
“The most important problem in our current economic system is the distancing of individuals from economic processes.”

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E. F. Schumacher Society
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Katrin Kaeufer: *What are three biographical steps that brought you to the role that you are in right now?*

Susan Witt: In the 1970s I was a literature teacher at a small, Waldorf-centered high school in New Hampshire. There I taught literature as a study of heroic activity, meaning an exploration of the qualities needed to live life responsibly on Earth. My students would say, "Oh, yes Ms. Witt, but where in the real world are these heroes that we're reading about?" I felt that it was a legitimate question.

My grandfather died in 1977 and left me a small inheritance of \$10,000, twice what I was earning per year as a Waldorf teacher, so I figured I had two years to write the great American novel. The problem was what would be the subject of that novel. In a way it became my cocktail party question: Where in modern life do you find heroic activity?

I imagined it might be where physics and metaphysics meet, at that juncture. I felt that it wasn't in the social sciences -- in the exploration of how we should behave with each other. Even when we fail to act properly, we've explored those regions and know how we should have acted. The realm of psychology seemed too personal. I was interested more in the relationship of the larger community to the cosmos as a whole, if you will.

But I had a trusted friend who kept on saying, "Ah, the modern hero is with businessmen." And I thought, "I don't think so. No, that must be where a problem lies, not a solution." Yet he kept on insisting. As I thought

more and more about it, I began to realize that the task of America in the last part of the 20th century was indeed to explore and work with the economic and bring a new impulse into it. The economic is in some ways the element, the context of American culture. It is our task, our destiny as a people, to evolve economic transactions into a force of good for the Earth and all of humanity.

Those that were working with the economic in a new way, bringing environmental values, social values, spiritual values, cultural values to their work in the economic sphere, were, in fact, dealing with some of the same trials that the heroes of old faced: the trial of greed, the trial of distraction, the trial of despair, the trial of fear, the trial of the wasteland – experiencing one's path as sterile and empty.

So, I resolved to volunteer for organizations that were working with the economic in a new way to get material for my novel. I didn't want to just interview the players of a new economics. I didn't want to be a kibitzer, who would look over their shoulders and say, "You should have played your cards that way." I wanted to be inside the work and actually understand the pressure. It was at this point that I turned on the radio and heard Robert Swann speaking at the Cambridge Forum about his friend Fritz Schumacher, the economist and author of *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. My impression was that here was a sound and value based approach to economics. I decided to volunteer for Swann's Institute for Community Economics.

"What can you do?" staff asked when I called. "Well, I have a master's degree in English literature. I can put your card file in alphabetical order." They responded, "That's great because our card file needs much attention." This was pre-computers in the office, of course. I began working at the Institute the same week in September of 1977 that Fritz Schumacher died. I would travel to Cambridge once a week, and then go back to my New Hampshire home with work.

Shortly after the Institute established the Community Investment Fund, the first fund in the country with positive investment criteria. There were at the time funds that chose not to invest in arms, or alcohol, or tobacco, for instance, but the Community Investment Fund was seeking investments to make a positive impact – housing coops, worker-owned businesses, appropriate technology, community land trusts. I was asked to staff the CIFund and in that way started to become a character in the novel rather than the novelist. Even without a background in economics, I found my

training in literature helped me introduce the stories of a new kind of economics, a value driven economics, a place based economics, to those with whom I now was working.

A related experience came later. In 1980 Bob Swann and I moved to the Berkshires and were simultaneously asked to establish the E. F. Schumacher Society. Our goal in moving to a region like the Berkshires was to implement some of the concepts that we had only written and talked about at the Institute for Community Economics in Cambridge. We were not satisfied with the theoretical and wanted to apply the ideas in an actual community.

It was a very American ethic of operation. Build it and they will come. Show me how to do it, rather than just talking about it. We organized the Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires as a model for a new method of land tenure. Land is held in common by the non-profit CLT and then leased for use. Lessees own the buildings and other improvements on the land but not the land itself. Resale of the buildings is limited to their current replacement costs, excluding the land value. The E. F. Schumacher Library and office and my own home are on community land trust land. At the Forest Row site of the CLT we built 18 units of permanently affordable homes for year round residents, hiring a worker-owned building crew. We established SHARE, a simple to operate microcredit program that connects investors directly with producers through a bank loan collateralization program. The first community-supported agricultural (CSA) farm in this country grew out of discussions at the E. F. Schumacher Society and took shape at Indian Line Farm a neighboring farm to the Library. The land at Indian Line is now also held by the Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires.

