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Editor's note: this transcript was made starting with the audio recording located inside: <http://ifg.org/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IFG-JArmstrong2014.mp3> – (Left-mouse click the local copy here at – [IFG-JArmstrong2014.mp3](#) – to download the mp3 file to your machine.) I am grateful to [Jeannette Armstrong](#) for her editing of the original transcript to enhance its meaning and for writing out the words she spoke of the Okanagan language. She employed Okanagan font using keyman to provide the Okanagan Unicode keyboard, in lucida sans Unicode font. More specifically, the nsylxcn font was used to spell Okanagan words. See the table at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okanagan_language#Orthography for more information. This presentation of Jeannette Armstrong was recorded at the [International Forum on Globalization's Techno-Utopianism & The Fate Of The Earth Teach-In](#) held in New York City on October 25-26, 2014.



Jeannette Armstrong: Indigenous Economics

IFG Teach-In: Techno-Utopianism & The Fate of the Earth

Great Hall of the Cooper Union, New York City, October 26, 2014

Introduction by Claire Greensfelder

It is truly an honor and a pleasure to introduce my long time friend and great speaker and traditional wisdom keeper for the [Okanagan People](#), especially the [Penticton Band](#) where she lives, Jeannette Armstrong. She has her Ph.D., she is teaching at the University of British Columbia but beyond that she is also one of the traditional wisdom keepers for her community. She is an environmental leader. She is one of the last native speakers of [her language](#) and has created a center to re-teach to her people in the Okanagan, the language that has been with them for generation after generation.

She has worked to save sacred sites, to create ecological communities, to bring back traditional lands into the hands of her people. But also to be a visionary and a leader globally for the rights and the values as well as the practices of Indigenous peoples and how those practices and technologies are actually the things that we need to move forward into this century and hopefully on into the future. Please welcome a truly extraordinary person, and a dear friend, Jeannette Armstrong.

Indigenous Economics: A Syilx Perspective



Limləmt (thank you) Jerry Mander, Claire Greensfield, limləmt (thank you). My name. There I am with my daughter. My daughter's name is Her Power Is Water, sumaxatk^w. My name is The Sound And Sparkle Of A Small Brook Rushing Along, laxłaxxtk^w. Behind and surrounding us,

embracing us, is our Grandmother. Our Grandmother who gifts us with the beautiful berries and the precious cedar baskets that take a year to make.

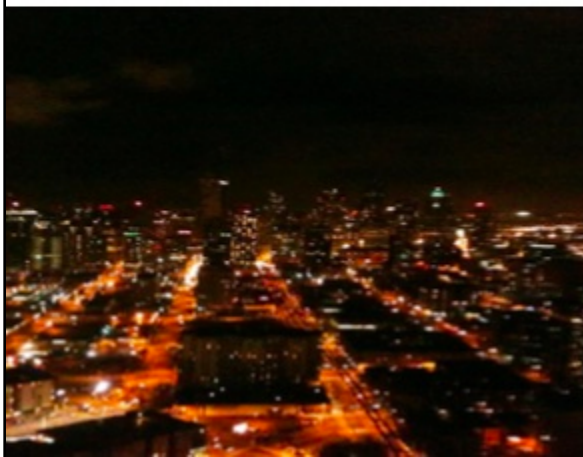
I have been a resister and an activist, as that is also needed in order to defend. But today I share my indigenous work here from my home. This place is the multiversity of my people which gave me my true Ph.D. My other Ph.D. is from university in environmental ethics. The Ph.D. is a way to look at, and share something, of my Grandmother's wisdom through that lens.

When I think of my grandmother I know that the soil and the plants and the animals and the birds are my ancestors. They have fed on our bones, on our lives. They have fed each other and us and we have sustained the reciprocity that is a gift to every living thing on that land. That is indigenous economics.

My Grandmother is wise in her wisdom, in her knowledge in the ways that that place needs to be.

"For the first time in the 3.8 billion years that life has existed on Earth, one species-humanity-is altering the biological, physical and chemical features of the planet on a geological scale." Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance*

However, **not all cultures of the human species are responsible.** One particular culture of human economics is responsible for such a scale of damage to the earth and damage to the many human cultures who are engaged in maintaining traditional Indigenous economies in their homelands.



