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Working Group I: The Creative Process and Technology

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> "Innovation makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old regime, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new."
> *Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)*

The rapid evolution of participatory technologies like social networking, mobile communications, and other digital media is disrupting and transforming many elements of human endeavor – from industries (pharmaceutical R&D) to social movements (Obama/Iranian revolution) to public process (government 2.0, transparency). Those who create, produce, present, or preserve artistic expression and experience approach that transformation with a spectrum of emotion from breathless excitement to paralyzing fear.

It's clear that such a transformation is already underway, although its course and destination are not so clear. These technologies offer new ways to communicate, coordinate, aggregate, and share. They foster unprecedented participation in global and local conversations. They burst traditional boundaries, and disrupt longstanding monopolies in publishing, media, public discourse, and social systems. They recalibrate traditional pillars of authority, credential, and curation, and with them many established support and revenue streams.

But while these changes are revolutionary, the process we face in the arts to forge a response is quite familiar. We have *always* been a borrower's field. Our means of generating, sharing, preserving, and interpreting human expression has always been subject to the systems around us. And these systems were rarely designed specifically for artistic expression and experience. Rather, our arts ecology is a patchwork adapted and adopted from the larger society; the corporate organization, the nonprofit or NGO tax framework, private, public, and corporate philanthropic models, community organization, and business processes were borrowed from an inventory already developed for other goals, and adapted to suit our creative intent.

These were all current technologies of their time. And our successes in the arts over the past half-century evolved from their creative application.

Our conversations at the Salzburg Global Summit, however, have surfaced a pervasive concern that the systems we've constructed in industrial economies, while powerful and productive for decades, are misaligned with current challenges. Participatory technologies, along with other trends, are opening new paths to artistic expression and experience, and challenging the useful fictions that defined our work. One of these useful fictions was the strict delineation between amateur and professional, producer and consumer. One of the consequences of participatory technologies has been to redefine what we can consider public space, beyond the stage or the information embodied in the architecture of our buildings.

At the same time, the opportunity in developing economies to reconceive artistic systems even as they are being built cannot be squandered. To simply replicate current systems internationally would ignore the mismatch with local cultures and with the changing world around them.

The world of participatory technology seems foreign to many, but is also intriguing as it carries many of the qualities we value in the arts. Participatory technology is by nature disruptive, but so is artistic expression. Both are fueled by the same human need to communicate and connect. Both shape and are shaped by the larger goals of communities and cultures. And while our impulse might be to react defensively, we need to embrace the opportunity in this transformation. Now is the moment to revisit our purpose, refocus our values, and recalibrate our expressive intent.

A first step is to recognize the broad spectrum of participatory media and the multiple goals of our artists, our communities, and our organizations. Participatory technology isn't a binary choice that we turn off or on, but rather a palette of potential choices that we must align with our intent. Our working group returned often to the need for nuance in understanding the various potentials and constraints of participatory media, and also the specific goals of our expression. What sorts of participation do we seek to invite? Which technologies fit best with our capabilities and vision? Where will we meet our current and prospective stakeholders? Are we ready to accept contributions of content as well as cash? And how do we hope to nurture or grow a better world than we now experience? These questions and others like them should continually frame our choices in how we align our time, money, attention, and spirit. In a time characterized by speed we have also to maintain a space for reflection.

Further, these daily choices will demand clarity and transparency in our larger goals. There will be more need than ever to revisit and focus our core purpose and intended value. In a participatory environment, there will also be a need to share that focus publicly. Once defined and claimed, our purpose must be served through agile, malleable, resilient, and responsive organizational and collaborative forms. These will not be developed on blank canvas, but evolved from our current institutions, and adapted from the growing spectrum of collaborative strategies appearing around us. Nonprofits and NGOs will be important partners in this new system, alongside hybrids, virtual and temporary organizations, community initiatives, commercial enterprises, and informal groups.

In this emerging ecology, we suggest that one of the values to take most seriously is curiosity – fostering it in stakeholders such as artists and creative partners, our organizations, and our communities. Curiosity drives innovation and fosters risk-taking. It encourages a search for different voices rather than voices like our own. Further, curiosity fosters the global awareness and interaction any future cultural system demands.

Clearly, there is work ahead, and complex work at that. We can't be experts separately, but we don't have to be. The same technologies that support participation by our stakeholders also permit us to collaborate to solve problems with them, and with each other. Collaboration becomes the new opportunity, the new strategic advantage. If we collaborate where we can, we free up energy, attention, and resources that we can focus more incisively on the qualities that make us distinctive, and the value we co-create with our world.