

## What Makes a Culture Generative?

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Suppose we had gathered for this conference, here in this very place, some three billion years ago. "This place" may have been very wet, for the earth's land masses were not arranged the way they are today. Wet or dry, this place would certainly have been home to some strange and seemingly primitive forms of life. And I doubt the conference would have lasted very long, for three billion years ago the earth's atmosphere was practically devoid of oxygen. In no time at all, we would have been gasping for what we considered to be "air."

Around two-and-a-half billion years ago, evolutionary biologists tell us, a remarkable metabolic innovation triggered a change in the composition of the earth's atmosphere. New kinds of bacteria, the so-called "cyanobacteria," began to take the hydrogen out of water and to release water's oxygen as gas. The growth of

cyanobacteria was extraordinary. Over ten thousand types are known today, and they can be found virtually everywhere--on walls at the mouths of caves, in hot springs, under Antarctic Ice, even on your shower curtain. Their production of oxygen began in seasonal cycles and was limited at first, but over time the oxygen they released started to build up in the atmosphere. By two billion years ago, the oxygen had become abundant. The earth had fresh air, thanks to the action of cyanobacteria.

Long after the work of cyanobacteria was done, something even more remarkable happened on earth. A more advanced life-form, breathing the very oxygen produced by these bacteria, created a second atmosphere. This time it was an atmosphere of meaning, and it was composed of ideas. Simple at first, the ideas evolved into complex symbol systems shared by particular communities of people. They evolved into art, literature, religion, philosophy, science, technology, law, and everyday common sense. They evolved into the subject matter of things called conferences. These symbol systems, these cultures, proved to be as diverse as the communities that fashioned them. And for each community they proved to be as vital as the air it breathed. If the earth was enveloped in oxygen, it was also enveloped in thought.

To get an idea of how recently this new milieu of meaning appeared on earth, let us imagine our planet's lifetime--all four-and-half-billion years--collapsed into

just a single year. The earth, then, would have been formed on January 1. A few days later, an enormous chunk of debris from outer space would have crashed into it and fallen into orbit, there to become our moon. Life would have appeared around the first of March, and cyanobacteria would have begun to fill the atmosphere with oxygen early in May. The arrival of culture is stunningly recent. If you date it from the earliest stone tools yet found (they're about two-and-a-half million years old), the earth discovered culture on December 31, at about seven in the evening. If you adopt stricter criteria, if you literally want your proof for the existence of culture in writing (writing goes back perhaps ten thousand years), the date remains December 31 but the time becomes 11:59 P.M. Just over a minute ago.

When I began thinking about generativity in relation to culture in preparation for this talk, the first thing that came to mind was this: how astonishing culture is and how recent its origin. In its last cosmic minute the earth has discovered an entirely new kind of life and a new kind of reproduction. Now we are able to "take in" the thoughts, the presence even, of distant ancestors--to "reincarnate" them, as it were. And just as they are reproduced in us, so we are reproduced, not just in biological offspring, but in offspring of the mind and spirit. Not too long ago, this kind of reproduction was unknown to planet earth. But it is more than known today; it is happening around us, and all the time. We move about in our atmosphere of meaning as

easily as we do our atmosphere of oxygen. And we breathe in its influence just as readily.

One need only stroll around a city like Kyoto to see a thousand ways in which humans hands have given expression to culture: in buildings ancient and modern, in streets narrow and wide, in gardens of rocks and chrysanthemums, in the way people bow to each other and enact revered rituals. When we seek to preserve these works and these gestures, we seek to preserve the meaning behind them. We seek to keep that meaning as fresh as possible so that future generations can breathe it in. We seek, in short, to render culture generative.

## I

What does it mean to say that a culture is "generative"? This is a complex question because cultures are so diverse and because each of us participates in so many of them. When I was growing up in Chicago in the 1940s and '50s, I participated in a school culture, a church culture, a sports culture, a neighborhood culture, an urban culture, and a national culture. I was exposed to a number of ethnic cultures. Later, when I attended graduate school in that same city, I encountered an intellectual culture unlike any I had known before; it was often at odds with the cultures of my childhood and adolescence. Because all these cultures overlapped in my mind, it would have been difficult indeed to identify which were generative and which were not.

