

## **Christmas 2016 in Town and Country**

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**Before Town and Country, let's talk about the election.** Trump won the three critical states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania by little more than 100,000 votes in all. The 107,000 voters who made Trump president could fit into a large football stadium. That Hillary lost this close election more than Trump won it, has become a truism - even though she received 2.7 million votes more than Trump. She was mistrusted by most of the country and not helped by the Democratic Party leaders (Wasserman) making sure that independent voters wouldn't count in various Democratic primaries. Otherwise, Bernie Sanders might have become the Democratic candidate and would have beaten Trump handily, according to earlier polls. The central issue controlling this election was (and still is) wealth inequality. We no longer have a two party system. We have only one party: the business party (as Chomsky asserts). If in 38 years, worker's wages only increase 4% while 95% of the burgeoning wealth flows to the financial sector (bankers, investors, corporate administrators), then the rage of ignored and exploited workers can burst forth against a government that doesn't represent them anymore. Corporate money and interests now control both parties.

The irony of electing Trump, of course, is that he belongs to the billionaire elite that is screwing the laboring class. In interviews, he repeats that he's very good at "construction" (real estate and fantasies). But he has declared six business bankruptcies so that he can stiff contractors and their workers, paying them pennies instead of dollars, or the true cost of his "towers". And, seemingly, he has paid no taxes in 19 years. Yet working class voters elected him. How come? Well, if profit becomes the ultimate value in all cultural pursuits as it has in the U.S. (and now being exported globally), truth doesn't survive in politics, media, education, or medicine. This is sadly and especially true of media. TV and radio have been governed by profit for decades - so false news, biased news, omitted news, are more the case than truthful reporting. That Trump followers paid no attention to media criticism that much of what he says has no content behind it, that his promises (e.g. to bring back steel and coal jobs, deliver great health care at a fraction of Obamacare cost, to "bomb the shit" out of the Islamic State, to cut taxes by \$6 trillion (for the elite) while spending trillions for workers to rebuild our roads, bridges, and airports, and to do all this while reducing the national debt ) are just hollow song and dance performances – these criticisms could be ignored because such criticism were the usual media lies. Finally, they believed they had someone who would "do something for us". But Trump's lack of respect for speaking truth and his indifference to the facts of public record are unprecedented in an American president and often

parallels European leaders of the 1930's. Pent up frustrated emotion in people often propel such demagogues into leadership.

Trump's selection of cabinet officials have all been homogenous in that they all identify American individualism with the pursuit of profit over all other values. These are 'what's in it for me' people and social justice or "fairness" hasn't ever intruded into their daily lives. Without a return to progressive populism (ex. FDR and Bernie), we seem destined to continue on the road to plutocratic oligarchy. Most probably, white workers are not going to be rewarded for having elected this administration. (Much of the above comes from Mark Danner *The Real Trump*, NYRB 12/22/16)

**To more pleasant matters. Town:** This year I enjoyed a rare visit from my Seattle sister, Anita, with hubby, Tom, who timed their visit to hear Jori Graham (poet) give the Gras Annual Lecture in the Humanities at GMU. Surprisingly, I also received a string of European visitors to DC. First came Prof. Jesus Lopez-Pelaez Casellas and family visiting the Folger Library in order for him to translate early English MSS. into Spanish and with whom I delightedly discussed what later would turn into biosemiotics (more below). Then came Ruediger and Uta Ahrens from Wuerzburg University with whom I had arranged the Wuerzburg Univ.- GMU student and TA exchange back in 1985. Diane came in from her West Virginia estate and we all enjoyed museums, theater, and Eastern Market shopping. Suffering the results of the heavy German cuisine (worse, maybe, than Standard American Diet or SAD), Ruediger was persuaded to try a vegan diet. Hope he continues.



DC townhouse front yard



Diane, Uta, and Ruediger at  
Eastern Market

Finally, Dominik Rigoll, a German historian, arrived for lunch. He writes on the 1950 – 1970 period in German history. At present, he is working for the German Minister of Interior, Thomas de Maiziere, checking out the transition from the Nazis and East German communists to the Bundesrepublik in regards to intelligence activities. He was interested in my experience as spy handler for the military in Berlin, 1955-56. That was nostalgic for me, evoking *Berlin, Berlin, nur du allein....* But, again, a mutual overlap occurred - this time centering on dialogism. His dialogism was with five points of view;

mine was between culture and nature. As pursuit of the latter dialogism sums up my life journey somewhat, I render here my email to him, expanded a bit.

