

Creative Rights & Artists

a conversation - July 19-23, 2010

Recently by *Alex Shapiro, Composer*

Feelings... Nothing More Than

By [Alex Shapiro, Composer](#)



With the likely exception of the person penning this post, this blog has been filled with tremendously agile minds that offer brilliant and deeply held beliefs about how to keep the arts patient healthy. Thanks to Doug for hosting one helluva e-party. Can I have you all over for dinner next week?

For all our analysis and intellect, let's remember that ultimately, people experience the arts because they want to feel something. So, when we discuss just how to get them to support all these feeling-making activities, we benefit by approaching the solution from the loins of that same desire. Oooh!

Just like art itself: it comes from feelings and emotions, right? The intellect is just the part that kicks in to allow the artist to make sense of all those right-brain instincts. We're all mammals with pulses. When it comes to promoting art of any kind, thinking on the most visceral, base level will score us the most points because that's exactly what connects the artists' work with the audiences' interest: they all want to feel. Something.

People also want to be heard, and that's part of the profound connection made by art: it expresses for them that which they have no words to express for themselves (likewise, for the artist him or herself). Usually, the art that connects the most successfully is that which springs from the artist authentically and offers a glimpse of their uncensored, unfiltered heart.

It's rather like a productive psychotherapy session: we get the farthest when we talk openly about how something makes us feel. Now double this into couple's therapy: the more the two parties can talk to each other about their genuine emotions, the more successfully they'll be able to communicate and understand each other—even if they disagree. So if the couple in question here is the artist and the audience, given that both want to be heard, getting the dialog going on a very base level may be pretty rewarding.

[Lynne's got it right](#) when she describes our need to not only involve the audience to whom we look for support, but to reach them particularly directly by caring enough to ask, "how did [this art experience] make you feel?". Whether we're seeking funding, or just seeking attendance, we cannot expect the non-arts world to care about us just because we happen to believe we're valuable. Entitlement doesn't play well. What does come across wonderfully, however, is when we demonstrate that we actually care about the experience we're offering and its impact—or not—on the ears and eyes receiving it. Just like that couple in therapy.

To ward off any angry creative villagers now heading toward me with spears, let me say that with art, even if the impact is not the most, uh, positive one, in no way does that mean the artist should alter their work (unless they choose to do so) or hang it all up and get that veterinary degree after all. Nope. Artists can remain completely true to themselves while simultaneously showing that they take an interest in the feelings of those around them. Especially if they expect those around them to support what they do. File this under "being a good human."

So, the problem with that great therapy session, is when the third wheel-- and yes, it *is* one-- of policy, enters the room. Policy really has little business being there, and yet keeps showing up to interrupt the otherwise intimate relationship between the artist and the audience. Policy tends not to care very much about feelings because it's wrapped up in legal and technological issues that cause its left brain to swell to such a degree that the right hemisphere as well as the emotion-laden limbic system are terribly squished. I hope I'm amusing you. But take heart: while policy is

ABOUT

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RECENT COMMENTS

[Alex Shapiro](#) commented on [All You Need is Love](#): As you already know from my post, I do not share your views on this point, ...

[Stefan Kac](#) commented on [Bridging the Creative/Critical Divides](#): Any time ArtsJournal adds a new blog, you can bet there will also be new ad...

[Stefan Kac](#) commented on [All You Need is Love](#): I am frequently amazed at audiences' contentedness with musical products th...

[Brian Newman](#) commented on [Doug's Challenge](#): Glad to see Bill and I can agree on some things. But, I think the three of ...

[William Osborne](#) commented on [My Own Not-So-Private Echo Chamber](#): This blog is about Net neutrality and the members were chosen accordingly. ...

[William Osborne](#) commented on [Doug's Challenge](#): I think the most common thread of this entire discussion is that we live in...

[William Osborne](#) commented on [Have we actually stopped objectifying audiences? Nope - and that's the Problem.](#): Perhaps the problem is not only a lack of knowledge about audiences, but th...

[Anu Kirk](#) commented on [Doug's Challenge](#): The letter of the law might be "life plus 70" now, but the reality is that ...

[Jesus Pantel](#) commented on [A challenge for this](#)

unavoidable, it cannot be made without...

...humans.

Mammals with a pulse, who feel.

My observation from lobbying experiences over the years in D.C. and elsewhere has been that a fair amount of the disconnect between the policy makers and the subject about which they are making policy, is due to a lack of enough contact with that subject on any personal, feeling-based level. To wit: most policy makers don't hang out a whole lot with artists. We are, after all, all in different worlds.

Or... not.

