

# *On Life and Meaning*

MARK PERES

## Episode 13 – Matt Olin – Creative Mornings

### *Evolutionary Intelligences for the Human Hive*

And now a personal word,

Matt Olin brings people together to enrich the creativity of the city. He is a whirlwind of activity. He hosts inspiring gatherings, he showcases talent, and he connects people and ideas. There is Charlotte with Matt, and Charlotte without Matt, and the city is so much more alive and exciting with Matt.

His joyful purpose reminds me of a book entitled *Integral City: Evolutionary Intelligences for the Human Hive* by Marilyn Hamilton. In June 2009 the Arts & Science Council of Mecklenburg-County released a Creative Vitality Index (CVI) benchmarking the health and impact of the cultural sector. The Great Recession had hit the arts community hard. Advocates for the arts sought to make an economic case that the arts create wealth and deserve investment even during recessionary times. The same month the CVI was released, I wrote that there was another reason to support the arts: creative activity makes us smarter and gives us tools to innovate, both of which are essential to a city's evolution and civic wellness. I referenced *Integral City* in an essay in *Charlotte Viewpoint* entitled "Why our cities need the arts":

Marilyn Hamilton, a self-described catalyst of city well-being, asserts that the purpose of a city is to optimize the life of the human species and add value to the life of the planet. She examines cities as whole systems. With nearly 60 percent of the human population now in cities, and the scale of our urban development exceeding the carrying capacity of bioregions to support them ... many of our cities are in crisis. Her book proposes a new "integral" framework ... so that cities can adapt to change and thrive.

Her central thesis is that cities evolve through stages of intelligence. Communities must constantly solve problems. They must regularly reorganize to provide essential services and reinvent themselves to confront threats and exploit opportunities. People and communities with greater integral development (or levels of intelligence and complexity) have more resilience to survive. They literally have more assets and capacities to manage conditions of stress.

Intelligence comes in many forms, across multiple domains. It includes the intelligence of mechanics, athletes, accountants, cooks, counselors,

and plumbers. Intelligence progresses from self-awareness to other-awareness to context-awareness to system-awareness. ... The broader and deeper these intelligences are in community, the greater the capacity for regeneration.

The arts ... pass along accumulated wisdom and provide vocabulary and tools for the invention of new visions. The arts help us become increasingly attentive and intentional. If we understand a city, as Marilyn Hamilton does, as a “living system that emerges from the intentions and interactions of individuals and groups to produce both a conscious presence (or spirit) and a habitat (or a built city),” it is through creative activity and the arts that the city evolves.

Matt Olin is making Charlotte smarter. He invites people to learn and share what they know. He entertains with a splendid wit and generosity of spirit that elevates what is possible. He and his creative partner, Tim Minor, are serious in their fun: they are intent on changing the narrative of the city to activate the next stage of culture. They are integrating domains of intelligence. They are catalyzing city well-being.

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