So let me approach this question of a culture's generativity a little differently--in layers, if you will. And let me begin by turning to history and contrasting a culture that was clearly generative, at least for a time, with one that was not. In the early seventeenth century, two groups of English settlers came to America and established colonies on its east coast. One of the colonies came to be known as Virginia and the other, about 500 miles to the north, as New England. The Virginians and the New Englanders crossed the same ocean at the same time, but the meaning of their migrations could not have been more different. And the meaning mattered greatly to the fate of future generations.

The Virginians represented "the very antithesis of a generative culture," writes historian Gerald Moran, who has studied the generativity of both groups. They were adventurers, traders, and mercenaries seeking to bring wealth back to England. When they discovered how much money could be made by growing tobacco, they imported young men from England to work the land, taking them on as indentured servants for contracted periods of seven years. The young men involved lost all connections with their past. In particular, they lost an important element of culture: the protection of labor laws regulating the treatment of servants like themselves. In England they were afforded such protection, but in Virginia they were at the mercy of their masters.

The results were lethal. Well over fifty percent of the youth who came to Virginia died before their seven years of servitude were up. Few of the remainder married or had children, mainly because women in Virginia were so scarce. Those who did marry were unlikely to live long enough to see their children reach adulthood.

In stark contrast to the Virginians stood the New Englanders, who came to America not to make money for investors, but to preserve a culture and to find a safe haven for their children. The culture in question was Puritanism, a religious reform movement that had developed in the mid-sixteenth century to "purify" the English church. Because their attempts at reform failed, the Puritans left for America in the 1630s. Unlike the Virginians before them, they came in family groups, not as isolated individuals, and they brought their culture with them.

In New England, the Puritans found abundant land and stayed relatively free of disease. They produced completed families averaging over seven children. As Moran observes:

Nowhere else in England, Europe, or in the West for that matter did completed families approach the size of those in Puritan America. . . . In some communities, the under age ten population was as high as 35 percent of the total, and the under age twenty population was as high as 60 percent of the total. . . .

What makes a culture generative? The first and most

obvious answer to that question is this: the culture creates an atmosphere in which children survive--survive in the most basic physical sense. Perhaps no elements of culture were more decisive in this regard than legal ones: in contrast to Virginian youth, who lost the protection of the law, Puritan children gained it. In 1641 the New Englanders enacted a document on the "Liberties of Children" that prohibited parents from exercising "any unnatural severity" toward their offspring. If parents failed to comply, children were given "free liberty to complain to authorities for redress." This act was the first of its kind in the Western world, and it came at a time when children were routinely maltreated.

Puritan culture, of course, addressed far more than the physical survival of children. Indeed, the Puritans had come to America to rescue their children from what they saw as the moral corruption of England. Above all, they wished to preserve a way of life, and they wished to do so through the mechanism of the family. "As a Biblical people," writes Moran, "they viewed the family as God's vehicle for perpetuating faith and religious obligations." Puritanism gave fathers absolute authority, and it placed severe generative demands upon them. Fathers were responsible not only for begetting children, but also for feeding and clothing them, for teaching them how to read and write, and for seeing to their religious and moral education. As New England grew in size, schools were created to assist in this education. In 1647 a law was passed requiring a form of

public schooling for every town over fifty families in size. A decade before, while immigrants were still arriving by shiploads, Harvard College had been created--an unparalleled achievement in the history of colonization. From their very beginnings in America, the New Englanders created an atmosphere of meaning that pervaded every aspect of a child's life and every stage of its development.

In his theory of the life cycle, Erik Erikson concentrated not on the physical survival of children but on their psychosocial development, and he emphasized how important culture was at every step of the way. Parents, he said, had to "represent to the child a deep, almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning to what they are doing"; to do so they needed the "trusted framework" of a culture. Parents needed religion, or at least some "institutionalized form of reverence," to support their child's ability to trust in life (the first step in psychosocial development). They needed "the principle of law and order" to affirm and delineate their child's growing autonomy (the second step). They needed the assistance of what we today call role-models, "ideal adults recognizable by their uniforms and functions" to channel a child's initiative (the third step). And they needed the right kind of "technological ethos" to underwrite the development of personal industry in their child (the fourth step). Frustrations at any of these stages could be endured, Erikson wrote, if a culture provided an interpretation for them--if the frustrations,

that is, led "toward a final integration of the individual life cycle with some meaningful wider belongingness."

