

Nurturing artistic creation: an exploration
into the experience of creative inspiration
using the four-worlds model

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*Don't loaf and invite inspiration; light out after it with a club, and if you don't get it you will
nonetheless get something that looks remarkably like it.*

Jack London

Introduction

The importance of creativity is often overlooked and there are many compelling reasons why it should be at the forefront of our minds. Turiano, Spiro, and Mroczek (2012) have found a correlation between self-identification as creative and increased life expectancy. In business, creativity was identified as the top indicator of success by 1,500 CEO's in a worldwide 2010 IBM study. It ranked higher than integrity, rigour and vision. Despite this, Kyung Hee Kim (2010) has noted a steady decline in children's creativity levels in the USA over the last 20 years.

Inspiration is a term which many seem confident using in conversation, but when asked to define the word, or even to describe the act of being inspired, it can be difficult to come up with something which accurately summarises the experience. When I first decided to write this thesis, I was struck by the response of friends and family to my choice of topic. They seemed somewhat taken aback, and invariably commented that it was a difficult task. As well as feeling intimidated by this feedback, I was encouraged to go ahead, as this reflected the reasons for my initial interest in the concept. My

previous experience working in the arts combined with my current role as an existential coach has led to a passion for helping artists with various creative dilemmas.

At this point, I must state that my use of the word artist is not restricted to people who practice what is sometimes known as 'fine art' (painters and sculptors for example) but extends to anyone engaging in artistic creation, thus including novelists, filmmakers, graphic designers and other such creators. For the purposes of this paper, I am excluding those who work exclusively as performers, simply because the role of inspiration in performance is likely to differ from more prolonged forms of creation such as writing.

Through both my experiences with my clients and my own personal involvement with the creative process, I began to realise that while inspiration is theoretically accepted as a part of that process, in practice its significance tends to be, in my view, underestimated. I noticed that my clients tended to refer only to inspiration as a moment already experienced, a trigger point for them to begin a project, but that seemed to lose its impact once the work had begun. And yet, if asked to describe the moment of inspiration - after some hesitation - there came a passionate and rich response. It was as if they could embrace the experience at the very beginning of a project, but that the power it held could not be revisited and was almost shameful to them. It was a moment of vulnerability that served its purpose and was swiftly buried under the hard work which is also imperative for creative work.

The stories of these artists were often prefaced with phrases like 'this is going to sound really stupid' and accompanied by a sudden loss of eye-contact in an otherwise engaged session. Often, it was only after some gentle encouragement that these clients were able to engage fully with the memory and to communicate the powerful impact it had had at the time. This has made me wonder about three questions.

Firstly, why is the seemingly powerful experience of inspiration met with such apprehension? Secondly, is inspiration something that only occurs at the birth of a new creative project or is it something that we can utilise throughout the creative process? Finally, given that inspiration is such a powerful experience, is it possible to actively pursue it rather than waiting for it to strike?

I began looking more closely at the literature surrounding creativity and found much about how to increase or train it, but very little specifically about inspiration. This surprised me as it seemed such a key moment in the creative process and unleashed such passion when my clients felt able to engage with it. At the core of my questions lies my concern that we seem somehow reluctant to fully engage with the experience of being inspired. This is mirrored by the dearth of literature, and in the responses of friends and family to my thesis subject. Therefore, the key question that I am endeavouring to answer is: how can existential coaching encourage an artist to realise their creative potential by engaging with the experience of being inspired?

In order to answer this, we must first examine the definition of inspiration. The Oxford English dictionary definition contains three parts:

1 [*mass noun*] the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.

2 a sudden brilliant or timely idea

3 [*mass noun*] the drawing in of breath; inhalation

(oxforddictionaries.com, 2013)

Whilst this gives a good grounding and objective view of what inspiration is, in order to gain more insight it is necessary to look at the experience itself.

Since my question is specifically about how we engage with the act of being inspired, and how this might relate to existential coaching, I will be drawing on the work of Edmund Husserl. Throughout

this paper I will look at accounts from artists who have written or spoken about their personal experiences and reflections on inspiration, as well as comparing and contrasting these with my own. In order to learn from and honour the subjective nature of the experience, I will be adopting an existential phenomenological approach as developed by Husserl (1929).

Phenomenology is specifically concerned with the study of subjective experiences. As well as looking at personal accounts, I will be examining existing research on the subject of inspiration, and ancient beliefs surrounding the subject, such as the Greek muses.

The knowledge uncovered in this investigation will then be rooted in existential philosophy. While there is very little in existential philosophical texts that specifically refers to inspiration or even creativity, I am anticipating that some broader existential themes such as freedom, authenticity and responsibility will be present, and I am interested in how an existential coach might work with these themes in order to encourage greater engagement with inspiration.

I have broken my research in to four sections based on the four worlds model as developed byBinswanger (1963) with later additions by van Deurzen (1988). This model illustrates the four dimensions of existence which human beings are confronted with: Umwelt (the physical dimension); Mitwelt (the social dimension); Eigenwelt (the personal dimension); and Uberwelt (the spiritual dimension). I have chosen to use this structure to help support my findings in a way that might bring some sense of order to a subject that is likely to bring out a plethora of different issues which could easily become chaotic.

My hope is that in breaking these down into a more defined framework it will be easier to pinpoint certain themes and to take a layered approach to what is likely to be a complex issue. In doing this, I am attempting to bring structure without oversimplifying my findings. On the other hand, applying any sort of framework does of course carry a risk of oversimplification. However, when trying to verbalise such a complex experience such oversimplification is probably inevitable to some degree,

and this is something that I will address throughout. Additionally, it is important to note that an existential approach is likely to bring out certain themes that one might not identify with other approaches, and that this is in itself potentially limiting. Since inspiration is profoundly experiential and subjective, it must be emphasised that this is just one of many ways of looking at the experience.

It is also important to note that there are many accounts of artists who specifically deemphasise the importance of inspiration. Anthony Burgess (1990) and Chuck Close (2008), for example, wrote that inspiration was for amateurs, and that hard work was the only way to move forward creatively. This is not an uncommon view, and perhaps reflects the bias in the literature towards training creative skills rather than training the ability to allow oneself to become inspired. The fact remains though, that there are many artists who would disagree with this, and the reality is that both inspiration and hard work have their value in the creative process. My particular concern is not that hard work is held in such high esteem - this is perfectly agreeable to me - but that inspiration is comparatively neglected, despite the power that it appears to hold for many people.

Umwelt

"This is the physical dimension. It involves the senses and the body."