And people came. We developed packets of legal documents for these model programs that could be used to establish similar programs. The press covered new stages of each project. There was a show of much interest. But few of those who came actually went on to implement the models in their own regions.

I pondered this. What had we failed to do?

Then in the winter of 1994, Schumacher's widow donated his books and papers to the Schumacher Society. They arrived on January 4th, the coldest day of that year. Only one small office of the library building was heated at that time. The forty boxes sat in the very cold "big" room – treasures that

we would take to the heated office to explore, a box at a time. What we found was not a library on economics – but rather a collection of books on philosophy, religion, and literature from all the world's traditions.

Schumacher was studying how to live well on Earth, how to conduct oneself responsibly on Earth and with each other. Out of that study a new economics was formed, rather than from a study of economics.

Schumacher's books were the same books that influenced me and Bob Swann and our board of directors. We came to realize that we needed to tell that whole story, that background story, when working to shape a new economics. It is not the examples alone with their legal documents that will inspire the rebuilding of our economy. It will take reaching to the core of our beliefs as a people and then exploring how those values can instruct economic institutions.

KK: *How does the current economic crisis show up in your work, and how does the crisis show up in your personal life?*

Susan Witt: The Schumacher Society formed in 1980. In Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful* he called for an economic system in which the goods consumed in the region are produced in the region. He felt that such local production for local consumption would create a more sustainable economic system. Goods would not be transported over long distances. Citizens would see the production process, the conditions of workers, and the effects on the environment of that process. They would meet shopkeepers and understand the relation of those businesses to the wider community. It was a face-to-face economics.

Schumacher argued that an interconnected system of small-scale or regional-scale economies would, in the long run, be more vibrant and resilient. Now, of course, Schumacher also said if everyone were for small, he'd be for big, and it wasn't just being contrarian. It was a question of balance. Even in the 1960s and '70s when he was writing and speaking, he understood that the balance was tipping too much towards large scale economic institutions and there needed to be a correction towards the local and regional.

What we have focused on at the Schumacher Society these past 29 years is to develop tools for citizens to implement the kind of economies that meet Schumacher's vision – diverse, robust regionally based economies. Rather than waiting for government solutions, rather than expecting producers to

struggle to create new businesses in an unfair playing field, how can we as citizens create conditions to encourage import-replacement businesses in our regions? These approaches include providing affordable access to land, affordable access to credit, and an educated market for a new economy.

For most of the Schumacher Society's 29 years of operation, our work was seen as a boutique operation, quaint and somewhat old fashioned. The global economy, its scale and range, was understood to hold the solutions to the world's many problems. So, the work of the Schumacher Society was loved but was, in some sense, marginalized. With the recent near collapse of world financial markets, the promise of what that global economy could bring has failed. Suddenly there's a new interest in the potential and stability of local economies where people actually take responsibility for their own economic interests.

The Schumacher Society's work is now at the center of much media interest and curiosity as people say, "Oh my goodness, for the past 29 years you've been working to build the institutions for a local economy, and we need to understand how that is done."

KK: *What would you consider the most important root causes of the current situation?*

Susan Witt: We've come to feel that the most important problem in our current economic system is the distancing of individuals from economic processes. The goods used in our daily lives are for the most part produced outside of our knowledge. We do not know what our money is doing tonight. It may be earning a three percent return, but that abstraction does not tell us if it is financing an organic farm in our region or a chemical factory using child labor. The financial process has affected an estrangement of individuals from the actual making of goods. The consciousness skips over an imagination of trees cut down, brought to factory in trucks, milled and cut, shaped into tables and chairs by a workers in assembly lines, carried over oceans on ships to a central warehouse, where UPS trucks load in response to an online order.

