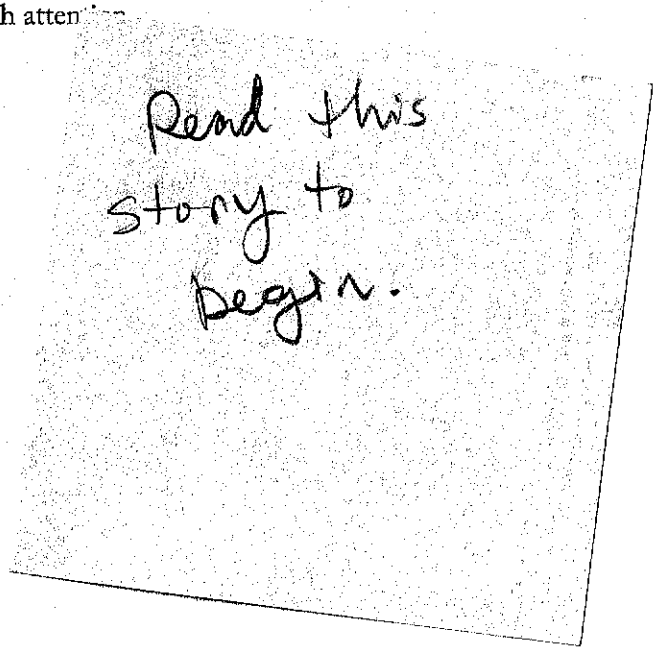
Two words of thanks: the initial spark that led to the coinage of the term "culture care" came from my friend and executive editor Caleb Seeling. It was in a car, on a winding road to the Aspen Institute, that he suggested I consider writing this book. Thanks also to Mark Rodgers and Amy Jones of the Wedgwood Circle for initiating the printing of the first culture care booklet, which has garnered so much atten



– 1 –

ON BECOMING GENERATIVE

BRINGING BEAUTY INTO OUR LIVES

As a newlywed couple, my wife and I began our journey with very little. After Judy and I got married in the summer of 1983, after college, we moved to Connecticut for Judy to pursue her master's degree in marriage counseling. I taught at a special education school and painted at home. We had a tight budget and often had to ration our food (lots of tuna cans!) just to get through the week.

One evening I was sitting alone, waiting for Judy to come home to our small apartment, worried about how we were going to afford the rent and pay for necessities over the weekend. Our refrigerator was empty and I had no cash left.

Then Judy walked in, and she had brought home a bouquet of flowers. I got really upset.

"How could you think of buying flowers if we can't even eat!" I remember saying, frustrated.

Judy's reply has been etched in my heart for over thirty years now. *"We need to feed our souls, too."*

The irony is that I am an artist. I am the one, supposedly, feeding people's souls. But in worrying for tomorrow, in the stoic responsibility

I felt to make ends meet, to survive, I failed to be the artist. Judy was the artist: she brought home a bouquet.

I do not remember what we ended up eating that day, or that month (probably tuna fish). But I do remember that particular bouquet of flowers. I painted them.

"We *need* to feed our souls, too." Those words still resonate with me today.

Is Judy still right? Do we, as human beings, need more than food and shelter? Do we need beauty in our lives? Given our limited resources, how do we cultivate and care for our souls? And how do these questions apply to the larger culture?

My life as an artist, and as a founder of International Arts Movement (IAM), has been in pursuit of questions like these—not just internally or for my own sake but with a growing global network of people. What began as an admission of my own failure to be an artist has now given birth to many principles that govern my life as an artist, father, husband, and leader. I call them generative principles. What started out as Judy's care for our own souls has blossomed into an effort to extend that care into our home and our churches, and into a vision for culture at large. What I call culture care is a generative approach to culture that brings bouquets of flowers into a culture bereft of beauty.

AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY TOWARD GENERATIVITY

I have found that what I am asked to do often seems impossible. How can I make a living as an artist? How can I support my family as an artist? How can I support a growing movement as an artist? These challenges seem to expand with every opportunity, but in my mind they come back to the same generative principles.