(van Deurzen and Kenward, 2005, p. 79)

In 2012, Blick Art Materials, a company which stocks art supplies issued a survey on inspiration targeted to 500 people self-identifying as artists either by trade or hobby. The top ranked source of overall inspiration was identified as the outdoors. This may be related to psychological distance, which I will explore later in this chapter, but also hints at what Maslow (1994 [1970]) termed 'peak experience', a transpersonal state which is often associated with being in nature. Maslow's concept of the peak experience contrasts with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of 'flow', which is a description of a mental state of complete absorption in a task. The two can occur at once, but a peak

experience does not necessarily mean that someone is in flow. While flow is certainly experienced by artists who have experienced inspiration, it does not account for the experience itself, only the possible outcome. A peak experience, whilst not always being a moment of inspiration, is closer to the catalytic nature of that inspirational 'Aha' moment.

It would be an oversimplification to take physical environment as it stands and not examine the importance of the meaning that we individually place on it, just as the four worlds' model supports connectivity between all four dimensions of existence. The physical cannot simply be the physical with no link to personal, social and spiritual experience. Charlotte Macgregor (2013) notes in her qualitative study of transformational experiences in nature that participants described a wide variety of impacts ranging from improved social relationships to a feeling of connectedness to a greater whole. As she puts it:

"Transformation is described by several research participants as being an holistic experience at an individual level impacting on thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, meaning and beliefs. The experience crosses all the facets of existence, it is all encompassing." (Macgregor, 2013, p. 103)

This holistic experience illustrates not only how the four dimensions interact with one another, but highlights the significance of working with the artist on all levels, to create this sense of harmony which seems to be related to transformative experiences and therefore possibly inspiration.

When talking specifically of creativity, the meaning of our environment is often taken for granted, though usually the subtext of the author reveals the significance of this aspect of our physical existence. For example, in *Coaching the Artist Within*, Eric Maisel (2005) writes about attending SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) in order to deliver workshops. He takes a paragraph to describe the school's method of renovating old buildings such as Masonic lodges for their premises. Although he does not go into further detail about the impact this has on him, there seems to be

subtext of awe and appreciation. One cannot help but think that these buildings hold meaning for the author, particularly as someone interested in creativity.

The overarching issue here is that environment is undoubtedly linked to creativity and to our ability to engage with the act of being creatively inspired. This means that special care should be taken to ensure that the environment one works in is conducive to this engagement. That could mean altering certain properties of the area, creating a different atmosphere. It could mean finding an alternative environment altogether. It ideally means taking care to assess how the artist is currently engaging with that environment and how they are making meaning in it so that any action taken is informed by this knowledge of one's subjective experience.

Perhaps the most significant, yet under-recognised aspect of our physical existence is our mortality. We are all united by the inevitability of our eventual deaths and yet we are usually in a state of denial about this. Existential literature is rife with theories about our attitude towards death and there is a perhaps surprising link between creativity and death.

Not much is written about death and creativity, perhaps because it is an unappealing link on the surface and might be seen to put an audience off because of the perceived unpleasantness of accepting our own mortality in a very conscious, reflective manner.

Heidegger (1962) wrote that in order to live authentically, we must face our being-towards-death. That is to say we must accept our own mortality instead of viewing death as something that happens to other people but never ourselves. In this sense, we might talk about authentic creativity: creativity or inspiration that stems from our own awareness of our mortality. Confrontation with our finiteness can be an inspiration.

Amy Tan addresses her own childhood experience of death causing inspiration in her 2008 TED talk. She describes how her father and brother died within a six month period of each other, and how her mother subsequently believed that Tan would be next. She observes how her impending sense of

death greatly increased her creativity, and attributes this to a biological function, presumably as a way of finding possibilities to avoid death, although Tan does not elaborate on this further.

Rollo May (1978) writes about the link between creativity and death in *The Courage to Create*, stating that the creative act is about establishing some way in which we can become immortal. We may perish, but our creation will ultimately live on. This is essentially about using creativity to ensure that we are not reduced to nothingness in our death.

Engagement with inspiration requires one to be comfortable with nothingness and uncertainty. There is nothingness to begin with, and it is in that space that we create. But in order to create we must at once accept the existence of that nothingness and see it as a call to action. We must confront the anxiety of the uncertainty that lies ahead of us by recognising the full range of possibility. Stephen Sondheim summarised this feeling in the final line of his 1984 musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, concerning the life of artist George Seurat, "White: a blank page or canvas. His favourite. So many possibilities."

Inspiration through nothingness is common in fields other than art. In science for example, inspiration usually stems from the observation of ignorance in a certain area, a sort of intellectual nothingness, and the scientist is compelled to combat this. In a contrasting field, RuPaul (2007) described his decision to become a drag performer from a similar perspective, stating that he had noticed a lack of prominence in feminine power or 'goddess energy' as he terms it, which he wanted to rectify. This is another area that we can encourage artists to look at for inspiration, where they see a lack or a nothingness, rather than focussing on gaining it through some existing stimulus.

Stephen Spender (1970) wrote about the use of physical stimuli to increase concentration in artists, mentioning Auden's love of tea and Schiller's slightly more odd penchant for keeping a rotten apple in his place of work. Spender argues that these are tools to keep the artist focussed, stating that distractions come so easily that they must be self-created so that they can be kept consistent and

therefore not interrupt work but in fact block other distractions out. Thus, by directing one's attention into the smell of a rotten apple, it is possible to avoid getting drawn away by the myriad of other possible interruptions: the sound of a car alarm, whistling or other such day-to-day noise. Therefore concentration is fostered by way of channelling that tendency to distraction into one activity that is self-dictated. Distractions are certainly an important point in working with inspiration, as Tchaikovsky wrote in 1878:

"In the midst of this magic process it frequently happens that some external interruption wakes me from my somnambulist state: a ring at the bell, the entrance of my servant, the striking of the clock, reminding me that it is time to leave off. Dreadful, indeed, are such interruptions. Sometimes they break the thread of inspiration for a considerable time, so that I have to seek it again - often in vain." (Tchaikovsky, 1970 [1878], p. 58)

Spender's suggestion of the creation of one's own, controllable distraction is an interesting one that may work. But perhaps there is a growing cultural source of these distractions. As I write these words I am aware of how modern technology has multiplied the opportunity for interruptions in a very personal way. Every now and then I hear an alert tone from various technological devices telling me that I have a new message. It is almost as if people are calling my name at regular intervals, asking for an answer, and I feel a responsibility to reply quickly. Such distractions are now so embedded in our consciousness that we often seem to take them for granted. They are considered a part of life rather than a distraction that we can control. This raises a wider issue about taking control of our environment in order to come to a fine balance. As Spender comments, it can be useful to create our own controllable distractions so that we are not overcome by the ones that we cannot anticipate. At the same time, we also need to become aware of those distractions which we can control but often choose not to.

