

ALL THINGS NEW

My name is Claudia Cramer from the Houston Region. I find myself deeply honored to be at this council, and to have a chance to share with you some reflections on what we sense is the focus of this council. In case you are asking whether I'm qualified for this task, the answer is that I am not, except for having had the chance to participate in the incredible dialogue we have experienced as a part of being the Regulatory assigned to prepare for this council. We have spent a great deal of time this week working on the question of what the council is all about, and would like to share some of those reflections with you. We finally decided to call these reflections "All Things New".

For those of you who may be participating for the first time, just a word about councils. Probably one of the most important experiences of this group has been the councils, where we regularly gather to report on what has been happening, and to plan the future. Sometimes we have gathered as regions, sometimes as the continent, which is what this gathering is, and once a year we have the deep honor of gathering from around the world with colleagues. We had that type of gathering last summer, in July. I think all of us experienced during that council, that while we were planning for the future 'as usual', something strangely new was going on. None of us were really ready to try to explain what was going on, yet all of us were very clear that something new was breaking loose. It was like... have you ever seen a deer eating grass, when suddenly its head snaps up, it knows that there is something new in the wind. It was like all of us began to see heads snapping up. Something strangely new was going on.

There has also been that sense of strangeness in the journey of the last five months since July. I'm not sure how to explain it, but want to share some experiences that may give you a sense of what I mean. But first, let me apologise to you - my illustrations are not very comprehensive. I've been living in Houston and have succumbed to a Texas disease. Texas doesn't have any trouble dividing the world into political entities: there is Texas and the rest of the world. Anyway, most of my illustrations are from Texas.

The journey of the past five months has included the experiences of continually being caught off guard. One dimension of that is the kind of passion with which people are talking about the story of who we are. Every place you go people are asking, "Who are we? What are we doing? What is our role in history?" It has been very hard to answer those questions. For instance, at the Houston Area Council, we decided to write the Houston Area story. I was anticipating having a way to talk about really who we are. But when I saw the title, I was not sure the story would be very revealing. The title was "Harnessing the Future Blowing Wildly in our Faces."

The second thing that has caught me off guard has to do with the Regional Team. Now, I am an 'oldie'. I have been around about 15 years and thought I knew what a team was. But I have recently decided I am very unclear. One aspect has had to do with the willingness of colleagues across the continent to commit themselves at a level far deeper than I had ever expected: commit themselves financially;

in terms of time; in terms of every resource they have. One of our colleagues in Houston, who was a local church galaxy pastor ten years ago, has spent every weekend this quarter fixing one or the other of the four broken down cars at the Houston House. I have said to myself, "Why?" I do know it comes out of a strange, unexplainable, but deeply profound commitment and decision to act that out. But the strange thing is that we keep running into people who have known about human development, or the ICA, for two days and are willing to make that same kind of commitment. I had the privilege of being in Tallahassee, Fla., and met people who were meeting for leadership training, planning, marketing, and so forth. They kept saying we are the Regional Team. I thought, how do you know that you're the Regional Team? You only heard about the ICA two days ago!

I have also been caught off guard by the dialogue over the so-called 'old' and the 'new'. The old and the new way to do things, for example, and trying to decide which is 'right' and which is 'wrong'. For example, we held an Imaginal Education Course in Houston this fall. In preparation we were trying to decide, are we doing an 'old' Imaginal Education Course, which was invented 20 years ago, or are we going to do the 'new' course, or lab, which has been developed by the Chicago Education Guild and others. We looked at all the constructs which have been recently developed for the course and discovered that it was all stuff we have known for 20 years. Then we looked at the 'old' constructs, and discovered that they weren't old at all! We simply could not say which was 'old' and which was 'new'. In fact, the 'old' had simply begun to disappear.

