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A Tribute to Nelson Goodman

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The American philosopher Nelson Goodman died on November 25, 1998, in Needham, Massachusetts, at the age of 92. He was buried in a family gravesite in Everett, Massachusetts. His wife, Katharine Sturgis Goodman, preceded him in death in 1996.

Born on August 7, 1906, in Somerville, Massachusetts, Goodman became a leading proponent of analytic philosophy in the United States, and his theories are now studied throughout the world. Goodman was a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University from 1968 until 1977. Previously he served as Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University from 1964 to 1967; Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania from 1951 until 1964, and Associate Professor there from 1946 to 1951; and Instructor in Philosophy at Tufts College, 1944-1945. Prior to these appointments Goodman was Director of the Walker-Goodman Art Gallery in Boston from 1929 to 1941. From 1942 to 1945 he performed military service in the United States Army. He received his B.S. degree in 1928 (Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude) and his Ph.D. in 1941, both from Harvard University.

Goodman's interests ranged from philosophy to collecting art. Within philosophy, Goodman's writing and teaching were far-ranging with topics including aesthetics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language. His books include *A Study of Qualities* (1941); *The Structure of Appearance* (1951); *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (1955); *Languages of Art* (1968); *Problems and Projects* (1972); *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978); *Of Mind and Other Matters* (1984); *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, with Catherine Elgin (1988);¹ and *L'Art en Théorie et en Action* (1996), a translation of two chapters from *Of Mind and Other Matters*, including conversations with Frans Boenders and Mia Gosselin, with a Postface by Jean-Pierre Cometti and Roger Pouivet. Beyond these books, Goodman wrote many articles for scholarly journals, as well as papers on topics in philosophy.

Among the major publications on Goodman's work are *Logic and Art; Essays in Honor of Nelson Goodman* (1972), edited by Richard Rudner and Israel Scheffler; *The Philosophy of Nelson Goodman* (1997), by Catherine Elgin; and *La Philosophie de l'Art de Nelson Goodman* (1996), by Jacques Morizot. Forthcoming in 1999 is *Kunst als Erkenntnis: Zur Diskussion um Nelson Goodman's Buch, Sprachen der Kunst*, edited by D. Gerhardis and B. Philippi.² A partial bibliography through the 1980s is published in volume 25 of *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* (1991). Goodman was a frequent subject in the press of Europe, where articles concerning his work regularly appeared in *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and other leading newspapers.

Throughout his lifetime, Goodman was the recipient of many honors and awards. He served as President of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, in 1967, and as Vice President of the Association for Symbolic Logic, 1950-1952. He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. In 1946 and 1947 he was the recipient of a Guggenheim Award. Among his many distinguished lectures and lecture series were: Sherman Lecture, University of London, 1953; Alfred North Whitehead Lecture, Harvard University, 1962; John Locke Lectures, Oxford University, 1962; Miller

Lectures, University of Illinois, 1974; Immanuel Kant Lectures, Stanford University, 1976; and Howison Lecture, University of California, Berkeley, 1985. His honorary doctoral degrees are from University of Pennsylvania (L.H.D.); Adelphi; Technische Universität, Berlin (Doctoren ehrenhalber), 1990; and Université de Nancy, France, 1997. The American Society for Aesthetics honored Goodman with a seminar on his work at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Society in 1992. He has been honored in Europe with various international colloquia during the past decade: Author's Colloquium, Zentrum Fur Interdisziplinare Forschung de Universität Bielefeld, Germany, 1991; "Colloquium on Representation," University of Rome/University of Tuscia-Viterbo, Viterbo, Italy, 1991; "Nelson Goodman et les Langages de l' Art." Musée National de l' Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1992; "Maniere de Faire les Mondes," Université de Nancy, Pont a Mousson, France, 1997; and Wei sender Welterzeugung (Ways of Worldmaking), Heidelberg, Germany, 1998.

Goodman's philosophical theories embrace nominalism, constructivism, and a form of radical relativism. He perhaps best sums up his approach to philosophical concerns in the foreword of his book *Ways of Worldmaking*: "Few familiar philosophical labels fit comfortably, a book that is at odds with rationalism and empiricism alike, with materialism and idealism, with mechanism and vitalism, with mysticism and scientism, and with most other ardent doctrines." He thought of his work as belonging to the mainstream of modern philosophy, yet he proposed to substitute his own structures of several symbol systems for the structure of the world, the structure of the mind (Kant), and the structure of concepts (C. I. Lewis). The symbol systems of the sciences, philosophy, the arts, perception, and everyday discourse thus constitute the "ways of worldmaking." For Goodman, "The movement is from unique truth and a world of fixed and found to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions of worlds in the making."³ He joins Quine in challenging two of the "dogmas of empiricism," namely, an appeal to an analytic/synthetic distinction, and a commitment to a reductionist/foundationalist account of knowledge.

In *Languages of Art* Goodman offers a new program for aesthetics, grounded in his theory of symbols. His attempt to analyze

the various art forms according to their symbolic features affords the possibility of greater discrimination among the art forms of painting, music, literature, dance, architecture, and the other arts. Underlying this approach is Goodman's belief in the cognitive nature of art, which invites consideration of the arts as partners with the sciences in the pursuit of understanding. Pictures, musical performances, literary texts, dance performances, and buildings shape our experiences, just as do linguistic and scientific representations. Within this formulation, representational, expressive, and exemplificational forms of symbols govern the features and functions of the arts. Goodman's approach substitutes for the question, "What is art?" that of "When is art?" He finds without significance the attempt to determine uniquely aesthetic qualities, preferring instead to look for certain clusters of symbolic features that evoke understanding characteristic of artworks. Gone too is the attempt to proffer spurious distinctions between scientific understanding and aesthetics. For Goodman, they are but two complementary means for making and understanding our worlds.

