

1-1-1999

Nelson Goodman Remembered

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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 grave site in Everett, Massachusetts. His wife, Katharine Sturgis Goodman, preceded him in death in 1996.

Born on August 7, 1906 in Sommerville, 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 1968-1977. Previously he served as Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University from 1964-67, Professor of Philosophy from 1951-1964 and Associate Professor from 1946-1951 at the University of Pennsylvania, 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. 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), *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. Beyond these books, Goodman wrote many articles for scholarly journals.

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 Diskission um Nelson Goodman's Buch*, *Sprachen der Kunst*, edited by D. Gerhardis and B. Philippi. A partial bibliography through the 1980s is published in volume 25 of the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Goodman was a frequent subject in the European press, where articles concerning his work regularly appeared in *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and other leading news papers.

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 the Howison Lecture, University of California, Berkeley, 1985. His honorary doctoral degrees are from the University of Pennsylvania, Adelphi University, Technische Universität, Berlin, 1990, Université de Nancy, France, 1997. The American Society for Aesthetics honored Goodman with a seminar on his work at the 50th Anniversary of the Society, Philadelphia, 1992. He has been honored in Europe with various international Colloquia during the past decade: Author's Colloquium, Zentrum Für Interdisziplinäre 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; "Manière de Faire les Mondes," Université de Nancy, Pont à Mousson, France, 1997; Weisen der Welterzeugung, 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 and dualism, with essentialism and existentialism, 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, and the structure of concepts. 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 fixed and found to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions of worlds in the making."

In the field of aesthetics, Goodman's *Languages of Art* 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 art works. 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 multi-disciplinary contexts, was a major theme in his life and work. He was the founder, and director of Project Zero at Harvard, 1967-1971, 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 at Harvard. Goodman conceived and actively participated in three notable performance events. His *Hockey Seen* was created in collaboration with the choreographer Martha Gray, the composer John Adams, and the artist Katharine Sturgis, was performed at Harvard in 1972 and Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium in 1980, and was filmed at Harvard in 1984. *Rabbit Run* was adapted from John Updike's novel in collaboration with choreographer Martha Gray and composer Joel Kabakov. *Variations, An Illustrated Lecture Concert*, with music by David Alpher and slides showing Picasso's painted variations on the Velasquez painting *Las Meninas*, was first performed at a Philosophy of Music Conference at the Helsinki Music Festival in 1985 and then 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).

Goodman's professional role as a gallery director and his private art collecting were sources of great satisfaction. His life-long pursuit of collecting art 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 would reveal a collector with enthusiasm and in-depth knowledge over a wide range of art. Virtually every corner and closet 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 naïve 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 Sturgess Goodman, his wife and companion of over fifty years. They met when she brought her watercolors of New England subjects for exhibition at his Boston gallery. Sturgis, Cambridge spinster and heiress, and Goodman were both over forty 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 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 with animal welfare. He was a member of the World Society for the Protection of Animals and other societies dedicated to this cause. His generous

contributions supported the rescue of animals in war zones or endangered by natural disasters. For instance, he funded animal rescue projects in Kuwait during the Gulf War, in Bosnia, during volcanic eruption at Montserrat and 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. The Philosophy Department at Harvard is reportedly planning a colloquium in his honor, possibly in the spring or fall of 1999. Until then, his passing has received surprisingly little attention in the United States, although he was one of the major original thinkers of the Twentieth Century, whose ideas may well have altered philosophical thought and deliberation on the arts for generations to come.