This book launches a series of essays and conversations on culture care, to which I invite the contributions of artists, curators,

critics, patrons, and other lovers of the arts and participants in culture. We anticipate more books on culture care, and the theological underpinning for my thesis will be laid out in my upcoming book on a theology of making. To help frame the conversation for different types of thinkers, I begin by briefly considering three G's sparked by Judy's act that have come to characterize my approach to generative thinking:

- genesis moments
- generosity
- generational thinking

In the next chapter, I will draw these elements together with more formal definitions of the terms *generative* and *culture care* to help shape and catalyze an ongoing conversation.

Bringing home a bouquet of flowers created a *genesis moment* for me. Judy's small act fed my soul. It renewed my conviction as an artist. It gave me new perspective. It challenged me to deliberately focus on endeavors in which I could truly be an artist of the soul. That moment engendered many more genesis moments in the years that followed, contributing to decisions small and large that have redefined my life and provided inspiration for myself, my family, and my communities.

Genesis moments like this often include elements of the great story told in the beginning of the biblical book of Genesis: creativity, growth—and failure. Two of these elements are common in discussions about arts and culture. God creates and calls his creatures to fruitfulness. Adam exercises his own creativity in naming what has been created. But the story also runs into failure and finitude.

Generative thinking often starts out with a failure, like my failure to think and act as an artist. I have discovered that something is awakened through failure, tragedy, and disappointment. It is a place of learning and potential creativity. In such moments you can get lost in despair or denial, or you can recognize the failure and run toward the hope of something new.

The key to recognizing genesis moments is to assume that every moment is fresh. Creativity applied in a moment of weakness and vulnerability can turn failure into enduring conversation, opening new vistas of inspiration and incarnation. To remember what Judy did, to speak of it with others, to value her care—all this is generative, as her act can be honored and become a touchpoint for others, leading to the birth of ideas and actions, artifacts and relationships that would not otherwise have been.

The bouquet was also an emblem of *generosity*. Judy's generous heart—more generous than mine at that moment—valued beauty over the day-to-day worries that had so nearly narrowed my focus. Generative thinking is fueled by generosity because it so often must work against a mindset that has survival and utility in the foreground. In a culture dominated by this mindset, generosity has an unexpectedness that can set the context for the renewal of our hearts. An encounter with generosity can remind us that life always overflows our attempts to reduce it to a commodity or a transaction—because it is a gift. Life and beauty are gratuitous in the best senses of that word.

Judy's bouquet is only one of many instances of generosity in my life. I was able to become an artist partly because of my parents' generosity and encouragement. Both my father and my mother encouraged me when I desired to pursue the arts. That, for an Asian

family, was extremely unusual. Music, painting, writing, and creating have always been part of my life. I took them for granted and thought that everyone's homes were a nurturing environment for creativity. Then I went to middle school and discovered I was an anomaly! It was then that I started to realize I somehow had to defend my time for creativity in a culture that does not nurture creative growth.

Artists have a deep capacity to develop and share generosity and empathy, to point toward abundance and connections. We learn generosity as we try to communicate with a new audience, or help people express what they cannot otherwise articulate, or say something meaningful into the void. Even an artist who journeys alone, like the poet Emily Dickinson, can develop a sense of communicating or communing with someone—the reader, nature, God—and so strengthen critical generative capacities to bring beauty into the world. An encounter with the arts can lead to generative thinking as generosity supplants our quid pro quo expectations. (In the sciences too discovery is linked to the generosity of information shared among its practitioners.) The effects of generosity begin with gratitude and lead to places we cannot predict.

As I reflect on Judy's simple act and on my life in the arts, I am more and more convinced that anything truly generative is not isolated. Generative values are given to us as a gift by our parents and predecessors. They grow in conversation with the past and in our intention to speak and create so as to cultivate the values of multiple future generations. Generative thinking requires *generational thinking*.

Culture formation is generational, not birthed in a night. Generative thinking can inspire us to work within a vision for culture

that is expressed in centuries and millennia rather than quarters, seasons, or fashions. People in the arts work in conversation with artists of the past as they are shaping the future, attempting to produce work with enduring qualities that might in turn speak to new generations.