Erikson never studied New England's Puritans, but had he done so, I believe he would have considered their culture to be generative in all these respects.

Not so the Virginians, who had no interest in establishing institutions that would support the development of their young. Continuing to import indentured youth throughout the seventeenth century, they cut off all connections with the past. "Each generation of Virginians seems to have started anew, paying little attention to what had preceded it," observed historian T. H. Breen. "[They] focused their attention on what they called the colony's 'present state.'" Even when Virginia became more stable in the eighteenth century, it showed little concern for educating its young. Some planters hired tutors to teach their sons, but without a school system many children never learned how to read or write. Although the system of indentured servitude was eventually abolished in Virginia, it was soon replaced with something far worse--African slavery.

As we can see from the example of the American New Englanders, generative cultures are concerned not only with the physical survival of their children but with their psychological and moral development as well. But the story of the New Englanders comes with a caveat, a reminder that no culture is permanently generative. As time wore on,

there was a cooling of the generative intensity that originally brought the Puritans to America. The early school laws they enacted were gradually ignored. Harvard College declined both quantitatively and qualitatively. Puritan fathers proved quite willing to disinherit the child who chose the wrong occupation, married the wrong spouse, or in other ways displeased them. As the second generation became adults, many failed to follow the religious path of their parents. One historian explains why: "Only unusual Puritans seem to have been capable of raising children who knew how to love their fathers." In the absence of this love, it was difficult for Puritan children to embrace the beliefs of their forebears.

This failure on the part of Puritan culture to realize an even fuller measure of generativity takes us to a second level of inquiry. Here we ask: what does a culture need to keep the young on the path of their forebears, even as it welcomes youthful innovation? What will lead them to create a generative identity (the fifth stage in Erikson's scheme) and to embrace the values of their culture?

## II

Now we have to become more focused--to drill in just one place, as it were. So while acknowledging that in their generative moments cultures do many things, let me at this point specify just one: they nourish generative desire in adolescents and young adults, desire that sets the stage for

the formation of identity.

What is generative desire? Listen to this twenty-three-year-old woman:

I don't think one day goes by that I don't worry about what my path is going to be. I keep coming back to the idea that I want to somehow make my mark. I want to help a person who is struggling. If I can't do that as a therapist, I would like to reach people with my writing.

I'm not sure if I will have children, but I want to make a difference in a child's life even if he or she is not my own. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I can say that I changed someone's life for the better. Maybe there's a term for being my age and being concerned with the legacy that I hope to leave.

Generative desire is evident in the phrases "to make my mark . . . to help . . . to reach people . . . to make a difference." It is evident in this young woman's hope to change someone's life for the better and her concern with legacy-making. Other young people will use expressions such as "making my life matter" or "making it count" or "giving something back to my community". I am amazed--and reassured--when I see such desire arising faithfully with each new generation, especially when it does so in someone whose early years have been troubled.

Researchers Abigail Stewart and Elizabeth Vandewater have begun to investigate generative desire. They found

high levels of it in two samples of college-educated women in their mid-twenties and early thirties. They also found that as time went on, these women experienced increases in the capacity for generativity and in actual generative accomplishment. They found outlets for their desire, in other words, ways in which they could express it. And so, it seems to me, they established a generative identity.

Both Erik Erikson and Dan McAdams have made it clear that identity needs culture--needs what Erikson called an "ideological outlook" and McAdams an "ideological setting." In a parallel fashion, I would suggest that generative desire needs something particular in culture, something like the oxygen in air. Oxygen is the element responsible for combustion; it's what makes a match burn when you strike it. What is the corresponding element in culture? What will set imaginations ablaze, creating generative desire?

For an answer to this question, we must of course consult the young. But as a way of opening a dialogue, I would suggest that if a culture is to spark desire, it must express its values not only in the form of prescriptions but also in the form of stories, and stories of at least five types.

