

LIVING EFFECTIVELY IN THE CULTURAL WORLD  
LENS DISCOURSE IV

I'm Joyce, related to one person as wife, related to two people as mother and there are thousands of other relationships that tell me what it means for me to be Joyce. I was born 5 million years ago, before the rocks broke apart and became grains of sand... even then I was Joyce. It was many thousands of years before I became conscious, conscious that I was Joyce. But I did become conscious, and I knew that I was, and I knew who I was. I was able to grasp meaning in my life that had not been there before. This is the story of my journey through history as Joyce. Now I stand here before you in an intensified moment of that journey, an intensified moment of that consciousness...one foot moving out of the 19th century, and all that I have understood and cherished about what it meant to be Joyce, with the other foot undeniably rooted in the 20th century with all the exploding consciousness of this age giving new depth to being Joyce, being beacons toward the 21st century and all the challenge and mystery of a more profound me. Here am I, Joyce, living the agony and the wonder of three centuries.

That is another way of trying to articulate what we have been saying already. The age in which we live, the mutation of consciousness that we are experiencing is like what has only been experienced once or twice in the whole existence of humanity. We are at one of the profound evolutionary points in Civilization...and I really believe that. This fantastically frightening and yet fascinating time we have talked about as resurgence.

Resurgence is both global (as we talked about it last night) and local (as we will talk about it in the morning.) It is inclusive of every dimension of society, economic, political, and cultural. When we looked at the dimension of the political, we talked about the whole question of engagement, the reality of four great life times or phases, and the burning issue of care. This afternoon we dealt with the dimension of the economic and the question of vocation, the radicality of sexuality and the burning issue of integrity. Now we want to look at the dimension of the cultural and focus in on meaning, or the void of meaning as it relates to this social process, then at rationality, or the way to make sense out of this world, and finally to touch on happiness, or the living of a fulfilled life. The human method of our concern in this process is that of motivity, or the way by which human passion is released and sustained.

Let us first for a moment identify the cultural dimension of the social process a little more. The cultural process is that which sets man apart. It is that which has to do with meaning and purpose of life. Without it there would be no economic or political. It is the illuminating or significating dimension of society. The three poles of the cultural triangle are Wisdom, Style, and Symbol. Wisdom has to do with transmitting the world view, it is about the prowess and expertise that gets things done (useful skills), and the handing down of what's known to the next generation (accumulated

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knowledge), and it is also about that which makes wisdom significant (final meaning). Style is about acting out of the journey of man, all that was, is and will be. Style therefore has to do with the stages of life, (cyclical roles), and the continual creation and re-creation of civilization, that is the arena of marriage, covenant and family, (procreative schemes), and in addition it has to do with the groupings of society or the units of society; what they are and their roles in society (social structures). Symbol has to do with that which holds society together, the reason for being and the rehearsal of the reason for being. It reminds society of who it is. It is about that which allows us to tell the common understanding of who we are (language), and that which gives expression to life as it is and our relationship to it (social art), then lastly, it has to do with the way we relate to the mysterious, to the unexpected and the unpredictable (common religion). This whole arena of symbol is largely unconscious yet it is most crucial. Now each of these three poles have a necessary relationship to each other. Symbol provides incentive for wisdom, and wisdom names and identifies the common experience relative to symbol. Wisdom provides new social contexts for style and style tests wisdom and demands reflection. Style gives realistic social grounding to symbol, and symbol births new modes relative to style.

There are a couple of places to look at the way that the economic has infiltrated the cultural. Useful skills is a place where this has happened. What we mean by useful skills generally speaking is from the economic context of what pays more as a useful skill. What has some sort of economic power behind it. You take a look at cyclical roles, the way it has been infiltrated by the economic is just in measuring the worth of a human being. The question of whether or not you can afford something is the basis on which some people decide whether or not to have children, or whether or not to have more. It is the whole question of whether or not we can afford it.. and somehow or other the procreating of human kind is lost in that economic haze. Here in language, the economic values have infiltrated the cultural as well. As you listen to the language you begin to hear economic overtones. What we mean by success is usually economic success. What we mean by getting prepared for life is usually getting prepared to work, to somehow get into the economic mainstream of life. Just the symbol itself that begins to hold this common experience for all of us is that symbol (\$). In fact there is no question about what that means. That is one of the powerful commonizing symbols of our society. That kind of infiltration is not bad, in the first instance. The economic in and of itself is a powerful, powerful reality. And the economic, as it relates to all dimensions of society, is powerful, and it has to be. It is not a question of squashing the economic to let the cultural get beefed up. No, you want the economic to keep going. You just think about the world situation and how all kinds of doors have been opened and walls broken down because of technology, and our ability to use the means of the economic to break through caring for the world. Whether we like it or not, what is going on there is not the issue. If we were to stamp out the power that is there....just think, we have famine now, and hunger, and distribution problems...that for me is not the answer. It is how you keep that economic going in full force and keep it moving, and at the same time begin to revitalize and re-empower the cultural allowing it to move ahead in a healthy kind of tension with the economic.