I have seen gratuitous acts modeled by Judy's parents and family. I have failed at times to appreciate my own parents' generosity—but at least I have had the receptivity to repent! My father's generosity in particular has led to so many blessings in the world that he did not expect or even realize—all flowing from his love for art and music. Such acts from Judy's and my parents are now reflected in unexpected ways, not least in the lives of our creative children, all of whom deeply value beauty and model generosity.

Even the term *generative* is a gift to me. My father, Osamu Fujimura, is a pioneer of acoustics research. I was born in Boston because he was doing postdoctoral research at MIT with Noam Chomsky. Recently I invited my father to attend an International Arts Movement conference. As we walked together to the TriBeCa Performance Center where I was about to give a keynote, he asked me what I was to speak on. I told him the speech would be called "On Generative Culture." My father responded, "Interesting . . . the word *generative* . . . that was my thesis topic."

I knew that. I had even read the thesis. But for some reason I had sidelined this influence and forgotten to link my theme to my father's lifetime of work! He was instrumental in bringing Chomsky's Generative Grammar Theory to Japan. I was grateful for the rediscovery and was able to present my version of generative thinking with a proper attribution of his influence.

Our lives are directed or constrained by paths paved by the generations before us. Sometimes we can trace the paths, as I did with

my father. Often they shape us unawares. What is true of legacies from our parents is true also for our communities and racial and national histories. Cultures are not created overnight. We are affected by layers of experiences, personalities, and works of previous generations. Cultural histories affect us far beyond what we are able to recognize—or, sometimes, admit.

Generative principles flow out of generational blessing toward creativity. But the positive examples of my wife and my parents are all too rare. Many people look back on what can seem to be generational curses rather than blessings. I created IAM and continue to advocate for the arts from a conviction that all people need a place of nurture toward their creative growth. Acts of generosity can inspire genesis moments even out of generational failures.

This book is the first in a series on culture care that will expand on these and other generative principles and apply them to several cases. It is my hope to engender conversations and so gather a community of people committed to generative living. This, it should be emphasized, is not an end in itself but a contribution to the greater good. Generative paths will birth resourcefulness, patience, and general creativity in all of life. They lead to cultural—and human—thriving.

Gratuitous can be a negative word, as in "gratuitous violence," but here I am using it to speak of intentionality, and even forcefulness, which, as we will see in later chapters, is necessary in our deeply fragmented culture. I will also be looking at how the reality of beauty can help integrate such fragmentation.

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BLACK RIVER, CRACKED LANDS

People in Western cultures often think of themselves first as individuals, but the human being may be better understood as a focal point of embedded relationships. Sometimes we are more aware of our dependence and sometimes we are more aware of our contributions, but we exist in community—in families, in places. In churches and work groups. In economies and ecologies. What is more, our multifaceted interactions with our physical and cultural environment directly affect our bodies, our minds, our spirits, and ultimately our souls.

We can talk about all these elements separately, but we cannot actually isolate our reactions (much as we might like to). Any experience that affects our relationships affects our minds, which affects our bodies, and so on, back and forth. If we are to thrive, we can do so only as part of a wider, interrelated ecosystem. Thriving ecosystems are known for abundance and diversity, hospitable even to those who want to dwell as outliers and remain on the margins.

Judy reminded us that our souls need food as well as our bodies. We will discuss how beauty feeds the soul in a later chapter, but first we should address the related issue of the consequences when the

soul is starved. What happens to communities when our souls are fed from the produce of a polluted ecosystem? This is the situation in which we live today. We need to be aware of the greater cultural reality that is causing this imbalance so that we can find the best path toward culture care.

An industrial map in the mid-twentieth century colored New York's Hudson River black. The mapmakers considered a black river a good thing—full of industry! The more factory outputs, the more progress. When that map was made, "nature" was widely seen as a resource to be exploited. Few people considered the consequences of careless disposal of industrial waste. The culture has shifted dramatically over the last fifty years. When I share this story today, most people shudder and ask how anyone could think of a polluted river as good.