The full economic process is not penetrating our consciousness, our understanding. It is almost as if the economic system is running itself, unobserved, unfettered, unrestrained by a higher consciousness – one capable of moral, social, ecological, spiritual insights and considerations.

There is an advantage to abstraction in the economic process. Before we had the tool of money, economic exchange was limited to what could occur at a particular place and time. If I needed carrots, I would have to have the cordwood that the carrot farmer required.

The introduction of money correctly allowed for an abstracting of that process. Instead of cordwood, I could offer some form of currency that stood as an abstraction of value. The carrot farmer is then free to hold that currency and at a future point in time assemble it with currency gathered in other transactions to purchase a cart that would make it easier to carry products to market. So the abstracting process of money allows for human ingenuity to enter into the economic process and permits a store of value across time and across space.

However in recent times this abstraction of the monetary process has been taken to such extremes that no moral intuition, no higher consciousness, can penetrate the multi-layered, divided, and reassembled financial transactions. The economic and social consequences of this excessive abstracting process has become apparent over the past year in the collapse of financial institutions at their source.

It is time to recreate an economy and economic institutions informed by and accountable to our highest ideals.

Another root cause of our current economic crisis is the commodification of land and other natural resources that are rightly part of our common inheritance and of limited supply. Land, water, minerals are the fundamental basis of all economies, but are not in and of themselves appropriately economic products. Natural resources enter the economic when human labor, organized by capital, transforms them into products for exchange. The products then are appropriately commodities, but not the natural resources themselves. To commodify natural resources gives those who have acquired them through market forces or conquest, an unfair advantage. They profit, through no work of their own, on the need of all people for access to the commons -- a speculative function that creates imbalance in economic relationships.

To address this problem we believe that land and other natural resources need to be treated in a different way in the economy. Access should be by social contract, rather than market force. Peter Barnes has written much about this subject in his book *Capitalism 3.0*

KK: *What do you consider the most important blind spot of economic theory or economic thinking?*

Susan Witt: Well, this goes back to what I was saying earlier. I think we've been lulled by an illusion of convenience into accepting an economic system that runs itself, uniformed by our human consciousness. For instance, most of our financial transactions are now carried out electronically. That distancing that is presented to us as a convenience, separates us from the actual economic processes. I'm concerned that, in order to create an economic system that actually reflects and serves our best values, our highest aspirations as a people, then it is necessary to facilitate more face-to-face and direct transactions.

I think a blind spot is not acknowledging that this is important. The necessary changes to our economic system will not come about through simple adjustments to the current system. It will require a full transformation, new ways of conducting our economic lives, so that the best of our human consciousness can penetrate and shape economic exchange. That's going to be hard work. It will take knowledge of every step of the production process, the stages of financing, the use of the land, the treatment of workers, the distribution process. Slow knowledge learned one-on-one-on-one – an inner activity, an inner knowledge, disciplined. We are out of practice, lazy about our economic lives, giving in to the convenience of a system that seems to run itself, so that we need not be bothered.

As a result, an entire system has nearly collapsed before our eyes, and created havoc and devastation that we are pressed to comprehend.

KK: *Can you give an example of where this vision that you just outlined is already visible?*

Susan Witt: Of course. Take for example the community-supported agricultural movement. What is it essentially? It is citizens taking responsibility to support the yearly operating costs of the farmer. This year in the Northeast there has been a devastating tomato blight. The tomato crop has nearly failed. Shareholders of CSA farms did not receive the bounty of heirloom tomatoes that they have come to expect. Their contract with the farmer is that no matter what conditions are met – rain, cold, drought, animals eating crops, equipment failure, we guarantee your yearly operating costs are met. We ask only that you farm to the best of your ability, and for that we share the risk of farming with you.

A direct consumer-producer relationship occurs in a CSA. Shareholders are fully engaged in the workings of the farm; they can imagine the life of the farmer; they pitch in to plant in May, to weed in July, to harvest in September.

But how else can this citizen engagement in economic life be encouraged? Because I live in the Berkshires, the examples I choose will come from this region. The beauty of the landscape and rich cultural attractions draw people to build second and third homes in the Berkshires. As a result land is held vacant for much of the year and so unavailable for homes for local workers and resources for local production. Land costs rise.