The first type is the epic. When the Puritans made their migration from England, they brought with them Biblical accounts like the Exodus, the story of the Jews migrating from Egypt. The Puritans were able to interpret their hardships in light of these Biblical narratives, to

attach their experiences to them, and so to feel Erikson's "wider meaningful belongingness." The Exodus is a kind of epic, a story of great deeds done by great people in the past. Epics come in many forms, and the kind of deed they celebrate will of course depend on the nature of the culture involved. The deed could well be the crossing of an ocean, but it could just as well be a breakthrough in science, a spiritual revelation, a courageous act in wartime, an artistic innovation, a political revolution. As adolescents develop their first life stories--their "Personal Fables" or their "Dreams," in the words of two American psychologists--they need to come into contact with greatness. They need to feel that they can touch it and be a part of it. They need the blend of history and myth that epics have to offer.

A second type of narrative that can foster generative desire is the story of real life--the account of ordinary people struggling to live the great virtues, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, but always doing so in a way that pays homage to the virtue. The protagonist in this kind of narrative is not a distant predecessor but a fellow traveler, someone who is very human and therefore very reachable as an exemplar, someone "just like you." In contrast to the powerful figure who is the subject of the epic, the leading character of the real-life story is a figure with whom one can be close. Both types of figures are needed if a culture is to inspire generativity. Together, they offer greatness and ordinariness, power and

intimacy--precisely those elements that research has found to co-exist in the personalities of generative adults.

Growing up in Chicago, I often heard stories from my parents about the economic depression of the 1930s. These were stories about people working for nothing more than the hope of being paid, or stories about children working for pennies and then giving what they earned to their parents. On one occasion my father told me about finding a \$20 bill (a fortune at the time) and having no choice but to hand the money over to his mother. My mother would tell me about her cleaning duties in a boarding house that her mother tried to run after her father was killed in an accident; she and her three sisters ended up moving from apartment to apartment, sometimes on welfare, sometimes not. These stories of real life were about honesty and hard work, about personal sacrifice and family loyalty. Now, some seventy years later, stories like them are taking on the proportions of an epic, as evidenced by the recent publication of books such as Tom Brokaw's The Greatest Generation.

A third type of story with generative potential is the parable--the teaching tale that is found in so many of the world's cultures. The characters in a parable may be great or ordinary, but their actions will be clear and direct, though often paradoxical in intent. In the simplest of ways and in the briefest of plots, parables depict what happens over the long run. They encapsulate a knowledge of all the mysterious forces that shape human destiny, and they suggest

ways of moving on when life is paralyzed. Because parables are open to interpretation, they invite the projections of those who hear them. Making the projections, in fact, is how listeners "get" the message. It's how parables bring wisdom and guidance to generative desire.

The parables I grew up on were the ones I heard in church, and today I see in them a great deal of wisdom about generativity. There's a story about a woman who finds a treasure in a field and sells all that she has to purchase the field; she illustrates a phase of the generative process that I call "selecting." There's another story about planting a seed but allowing it grow on its own; it illustrates a phase called "letting go." There are stories about evil growing up in the midst of good, like weeds in the midst of wheat, and stories that reconcile one to the fact that much of what is sown fails to bear fruit. And there are ones with the message: eventually you will die, but something will spring up from you.

Another vehicle of wisdom and guidance is the cautionary tale, the account of one who goes astray and abandons cultural ideals, or the account of a culture itself that goes astray. The story of the colonial Virginians may be regarded as an example. Another, which I have recently written about, is that of an American minister named Jim Jones who in the 1960s and '70s became a surrogate father to thousands of abandoned people, only to lead many of them-- and their children--to their deaths.

Cautionary tales keep us alert to what I call the "dark side" of generativity. They warn us not to ignore the destructive tendencies that are present in our cultures. By providing examples of how things go wrong, they show how evil can be resisted in its earliest stages, before it gains momentum.

Finally, a culture needs a story of everything, an account of the grand scheme of things and humanity's place therein. A story of everything has the scope of physics' "theory of everything," but it has more: a sense of person and spirit, a feeling of connection to the universe, a resulting ethic. Erikson once defined the German Weltanschauung as "a world view which is consonant with existing theory, available knowledge, and common sense, and yet is significantly more: a utopian outlook, a cosmic mood, or a doctrinal logic, all shared as self-evident beyond any need for demonstration." A story of everything is a Weltanschauung in narrative form.