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That relationship between the economic, the cultural, and the political in terms of the imbalances also is going on here. If you look at the cultural within its own reality there is also imbalance. It probably looks something like this. Wisdom has overextended itself in the cultural process. I remember today when we were doing our proposals, someone said, "Look how many of the contradictions up there are educational." There are just so many things...if the educational structure would do this and if the educational structure would do that....and I just want to suggest that that has to do with the way that this reality wisdom began to force style to become subservient to it; and almost completely irradiated any kind of common symbol. The concern for getting an education, really interests me, it doesn't seem to matter that we know that that isn't adequate. Every body knows that, knows that the educational process is not doing the job relative to equipping human beings to live their whole lives, not just one part of it. And to be able to make responsible decisions about our participation in the whole thing. It is not going on, and yet, everybody still insists that that is the answer. It is like we know it is irrelevant and yet have to have it. It's not like we think education is an answer, but you have got to have it to function in this society. You have got to have it to be able to move and carry on.

The kind of happening that is going on in the cultural process has thrown us out of kilt, even though the economic has so much strength. Somehow there is something askew, have you noticed? And you can hear cries and screams for help. I would suggest that the black revolution was a cry for help. It was manifested in terms of its outcome and rewards...most of it took place in the political dimension of society, but it was the scream that came out of the cultural. And probably over here in social structures, where human beings group together and live. The youth revolution was a cry for help. It's a scream for help over here in cyclical roles. Somehow wanting to unleash a power, something that is not being fulfilled or not being attended to. And the woman's revolution, though a lot of the screams go on concerning the economic issues and jobs and training and so forth, it is a cultural cry for help relative to procreative schemes, and somehow creating a meaningful kind of relationship between men and women as sociological beings. There is not even any question in my mind and I'm sure not any question in any ones mind that women can do almost anything relative to the business world and vocation and careers. That is not the issue. That is very well known. The question has to do with their sociological inter-action in society, not economic issues...of whether or not they can produce or whether or not they can enable society.

All of that swirl, all of that scream for help begins to leave you with a gnawing at your insides. It does me at least. Just a yearning, restlessness. Everyone visibly seems to be doing so well, and yet internally something is wrong. We live better today in terms of our physical situation, we eat well. If you look at society it seems to be functioning well. There are problems, and yet if you look it seems to be functioning well. And yet there are all kinds of despair, like a big whole in the center of our being, that has just happened to us. That has to do with the crisis of meaning; just the senselessness of it all, or the felt senselessness...not having any way to grasp life as meaningful existence. The dissolutionment of the American

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dream. It is really ironic when I think about the years of the black revolution. I remember one of Baldwin's papers that I used to read quite frequently that had this image of being integrated into a burning house. Everybody is beginning to see that. The crys and screams....are global too. The yearning of the rest of the world to participate in the American dream which has somehow gone flakey. The world, and those within America who have not experienced her full riches, begin to sense that they are yearning to participate in something that is burning down. It is just not standing up, it is just not holding up anymore. That kind of crisis in meaning is not a psychological issue. It is not something that has to do with personal despair. It is not something that can be treated by the psychoanalyst office. It is not something that can be treated on somebody's couch. The kind of despair that you see today has nothing what so ever to do with the psychological reality of man. It has to do with sociological existence. It is not a personal kind of frenzy, a personal kind of meaninglessness, a personal kind of despair.

This despair is social. You just look around, it is everywhere. When everybody is experiencing themselves as caved in, how can we think that some individual people have problems. It is like the whole of the people are suffering. The internal experience of this is reeling, dizzy, endless wandering, not knowing which way to go, not knowing just what to do, not having any sense of purpose or any sense of direction. You get the sense that everything we ever had that had some validity, some meaning, or substance is gone. I think about my community. I'm sure that in all of my work in community organization, what I've been out to do is recreate in this time a community like the community that I grew up in. A community just like that one, where people got along, where people worked together, and where people took care of each other. Every body took care of all the children. There was the extended family, everybody together. But you know that community is gone. It is dead as a door knob. It was probably dead when I was growing up in it and I just didn't know it. It is so gone that it is painful. And I want to suggest that that is true for many of the structures that have held meaning for us in the past. And you begin to ask why, what was it that went wrong? What went wrong? Where did we go off on the wrong track? Where did we step off kilter? What happened? Why?