If we as citizens envision a future economy in which much of the food we eat is actually produced locally, then we will have to create affordable access to land for farmers. One method we have developed to address this problem is a community land trust. Through a one-time purchase of the land by the community, the land is held permanently in trust and leased to farmers on 99-year leases. The farmers own their home, their fences, their perennial stock. If they plant an orchard; they own the replacement value of the orchard. They even own the soil improvements. If the soil is farmed organically and its quality builds, the Cooperative Extension Service of our regional land grant college can actually determine the dollar value per acre of the soil improvements. The farmer can sell the improvements if the lease is transferred to a new farmer, but the farmer cannot sell the land itself.

In this way the farmer builds equity, but equity not in that land value, not in that common inheritance, but equity in what they've achieved through transforming nature through their own ingenuity into new product and new value that enters the economy, but not the land itself. So, that means the community working through the community land trust has secured a permanently affordable site for local production of vegetables. That's a good example.

Another is a program we've started recently here in the Berkshires called BerkShares, which is a local currency that circulates just in this region. There are 13 branches of five local banks where citizens can walk in, and exchange \$95 Federal for 100 BerkShares (B\$), which they can spend at one-to-one value at any of the 400 businesses in the region that accept it. BerkShares in their wallets are a commitment from local citizens to find

ways to support their local businesses, rather than going on the Internet and purchasing goods without a story from anonymous sources.

BerkShares are cash. That means when you pay a bill in BerkShares, you can't just sit isolated at home, go online, and transfer funds. You have to walk into the print shop, walk into the accountant's office, walk into any number of retail stores and actually pay in person, looking at the retailer or producer or professional in the eyes, coming to know them, understanding the conditions of their business, of their shop, and beginning to understand how local ordinances affect those businesses. You become a better informed citizen. When you go to town meetings to vote on that new by-law you understand its consequence on your neighbors and local economy. You engage with the people and the place that is your community.

Another thing occurs, you begin to know the stories of the items you use in your home. You know the woodcutter that cut the cherry tree in the woods that the carpenter used to make the table that is your kitchen table. You've seen the children of the carpenter as they go to school. You might serve with the carpenter's husband on the school committee. Again, it's an economy that now has a story that connects you to a particular people and a particular landscape. Your full imagination is engaged, your full capacities as a human being. The connection leads to responsibility for that people and that landscape.

KK: *Where do you see that we as a society will be in three, four, five years?*

Susan Witt: Optimistically, I see—in those coming to the E. F. Schumacher to study and adapt the programs we've modeled in the Berkshires, in the vibrant Transition Town Movement, in the work of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies and the New Economics Foundation, in the business innovation shown by people like Will Raap, Dan Levinson, Judy Wicks and others, in the writings of David Boyle and Michael Shuman, and many others now picking up the theme of local economies, in a younger generation who we meet at the Schumacher Library who intuitively understand a new economics integrating social, cultural, ecological and economic issues—I see this groundswell of interest village by village, if you will, town by town, region by region, in finding ways to build local economies that are more self-reliant. Economies not shaped as one monoculture global economy but reflecting the very uniqueness of a particular people in a particular place and a particular time in history. Diverse economies. And in that diversity, that very uniqueness, meeting to share

our common concern for this single planet that we inhabit and have the responsibility to steward.

These newly imagined local economies have, of course, coalesced around food, with a consciousness of the need to have fresh, healthy, secure food at the local level, food with a story, food with a farmer that is met in sidewalk conversations and trips to the farm. But the imagination is expanding beyond food to other products in our daily lives. Nor is the awareness limited to citizen consumers. While in the past the strategy of economic development authorities in our towns and states was to try to lure a branch of some large corporation with tax incentives, that is now changing. Savvy politicians now understand that a more sustainable approach to economic development is to build a complex of small businesses producing locally for local consumption. They plan networking meetings between businesses to keep money circulating locally. They facilitate sharing of resources between companies. They talk of the Creative Economy, once marginalized, as an important component to regional vibrancy.