Another strangeness has had to do with the image that 'nothing is happening'. A region tells us, "Nothing has been happening. We just can't get ourselves together". They tell you this while they are showing you the three contracts they signed last week and the 14 checks they received from programs done in the past three weeks. Last week I was looking through the mail, in Houston, and saw a check for a program and asked, "When did we do this?" The response was, "Don't you remember?" My response was, "No, I don't remember. I don't even remember our saying we were going to do it." We have produced more programs in the last quarter than in the last two years. Yet we experience ourselves saying, "Nothing has happened." It is very strange, and I think it is a struggle that has to do with our naming who we are and what we are doing and being for. We held a LENS over Thanksgiving with the Houston Regional Team, the focus of which was to build a four year plan. I was personally very excited, because I think we need to do more long range planning. I was convinced that by the end of the LENS we would have a substantial four year plan. But again, I was caught off guard. During the contradictions workshop we decided that the major contradiction was 'Deciding the necessary deed in view of the overwhelming task'. It suddenly dawned on me that the contradiction had to do with not having a four year plan. Therefore, our proposals would have to do with building a four year plan. Therefore, we would not be building a four year plan during the LENS, but later! I found myself saying, "Why can't we do it NOW!"

As the council prep team discussed what we were experiencing, we reflected on what has been happening to the continent. We discovered the same strange newness. One of our clues was the frightening receptivity we have experienced. Our issue has not been whether we can market programs, but how to deal with the requests for programs. How can we possibly staff the kind of possibilities we have? Another receptivity has had to do with individual requests. Mary Warren Moffet mentioned the number of letters from people who have written to say, "I want to work with your organization". Her comment was, "What do I tell them?" We have all experienced a new and frightening receptivity. For example, Janis came to our fall Regional Council. She had seen the global film six months earlier. During the council, Alfreida invited people to spend two weeks to a month sojourning

in the house. The following Monday morning Janis called to say, "I am very interested in this sojourn program and wondered if you still had any openings."

There's an incredible receptivity. I think it has to do at least partly with the experience the continent has also had in terms of the collapse of the old. That collapse has created a new kind of openness to the question of what it means to create the future. Again, I think of an interview last year during the Regional Consult with a man in real estate. He is one of the richest men in Houston, and looks exactly like Ben Cartwright - including the hat, the boots, the gray hair and the calm, steadfast look. We asked him what were the issues facing Houston. He said, "Don't ask me what the issues are. Tell me who has got a model. That is the issue. For example, I'm so tired of hearing people talk about transportation as an issue. The question is who has got a model to deal with it. We're going to choke ourselves to death. If you have a model, the city will use it."

That is the kind of openness we have been experiencing. Part of it has to do with the experience of structures going out of being in the blink of an eye. You thought the agency was going to be there for years and years. Suddenly the agency disappears. That is not simply happening because of 'Reaganomics'. And because of the experience of the fragility of structures, people are asking the question of "why" at a new depth. Why is our organisation in being? Larry Ward told us about an appointment with the Inter-Americans Foundation in Washington D.C. We have worked with that organisation for some time, but had never met this particular gentleman. They walked in expecting to talk with him about the ICA and human development, but his opening line was, "I know all about your Human Development Projects. I know all about the community forums and your work across the globe. Now tell me about the Order."

There is a new depth to the questions being raised; and again it is a sense of dialogue over the 'old' and the 'new.' It is not just us who feel like there isn't any old anymore. Everywhere people seem to sense there is not any old anymore. We have been talking about being in transition, that this is a time of transition. I would like to declare to you, the transition is over! Transition has to do with transisting from something to something, and there simply is no more 'from!' There is only 'to'. You want to go back to the old regional team, but there is nothing there. You want to go back to the old social service agency, but it is simply not there. There is no old. There is only the new. We don't have the option of choosing the old anymore. People talk about 'saving the world'. That isn't even our option anymore. The only option we have on our hands is creating the world. If you remember, we used to draw a timeline that described civilisation, then a period of transition, then post-civilisation, or what Toffler calls the Third Wave. We have talked about the period of transition being the 20th Century, or the '60's and the '70's, and always described it as a gap. But I would contend we are no longer in that gap. We are out in the new. There is no old to conserve, but only the new to invent.

