressway through Washington Park, near her Greenwich Village neighborhood. Although she rarely refers to her own experiences in local political action, they clearly inform Jacobs's account of cities' hospitality to political organization.

Yet there is a deeper reason for us to assimilate Jacobs's thinking beyond the faint hope that it may actually come to influence urban design. Early in his eulogy, Baker remarks: "The urban crisis of affluence exemplifies our wider crisis: we now live in an America where we believe that we no longer have any ability to control the systems we live under." As I hope to show, Jacobs's work is an effort to resist just this sort of resignation. In confronting the urban crisis of her own day, Jacobs meant also to show that social systems, including cities, are the product of deliberate choices that reflect deeper assumptions – choices that might have been otherwise and might still be.

In what follows, I trace Jacobs's exploration of the "real world" – her analysis of what makes real cities work and why, given what they accomplish, they are worth saving. I first rehearse the tradition of urban planning that Jacobs confronted. I then outline Jacobs's conditions for a successful city, which, by Jacobs's standard, is one that supports a robust diversity of uses and enterprises. I also consider how urban diversity underwrites a uniquely urban social order by fostering formal and informal mechanisms of self-government. I then turn to the deeper sources of Jacobs's defense of the city: the city draws out the full range of diverse human faculties, including the capacity for self-government, and the organization of cities as Jacobs understands them is therefore an expression of natural human tendencies. I argue that this understanding of the city dissolves conventional dichotomies between the natural and artificial and that Jacobs defies categories of nostalgia and progress that require situating the city in a progressive vision of the future. Finally, I return to Jacobs's understanding of tradition and how it informs both her confrontation of the dominant planning of her day as well as her effort to supply an alternative.

The Dominant Tradition

The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jacobs's most famous and influential work, was published at the height of "urban renewal," the postwar grappling (or failure to grapple) with what American cities would become amid deindustrialization and suburbanization.[7] *Death and Life*, published in 1961, should be understood alongside books like *Growing Up Absurd*, *The Feminine Mystique*, or *Silent Spring* as a challenge to both the substance and spirit of the comfortable postwar consensus – as a big-think effort to stand back and reappraise the "inevitable" direction of an aspect of American life. As Jacobs announces in the opening lines, "This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding. It is also, and mostly, an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding, different and even opposite from those now taught in everything from schools of architecture and planning to the Sunday supplements and women's magazines" (3).[8]

The flaw at the heart of contemporary planning, as Jacobs saw it, was that it ignored cities as they really were and was "guided instead by principles derived from the behavior and appearance of towns, suburbs, tuberculosis sanatoria, fairs, and imaginary dream cities – from anything but cities themselves" (6). Jacobs identifies contemporary planning as the modern inheritance of nineteenth-century theories of the city that were distinctly un-, and even anti-urban. The most important of these was Ebenezer Howard's

[7] For a recent, sympathetic rethinking of urban renewal see Lizabeth Cohen's biography of Ed Logue, who led the mid-century redevelopment of New Haven and Boston: *Saving America's Cities*: *Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

[8] All parenthetical references are to *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

"Garden City." Howard reacted to nineteenth-century London by aspiring to move the working poor closer to nature. Garden Cities would include industry, but would be of limited size and surrounded by an agricultural Green Belt. Industry, housing and green space would be neatly separated from one another, and from the commercial and cultural centers that would occupy the center of the town. "Town" and not "city" is the operative term here because the Garden City was consciously imagined as an alternative to the city, a solution to urbanization on the model of the English town "with the manor house and its park replaced by a community center, and with some factories hidden behind a screen of trees, to supply work" (18).

While American planners would not accept Howard's Garden City as a real-world blueprint, they would adopt his principles: the thinning out of cities – returning to nature and preventing "unnatural" crowding – and the segregation of their functions. These principles informed the planning of the "Decentrists," Jacobs's term for the planners who reimagined large cities as networks of smaller cities or towns that would resemble Howard's ideal. To be sure, a weaker version of this anti-urbanism had found its way to America sometime before the Decentrists. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was the beginning of the City Beautiful movement, which lacked Howard's emphasis on "nature" but anticipated the segregation of city functions by insisting that civic and cultural functions be housed in grand neo-Renaissance-type buildings set off from more mundane functions and situated amid wide boulevards and sprawling malls. It was the Decentrists, however, who took up the more distinctly anti-urban dimension of Howard's thinking. In cities, Decentrists like Lewis Mumford or Clarence Stein saw nothing but "solidified chaos" or "chaotic accident." In short, the congested, dirty, inefficient city was

no place for people. Indeed, as the Decentrists saw it, "The presence of many other people is, at best, a necessary evil, and good city planning must aim for at least an illusion of isolation and suburbany privacy" (20). In Stein's words, the city is "the summation of the haphazard, antagonistic whims of many self-centered, ill-advised individuals" (21).

But anti-urban city planning reached its fullest expression in the thought of French architect Le Corbusier, who insisted that the Decentrists did not go far enough to ensconce the city in nature. "Nature melts under the invasion of roads and houses and the promised seclusion becomes a crowded settlement…The solution will be found in the 'vertical garden city'" (22). Corbusier's "Radiant City" would consist of an immense green space that would host skyscrapers connected by an elevated roadway. As Corbusier himself put it, "The whole city is a park," with housing, administrative, and cultural functions neatly separated. Moreover, just as Howard would have instituted stringent controls on land use, and the Decentrists rationed commercial space based on neighborhoods' demand for goods, Corbusier rationalized density at 1,200 inhabitants to an acre – an achievable density for a skyscraper city.

These theories would be harmless enough if they amounted to idle if mistaken philosophizing on the nature of cities. But Jacobs's point in rehearsing their history is to highlight their decisive influence on urban planning and policy. "[I]n the schools of planning and architecture, and in Congress, state legislatures and city halls too, the Decentrists' ideas were gradually accepted as basic guides for dealing constructively with big cities themselves" – despite their frankly anti-urban purpose. Cities from New York to St. Louis to Cleveland had been afflicted with City Beautiful monuments that, for

reasons that will become clear, deadened their neighborhoods. Corbusier's ideal of open land punctuated with gleaming, vertiginous towers formed the point of departure for slum clearance.

Little wonder, then, that Jacobs continually confronted the effects or potential effects of efforts to suburbanize cities by spreading them thin and segregating their functions. These form the backbone of the contemporary planning to which Jacobs continually responds in *Death and Life*. Beyond its substance, however, Jacobs's resistance has both methodological and political subtexts. The source of the theorists' misapplication to cities lay in contemporary planners' failure to take cities as they are. Had they done so, the absurdity of the Garden City dynasty would be obvious. As Jacobs says of Howard's ideas, they work in their own terms but make no sense for urban planning. But planners have taken the Garden City and its progeny as the ideal of how cities *ought* to work (8). Against this theoretical approach, Jacobs sets out "to look closely, with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them" (13). In fact, one can get a good sense of the tone – at once prickly and personable – that pervades *Death and Life* in the ironic front-matter notice of "Illustrations": "The scenes that illustrate this book are all about us. For illustrations, please look closely at real cities. While you are looking, you might as well also listen, linger, and think about what you see."

The political dimension of Jacobs's objections comes to the fore in her view that contemporary planning and the theories behind it are "utopian." In considering what a city might be or *ought* to be, rather than what they are and need to succeed on their own

terms, the planners seek to give a city "a pleasing appearance of order, without knowing what sort of innate, functioning order it has." In both the theories and in their application to real-world cities, the lives of cities and their inhabitants are treated like variables plugged into utopian equations that would achieve a certain aesthetic *and* social life. Howard's towns would be "really very nice towns if you were docile and had no plans of your own and did not mind spending your life among others with no plans of their own. As in all Utopias, the right to have plans of any significance belonged only to the planners in charge" (17). For his part, Le Corbusier planned for "a condition of what he called maximum individual liberty, by which he seems to have meant not liberty to do anything much, but liberty from ordinary responsibility. In his Radiant City nobody, presumably, was going to have to be his brother's keeper any more. Nobody was going to have to struggle with plans of his own. Nobody was going to have to be tied down" (22).

At the level of city planning, these theories translated to the imposition of amenities that supposedly make for more humane, enlightened cities – at the expense of the needs of real-life people. Jacobs quotes a tenant of a prominent Corbusier-inspired New York housing project: "Nobody cared what we wanted when they built the place. They threw our houses down and pushed us here and pushed our friends somewhere else. We don't have a place around here to get a cup of coffee or a newspaper even, or borrow fifty cents….But the big men come and look at the grass and say, 'Isn't it wonderful! Now the poor have everything!'" (15).

Jacobs's insistence on direct observation and dealing with real places, then, cannot be understood apart from her aim to vindicate the social lives of cities and their inhabitants. In insisting that planning grapple with cities as the intricate organisms they

are, Jacobs insists that we deal with the places and people we've got, rather than the places and people we might like. But Jacobs's approach does not stand simply for realism over and against the theory-inspired dreaming of the planners; nor simply shades of libertarian populism against the designs of an effete planning class. Jacobs was a realist, and she was on the side of ordinary people. But neither realism nor populism is the end of the story. As we will see, realistic city-functional planning for Jacobs means precisely planning that would facilitate the plans and projects of urban inhabitants, for that is precisely the function of a city.[9] To the extent that contemporary orthodox planning was distinctly anti-urban in theory and practice, Jacobs's insistence that cities be at the center of urban planning is in fact a defense of the city itself as *the* venue of human endeavor, the place that makes possible the plans and projects of its inhabitants and in so doing puts on display the full range of human curiosity, creativity, responsibility, and taste. Indeed, Jacobs gives us a view in which the planning and maintenance of a city – of the place adequate to putting our energies on display – emerges as the architectonic display of those energies.[10]

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[9] It's useful to think of "city-functional" and "humane" as standards that should inform city planning. (Cf., Jacobs's remark that "Le Corbusier really did not have to justify his vision in either humane or city-functional terms," 22.) As Jacobs saw it, planning had to be city-functional if it was going to be humane, since humane planning would be that which makes a city function as the quintessentially human artifact it is. In terms of Jacobs's normative understanding of the city: a city is a city in the fullest sense when functional planning has made it a successful instance of its type – namely, the sort of place that draws out the human capacities at stake.

[10] This suggests the ways in which Jacobs is and is not a libertarian. On one hand, the city itself is an exercise in self-government, by which Jacobs did not simply mean the use of formal democratic government but rather informal organization and management by citizens. On the other hand, Jacobs is no rugged individualist. The whole point, to be developed in what follows, is that the "mutual support" that cities alone facilitate is indispensable. It is instrumentally indispensable to the success of any one individual's plans or ambitions. But the deeper point is that the dynamism of urban life creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts, a whole that is itself a human achievement apart from the individual enterprises it makes possible. It is likewise easy to exaggerate Jacobs's populism. But she was interested in vindicating the interests of ordinary people against urban reformers, at least to the extent that the former, unlike the latter, know from daily experience what cities require.

Jacobs's defense of the city should be understood as the defense of a certain kind of place over against its alternatives. At stake for Jacobs's in her confrontation with orthodox planning was the survival of the city itself, since, as she saw it, planning would result in a new kind of social entity entirely, whether it was called a city or not. In this light, it becomes clear how Jacobs's defense of place is also a refusal to accept the kind of dichotomous thinking about history in which cities as we find them become untenable. If Jacobs would reject frank calls for a "return" to some pre-urban idyll, so too does she reject the post-urban idyll of contemporary planning that also took its bearings from a nostalgic pining for (literally) greener pastures. In confronting contemporary planning, then, Jacobs was also confronting the aura of progressive historical inevitability that surrounded the planners' ideal, whose attributes had been popularized "as the hallmarks of humane, socially responsible, functional, high-mined planning" (22).

This, in turn, suggests the second level on which Jacobs confronted the dominant tradition of urban planning – that is, *as* a tradition and not the application of scientifically objective realities of social life. Whereas the planners presented their ideal as the wave of the future, Jacobs is at pains to point out that that the theories behind urban planning are themselves informed by debatable assumptions about social life. Implicit here is an assertion of the traditioned quality of science. The point is made in Jacobs's discussion of bloodletting, whose history she uses to illustrate the how the weight of inertia -- longtime practice and the prestige of practitioners, in the case of bloodletting -- can reinforce a consensus that is supposedly based on science alone. Thus science is not only informed by political assumptions but can itself become beholden to the force of its longstanding conclusions. This is exactly what Jacobs saw at work in urban planning. "As in the

pseudoscience of bloodletting, just so in the pseudoscience of city rebuilding and planning, years of learning and a plethora of subtle and complicated dogma have arisen on a foundation of nonsense" (13). But the case of bloodletting also illustrates how a once apparently invincible consensus can be reversed. Jacobs aspires to just such a correction of urban planning. "The pseudoscience of city planning and its companion, the art of city design, have not yet broken with the specious comfort of wishes, familiar superstitions, oversimplifications and symbols, and have not yet embarked upon the adventure of probing the real world" (13).