So, I hope and expect that in three to five years the movement will grow further and realize some of its boundless potential. That each region of the world will turn to first to the resources within that region, building an economy out of the skills and materials found there, and then from that secure base begin trade with other regions, neither exploiting other regions nor being exploited. From those secure local bases a new universal sense of our common humanity and common responsibilities will then emerge.

KK: *What three action steps would you suggest that Obama take?*

Susan Witt: Well, much of what a government must do and much of what a president must do is propose legislation. But in all legislation a kind of tug of war begins between those who feel their interests have been slighted. That is almost inevitable, yet must be done. However, it would be wonderful if President Obama could take at least some time and use the prominence of his position and the eloquence of his understanding to initiate a cultural dialogue around what we might commonly envision as the new economics.

So, say, "Dear citizens of America, we find ourselves in an economic crisis of historic proportions. Our existing economic systems have failed us in this crisis. Yet we are a people of vision, of principle, leaders in the building of a new society. Can we return to these principles, look at them now in this first part of the Twenty First Century when much is changing

rapidly because of technology, and ask how these principles can again inform our economic lives, our economic institutions, our work and trade with each other? It is a big task, but necessary. And I believe we can meet this challenge of transformation of our economy into one that matches our spirit and vision and destiny as a people."

If America, as a great country, is going to continue to lead in the field of economics, then let's step back. Let's look again at our core values as a people and see how, if we were to start from scratch, we might shape a new value conscious economics. This would be an important step if the President could inspire such dialogue and consideration.

KK: *How does the essence of your work address the challenges and issues? Can you summarize it?*

Susan Witt: At the Schumacher Society we work at two different levels. We have this extraordinary library of ideas including Fritz Schumacher's personal books and papers. We conduct an annual lecture program, now in its 29th year, that has hosted some of the leading thinkers on a new economics and new society. Much of the intellectual capital that we're working on now as a culture can be found in that body of lectures.

But more importantly, we work to put these concepts into practice with telling effect. For instance, as soon as we established the community land trust in the southern Berkshires, it made the statement that here was a vehicle for holding land and not speculating on land. It was a statement. We didn't have to talk about it. We didn't have to write about it. The very fact of forming that organization and gathering some of the first pieces of land raised the concept, raised the image of a new way of treating land. That meant that people began relating to the institution to the doing, rather than to the ideas. In one way, it made conversations simpler. We did not have to sit at a dinner table with someone complaining about how corporations speculate on land. Suddenly there was the practical option to place one's own land in trust rather than holding it for speculation in the future. So, the whole nature of the experience with the concepts changed, just by the forming of the organization. That did not mean that those complaining then moved to action. But they then had to relate to an active entity for change in the world, and not just an abstract concept.

In September of 2006 we issued BerkShares, a local currency for the Berkshire region. Something similar happened as the creation of the Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires. Suddenly the

discussions about the federal reserve and a concern that it was inappropriate to have centralized currency issue, quieted. Here was a democratically structured, place based, non-profit issuing a local currency. The bar was raised. It was no longer enough to just complain about central currency issue, a positive step could be taken. Use of a local currency is not easy and automatic. Long established economic patterns had to be changed. No late night buying on the Internet from an unknown supplier. It meant going to Main Street and having face-to-face relations with store keepers and professionals. Choices were limited. Prices were not always the lowest. Did we have the conviction to make these changes.

In economic terms the BerkShares program is very small. In a region of 19,000 people, 2.5 million BerkShares have gone out from 13 branches of five participating banks since launch almost exactly three years ago. But that's a very small part of overall trade in the region. And yet the program has received an enormous amount of national and international media attention with prominent stories in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Time Magazine*, *Washington Post*, Reuters, ABC World News, Fox News, MSNBC, CBS, BBC, French TV1, Russian TV, etc. In April of this year, for instance, the BerkShare's website averaged 43,000 hits every day.

The fact of the currency, the holding of it in the hand, the circulation through the 400 businesses is more powerful than a book on the subject. The fact of the currency raises questions that otherwise wouldn't have come forth. So, we find it interesting to experience the world of pure economic theory and then have this different experience, different set of pressures, different relationships that come through putting theory into practice. The practice engages a different set of skills, a different part of the body politic. This interests me tremendously and amazes me – the alchemy of it, the unexpected graces that occur when a project is actualized. It takes on its own unexpected life independent of its group of creators, though still working on them and with them.

