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**LIFE ARTS
LEARN AND**

STOOL THE HEALTH

2011



Over the past year I've had a thousand conversations about just as many things: things that eat us up; things that we're proud of; our passions, failures and successes. We've shared stories, facts and fables and unpicked the egos that sometimes railroad our vision. This manifesto comes with some - I won't deny it. I've got one, we all have. So this is a bit of me – visible in the work – but affected by you, and all that we have shared. This is my bit, my framing of a conversation or two.

So yes, whilst there's ego in it, it's not the bloated ego of the banker scheming the next big deal, or the slick double-dealer, stealing your ideas and planning their next scam. No,

this is about us, *you and me* and our conversation,

and I'm going to share some of our stories here; frame them in this brief narrative.

This thing that we call arts and health: just what is it? What does it mean to someone walking in the street – a stranger with no interest in the arts and without a moment's concern for their own health, in the here and now?

Those of us involved in these words (ARTS/HEALTH) might as well be selling snake oil, the next cure-all, the next big thing...a passing fad. There's one thing we all know: that art's not going to change the fact we're all mortal: FACT. No amount of tinkering is going to alter that. Magic Bullets don't exist and we can't cheat death by painting.

We're told that art might make us happy, (whatever that is) and our well-being may improve – but to that stranger in the street, art belongs in a gallery and all the dancing and singing is something we might taste after a strong drink... nothing more.

Art?

Health?

- it's just the icing on the cake
- well, it's just not being sick

So, what have we got to say for ourselves?
Who do we think we are?

There's a crisis going on: we've got no jobs, we're in debt, there are riots on the streets, we're obese, we're drunk, we don't know how to parent and we're out of control (and we have a deficit of aspiration)...so what have artists got to add to this?

Are we offering a prescription for the maladies of our society? Is that what we're suggesting? Are we offering a cure-all?

Don't be ridiculous! We've already established we're all mortal. No art class can change that.

NO...we offer something apparently elusive, but in reality, that's just around the corner: ready for you to grab hold of, to pluck from the branch...something that will surprise you – NO, SHOCK YOU!

We will give you a voice...NO we will give you your voice...more than that, we'll give you the power to throw your voice...your wonderful unique voice (and which might, or might not, be similar to mine). Let me explain.

All these things that shine and glitter in the galleries...those booming voices on the stage and those movements, sounds and gestures that we don't quite understand, are yours and mine, whoever you are.

We've been distracted by other shining things, and clawing to grab at what we're told is what we want; we lose our voice and learn the language of the conspicuous consumer, dependent and needy.

And this isn't about the blame game...you and I weren't to know. The power that took your voice swapped it for something altogether more instantaneously gratifying. The triple-whopper-4x4-lifestyle of the rich-and-famous, who, like you and I, have fallen for the power of products...something that has very gently, and oh-so insidiously, nurtured and strangled us.

Artists have provoked us and given us some solutions, barbed and dripping with stimulants and sedatives. Swift¹ the well-meaning economist offered us a solution to famine and poverty: the poor can sell their children to the rich for food. Deller² has brought the results of a distant war to our doorstep and given us a taste of rust, blood and fear. Boal³ has shown us we all have a voice, that we're all part of something

bigger, and right on our doorstep, Darling⁴ painted a utopian possibility.

So, when we're asked, what is this arts and health about, we must remember that our health and our well-being are bigger than narrow notions of sickness and disease. Our work is about our imagination and our voice, here on a street, there in the world. This isn't slavish instrumentalism, or impenetrable elitism. There is no formula, no commandments or little red book. But this manifesto is a start, a shared vision, made real, connected by our passion and values, changeable, open to disagreement, but a starting point.

So, if it's kite-marks and standards, or the toolkit of how to do it, weighing in your art by the cubic tone and counting its value, this manifesto isn't the place for you. It's not a strategy and it never will be. This is us and our expression of the here and now. It started out as arts, health and well-being, but it's underpinned by so much more. And that's the thing: it's the politics of being alive, here and now. Our arts/health story can't ever be separated from the inequalities that underpin and undermine our world. This is PART 1 of a manifesto for arts, health and well-being...but it's so much more than that.

