

MAKING SENSE TOGETHER

JON HAWKES

This is perhaps the most difficult speech I've ever tried to put together. Partly that's been because I couldn't really understand why anyone in Winnipeg would be remotely interested in someone from Melbourne. I mean, you probably don't even know where Melbourne is, nor should you care. And partly it's because, despite my research, I know so little about your place. In the last twenty-four hours that's changed a little – hopefully enough for you to find what follows somewhat engaging.

I will begin, as we always do in Australia, by paying my respects to the original custodians of the land I find myself in, and let me also pay my respects to the custodians of my own land. I come from a place that is home to the most enduring culture on this planet. Two hundred years ago, these people had to cope with the invasion of whitefellas, and since then have been trying to civilize the barbarians that landed on their shores. They've been reasonably successful. At least their culture has managed to survive and grow and whitefella culture has – what can I say? – learnt a little. But it's like here. Child mortality is higher amongst Aboriginal people in Australia than in most of the world's countries; the prisons are full of blackfellas; living conditions for most Aboriginal people in Australia is execrable. On the other hand, Aboriginal culture has become, in a sense, the key image of what Australia is and what Australia could become.

MY CITY'S STILL BREATHING

a symposium exploring
the arts, artists
and the city

*This is a transcript of the keynote
address given on November 4, 2010 at the
Winnipeg Art Gallery.*

Transcription by Sarah Michaelson



I've recently been ever so slightly involved with a popular music program that had a cross-cultural intent, where the leaders of the project were senior Aboriginal singers and rock musicians, supported by whitefella musicians. The last show they did was called "Dirt Song". It involved a lot of these people singing in their own language for the first time. Just as one can no longer talk about Australian art without recognizing that Aboriginal art is front and centre, I think we're now arriving at a point in Australia where when one talks about Australian music, Aboriginal music will also be front and centre. One of the most remarkable things about "Dirt Song" is that not only are blackfellas singing in language, they've allowed whitefellas to sing in language as well. Now in New Zealand – where the Maori culture is comparatively monolithic - at least there is only one language – whitefellas have been invited and allowed to sing in Maori for thirty or forty years. In Australia, this is still a contentious issue, as to whether as a whitefella, you are allowed to be a part of anything that could remotely be regarded as authentic blackfella culture. For me, the biggest breakthrough is the idea that as a whitefella, one can be invited to be a part of a cultural process where blackfellas are taking the lead, rather than being appropriated, which is the usual situation. I imagine it's not dissimilar here.

When I was invited to do this gig back in November, I was told that "My City's Still Breathing" was the title. I googled "still breathing" and discovered that every reference to the concept was negative. Dead, but still breathing. Walking, but still breathing. On and on. It was always a "but". I thought, "Why would one choose to call a conference that?" I didn't get it then and I didn't get it until yesterday. In fact most of what I'm going to talk about I didn't get until yesterday. Which is why I don't have a script.

The moment I did get it, I realized what it was that would let me feel some sense of connection with you people. Australia invented the term "cultural cringe". What it described was that many Australians, for one hundred and ninety-eight years of European occupation of the land, have believed they were inferior. That nothing that Australians could do would ever remotely compare to the European benchmark at which we knelt. And it really was only — and this is sort of odd — with the companies that I've been involved with in the last thirty years, in particular Circus Oz, that we began to be able to say, "Hang on a minute. We can do stuff that is different from and better than anyone else. We don't need to cringe anymore." So that may well be the connection between Melbourne and Winnipeg — that sense of inferiority, of cringe.

Not long ago, I was involved for some seven or eight years in a community singing program. We trained ordinary people to lead sessional singing in their communities. We touted ourselves as a training organization, saying that what we did was pass on particular skills and techniques. This was, on the face of it, an accurate description. But what we realized, soon after we'd begun, was that the most important thing we were passing on wasn't the skills and techniques. It was simply confidence. What we were offering to the people who came to us was confidence in their own capacities. And the more I find out about Winnipeg, the more I feel that, if I've got a function here, it is to say: What is this "still breathing" bullshit? This town is clearly way up there. There is so much happening, so much interesting stuff, so many wonderful people, such an interesting history — there is nothing not to be proud of. There is nothing about this place that is mediocre or second-rate.