KK: *What are important future research questions?*

Susan Witt: Andrew Kimbrell was one our most popular Schumacher speakers. He gave an extraordinary lecture called *Cold Evil*. He said, "I feel in the future that the main problems that we have to address are not going to be those caused by the old, hot evils of temper and anger and fury that occur one-on-one or in a people against a people. The great evils of this age and into the future will be brought about as a result of the distancing effect of technology. A distancing that permits some very nice

husbands to get up in the morning, leave for work, fly a plane, drop a bomb, burn a village and as a consequence destroy the village and its people without any direct experience of what has been done. At the end returning home to their life as good fathers."

He went on to describe how in so many aspects of our lives this distancing effect of technology is enabling us to create great harm without conscious understanding of that harm. We must tackle this problem if we are to retain our very humanity. Kimbrell's lecture is one of the most read and circulated of our collection.

I've come to value his insights. It was Andrew Kimbrell who posed this question to me, "Susan, if we are really going to get behind a new economics, a new way of conducting our economic lives, then we're going to have to fall in love with a new vision of what that can be."

I feel that various groups, various people, are working on parts of what that new economics might be. Gar Alperovitz is doing extraordinary work around cooperative business structures. Peter Barnes is probably our best thinker on the commons; there are multiple people working on a new monetary system, the democratization of money systems.

But how can we put that vision together as a whole and see it and talk about it, develop it as curriculum in our schools, even starting at a young age? What are the texts of that new economic vision? What are the best reads on land reform, for instance? What is the bibliography of a new economics? I would want to include Jane Jacob's *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, Rudolf Steiner's *World Economy*, J. C. Kumarappa's *Why the Village Movement*, Martin Buber's *Paths in Utopia*, Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Wendell Berry's *Unsettling of America*, Leopold Kohr's *Breakdown of Nations*. But those are my touchstones. We need many others, all looking at the problem/solutions from multiple angles. Annotated bibliographies. Again, we need the teaching material. We need the story told in multiple ways if we are to fall in love with a new vision as Andrew Kimbrell asks.

And then after we have the story, we need to figure how to get there from here. What are the steps necessary to transform our current economic system into one where we live more fully conscious of our activities and their consequences. An economics permeated by our best values, our hopes and dreams for the future of the Earth and all its citizens?

KK: *Is there anything else you would like to add, people we could talk to or places that are interesting to explore ?*

Susan Witt: I'd clearly like to recommend Andrew Kimbrell. And Arthur Zajonc who is an extraordinary physicist at Amherst College who has at the same time a deep knowledge of esoteric literature and its practice. He's been an inspiration to me in some of our discussions about a new economics. He's served as head of the Anthroposophical Society in America and as head of Lindisfarne Association. Will Raap of Gardener's Supply in Vermont, an entrepreneur who's taken his wonderful skills and applied them to creation of new economic forms in his community. He is an idea-a-week person, but in a very practical way, out of the love for his community and a sense of what is possible. Judy Wicks, who founded the White Dog Café and then had the vision for Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. And, of course, Hazel Henderson, a giant early thinker in green financing, and still as strategic as ever in her thinking about the current financial situation. I'd whole-heartedly recommend them all.

But let me also tell a story about Wendell Berry, our great American poet and essayist. His writings reflect what is best about rural America, the best of an agrarian ethic. He has helped define elements of a healthy local economy. Wendell and his wife Tanya live on, and continue to farm the land that his grandfather stewarded in Kentucky.

I had occasion to travel to Lexington, Kentucky, where my elderly mother was living for a short time. Wendell lives in Henry County, north of Lexington. I would never know in advance of a trip to Kentucky how well my mother would be, and if she would welcome a drive, so I could not plan visits with Wendell and Tanya. But on this occasion she welcomed a road trip and I had some materials to deliver and so we set out. Wendell Berry is on the advisory board of the E. F. Schumacher Society.