An area of the Umwelt which I have noticed, but which is seldom mentioned in the literature, is that the act of being on a journey seems to yield inspiration. I had started to suspect this through my own

experiences, having noticed that I had some of my most profound creative insights whilst in transit. The most memorable of these experiences was the composition of an entire song in my mind while on a boat in Russia. Having noticed this, I started to pick up on the theme of travel and inspiration in my clients. It seemed that if prompted to consider the idea, they soon identified that they also had peaks of creativity whilst travelling. Research in the field of creativity gives us some insight into this phenomenon. Jia and Hirt (2009) conducted various studies on the premise that psychological distance is key to creativity. In other words, the more we feel that we are distanced from a problem or project the more we are able to engage with it. Jia and Hirt used a number of experiments in which participants were faced with various dilemmas that required a moment of sudden inspiration to solve. They were given different briefings on the same problem, either being told that the question had been developed by a local team or by a team from a distant country or state. Groups who were told that the problem was developed further from home were far more likely to solve the dilemma. Interestingly, these experiments were conducted to build on prior studies that illustrated the same results but for time rather than locality. This means that inspiration can be linked to a sense of distance in both location and time and this link would explain why being in transit can enhance our chances of being inspired.

When we are in transit, we are by definition not at home and are therefore either acquiring distance or returning from a point of having been distant (and therefore there is likely to be a lasting psychological effect of this). Not only that, but we are in a position where we are unlikely to be able to do anything practical about our thoughts at the time, either because we do not have access to the required resources (e.g. pens, paper, paint) or because we are actually controlling the mode of transportation, for example a bicycle. From this perspective, there seems to be a connection to our perceived amount of freedom. When we are travelling, our freedom is restricted in terms of resources and practical options. But this restriction in itself can give us a sense of psychological freedom as we are liberated from our responsibility towards day-to-day tasks. Duties that we may usually feel pressured to perform such as catching up at work, paying bills or doing housework are

temporarily impossible, although as mentioned above this is starting to change given recent advances in technology.

Such advances in technology also raise an interesting issue around embodiment and inspiration. This can be illustrated with an example of a client of mine striving to write her first novel. After being inspired by a particular story, she was finding it hard to engage with the process of getting it on paper. Something seemed to be lost in translation. After some time, we found that she was being inhibited by the use of a computer which she felt was taking something essential away from the process and she began using a pen and paper instead. Whilst this could be about the meaning she attributed to working with different tools, it also hints at a possible link to embodiment in general. Merleau-Ponty (2007 [1945]) wrote extensively about art and embodiment, though his focus was primarily on painting, in particular the work of Cézanne whom he credited with succeeding in bridging the gap between impressionism and academic painting. Merleau-Ponty believed that this was about the ability to portray both the objective image and the way in which this image comes into being for the viewer, giving the example of Cézanne's use of distorted perspective to illustrate this phenomenon. He called this the 'lived perspective'.

Although this view does not essentially translate to writing, it does raise the point that something may get lost in translation when using technology to create, a sort of distancing of the lived experience that the writer is already attempting to translate into words. It is as if the translation must occur twice, once into descriptive language and a second time into a medium that is distinctly un-primal. My sense of my client's predicament is that she felt more able to access her lived experience through the physical act of writing on paper, rather than using a computer which took her somehow out of that embodied translation into words.

On a neurological level, there is a link between inspiration and sleep, specifically hypnagogia, the transitional state between waking and sleeping. Salvador Dali was a great believer in the power of the hypnagogic state and gained the majority of his inspiration from utilising it. Bernard Ewell (2009)

describes Dali's method in his essay Provenance is Everything describing how the artist would sit with a mixing bowl on his lap and a large spoon in hand. He would wait to fall asleep, at which point the spoon would hit the bowl waking him. This routine would continue on a loop until he felt inspired by his imagination which would run rampant in such hypnagogic states. On a neurological level, this experience is thought to be caused by the inhibition of the neocortex which results in more primitive brain structures taking over (Mavromatis, 1987). The inspiration may then essentially be a result of inhibitions being removed, allowing us to engage with our imagination in a more primitive, non-judgemental manner. This would also explain why many artists use alcohol or drugs to assist the creative process, and raises an issue of how we might be able to train ourselves to adopt such attitudes in different ways.

Mitwelt

"This is the social or public dimension. It is our everyday encounters with others. Our modes of interpersonal relating are within this dimension, whether we are dominant or submissive with others, or whether we withdraw."

(van Deurzen and Kenward, 2005, p. 79)

Aspects of relatedness appear in all of the four dimensions, but the hallmark of relating in the Mitwelt is a focus on how we experience the effect of the others in our lives, and how we might be experienced by them. In the Eigenwelt, in contrast, the focus lies in a more introspective sense of how we experience the self, and thus what we tell ourselves about how we relate to others. Perhaps the most obvious way in which inspiration and our everyday relatedness with others are linked is in the ability to draw inspiration from observing others. This is essentially about being observant and curious about human behaviour, so that one is able to be open to one's social environment in the same way that one may be with one's physical environment. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) gives an example of this process. A woman observes a stern, female financial advisor whom she assumes has

no personal life, just raw ambition. She is then shocked when the woman completely changes character on a personal call. After some time, the original woman connects this observation to several others involving business women spending hours in beauty salons. She notices a common thread in these women's lives.

Interestingly, Csikszentmihalyi refers to this moment as insight rather than inspiration, and prefers the term insight for his eventual formulation of the creative process. While insight and inspiration can overlap, they are not the same thing. Insight refers to a sudden eureka moment, usually where either a solution to a problem is revealed or a connection between two or more ideas is recognised and suggests an introspective process. Inspiration, meaning literally to breathe in, suggests a taking in of the outside world, and is thus almost the opposite of insight. By using the word insight rather than inspiration a range of experiences remain unexamined, and the focus is placed on the artist herself (since insight is surely dependent on some internal cognitive process) rather than sharing the space between the artist and the outside world. It is my view therefore that simply favouring the word inspiration will give a more holistic understanding of this aspect of creativity.

In terms of relatedness involving the artist herself, inspiration can be gained from others both competitively and appreciatively.

The competitive element could be compared to the link made earlier between inspiration and nothingness. An example of this would be a writer who reads another author's work and thinks 'I can do better than that'. They have noted a lack in the other writer's work, and a potentiality in themselves.

The appreciative element is the opposite of the competitive one. An example of this would be a songwriter going to see concerts and being inspired by another composer's sound, which offers something that they have not yet experimented with themselves. They are thus inspired by a combination of a 'something' in another person and a historical lack in their own work.

Since both of these offer inspiration, it is important for an artist to be aware of others' work and to tune into their own sense of lack or potentiality. Let us look at the philosophical implications of both of these mindsets, to see how they might apply to the client in any given situation.

The competitive attitude is best examined in the works of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Nietzsche (2003 [1885]) spoke of conformity as a herd mentality, and encouraged his readers to find their own sense of morality and culture by reassessing their values in order to become what he called the Superman. Similarly, Kierkegaard (1941) favoured individualism, stating that the 'crowd is untruth' and therefore the majority is not always right. This seems particularly relevant when looking at cultural trends. A preference for one particular style of music, clothing or any other artistic product will take cultural precedence, and by tapping into this philosophical mindset, an artist can be encouraged to take inspiration from rejecting these ideas and finding their own, unique creation. This is not always easy. Heidegger (1962) theorised that we are in a frequent state of inauthenticity, having been thrown into the world which we share with others. He terms this 'fallenness', and emphasises that we are essentially defined by the Other before we are defined by ourselves. It is therefore difficult to find our own perspective. This is extremely relevant creatively, as we are, too, thrown into a world of other peoples' artistic creations, and are undoubtedly influenced by this.