A key feature of such a story will be a mythic account of origins, of how the world came to be, of how our people did, of why we embrace each newborn as our own. As Charles Long has pointed out, origin myths express what a people believe to be important now, in the present rather than in the past; they express "what is most essential to human life and society by relating it to a primordial act of foundation." Through its origin myths a culture says, "This is the way things are because this is the way they began."

This is what we must do now."

It has been suggested by writers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard that "grand narratives" of this type are losing their credibility in the postmodern world; people no longer trust them. And yet the popularity of a movie series like Star Wars suggests to me that people long for such narratives. Indeed, I believe that any time a culture approaches a generative moment, it comes into possession of one. Here is an example:

In the beginning we humans tried to fulfill our desires by separating ourselves from each other. We created individuals, races, and nations. But now that must change. Now, in order to save the planet, we must become aware of the interconnectedness of life. We must practice this awareness in our daily activities in order to effect a meaningful relationship with the world and a better future for all. We are striving for Universal Unity.

That, in a nutshell, is the grand narrative of the Future Generations Alliance Foundation.

I suspect that the five kinds of stories I have been describing can be found in cultures of all types, even those in which narrative has no formal role. I once wrote a brief piece arguing that some of the classic experiments in social psychology, a discipline that prides itself on being scientific, were actually parables in modern guise, and that this was the reason for their influence. And I recently

heard an astronomer speak movingly of the fact that she herself was made up of the very elements created in the universe's original Big Bang. Something from that founding event had flowed outward to produce her, and now she was privileged to study it. She was connecting her life's work to a story of everything that had no place in formal scientific method. But there it was in science's mythic substrate.

Given my own love of narrative, and given the rise in America of narrative psychology, it is not surprising that stories should head my list of cultural forms that can inspire and guide generative desire. As the extensive work of Dan McAdams is demonstrating, it makes a good deal of sense these days to think of personal identity as a life story, one that depends on an ideological setting. I believe that a culture's stories can provide such a setting. I believe they have the power to ignite generative desire and steer it in the direction of a generative identity.

### III

In the twentieth century we have seen the development of new media--radio, television, movies, and now the worldwide web--that offer unprecedented means of disseminating a culture's stories. Media are "machineries of meaning," in the words of Ulf Hannerz, and the new ones are having an impact on the world's thinking as great as that of the printing press. Those of us who work with these

machines have a responsibility to uncover the stories in our cultures that have generative power and bring them to the world.

Ironically, it is the advent of the new information technologies that leads us to a third level of response to the question of what makes a culture generative. For while these technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for the dissemination of culture, they also offer an unprecedented threat: that culture will become nothing but "virtual" reality. As Takatoshi Imada writes of the situation, "Distinctions between original and copy and between reality and unreality become vague. The essentially fictitious is taken as reality. In extreme cases, reality is recognized only in fiction." Often enough in today's world, the media image that seems to be authentic turns out to be anything but. Cyberspace becomes phony space.

Even as cultures make use of the new technologies, then, they will have to protect a very ancient form of expression. That "form" is the human person--the individual who is a living embodiment of a culture's stories, and so of its values. By "living" I mean "not deceased," but I also mean "not imaged."

The living forms that culture needs are of many types; research is only beginning to identify them. One is the keeper of meaning. As described by psychoanalyst George Vaillant, this is a person located between the seventh and eighth of Erikson's stages (between generativity and ego-

integrity, that is) who is concerned with preserving a culture's traditions. I once interviewed a woman who felt a need to preserve such traditions in her very person. At certain times in her life, she said, she had tried to "present" a paradox, "exemplify" a virtue, or "stand" for something. Indeed, she saw her whole life as a "statement of" or a "testimony to" to certain beliefs. She was a keeper of meaning.

I also include in this category people who become "living legends" or "legends in their own time." Even before their death, anecdotes build up around them and begin to create a myth. Icons such as Albert Einstein and Mother Theresa are clear examples, but there are others closer to home. A young woman once told me about a great-grandmother who had developed a reputation for "knowing things." She had intuitions about family members that always seemed to come true; her premonitions were becoming legendary. Well known or not, living legends like her command our respect not only because of the gifts they possess but also because their lives ring true to cultural values.