This is PART 1 of our conversation on Art and Society. Now you can scratch out your ideas and thoughts. Pour out your heart and I will gather yours and others' thoughts and

PART 2 will be delivered kicking and screaming into the New Year.

PART 1 saw us gathering in small (and not so small) groups

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”⁵

Margaret Meade

Our manifesto is just as much about education as it is health; the art as it is science, communities as it is the individual. Well-being is central to our vision. The arts are central to fulfilling our fundamental human rights.

this is not a quick fix

**this is not about benign lumps
of municipal sculpture**

**this is not about reducing the arts
to a cost-effective prescription**

this is about well-being

this is about democracy

this is about human flourishing

**this is about new ways of
understanding impact and value**

this is about solidarity

“Solidarity is not a matter of altruism. Solidarity comes from the inability to tolerate the affront to our own integrity of passive or active collaboration in the oppression of others, and from the deep recognition of our most expansive self-interest. From the recognition that, like it or not, our liberation is bound up with that of every other being on the planet, and that politically, spiritually, in our heart of hearts we know anything else is unaffordable.”⁶ - Aurora Levins Morales

But how do we compete with the neon gloss of consumerism

what is our offer

what are our assets

what are our values

how do we determine

our success

how will we communicate

our vision

we are unreservedly utopian and aspire to our vision of a better society, not a big society, and will share this vision far and wide and inspire and support people in the struggle to get there

we will plant culture at the core of other strands of decision making and influence the hearts and minds of politicians and the public

our language will speak to a wider community and not be self-congratulatory or sanctimonious

we are hybrid and evolving, embracing diverse disciplines but constrained by no individual profession

our fourth culture⁷ will create debate, influence policy and people, and look outwards

we will challenge ourselves to engage with the cynical

we take the long-view and look beyond short-termism to generational change

we are more than the sum of our parts and will nurture local activity that embraces a world view

we will not reduce our work to a standardized form, but will articulate our potency through a common language and shared vision

this is a movement, we are the resources; we will tell the story of our work and like a virus, will spread

we will meet, we will talk, we will argue and we will influence change, thriving on critique and rallying our resources...face-to-face, person-to-person

creativity goes beyond materialism and is like food and water, art is an expression of imagination and a powerful vehicle for social change

PART 1: is over, and now we will ask you and others to comment

PART 2: this is our window of opportunity

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1. Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745) A Modest Proposal, For Preventing the Children of Poor people in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public. (1729)
In this satirical essay, Swift, in the guise of a well-meaning economist, suggests a vicious solution to attitudes to poverty and the cure-all solutions of governments.

2. Jeremy Deller, Baghdad, 5 March 2007
Deller shares the reality of a far-off war with those of us fed sanitized media representations from 'embedded' journalists. This wreckage of a car that had been destroyed in a bomb attack on a book market in Al-Mutanabbi Street, has toured the US and now resides alongside weapons of war in the Imperial War Museum.

3. Augusto Boal (1931 – 2009)
Boal was a theatre director, writer and politician who developed radical theatrical and educational approaches to civic engagement, including Legislative Theatre, which gave voice to the marginalized and oppressed.

4. Julia Darling (1956 – 2005)
Darling was a novelist, playwright and poet and presented her Manifesto For Tyneside Upon England on 30 April 2004.

5. Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978)
Mead was a cultural anthropologist, writer and speaker who brought anthropology to the mass media.

6. Aurora Levins Morales
Morales is a writer, historian and activist, challenging how we think about ourselves through art.

7. Jonah Lehrer
Lehrer is a neuroscientist and writer and is contributing editor to Wired and author of Proust Was a Neuroscientist, in which he builds on the earlier ideas of C.P. Snow who coined the term Third Culture to describe the synergies between Arts and Science, as the twin pillars of society. Lehrer suggests that whilst we haven't quite achieved this Third Culture, and we make token gestures to each other, a Fourth Culture however, will be one that truly engages with each other and inform each other with equity and acknowledgement of each others' distinctiveness.

Artists, all of them

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