As Bohm (1998) notes in *On Creativity*, a fundamentalist non-conformist paradoxically ends up conforming very strictly to her own ideals, and is thus ultimately a conformist herself. Bohm argues that this is not true creativity. Whilst this point is debateable, it does speak of a need for balance.

The appreciative mindset can be illustrated by the work of Levinas (1979), who asserted that the Other has priority over the self. He also contradicted the trend in existential philosophy for self-centric thought. This does not mean that we sacrifice our individualism, but that the Other is held in higher regard. In this sense, we might look at the work of the Other as having priority over our own, thus gaining inspiration from what the Other has contributed to the world.

A recurring theme that I have noticed in client work, and indeed relate to very much personally, is the fear of revealing one's creativity to others. This is particularly noticeable in artists who are working on their craft in their own time but hold alternative employment in order to fund it. There are two tiers to this which I have noted in client work.

Firstly, artists who attempt to separate two sides of their lives: work and creation. One such client of mine seemed fairly self-assured in his creative work, and didn't seem to lack creative confidence, but noted that at his alternative job he did not reveal much of this side of himself. As a songwriter, he had often thought of humming or singing his own creation in the workplace but had never done so due to a dichotomous attitude. The realisation that he could in fact incorporate both sides of his working life into one was somewhat of a revelation, and once noted, he was able to put it into action with little or no hesitation. This was an important milestone and a theme which we revisited many times in various aspects of his life.

The second example of the creative reveal is best illustrated in another client of mine, a writer, who having not yet published her work found it difficult to introduce herself to strangers in a way that felt authentic. She had a desire to tell them that she was a writer, but feared the possibility of being probed further, and subsequently tended to avoid social situations.

Having struggled with this problem myself, I often recalled a story about Jonathan Larson, the writer of the hit Broadway musical *Rent*, as told in the 2006 documentary about his life. Before Larson's major success, he lived in poverty working at a local diner and was unable to sell his creative work. Despite this, he was known for introducing himself at parties by stating that he was writing the next great American musical. While this had some negative results due to the inevitable judgement of the recipients of such introductions, his eventual success was undeniable. There is an element of self-belief which probably helped Larson, but there is also a theme of taking a holistic approach to one's creative life, so that one's sense of identity is reflected not only in our intimate relationship and inner world (as I will discuss in the next chapter) but also in our everyday being-with-others.

Self-consciousness is widely considered an inhibitor of creativity and might affect the artist in the process. For example, an artist in the throes of inspiration is working on her project. She feels a sense of excitement and personal connectedness to her work. At some point, she is likely to face the inevitability of having to share this work with another. This realisation changes her relationship with her creation. Suddenly, it is not just something that she is creating on her own terms, it is something that she must create with an audience in mind. This does not necessarily mean that the content of the creation will change, though in many cases this will occur, but it means that her sense of relation to the project itself will evolve. This is essentially an illustration of what Sartre (1990 [1943]) called 'The Look of the Other'. The concept of 'The Look' describes how when one is conscious of another person's gaze, there comes a realisation that they have been made into an object by the onlooker. In this encounter, the artist becomes the object to the audience's subject. The meaning that the artist has expressed within her work is suddenly no longer in her control and is open to interpretation by the audience. Sartre explains that this conflict between object and subject results in a power struggle in which beings will either embrace their objectification or try to exercise dominion over others. In the case of a creative project, this becomes increasingly difficult, because the finished project is the initial object of judgement and not the artist herself. Despite this, the artist will still experience 'The Look' as the project is seen as an extension of herself. I will further explore this relationship between artist and project in later chapters, but first, let us look at what Sartre names an alternative to this struggle. He writes that the antidote to this conflict is love of the Other and acceptance of their freedom.

The desire of the artist to become an object-in-itself can be strong. She wants to be defined as a great artist rather than accepting her holistic sense of self as a changing, unfixed being-for-itself. The notion of herself as a great artist is both compelling and limiting. If she focuses on this outcome of her work she is in bad faith, having convinced herself that she is, or is striving to become a fixed object.

My personal solution to this problem is in my conceptualisation of my role in the creating. Since inspiration is about taking in, I see this starting point as the Universe acting as subject to my object. I take in its message. At that point, I become subject, and I begin the job of communicating this message to others. Once this is done, there remains a connection between myself and my creation but we are not one and the same. The audience becomes subject to the creation's object and by extension myself. Because the creation is the result of my sense of connectedness to some greater whole, this objectification of the audience is not solely directed at me. The result is a holistic engagement between universe, self, other and creation.

This shows the importance of factoring in the act of being inspired, as it brings with it a sense of connectedness to something external, rather than one's creative project being a solely personal endeavour.

Of course, this is just one way of grappling with the problem of The Other, and the goal in coaching would be to uncover a conceptualisation that works for that particular client. What is important is an awareness of the various issues at hand, and an ability to engage with the problem in a philosophical way with the aim of revealing the client's own philosophical truth.

Eigenwelt

"This is the psychological or private dimension. It is the dimension most associated with psychotherapy, for it involves the person's relationship to him or her self, and to intimate others."

(van Deurzen and Kenward, 2005, p. 79)

This is the dimension which pertains to the vast majority of literature on the topic of creativity, and this focus on the self is likely to reflect our recent social and cultural climate. While I agree that our personal management of emotion, self-talk and sense of meaning are all important aspects of creativity, these tend to be discussed in the context of self-mastery and do not offer much sense of their connectedness to something wider than just the self.

Existential perspectives on the self vary considerably. Sartre (1990 [1943]) believed that we are not initially aware of a sense of self, and that we are ultimately a project at that point. It is only as we begin to reflect on our being that we begin to establish a concept of selfhood. Nietzsche (2003 [1885]) argued that we only become ourselves through acts of will. There are of course many other existential concepts of the self, but the common thread throughout is the notion that the self is fluid, and is essentially something defined by our relationship with ourselves (and others), rather than a fixed state.

In my research into artists' accounts of their own creative process, and particularly their own sense of being inspired, a specific word, 'soul', seems to be commonly mentioned. I struggled with which chapter to include this section in, as the word itself conjures up very spiritual images to me. After careful consideration, I came to the conclusion that the use of the word 'soul' is about one's relationship with oneself. It is our own personal sense of what moves us, quite apart from how we subsequently translate this into action. It may be experienced in a profoundly spiritual way, particularly when confronted with an experience that suddenly and surprisingly focuses our attention on that core sense. For example, visiting a foreign land where one inexplicably feels touched and somehow 'at home' despite never before having been there. This might inspire a feeling of connection to the world, or, for some, even a sense of a possible past life, but it is ultimately reliant on one's sense of 'at-homeness' within that situation. My sense of the word is about a strong sense of self on a very intimate level. It might be stirred by our environment, other people or a connection to something greater, but it is not created by them and is always located within our sense of self. This reflects the introspective nature of the *Eigenwelt* as detailed in the previous chapter.