[[The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place In Nature](#), by David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell, 1997]

The point to me seems obvious, that the root of today's problem is how humans chose to live insulated from nature's mediation of their behavior within a system of reciprocities in which everything that takes must also give.

I can also see that it has something to do with a belief, a belief in ever increasing the insulation from nature's economic requirements of us as humans in the way we are.

It has been at great cost. A cost we cannot afford. We are now in deep, deep, deep debt. It has been but a few thousand years, this idea of civilization.

Techno-Utopianism: Globalized Culture-ism Eroding Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity



As economic framework it situates **techno-wealth as desired human advancement.**

Lack of it is “poverty” or “primitive conditions” and casts Peoples living in Indigenous economies as backward and less.

As cultural imperative it asserts that **civilization is commensurate with ever new technology.**

It masks the actual parasitic goals of its economic contrivers to insure social ignorance of its true costs to what is human.

This civilization grounded in the belief that the Grandmother is wild and needs taming and that Indigenous Peoples are wild and need taming.

First they tamed Grandmother to make things. Taking things, easy to take without giving back. Taming the land. Agriculture was a way first to increase human advantage to sustenance. However, it also increased populations that now needed more and more and so more land was taken from other living things.

Agriculture needed easier tools in order to produce more and more. Then it created a need of tools for war in order to keep the tamed lands and tools to take more land from more peoples. Then it was necessary to make more war tools so taking was easier.

It was necessary to make more tools and to teach people to run the new tools to feed their families. It was necessary to make them believe that they could be wealthy and thus happy. It creates junk-ease.

It Creates Junk-Ease

- It is a flawed model “**sourced** solely by the continual depletions of natural capital **fueled by social dependency** on production and consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources structured into daily living.” Daly, Steady State Economics
- It is dependent on the overwhelming **influence of societal mechanisms** structured to normalize the insatiable desire for newer, easier and faster things.
- It normalizes the earth-ravaging and human violence practices of development as “progress” and “wealth” and safeguards **the belief that this is prosperity.**

[[definition: Steady State Economy](#) / [Steady State Economics](#), Herman E. Daly, 1977]

Tools were made to reach into every house with that in mind. To keep people believing in making more tools to make life easy, and to rush to use new tools and thus to believe they need such tools. And so it is necessary to tame more and more—necessary to make junk easier and easier and they might be happier.

There is a deep belief that economic prosperity is based on this. There is a deep belief on this form of social dependency. We confirm this every day in the way we do things. The influence of the social mechanism structured to normalize that which we accept every day as our reality.

My Focus on Indigenous Economics follows the words of the late John Mohawk, Seneca Scholar, that:

“It’s not necessarily about the Indigenous People’s of a specific place; it’s about re-indigenizing the peoples of the planet. It’s about us looking at the whole thing in the broadest of possible ways.” Mohawk, in Original Instructions.



[[Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings For a Sustainable Future](#), Melissa K. Nelson et al, 2008]

This is my brother, Richard. He didn't go to university. He went to Grandmother's University. This is my brother training ecologists and environmentalists and biologists in our lands economics. In doing restoration and conservation, they need to know the land's requirements of us all. And that many of its beings on those lands have included us humans in their reciprocity and need humans to take their gifts. And that the grasses and the great herds have included us and other animals in their reciprocity. Learning that way so we stay a part of that reciprocity.

Indigeneity : A Framework of Economic Principles

"Indigenous" refers to how living things learned a **way of inter-relating** within a specific place to achieve the dynamic optimum efficiency insuring constant renewal.



Peoples maintaining principles of constant renewal of nature's bounty require their whole society, **at a level of individual personal knowledge**, to do things in a way which never destroys the ability for its constant renewal.



My brother here is providing some ideas. It is a framework of economic principles. That is my extended family's children. That is my nephew and myself working with children.

And so one of the things that I have come to understand is that in maintaining those economic principles, is that we have to pass them on. Indigenous economics is a lived experience. We are socialized into that lived experience. It's not something we can learn about from a book or something we can learn about from a far distance from what we need in our lives.

We are needed in that place by those things that live there in that place.

So one of the things that I see is that at the level of individual, personal knowledge, some of those things are lost.

Indigenous Economics: A Learned Experience of What is “Right”

Indigeneity viewed as a social paradigm is not about race or ethnicity.