The City: Density and Diversity

So what makes cities succeed *as* cities; what features allow a city to function as the sort of place that will draw out and manifest the full range of human tastes, habits, and curiosities? Jacobs's answer can be summed up in two words: density and diversity. The principle that Jacobs found in attempting to explain the behavior of cities is their ubiquitous "need for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially." This sort of diversity, then, must become the goal of urban planning: "[U]nsuccessful city areas are areas which lack this kind of intricate mutual support…the science of city planning and the art of city design, in real life for real cities, must become the science and art of catalyzing and nourishing these close-grained working relationships" (14).[11] Mutually supportive

[11] It may seem like I've committed Jacobs to a tautology. Asking, "What do cities need in order to put on display the full, that is to say *diverse*, range of human ability?" and answering, "They need diversity" amounts to saying "in order to be diverse, cities need to be diverse." But Jacobs's interest in "working relationships" suggests her emphasis is on *intricate*, *close-grained* diversity that can facilitate mutual support among diverse enterprises. In other words, the social function of a city in putting creativity on

enterprises, understanding the city as a "close-grained" system in which no part can do without the whole, and the diversity that follows, are essential to the development of the unique social order that obtains in cities. Where dominant planning saw the elaborate mixture of uses as a form of chaos, Jacobs saw it as the basis of "a complex and highly developed form of order" (222).

Before considering the urban order it facilitates, more needs to be said about the sort of close-grained diversity that Jacobs seeks. Successful diversity depends on four conditions to which Jacobs returns again and again.

First and foremost, city districts "must serve more than one primary function; preferably more than two. These must insure the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules and are in the place for different purposes, but who are able to use many facilities in common" (150). By "primary function," Jacobs refers to the big, anchoring purposes a neighborhood or district serves: work, lodging, and play: "Office and factories are primary uses. So are dwellings. Certain places of entertainment, education and recreation are primary uses" (161). Perhaps the simplest illustration of the function of primary-use diversity comes in Jacobs's discussion of city parks in Philadelphia. Jacobs itemizes the perimeter of Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square: "an art club with restaurant and galleries, a music school, an Army office building, an apartment house, a club, an old apothecary shop, a Navy office building which used to be a hotel, apartments, a church, a parochial school, apartments, a public-library branch, apartments, a vacant site where town houses have been torn down for prospective apartments, a cultural society, apartments, a vacant site where a town house is planned, another town

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display depends on the diversity of uses found within its limits, but the diversity of uses found depends in turn on a city's ability to facilitate mutual support.

house, apartments" (96). And this perimeter leads immediately into streets of "shops and services of all sorts with old houses or newer apartments above, mingled with a variety of offices." Washington Square, which Jacobs's characterizes as Philadelphia's "pervert park," is by contrast bordered only by "huge office buildings," and the surrounding neighborhood is only sparsely populated. The district surrounding Rittenhouse Square is lively at all hours and the park itself stands to have visitors at diverse hours and for a variety of purposes (lunching, merely traversing, lingering). Washington Square's district, on the other hand, is used only during working hours and the park "is a vacuum most of the day and evening. Into it came what usually fills city vacuums – a form of blight" (97).

It is no accident that the Rittenhouse Square district is so diversely populated and the Washington Square district not. Jacobs's interest in primary-use diversity is that it encourages secondary diversity, "the enterprises that grow in response to the presence of primary uses, to serve the people the primary uses draw" (162). This pattern points to a distinction that is important for understanding Jacobs's ends. Secondary diversity is the lifeblood of cities, and Jacobs's goal is the cultivation of supportive city environments, understood as settings that facilitate symbiotic relationships. Such symbiosis begins with the *right* mixture of primary uses. When primary uses complement each other by drawing people into a district throughout the day, they in turn cultivate the area to support secondary diversity. Jacobs's discussion of struggling Lower Manhattan illustrates the point. A district "embracing Wall Street, the adjoining law and insurance complexes, the city's municipal offices, some federal and state offices, groups of docks and shipping offices, and a number of other work complexes" is diverse, to be sure. But it totally lacks

primary-use diversity, and, as a result, can support only a relatively small number of secondary enterprises, all of which must exploit "the midday mob operation" – i.e., the lunch crowd – "to the hilt" (155). Beyond such businesses, "other retail services can and do manage by keeping their overhead abnormally low." This is how "most of the interesting and civilized and unusual places" have survived, and why they inhabit "singularly decrepit and decaying lodgings" (156).

Again, the problem will not be solved by introducing greater diversity simply, without considering how it might work symbiotically. Proposals to "fix" Lower Manhattan included new residential properties and, incredibly, efforts to bring in still more work uses. As Jacobs points out, the plans would have made residents a meager one percent of the daytime population – and impossibly small number to support secondary diversity. But even if residences were built at the highest densities the district could support, there still would not be enough residents. "The daytime use of the district is so intensive that residents, even at the highest densities possible, would always be ineffectually small in their proportionate numbers, and would preempt territories of a size utterly disproportionate to the economic contribution they could render here" (157). In other words, even the maximum number of residents the district could support would not be enough, above and beyond the existing daytime population, to support much by way of new secondary diversity; the workers would remain the only viable market for secondary enterprises. Moreover, even the most land-efficient residential properties would rob potential secondary enterprises of the real estate they need to flourish.

The point here is that Jacobs does not endorse just any combination of primary uses; rather, diversity must be tailored to the needs of a given district if it is to function

symbiotically. In Lower Manhattan, residence is incapable of complementing work as a primary use of the district. What would? Jacobs suggests tourism as a more realistic complementary primary use. She imagines new uses that would bring visitors outside the workday, such as a marine museum, terminals for pleasure voyages in the harbor, and a new aquarium. Such attractions would reasonably diversify the district's primary uses in light of the inevitable concentration of daytime users. They would also avoid the destruction or replacement of the very spaces that secondary enterprises require. They would also make use of the district's dramatic waterfront. Such a combination would make the district ripe for secondary diversity. As Jacobs writes, "If new sea-food restaurants and much else would not start up nearby, I will eat my lobster tail" (159).

Alongside suitably mixed primary uses, Jacobs posits three physical conditions for achieving diversity in city districts: small blocks; a mixture of old and new buildings; and a dense, concentrated population. Small blocks facilitate diversity because secondary enterprises must draw their clientele from as wide a radius as possible. Streets must invite exploration and allow easy access between blocks if they are to be cross-used by different groups of primary users. Long-blocks do just the opposite. A limited number of cross-streets means fewer points of convergence among pedestrians' paths. Most streets are segregated according to use, and viable pools of economic use, where pedestrians converge into a single stream, are limited to the cross streets that do exist. In the long blocks of the Upper West Side, users are forced to walk down, say, West Eighty-eighth or Eighty-ninth to Columbus Avenue, which then holds a monopoly on viable street frontage. And because viable frontage is so scarce, stores must be standardized and consolidated, giving Columbus Avenue its own kind of monotony. Jacobs urges shorter

blocks to allow for a greater diffusion of secondary enterprises that could thrive on new cross streets. These new cross streets would in turn also allow users easy access between their regular destination in the neighborhood (be it home or work) and secondary enterprises, as well as between secondary enterprises themselves. Thus short blocks complement the mixture of primary uses by putting different users on the same convenient paths at different times of day, fostering a diffuse and continuous pool of use for neighborhood businesses. They also promote a symbiosis between businesses, not only in convenience, but also since success breeds success and viable enterprises can reinforce once another's success. The whole situation uses "the potential advantages that cities offer to incubation, experimentation, and many small or special enterprises, insofar as these depend upon drawing their customers or clients from among much larger cross-sections of the passing public."

The final two ingredients of diversity provide for variety in a city's buildings, which in turn allows for greater diversity in secondary enterprises. As noted, Jacobs promotes a mixture of new and old buildings. Old buildings provide space for fledgling enterprises that cannot afford the higher overhead of newer buildings, as well as for "ordinary enterprises…appreciated for their convenience and personal quality" that "are inexorably slain by the high overhead of new construction" (188). Of course, no neighborhood should "age unremittingly." Uniformly aged buildings make for worn out neighborhoods and prevent the healthy mixture of "high-yield, middling-yield, low-yield and no-yield enterprises" that Jacobs seeks. That said, new construction will not save an aging neighborhood. The neighborhood is not failing because it's aged, it's aged because it's failing – for lack of one or another component of success that would attract new

construction, maintain successful businesses, or bolster existing enterprises such that they could undertake new construction. One of those components is a high concentration of people, the final requirement for diversity. The contribution of high population densities to diversity is fairly straightforward. More people put in play more needs, tastes, interests, and resources to foster and underwrite new enterprises.

The key to achieving a high concentration of people in a given district is a high density of occupied land use. This principle highlights how Jacobs's four conditions of diversity work in tandem. As we've seen, any primary use must make intensive use of an area's physical space – hence the unsuitability of residence in lower Manhattan (cf., 201). Primary users who take up more space than they "earn" in their economic impact can't contribute to secondary diversity, and may in fact undermine it by taking real estate that secondary enterprises would otherwise use. High-density land use is also necessary to maintaining or introducing a variety of buildings, which might house a variety of enterprises. When too little land is available for development, buildings must be standardized to accommodate a suitable concentration of people, usually in the form of high-rise apartments that use what little space is available most efficiently. Intensive land use also tells in favor of maintaining old structures and permits a greater diversity of structures as new construction can grow up around rather than replace existing buildings. Finally, the diffuse pools of use that short blocks make possible depend equally on a concentration of users and intense use of street frontage. At the same time, short blocks also make concentration more appealing by breaking up ground coverage that can become oppressive when it's uninterrupted for long stretches. The point is not merely to "relieve" high ground coverages – streets, given their economic potential, are far better

interruptions than dead green spaces or empty lots. Indeed, the effect of Jacobs's requirements taken together is to create something "totally different" from what would result under orthodox planning. As Jacobs writes, the satisfaction of each requirement "contributes in its own distinctive and indispensable way, to the diversity and vitality of an area, so that something constructive, instead of merely inert, can result from the high densities" (218).

These requirements of diversity form the basis of Jacobs's counter-tradition of urban planning. Again and again in her discussions, Jacobs positions her proposals opposite those of the dominant orthodoxy – the failure to bring new groups of users to lower Manhattan, the insistence that frequent streets are wasteful and inefficient, and the reflexive resistance to dense populations that takes no account of dwellings per acre, of whether populations are overcrowded or merely concentrated.

As we've seen, the dominant tradition had two aspects: a technical aspect of urban planning itself and the social theories in which those techniques are grounded. It's possible to think of her requirements for diversity as forming the technical dimension of Jacobs's counter-tradition, but they are likewise grounded by a more foundational defense of the city. Jacobs's ideas for planning would create an effect in cities wholly different from that of the dominant planning because the work of contemporary planning is not really for *cities*, drawing as it does on theories that are explicitly anti-urban. While contemporary planning, wittingly or not, effectuates some idealized social entity other than the city, Jacob's plans are meant to bring into being the unique social entity that is the city, to foster the unique social order that obtains in successful cities.

The Urban Social Order

The most basic illustration of the urban social order at work is Jacobs's account of city safety. Here we see firsthand Jacobs's concern with the city as a unique social entity with its own challenges, but also its own set of advantages for confronting those challenges – provided the presence of close-grained diversity. "Great cities…differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definition, full of strangers" (30). This poses a unique challenge for social control. "In settlements that are smaller and simpler than big cities, controls on acceptable public behavior, if not crime, seem to operate with greater or lesser success through a web of reputation, gossip, approval, disapproval and sanctions, all of which are powerful if people know each other and word travels." Because they are full of strangers, cities "have to operate by more direct, straightforward methods" (35). Key to cities' self-management of safety are well used city sidewalks, and well used sidewalks require the kind of diversity Jacobs champions.

A safe street is a street that is watched, which in turn requires that the street be used – not by vehicular traffic, but by pedestrians. A diverse array of secondary enterprises is necessary to bring and keep people on city sidewalks. Stores, bars, restaurants and other public places give people concrete reasons to use sidewalks. They also foster foot traffic past places that are not otherwise used, preventing the onset of localized vacuums. Because this rule applies only within a limited geographic range – people will not walk on endlessly to reach their destination – enterprises must be plentiful. This requirement, along with the more general fact that safety relies on *sidewalks*, implies tight densities and intensive land use. Secondary diversity also

populates a city district with a corps of "storekeepers and other small businessmen" who "are typically strong proponents of peace and order themselves…" (37). Finally, and maybe most significantly, the activity created by local businesses is itself an attraction.