Which brings me to my next point. One of the things I've got in my bag is a book called *The Subconscious City*¹ that is dedicated to "those who choose to remain." I make the same dedication for my talk today. Part of the reason I do this is so I can raise one of my pet hates — one that has been obsessing me for some years now. It is Mr. [Richard] Florida. The reason I hate him (or at least his ideas)...hate?...well, no, it's too harsh a word...is his revival of cargo cultism. You know about "cargo cult"? We do in Australia because it's a belief that could be found in parts of Papua New Guinea. "Cargo cult" is the belief that there's all this good shit (cargo) flying around in the sky and if only we can do the right things down here, the carriers will actually land and hand out the goodies. To me, the whole creative class thing is exactly that: there are a bunch of creatives up there orbiting the earth, trying to decide where to live. If only, our local government authority can imagine correctly what they want, they will land on us. Now, sometimes this works, but the only thing you can guarantee about these people is that they will leave. Somebody else will inevitably make them a better offer.

Cirque du Soleil is an interesting example of this. Some time past, Cirque du Soleil, with whom I was once vaguely intimate, was trying to set up an Asian headquarters. They did exactly the Florida thing. They put out an ad saying, we are thinking of setting up an Asian headquarters, any offers? Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and others made them offers — you know, tax breaks, yadda yadda yadda. For a whole bunch of what I suspect were primarily economic reasons, Cirque du Soleil chose Singapore. Melbourne, where I come from, didn't bother to put in an offer. Cirque du Soleil lasted in Singapore for about two years. Then they pulled up their tent poles and moved to Melbourne. Not because they had any offers from



Jon Hawkes delivers his keynote address at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Melbourne, but because they recognized that the culture of Melbourne was the sort of culture that they would like to live in. So for now, Cirque du Soleil's Asian headquarters is in Melbourne. Yes, Florida's model reflects reality to some degree, but nothing is certain, and nothing is permanent. It seems to me, that government's primary responsibility has to be to its local constituency, not to some imagined group of people that they think they can attract to their place. It terrifies me that virtually every conference I go to now, what I find is local government — politicians and bureaucrats — desperately trying to imagine what it is that will attract people to their place, rather than trying to imagine what it is that will stop the people that are leaving their place from leaving. It's insane; not only sick but unconscionably irresponsible. The fundamental responsibility of local government, and of provincial government, and of federal government, has to be to their own constituencies.

¹ *Subconscious City Catalogue*, Curated by Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Winnipeg (Winnipeg Art Gallery/ ABC Art Books Canada, 2008)



Now I've got that off my chest, where do we go now? When I was invited, I asked what was expected of me. I got second hand from Carol, "Just say what you said in Seattle." Now, the thing about Seattle was that my spiel was improvised. Number one: I have a drug-damaged memory, so I've got no idea what I said. Number two: they didn't pay me to come. The trade off was, "Don't prepare anything." So I didn't. All I had to do was sit in an armchair and be interviewed, which was very nice. But I couldn't bring my interviewer here with me. So I've got to invent; I can't remember the questions he asked.

I have some recollection of vehemently carrying on about another of my pet hates — arts and culture as a single concept. "Arts and culture". "Arts and culture". It's a phrase we've already heard this morning. One moment the person says culture, the next moment they say art and it quickly becomes apparent that they mean exactly the same thing each time. The most awful example of this is Cultural Policy. I've yet to see one that isn't just a tarted up arts policy. What has happened, as far as I can see, is that the concept of culture has been taken over by arts bureaucrats. They decided that culture was a word worth appropriating. I think this occurred to them because, back in the '80s, arts funding looked under threat and it was decided that if it was called culture instead, the arts might get a bit of a better run. I think that strategy failed, and in the process, unfortunately, these two words have become stuck together. Arts and culture. Now every local government has an arts and culture department. Now think about it: what on earth does arts and culture actually mean? Can you imagine, for example, a green grocery that called itself "The Broccoli and Vegetable Shop"?