You know what? There is no answer. There is no answer at all. The whole question of why, though, I'd suggest is a way to begin to weave sense back into life. It is the sense weaving reality of life itself. It is when the "why" fills your being. When the "why" rings around in your ears and you begin to get clear that there is no answer to it. It just screams and shouts, and screams and shouts, and it is then that every thing that is rational, every thing that makes sense, is of no help. It is at the point of the "why", the yearning, the burning asking of that question that you fall into the level of irrationality. It is rationality, not rationality like you

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and I know rationality to be. It is the kind of rationality that calls for a new invention. That calls for us to use our rational powers, to use our rationality. To invent the answer. There is not one out there. Any thing that is going to happen has got to be invented. It is so strange, you know, you think about life. There is nothing in and of itself that tells you what it is. Life is almost nothing until it is made, until the relationship to it is invented. And then it becomes something. It is like chalk...who decided that this was to be called chalk? Why not ash tray? The meaning and the name for it was invented. And you and I still live out of that invention....that this is chalk. And I want to suggest that the patterns and realities for humanness were also invented. The names were created, and what we are experiencing now is that those inventions are inadequate for our time. It is just not holding up anymore. What we have on our hands is the necessity to bring that rationality into focus and invent the new meaning of humanness, to invent the new understanding of what makes life meaningful; invent the new understanding of what makes life significant.

It is like the Man of LaMancha. Did you see that movie? In that movie, Man of LaMancha you remember that line about how he fought and fought and fought and fought until his brains dried up. And then he created a brave adventure. It is at the point of our brains drying up that suddenly the possibility of inventing a whole new adventure begins to open up. And you remember with Don Juan... was that an adventure! He goes out into the world...and there is the same world that he went to sleep in the night before...but he walks into that world and all of the inns and taverns are castles. All the ladies and prostitutes are fair damsels. And just the whole world is different. Isn't that strange? It doesn't make sense. But the whole world literally changed. You know what, if you really watch that movie...I looked at it and I watched it begin to change. Right there before my eyes....I said, wait a minute. I watched him go right out and tackle that windmill. You know, the passion with which he lived that invention is what began to seduce others into living that invention. But that world was an invented world. It was a world that he invented out of the pit of a meaningless life. He began to carve the initials of meaning again. Now that is very hard to grasp. It is particularly hard for you and I because we are so pragmatic, and practical, and realistic. That is part of our scientific training. We have a hard time dealing with things that are just nothing until you do something with it. Because everybody knows that life is real and practical. There are facts that have to be considered. There is data that cannot be ignored. After all the world is a rotten mess, look at it. How can you say it, all of these inns are castles? There are just hard facts out there. It is very hard to grasp, and yet it is true. It is true. It is what you and I invent, it is nothing else until you and I invent it. Somebody else did it. All that is there is pure possibility for new invention of what's needed. What is a meaningful life?

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It is like the Wizard of Oz. You remember that story. There are all these people with all these problems, one couldn't fight because he was cowardly, one didn't have a heart, so he couldn't be compassionate, couldn't care like he wanted to and on and on and on. Here are all these cripples, broken up people and they go and visit Oz. It is like Oz becomes the land of mystery and awe and wonder. And they are given what they already have. Nothing different, a piece of paper, a clock, nothing, and yet....life just becomes different. After visiting the wonderful, after experiencing the awe-filling, all of a sudden the cowards become brave, and the callous become sensitive, and compassionate.

It is like discovering a new place to stand; a new land, uncharted waters, whole new turf to walk on. It is like being in something that is completely other than this world. Suddenly you stand there, in the land of wonder and awe, and you know. I experience that kind of journey to the center and some how come back with a new perspective, a new relationship to what is. You can sense it happening. The thing that is so phenomenal about it is it doesn't always happen the way you want it to. How we get our creativity into self-consciously inventing the new is the issue at hand. But whether we do it or not, it is like we stumble on it. Have you noticed? Sometimes you just stumble into it. Sometimes you just stumble into that kind of land, that kind of wonder. It is when your wife was so fed up one evening and you wanted to go out and find something that was going to make it make sense again. So you take a stroll down to Burger King for a hamburger to somehow fill up the empty hole that your life is. Have you ever done that? And in walking down the street, suddenly you notice that somebody has put a sidewalk there, just for you. You walk in to Burger King and get a hamburger. You walk in and there is somebody waiting there just for you...to ask you, "May I help you?" You look around and there are tables and benches just for you. You find you've stumbled into a new kind of relationship with what always has been.