But today we are doing the same thing with the river of culture. Think of the arts and other cultural enterprises as rivers that water the soil of culture. We are painting this cultural river black—full of industry, dominated by commercial interests, careless of toxic by-products—and there are still cultural mapmakers who claim that this is a good thing. The pollution makes it difficult for us to breathe, difficult for artists to create, difficult for any of us to see beauty through the murk.

It is widely recognized that our culture today is not life giving. There is little room at the margins to make artistic endeavors sustainable. The wider ecosystem of art and culture has been decimated, leaving only homogeneous pockets of survivors, those fit enough to survive in a poisoned environment. In culture as in nature, a lack of diversity is a first sign of a distressed ecosystem.

Many of the streams that feed the river of culture are polluted, and the soil this river should be watering is thus parched and fragmented.

Most of these examples are well-known, but let me briefly touch on some of the fault lines in the cultural soil (starving the soul) as well as some of the sources of the poisons in the water (polluting the soul).

STARVING THE CULTURAL SOUL

One of the most powerful sources of cultural fragmentation has grown out of the great successes of the Industrial Revolution. Its vision, standards, and methods soon proliferated beyond the factory and the economic realm and were embraced in sectors from education to government and even church. The result was reductionism. Modern people began to equate progress with efficiency. Despite valiant and ongoing resistance from many quarters—including within industry—success for a large part of our culture is now judged by efficient production and mass consumption. We often value repetitive, machine-like performance as critical to bottom-line success. In the seductive industrialist mentality, people become "workers" or "human resources" who are first seen as interchangeable cogs, then treated as machines—and are now often replaced by machines.

A related cultural fault line is hyperspecialization, where a person or firm focuses on increasingly narrow segments of a production process, discipline, artistic genre, or market. One result is an increasing prominence in our culture of the "expert." The expert knows one part, not the whole, and often not even the wider field in which they work. They consciously reduce their scope of concern to go deeper in their discipline. But increased clarity on a narrow point usually comes at the price of blindness to context and to one's working assumptions. It often brings isolation from—and sometimes alienation from or hostility to—those with differing expertise.

Today's expert usually shies away from questions of meaning and connection and responsibility—referring such issues to those who

"specialize" in meaning. This is, of course, fundamentally unsatisfying for human beings and contributes to our cultural unease. It also has troubling consequences within a discipline. My father's career offers an example of this.[1]

My father spent years at Tokyo University after his research with Chomsky, and he later joined the famed Bell Laboratories pure-research complex in Murray Hill, New Jersey. It was at Bell Labs in the early 1970s that he began to notice fundamental deficiencies in acoustics research. In the 1980s, in his early fifties, my father began to send a series of notes to his colleagues questioning basic tenets of their field. He found many of their approaches flawed because they were based on reductionist assumptions. They did not fit the data and were thus inadequate and unable to reach their stated goals.

In my simplified understanding, the early research assumed that you could generate enough data to rebuild speech by segmenting speech patterns. It seems a bit like dissecting a frog and stitching it back together, only to expect it to jump again—a typical modernist approach. Researchers expected to be able to simulate natural-sounding human speech within a decade, and they predicted the rise of technologies like Apple's Siri and Google's voice navigation. But my father was right. Even the best such technologies thirty years later sound choppy and machine-like.

Though he was dealing with a community of scientists—who are supposed to be known for their mental flexibility—it took years before my father could present his new ideas to the linguistics/phonetics community. Many tenured professors, I am sure, found his claims threatening to their assumptions. Prior to this time my father had never had problems finding support for his research, such as

government grants, but now he found himself fighting the research establishment that he had himself helped to build. After many futile attempts to secure funding, my brother, a successful Silicon Valley entrepreneur, stepped in to fund a post for a graduate student to help my father compile enough data to begin his research.

That today's computer voices sound as good as they do is in part the result of my father's work. After the breakup of AT&T in the 1980s, he spent many years at Ohio State trying to introduce a new path called C/D (Converter/Distributor) theory. This theory is not so much concerned with segmenting language as with recognizing patterns of vocal stress and intonation. He calls this approach *prosodic*, as it better accounts for the natural complexity of speech and language.