It is about **cultures of knowledgeable economic interaction** with their specific place.

It brings both practical and psychological fulfillment.



This is one of the boys in our puberty training. He is learning how the deer gives to us. He must do a gratitude ceremony to release the deer’s spirit to rejuvenate itself. That way he never allows himself to kill the deer’s ability to fully regenerate its kind. So it will always be there to give us its gift of its life as food. He is recognizing through our human spirit the spirit of the lives that embrace us.

The idea of indigenous knowledge, is to understand it as economic interaction. It is to have deep knowledge about the limits and the requirements of all the different living things in the place you use. It is understanding that we as humans can partake in that place like every other living thing, but we have to know those limits. Indigenous economics is about knowledge, in how we view nature.

Indigenous Knowledge is about how we view “Nature”.




It is a matter of how we experience it in our lives as a society as family and community

These are children in my extended family. They are learning to love the taste of Grandmother's gifts and the pleasure of harvesting it together, and to hear the songs of its celebration. Also to give thanks and to love to work slowly and hard picking reverently each berry.

One of the things about the work that we do is in terms of bringing back our language. It is about re-languaging what we mean about work. That it is not work. That it is a joyful experience to be a part of that, to taste that, to love that and to be embraced by it. To re-language that our giving back is not work. That our giving back is being who we should be as humans.

Indigenous Economics: Society-Wide Knowledge of the Requirements of the Places We live Within



Each place requires us to act **within its reciprocity** as a necessary part of our everyday living.

How we are socialized in the knowledge of our place is the foundation of our **internalized laws** about it.

It is the **spiritual guiding force** for our human interactions within it.

These are children of the [En'owkin Centre](#), our Syilx (the name of our people) learning center. They are learning appropriate ways to take but not to kill the relatives of the land. Those relatives have a right in their long, long lifeform residing there.

Whether they are trees for baskets or deer for food, to kill means taking until they cannot regenerate and they disappear. The laws of this is that it is nature's requirements of us, to know those limits. To know its reciprocity as a human love for these relatives. This is a human responsibility in terms of our reciprocity.

We know that doing things in a way in which that reciprocity is not possible, causes the extinction of any one of those relatives and that is what killing is about.

The Question

To reverse the devastating cycle which industrialized society has imposed on the planet, we will have to relearn ecological knowledge and earnestly deal with the question.”

Posey, in *Paradigm Wars*

Can we really embrace better practices which hooks people together as change forces which restores both people and place?



[[Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization](#), Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpus editors, 2006, p.31]

These are the local people of both indigenous and non-indigenous heritage at En'owkin's riparian forest restoration place. We rescued it from becoming a golf course.

We turn to the community of the local cities and the local reservations. We turn them into a force to protect it, to increase its reciprocity. We bring people to love it. The school's children in all the surrounding towns come. Adults learning ecological restoration and those who just need to rest and heal come to learn about it. To learn about the ecological knowledge from our point of view, from the Syilx point of view, as a collaborative force and a collaborative voice in re-indiginizing the place.

Society changes when transformative experiences are made available



“We are on the verge of the inevitable transition from an economy based on new development to one based on restorative development.”

Storm Cunningham,
The Restoration Economy

[[The Restoration Economy: The Greatest New Growth Frontier](#), Storm Cunningham, 2002]

These are En'owkin's adults going into this park to greet our relatives. The park has been closed

because of perceived dangers and was secured to exclude us from harvesting the spawning kokanee, a land-locked salmon. We have resisted that. The millions of teeming salmon in those deep creeks kept us alive for many years.

However, we can't eat them now. The Okanagan Lake is being poisoned with effluent and agricultural and orchard pesticides and so we stopped eating them. But we do not stop going there to greet them, to give them offerings and to sing to them and to make a feast of giving to those who come to join in. We love them and they loved us. For too many years they loved us, for us to forget them.

One of the things I like about restoration, locally, is that it brings people back to local place. Local people back to local place. The spirit of the place wakes up inside of those local people and they are changed by it. It restores them to become indigenous to that place.