Now, I'm a back roads driver. I like to go via ways I haven't been before, small roads out of the way. Previously when I had visited Wendell and Tanya I'd gone up from Louisville to Henry County. The trip from Lexington was a new route.

We started off driving, and it was beautiful, new country. As we reached Henry County, the road followed a river on the right, and I thought, "This is kind of familiar. If we drive ahead maybe a mile more, the road will turn left, and Wendell's farm will be on the crest." Or so I thought; it was an

image in my mind. But suddenly, as we were driving, we came into a shining landscape. That's the only way to describe it.

You know how, as a traveler, you sometimes see things in a way that you can't see when you've been there every day? You have a fleeting vision of a place more intimately, more deeply. And there I was in this shining landscape. The shimmering leaves, the water glistening, and it wasn't just the sunshine. There was a different character in that landscape, and I thought, "What's happening?"

Of course, we had reached Wendell's farm and I hadn't recognized it. I missed the drive and had to turn back.

He wasn't there, so I left the material and we returned to Lexington. But I pondered about that shining landscape, what made it so.

At length I came to the following: that it was a landscape well observed. A landscape well observed, but not just observed in a distant way like a reporter might describe. It was an observation that was penetrated with love for the place itself, a love that could then lead to action.

When reading Wendell Berry's essays and novels, you walk through that landscape with him. You peek in the old tar bucket hanging from an oak tree and count the acorns that have collected there. You step over the stone wall and realize that the next field needs reseeded and plan to take the team of horses out next week. It's an observation penetrated by love that leads to restorative action.

That type of conscious observation works to transform the very landscape itself. A physical change takes place. A consciousness embeds the trees, and fields, and rivers and begins to spiritualize them.

It was Martin Buber who said that our responsibility on Earth is to waken the sleeping spirit of things and raise it from stone to plant, from plant to animal, from animal to speaking being. Wendell's shining landscape helped me understand what Buber was describing.

But then the question arose, what is preventing the creation of more shining landscapes? And for me the answer lay in our economic institutions that distance us from direct relationships with the landscape and the people of a place.

When land and other natural resources are bought and sold as a commodity, rather than experienced as a community to which we belong, a barrier occurs to the creation of shining landscapes. When our financial system separates the investor from the producer, then the citizen is alienated from the maker of the products used in the home and the objects become merely stuff rather than reflecting the story of a local place.

So in part what motivates me in my work at the Schumacher Society, is an effort to cross these economic barriers to the creation of shining landscapes. The intention is to shape new economic institutions that reveal and support our conscious connections with a place and its inhabitants.

I'd like to add one more thought.

For those of us working with local economies, there's always a tension when people ask, "Ah, isn't it through our global economy, through our interactions with people around the world, that we create a common brotherhood, sisterhood of all people?" Now I'm a child of the '60s. It was a generation that experienced itself more connected with members of its own generation than with members of its own town or nation or race for that matter. We were a television generation, and we met peoples from around the world through that media. We prided ourselves on being citizens of the world.

There was at the time an optimism about the benevolent influence of the global economy, that we could meet and connect with all people through the global economy and that the global economy would be a vehicle for creating this universal brotherhood/sisterhood.

But the promise failed us.

When I asked Arthur Zajonc about this, he said, "Ah, well in a way what happened with the global economy is that the negative, the shadow side of the economic appeared first – a spiritual law, that the shadow appears first." We moved into this alluring global economy with sophisticated technology and skills, but we hadn't evolved our humanitarian skills to the same degree. The technology moved ahead of our capacity to responsibly meet what we unleashed in the economy.

So there was, as it were, this premature moving into the global economic sphere without a transformation of our personal, social, and community skills to meet the scale of economic activity. The economic ran on its own

laws, raw, undisciplined by a higher consciousness, corrupted, off-balance. It is now important to return to a human scale economy, using it as a testing ground, exploring and training all of our capacities as human beings and embedding our economic systems with our best ideas, our highest aspirations. Then once we learn how to conduct our economic lives in the testing ground of the local or regional, then bring those skills to a transformation of the global economy where we meet as a common people in a common stewarding of the Earth and its inhabitants.

KK: Thank you so much!

Susan Witt: You are welcome!