Most of us recognize the shortcomings of reductionism at a deep level: we know that we are more than what we produce and that efficiency is not the point of education, religion, art, play, or many other aspects of human culture. Most people are dissatisfied with the reductionist viewpoint, yet not enough of us have or can articulate viable alternatives because reductionism has taken over not only how people define success but also what we value in society. Many in our culture no longer value a bouquet of flowers because beauty contributes neither to the machinery of production nor to an advantage in the latest cultural battle—and because the pressure for continued consumption warps our capacity to appreciate and enjoy.

It is not the desire to survive or to provide for a family that is problematic. Cultural fragmentation comes rather when we fall into the trap of treating survival as the bottom line and thus neglect the holistic approaches that demand personal growth and point our civilization toward a greater vision. Fragmentation comes when we

forget the importance of beauty for our lives and the necessity—for both individual and social flourishing—of sharing the experience of beauty in community.

In the face of reductionism, we must recall that human beings are not "human doings," as one of my mentors says.[2] We are more than animals following our instincts to compete and survive. Human culture encompasses more than loyalty to a den, herd, or pack. Our concern as individuals and families should thus be to raise, educate, and form whole persons—to cultivate connected citizens who can co-create thriving communities, cities, and nations.

POLLUTING THE CULTURAL SOUL

I see the fragmentation and reductionism operating in culture today as releasing two main pollutants into the river of culture. They are what I call *overcommodification of art* and *utilitarian pragmatism*. Today, instead of regarding art as a visionary gift to society we see it as a means for commercial gain. Those artists who aspire to anything other than market success are often caught up in the culture wars, their works put to use as ideological tools—or weapons—in those divisive struggles. These pollutants are choking the creatures that should be swimming and contributing to the diversity of expression.

Reductionism is no stranger to the arts. What my father experienced as a scientist in battling against reductionism, artists were experiencing very early in the twentieth century. In culture, reductionism grew not from a rational path toward specialization but in response to the impending threat of humanity's weapons used against ourselves. In the aftermath of two world wars, artists began to articulate the culture's dramatic loss of humanity. For many, Hiroshima and Nagasaki revealed the naiveté of earlier attempts to capture beauty via canvas or concert hall. In movements such as Dadaism and

abstract expressionism, artists created images that visualized trauma, disillusionment, and dehumanization and attempted to counter it not with beauty but with irony or the pure power of expressive gestures. The resulting work, an honest depiction of our loss, screams at us with contempt for a dehumanized view of life.

At the same time, artists recognized the gap left by the weakening witness of the church in culture and increasingly came to see themselves as secular prophets and priests with a call to speak the truth against the establishment. They intentionally isolated themselves from society and produced work aimed at shocking people into recognizing and decrying the horrors of the age. As critic Robert Hughes has noted, "the shock of the new" became a way of life in the twentieth-century modernist experiment.[3]

Artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Mark Rothko, and Ad Reinhardt point to a world in which art is no longer decoration or representation of historical events. By creating a new language with which to speak into society, they began to express an artistic via negativa—a version of the Christian theological and philosophical tradition that points to truth by emphasizing what truth is not. These artists created an aesthetic antithesis to the direct linkage of art and power (Duchamp), depicted the angst of the "edge" of our time and space (Rothko), and pursued the purity of sensory experiences to see beyond representation (Reinhardt).

During this period the voices of artists became more and more esoteric and elitist. Their work was generative, providing ways for viewers to confront the dehumanized world. But at the same time, a reductionist vision began to solidify (especially among the critics), so that artists' confrontational nature and insistence on defining themselves against the status quo resulted only in ideological fragmentation and marginalization. Even the new ideals that they had

for art—for the purity and unity of expression—made little contact with the lives of most people in their culture.

The gap between artists and the wider society has only widened since the rise of the culture wars and the increasingly overt use of art in that struggle. All artists have been conscripted by progressive draft boards as frontline soldiers to defend "freedom of expression" against tradition and conformity. It is a disturbing irony that freedom of expression and the diversity of artistic voices have been early casualties. Artists have been pressed—sometimes willingly and sometimes not—to speak not for their own work, vision, and principles but for (usually leftist) ideologies. The implicit and explicit cultural pressures toward ideological uniformity are so high that one could say that in the culture wars artists are free to express anything *other* than beauty.