It might seem to be counterintuitive that one could speak existentially of the soul, as it is popularly associated with a belief in a God and the afterlife. Perhaps we might see it as a human creation developed to escape from our own mortality into some everlasting piece of ourselves. But the word

is still used in existential philosophy, and in fact is particularly favoured by Nietzsche despite his famous declaration that God is dead (2003 [1885]). Nietzsche (1998 [1886]) wrote that the soul is a combination of our drives and social structure, rather than a physical or religious aspect of our being. The notion of the soul being made of our drives does account for the intensity of the experience of having it stirred, suggesting that we are in contact with something that is deeply motivating to us. This is especially true when we take into account the breadth of Nietzsche's philosophy which is largely about individualism and the need to develop one's own ideology. If we take these two ideas together, perhaps Nietzsche's notion of the soul is more about individuality and the subjectivity of what drives us in life. But there is something about this which still seems oversimplified and does not account for the actual experience of having the soul stirred. It is a somewhat objective idea about the subjective nature of the soul, rather than an assertion that inspiration or creativity in a more general sense might stem from one's soul being stirred. Put more simply, inspiration might emerge from one's heightened sense of self.

My noticing the use of the word 'soul' is linked to a previous fascination with the concept, and I think part of this draw is reflected by the recurring theme in the literature. My personal connection to the word stems from a general desire to gain a clear sense of identity, which was particularly emphasised at a time when I was facing a heightened sense of uncertainty. My solace in this uncertainty was a sudden fascination with identifying what I thought my soul looked, felt and sounded like. It was an extremely abstract exercise, mostly non-verbal, and seemed to give me some sense of self that was at once simple enough that I could capture it in an image or feeling, yet complex enough that translating everything that image meant into language would be extremely challenging or most likely impossible. This is my sense of the soul. Given this explanation of the nature of the soul, a creative connection to it is vital since it holds the most core sense of self available to us. Of course, because the word soul itself might be defined in different ways by

different people, it is therefore important to establish how we connect to this essential sense of self individually.

Having personally explored the notion of the soul in quite a creative way, I can see a place for this within the coaching relationship. If an artist is to gain a clear sense of self, then the notion of the soul (or however they choose to name it) is a fantastic resource. It goes beyond idiosyncrasy, personality, history and meaning to an essence that seems to encompass all of these at once and more. This could be done using imagery, dance, music, abstract discussion or any medium that feels relevant to the client and serves the secondary purpose of training the artist's creative process within the coaching setting. This will not only give the coach valuable insight as to how the client works, but if done in a phenomenological manner, it will possibly illuminate aspects of the artist's process upon which she had not previously reflected.

Current literature on how one connects with this sense of self is common, though often seems somehow to remain at a superficial level. For example, Paul McKenna (2004) suggests imagining an image of your ideal self and then experimenting with the idea of stepping into that self. Additionally, psychometric tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or Enneagram are often used in coaching to determine some sense of personality or self. An exception to this is Eric Maisel (2005) who advocates that one of the primary tasks of the artist is to explore their life's purpose. He speaks of sense of meaning as a key enhancer of creativity, and encourages the artist to become what he calls a 'meaning making expert'. Maisel encourages the artist to uncover multiple levels of meaning in her life before a summary of her life purpose can be established. While this approach does encourage vital insight into the subjective sense of meaning of the artist, it also poses a problem. For those people who have not done any such exploration before, this will be a good starting point, but for clients who are particularly philosophically engaged or who have already immersed themselves in self-help literature, such exercises will have been completed multiple times and the outcomes more or less learned rote. Even if I am to suspend this temporarily in order to explore my own sense of

meaning once again, allowing for inevitable changes in my worldview, I am likely to be limited by the knowledge that I have already explored this. It is for this reason that I believe that the coach needs many different ways of exploring the client's sense of self. The use of non-verbal explorations can yield a much richer canvas of insight not only because these are less likely to have been rehearsed but also because self-exploration based on imagery and intuition is not limited by vocabulary.

In *The Making Of A Poem*, Stephen Spender (1970) emphasises the importance of good memory for poets. He explains that although poets may have a poor memory for telephone numbers, dates or other such details, they tend to have an extremely strong emotional or experience memory. He postulates that this is not only useful in terms of being able to revisit a moment of inspiration in great detail in order to write about it, but that the greatest poets are able to use their memories of a particular experience and meld them into others. Thus, they have a sort of experiential template that can be transposed into other scenarios, therefore highlighting links, themes and honing in on some element of that is transcendental. Spender describes this as:

"a memory once clearly stated ceases to be a memory, it becomes perpetually present, because every time we experience something that recalls it, the clear and lucid original experience imposes its former beauty onto the new experiences. It is thus no longer a memory but an experience lived through again and again." (Spender, 1970, p. 72).

Spender is highlighting the importance not only of memory in general, but of engagement during and after one's personal experiences.

The practical implications of this in the coaching relationship are again enhanced by the adoption of a phenomenological method of working. It speaks of the need to train the artist to revisit meaningful memories in an exploratory manner, looking at generalities of feeling and other observations that stem from the reliving of that experience. Once the lived experience is explored fully, a sense of meaning, or intuitive feeling about its significance can be derived. Coach and client can then play

with this sense, seeking other experiences or stimuli that might fit with the blueprint of that experience. In this way, we can encourage a deeper engagement with a memory of inspiration, or of great meaning and allow it to live on and transpose itself into other experiences. This might also enable the client to revisit a feeling of being inspired multiple times instead of just the initial instance. By exploring what that feeling means and intuiting the importance of its message at the time, it might be possible to re-engage and use that insight to gain a deeper sense of being inspired. This idea was illustrated to me in a writers forum (<http://www.writingforums.org>) in which a thread was created by a user seeking advice on how to regain their inspiration. They described having written themselves copious notes for a potential novel in a moment of creative frenzy, only to wake up the following morning with no real sense of connection to the story. Among the commiserating replies declaring that this is entirely to be expected, was a poster who suggested that the notes themselves were the problem. They postulated that the details of the idea were irrelevant in terms of regaining inspiration, and that the importance lay in that sense of why the idea was meaningful to the writer in the first place, what the essence of the intrigue was. This example illustrates the importance of connecting to the general sense of the inspirational moment. An ability to work with this retrospectively would again rely on finely honed memory skills and highlights the need for this kind of work.