Occasionally, moments like that happen, when the mundane begins to just scream with meaning, just to come alive with wonder. That doesn't make the tragedy go away. That doesn't make the tragedy go away, it is still there. And it is because of that, that the kind of charge or challenge that you and I have to invent that meaningful world is possible. It is possible to just decide. It sounds absurd, to invent it, to create the meaning that life is. Who is to say that I'm only happy when I'm feeling good and life is going my way? Who is to tell me that that is what happiness is? I decide what happiness is. And happiness is my whole life, every moment of it. Who is to say that one part of it is designed for happiness and one part of it is designed for doom? The whole thing is a happy life. Now that doesn't mean that it is some sort of Pollyanna existence, and that I don't experience real tragedy, and real suffering, and real despair. And yet that tragedy and that suffering and that despair are my life. It is not something tacked on, it is not something other than my life. That is it. That's it. I mean, there is nothing else. There is no such thing as looking

forward to living a fulfilled life. The only life you have is the one you have right now. There is no one out there in the future waiting to fulfill us. It is not even there. It doesn't exist. All that we have is what we have. Tragic, pain filled, joyful, happy life, right now.

It is like a sea, If you've ever lived by the sea, it is sometimes calm and smooth, it humms. Have you noticed that? You get seduced to it. Life is like that too, sometimes it is very calm like the sea, and then violent, raging, with the waves crashing. It sounds like thunder instead of humming, and yet, it is the same sea. It is like life. Life is like that kind of sea of tranquility, the sea is tranquility, which is calm and violent.

There is in the midst of that the possibility of living a problemless life. The possibility of living as a fulfilled one, as one who has no problems. It is the indicative life that you and I already have on our hands. The fact is, if you want to deal with facts, the fact is that we have no personal problems. Do you believe that is a fact? You do? We have no personal problems, they don't exist. Any thing that is my "problem" is my husband's, is my children's, is yours. There is no such thing as any personal problem. They are all sociological. I have no special claim on them. They belong to society as I am a part of society. Have you noticed that? I can't begin to count the ineffective days that I've spent drowning in my problems, just days of absolutely no creativity, hours of remorse and self-pity, wallowing in my problems. It is phenomenal the kind of human energy that is soaked up and consumed in problems.

The indicative reality of the fulfilled life, which is the one we have that is so filled up already, is that there are no personal problems. There aren't any. There aren't any. We can just experience life as problemlessness....as problemlessness. I read a Cosmopolitan ad about a girl, I can't remember who she was...who was being questioned along with a lot of other young women about what was the most important thing in life. And this one girl said, she loved the way her senses related to life. She loved to smell things, and to touch things, and feel things. Her senses were very very important to her in being able to experience life. But, she added, even if I had no eyes, and no ears, and no sense of touch, or smell, or anything, I would still have life. It is that kind of indicative reality that life is. The fulfilled life is one who is profoundly grateful for having that kind of life.

Well, that is the kind of charge that is screaming forth from the cultural relative to our lives as human beings, as social realities. And yet it is very personal, personal in the sense of experiencing the pain and despair of this age. The cultural screams in its whole essence in terms of being the significating reality of life. The scream is...go ahead, invent life, invent it, invent the relationship, invent the new name. It is like Camus who said, "I'm going to be the experiment of my life. I'm going to be the experiment of my life. And that issue becomes extremely critical

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when you think about the whole interrelationship of society.