Goodman's activities extended beyond philosophy. Activating the arts in museums, performance, and especially in multidisciplinary contexts was a major theme in his life and work. He was the founder and director of Project Zero at Harvard (1967-1972), an interdisciplinary research program investigating aesthetic education, which continues today under the direction of Howard Gardner and David Perkins. He was also producer of the Arts Orientation Series (1969-1971), Consultant in the Arts for Summer School (1971-1977), and Director of the Dance Center, all taking place at Harvard. Goodman conceived and actively participated in three notable performance events: *Hockey Seen* (in collaboration with the choreographer Martha Gray, the composer John Adams, and the artist Katharine Sturgis), which was performed at Harvard in 1972 and in Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium, in 1980, and filmed at Harvard around 1984; *Rabbit Run* (adapted from a novel by John Updike, in collaboration with choreographer Martha Gray and composer Joel Kabakov); and *Variations, An Illustrated Lecture Concert* (with the composer David Alpher and slides showing Picasso's painted variations on the Velázquez painting "Las Meninas"), which was first performed at a Philosophy of Music Conference/Helsinki Music Festival in 1985 and at Harvard in 1986. His interest in activating the arts also

extended to museums, as indicated in his writings on museums such as "The End of the Museum," a lecture to the American Association of Museums (see *Of Mind and Other Matters*, 1984), and "Art In Action" (1992), an unpublished paper.

His professional role as a gallery director and private art collector was a source of major satisfaction in Goodman's lifelong pursuit of collecting art that began in his student days. He was well known in the art world for his discriminating aesthetic perception and equally for his astuteness in negotiating the price of an object. A visit to his home in Weston, Massachusetts, where he lived for many years, would reveal a collector with enthusiasm and in-depth knowledge over a wide range of art. Virtually every corner and closet in his home held yet another group of art treasures. It was not unusual to see hanging on opposite walls an important Flemish Old Master by Jan Van Kessel and an exquisite naive work by an unknown twentieth-century Italian immigrant farmer, Peter Petronzio. His collections included seventeenth-century Old Master paintings and drawings, modern art from Picasso to Demuth, ancient Asian sculptures, and Native-American arts of the Northwest Coast and the Southwest, even Pre-Columbian.

As a generous lender and donor, he benefited various museums including the Fogg Museum at Harvard, the Worcester Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the Haggerty Museum at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His most cherished discovery relating to his art endeavors was the artist Katharine Sturgis Goodman, his wife and companion of over 50 years. They met when she brought her watercolors of New England subjects for exhibition at his Boston gallery. Sturgis, a "Cambridge spinster and heiress," and Goodman were both over forty years old when they married. Goodman continued with great devotion the advancement of her career throughout their years together. On the occasion of an exhibition of her work, Goodman would be found attending to minute details of the installation and arrangements. One of his last official matters of business was to establish a permanent repository in 1996 for the care and display of the works of Katharine Sturgis at the Cape Ann Historical Association in Cape Ann, Massachusetts.

Nelson Goodman pursued his interests with energy and great intensity, whether writing, lecturing, or in pursuit of a new work of art. To his friends he was a warm and stimulating person, with high expectations and a great deal to contribute to a friendship. He had little patience with incompetence and anything less than full attention to his perceived needs. As a lover of animals, he was deeply concerned about animal welfare. He was a member of the WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals) and other societies dedicated to this cause. His generous contributions supported projects throughout the world affecting the rescue of large numbers of animals in war zones and animals endangered by natural disasters. For instance, he funded animal rescue projects in war zones during the Gulf War and during the war in Bosnia, as well as projects to rescue animals affected by a volcano eruption at Montserrat and by fires in Borneo.

In the months before his death, Goodman suffered a stroke and became unable to continue his regular travels and other activities. Characteristically, until a few days prior to his death, he was expecting to travel to an international conference to deliver a paper. Sadly, this was not to be. Nelson Goodman's passing has received surprisingly little note in the United States for one of the major original thinkers of the twentieth century, whose ideas may well have altered philosophical thought and deliberations on the arts for generations to come.⁴

¹ *A Study of Qualities* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1941. reprint New York: Garland Press, 1990); *The Structure of Appearance* (Harvard University Press, 1951); *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Harvard University Press, 1955); *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968); *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972); *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978); *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Harvard University Press, 1984); *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, with Catherine Elgin (Indianapolis; Hackett, 1988).

² *Logic and Art; Essays in Honor of Nelson Goodman*, ed. Richard Rudner and Israel Scheffler (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972); Catherine Elgin. *The Philosophy of Nelson Goodman*, 4 vols. (New York: Garland Press, 1997); Jacques Morizot. *La Philosophie de l'Art de Nelson Goodman* (Nimes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1996): and *Kunst als Erkenntnis: Zur Diskussion um Nelson Goodman's Buch*, Sprachen der Kunst. ed. D. Gerhardis and B. Philippi (Frankfurt am Main; Suhrkamp. forthcoming).

NOT THE PUBLISHED VERSION; this is the author's final, peer-reviewed manuscript. The published version may be accessed by following the link in the citation at the bottom of the page.

³ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*.

⁴ I would like to give special thanks to Catherine Elgin and Robert Schwartz for their help in preparation of this work.