Returning to the 2012 survey by Blick Art Materials, the number one way that the participants reported that they found inspiration was to "pay attention to everything around me, because I never know when I'll feel that spark." This greater enhances Spender's commentary on the importance of developing a strong memory, for it would be impossible to memorise the specifics of an experience without generally having strong observation skills with which to absorb them in the first instance. The necessity of good observational ability is again often covered in literature on creativity, with artists often encouraged to carry notepads or recording equipment to log anything that seems significant. But perhaps there is a flaw here: if the artist is only encouraged to note down what they identify as significant, they are simply honing a record-keeping skill but not the ability to be open to

a wider range of stimuli in the first place. This is certainly an area that could be cultivated, and the use of mindfulness techniques could foster this openness to the world around us. Thich Nhất Hạnh (1987) details how contrary to popular belief, such meditative techniques should not be used in order to escape reality, but to encourage increased awareness of it. By allowing our thoughts to occur and acknowledging them, Nhất Hạnh proposes that we can gain heightened awareness of body, mind and the outside world.

The significance of emotion in art is almost legendary. Stereotypes of artists usually involve some sort of very strong negative emotional life, usually leaning towards depression or anger. In reality, I believe that the link between art and emotion is usually far subtler than this. Firstly, in my experience of working with creative clients I have observed that, contrary to popular belief, if the current emotional climate is too volatile, less work is done. There are of course many examples of prolific artists suffering from mental illness or particularly heightened emotional states who are able to use this as inspiration to create. Examples of both and many in between exist. What I have observed, is that while artists engage with their emotional life very differently, there does seem to be a clear connection between emotion, creativity and inspiration. This makes sense, as we have already noted how artists talk about something 'stirring their soul'. What tends to happen in the literature, is that the writer will favour one particular type of engagement rather than allowing for an array of responses. For example, Julia Cameron (1992) advocates the use of what she calls the morning pages, a free-writing journal exercise that the reader must complete every morning. Her reasoning behind this is that expressing all of one's confusing, overwhelming inner life first thing in the morning gets it out of the way immediately so that one can focus more easily later on. This technique has proven to be extremely beneficial to an array of people as can be seen from the success of *The Artist's Way*. However, there is of course another side to this. A quick glance at creative writing forums discussing the book reveals that many readers seem to find this counterproductive, that it brings emotions to the surface and lets them linger there throughout the day disrupting their creativity rather than enhancing it. It is therefore vital to remember the

subjective nature of working with emotion and to spend plenty of time exploring the emotional landscape of the artist before making a plan of how to get the best out of her emotional engagement.

The combination of observation, attention to detail and the enhanced relationship to one's emotions suggests that a general heightening of engagement with one's environment and one's inner life is key. The combined effect of these factors is an artist who is able to take on board both external and internal stimuli equally, and who can effectively absorb the memory of the two combined. Perhaps this is why art that is deeply moving often forges a similar link: it makes us feel a glimmer of recognition for an emotional experience without necessarily reflecting a situation that we have specifically been in. There is a combination of empathy and mystery.

A notable example of this sort of emotional projection in art can be found in the computer game design industry. A 2013 article in Edge magazine highlighted a growing trend among independent game designers for drawing on life experience in order to create. Designer David Gallant created a game based on his experiences of boredom and frustration in his customer support job having been inspired by the work of Anna Anthropy, who designed a game based on her experiences of gender-reassignment surgery. Such games are not yet popular, but provide a platform for heightened empathy in art as they require active participation in the choice-making of the characters.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the ability to identify oneself as an artist to others is often a struggle that carries huge implications. One of the most pressing of these is about whether or not we are actually able to self-identify as artists. This is essentially what Leon Festinger outlined in his cognitive dissonance theory in 1957, which posits that people feel extremely uncomfortable when their actions do not match their attitudes. This feeling of discomfort is so strong that it is possible to alter a person's behaviour based on their sense of identity. This is beautifully illustrated in a 1980 sociological experiment conducted by Steven J. Sherman in which he aimed to increase volunteers with the American Cancer Society. Sherman telephoned a sample of people with a brief survey on

volunteer work. One of the questions he asked was whether or not they would hypothetically give their time to volunteer at the charity. Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants said that they would, presumably because they wanted to appear charitable. The result was a staggering 700% increase in volunteers when a representative of the charity actually did call looking for recruits. This gives us some valuable insight to the inner world of the artist struggling for inspiration. Perhaps if we can encourage the idea that inspiration is found more easily, or that the artist herself is generally inspired in her work this in turn will increase instances of inspiration.

As van Deurzen and Kenward (2005) state in their definition of *Eigenwelt* (see above), one must not only look at one's relationship with oneself, but also intimate relationships with others. This is not something that is usually addressed greatly in psychological literature, but if we turn to artists themselves there is plenty of illuminating information. The second most mentioned inspiration to artists found in the Blick Art Materials survey was family. It is unclear from the results published exactly how the artists gained this inspiration, and it is reasonable to assume that this comes in many forms. For example, it could come in a non-relational manner where the artist uses family as an observation point, watching interactions and mapping emotional memories into their art as we have previously discussed. But there is also an implication from the intimacy of family relations that the inspiration is also coming from a familial support-system.

David Kelley addresses a key factor of this in his 2012 TED talk on creative confidence, where he speaks of how most of us have an experience early in life that wounds our creative confidence. A quick glance at the comments section of this video on YouTube shows a wealth of examples of such experiences. I can personally think of at least three key moments like this, involving friends, family and teachers: probably the three most intimate relationships a child will have. There is little that can be done about such childhood occurrences short of massive social, cultural and political change or specific coaching of parents and teachers in the area of nurturing creativity. However, the implications in later life are surely key to the overall problem of getting artists to engage with their

sense of being inspired. If family has been identified as a key source of inspiration, and yet intimate relationships can be so destructive to that process then we need to pay some attention to how we relate as adults in these situations. I have touched on this in a less intimate way in the previous chapter when we explored Sartre's notion of *The Look* (1990 [1943]), but this same notion can also apply to more intimate relationships. If the artist wants to draw on the resource of intimate relationships to gain inspiration, this can of course be done without the awareness of another in a sort of indirect manner, but the resource would greatly widen if the other can be safely involved in the process without fear of serious knocks to the creative confidence of the artist.

Of course, just as was discussed in the similar section in the previous chapter, such fear can never be entirely relieved. The chances are that such knocks will continue to occur and the artist will need to bolster her courage in order to handle both the potential for and reality of them. However, there is also a further question about how these are handled in an intimate relationship as opposed to those with strangers or acquaintances. In terms of dealing with the potential for these blows, there may be a tendency to withdraw from discussing creative work with those we are close to. The stakes are certainly higher as we will not only need to face those people repeatedly in the future, but we also care more deeply about gaining their respect and understanding. If we let that fear influence our choices, we might end up missing out on sharing our creative world with intimate others altogether. The need to talk about the process, and particularly to discuss moments of inspiration is oftentimes overwhelming. Now, as I write this, I find that in moments of inspiration I am overpowered by a desire to share the experience. If someone else is present I will do so with them, and in this age of new technology I can also turn to my telephone or to the internet to share my feelings. I find myself using Facebook updates to gain a sense of connectedness in this powerful experience, and on examination I can see that this sharing is a big part of the draw of inspiration for me. Not only do I want to be inspired, but I want to share that power with others and hope that they in turn feel inspired.