I was in Russia two months ago, and they told me that "art" means the ballet, opera, etc. (real art) and that "culture" means everything else. That doesn't make sense. But no less sense than any of the other spins on why these two words could or should be put together. The more I hear "culture" used in the arts world, the more I realize, that the Russians weren't that far off the mark. Culture is just "arts plus" — the acts of art making and presenting plus libraries, galleries, museums, possibly sport, possibly the decorative side of urban design — never education, never communications. What you might call "arts and heritage".

Now, talk to a CEO of a business and what will she say? She'll say culture is the value system that informs the company from top to bottom. Their culture is the values and the behaviours of the people in this organization. Talk to biologists and they will say culture is the transmission of information by non-genetic means. For hundreds of years we've presumed that the only living things on earth that have culture are us. What we've discovered over the last thirty years is that virtually every species has culture — that most beings teach their young behaviours and ways of doing things. Talk to anthropologists about what culture is and they'll probably start with kinship systems and you'll realize that as far as they're concerned, really the basis of culture is law/lore: spelled either L-A-W or L-O-R-E. That culture is the embodied set of values that any society has.

In the *Fourth Pillar*² what I was saying was that by concatenating — shoving together — these two ideas, arts and culture, we bugger up both concepts. We lose the sense of culture as a value system from our public planning processes. And that’s a tragedy. This loss may also well be deliberate: one of the ways hegemonies maintain power is by cultivating the assumption that the values upon which a system is based are set in concrete. They are assumed; they are never mentioned. The values are the values. What’s happened over the last twenty or thirty years, is the realization that value systems are in fact constructs. And not only are they constructs, but they are dynamic. They change, all the time. And perhaps it is the primary responsibility of government to recognize the diversity of values that exist within any society and to ensure that all those values are brought to the table. So I’ve argued that the concept of cultural policy is a crock; it’s nonsense. As I’ve said, all of the cultural policy that I’ve ever seen, so far, is basically arts policy. You don’t have economic policy. The economists are in such a position of power, they apply an economic perspective to all policy. You can’t get policy through without the economists having done their assessment of it. And increasingly — one would hope — that is true of environmental policy. You don’t have an “environmental policy”; instead you assess all policy as to its environmental impact. What I say in the *Fourth Pillar* is that that is exactly what we should be doing in terms of culture.

“Rather than having a cultural policy, all policy should be examined and assessed as to its cultural impact.”

Rather than having a cultural policy, all policy should be examined and assessed as to its cultural impact. By that I mean, first: Were all the diverse values that exist in a society discovered and brought to the table? Secondly: Was the process of negotiation of policy fruitful? And it’s always a negotiation. Was that negotiation collaborative? Was that negotiation engaging? Thirdly: Does the result allow for ongoing negotiation? Because it will always be ongoing. Never ever are values fixed. All culture is syncretic. So that’s the culture bit.

Moving on to the next thing I discovered.

Yesterday, I visited the Institute of Social Planning [Social Planning Council of Winnipeg], where I was shown the medicine wheel, the four quadrants. Now I’ve always hated the four pillars. A) it’s such a phallic image B) it’s an engineering construct, C) it’s classical. Everything I hate. Awful. When one local government in Melbourne introduced a four pillar framework into their policy-making, the staff jokingly referred to them as the “four pillows.”

Many a truth is made in jest. I just wish I’d thought of the four pillows. Things upon which we can rest. Things which protect us from the rocky ground. The four pillows of sustainability. That would be great. So, the medicine wheel, with its four quadrants — I wish I’d known about that when I wrote the book. As one constantly keeps finding, there’s nothing new under the sun. And we have so much to learn from ancient wisdoms.

2 *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture’s essential role in public planning*, Jon Hawkes Common Ground, 2001



This is particularly true in Australia because we have a vibrant and vital culture that has been going for some 60-70,000 years. The oldest uninterrupted culture on the planet. Jared Diamond, in *Collapse*³, suggests that all civilizations, sooner or later, fall apart under the weight of something. It's hard to imagine a heavier weight than the two hundred years of whitefella occupation that Aboriginal culture in Australia has had to endure. Not only have they survived, they've blossomed. So what is it about so many indigenous cultures that allow them to be able to continue in the face of the most horrific impacts from largely European sources? I don't know. What I do know is that they continue. And if we wish to continue, we should be spending a lot of time learning from indigenous cultures.