This last point is central to Jacobs's understanding of urban social life. "[T]hat the sight of people attracts still other people, is something that city planners and city architectural designers seem to find incomprehensible" (37). For their part, the planners "have long observed city people loitering on busy corners, hanging around in candy stores and bars and drinking soda pop on stoops, and have passed a judgment, the gist of which is this: 'This is deplorable! If these people had decent homes and a more private or bosky outdoor place, they wouldn't be on the street!'" (55). But facilitating the interest people take in one another is one of the city's great advantages, especially because -- not to put too fine a point on it -- that interest goes only so far. "A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact…" (59). What planners substitute for this is what Jacobs calls "togetherness," a "fittingly nauseating name" for the ideal that "if anything is shared among people, much should be shared." It is a suburban spiritual resource but destructive in cities. Jacobs recounts the experience of a friend in a suburban neighborhood in Baltimore where mothers and children using a local park must stop at neighbors' houses to warm up in winter, make phone calls or use the bathroom. "Their hostesses offer them coffee, for there is no other place to get coffee, and naturally considerable social life of this kind has arisen around the park. Much is shared" (63).

One can imagine less dated examples. Suburban togetherness plays out whenever common life is centered on shared planned activities – families come to know one another through their churches or children's schools or sports teams. And the intimacy possible within these small groups is considerably greater than that on offer in the unplanned but regular contact on a city street populated with primary diversity. Encounters here are invariably public and "by-the-way," incidental to the regular to and fro of city life: catching a bus, stopping for groceries, walking home from work. Contact of this sort is immersed in the public life of the street, where intimacy would be difficult, unwelcome or both. "Under such a system it is possible to know all kinds of people without unwelcome entanglements," while the wide array of users makes it "possible to be on excellent sidewalk terms with people who are very different from oneself, and even, as time passes, on familiar public terms with them" (62).

Lively sidewalks are the basis of city social life, and that social life is the basis of city safety. Lively sidewalks are anchored by conscientious business owners and a concentration of users puts "eyes on the street." In short, the public life of the city street offers both surveillance and accountability that is impossible in open expanses of green space or project courtyards. This relates to a second benefit of city sidewalks, namely the productive space they allow for "the unspecialized play" of children. This may seem like an odd issue for urban theory. But the "delinquent problem" was very much salient in Jacobs's New York. The answer to gang violence offered by urban design was invariably a larger number of parks and playgrounds. Of course, if Jacobs is right, such spaces can only introduce counter-productive urban vacuums (cf., 75-76). Residential courtyards or enclaves closed off from the street are likewise unhelpful. Such spaces divert energy from

the street as buildings are turned inward; the eyes that are put on the courtyard are not on the street. But the street still must handle the usual population of strangers, and children must eventually leave the enclaves for streets they don't understand and which lack the assets for safety (80).

But there is a deeper issue at stake in Jacobs's discussions of sidewalks that emerges from the attention she gives to children's play. Beyond sapping streets and sidewalks of their ability to provide safety, enclaves and courtyards are simply not as much *fun*. Such places may be suitable for "Little tots" who are "decorative and relatively docile, but older children are noisy and energetic, and they act on their environment instead of just letting it act on them" (80). This is why such places are reserved for young children: "the environment is already perfect" and should not be disrupted by the adventurous, spontaneous play of older children. Sidewalks, by contrast, offer a space for unspecialized play, "an unspecialized outdoor home base from which to play, to hang around it, and to help form their notions of the world" (81). In this setting children become features of the organic day-to-day life of the city. When children are not set apart physically or socially from adults they become members of city society. Adults supervise the unspecialized play of sidewalks, but do so "in the course of carrying on their other pursuits" (82). When their play must coincide with the ongoing business and comings and goings of adults, children are incorporated into the life of the city. More to the point, as adults supervise their play as a feature of the larger ecosystem of the street, rather than an activity set apart unto itself, children are assimilated to the hallmark of urban social life: cooperative self-management. When their play is supervised by, or they are corrected by, neighborhood personages with whom they have only "street propinquity," children see

those adults taking responsibility for people to whom they have no formal responsibility, in order to be good managers of the street. Children learn indirectly the "first fundamental of successful city life: People must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other" (82).

Her discussion of play encapsulates Jacobs's larger battle with the planners. The courtyard playpen that is suitable for "docile" children, a controlled environment that cannot be disrupted, is, writ small, the city of planners' imagination (which, we've seen Jacobs say, are ideal for those who are "docile" and have "no plans of their own"). In contrast, the city street where children can exercise their independence and spontaneity within the organic supervision of a society – and thereby learn norms of public responsibility – stands as an embodiment of the social forces that cities are meant to let play.

Jacobs's concern with diversity appears to be primarily economic. And indeed Jacobs does often argue as an economist. But her interest in diverse uses of city streets is rooted in Jacobs's defense of the social life of the city. At work in the diverse, successful city street is an intricate system of collective self-responsibility that both reflects and furthers human initiative. Neighborhoods must be thought of as the basic units of that system. "We shall have something solid to chew on if we think of city neighborhoods as mundane organs of self-government. Our failures with city neighborhoods are, ultimately, failures in localized self-government. And our successes are successes in localized self-government" – where "self-government" is understood broadly to include both the formal and informal mechanisms of social control and management of common projects (114).

As far as some purposes go, the operative unit of coordination will be what Jacobs calls a neighborhood of the city as a whole: “The neighborhood of the entire city is where people especially interested in theater or in music or in arts find one another and get together, no matter where they may live. This is where people immersed in specific professions or businesses or concerned about particular problems exchange ideas and sometimes start action” (116).

At the other extreme, there are street neighborhoods that, as we’ve seen, exercise self-government through casual surveillance and the social regulation inherent in public life, especially among neighbors. It’s important to appreciate that what Jacobs calls “the street” is not a single street or block, but networks of street neighborhoods that come together to form something like small wards. Residents of each individual street may or may not know residents of other streets as well as they know neighbors in closer proximity, but they are at least familiar with bordering streets. Each street exists on its own, but not in isolation, and well integrated neighborhoods have a greater pool of primary and secondary diversity on which to draw, bettering the odds of a safe and robust public life.

In addition to their routine functions of self-government, however, street neighborhoods must have the ability to “draw effectively on help when trouble comes along that is too big for the street to handle” (119). Here Jacobs has in mind a third, intermediate division of neighborhood: the city district. If street neighborhoods are networks of blocks, districts are networks of neighborhoods, comprising something on the order of 100,000 residents. “The chief function of a successful district is to mediate between the indispensable, but inherently politically powerless, street neighborhoods, and

the inherently powerful city as a whole. In the most straightforward use of a district, it is a larger unit of the city that identifies – and is identified by elected officials – with its particular neighborhoods and the issues they face. The district is aligned with neighborhoods and, on account of the votes or other civic resources it can muster, brings city policy to bear on the issues of a given neighborhood. The district does not always act relative the larger city outside. It also takes a district to confront a problem like credit blacklisting, the banking practice of excluding certain areas of a city from credit, for housing or other purposes, on the theory that the area is or is becoming a slum. The handling of credit blacklisting in Chicago's Back-of-the-Yards district offers an important illustration of district-level self-government. There, residents formed a district council led in part by Saul Alinsky. The council conducted a survey of residents' bank accounts and facilitated an agreement among residents and businesses that they would withdraw their deposits if the district continued to be blacklisted. Representatives of the banks were invited to a council meeting where "comments were dropped" about "the extent of their deposits… the difficulty of understanding why investment of savings by city dwellers seemed so little available for use in cities" (299). The district was removed from the blacklist in short order.

The first step toward leveraging the city's natural capacity for self-government is lively streets that enjoy the conditions of diversity. The next step, however, is planning that maximizes the permeability of urban space and social interaction. What Jacobs has in mind here is physical planning that maximizes the fluidity and openness of the city, allowing coordination among citizens for common purposes. This underscores the importance of small blocks. Frequent streets must be complemented by planning that

avoids situating parks, squares, or large public buildings as barriers between neighborhoods or districts. The idea is to foster a functional identity of areas suitably large to work as districts (129). The last point is crucial for the success of districts. People will identify with a district, not as an abstract name, but to the extent they actually use it and the district harbors a public life of its own. If a district successfully acquires a functional identity, there is a basis to start thinking of the district, in Jacobs's own formulation, as "a Thing." As "a Thing," the district works through cross-link relationships that arise from common use and from local leaders' recognition of the district's functional identity. Once the leaders of neighborhood associations like PTAs, social clubs, neighborhood watches and the like see the district as a functional entity unto itself, with its own interests, they are able to "enlarge their local public life beyond the neighborhoods of streets and specific organizations or institutions and form relationships with people whose roots and backgrounds are in entirely different constituencies, so to speak" (134; cf., 57-8). Once such "hop-and-skip" relationships are formed, they can be called upon when local neighborhood organizations need to coordinate efforts on behalf of the district, as when fifty-two organizations in East Harlem "participated in a 1960 pressure meeting to tell the Mayor and fourteen of his commissioners what the district wants" (135).

The real importance of planning, then, is in realizing the city's potential for self-government. Indeed, all the factors of diversity are doubly important. If diversity is the basis of intra-district cross use, it also makes for the lively, stable neighborhoods that retain residents. Long-term residence is crucial to the development of the sort of hop-skip district networks that Jacobs envisions. All of this is possible only if cities are designed

with their natural capacity for self-government in mind. But it would come to the same thing if planners planned for real people rather than abstractions. “Neighborhood planning units that are significantly defined only by their fabric and the life and intricate cross-use they generate, rather by formalistic boundaries, are of course at odds with orthodox planning conceptions. The difference is the difference between dealing with living, complex organisms, capable of shaping their own destinies, and dealing with fixed and inert settlements, capable merely of custodial care (if that) of what has been bestowed upon them” (132). When artificial barriers are not imposed, areas are defined organically through their everyday use and by residents’ common identification of an area’s functional identity. Likewise, planning that took seriously the need for a stable population would be planning that recognized that residents are not interchangeable. “Real people are unique, they invest years of their lives in significant relationships with other unique people…Severed from their relationships, they are destroyed as effective social beings” who go about building the networks crucial to the city’s brand of self-government (136). Indeed, the imperative for diverse, lively streets is that much greater because a neighborhood must compete with all sorts of centrifugal pressures to which real people are subject. “Over intervals of time, many people change their jobs and the locations of their jobs, shift or enlarge their outside friendships and interests, change their family sizes, change their incomes up or down, even change many of their tastes. In short, they live rather than just exist.” Diversified districts accommodate these and other changes, allowing, in fact encouraging, residents to stay put despite the changes in their lives.

"The point of cities"

It is important to see that what goes for neighborhoods and districts must also go for the city as a whole. The neighborhoods of the street, district, and whole city are functionally distinct: the street does things that the district does not; the district handles things the street cannot. But the pattern of economic and social mutual support that Jacobs seeks depends on physical continuity between parts of the city. Cities that maintain a fluidity of use allow residents to stay in their neighborhoods because of the ease they experience in navigating the city and using assets that they might not have needed before. At the same time, neighborhoods and districts should be not only internally diverse but also different from one another. This makes a given area attractive to economically stimulating outsiders and in general gives residents of one area reasons to visit other areas. Inter-district cross traffic, in turn, contributes the vitality and staying power of each neighborhood and district. Fluid cities that are easily traversed and where people have reasons to leave their immediate locales thereby contribute to the conditions of self-government that Jacobs seeks.

Yet there is something more at stake in the fluidity of cities beyond economic vitality, staying power, and the intricate conditions of urban self-government. Implicit in the fluid city, in the easy flow of neighborhoods and districts, is the idea that cities put a wide array of experiences within reach. "[C]ity people are mobile. They can and do pick and choose from the entire city (and beyond) for everything from a job, a dentist, recreation, or friends, to shops, entertainment, or even in some case their children's schools. City people…are not stuck with the provincialism of a neighborhood, and why should they be? Isn't wide choice and rich opportunity the point of cities?" (116).

We're now in a position to see how Jacobs's rejection of orthodox planning is in fact a rejection of a certain way of life it tried to make possible, and how her acceptance of and planning for cities is an endorsement of a certain political culture and overall bearing in the world that they make possible.

In all its various techniques of "unbuilding" – introducing expanses of open space, segregating uses, sorting and separating neighborhoods – conventional planning looked not only to newly imagined physical space but, implicitly or not, to a new social reality as well (cf. 408). We've seen what they had in mind: urban residents whose lives are fairly predictable, who will live in one district, work in a second, and play in another; whose common life is centered on select mega-centers of commerce or entertainment; whose neighborhoods are deemed successful or unsuccessful by outside powers parceled out according to impossibly procrustean zoning principles (cf., 237). Again and again, we've seen Jacobs confront the social assumptions behind orthodox planning. These are Howard's docile citizens with no plans of their own (17). "Paternalist" planners are "utopian minders of other people's leisure" (193n, 271; 57).