Earnestly Implementing Indigenous Economics

- **A modern social ethic of local regeneration within nature's reciprocity can be constructed.**
- **Indigenous led local land restorations are opportunities to create Indigenous economics**



This is part of the Meadowlark Festival. A festival in which all the district's environment projects are showcased and celebrated here on our restoration place called the Locatee Lands. Drumming together, singing together, feasting together, learning together, replanting and restoring together—it is the spirituality of that local culture that we are restoring and rebuilding.

Creation of New Social Institutions

- Collaborations with Indigenous peoples produce transformative shifts away from domination frameworks and institute new communities in solidarity on mutual ground.
- Necessary shifts in education, training and academia for social applications at local levels will evolve.



This is a local teach-in at that same place with ecologists, biologists, and traditional indigenous keepers. En'owkin institutes a traditional knowledge component into Okanagan land conservation and restoration outside of the walls of the university. It has transformed the way they do things and the way they learn things in that place with us.

We need much more of this kind of restoration which restores local people to local places. It is people who need restoring to be able to do the things that are necessary to bring nature back on a global scale. One of the things I like about this slide is that that man is a bird watcher.

Reconciliation With What is Indigenous

- Reconciling colonial mindsets about Indigeneity.
- Reconciling food prejudice is core.
- Restorations for wild food and perma-culture harvesting access specific to local community invests in local food economy.



The idea of reconciling with what is indigenous in local nature is people living within its reciprocity. It can be something as obvious today as changing our food tastes. Something as easy as that.


The taste for exported and agricultured foods should be decreased. And the taste for local harvest indigenous foods increased. Learning how to responsibly and ethically empower indigenous reciprocity is to use those foods in local places by local people, while respecting the requirements of indigenous foods and learning to love them.

Those are my two Ph.D. supervisors, one is in environmental ethics the other in literature. It is a way of sharing Syilx ethics through that academic lens.

Earnestly Committing to Establishing an Indigenous Economy

Conceptualizing large scale projects which **position *Indigeneity as a guide*** to finding ways for whole community to un-hook from techno-utopian economic behaviors.

Actualizing local cultural collaborations, alliances and coalitions intent on pro-active Indigenous Economics regeneration projects.



And this is a ceremonial feast. A gathering, a releasing of baby Sockeye which has been collected by hand from the Okanagan River and hatched to restore them where they had almost gone extinct. The whole community, indigenous and non-indigenous come together. To raise them, to sing, to pray, and to feast their release and their gifts to us.

It is one of the most beautiful ceremonies that our people did. This was the first Salmon release ceremony about 17 years ago. Since then, it's just grown so huge that many, many people can't fit into that small area.

This is [Penticton](#), my home. [En'owkin Centre](#) is just behind there and the Locatee Lands that I was showing you is just behind, in that cottonwood riparian forest. Riparian forests now have only four percent left in the entire Okanagan.

Indigenous Economics : **Okanagan Sockeye Salmon Restoration**

Collaborations with International & Federal Departments of Fisheries and Oceans, State PUD's, 3 Municipalities and 8 First Nations.

Sockeye return in record numbers not seen in last 100 years to the Okanagan river, once listed as Canada's third most threatened river.



First Salmon Return at Okanagan Falls Traditional Fishery in over 60 years.

Inspired 2 long-term collaboration conservation projects to restore original river paths and restore river riparian forests.

This is the first run of returned Sockeye into the Okanagan. The gifts of Sockeye allow us its gifts, along its rivers and on its way to the ocean. Restoration is our way of giving back as Syilx people, as Syilx people enjoying each other. Living in the right way with these salmon, with these rivers and with these forests and other beings that surround us and embrace us.

These two long term collaboration projects that I mention here are still going on and more and more small environmentalist groups and conservation groups are working in collaboration with the Okanagan Nation Alliance to do that.

These are some of the gifts of the Sockeye to us.

Our Chiefs Dream

Wild sockeye raised by Okanagan Nation, by people and by schools feeds the whole Columbia River system. It is a Syilx view of reciprocity and responsibility

Salmon is distributed to Syilx communities as food harvest.

Fresh Sockeye shared in Annual Feasts open to all.

A Nation owned commercial fishery for canned and fresh sales.



These are my relatives, my grand daughter and my nieces and they're preparing the salmon. The

happiness that it brings is in the faces of my niece and my granddaughter. The taking care of the salmon in the right way is spirituality.

Belonging is core. One community caring for one place.