My best friend is a guy called Gary Foley, a legendary blackfella activist in Australia. He and I — God knows why we did this — both became senior bureaucrats in the equivalent of the Canada Council in Australia simultaneously, in the early '80s. I arrived first, and a couple months later, Foley arrived. Now the Australia Council, probably not unlike the Canada Council is made up largely of poo-bahs, men in suits - the Council itself that is, not the organisation. So there's this big conference room, full of men in suits and the next item is the introduction of the new Director of the Aboriginal Arts Board, the first blackfella ever to be appointed. Foley, who is a real-life edgy '60s/'70s activist walks in. The room is at the top of a skyscraper in North Sydney, which is high rise heaven or high rise hell. Foley walks over to the window and he looks out and says, "It's fuckin' shit out there, innit." Nobody dares deny it. Then he says, "Look, the only chance you've got is a blackfella-led socialist revolution!" He was probably joking, but I think he was right. If we are going to get anywhere... the move from

indigenous cultures demanding recognition of their victimization, to actually being in the position of taking leadership in the societies in which they live, seems to me one of the few ways onward that I can look forward to. The sooner Aboriginal culture in Australia — I can't say for Canada — gets to the point where it can confidently take leadership, the sooner Australia will turn into a country I'm proud to come from, which I can't say I'm all that at the moment.

Let's talk about art. I was overwhelmed — not only by Wanda Koop's work out there on the walls — but by the fact that she started Art City. Her commitment to the social function of artists in terms of their responsibility to pass on their skills to ordinary people is as exemplary as her art.

Just let me go back a step — well, five hundred years. That's an awfully big step, isn't it? But we need to go back that far to get a handle on another of our current buzz words — creativity. Once upon a time, creativity used to be an attribute of God and only of God. Then came the Renaissance and the Reformation. Among the changes was that we allowed ourselves to become creative. Humans now had a capacity that was previously only God's. And it wasn't just God that got revised, it was his earthly representatives. Part of what the Reformation was about was an anti-priest thing. The activists argued that every human being had the capacity and the right to communicate directly with their God. It did not need to be mediated by a priest. The individual could talk to God directly.

But these changes didn't herald a new age of creative democracy. The pedestal from which the priest could commune with the infinite was empty, but not for long. Along came the Artist — with a capital A. These were the new visionaries, the new interpreters of the cosmos. It is the Artist

³ *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond, New York: Viking Adult, 2004



who is Creative, with a capital C. We couldn't cope with the idea of all of us being creative, so we invented a specialist class who would be creative on our behalf. And who we will worship — and worship we do — in exactly the same way that we used to bow down to the priests. So, while the secularisation of creativity was a step forward, the sanctification of the Artist was probably a couple of steps back.

I guess I should declare my colours, even though they're pretty obvious. I'm an anarchist, a libertarian socialist. I believe we all have the capacity to do most anything we wish to do — provided we are brought up in a culture that gives us the confidence to be able to do it, and to be able to keep trying. I believe I have the empirical evidence. This morning someone asked me, "Were you really a strong man in a circus?" I told them, "When Circus Oz began, it was a set-up: I was a parody of a strong man. But, over time, I actually became one. By the time I retired, I was carrying huge weights around. I was real." What I'm saying is, the confidence of pretending to be one gave me the chance to learn to be one. And I think that's true for everyone.