We have also seen how Jacobs counters this vision with one in which the city emerges as a vast project in self-government. This line of criticism colors Jacobs something of a libertarian. Yet her position cannot be reduced to libertarian resistance to centralized planning in the name of the rugged individual. Fundamental to her downright Tocquevillian interest in self-government subsidiarity is a kind of fascination with the possibilities of collective human endeavor. The city rightly understood is *the* collective human endeavor insofar as the mutual support it fosters allows not only self-management of the streets but also the flourishing of all manner of creative undertakings, collective

and individual. In this respect, the design and administration of cities that actually function as collective endeavors is the architectonic display of the capacity for collective enterprise; the planning of cities is the foundational collective undertaking essential to the development of systems of mutual support.

It is telling, then, that Jacobs resisted "docile" citizens. She was interested above all else in people and the "bees in their bonnets." "The diversity, of whatever kind, that is generated by cities rests on the fact that in cities so many people are so close together, and among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets" (147). It's no exaggeration to say that Jacobs's interest in all things human is the basis of her interest in cities, since the whole point of cities as mechanisms of mutual support that leverage the collective weight of differing needs, interests, ambitions, and tastes is to expand the horizon of what is possible. Smaller places can support one or two varieties of a given enterprise. "Cities, however, are the natural homes of supermarkets and standard movie houses *plus* delicatessens, Viennese bakeries, foreign groceries, art movies, and so on, all of which can be found coexisting, the standard with the strange, the large with the small" (146-47). This diversity is definitive. Planners are wrong to look for a single spring that makes cities tick. "No single element in a city is, in truth, the kingpin or the key. The mixture itself is kingpin, and its mutual support is the order" (376). Better than trying to reduce cities to a set of physical or social phenomena is to let a thousand flowers bloom. "Where diversity is generated…where there are opportunity and welcome for many people's plans and tastes, eye-catchers…always turn up, and they are more surprising, various and interesting than anyone, aiming primarily at city design, could deliberately plan. Truth is stranger than fiction" (388).

Diverse cities are human cities. “Genuine differences in the city architectural scene express, as [architect David] Raskin says so excellently, ‘…the interweaving of *human* patterns. They are full of people doing different things, with different reasons and different ends in view, and the architecture reflects and expresses this difference – which is one of content rather than form alone’” (229). As we have seen diverse, vital cities can function to retain people who “live rather than just exist”; they are successful as ongoing efforts to respond to “human needs” (195). The possibilities for variation and self-organization in cities “grow in our cities like leaves on the trees, and in their own way are just as awesome a manifestation of the persistence and doggedness of life” (134).

In their diversity, cities accommodate people’s basic needs, but urban diversity is also a good in itself. Lest it be thought that Jacobs would resist such a philosophic gloss, her authority on this point is no less than the theologian Paul Tillich. “By its nature, the metropolis provides what otherwise could be given only by traveling; namely, the strange. Since the strange leads to questions and undermines familiar tradition, it serves to elevate reason to ultimate significance” (238). Of course, Jacobs knew that this idea didn’t require formal expression; it is what the city teaches everyday. “Kate Simon, author of *New York Places and Pleasures*, is saying much the same thing when she suggests, ‘Take children to Grant’s [restaurant]…they may bump into people whose like they may never see elsewhere and may possibly never forget” (238).

An Urban Arcadia

Thus far we have surveyed what Jacobs believes is necessary, from a purely practical point of view, if cities are to achieve diversity. We have also surveyed why

diversity is so important: the political and social goods that flow from diversity and whose realization is the purpose of cities. These goods depend on diversity, so the conditions of diversity are in fact what cities require to fulfill their purpose, to succeed *as* cities. But the dominant planning is a failure only to the extent that the city really should be a capital of diversity and bazaar of the human experience. If the empirical task of *Death and Life* is to show the failure of dominant planning, the more basic task is to correct the standard of success and failure, to convince us that the city's purpose is what Jacobs says it is.

Planning flows from, and succeeds or fails, in terms of broader assumptions concerning what a city is. "First comes the image of what we want, then the machinery is adapted to turn out that image" (313). The dominant planning, Jacobs concedes, is internally consistent and operates on a logic of its own. "One seemingly logical step is taken after another, each step plausible and apparently defensible in itself…"(355). For example, "Behind the use of mortgage and building money is, to be sure, concern about the profit factor…But in addition, behind the use of this money stand more abstract ideas about cities themselves" (295).

To examine these "abstract ideas" and pair them against Jacobs's own is to arrive at her most basic disagreement with the planners. We have seen that the dominant planning of Jacobs's day was influenced overwhelmingly by anti-urban ideas and an idealization of what can only be called the pastoral. Lending practices that privileged suburban models of growth "originated with high-minded social thinkers." Herbert Hoover opened the first White House Conference on Housing "with a polemic against the moral inferiority of cities and a panegyric on the moral virtues of simple cottages, small

towns and grass" (310). This return to the pastoral inflected all contemporary planning, with its emphasis on low ground coverage and what can be described only as efforts to paper over the city with green space or monumental buildings. This is no surprise given the explicit commitments of Ebenezer Howard, whose Garden city served as the Ur-template for the planners Jacobs confronted. The Garden City, with its carefully parceled districts and administered economy, was meant to address the loss of the English village. "How to stem the drift from the country is one of the main problems of the day…The laborer may perhaps be restored to the land, but how will the country industries be restored to rural England?" (289).

At one level, then, the abstract ideas behind the planning Jacobs resisted were informed by "nostalgic yearnings for a bygone simpler life" (342; cf., 114). Yet the dominant planning had a certain back-to-the-future quality that comes into view when we consider Jacobs's claim that "modern city planning has been burdened from its beginnings with the unsuitable aim of converting cities into disciplined works of art" (375).

In some societies, Jacobs argues, "either hard necessity or tradition and custom can enforce on everyone a disciplined selectivity of purposes and materials, a discipline by consensus on what those materials demand of their organizers, and a disciplined control over the forms thereby created." In other words, some societies function – in terms of industry, architecture, organization of physical space – according to the principles of an artistic discipline. "Such societies can produce villages, and maybe even their own kind of cities, which look to us like works of art in their physical totality" (373). These societies, Jacobs contends, represented an ideal for nineteenth-century

Utopians, among whom she counts the Garden City movement and its progeny. The hope for a society of harmonious, cooperative artisans thus formed a variation on Howard's original, more authoritarian design for centralized planning and economic administration. Nostalgics that they were, the planners hoped for works of art that would be informed by ideals of "natural" simplicity and rustic industry. Lewis Mumford, for example, envisioned that his planned communities would feature group crafts like basket weaving, pottery making, and blacksmithing" (374).

Such plans would take cities back to the future by imparting the (supposed) feel of the past to the city: but not to cities as they exist; the whole problem, on the planners' theory, is that the city has never been a place to get in touch with nature or to foster organic harmonies. The pastoral, an idea of what the past was like *somewhere*, must therefore be transplanted to the city of the future. It bears highlighting here how the two distinct abstract ideas behind the dominant planning come together: the likes of Howard, Le Corbusier, and Mumford preferred the pastoral on aesthetic as well as social and political grounds. They looked to the pastoral as the embodiment of a simpler life and of a social order that they identified with a more verdant, rural past.

Jacobs challenges the whole premise that the past, more rural to be sure, thereby stands for organic harmonious community to which we should aspire. To be sure, she assumes the patronizing modern view of the countryside as a simpler place. But one can pine for simplicity or celebrate its passing. For her part, Jacobs sees in the country not quaint community but a society "bound by tradition, ridden by caste, fettered by superstitions, riddled by suspicion and foreboding of whatever is strange" (444).

More broadly, the romantic notions on which the planners played amount to a "sentimentalization of nature" possible only because nature in all its ferocity could be forgotten: "Owing to the mediation of cities, it became popularly possible to regard 'nature' as benign, ennobling and pure…" (ibid.).[12] In this imagining, cities, of course, stood for the un-, indeed, anti-natural. But there was no escaping that the romantic view of nature and pastoral culture was a put-on, possible only from the standpoint of civilization. "Most sentimental ideas imply, at bottom, a deep if unacknowledged disrespect." This disrespect registered in the irony of lost farmland, decimated forests, and polluted air, all "required in this great national effort to cozy up with a fictionalized nature and flee the 'unnaturalness' of the city" (445). But it also registered in the very idea that suburbs or suburbanized cities amounted to anything more than a fictionalized nature. The "nature" the planners would offer is the creation of "a sentimental desire to toy, rather patronizingly, with some insipid, standardized, suburbanized shadow of nature…" (ibid.).

Far from a return to nature, modern planning is the ultimate artifice. It is not a restoration of what once was, but instead the imposition of a new aesthetic and social life on cities. Moreover, it is a recreation that requires degrading the environment, as the countryside is "dotted with suburbanites who have killed the thing they thought they came to find" (ibid.).

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[12] The work of Frederick Law Olmsted exemplifies this tendency. Influenced by eighteenth century romantics, Olmsted believed that natural scenery could work "by an unconscious process to produce relaxing and 'unbending' of faculties made tense by the strain noise and artificial surroundings of urban life." See Charles E. Beveridge, "Olmsted – His Essential Theory," *Nineteenth Century* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 32-37.

Yet Jacobs's critique goes deeper. Jacobs resists that flora and fauna should define the whole of what is natural. The whole idea that the city must be supplemented with idyllic trappings stems from "sheer disbelief that we and our cities, just by virtue of being, are a legitimate part of nature too…" (ibid.).

This is where Jacobs's goal of changing our basic ideas about cities must begin, with dissolving the usual dichotomy between "nature" and our creations. "Human beings are, of course part of nature, as much so as grizzly bears or whales or sorghum cane. The cities of human beings are as natural, being a product of nature, as are the colonies of prairie dogs or the beds of oysters" (443-44). The city rivals any work of art by consensus, not because it is a work of art, but because it achieves something remarkable when it is left to its own devices to grow as "nature" intended, into a system of mutual support, one that allows its inhabitants to be as they are naturally. "What we have to express in expressing our cities is not to be scorned. Their intricate order – a manifestation of the freedom of countless numbers of people to make and carry out countless plans – is in many ways a great wonder" (391).

Jacobs may sound all-too-progressive in her depiction of a benighted rural past. Yet her rejection of the countryside and what it (supposedly) represents is not complemented by an equal and opposite allegiance to the future, so often represented by the city. The whole thrust of her resistance was that the planners styled themselves as the party of the future and aimed to bring the city along into a new age of civilization. Her objection is precisely that the city as it always lived and breathed is a casualty in the quest for a neater, more standardized efficient future that answers to a false dichotomy between the natural and the man-made. At the root of her admiration for the city, and of

her view that it should be planned for diversity, is an acceptance of what *is*, the here and now, as opposed to the imposition of abstract aesthetic or social categories on reality or seeing the present only in terms of some hoped-for future. "Howard wanted to freeze power, people, and the uses and increments of money into an easily manageable and static pattern" (289). Jacobs's position, by contrast, was a fundamental acceptance of dynamism and an openness to the uncertain paths it forges. "For all our conformity, we are too adventurous, inquisitive, egoistic and competitive to be a harmonious society of artists by consensus…" So much the better, from Jacobs's point of view. These are the features of human societies that make them attractive for other humans. And they are the features that find their fullest expression in cities. "When we deal with cities we are dealing with life at its most complex and intense" (372).

A New Paradigm

This openness -- what can only be called her openness to life -- is the basis of Jacobs's attachment to self-organization and, ultimately, the basis on which she advances forms of planning that would allow self-organization and diversity to flourish. These ideas form the substance of Jacobs's confrontation with the dominant schools of planning. Yet alongside the substance of her counter-tradition is a kind of meta-debate with the planners. The contours of this debate begin to emerge when we consider Jacobs's resistance to the planners' self-appointment as the party of the future. We've seen that this resistance makes Jacobs something of an anti-progressive in the sense that she refused to conceive of the city in terms of what it might be in a future world, or as some project in a greater utopian remaking of the world. But there is a second sense in

which her resistance to the planning of the future makes her an anti-progressive. The planners claimed to be the party of the future because they believed they were applying the latest science of urban planning. Jacobs's intention in highlighting the abstract ideas behind the dominant planning is to expose how contemporary planning is in fact underwritten by its own history and cultural assumptions – the intersection with romantic notions of nature, admiration for the static social world associated with the pastoral, etc. If an article of the progressive creed is the linear advance of science, then it is part of Jacobs's anti-progressive stance to instead historicize science, including the science of urban planning.