In response to [Doug's challenge](#), I think it would be pretty terrific if arts service organizations would place a greater emphasis on putting art-makers and policy-makers in the same room, whether formally or, far better, socially. Non-artists really do derive a great deal of pleasure getting to spend a little time with those of us who do things that they love but cannot imagine being able to do themselves. Just as they might be a little bit foreign to us, we're a little bit exotic to them, and we fail to make enough use of this natural asset. Seeing someone light up when they get to talk about art after a whole week of talking about nothing other than business or legislative issues, is a real joy. Interacting with those in charge of the policies on an emotional, human level is one of the most effective things artists can do.

With all the excellent, potentially transformative, as Doug says, policy suggestions that have flooded these expixelated pages, one of the most important transformative policies I can think of is that which takes place within ourselves: that of our perceptions. Many of this week's bloggers are themselves gifted artists (sorry to blow y'all's cover). I'm hoping that they're smiling as they read this. Technology has changed everything, and will only continue to do so. Policy battles will always exist. But thinking on a purely emotional level is something that will never, ever be altered no matter what the next paradigm shift may be, and emotion is what artists do beautifully. Let's use it!

Even if we're not policy-makers, we can be policy-influencers. To my U.S. artist colleagues reading this, I invite you to fearlessly call up the office of the policy-maker of your choice and schedule an appointment for a brief visit with them, either in your home state or in D.C. Tell the aide or assistant to whom you speak that you're a constituent (if this is an elected official- who you, as a taxpayer, employ). Or, if it's a commissioner or business leader, indicate that you want to say hello, introduce yourself, and just have a brief conversation about... fill in the blank. How has the internet indelibly affected your career? How have the latest hearings on C-SPAN inspired your latest piece of work? What is your life as an artist like, and what are the issues that are important to you? How about those Lakers? You don't have to know the scholarly details of anything, except of your own life. Because ultimately, it's your life that is going to be affected by their decisions. The more connected to artists those decision-makers can be, the more feeling and emotion that may, just possibly, infuse the framework of their policies. Let's appeal to the part that feels the best: they're all... human!

July 23, 2010 10:49 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [ShareThis](#)

All You Need is Love

By [Alex Shapiro, Composer](#)



Brian [asks](#), "Can we have greater success by embracing the creatives formerly known as amateurs?"

I believe so, because by embracing them, we automatically foster what I referred to in [my initial post](#) on this blog as "affinity." The more people who have their own hand in some form of art-making, the more people who will appreciate the making of art on all levels. And, quite possibly, be willing to spend money on art. This is also why arts education for kids is vital for creating future audiences (as well as future artists). Building affinity. But we all know that tune.

I've always giggled at professionals who view "amateurs" who blindly plunk around in Garage Band or Photoshop as a threat to their livelihood. The essence of being an artist is that presumably, you're unique in what you have to communicate. People respond not to the number of academic degrees you possess, but to your personal take on the world as it relates to your heart and every other part of you. When non-professionals have access to tools that allow them greater self expression, this is a wonderful thing for them, and also for those of us who earn our living from the

[National Alliance for Media Arts & Culture \(2\)](#)

[Ian David Moss, Research Director, Fractured Atlas \(2\)](#)

[Jean Cook, Director of Programs for Future of Music Coalition \(4\)](#)

[Justin L. Karr, Director of Technology Programs, Fractured Atlas \(1\)](#)

[Lynne Conner, Chair and Associate Professor, Colby College \(4\)](#)

[Marty Kaplan, Director, The Norman Lear Center \(3\)](#)

[Douglas McLennan \(4\)](#)

[Mind the Gap \(3\)](#)

[Nettrice Gaskins, Board Member, NAMAC \(2\)](#)

[Nathaniel James, Community Engagement Specialist, Mozilla \(1\)](#)

[Tim Quirk \(6\)](#)

[Vicki Callahan, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee \(3\)](#)

[Yolanda Hippensteele, Media Democracy Fund \(2\)](#)

[last day](#): My corollary question would be where/how do we find out what the biggest po...

[Casey](#) commented on [Stories Are A Resource](#): So true! If I might add: Number one rule when dealing with decisionmakers...

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dance

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Apollinaire Scherr talks about dance

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Tobi Tobias on dance et al...

results of our own plunking.

Remember, boys and girls: "amateur" comes from the word "amare," "to love": amo, amas, amat, for those of us geeks who enjoyed years of Latin classes. Amat-eurs love what they are doing. And presumably, what we are doing, when we're doing what they love.

July 20, 2010 2:17 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [Share This](#)

Navigating More Than Just the High C's

By [Alex Shapiro, Composer](#)



William Osborne wrote in a [comment](#), "The simple fact is [artists] don't share those concerns [of licensing of music on the web, copyright laws, and media consolidation] because our world is so different."