As the ideals faded, what was left was commercialism. Think of Andy Warhol's pop art featuring Marilyn Monroe and Campbell's soup cans. He was brilliant in capturing the icons of his age with an exquisite touch and personal flair. But though his own works were generative, providing an important conversation and an enduring legacy, his pop art led to thousands of derivative works, flooding the market. With the exception of ideological uses, today's art has been commoditized to such an extent that we often see commerce as the prevailing goal of art and value the arts only as transactional tools to achieve fame and thus wealth.

The shock of the new has devolved to a game of gaining the fifteen minutes of fame that Warhol forecast each of us will someday have. In our river metaphor, the artists are struggling in polluted waters to find the oxygen they need to create. Artists are adaptable, but surviving in a stressed ecosystem like ours often means becoming bottom-feeders like catfish, feeding off the lowest layers of culture,

and the pollution there turns many into monstrous, hideous creatures. Their creativity is given over to survival—and those who are fittest to survive are usually those who fashion the cleverest means to twist and adapt to the celebrity model of art. Too often they create primarily what they think will sell. Speaking recently to a group of musicians, I implored them not to do so. "Be a trout instead," I said. "Endeavor to go upstream into the tributaries and find clear, pure waters. Create upstream, and then what you create will affect the whole stream."

But the problem for them, and for me, is that today no pure waters are to be found upstream either. Thus a key culture care strategy, as we will see later, is to create diverse microcosms of pure water so that "trout" can survive in our cultural ecosystem.

We are living in a time of cultural upheaval. No matter what field an artist operates in, the sustainability of art that points us beyond ourselves is threatened. Every sphere is being shaken up. Galleries have faced a frozen market since the Lehman shock of 2008. Every midtier gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood now struggles to pay rent. The music industry is no longer able to give lucrative contracts to musicians because every song is now worth 99 cents. Top modern dancers have to pay for rehearsal space out of their own pockets. Publishers, threatened by the lower margins of Amazon sales and electronic books, are offering less and less rewarding contracts to writers. Even established first-rate writers cannot count on being given a New York City reading today because it is not worth the risk for the publisher.

We could be facing a public eclipse of those species called art, dance, and music. (Poetry is the only field that seems to be producing at a terrific pace at the moment, partly because poets do not depend

on commercial forces to keep writing. But not many of us seem to be *reading* poetry.) The arts audience is changing and shrinking amid an ever-demanding chorus of offers online that change how we assess the value of an experience.

Why is culture care needed? From the perspective of the arts, it is because today an artist cannot simply paint; a novelist cannot simply write; a pianist cannot simply play. Utilitarian pragmatism and commercialism so thoroughly pervade culture that without some shift in worldview and expectation, what we do as artists—the activities of the arts—will be neither sustainable nor generative. We will not be able to resist their use as weapons in the culture wars.

We need to recognize our time as a genesis moment.

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FROM CULTURE WARS TO A COMMON LIFE

The cultural fragmentation we have experienced, and the reductionism that has accompanied minute categorization within all disciplines, has contributed directly to today's polarized ideological positions. Too many of us live isolated—sometimes more literally, sometimes virtually—with the tribes on our own cultural islands. We have no meaningful engagement with or understanding of the human beings across the divide. Few people are able or willing to build bridges. When we are living in a mode of survival and scarcity rather than generativity, we easily fall into viewing those outside as enemies locked in utter competition for commodities or power that should be ours.

Sociologist James Davison Hunter noted more than twenty years ago that participants in culture wars employ language that reduces the "enemy" to a caricature, portraying their ideas as not only false but pernicious, alienating their humanity. Hunter identifies the culprit in *Culture Wars*, arguing that a shared weakness "in both orthodox and progressivist alliances" is "an implicit yet imperious disregard for the goal of a *common life*."[1]

This "disregard for the goal of a common life" is the abject failure of our times. Yet from this failure we can begin a new path toward culture care.