All of this leads to an important point for consideration: perhaps our lack of creative confidence has led to a reluctance to share the experience with others which in turn inhibits our engagement with it and breaks a potential chain of inspiration which can occur through relatedness.

If this is so, then care needs to be taken to ensure that we are able to communicate freely such experiences and that we recognise the importance of bonding on this intimate level. Given the current technological climate, this should be easier than ever before as this kind of intimacy is no longer limited by our geography. In coaching, these intimate relationships must be explored, and if a problem of low creative confidence is identified, work must be done both on managing the client's relationships with others (as we have already discussed in the previous chapter) but also on their own sense of personal inhibition. Exercises can be done within the coaching session to increase the client's creative confidence, and where possible their work should be brought into the session to be shared and discussed at some point in the relationship.

Uberwelt

"This is the world of meaningfulness, of ideas, religious beliefs, ethical values. The Uberwelt is the attitude one takes to life."

(van Deurzen and Kenward, 2005, p. 79)

It is in this spiritual and philosophical dimension that the greatest divide in creative theory seems to lie, and it stretches back thousands of years. This divide is about external versus internal influence when it comes to inspiration. We have already looked at the more internal focus in the previous chapter regarding the Eigenwelt, but this can be elevated to a more spiritual level if taken in contrast with the notion of external or 'divine' inspiration.

Examples of such instances of what feels like divine inspiration are often hard to find on the surface of things, as we are so unwilling to disclose details of what is such a personal and unbelievable experience. Paul McCartney famously woke up with the melody for Yesterday stuck in his head, not believing that he could have possibly have written it. In a 2011 podcast for RadioLab, Elizabeth Gilbert describes an anecdote from Tom Waits, who hears the fragment of a song whilst driving in heavy traffic. With no way of recording it, he tells it, "Excuse me, can you not see that I'm driving? If you're serious about wanting to exist then I spend eight hours a day in the studio. You're welcome to come and visit me when I'm sitting at my piano. Otherwise, leave me alone and go bother Leonard Cohen". I have spoken to friends and clients about their experiences, and have heard stories of words or images appearing in their heads as if out of nowhere prompting a three-day writing spree. For my own part, I have, as previously discussed, had experiences when an already written song seems to have planted itself in my head ready to be arranged. It is a sudden, and shocking yet somehow peaceful experience which feels totally outside of my control.

In order to examine this phenomenon fully, we must first look at the historical context.

In ancient civilizations, inspiration was believed to be an external force, often associated with a God or spirit. The ancient Greeks called on the Muses to put them into a *furor poeticus*, a state of madness where the Muse's thoughts replaced those of the individual. Likewise, in Old Norse culture, inspiration was given by a deity and seemed outside of the control of the subject. The Romans, similarly, spoke of a personal daemon called a genius who would imbue its owner with insight and inspiration. While these concepts have fallen out of fashion, it is interesting to note how much of our current language is owed to such concepts (*Music from Muse, Genius from the Roman daemon*). The concept of art as a sort of divine inspiration was summarised by Plato in his Symposium where he theorises that through such inspiration the artist manages to create something that is truer than the objective reality. This raises a very interesting point from an existential perspective, as it posits that the subjective experience of living carries more truth and intrigue than the objective one.

Interestingly, Plato also posed what is often viewed as an opposite view in *The Republic*, in which he states that art is merely imitation and is therefore always further and further from the truth. This trend for the divine, external source of inspiration continued into the Renaissance, and was even expanded upon by Pontus de Tyard who claimed to have identified four different types of divine inspiration.

Whilst some of this thought continued with artists such as Coleridge and Yeats, the focus became more and more towards an internal locus of influence. Freud (1958 [1908]) famously wrote that inspiration was located in the subconscious mind and was born out of unresolved psychological trauma or conflict usually stemming from childhood. This theory very firmly placed inspiration at the hands of the artist rather than a God or spirit. Jung (2011 [1912]), similarly, spoke of genius within a person, as a sort of trait that they could possess in contrast with the Roman concept of genius as a visitation or spirit quite separate to one's self. It is also noteworthy that skills such as automatic writing and keeping a dream diary are now linked to this internal idea of inspiration and seen as coming from the subconscious, whereas they could just as easily be seen as some sort of channelling of an external influence, were we culturally attuned to this way of thinking.

There are clear cultural implications of this shift in thinking. It seems likely that it is linked to the steady decline in religion and other faith-based practices in Western culture as well as the general preference for cognitive and neuro-linguistic approaches to psychology. But I believe there is another major cultural issue attached to this change, and that is the digital revolution and other aspects of the new Information Age. With computer technology and new media very much at the forefront of our cultural evolution there is a focus on verbal communication. This has been streamlined further and further with the trend for social networking which habituates particularly limited exchanges in which messages are often capped by a character restriction. This means that we have come to focus very much on verbal descriptions of experience, which need to be pithy and clear in order to facilitate communication. We are well-practised in setting up personal profiles on

websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, expertly selecting what we reveal to the world about ourselves. The result of this is that we have become rooted in our Mitwelt and Eigenwelt, able to communicate with each other, and about ourselves, in a verbally efficient and thought-out manner. Unfortunately, there is a lack in this connectedness, which not only tends to exclude or at least subordinate the physical and spiritual dimensions, it also takes us away from non-verbal aspects of experience. Our reliance on language is reflected in the current literature where free-writing, neuro-linguistic programming and self-talk are all highlighted as key issues and the notion of inspiration is largely overlooked.

This is an area in which existential coaching can offer something new: a willingness to sit with the uncertainty that arises in the pre-reflective, non-verbal experience of something which might be significant or inspirational. In doing this regularly, it may be possible to train the artist to allow inspiration to come, rather than pushing through with her own verbal accounts of her experience before these have sufficiently ripened in her mind. It teaches a trust of the non-verbal, a faith in the lived experience which can be lost when paired with the anxiety of creating. Focussing (Gendlin, 1978) could potentially be a good starting point for this. This process encourages the client to sit with a particular feeling, using a series of reflective steps to try to grasp what that experience essentially is before trying to assign any language to it, followed by careful checking of any verbalisation to ensure that it is accurate. This and other such techniques could be taught to enable non-verbal reflection to be trained within a specific framework, although I am certain that should more research be done into the experience of inspiration we would need to develop another technique altogether. Without such qualitative research it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what we would need to train in order to gain greater access to moments of inspiration. However, open dialogue around the concept is a good starting point.