If the keeper of meaning is a cultural beacon, a second figure, the mentor, is a practical guide. Psychologist Daniel Levinson has described the complexity of this role. The mentor, he said, is a host who welcomes an initiate into a new world; an exemplar who provides a model for emulation; a teacher who passes on skills; a counselor who provides guidance and moral support; a sponsor who facilitates a

protege's advancement; and, above all, someone who believes in a young person's Dream. To this description we must add what is in the interest of culture: that in their role as teachers, the very best mentors see that crafts are passed on with integrity, that the art in question is not compromised. They also seek out students in whom special talent, special virtue, or special ideas are struggling to emerge, for cultures need the fresh eyes and the fresh blood that these students possess.

To be generative, cultures also need a third figure, one that Kathy Kotre and I have called an intergenerational buffer, but one who in a larger context might simply be called a reformer. This is a person who has firsthand knowledge of a culture's destructive tendencies and stands in the way of them, absorbing the damage and protecting future generations from their impact. The role of buffer may be clearest in families, where many parents who suffered at the hands of their own parents vow that their children will not suffer as they did. These mothers and fathers stop the intergenerational transmission of damage. They break the cycle of abuse.

Similar stands are taken outside the family in a variety of cultural contexts. A gynecologist who worked to stop the practice of automatic and unnecessary hysterectomies served as a vicarious buffer, as did a woman who worked to change the prohibition against birth control in her church when she saw the damage it was creating in the

lives of married couples. In our study of these buffers, Kathy Kotre and I learned that, as important as the role is, it is fraught with difficulty, for a culture's adherents rarely agree on what is damaging and what is not, and therefore what is or is not in need of reform.

Research in a number of areas has also underscored the importance to culture of fellow travelers, even though it has not called them such, preferring instead the terms "peer group" or "support group." Groups of this kind (the fourth kind of cultural mediators) have been found to be beneficial in coping with loss, illness, and a host of other significant life changes. More to the point, they appear to help gifted individuals achieve their creative breakthroughs. Studying shapers of the twentieth century such as Einstein and Freud, psychologist Howard Gardner was surprised by the intense social and affective forces that surrounded his subjects at critical moments. Confidants, collaborators, lovers, and other kinds of fellow travelers provided emotional support and intellectual understanding during the time of the creator's breakthrough.

In this brief and admittedly incomplete list of figures that mediate culture there is the same blend of power and intimacy that appeared in the preceding list of story types. The intimacy is especially important if we recall the failure of Puritan fathers to evoke love from their children. Intimacy gives the young--it gives us all--someone to touch, and not just through technology. It gives

the abstract values of culture a human face. These days we need more than electronic belonging. We need it in the flesh.

#### IV

Up to this point I have probed inward and described characteristics of a generative culture in relation to "its" young. Such a culture, I have said, creates a milieu in which children not only survive but develop the Eriksonian virtues of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry; in which adolescents develop generative desire; and in which young adults develop a generative identity. It is a milieu full of stories and living embodiments of those stories.

In the twenty-first century, however, it will become more and more difficult for any culture to speak of the young who belong to "it," and to no one else. The reason is that, because of travel, commerce, and the new media, the earth's cultures are losing their connections to particular places. They are becoming "deterritorialized," in the words of one observer. They are "moving and mixing" in those of another. A complex global culture is emerging and beginning to penetrate local ones, a phenomenon for which one scholar created the composite term "glocalization." We live increasingly in one world, and that world is coming to our doorsteps.

The Dutch psychologists Hubert Hermans and Harry Kempen have seen the signs of cultures connecting:

. . . Mexican schoolgirls dressed in Greek togas dancing in the style of Isadora Duncan, a London boy of Asian origin playing for a local Bengali cricket team and at the same time supporting the Arsenal football club, Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam, and Native Americans celebrating Mardi Gras in the United States.

In view of this extraordinary development, let us ask a concluding question. How can a culture look outward and be generative? How can it take care of the atmosphere of meaning that envelops not just "its" young, but the world's?

Such care, I believe, would have to begin with the conviction that we need to protect the earth's idea pool as much as we do its gene pool, and that such protection begins at home. A generative culture, then, would store its own ideas the way a botanist stores seeds. It would conserve its stories, venerate the living persons who embody them, and keep fresh the many aspects of culture I have failed to touch on here. It would do so not because of the historical interest of these cultural elements, though that is reason enough to preserve them, but because a time may come when the earth has need of them.