There's a group in England — the Drawing Foundation — that has a similar ideology to the community singing program that I worked on. The Drawing Foundation believes that everyone can draw. They know that most people believe that they can't draw. I bet that if I asked you lot, "Who can draw?" less than ten percent of you would put your hands up. If I asked, "Who can sing?" probably less than five percent of you would put your hands up. There's a Zimbabwean

proverb that goes, "If you can walk you can dance; if you can talk you can sing". And if you can move your hands you can draw. The reason we can't draw, and increasingly — and this is a bit horrific — the reason we can't write, is because we don't practice. We don't do it. It's that simple. Of course you can't draw if you don't do it every day. I bring this up simply as being another example of the contradiction of the industrial revolution. Specialization brought our society enormous benefits — if society divides itself up into specialist groups, production will be much more efficient,

"There's a Zimbabwean proverb that goes, 'If you can walk you can dance; if you can talk you can sing'".

which is true. But on the other hand, it alienates us from some of the most important aspects of being human. And cultural production is one of those.

More on this term culture. In the *Fourth Pillar*, I developed a semi-academic description of culture, which was "the social production of meaning". The implication of that being that this is an ongoing, dynamic and communal process. I've colloquialized that into "making sense together", which is meant to be the title of this speech. There's a couple of other interesting ways of thinking about culture that I find very attractive. These are "framing chaos" and "joining the dots".

When Mary [Reid] was first trying to get people together for this conference, she was trying to get a woman called Elizabeth Grosz. She failed, I think. Elizabeth wrote a book which is an analysis of a French philosopher called [Gilles] Deleuze. I think it was Deleuze who invented this framing chaos idea.



Art, philosophy and science are three very different, discrete ways of framing chaos. The way Deleuze talks about chaos, he doesn't mean chaos in terms of randomness; he means chaos in terms of the fact that the world is composed of so many competing and complex systems that humanity is incapable of being able to envisage them all simultaneously so it looks like chaos. But it ain't and we know it. But it is beyond us to be able to hold it all together. So art frames a small piece of chaos — as does philosophy, as does science.

“Joining the dots” is a powerful metaphor for our need to make sense, and the way that we do it. Perhaps the first art, the first science and the first philosophy were all about dot joining. Imagine the cave person, probably a cave man — it's the sort of stuff a man would do — standing outside the cave every night, guarding against the saber-toothed tiger, looking at that chaotic sky. What does he do? He joins the dots. Literally. He creates images out of this chaos. And those images are still with us now and there are poor, deluded people who still believe in them, still reading the astrology charts every morning. We created images, and consequently meaning, out of that randomness up there. That happens in all arts forms. Music is perhaps the most obvious. Where you turn random noise into rhythm, basically. And what is rhythm but creating a set of sounds where you are able to predict and imagine what the next sound will be? Rhythm really, it seems to me, is at the basis of all music. The Europeans thought something else: that melody was at the basis of all music, or that lyrics were at the basis of all music. Most primitive, meaning first, cultures all recognized that rhythm is the starting point. That was a little rabbit hole. Where was I? I'm lost. Ah, back to art.

In this moment, arts research. When I was doing the music thing, I got suckered into formal evaluation, which I'm sure many of you

have. After having been through the hoops, I've concluded that evaluation is a conspiracy. A conspiracy of men in white dust coats who aim to create more work for themselves. I have yet to read a piece of research that doesn't finish with the sentence “more research is needed”. It's unbelievable that we take these people seriously. And what do they do? They're ending up telling us what we know already. I don't know that I've ever read a piece of research that has been surprising. And to what end is all this research? John Holden from Demos⁴ had a lovely anecdote: if a politician doesn't like the research that you give him, he simply says, “I don't believe it” and moves on. The belief that political decisions are based on hard evidence is itself a question deserving research. I know that the research will conclude that they don't. Politics comes out of activism. Politics comes out of the street. Politics comes out of influence, not out of science, unfortunately. The organization that we got most of our funding from was an organization originally funded by cigarette taxes. And most of the work they did on the basis of that money was research about the downside of cigarettes. I went to a talk that the head of this organization gave once, in which he said, “Look, for the last twenty years we've had incontrovertible evidence, absolutely incontrovertible evidence that nicotine is the most dangerous legal drug there is. It costs society billions of dollars; it will cost it many more billions of dollars. It's all there: there are numbers coming out our ears.” Why haven't we been able to do anything about this? His answer was, “We have the numbers but we don't have the numbers. We have the numbers in terms of the research. What we don't have is the numbers in terms of the political will within in the political constructs that we have. We don't have the numbers on the parliament floor, despite the fact that for twenty years we've had the numbers.”