To this end, Jacobs cites a 1958 report of the Rockefeller Foundation to argue that science has passed through three distinct stages of development, each defined by the kind of problem scientific thought was equipped to confront. The first modes of scientific thought were concerned with "problems of simplicity." During this period science developed experimental and analytical techniques for dealing with problems in which one quantity depends primarily on a second quantity – as in the relationship between the volume and pressure of a gas. By the nineteenth century, with the progress of statistical modeling of probability, science developed means of confronting "problems of disorganized complexity." While the nineteenth century might have been able analyze and predict the movement of one or two billiard balls on a table, twentieth century theorists developed techniques that would allow them to map and predict phenomena that looked more like the movement of billions of billiard balls: the behavior of atoms, astronomical movements, laws of hereditary and thermodynamics. More recently, however, science has recognized a third set of problems. Typical of the life sciences,

these problems had a far greater number of variables than problems of simplicity, but far fewer than problems of disorganized complexity. More importantly, the variables in these problems were fundamentally interrelated. The behavior of scores independent variables formed "systems" of disorganized complexity only by analogy, from a bird's-eye view. The variables affect one another only incidentally, as a matter of probability. This new set of problems, however, had variables that necessarily acted on another and therefore had to be understood as problems in "organized complexity": "What makes an evening primrose open when it does? Why does salt water fail to satisfy thirst?...What is the description of aging in biochemical terms?" (432).

Cities are problems in organized complexity. There is no master principle that can be applied to map the behavior of all the city's disparate parts. The city has disparate elements that can be studied apart from one another but that ultimately function together, as "an organic whole." We've seen that this is exactly how Jacobs has confronted cities, in her insistence that the conditions of diversity are mutually supportive and must co-exist but also more broadly in her resistance to formulas and kingpins: "the mixture itself is the kingpin."

For their part, "The theorists of conventional modern city planning have consistently mistaken cities as problems of simplicity and disorganized complexity." Howard and his successors imagined the city as a two-variable system in which one seeks the right ratio of one variable, such as green space, to another, like population. Le Corbusier's Radiant City "assumed the statistical reordering of a system of disorganized complexity" – a rationalized allocation of people and land in order to create the city-as-park (436). Thus urban design aped the techniques of the natural sciences. What is

important here, though, is that both their plans and their larger modes of thinking -- the kind of problem they conceived cities to be -- were informed by their cultural and social assumptions concerning what a city should be. They were informed by the assumption that cities had to be something other than what they were; cities were not confronted as they were, but instead as vehicles to, microcosms of a better social future. And it was these imaginary, future cities that fit the confines of problems of simplicity or disorganized complexity. Misapplications of techniques suited to problems of simplicity or disorganized complexity "could hardly have occurred, and certainly would not have been perpetuated as they have been, without great disrespect for the subject matter itself – cities" (435).

To the extent that planning makes sense only in light of prior abstract ideas about what cities are for, it follows a pattern found throughout the sciences. This is almost putting it too technically. To the extent that science proceeds within a paradigm, it displays a more fundamental fact about our engagement with the world, a point Jacobs illustrates with characteristic wit: "A friend of mine reached the age of eighteen believing that babies were born through their mothers' navels. She got the idea as a small child, and whatever she heard from then on, she modified and embroidered into her initial mistake…The more she learned, the more support, therefore she seemed to have for her notion. She was exercising, somewhat bizarrely, one of the most universal, ingenious, and distressing of human talents" (322). And those paradigms are not rooted exclusively in objective facts. "[R]eason does not rule this world, and it will not necessarily rule here…Systems of thought, no matter how objective they may purport to be, have underlying emotional bases and values" (220-21).

The view that Jacobs here expressed was articulated most famously by Thomas Kuhn in his *Nature of Scientific Revolutions*, published a year after *Death and Life* – and Jacobs's position is very much of a piece with the era's skepticism of scientific objectivity as scientists figured more and more prominently in the projects of corporate liberalism. But the theme ran throughout Jacobs's work. In her last book, in an essay on economics, she describes Kuhn's position: "Previously established scientific verities are themselves capable of hampering scientific advancement… A paradigm tends to be so greatly cherished that, as new knowledge or evidence turns up that contradicts it or calls it into question, the paradigm is embroidered with qualifications and exceptions, along with labored pseudo-exceptions – anything, no matter how intellectually disreputable or craven, to avoid losing the paradigm." In the Jacobs-Kuhn view, science is always in the position of Jacobs's friend with odd ideas about childbirth.

Thus, alongside, or rather underlying, the argument of *Death and Life* is a bold claim about the nature of science. Jacobs aligns herself with the view that science grows up within paradigms – clusters of ideas through which we filter available evidence into a coherent picture of reality – *and* that paradigms do not, cannot operate apart from cultural influences. Kuhn "drew attention to the fact that [paradigms] shape people's entire worldviews." They run deeper than a set of scientific conclusions, having been influenced by value choices (as when planners adopted methods of dealing with cities because they disrespected cities). Jacobs draws attention to the abstract ideas behind planning and goes about tracing the history of her opponents' ideas to show that these scientific paradigms might have been otherwise. At the same time, Jacobs does not claim that her planning is any more "rational" or "progressive" than the dominant planning. Rather, it is preferable

because it is informed by a better set of ideas of what the city is and what about us it might express. They are the basis of a new paradigm.

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What is interesting is that Jacobs does not argue us into accepting her paradigm. Rather she shows us. In his review of Jacobs's sequel to *Death and Life*, *The Economy of Cities*, Herbert Gans refers to Jacobs's project as one that would give us "a new urban myth." Gans meant it, in part, to express skepticism. But it's not far off the mark as a description of Jacobs's enchanting style in convincing us that cities really are the inspiring places she says they are. It is hard to disagree with the many readers who find a literary quality to *Death and Life*. Jacobs had a way with words when it came to conveying an image of the city and city life. In urging a better plan for lower Manhattan, Jacobs highlights the particular character of the area that would be tarnished by the current plans: "What is more dramatic, even romantic, than the tumbled towers of lower Manhattan, rising suddenly to the clouds like a magic castle girdled by water? Its very touch of jumbled jaggedness, its towering-sided canyons, are its magnificence" (158). The feel – and feeling – Jacobs has for the city and its inhabitants is palpable in her picture of a successful park: "Even the same person comes for different reasons at different times; sometimes to sit tiredly, sometimes to play or to watch a game, sometimes to read or work, sometimes to show off, sometimes to fall in love…and almost always to be entertained by the sight of other people" (103).

Probably the most famous example of the book's vivid style, however, is Jacobs's description of what she calls the "Hudson Street ballet," her own neighborhood's daily upkeep of the "marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom

of the city." Consider this portion of the ballet: "Two new entrances are being made from the wings: well dressed and even elegant women and men with brief cases emerge from doorways and side streets…Most of these are heading for the bus and subways…It is time for me to hurry to work too, and I exchange my ritual farewell with Mr. Lofaro, the short, thick-bodied, white aproned fruit man who stands outside his doorway a little up the street, his arms folded, his feet planted, looking solid as earth itself. We nod; we each glance quickly up and down the street, the back to each other and smile. We have done this many a morning for more than ten years, and we both know what it means: All is well" (51).

This sort of writing is an invitation to follow Jacobs in heeding her own opening advice, to look at the real cities around us and to "listen, linger and think about" what we see; it beckons us into the life of the city, where, once we see it for what it is, Jacobs believes we will want to stay. It is an aesthetic effort to persuade us to adopt Jacobs's paradigm -- which begins with an openness to open-ended dynamism and an idea of the city as an organism of mutual support -- by illustrating what cities are like when they succeed on Jacobs's terms.

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Jacobs's effort to shift the terms in which we think of cities parallels her resistance to the planners' use of the city as an exercise in future-making. If their ideas about cities are not simple, objective realities – but instead, the outcome of contestable social theories and contingent histories – then neither are their conventions of planning simply enlightened axioms. Jacobs never takes the position that science is simply "political." But she does take the position that science becomes unscientific when the

foundational premises of scientific paradigms are reified into immutable dogmas. In this respect, science is political insofar as its genuine practice is a choice. Of course, we've also seen that science is not simply an autonomous process for Jacobs. Science is political in this respect too, insofar as the formulation of scientific paradigms are inflected by prior value choices.

This gets at the larger message of *Death and Life*, and indeed of the autodidactic Jacobs's work broadly: self-reliance and resistance to ideas or programs that shield themselves with an aura of inevitability. With the basis it provides for self-organization, cooperation, and political action, the city is an exercise in self-responsibility. Recall Jacobs's schema of informal government in cities, the hierarchy of street, neighborhood, district, and city. "Districts effective at carrying intelligence from the streets upward sometimes help translate it into city policy." In one such case, local organizers pressured New York City to enhance its addiction treatment services and drug trafficking enforcement. "The study and agitation that have helped push these moves did not originate with some mysterious 'They.' The first public agitation for reform and expansion of treatment was stirred not by officials at all, but by district pressure groups from districts like East Harlem and Greenwich Village" (125). In a slogan, the message of Jacobs's writing and activism might be: "We are 'they'!" There is no class of official, planner – no "they" out there – with access to the inevitable future we must learn to live with. As Jacobs's notes in her discussion of urban finance, "The 'inevitable,' as Holmes said, comes about only through great effort…" (294).

What look like inevitabilities are in fact workings of deliberate choices, themselves directed by the paradigms through which we engage reality. Creditors, for

example, influenced by contemporary planners' opposition to a high-density of dwellings, draw credit blacklisting maps accordingly, to exclude high-density neighborhoods on the theory that they are bound to become slums. "In choosing to use the power of credit to destroy, lenders operate on the premise, therefore, that their actions register an inevitability and, in the light of that inevitability, no more than prudence. They are making prophecies." Yet cutting off credit to blacklisted neighborhoods all but guarantees that they will become slums. The prophecies are self-fulfilling; they reflect not an economic reality about high-density areas but simply a bias against high-density localities (300-1).

Jacobs's point is that none of what she resists -- and what she hopes we will resist -- is inevitable. Rather, "We thought it would be good for us, and we got it. Now we accept it as if it were ordained by God or the system" (309). The explanation for credit practices is simple: "The financial machinery has been adjusted to create anti-city images because, and only because, we a as a society thought this would be good for us" (313-14). Nothing in the fate of cities is "something which happens accidentally or without the use of will. This is exactly what we, as a society, have willed to happen" (446).

Jacobs's ideal of the city as a home to the "living, complex organisms, capable of shaping their own destinies" that so fascinated her is rooted in a larger hope for the culture. The city is a mechanism by which we might take responsibility for the streets, for the institutions of government, for each other. And the responsibility we might take for one another is paralleled and extended by the responsibility we must take for recognizing that the world in which we live is the product of our individual and collective choices – choices that are defensible only in the light of larger, contestable assumptions.

Jacobs's last work was ominously titled *Dark Age Ahead*, an account of the demise of community, the dumbing down of universities, undemocratic government, environmental degradation, and, familiarly, the sclerosis of economic scientific paradigms. Jacobs did not leave behind much optimism to spare. Indeed, she thought that even *Death and Life* had made little difference. It is hard to disagree, with either her assessment of great cities in the twenty-first century or her broader fears. But it is also hard not to notice that the present political situation reflects a current of anger confronting the world that Jacobs feared, not least cities that function more and more to the exclusion not just of the poor, but of urban diversity altogether.

The deeper lament in Baker's picture of today's New York is that "we believe that we no longer have any ability to control the systems we live under." This observation suggests that the future bears an ominous aura of inevitability. But if Jacobs is right, these systems are ultimately our own, and can be remade if we wish. There is, at this political moment, a growing but unformed awareness that things could be otherwise. Where it leads is uncertain, but it is possible that this awareness will foment new, creative attempts to recover systems that we *do* control. Sanguine about our prospects or not, Jacobs would be the last to discourage us.

CONCLUSION
A New Tradition of Tradition

In a superficial but significant way, the thinkers presented in this dissertation are united by a concern with limits. Lasch was most explicit on this score, calling for a new public culture that would recognize the material limits of technical progress. Lasch also endorsed the spiritual discipline that emerges from confronting what he saw as the inevitable limits to the scope of human perfection and justice available in this life. Goodman resisted the senseless abundance on offer in the Organized System; his arguments against cheap, disposable goods (and jobs) anticipate those of today's environmental movement. For her part, Jacobs's defense of the city's organic mechanisms of self-government can be read as an effort to define the limits of urban design as social engineering. Planning should be minimally invasive, doing what it can to encourage those mechanisms, but, more importantly, avoiding disruption of the urban ecosystem through dramatic changes. In this way, the need for limits is one of the main elements of each thinker's counter-tradition; or, put it the other way around, notions of limitless improvement are at the center of the traditions to which they were responding.

But Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs are united by a more fundamental resistance to the idea that a limitless world must be accepted as an inevitable dispensation of history or science. The real spiritual enemy of each is resignation. Ideas and ideals of limitless prosperity, limitless abundance, limitless improvement of the city depend on prior, contingent conclusions about the progressive flow of history. These conclusions, in turn, inform our view of the past; of the possibilities for new, meaningful work; of the fate of the city. Each thinker set out to expose that prevailing habits of mind in these areas are

not inevitable, that they reflect their own histories and assumptions that might have been otherwise. In so doing, they challenged the notion that history is a one-directional saga, and that the latest thinking invariably represents progress toward the best of all possible worlds.

At the deepest level, this challenge is undergirded by a new understanding of tradition. Exploring that understanding will be the work of this final chapter. Implicit in Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's efforts to sketch the contingency of the prevailing habits they confronted is the idea that supposedly inevitable conclusions are instead part and parcel of debatable worldviews. The dominant ideas that Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs confronted were taken to have escaped the confines of tradition to reach the uplands of, respectively, scientific history, a world without ideology, or enlightened urban planning. The deepest reply to these theories by the authors we have studied is that they remain ensconced in a particular tradition, and so, in some basic sense, also remain optional. Not only do these thinkers show the contingency of dominant ideas, but they reject altogether the dominant view of tradition as something to be escaped. Having situated their rivals in a tradition, Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs do not claim to have reached the sunny uplands for themselves. Rather, they consciously develop their reactions to dominant traditions as counter-traditions. Their thought reflects the best possibilities of neo-traditionalism. The counter-traditions of Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs reflect the reality that tradition is an inescapable lens on the world. At the same time, they reflect – indeed emerge from – the sort of inter-traditional battle that keeps traditions from becoming either Burkean refuges or relative, tribal perspectives lacking any claim to truth value.

The Old Tradition of Tradition

The idea of tradition operative in Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs becomes clear in contrast to the idea of tradition implicit in the perennial search for "community."

The whole of idea of speaking up in behalf of "community" implies a need to balance community against something else. The debate between liberals and their communitarian critics, for example, relies on sociological categories of "community" and "society." Each side has inherited from sociological thought the *dichotomy* between community and modernity: they accept that modernity – liberalism, social democracy, the collective pursuit of material abundance – is here to stay. They likewise accept that greater freedom and prosperity makes community – understood as the organic home of tradition, an orienting whole, free from the disruptive dynamism of modern economies – impossible. Most important here is the fact that community is identified with the unanimity of opinion. This is why, having conceded the intractability of the modern project, communitarians must find a new basis for community in broad, thin appeals to common values like "democracy, the Bill of Rights, and mutual respect among subgroups."[1]

Another set of such communitarian proposals recommends that community be replicated in the private sphere. Their very use of the distinction between "private and public spheres" shows the extent to which communitarians accept modern categories. A statement Lasch cites from Peter Berger and the other authors of *The Homeless Mind* suggests the degree to which the communitarian impulse is merely to make some

[1] Such are the basis of consensus for Amitai Etzioni. See Lasch's discussion in "Communitarianism or Populism?" in *Revolt of the Elites*, 109. Etzioni's values are hardly outdated as examples of what is taken to make the American "community."

accommodation for community, to carve out some enclave where it can survive given the invincibility of modernization: "it is possible to concede the irrevocability and irresistibility of modernization…and to look upon the private sphere as a refuge or 'reservation' for other structures of consciousness." Thomas Bender likewise argues that since the territorial community of the past is impossible, the "experience" of community can be had only with "family and friends" whose company satisfies the need for intimacy in a world governed by impersonal market forces.[2] Proposals to grow social capital, to nurture "civil society," and promote voluntary association should be read in a similar light: relocating and preserving the supposed "experience" of the affective community in a cold modern world. Given the inevitable persistence of modernity and the fact that community is equated with consensus, communitarians are forced to relocate community to the "little platoon," where agreement and intimacy are more likely.

More recently, this communitarian impulse has re-surfaced not among political theorists but among conservative Christians wondering how to be in but not of the modern world. As articulated by Rod Drehrer, an Orthodox Christian public intellectual, a so-called Benedict Option calls for Christians to opt-out of modernity and "construct local forms of community as loci of Christian resistance against what the [American] empire represents" – in imitation of St. Benedict of Nursia, who, repelled by the decadence of fifth-century Rome, left the city to establish monastic communities that became outposts of classical and Christian learning and centers of evangelization to the barbarians.[3] Counter-cultural Christian communities today can, but need not be, literal

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[2] See Lasch's discussion at *True and Only Heaven*, 164-65.

[3] Drehrer, "Benedict Option FAQ" *The American Conservative* (online), October 6, 2015: https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-faq/.

physical enclaves outside the modern Rome. While Drehrer gives several examples of such communities, he also indicates that orthodox schools and homeschool groups can serve as a form of the Benedict Option.

Drehrer's proposals are the latest instance of what theologian James Gustafson in 1985 called the "sectarian temptation." Gustafson was confronting the work of theologians like George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas. These theologians advocated the isolation of "Christian theology and ethics from critical external points of view in order to maintain the uniqueness or historic identity of Christianity."[4] Sectarianism is a "seductive temptation" in the face of seemingly relentless pressure from a secular and ever-secularizing culture because it "at least enables Christians to assert, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.'"[5] At grave risk for sectarians is the survival of a received tradition and Christians' ability, in the absence of supportive institutions, to live out that tradition and give authentic witness to their faith. To counter the threat of "revisions in the received tradition…some historic point gets frozen; it becomes the basis for contemporary faith and life," of new institutions like Drehrer's agrarian communes and homeschool groups.[6]

The time that is frozen for Drehrer is a time at which Christianity dominated public culture. The Benedict Option aims to produce, on a smaller scale, communities in which Christianity is again the dominant tradition. And what's at stake for sectarian theorists is a cohesive community free to live out its tradition without competition from other traditions: authentic Christianity requires a social ecosystem that is impossible in the midst of centrifugal modern cultural forces, such as scientific rationalism, and

[4] James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University" *CTSA Proceedings* 40 (1985), 83.

[5] Ibid., 84.

[6] Ibid.

political forces, such as pluralism, that are non- and perhaps even anti-Christian. Just as communitarians believe that "community" cannot survive exposure to modernity, the sectarian position assumes a point of view in which Christian tradition cannot survive the cultural forces that came with modernization – in Drehrer's nostalgic accounting of history's long train of abuses: the Renaissance; the Reformation; the Scientific Revolution; liberalism; industrialism; the World Wars and the garrison state that followed; and the rights revolution, which unfolds still, already having mainstreamed abortion, divorce, contraception, and same-sex marriage.

At play in the sectarian position, however, is a view of tradition not only as a fragile, orienting whole torn asunder by modernity, but as a distinct form of knowing the world, a way of engaging reality accessible only to the converted. As Gustafson said of Drehrer's sectarian predecessors: "Reasons for believing are given, but tend to exclude what was classically the apologetic task of theology and ethics, that is, showing reasons for plausibility of belief on grounds other than those drawn from within the historic tradition itself. Christian beliefs become subjectively meaningful, but their *truth* is not challenged."[7] The modern sectarian movement came to theology by way of the linguistic turn in philosophy, and the original generation of sectarians were called by one critic "Wittgensteinian fideists" for their view of Christian tradition as one of several "language games" on offer in a given culture:

> There are various language games in culture: scientific, religious, aesthetic and moral. Among these it is clear that the language of science and the language of religion (including theology) are totally incommensurable. The language of religion is therefore exempt from critical assessment from

[7] Ibid.

> any scientific perspective; it is free from criticism from all perspectives other than its own.[8]

Not only can religion dispense with engaging science; other language games threaten religion's integrity as a language if they become as culturally and politically powerful as are, say, science and liberal individualism: like a language, Christianity is a "communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals" – any language survives only so long as it is spoken, and it is less likely to be spoken in unadulterated form or at all if its adherents are exposed to competing language games.[9]

In a sure sign of his project's lineage, Drehrer describes the Benedict Option in terms resonant of this "cultural-linguistic" framework: "When I talk about the Benedict Option, I don't mean – or don't mostly mean – a physical retreat to a quasi-monastic community, but rather an intentional and thoughtful retreat into narrativity, by which I mean a reclaiming of the church's story, inculcating commitment to it within the lives of its members, in defiance of the narrative collapse around us."[10] At stake is a particular narrative, a language used to tell a certain story that has collapsed in the face of modernity and that can be recovered only through a strategic retreat.

Drehrer has been forced repeatedly to fend off the charge that he advocates a head-for-the-hills retreat from public life. Although some forms of Christian community that Drehrer endorses certainly look like withdrawal, the real problem with the Benedict

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[8] Ibid., 85.
[9] Ibid., 86.
[10] Drehrer, "The Cost of Narrative Collapse" *The American Conservative* (online), Febraru 17, 2014: http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-cost-of-narrative-collapse/. On the connection between Drehrer and the earlier generation of sectarian Christian thought, see Brad East, "Theologians Were Arguing About the Benedict Option 35 Years Ago," *Mere Orthodoxy*, March 13, 2017: https://mereorthodoxy.com/theologians-arguing-benedict-option-35-years-ago/.

Option is not that it is hopelessly apolitical. The real problem, surprisingly enough for a position that many would say romanticizes the past, is that the Benedict Option is all too modern. Indeed, it smuggles in and popularizes *post*-modern theories of language and knowledge that were more explicit in the first generation of sectarian thought. In this post-modern perspective, all language games are rationally on all fours with all the others; what makes one preferable to the next is its ability to furnish a certain culture. In pursuing the integrity of the Christian language game in order to preserve a Christian culture, the sectarians are doing much the same thing as a post-modern pragmatist like Richard Rorty, who looked to "some new ways of talking" in order to promote a more fulsomely liberal culture, one where we'd "take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself."[11] The sectarians' preservation of a language and Rorty's hope for a new one work toward the same goal: at stake for each is not the substance of the positions a language game asserts, but the ability of a language and associated habits of thought to furnish a desirable narrative.[12]

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[11] Rorty characterizes this as his "slogan" in an interview with Eduardo Mendieta. See Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *Take Care if Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself*: *Interviews with Richard Rorty* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 58.

[12] On Rorty's narrativity, see "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*: *Philosophical Papers* Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 587. Some might wonder about Rorty's appeal to narrativity positioning him as a representative of postmodernity more widely. But I do think this makes him representative. As Richard Bernstein notes, Jean-Francois Lyotard notwithstanding, postmodernism *is* about narratives, albeit new ones that avoid grand universals. See Bernstein's "American Pragmatism: The Conflict of Narratives," in Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., ed., *Rorty and Pragmatism*: *The Philosopher Responds to His Critics* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), 54-67.

Postmodern narratives draw precisely on the sort of "ethnocentrism" that Rorty wants us to (ironically) embrace. In this vein John Arras remarks: "In the place of theory and overarching coherence, the postmodernist asserts the virtues of the *petit recit* or 'little narrative.…The postmodernist…seeks a kind of legitimation through the telling and retelling of stories.'" See Arras, "Nice Story, But So What?" in Jecker, Jonsen, Pearlman, eds., *Bioethics*, (Sudbury, Mass.: Jones and Bartlett, 2012): 206-225.

This puts a post-modern twist on sectarian nostalgia. Nostalgia is the mirror image of the modern belief in progress, which juxtaposes tradition (the benighted, simpler past and its myths) and knowledge (the progress of critical reason). Whereas modernity held out the possibility that real knowledge would replace tradition as it was thrown off in favor of science, post-modernity reduces science and Enlightenment rationalism to one more language game, one more tradition. But in so doing postmodernity also preserves the hard distinction between knowledge and tradition: there is no knowledge, only tradition – there are no facts, only interpretations. Post-moderns like Rorty are the latest generation of romantics – in a crucial sense carrying on the work of that great romantic Edmund Burke! – insisting we recognize the totalizing force of tradition and the folly of thinking that reason and science allow communities to transcend it.

So too with Drehrer and other sectarians. Their position is decisively nostalgic in accepting the progressive view of tradition as depending on a *Gemeinschaft* that is threatened by modern pluralism. Yet sectarian theology goes farther. Unlike nostalgia per se, sectarians do not simply shed a tear for a simpler time that cannot be recovered. Sectarians follow post-modern thought in taking up a project of tradition-building. They do not ruefully concede a colder, less magical world as the price of enlightenment because they do not concede that progressive rationalism, as a tradition itself, has really enlightened us. It has not enlightened us because enlightenment, in the sense of developing ever more "correct," universal maps of reality, is a pipe dream. We have replaced a tradition of old ennobling certainties with a tradition of skepticism for nothing!

What is at stake, what is the task of any tradition, is not a "correct" map of reality, but solidarity.