We are asking ourselves many questions. One of the most poignant of those is "What are we asking of ourselves?" What are we asking of ourselves relative to what it means to be a body of people who decided to care for the planet. In the midst of that question, we experience all kinds of temptations. It is a question you find isn't surrounded by a lot of light. It is a question surrounded by a kind of darkness. None of the past answers seem to hold, yet it seems to be a very old, very foundational question. We have struggled deeply with them, and experience

ourselves being tempted at many points. It's a temptation with subtlety. It's a temptation to stay in the darkness rather than deal with the pain of light - which is real pain, by the way. One form that temptation comes in is that of finding a plateau. I find myself saying, "If I have to go to one more council and wrestle one more time with the question of what are we going to do....! Why can't we just say, okay, we are going to do x, y, and z. And that's it. Period. I am not going to be faced with all of this ambiguity any more. I am just going to teach LENS. I am just going to..." Anything that will restrict the mission so it is handlable so I don't feel myself always trying to walk on quicksand.

Yet we are rescued from that temptation by our own roots, by our very being. We have no escape from the fact that we intend to be on behalf of the innocent suffering of the planet. That question haunts us. There is no escape. You hear it in every house you visit, you hear it from the teams. "What does it mean to be on behalf of the innocent suffering of the planet earth?" We are also haunted by the fact that we have only just begun. I find it very difficult to read stories about Somalia, We aren't doing anything there. Every day you see those pictures of people starving to death, you see food sitting on the coast rotting because there is no distribution system. It is the haunting awareness, as David McCleskey said the other day, "I have been too long in the school of innocent suffering, a school from which there is no graduation."

You have seen the phrase, "The Americas Challenge" all over the place. I want to talk just a bit about our sense after what that means. As I look around the Americas, it seems that the question we are asking is precisely the same question the Americas is asking: "What is it we are asking of ourselves?" One dimension of that has been dramatically revealed by the whole Reaganomics. When you hear that we are \$4 trillion, or so, in debt, or is it more, as a nation? I don't even know how to grasp being \$4 trillion in debt. But it makes sense that the budget needs to be cut. It sounds reasonable, until you hear that may mean cutting back Social Security and ask yourselves are we saying, therefore, that elders may just have to go without enough food to eat? You sense we are having to ask ourselves, "What are we asking of ourselves?" It is being asked by the times we live in. We discover - as a continent that none of the old solutions fit, none of the old structures fit. I don't have to give illustrations. You have all probably read, The World Challenge, or Entropy, or The Aquarian Conspiracy. And the 20 other books sitting on your desk. Or at least you are intending to read them; all books about the kind of radical new that is happening.

But you don't even need books. At Hughes Tool, which is one of the most Texan of Texan economic institutions, the most frequent name on the payroll is Nguyen. Not Smith. Nguyen is a Vietnamese name. That is indicative of the new that is happening

Our continent finds itself in a new dilemma. Yes, we are faced with the question of economic survival, but that is not finally the dilemma that is at the depths. We are also faced with deep political ambiguities, though again, that is not finally the depth question. The question has to do with being in a moral dilemma. What is at the root of our being? What does it mean to be a people at this time in history, when - "All things are new"? What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be a community? What does it mean to be a city? What does it mean to be a nation? It used to be simple for this continent; it is two nations, the United States and Canada. Then we read about Nine Nations of North America. Which nation are you a part of? I live in Mexamerica. Not only that, I live in Mexamerica, the capital of which is Los Angeles. At the same time I live in Houston, which isn't even a part of that nation because Houston is the oil capital

of the world! What does that do to your sense of the continent and how to plan for the future? I think that is what has happened to all of us.