It was a pleasure talking to you, too, Dominik. And not just for the nostalgia of thinking back to Berlin in 1955-56. What I gathered from our conversation re "dialogism" was that you were aware of the legacy of postmodernism - that all we ever get is an interpretation, never "das Ding an sich" - that doing history from god's point of view ( usually selected by historian) is no longer believable. Thus, in your dissertation, you write process history wherein five points of view combat or influence one another. That kind of history can last longer. Sooner or later, however, you will feel compelled to take a stand re historical outcomes. When you take a stand, of course, you apply values; you don't just "objectively" record what happened. Authority for values has disappeared - no more Plato or revealed Word of God. Dualism has departed and with it any supernatural explanation or deduction from some universal or absolute source - even in science. Einstein's space/time Siamese twins, for example, replaced Newton's absolute categories of time and space out in the universe. Value judgements become an horizontal affair, a comparison between before and after. We replace Aristotelian physics with Newtonian because the latter is more adequate; it can do so much more. Thus, if we take up Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, which once were thought capable of universal transhistorical validation via Platonic idealism, we now need to find a new source for their validation. As "process" is now taken as the new reality and not "substance", values will have to be tied to that evolving reality. In other words, culture is an open ended affair in which scientific universals, social and moral laws or rules, canons of judgement in art and fashion, themselves do not escape history. All such frames or assumptions, on which we stand at any given moment and with which we classify, order, and understand the world, are themselves products of history. Each new generation of humans inherits a pre-interpreted world which they need and should attempt to make more truthful, more beautiful, and better than the one they inherited. So, to come back to your "dialogism": ultimately, you will have to connect cultural dialogism to nature's evolution. If you cannot connect the former to the latter, you will be left in the absurdist position of Beckett and that period of past dualistic culture which believed that nature was indifferent to human values and one can't jump the gap between culture and nature (e.g. the early films of Peter Greenaway) The new paradigm, however, is emergent evolution and the two best sources to seek for a continuity principle between culture and nature is Fritjof Capra's *Systems View of Life* and Jesper Hoffmeyer's *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*. I'm writing this to you, Dominik, because it's the central problem of our time,( i.e. how to feel at home in the universe, to become cosmic citizens) and I hope to save you some time. Best, Vernon



Beaverdam Creek culvert



Solar Panels on DC townhouse

**Country: Farm and Environment.** Out on the farm, I've had to replace a culvert over Beaverdam Creek (See picture). In the last two years, the creek has flooded from 4 inches deep and 4 feet wide to 8 feet deep and 60 feet wide three times without benefit of hurricanes. In the 1980s, it happened once every ten years with a hurricane. The climate is changing. With warmer weather producing heavier rain, kudzu is also invading Virginia from the south. My ten acres of forest on Ashby's Mt. are being threatened severely by hundreds of strangling vines. My 450 planted loblollies and white pines, however, are still untouched and splendid, reaching 65+ feet. A 300 lb. black bear also seems to like the ambience and wanders through my nut orchard..

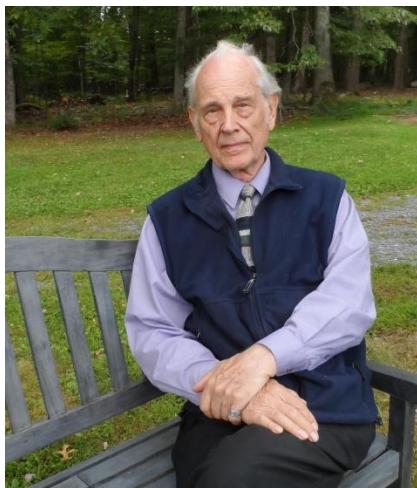


Grasmere cottage with pines behind



St. Monica's Park in DC

The Environmental and Social Justice Committee of UUBridge in Sperryville, VA., has finally completed the 12 projects which will turn us into a certified Green Sanctuary Congregation by the UUA, Boston. To help in the GSC *Energy Transition Project*, I installed 20 solar panels on my DC roof (see picture) and wrote a solar support letter to the Virginia governor (which most of you received). Also in DC. I look across the street at beautiful St. Monica's Park , whose creation I helped initiate and still help to maintain. So, here at the end of my life, I'm helping others to become nature lovers and trying to make the world a truer, more beautiful, and better world than our inherited one. Hope you all try to do the same.



Love      Vernon