I do not mean to suggest that Ben-Opters are Christian ironists just as postmoderns are, for example, liberal ironists. Rorty does not consider liberalism "true," regarding truth as a category belonging to the tradition of Platonic philosophy he aimed to replace. Sectarians on the other hand surely consider Christianity true in some sense. But this hardly makes them Platonists since they do not believe they could ever justify Christianity. What sectarians share with the postmoderns is the belief that, as language games, neither Christianity nor liberalism could justify itself. Because this puts justification beside the point, the aesthetic of a language game is more important than its truth. Thus sectarian and secular postmodern alike would *reject* the correction Gustafson offers sectarians: "[T]he rational activity of the religious [or liberal, or scientific, or Freudian, or Marxist] community overlaps with and has similarities to the rational activities of other communities and therefore is subject to correction and revision by other ways of knowing."[13]

Thus both sectarian and atheist postmoderns abandon the quest for objectivity and look to tradition as the basis of solidarity. They urge us to self-consciously come to terms with the way of life in question, whether it be Christianity or bourgeois liberalism, *as* a tradition. Of course, these traditions could not be more different. The sectarians' push to isolate the Christian community adopts the modern sociological outlook in which tradition is a harmonious, organic whole that cannot survive modernity. Rorty on the other hand urges us to see pluralism as a principal feature of our bourgeois liberal

[13] Gustafson, 92.

tradition; his preferred tradition attempts the trick of surviving not despite but simply *as* cosmopolitanism and the peaceful co-existence of lots of traditions all playing, to the degree necessary, the liberal language game of tolerance.[14]

These differences, however, should not obscure the way in which the meaning of tradition is the same for sectarian and atheist postmodern alike. Rorty's tradition does not depend on *Gemeinschaft* and he insists that his neo-pragmatism overcomes the distinction between reason and tradition.[15] Yet Rorty has overcome that distinction only by making everything a tradition. That his tradition happens to be pluralistic does not diminish that it depends, in the last analysis, on "ethnocentrism." He attributes political liberalism to the cultural bias of wet liberals like himself; indeed, he considers political liberalism to be merely the systemization of "the principles and intuitions of American liberals."[16] This culture, and the fact that liberalism is merely cultural, imposes limits on the ability of liberalism to engage other traditions:

> [W]e heirs of the Enlightenment think of enemies of liberal democracy like Nietzsche or Loyola as, to use Rawls's word, 'mad.' We do so because there is no way to see them as fellow citizens…whose life plans might, given ingenuity and good will, be fitted in with those of other citizens. They are not crazy because they have mistaken the ahistorical nature of human beings. They are crazy because the limits of sanity are set by what *we* can take seriously.[17]

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[14] See, for example, Rorty's remark that pragmatism should make us polytheists insofar as "human perfection becomes a private concern, and our responsibility to others becomes a matter of permitting them as much space to pursue these private concerns – to worship their own gods, so to speak – as is compatible with granting an equal amount of space to all. The tradition of religious toleration is extended to moral toleration." See "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism" in Dickstein, ed., *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 24.

[15] "A Reply to Clifford Geertz," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 208.

[16] "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 189.

[17] Ibid., 191.

To be sure, Rorty is a good Rawlsian political liberal and believes that non-liberals can participate as loyal citizens in a liberal society. Indeed, Nietzsche and Loyola could be tolerated, even if they "despise most of their fellow citizens," provided they were "prepared to grant that the prevalence of such despicable character types is a lesser evil than the loss of political freedom."[18] But we run up against the limits of Rorty's ethnocentric liberalism when we consider that not only can Nietzsche's and Loyola's politics not be tolerated, but that these figures are philosophic and not just political opponents of liberal democracy.

To see the insularity of Rorty's cultural liberalism, consider how he might deal with such a philosophic controversy. Rorty "commends" to political liberals a view of the self as a "centerless web of historically conditioned beliefs and desires." He does not, however, assert that such a view of the self is true or that it offers a "basis" for political liberalism, which may or may not require a view of the self at all. Rorty hopes that his anti-foundationalism – this view of the self and the "light-minded aestheticism" that goes along with it – will win out in liberal societies because it makes their inhabitants "more pragmatic, more tolerant, more liberal, more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality." In keeping with political liberalism, he believes non-pragmatists and non-liberals can formulate their own views of the self, and that they can still participate as liberal citizens, if only on grounds of expediency. Here, however, Rorty raises the potential objection that political liberalism depends on the view that there is no matter of fact concerning the nature of the self, a philosophic position of the sort political liberalism claims to do without. He waves off this objection by asserting that "the very

[18] Ibid., 192.

idea of a 'fact of the matter' is one we would be better off without" and dismissing as "pointless and sterile" the further objection that *this* claim is equally philosophic as the one that we can't know what the self really is.[19] Rorty's intention is to deflate any force behind the objection that political liberalism rests on a philosophic first principle, namely that the self is something about which there can be no matter of fact. Yet the fact that Rorty's ideal liberal society would have moral resources like "insouciance" and would approach those who still worried about traditional philosophic topics by "trying to josh them out of the habit of taking those topics so seriously" shows the insularity of his liberalism, less able to answer opponents like Nietzsche and Loyola than to laugh them off.[20]

What Rorty accomplishes by playful insouciance, the Benedict Option accomplishes by the formation of Christian *Gemeinschaft* where the church can recover authentic narrativity. At one level, this runs up against the objection that sectarians are indulging in a romanticized version of the past. If the members of early Benedictine communities were more secure in their faith, it wasn't on account of their isolation from the wider world. The original Benedictine communities simply weren't so isolated. They depended on their connection with local villages for trade and for a supply of novices. Like all communities, they evolved over time, slowly becoming centers of sacred and secular education; mass was not celebrated in Benedictine communities until the Middle Ages.

More problematic, however, than finding a Christian *Gemeinschaft* in the past is the view of tradition as dependent on *Gemeinschaft*. Narratives resort to insouciance or

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

look to the creation of uniform societies when they take their task to be solidarity, not engagement with – correction of, or hope for correction *by* – other narratives.

A New Tradition of Tradition

It should be clear that the categories at work in these strands of communitarian and post-modern thought are so much responses to the view of tradition implicit in the progressive view of history. At the heart of what Lasch called "the illusion of disillusionment" is a hard and fast distinction between solidarity and truth, between tradition and reason. All parties – progressives, communitarians, and post-moderns – concede that tradition cannot be a critical lens on the world. Communitarians concede the progressive point of view that tradition has been replaced by science. For communitarians, the world is all grown up, and tradition, as the stuff of togetherness, must be re-founded on modern terms (as paradoxical communal commitments to the values of liberalism) or relocated to the little platoon. For post-moderns, the language games of modernity are no better or worse epistemically than any other language game, and the purpose of any language game or "tradition" is solidarity -- so we are left with a poetic war of all traditions against all to win over the culture on aesthetic grounds.

Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs dissolve this debate's central distinction between tradition and knowledge. They do so, first, by showing that the world is not all grown up, that we are not, in fact, disillusioned – where disillusioned means graduated from the confines of tradition. We have seen how each thinker has shown how supposedly inevitable or scientific worldviews are in fact the contingent workings of a given tradition. Lasch showed progressive history to be a tradition by exposing its contingency,

mapping in *The True and Only Heaven* the road not taken by telling the story of liberalism's defeated opponents, the populists and their latter-day descendants. Goodman resisted above all else the idea that the Organized System is an inevitability, lamenting the false "Either/Or" it presents American youth. His "one paragraph" histories of missed revolutions are an attempt to show that far from a settled, coherent program – the arrival of a reasonable world all grown up – the Organized System reflects the incoherence of lost opportunities. And Jacobs confronts the dominant strain of urban planning as a paradigm, showing how progressive and supposedly scientific ideals of urban design reflect debatable social and political principles.

Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's identification of their opponents with a tradition is leveled as a criticism only to the extent that their opponents took themselves to have graduated from tradition. Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's point is that tradition is not something to be escaped but is, rather, an inevitable lens on the world. It is important to see that Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs recommend *this* view, too, as part of a tradition. The view of tradition they hope we adopt is part and parcel of the larger counter-traditions they have weaved together. And to the extent they are aware of their reliance on tradition, these thinkers exemplify what it means to think within a tradition, even in reaching a conclusion about the nature of tradition.

Lasch did not attempt transcend tradition but worked instead to recover "discordant" voices to build a new one. His reliance on a tradition of anti-progressive thinkers, poets and divines to furnish resources of hope and civic virtue assumes that communities will always live and reason and debate within a tradition.

Goodman's self-conscious acceptance of tradition is even more explicit. Completing the missed revolutions would be the painful perfection of "the revolutionary tradition we have." Indeed, to the extent that Goodman identifies modernity with the realization of human responsibility for the systems and habits of thought around us, modernity is the realization of ourselves as tradition-makers and of the working of tradition rather than Fate, History, or Science.

Jacobs too underscores the epistemic need for tradition, as opposed to science. She writes memorably that "reason does not rule this world," pointing more broadly to the ways in which scientific theories are part of traditions. Theories are subject to inertia and the accumulated weight of opinion and, as in the case of urban planning, they can also answer to unstated normative assumptions. Moreover, Jacobs presents her principles of urban design in the context of a frank argument concerning the social and political goods she believes cities should realize.

Agonistic Traditions

Yet if this were all the farther Lasch, Goodman and Jacobs went, we'd be left with a kind of tribal postmodern traditionalism. Endorsing the decisive epistemic role of tradition seems to put them squarely in the camp of "solidarity" over against "objectivity." So far, in other words, it is not clear reasonable grounds they have given us to adopt their counter-traditions, including the view of tradition implicit in each. In dissolving the dichotomy between knowledge and tradition, they have shown that what presents itself as the progress of reason is in fact tradition. They have yet to show how tradition can count as reasonable.

How they do so is suggested by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, whose *After Virtue* Lasch called "a masterpiece" and whom Lasch invited to speak at the University of Rochester in 1983. MacIntyre was an important influence on Lasch in particular, but the former's understanding of tradition provides a framework for understanding how Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs alike approach tradition as a means of reaching, and not a replacement for, a true picture of reality.

MacIntyre is not infrequently read as a postmodern traditionalist and a forerunner to the new wave of Christian sectarians. Indeed, Drehrer draws a line from the "Benedict" Option to the closing line of *After Virtue* in which MacIntyre is thought to conclude that restoring moral coherence in the midst of modern pluralism will depend on the development of strong communities capable of telling their own stories: "We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict."[21]

The problem is that MacIntyre has said that he regrets this line more than any other he's written[22] and has somewhat vehemently denied any sympathy for the Benedict Option. While tradition is central to MacIntyre's moral theory, he does not regard traditions merely as groups' efforts to narrate their own reality. Tradition for MacIntyre is indeed the inescapable lens through which we learn about the world and the ground of a community's standards of warrant and justification, but traditions are also capable of engaging and correcting one another.[23] A given tradition might turn to a rival when it has reached an epistemic crisis it cannot solve with its own resources. In this situation, the

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[21] *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 263.

[22] At least according to his friend Stanley Hauerwas. See "Why Community Is Dangerous" *Plough Quarterly* May 2016 (no. 9): https://www.plough.com/en/topics/community/church-community/why-community-is-dangerous.

[23] My account of MacIntyre owes much to the excellent discussion of Micah Lott, "Reasonably Traditional" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, 3 (2002): 315-39.

adherents of the first tradition enter into the second tradition on its own terms and not simply from the perspective of their own tradition. In so doing, they might realize that the new tradition furnishes the conceptual and epistemic resources that can both resolve the crisis their own tradition had encountered *and* explain why their own tradition was unable to resolve it.

In such a situation, the adherents of the tradition in crisis should "convert" to the second tradition. But whether they do or not, MacIntyre's point is that it would be *reasonable* for them to do so. In this way, MacIntyre gives an account of how tradition can indeed be both – to mix metaphors – the cultural water in which we swim and a reasonable lens on the world. This shows that rational improvement is possible across rival traditions; indeed, that tradition is not opposed to the progress of critical reason but that the latter is possible only through traditions: their honest appraisal of their resources and willingness to look outside themselves when they encounter epistemic crises. This highlights the final feature of traditions in MacIntyre's account: they do not depend on *Gemeinshcaft*. On the contrary, traditions must be characterized by *argument* over the questions or problems the tradition encounters, and the vitality of a tradition depends on a tradition's adherents putting their resources to the test in dealing with these problems. Since justification is always internal to a given tradition, this argument takes place between adherents of a tradition and their predecessors. This means that the argument may extend in part to what constitutes the tradition in the first place, since a new generation of adherents may argue that their predecessors' misunderstanding of the tradition led them to overlook resources that might have resolved a longstanding

dilemma. "Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead."[24]

In sum, MacIntyre argues that traditions serve as our epistemic lens on the world; that they nonetheless embody a kind of knowledge that can cut across traditions; and that their usefulness depends on their dynamism, not on tradition for tradition's sake. He would, and does, admit that this view is itself traditional, that is it belongs to the particular Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition he crafted. But the point is that MacIntyre does not recommend his tradition on ethnocentric or aesthetic grounds; rather, he believed that an Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, including the view of traditions it embodied, could better meet the moral crisis of modernity and therefore supersede the dominant tradition of Enlightenment. Against the Enlightenment-progressive tradition, MacIntyre rejects the view from nowhere, the possibility of reason external to tradition. At the same time, against post-moderns and neo-traditionalists, MacIntyre insists that rationality across traditions is possible just because tradition is not the closed system it is thought to be by progressives, post-moderns, and neo-traditionalists alike.