At the roots, it has to do with a paradigm shift, or radical shift in world view. Yankelovich describes it as a cultural revolution. He says it is a revolution in "shared meanings or common understandings about our social life and individual behaviour". Our common understandings simply do not match the realities we experience. We had a common understanding of what it meant to be a family, to be a city, and so on. Now, none of our definitions match the reality we experience. I thought I had a "common understanding" of what it meant to be a teenager. Now, we have two teenagers and I am tempted not to even call them teenagers because they do not match the definition I had of teenager. They are a brand new reality.

I thought I had a definition of what it meant to be a new woman. I'll tell you I was one of the most fanatic about becoming a 'new woman'. Now, I am scared to death of being a new woman. Even my definition of that does not match the reality I experience. Another thing has to do with this transition business: I can't opt for going back. There is no 'old' woman. It is just gone. But it also has to do with my definition of the 'new' woman not matching the reality I experience. The other day I was waiting for a ride from the Houston airport. I was sitting next to a woman who had no hair on the sides of her head. It had all been shaved off except for a strip at the top. I think you call the style 'punk'. Now she wasn't as old as I am, but she was not a teenager. She did have hair down the middle of the top of her head, and the hair was about four inches high and it was bleached white. What she had on the rest of her body was black leather and silver. Black leather tights, for instance. Actually, I was a bit jealous, because she looked so good in them. But I mean there was nothing on her body but leather and silver. I was sitting there thinking, it is one of these psychotic kids, until all of a sudden a middle-aged man came up to ask for her autograph. It turned out she was performing some place in Houston. He had seen an article about her in the Houston Post, and had heard her singing before and was so impressed he just wanted her autograph. I found myself saying, "He should be asking for my autograph!" She doesn't fit with my definition of the new woman. Yet I tell you, she certainly doesn't fit any definition of the 'old' woman.

We don't have any common understanding, any sense of shared meanings. You know a new reality is happening, that is brand new. But when you try to describe it, you find it is not just a matter of thinkig you are describing 'blue' but the reality is actually 'big'. Does that make sense? It probably doesn't make sense, because it doesn't. We find ourselves trapped in old shared meanings. It's like going to the subway, thinking you know that Evanston is north of here and the Water Tower is south. You get on the subway headed where you think north is, but when you come out of the subway you discover not only are you not in Evanston, you are not even sure you are on the planet earth. It is the experience of reality shifting right before your eyes. Alvin Toffler has written a book calle The Role of the Future in Education. It's an 'old' book written way back in 1974. The book is not about the future of education, but the role people's images of the future play in the education process. The thesis of the book is that images of the future play the most determinative role in the effectiveness and relevancy of teaching. He has included a quote from Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf which talks about the real suffering which occurs when a human being finds himself or herself trapped between two ages. You thought you were in the middle ages when the reality is you are in the renaissance. Herman Hesse says that in our time it is not one or two human beings experiencing this suffering, but an entire planet. An entire planet caught between two ages.

I would want to contend that if we want to look at the innocent suffering of our times, we need to take a very serious look at that, and how our continent, in particular, experiences being 'caught in between'. You see evidence of that in a kind of psychotic behaviour. Larry Ward told us about a man who got into an argument with the post man over a letter, and just shot him. Two days later he called up the police, in tears, to tell them he'd shot the post man. In Houston it is far more dangerous to go to a suburban grocery store and walk through the parking lot than it is in the inner city. You are more likely to get shot in the suburbs. Nothing makes sense. Yet you know it isn't because suddenly everyone is 'worse'. It is the experience of a psychoses over the pain and the 'no sense' of the times.

