

March 12, 2008

Don McNeil
P.O. Box 312
Wyalusing, PA 18853
570-746-1646

Phil Henshaw
680 Ft. Washington Avenue - #1A
New York, NY 10040

Dear Phil,

I am happy to hear that you are striking some nerves as you poke the sharp stick of systemicity into the flanks of the porcine purveyors of pernicious progress. It sounds as if some of Salthe's notions about "senescent systems" are sneaking in also. All this may allow you to put your systems work onto your entertainment budget. For my part, I have pushed forward with the "Going On With Systems" sampler, and a current version is enclosed as a PDF. Tedious as you may find it to be, I nonetheless recommend that you notice its subject headings and browse some of its images because I think there may be materials in it which you can use to advantage to focus your own thinking, whether you agree with what I have to say or not.

I am realizing – and I hope not merely rationalizing -- how come it was best that I stopped attending ISSS and ASC meetings after 1996 and that I failed in my attempt to emigrate to Australia at that time for a career in "general systems" and that my interaction with the IIGSS did not work out in 2000-2001. My stark isolation here in recent years has put me on notice that I can do less than nothing or I might proceed with work that only I can do. That message together with a little inspiration from a few helpful people made 2007 a year of some accomplishment after all ... one small step for a man, one giant leap for me. Among other things, I continue to learn about things I didn't know that I knew as well as about what I didn't know that I didn't know. Anything I could have asserted about systemicity ten years ago or even two years ago would have been premature at best. What I can say now may not be much better, but it is certainly different in subtle as well as obvious ways. To focus on what is going on and to identify every relative invariant as the result of a cybernation re-centers everything. It suggests that the universe generally does not tend toward any particular ultimate such as "maximum entropy" or "least action" or "maximum reproduction" but rather tends to what cybernates, by happenstance or by design. Along the way it makes some sense of "innerness" regarding what systems do and how they are necessarily a composite wholes, not subject to "analysis," that which would take things apart so as to make external what is inherently internal. It also promotes the concept of "enoughness" which is anathema to the onward-and-upward "growth people." Thus the developmental sigmoid has its place in life cycles as does operational cybernation and precipitous collapse, the latter being inevitable but not predictable as to time and cause. Your notion of unaccounted factors is surely a key to some portion of this unpredictability as well as to other understandings of the general misunderstandings of what is going on.

I have browsed in your website on several occasions and will try to peruse it all eventually. I think that I agree with most of your concerns and conclusions expressed there, but even as an interested student and a kindred spirit I cannot be sure what to think until you can sharpen and consolidate what you have to say. As I have been finding with my own work, there are many possible modes of presentation, some more effective than others for a reader and also for a writer; a form which is most convenient and natural to compile is not necessarily the easiest to read and study. I have settled at last upon the etude-with-art format in my Sampler, but it can be desultory as to its order and may have other disadvantages for a reader. Logs are popular nowadays, but they can lead to repetitiousness and inconclusiveness. I can say from recent experience that you will produce your definitive work only when you are ready. In the meantime, others will have to struggle to decipher what you can offer piecemeal, even if they are inclined to agree with you. I wouldn't make the implied criticisms here if I didn't think your ideas, your work, and your access to some of the movers and shakers was of urgent importance. The sooner you have a consolidated offering in place, the sooner might people who need it be able to learn and to act more appropriately. Of course, if the current world system is metastable then it is already too late, and the accounts will be paid with a surprise visit from Mother Nature in the guise of a repossession agent. Still, it is worth a try. If you could benefit from a getaway to my Homestead here for some concentrated work on what you would do next, the door is open. Some intense discussions might tease out some helpful initiatives.

As it turns out, there are a few non-academic things which this property can teach, divided as it is between a highly artificial portion (house and barn) and some acreage which is at once somewhat domesticated and somewhat wild. All parts of it cry out for the Hypocratic Oath: first do no harm. One can as proprietor make "improvements," but it is wise first to stand off at some remove and witness what is going on without human intervention and then to allow some of that, even as other matters must be attended, e.g., the eleven mice in the house last year had to go. If only the rat race of human activity in the Western Rational Tradition had the luxury of just stopping temporarily so as to let the systemicity of Nature play out and be appreciated. Unfortunately, the systemicity of our artifices is a treadmill which does not allow anyone to step off without serious consequences. I am old enough to remember when it was possible for one to move safely aside, and in my little corner of the world just now I have sometimes enjoyed a return to the feeling of freedom that comes with being able to relinquish "control" and still be somewhat secure. Would that this were the way in which a more felicitous culture could learn to live.

Best regards,
Don