Indigenous Economics immerses local people in regenerative knowledge together as a whole community.



Belonging. The longing to be part of the way things are as a whole is a longing for the joy of breaking free from the destructive spirit of killing behaviors.

Belonging to nature's reciprocity, here in this beautiful land and its diverse places. The longing to be a part of nature must end, and belonging must happen. It must happen in a good way.

Indigenous Economics A Historic Treaty to Bring Back Bison

- Signed in Montana, September 23, 2014 by 11 First Nations and Tribes on both sides of the Canada-United States border.
- The Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty — the first of its kind in 150 years — establishes inter-tribal alliances for the restoration of free-roaming bison on reserves or co-managed lands within the U.S. and Canada.
- Their respective lands collectively make up more than 2.6 million hectares throughout the U.S. and Canada.

[See "[Historic Treaty: Bring Buffalo Home, Heal the Prairie](#)," *livescience*, 09/24/14]

So I will leave you now, with the contemplation of re-indigenization in this last slide as I walk back to my seat. Contemplation on how it transforms people to the land's spirit.

I pray for many, many ways to do this. And this is the song that Turtle gave us, that gave me this medicine which I sing walking back to my seat.

The Turtle came up from the deep dark and grasped onto the land's edge. I pray for that for everyone here. I give my medicine to you.



Jeannette Armstrong is [Syilx Okanagan](#), a fluent speaker of [nsyilxcen](#) and a traditional knowledge keeper of the [Okanagan Nation](#). She currently holds the [Canada Research Chair](#) in Okanagan Indigenous Knowledge and Philosophy at UBC Okanagan. She has a Ph.D. in Environmental Ethics and Syilx Indigenous Literatures.

She was awarded British Columbia's Community Achievement Award in 2012. She is the recipient of the [2003 EcoTrust Buffett Award for Indigenous Leadership](#) and she has been instrumental in the research and implementation of a successful nsyilxcen adult language fluency and cultural revitalization program at the [En'owkin Centre](#), the Post Secondary Institute of the Okanagan Nation. She is distinguished with Honorary Doctorate's from the University of BC, the University of St. Thomas, and the University of Queens and holds the [Okanagan College Lifetime Fellow award](#) (2008).

She is an author and Indigenous activist whose published works include literary titles and academic writing on a wide variety of Indigenous issues. She currently serves on Environment Canada's [Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee](#) on the [Status of Endangered Species and Wildlife in Canada](#).

Written Word:

- [“Indigenous Peoples: Development with Culture and Identity”](#) (Doc format), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Expert Group Meeting, Articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, New York, 12-14 January 2010. Republished on [pages 129-138](#) (numbered pages 79-88) of [Towards an Alternative Development Paradigm: Indigenous Peoples' Self-Determined Development](#), TEBTEBBA, Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, 2010
- [Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Orality and tmix^w centrism](#) by Jeannette Christine Armstrong. Dissertation (Ph.D.)—University of Greifswald, December 2009. Categories: Indigenous Knowledge, Language, Literature & Stories, Oral Traditions, Oratory Skills & Practises ([Abstract in HTML format](#)).
- [“Sharing One Skin,”](#) *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 2006
- [“Let Us Begin With Courage,”](#) 1999, Centre for Ecoliteracy
- [“Keepers of the Earth,”](#) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind*, 1995

Spoken Word – Film / Audio:

- [A Radically Different World View is Possible](#), “Inside and Outside Patriarchal Capitalism,” Gift Economy, 2014

- [Derrick Jensen Resistance Radio with Jeannette Armstrong](#) October 27, 2013
- [The Subjugation of Indigenous Governance - The Salishan Inter-Areal Construct](#), International Seminar on the Doctrine of Discovery, September 20-21, 2012 (sound problems)
- [Indigeneity: A Necessary Social Ethic to Take Us Beyond Sustainability](#), TEDxOkanaganCollege, 2011
See Also: written form of this presentation published in: [Beyond Sustainability](#), Curated by Brian Hughes, Contributions to TEDxOkanaganCollege, 2011, pp. 45-57,
- [Knowledge of Place](#), “Smart by Nature: Schooling for Sustainability” Conference, 2009
- [Human Relationship as Land Ethic](#), Bioneers, 2002
- [Okanagan Knowledge Keeper](#), date unknown (sound problems)