4 Demos is a think-tank focused on power and politics www.demos.co.uk



What is the point of all that research if you can't actually do anything with it in terms of getting decisions made?

Now in our country, most of the research that goes into the arts comes out of the arts budget. Whereas twenty years ago all that money was going to artists to do interesting stuff, now a good fifteen percent of that money is going to white dust coated boffins who are following the artists around. I hate it. Why did I bring this up? Because our funding from this organization was conditional on being the subject of a research project. Of course, the researchers didn't understand what we were trying to do and it ended up being a shit fight and the research was redirected and in the end our funding ceased. But, in the process of doing that, I, at one point said, "Surely there's enough research about the effect of music making on humans that we don't need anymore research. Haven't we got enough already?" Oh no, no, no. There's not enough, there's not enough. And I thought, no, I don't believe that. So I have spent three years following the music research.

You may know of Daniel Levitin – *This Is Your Brain on Music*⁵ – there's a vast amount of serious, hard-edged research out there about the neurological impact of music on humans. It's huge. In fact, there's a biochemical called oxytocin that's released in the brain by four activities: fucking, breastfeeding, eating and singing. It's called the cuddly drug. How's that work? Why do those four activities make you feel fabulous? Why singing? What's singing got to do with breastfeeding? A theory of some evolutionary biologists is that the release of this biochemical is what's called an "adaptative characteristic". There are a number of things we need to do that genetically we are not up to. The human being

— now pardon me for my language here — the human being does not know, innately, that in order for there to be children, fucking has to happen. We work it out, intellectually, but we're not born with that knowledge. So what nature did to us was made that activity seriously pleasurable, so that men just have to do it all the time. Now Freud thought that they had to do it all the time because they wanted to replicate themselves. That seems to me to be one of the most bizarre observations about men I've ever come across. I don't know very many men who have a desperate desire to become fathers. The reason that all this fucking happens isn't because they want to have children, but because it feels good. Same thing with eating, interestingly. We apparently don't know, innately, that we have to eat in order to survive. Eating makes us feel good, so we keep eating. Which is, they say, one of the reasons for obesity. It used to be that there wasn't much food around, so humans needed a positive feedback loop to be out there looking for food all the time. Now, at least in the societies in the West, we have more food than we know what to do with. But it feels so good that we keep eating, even though we don't need to. So there are these positive feedback loops in our brains, encouraging us to do these things that promote our survival. Now that's obvious in terms of intercourse; it's obvious in terms of breastfeeding; it's obvious in terms of eating. Why is music in there? Why does it feel good to dance? Why does it feel good to sing? What is it about these activities that inspired our genes to encourage us to keep doing them?

The reason I brought up Elizabeth Grosz was because she argues that a similar thing happens in relation to the observation of paintings.; that we have an emotional response to images that is independent of intellect and ultimately, independent of content. We are responding to patterns. The reason that she raises this is because

⁵ *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*, Daniel J. Levitin, New York: Plume/Penguin, 2007



she's an Australian and she knows Aboriginal dot painting really well. Aboriginal dot painting to blackfellas is not abstract: they are stories; they are maps; they are dreamings; they are songlines. They have very specific content. Whitefellas are oblivious to all of that. All a whitefella is responding to is the patterns, the composition, the colours. And yet we have an enormously powerful response to these paintings. Why is that? She argues that — and I think Deleuze argues the same thing — we need to see patterns, they connect us to our surroundings. It's not dissimilar to the way and the reason we respond to music.