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Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs's counter-traditions can be read as case studies in the confrontation of one tradition by another. Each thinker took the dominant tradition to be in crisis and offered, consciously, as traditions, new counter-traditions as correctives. While MacIntyre provides a clear theoretical frame into which to situate the three thinkers, and while he clearly influenced Lasch, it is equally important to remember here

[24] *After Virtue*, 222.

the influence of American pragmatism on Goodman (and Lasch) and of Thomas Kuhn on Jacobs. Each of these perspectives takes seriously the ways in which reason is embodied in particular traditions; that is, they too dissolve the Enlightenment distinction between reason and tradition. Indeed, each offers an account of how traditions prove their reasonableness through confrontation of rival views. For each, truth is the sum total of views and conclusions that have survived this combat. And for each, therefore, it is vital that traditions not be regarded as static closed systems that impose and require unanimity, but rather as dynamic ongoing arguments within and between themselves.

Lasch greeted enthusiastically work by theorists like MacIntyre and others that challenged "the assumption that [tradition] rests on unreflective, habitual agreement. This new work suggests that tradition is the precondition of thought rather than a set of constraints from which thought must liberate itself."[25] Lasch also rejected the view that tradition stands in contrast to knowledge, "the notion that knowledge becomes reliable only as it approximates the timeless, universal truths supposedly revealed by science." What Lasch found most valuable in tradition was its ability to furnish a common vocabulary of argument. As noted in Chapter 1, against the picture of a quiet "traditional society" Lasch substituted a picture in which tradition and memory is the basis of debate. The recollection, retelling, and argument over a community's past or tradition is in part what constitutes a community insofar as its members alone can access the lore at stake. And like MacIntyre, Lasch, himself citing Aristotle, asserted the epistemic value of argument. As opposed to the Enlightenment view of knowledge as science, adopted by the philosophes and their opponents alike, Aristotelian practical reason aimed neither "to

[25] "A Response to Fischer," *Tikkun* 3, no. 6 (1988), 72.

establish timeless truths nor to calculate the most economical means to a given result but to promote a harmony of means and ends, to train the capacity for judgment, and above all to encourage self-knowledge" and proceeded not through philosophic speculation but through argument and dialectic.[26]

As opposed to the communitarian ideal of consensus, political life for Lasch thrives on "controversy, remembrance, and a periodic return to first principles" – memory, not custom. Indeed, this view of tradition as a dynamic basis of public life and, more generally, the persistence of tradition in memory as opposed to its veneration in custom, is central to the democratic tradition Lasch develops. Populism as Lasch sees it has always stood for plain- spoken argument, a willingness to persuade fellow citizens and to be persuaded, and a respectful but proud bearing that would hold citizens accountable to a certain tradition of virtues like "fortitude, workmanship, moral courage, honesty, and respect for adversaries."[27] The virtue of such a tradition that incorporates argument among its features is not only that it invites argument about itself as a tradition but that it advances a set of proposals about the good society that it would try to persuade others to adopt. It thereby positions itself as the basis of an ongoing argument. It establishes a common field of debate and, without doing so explicitly, tests the tradition itself in the arena of public discourse by raising questions like: how well do the virtues of populism square with our collective self-understanding, what do these virtues mean in practice, and can they survive crises that appear to show their limits?

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[26] *True and Only Heaven*, 130.

[27] "Does Democracy Deserve to Survive?" in *Revolt of the Elites*, 87.

Goodman's counter-tradition too is marked by the sort of dynamism that is required for traditions to aspire to rational persuasion. In fact, Goodman's counter-tradition is a sort of antidote against the sort of tradition, like the end-of-ideology liberal tradition he confronted, that takes itself to be a finished product. Goodman resisted institutions that would crystallize development at a given moment in time. Indeed, the hallmark of his modern tradition is openness to conflict, to new syntheses, and to the inevitability of further conflicts. Goodman's modern man is one who has come to terms with his own, open-ended creative responsibility for the world – who sees in institutions deliberate choices, not the workings of fate – and who is prepared to shoulder that responsibility.

Jacobs's confrontation of the dominant schools of urban planning likewise implies a dynamic understanding of tradition. We have seen that Jacobs situates her particular concerns about cities in the context of a larger argument about the non-linear history of science. Scientific consensus must be able to withstand challenges from rival theories – as bloodletting, eventually, was not. Jacobs articulated such a rival theory that challenged both the ends and means of the prevailing planning orthodoxy. This challenge included the exposure of both urban planning's unstated social presuppositions, as well as the force of inertia and self-fulfilling prophecies of "inevitable" outcomes in thwarting challenges to the prevailing wisdom. At work here is a fundamental resistance to the idea that any paradigm would present itself as inevitable or beyond correction by the process of salutary skepticism.

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Not just Jacobs but Lasch and Goodman too resist their opponents' self-presentation of inevitability. As noted, this resistance is an effort to deflate the dominant traditions' claims to have transcended tradition and reached the realm of science, or foreseen the end of history. But the three thinkers' resistance to the idea of inevitability operates at a second level as a defense of the present, of what *is*. This gets at the complicated way in which each thinker is and is not a progressive. Their dynamic understanding of tradition clearly separates Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs from anti-progressives, post-moderns, and genuine progressives, who all understand tradition in Burkean terms. Against this view, these thinkers articulate the position that if progress is possible (contra reactionaries), and if enlightenment is possible (contra postmoderns), they are possible on the basis of tradition (contra progressives). Yet their particular traditions also make these thinkers hard to situate as either reactionary or progressive because they reflect a deeper refusal to see the present in terms of either the past – as a corruption – or the future, as a way-station to a predestined future.

We have seen this concern for the present in the thinkers' counter-traditions themselves. The aim of Lasch's counter-tradition is to stop us from situating the present in the story of inevitable material progress, against either a simpler past falling away or an ever-better future on the horizon. For Goodman, not only is the present not a corruption of a better past, it is in fact an improvement, insofar as the halting project of modernity has opened a new awareness of human creativity and responsibility. This is why the students Goodman confronted were wrong to see in the present only the imposition of past generations, instead of the great open-ended unfolding of human creative forces. At the same time, they were not wrong to have lost faith that the world

will "support the next step" and welcome their own creative efforts. Goodman's aim was to show them, however, that the present was not the end-of-history presented by the Organized System. It stood to be improved, and new opportunities opened, by the recovery of the Missed Revolutions.

The present is represented for Jacobs by cities as they *are*, as opposed to either what they have supposedly corrupted, or what they might become. The city is not an imposition on nature, but a part of nature. Only when cities are not seen as they really are – but instead situated in a false but enduring man-made/natural dichotomy – can their future be falsely imagined as a return to nature. An urban future on the artificial pastoral terms of the planning class, which would undo the "corruption" done to nature by cities, takes no stock of cities as the natural creations of lively, independent, curious citizens.

In each thinker, there is a resistance to dichotomous thinking in which the present falls between two stools: between a simpler golden age and the brave, new, modern world; between the achievements of past generations and the end of history; between the lost pastoral world and back-to-the-future planning which would restore it. We cannot claim allegiance to either the past or the future without abandoning our responsibility to the present. Each thinker emphasizes the continuity of history: the present must be understood on its own terms, as a concrete reality at the intersection of past and future, that could give way to the future in any number of ways – not in the abstract, as a shadow of the corrupted past or as the anticipation of an inevitable future.

In this sense, the past as it is embodied and lives on in the present is not an inevitable constraint on the future. Nor is it simply a precursor to a future that will replace it. Rather, the point is that the present, and the past decisions and influences it

represents, must be grappled with on its own terms. When it is, the present itself and what in it is preserved and what is changed will all be recognized as the outcome of our deliberate choices rather than the workings of impersonal historical forces. This perspective comes across most clearly in Goodman's insistence that the culture, like the patient in analysis, deal with unresolved conflicts – missed revolutions – that are unconsciously embodied in the present, which only "neurotically" seems fixed on a particular trajectory. But the same perspective informs Lasch's refusal to grant that modernization as conventionally understood must proceed apace; it informs his urging that it is possible to take stock of our present and proceed in a new direction. For her part, Jacobs presents a view in which the space and support they give the free, open-ended organic activity of citizens are what make cities the distinct creations they are, and what make them worth saving. Indeed, urban life itself –never static, but never starting from scratch – reflects this openness to the present. Jacobs rejects not only efforts to evaluate and manage that activity in terms of some other, futuristic entity but the view that the city as it has existed will become a thing of the past.

The idea that the future cannot simply take leave of the past explains these thinkers' reliance on tradition in the first place, their reliance on a mode of knowledge that embodies what *is*, to include what has come before. This is seen, above all, in the specific sources to which the counter-traditions point us. In all three thinkers, the future is made to take account of the past, which returns as a corrective to a progressive vision of the future that would, alternately, drown out discordant voices, forget unfinished conflicts, or remake cities in the image of the anti-urban.

Lasch can bring back supposedly defeated voices because the past is not dead and gone. Nor is the progressive future imagined by these sources' opponents so certain that the critics are useless except as artifacts. Likewise, Goodman's use of the Missed Revolutions implies a view in which history has not simply left the past behind. There is no predetermined future to which the failed revolutions are now simply irrelevant. In fact, the failed revolutions live on in a present that reflects the incoherence of their partial completion, and a coherent culture will require their resolution. For Jacobs, too, we must deal with what already *is*, cities as they are. The evidence of the free, organic activity that should orient planning is to be found in cities as they are in the here and now, not as they exist in an imagined future.

New Directions

The point of departure for each thinker's counter-tradition is the crisis of a dominant tradition. Lasch believed that the dominant Enlightenment tradition was in crisis, that its hallmark belief in material and technical progress was no longer credible. "We need to…ask whether the left and right have not come to share so many of the same underlying convictions, including a belief in the desirability and inevitability of technical and economic development, that the conflict between them, shrill and acrimonious as it is, no longer speaks to the central issues of American politics."[28] Goodman saw a culture that guaranteed comfort and offered an almost useless degree of material well-being but which foreclosed opportunity for meaningful, self-directed activity. And urban planning,

[28] *True and Only Heaven*, 23.

in Jacobs's view, threatened to make cities dull and burdensome where once urban life was an education in organization and an ongoing introduction to the strange.

That Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs might be important guides to new directions – that they are needed now – is suggested by evidence that the crises they confronted have only deepened. Where Lasch saw a hollow faith in progress that impoverished American civic life, the progressive faith now forms the deepest fault line in American politics. The party of progress, the partisans of the liberal order that took hold in the last half of the twentieth century, now faces a resistance in the form of a populist movement that, for all its potential to correct progressive optimism, too often takes the reactionary view that an inevitable loss of American greatness can be recovered only through a politics of the extreme. Where Goodman saw the encroachment of centralization, technology, and easy abundance on the individual's creative energies, young American men increasingly find themselves at a loss to find meaning. Where Jacobs feared the effect of contemporary planning on cities' capacity to harbor a rich diversity of talents and undertakings, American planners today are confronted by a model of urban growth that privileges mega-developments for an increasingly affluent, transient, and uniform class.

Of course, that the dominant traditions find themselves in crisis is the beginning, not the end of, an argument. The case for adopting Lasch's, Goodman's, or Jacobs's counter-tradition depends on careful consideration of its ability to confront the crises in which the dominant tradition finds itself. Yet the most basic danger of the dominant tradition is its presentation of inevitability: that there is no turning back. And this is precisely the most basic advantage of the counter-traditions: that they would have us argue from within traditions, that traditions need not be conclusive but can instead be the

basis of ongoing arguments, and that arguments cast in terms of tradition open the full range of alternatives before us. They do so because traditions are, in the best cases, self-conscious of their own histories and changeability, and of their rivals. In such cases, they make us aware of our own responsibility for the lens we take on the world, and therefore, of our ultimate responsibility for decisions that have been or will be taken as we look through that lens – decisions that otherwise seem fated, imposed, or necessary. Indeed, a sense of tradition would show us that the idea of necessary changes is itself a feature of a tradition that might be otherwise.

This is the most fundamental given in contemporary debates: that there is no viable alternative to the common life we have. Whether we follow them down all the roads they would lead us, Lasch, Goodman, and Jacobs point to a new plane on which debate about our common life might proceed. They are, for that reason alone, worthy guides for those ready to strike out in a new direction.