
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

James Cromwell answers Culture: So What?!?

James Cromwell · Tuesday, January 14th, 2014

“Dare to be an Artist. Let the Culture Take Care of Itself.”



James Cromwell. Photo: Ryan Rogers

Culture: So What?!? Each week, we ask thought leaders from all walks of life to answer the question: What is Culture and Why Does it Matter?

This Week’s Thought Leader: James Cromwell is truly one of the great American actors of film, television and the stage. Over a career that spans nearly 40 years, he has been nominated for an Oscar, four Emmys and four Screen Actors Guild Awards.

If you accept the premise that we are defined by the stories we tell ourselves, then our so-called “culture” (at least in the anthropological sense, as in “the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings over time and transmitted from one generation to another”) is for the most part a collection of assumptions, half-truths, misperceptions, obfuscations, prejudice and outright falsehood, taught both overtly and covertly, ingested and metabolized with our mother’s milk, then regurgitated back in the service of a system whose only purpose is its own survival at the expense of everything other than itself. It is a process analogous to the “grey goo” paradox in “nano” technology, where microscopic machines deconstruct everything in the world in order to replicate themselves ad infinitum, reducing all existence to a homogenous nullity called entropy. This is a trajectory that has taken humans from the glory of Chauvet, the cave of our forgotten dreams, to the ethos of reality TV, or most TV for that matter, from Homer to Fox News, Shakespeare to People Magazine ... US News and World distort, Time without Life, or the Cosmopolitan inanity of our noxious, popular culture.

The antidote to this malaise exists, as it always has, in immediate felt experience, full self-expression, the inspiration of the imagination, the power in the collective celebration of the ecstatic, and the revolutionary potential of all art to transform the commonplace into the miraculous. All this is anathema to the status quo, and a dire threat to the agendas of power. “To hold the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” is today an act of insurrection. In our drug addicted, violence prone, greed induced and celebrity besotted culture, where the one tenth of one percent have a stranglehold on the organs of communication, it is imperative to raise our collective voice in

resistance. Question authority. Dare to be an artist. Let the culture take care of itself.

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