I think one of the keys to caring for our continent is myth. What is the story, what are the common understandings, the sense of shared meanings that give back to this continent a story having to do with meaning, with significance, that care for the moral dilemma. I am clear it is not a matter of this group of people sitting in the room building a new myth and then declaring it to everyone else. The myth has to be built by the people of this continent. This is because another critical element of the 'new' has to do with the fact of participation being key. I want to quote from Roger Talpert, an European management expert, who borrows from Daniel Bell's image about major periods of history being dominated by what he calls 'axial principles'. Talpert claims that the axial principle of our age is participation. "It is unthinkable for people to have any form of collective action without being able to influence the goals and choices." The new story about who we are as the Americas is not going to be built by a political administration or any elite group. It is unthinkable for the people on this continent to contribute to any form of collective action without being able to influence the decisions about what that action is. At the same time, the question "What are we asking of ourselves?" is the Americas Challenge.

What clues does that begin to give us about our task? Suddenly, I find myself saying I wish I weren't so clear. The terror I experience is that, whether we like it or not, we have, by virtue of our past, the methodologies by which the people of this continent can participate in creating the new myth. I suspect your response is not unlike that of the Denver Regional Team. Do you want to know what contradiction they came up with when planning their future? "These are the times, and we hope to God we die before we're called to be the people". The fact is, we haven't -- died, that is. We are here. That is just the reality. And I think it is also reality that we know we have been called, whether we're ready or not. Whether we like it or not, that is the indicative. We all feel deep pain over the sense that somehow the Human Development Projects or the Town Meeting campaign didn't quite turn out the way we expected them to. Yet underneath that the far deeper question has to do with the reality of the miracle those communities and structures have been, and what has been revealed about our readiness to serve this continent in a way that before was simply not possible. The continent is aware of those miracles, of the new life that has come into being. And they are saying 'we are ready to listen and learn'.

However, it does not mean that our job is to go out to declare to people. It has to do with finding ways to elicit the declaration out of the people. We will never 'convince' anyone by talking 'about'. The mode of the times, has to do with the 'axial principle' of participation.

The declaration will not be real unless it is declared by the people of this continent themselves. We do, however, have the methods to elicit that declaration, methods which are both contextual and practical. The contextual methods have the power to release people to see themselves in the new paradigm, in the new world, to be able to declare "All things as new". There is no old. If people have a chance to declare that, then they have a new way to begin to operate. One of the biggest dangers of teaching practical social methods without the contextual is that

if you teach someone how to plan, but his or her world view is from the past, the plan simply will not work. It will be irrelevant. On the other hand, contextual methods without practical methods are also dangerous. Having a context for knowing the new with no practical way to Do and Be the new creates a kind of paralysis.

Don and I visited some very dear friends recently, who we used to spend a lot of time with in the early '60's. These people were very close to us. We used to stay up late many nights talking about the new world and the new times. When we went back to visit them, we literally had to cut the visit short. It was too painful. It was like they had turned into stone. The husband had a little motto on his desk that said, "I am just a squashed bug on the windshield of life". That is exactly what he looked like. He knew what the future demanded and didn't have any way to respond. Both the contextual and practical methods are critical.

Finally, underneath that, or within those methods is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer. It is the grounding in the Word in both of these methods. I have no way to talk about that gift except in the language of our historical memory, that is the Word which is the root of the Christian faith. I do know that Word has a way to give people a way. When people say "Life is finally just mysterious." Right. That is what the Word is about. When we have a way to help people know that you are constantly building illusions and those illusions are always getting broken. That is the way life is, that's what it means to be human, that's precisely what gives you permission to live in reality. Or, you are looking for a messiah? You are looking for someone else to come up with what it means to be the new family, or the new community, or whatever, to be the new experiment? There isn't anybody coming. Your ARE the experiment. Period.

I anticipate this council being a profound dialogue, with context, with methods, and with the Word. This dialogue is not new, but I think it was intensified with the regional consults last year. Many of us called our consults "Dialogue I". We weren't sure what Dialogue II was going to be, but now I think we are much clearer. Whereas Dialogue I was the dialogue with society in which we began to get clear where the innocent suffering authentically is within our regions, Dialogue II has to do with how, as Regional Teams, we begin to respond to that innocent suffering, knowing all things as new.