Consider flipping that: perhaps the classical artists' world wouldn't be as vastly different, and they would be better remunerated by the marketplace, if the artists themselves were to take an interest in and educate themselves on matters of licensing of music on the web, copyright laws, and media consolidation. I don't argue that, with some exceptions, the new music world does not generate a comparable scale of income to that of the popular music world (I'm just guessin' that's why they don't call this popular music). But I absolutely believe that many artists could do better than they do professionally, were they to embrace a broader vision of entrepreneurship and business savvy that goes beyond grants and charitable support.

It's a little bit chicken-and-egg (or, Catch-22, take your analogous pick). If artists proceed with a negative attitude about their ability to generate income from their art, then it's more likely that such an attitude will become their reality, and only further perpetuate the frustrations they already experience. It's hard to make money when one is constantly transmitting a message that one can't make money.

We all appear to agree that educating artists is essential, and I look forward to more discussions here about how we can go about implementing that more effectively. I've observed that once artists understand the worth of their assets and how those can be used to benefit them in the marketplace, things tend to improve in their careers. The better we can read and understand the open sea of the non-arts world, the more capable we will be of successfully navigating through it! It's an enjoyable journey.

July 20, 2010 2:06 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) |

Tell Your Story

By [Alex Shapiro, Composer](#)



Today's posts have been wonderful, and for the moment I want to comment on [Casey's contribution](#) a short screen scroll down.

Thanks to three of my fellow bloggerati here on this week's ArtsJournal-hosted discussion (Molly, Jean and Casey), I was the sole artist invited to testify last September at one of the FCC's public hearings to which Casey refers below in his post. The topics at hand were broadband access and digital piracy (details, and stories of my adventure can be found [here](#)). When the session wrapped up, I chatted at some length with one of the commissioners, who made it very clear that she wanted to hear from more artists and that they should feel free to be in contact.

The following week, I sat in a committee meeting in New York City that was attended by a good number of respected composers and publishers. After I reported on my D.C. experience, I repeatedly stressed to my colleagues that they, too, should add their voices and make their opinions known to the FCC. In fact, I think I stated this enough times that being hit over the noggin with a two-by-four might have been more enjoyable for those having to endure my impassioned entreaty.

To my knowledge, not one person in the room chose to follow up and contact the FCC. I would love to learn that I'm mistaken.

It's possible that some artists may view participating in the process to be

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Lee Rosenbaum's Cultural Commentary

intimidating. But they can calm their nerves by remembering that since the corporate and government world is not *their* world, they shouldn't feel as though they've got to be a polished expert to be worthy of being heard. Indeed, it's the lack of polish that often makes what we have to say most meaningful.

Look, we already know that we can't match the lobbying power of multi-gazillion dollar corporations. But we can tell stories.

Artists have extraordinarily valuable insights that the business world does not. Our stories and our perspectives are important, and it's vital that people outside our field hear from those of us with the stories, since they're the ones signing policy suggestions into laws and regulations that will affect how our upcoming chapters unfold. U.S. citizens often forget how fortunate they are: despite turns of politics that may dismay, they still live in a Democracy in which much of the time their opinions can be voiced and registered.

I'm not suggesting that just anyone from the arts community is going to be sitting across the table from the CEO of Comcast in a high-stakes horse trade.

Agreed. But I say to any fellow artists reading this, that if they want to be sitting at that table, it's not beyond the realm of possibility. I wasn't doin' no horse trading, but there I was, questioning the COO of Paramount Pictures. Intimidating? You bet! An addictive and enjoyable experience? Absolutely.

July 19, 2010 2:55 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [ShareThis](#)

Does It Feel Good? The Endorphins of Activism

By [Alex Shapiro, Composer](#)



Doug's topic-du-week is important, because we need to speak openly about the disconnect between so many artists and the world in which they are making their art and their living. Complacency is not creative, it's passive. But art-making is a hopeful, purposeful act, and so is activism. How can we appeal to that optimistic spark in our colleagues and encourage them to apply it to realms beyond their own studios? Just as artists are indeed often left out of important government policy discussions, they are also just as often responsible for choosing not to participate. Ouch.

Many, many artists are fabulous activists and outspoken entrepreneurs when it comes to generating their own art world and bringing colleagues together. Their efforts are often beautiful, exciting, profound... but yet, self-referential. Their events are by and for other, often like-minded, artists and arts insiders. The creators and participants have a natural affinity for what's going on around them, and they feel good doing it. They're part of a team.

Appealing to someone's affinity is also one of the key ingredients for fund-raising efforts: the patron feels good being involved in something they like, in which they have a positive, helpful role. They're part of a team.

So how do we create an affinity in the minds of artists by which they'll want to participate in the non-artsy process that governs them? If what drives them is the endorphin-drenched joy of what they do in their daily creative lives, how can a message come across that by raising their voice and giving a little of their energy, they'll feel good? How do we make activism an appealing ~~drug~~ team artists want to ~~take~~ join?

July 19, 2010 2:47 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [ShareThis](#)

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