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Working Group IV: Understanding Our Crisis of Legitimacy

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Our discussion started from the proposition posed in John Holden's paper and we had significant discussion around the relationship between the funding of arts and the audience for arts and their relationship in terms of legitimacy.

We considered that these were two traditional measures of legitimacy and that perhaps we were asking the wrong questions. We are living in a time of mass cultural consumption that is happening outside of traditional structures and therefore outside of traditional measures.

We considered then what would the measures of legitimacy be and what are the structures within which legitimacy operates.

In our conversations we realised that quite often we came back to the subject of funding and that it seemed that somehow legitimacy had traditionally been linked to justification of funds, public private or other. However, in the reverse funding is very rarely withdrawn because of illegitimacy and we considered the relationship between the legitimacy of the arts and the arts as luxuries.

Above all we knew that legitimacy was relational. It is about interaction between constituencies and your view of legitimacy depends upon your position within that range of constituencies.

We questioned how you gain legitimacy: legitimacy is bestowed, conferred, awarded. In the act of bestowing legitimacy you give a mandate to act and legitimacy comes with responsibilities and obligations. We considered at length some of the power relationships within the act of bestowing legitimacy, legitimacy is not neutral. Legitimacy must be earned and re-earned it can not be assumed.

One of the most fundamental questions in the discussion was around the question of legitimacy for who? Who are we seeking legitimacy from? The list is long: Audiences, Peers, Communities, Governments, Funders, but legitimacy is also transient and because it is also relational there is a changing hierarchy of legitimacy. We seek it from different constituencies at different times for different reasons.

So what are we seeking legitimacy for? As discussed traditionally we have sought legitimacy for funding, as justification but also for validation, acknowledgement and affirmation. We seek legitimacy for our existence.

The many and varied relationships and stakeholders within this are complex. Because legitimacy comes with a mandate the conferring of legitimacy often comes with an agenda. Particularly in the context of public funding or where there are relationships with governments and national agendas. The varying agenda's of those constituencies from whom we seek legitimacy can often conflict, not only with each other but with our own missions and values. In seeking legitimacy we sometimes also undermine our legitimacy.

It is not about what you are but what you do. In our discussion we did not consider the legitimacy of the arts per se, but rather considered that legitimacy was related to activity not form itself.

We need to focus on the creative process, the institution in itself is a creative process and it is this process that should be the focus of any interrogation of legitimacy.

That legitimacy, because it is relational, is strongly related to engagement in the widest sense. That in being relational it is not static but rather it is dynamic and must be constantly interrogated. This means that in engaging with legitimacy we must be adaptable, flexible and willing to change. That legitimacy is attitudinal and should be embedded in what we do and the way we do it. That it is part of the creative process.

Much discussion at the seminar has perhaps been focused on institutions and organisations. But legitimacy has many levels; it encompasses systems, organisations, individuals and processes.

It is perhaps the idea of systemic legitimacy that brings us to our first recommendation. That we need to consider the legitimacy of the structures within which we are framing our discussions.

In this way we recommend a rejection of the traditional view of legitimacy: The idea that legitimacy is primarily gained through the receipt of funding or through audience and participation figures. Or that legitimacy comes from conferred status or the longevity assumes legitimacy.

We need to shift the paradigm.

We need a more nuanced view of legitimacy that is about a plural mandate which includes real relationships with many and varied constituencies. And this must be embedded in the creative process, in the culture of our organisations and systems.

Our second recommendation therefore is that we all undertake a legitimacy health check. A checklist that interrogates and re-interrogates the issues presented and becomes a fundamental part of our strategic planning and activity.

This legitimacy health check must be embedded in the culture of the organisation and form a check for all activity. The answer to how we make a paradigm shift is in part to do with the examination of our own attitudes and ensuring that legitimacy, not economics, longevity or self interest are the drivers of our creative processes.

**The Performing Arts – Lean and Legitimate?
Opportunities for Reinvention**