How is it that you enable people to act out the motivated life? Life that has some push to it? Life that is filled with passion. How do you get that to happen? What does it take? Motivity is another strange kind of thing. It is one of those things that doesn't exist. And yet, what I'm pointing to with that word is that which releases the potential, the authentic potential and the passion of human life. It is a sustaining kind of passion. It is not 'spurty'...maybe that's the difference between motivation and motivity. Motivation seems to carry a note of getting motivated to do this or that, where as with motivity I'd be talking about something that sustains, something that carries through. You are not going to get that kind of motivity with any kind of psychological manipulation. I think we have discovered that. Psychological manipulation will 'whump' up the human courage, or 'whump' up human drive for a while, but it is not lasting, it is not sustaining. It is only temporary. The M & M trick for giving rewards for good kinds of behavior, or a good job. You succeed and you get a gold watch or an M&M, which ever it might be. That doesn't last, it provides some kind of momentary motivation, perhaps, but over the long haul, I really believe it is going to be a long haul, that kind of motivation doesn't last. It peters out. It dries up like a raisin that just withers away. The question is coming at this a different way. Somehow the presupposition that you can get somebody motivated to do something suddenly becomes flipped in my imagination.

It is in the doing of something that motivity comes forth. It is in the action itself that motivity happens. It is not that you can motivate somebody to do something, but it is the doing that releases motivity. And that is a whole different way of thinking about what that might mean. It has to do with vision. It has to do with somehow having an understanding of a place in history, a place that takes me far beyond my goals. They may be four year goals, or five, or ten, or twenty. It is a vision that takes me far beyond the goals, whatever they are. Even if they are 40 year goals, that gives you a sense of being placed in history. That gives you a sense somehow of one who is going to participate in it.

It also is a sense of selfhood...a sense of being. A sense of being able to perform even the most menial of tasks, even if it is the most menial of jobs, with passion, as if it is the most important thing that I can do with my life. It has to do with expanded space, it has to do with somehow getting beyond my family, or my community, or my self or my city even. Expanding the space so that I have a whole spectrum out of which to recontext myself, or to revitalize, or get revitalized. The problem with reduced space

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is when you focus all of your passion on one little corner of the universe in isolation from everything else, when anything happens in that little corner contrary to what we wanted to happen it is so crushing. It is as if the whole universe is crushing in on you. You have no way to stand back and be objective about it. There is no other screen through which to look at it. It is like all of my life is right here in this corner. It is falling apart. The result is cynicism and despair about whether anything is worth my life, anything is worth doing. But it is when you have space just sprawled out as part of your whole being that your little unit, your little community, your own city can be lived in full passion and intensity. Yet it is put in perspective relative to the whole situation.

This kind of engagement or doing that I'm talking about that creates motivity also has to do with extended time. It has to do with stretching my understanding of my relationship to time further than just tomorrow. Getting away from the immediacy of everyday... moving beyond what is immediately facing me. You know, I get so angry when people say that poor people don't help themselves. They just don't seem to care because they don't seem to help themselves. I want to suggest to you that that is a violent untruth...there is so much care there that it is eating them alive. It is not being able to get that care extended over time. It is having tomorrow face you with all of the crises and issues of trying to deal with day after day after day and not having that placed in the context of a broader sense of time where tomorrow doesn't become a crushing experience. It is when time is extended that somehow the immediacy doesn't chew life up and human beings experience being released to deal with a broader variety of issues, or released to forge through some sort of destiny.

Motivity has to do with corporate action, not individuals first, but with corporate action. And it has to do with tactical thinking. It has to do with pulling together, weaving and sensing after the directions relative to what is tactical over the long haul. It has to do with a story. It has to do with the story that keeps reminding you about what the whole thing is all about. The symbols that surround you. The books that you read. Everything that contributes to the myth creation, the story of why it is that I've gone this way instead of that, or I've taken this relationship instead of that. Just holding it before you continually, brain-washing yourself that this is what my life is going to do...this is the way that it is going to go. That kind of storying dynamic is so crucial. Then the other thing- in terms of that corporate action and the group experience is fellowship. It is having that array of colleagues who you participate with in the common venture, the common adventure, as you invent what ever that creation is that you have decided to invent. It is in the fellowship dynamic, the singing, the celebrating, the spinning. The reflecting, almost borders on reminiscing. That whole fellowship dynamic becomes critical.

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It is the swirl of all of that....going, going, going, going, going.....of human beings engaged with other human beings on some decided on cause, with a story that keeps reminding them of what they are doing. It is the swirl of that whole dynamic in the midst of that that motivity gets released. When you see all that going on you see motivity getting released. When you see all of that, I'd suggest also, you see somebody who is going to make a difference relative to their whole relationship to life. I have to stop, because I am over time as I so frequently am, but I just want to say that the issue again, is the issue of the destiny of man. It is not tomorrow....it is all the morrows yet to come. It is the new invention of humanness that is ours....we are standing at a critical evolutionary point.

Joyce Ollison