So, why is this happening? Let's go back even further back than the Renaissance, to the savannah and the primates coming out of the jungle. This is the beginning, the very beginnings, of human development. Primates in the jungle were pretty much vegetarian; they were family groups; there were no big predators; they hung around in the trees in small groups. The ones that moved onto the savannah encountered an entirely different world. They found themselves in a world where there wasn't food hanging from every tree that they could eat. They encountered a world where there were predators. They encountered a world where the small family group, which is genetically attracted to each other, was no longer a viable survival-sized group. The primates that moved onto the savannah had to learn to cooperate and collaborate and coordinate in ways that their forebears had never done. And there was no genetics to help them. Yet we're here. We got from the savannah and the saber-toothed tigers to here. How did we do that? We did that — and this is evolutionary biology coming in again — we did that by this positive feedback loop. Those groups that survived were those that were able to coordinate and cooperate most efficiently, beyond the genetic family attractions. Which

is to say, that at the very beginning of human civilization, the social contract had a reward side. Getting together around the campfire, dancing, singing, and making music together was immensely pleasurable. So pleasurable that you went back to it over and over and over again. And the more you made music together, the more you danced together, the better able you were to hunt, the better able you were to protect yourself, the better able you were to do everything that humans do now. The interesting thing is that now we have a world in which the social contract is essentially punitive. There are very few immediate rewards for being in a group together. In fact, it's usually the opposite. There's a line in *Fanshen*⁶, a book about China and the cultural revolution: "Under the Nationalists, too many taxes. Under the Communists, too many meetings." We hate meetings. Meetings are boring. Meetings are things you do for duty. "I'd rather not go. I only go because I recognize it's an important thing to do." Meetings are not events we look forward to. At some point in the development of humanity, meetings must have been hugely enjoyable, otherwise we would have never gotten this far. But because we're now so big and so organized, we don't need those rewards anymore because you get punished if you don't go and that's enough. In fact, most theory describing the social contract is written in punitive terms. The social contract is about punishment. And that's a tragedy. And not only is it a tragedy, it's unsustainable. We have to rediscover ways of being together that are enjoyable. We have to rediscover the joy of collaboration; we have to rediscover the joy of cooperating. But we live in a culture that tells us that competition is the be-all and end-all of everything. And that competition is the way forward to efficiency, and yadda yadda yadda.

This might be true in fundamentalist economic terms, but we don't just live in an economy, we live in a culture, we live in a society and we live in

⁶ *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, William Hinton, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996



an environment. And to live in a world in which the economic perspective is the only one that counts is tragic, and ultimately suicidal. Perhaps not necessarily for individuals, but certainly for society.

I'm getting wind up signals so I'll conclude with two points. First: I'm not sure where this comes from, but there's a lot of rhetoric around arts circles that we should not value the arts for its instrumental functions, and instead promote the innate value of the arts, whatever that is. That thinking about art as having public purpose is somehow dreadful, demeaning even. As far as I can see, all art is instrumental; everything is contextualized. People do things for a reason, even those that are obsessive and compelled to do it. There's a reason there. And socially, it seems to me, those that govern us should recognize their obligation to ensure that their entire constituency, both adult and children — most importantly, children — should be exposed to and have constant experience of art making. In particular, art making with others. That is what socializes them, more than anything else. Social eating, social dancing, social singing, social music making are critically important activities in the growth of every human individual and in the survival of every human society. That is, the innate function of art is as an instrument of socialization. It is through making art with others that we learn to be, and to enjoy being social. So that's the first thing.

“...the innate function of art is as an instrument of socialization. It is through making art with others that we learn to be, and to enjoy being social.”

The second thing is back to what I said before: that art, philosophy and science are ways of joining the dots, of making meaning, of making sense. Perhaps the most important thing we make, and certainly something we are impelled to do. We are all our own narratives. We all create our own stories. We cannot exist without having constructed the story of our existence around ourselves. And we do that virtually from the moment we're born. And the very first way we do it is artistically, and then through faith, and then into science, and then into philosophy. But it is with art that we create our stories; it is with art that we place ourselves in the world. And to deny people that, on the one hand — and I think in a way this is even worse — to delegate that function to others, is tragic. To think that you have to get an Artist with a capital A to write your own story is deeply shocking. And if government has a function, its critical function has to be not to have the Artist write the story for us, but to have the Artist liberate that capacity in ourselves. In terms of the public function that should be supported by government, that is the critical function of artists. They are the ones that have the fluency in these languages. And that fluency needs to be democratized. And it is artists that can do that.