Take the word "generativity." It was coined in 1950 by Erik Erikson, whose memory we honor at this conference. "Generativity" was a new word, but the idea behind it was very old, perhaps one of the oldest in existence. In bringing this idea to life, the Future Generations Alliance

Foundation has found seeds buried in many cultures--ways of thinking about the self, for example. From Korea comes the idea of a nuclear self (na) that maintains a spiritual relationship with others (nam), with one's nation (nara), and with the world (nuri). As Yoon-Jae Chung points out, the linguistic embeddedness of the root n reminds us of the actual embeddedness of the self in these larger collectivities. From Japan, and specifically from the Kyoto School, comes the idea of the self as betweenness (ba or ma). This is a self keenly aware of contextual or atmospheric influences--keenly aware, it seems to me, of the meaning that surrounds it.

Ways of thinking about time have also been unearthed. From the Huayan School of Buddhism comes the idea that the future is able to affect the past as well as the past the future. The point is that generations to come are not simply downstream from us; they are upstream, "ancestors of the future." An African proverb captures the same idea: "The world was not left to us by our parents. It was lent to us by our children." So does a statement from the Great Law of the Native American Iroquois: "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations." Unless these ancient proverbs and policies had been preserved, they would not have been open to discovery at a time when the world needed to hear them.

How many seeds of this kind exist right here in Kyoto--

how many ideas ready to take root in the new global landscape? How much wisdom does an island-nation have to bring to a world that, more and more, sees itself as an island in the expanse of outer space? How many seeds lie dormant in all the cultures represented at this conference?

Not only will a generative culture in the twenty-first century preserve its ideas, it will encourage cross-fertilization with those from other parts of the world-- this, in the hope of bringing new ideas into being.

To find an example of what can happen when different cultures meet, one need go no further than the life of Erik Erikson. A child psychoanalyst trained under Sigmund Freud's daughter Anna, Erikson left Europe for the United States in 1933. A few years later, he was in some of the remotest regions of the American wilderness asking the grandmothers of Sioux and Yurok Indians how they raised their children. In these conversations, psychoanalysis interacted with the cultures of buffalo-hunting and salmon-fishing Native Americans. In them, the wisdom of Anna Freud interacted with that of old shaman women who were just as keen in their observations of children. Cultures and ideas mixed in Erikson's mind, and from the mix came a new vision of the life cycle, one containing the very idea we are discussing today.

Scholars have pointed out that such cross-fertilization is already taking place in contact zones at cultural boundaries. As Tae-Chang Kim writes, this is not a new

phenomenon:

The creation of new value systems throughout history has always taken place at the peripheries, and not in the "world centers" of the time. The founders of all new value systems (e.g., Jesus Christ, Buddha, Confucius) did not appear, serve, or teach in the political, economic, cultural or religious centers of their times. . . . We should recognize and utilize the potential and energy which peripheries possess in value creation.

I would add, however, that those working at the peripheries need themselves to be deeply centered--committed, that is, to a value system--while recognizing that there are indeed other centers. Otherwise, a contact zone becomes a place that suffers the postmodern malaise in which everything is fluid and nothing foundational, a place where it is difficult to generate much of anything.

This view of individual cultures standing in a generative relationship to a global culture takes us beyond cultural absolutism, which has led to terrible assaults on many of the world's indigenous cultures. But it also takes us beyond cultural relativity, which, in its embrace of diversity, has ignored the interplay of cultures and overlooked their dark side. It is a view of cultures contributing their ideas, their stories, and even their living representatives to something larger.

And no contribution is too small. I am reminded in

closing of what chaos theory calls the Butterfly Effect. Chaos theory was born when meteorologists trying to predict long-range weather patterns found their task impossible, no matter how sophisticated their instruments or how widely they were dispersed. When it comes to the behavior of complex systems, they observed, tiny differences in input quickly become overwhelming differences in output. In other words, the flap of a butterfly's wings in Beijing could set in motion a chain of events that transformed storm systems in New York a month later. The smallest act could have enormous consequences in the atmosphere.

As with the weather, so with culture. No matter how insignificant the arranging of a flower, the arranging of a story, or the arranging of a life, it could be the flap of a butterfly's wings. It could have profound effects on the atmosphere of meaning that appeared on earth just one cosmic minute ago.