Another implication of the focus on internal influence in inspiration is that of the responsibility of the artist. Author Elizabeth Gilbert outlines this in her TED talk (2009) entitled "Your Elusive Creative

Genius", in which she compares and contrasts how the artist relates to her own sense of responsibility based on a notion of internal or external inspiration. She observes that with an external focus, the responsibility is placed on the deity, daemon or other source of inspiration. With an internal focus, the artist becomes responsible for any success or failure and therefore the stakes are higher. This sense of responsibility causes anxiety and dread and is probably often the source of writer's block and procrastination in artists, as well as more extreme examples of suicide and self-harm. Gilbert encourages her audience to consider that they 'have' a genius rather than that they must 'be' a genius.

This raises some extremely interesting existential debates surrounding freedom and responsibility. If we take Gilbert's point as valid, and I think that it is, there is a suggestion that for the artist to take responsibility is somehow wrong. This does not tally well with existential thought, which highlights the need for each individual to take responsibility for his or her choices (Sarte, 1990 [1943]). To not do so, or to ignore the fact that one has responsibility, leads to what Sartre calls Bad Faith (as we discussed in the chapter regarding the Mitwelt). However, Bad Faith can also be experienced by denying one's freedom, and this provides a rather tricky counter-argument to this particular situation. If an artist takes an external, divine sense of inspiration and thus experiences that distancing from their responsibility, perhaps this is in fact a sort of claiming of their freedom: a freedom which allows them to create something which comes from outside of themselves, that is larger, less familiar and therefore a broadening of their horizons. This cannot come from something internal since that already presupposes that the idea is personal to their worldview.

The other counter-argument to the idea that external inspiration merely takes away the artist's responsibility, is that perhaps the creation itself being a separate being. This might seem somehow delusory, given that a creative project is clearly not a living being, but there is something in the creative process which might actually generate such feelings. Consider the artist who spends not only hours of their time, but invests a great deal of energy, thought, care and emotion into their

creation. Even in the process of creating, the initial idea can be grown into something entirely different, making it seem somehow organic. There is constant development and change. She must then release it to the world not only to be judged, but to be potentially misunderstood or even in some cases (such as a book being translated to film by a Hollywood studio) moulded to someone else's tastes to the point where it becomes something altogether different. Despite the lack of a living being, there is something similar to the notion of birthing a child and eventually letting it leave home. This was beautifully summed up by Guy Garvey in a 2012 Guardian article:

"The best advice I've ever had came about 20 years ago from Mano McLaughlin, one of Britain's best songwriters. "The song is all," he said, "Don't worry about what the rest of the music sounds like: you have a responsibility to the song." I found that really inspiring: it reminded me not to worry about whether a song sounds cool, or fits with everything we've done before – but just to let the song be what it is."

McLaughlin makes a distinction about the breadth of responsibility that the songwriter has. The responsibility is to the song, but the song itself has a separate destiny and is referred to as if it is a separate being. The song has to fulfil its own destiny, and that is not the artist's responsibility. The artist has only to help the song to take shape according to this destiny, and not according to the whims of the songwriter herself. This implies that it isn't so much about an egotistical creation as it is about listening to some external sense of potential and nurturing that so that the project exists in its own right and not as an extension of the artist. Again, this mirrors the comparison I drew to parenting, where the parent must nurture their child to become what he is meant to be, rather than what the parent hopes the child will be. If we extend this further to include inspiration in the equation, we might describe the final creation as a product of the artist and the inspiration. It is a collaboration.

There is clearly scope for the existential coach to highlight issues of responsibility and freedom, and specifically to explore how letting go of some of that sense of responsibility might allow the artist to

experience greater a incidence of inspiration. Additionally, a sense of freedom could be explored in the coaching relationship in order to practice letting go, and inviting something external in. By focussing on creating a balance between freedom and responsibility, the artist might be encouraged to open up to the experience of being inspired when it occurs, while still occupying herself with creative pursuits in the meantime due to her sense of responsibility to her craft.

Additionally, there is space for exploring the parental relationship which the artist might have with her creation, thus allowing her to become inspired by the external potential that the project itself carries, rather than relying on her inner sense of what it should be. A kind of flexibility is required as the project evolves, and the artist must be able to begin without fear that the initial headway will necessarily be a part of the final product. But there seems to be something much more profound underlying this. Some sense that the artist can draw inspiration from the potential of the project itself, from that sense that it is developing in its own right and contains some sort of tacit knowledge as to where it can best go. This is quite separate from the artist's own conception of what the project should be and points towards a sense of relatedness between artist and creation. If the existential coach can encourage thought in this vein, there is surely some inspiration to be garnered from it. At the very least, it would encourage the artist to consider a greater and longer lasting connectedness with their initial experience of inspiration, recognising the ongoing role that it might play in the creative process.

All of these observations strengthen the need for a holistic approach to creativity. While this is often addressed in literature by writer's such as Eric Maisel (2005), issues such as external and internal inspiration are left out in favour of an overarching cognitive approach. I do not criticise the use of such approaches, and indeed they may be more convenient given the current cultural climate. But do leave something lacking. Whether this is due to a fear of addressing more metaphysical principles in a scientific age, a deliberate omission or simply that it has been overlooked, there is a clear absence in current writing and theory. If we are to be truly holistic, this has to change. I am

reminded at this point of those artists whom I mentioned in the introduction, who have adopted a disparaging view of inspiration, stating that it is for amateurs or that, "If there's one thing that's dangerous for an artist, it's precisely this question of total freedom, waiting for inspiration and all the rest of it." (Fellini, 2003). Perhaps the reason for such denial of the transcendent qualities of inspiration is because it is often seen as a denial of responsibility. It is taken to either extreme: total freedom where the muse must strike or else no work is done and the artist holds no role other than that of a vessel, or total responsibility where the artist must master herself and own her genius regardless of the potential for narcissism or self-destructive anxiety. Both extremes are unhelpful, unrealistic and unbalanced. There is a gentle tug-of-war to be created between freedom and responsibility within the artist. There is a beauty and a utility in allowing oneself to be inspired, to take in something of the universe that cannot be explained, quantified or owned. There is also a necessity and meaningful self-actualisation in exercising one's creative muscles and mastering the mind in order to allow greater productivity. In unison, this could be extremely powerful, bringing an attitude of creation that is both transcendent and self-affirming, both ephemeral and industrious, both free and responsible.

It is a challenge to start a dialogue on the spiritual properties of inspiration when we live in such a rational, scientific era. There is a tendency to try to explain on a neurological or theoretical basis what is being experienced. But this tendency to explain does not seem to highlight anything of great significance and probably harms the cause more than assists it. To try to explain to an artist what is happening in the brain when inspiration is experienced, or to try to develop a scientific formula to encourage it risks taking the magic out of it altogether. There is something to be said for keeping a sense of mystery about it, and using that sense to enhance engagement with the experience or to enable us to increase the instances of inspiration in our lives. This does not mean that we need to view inspiration as a religious, spiritual or somehow divine experience. For some people such thinking might be a help and to others a hindrance, a sort of off-putting, flaky way of looking at the world. I am not proposing that we all adopt such an attitude, rather that it be made accessible and

allowable for those who would find it a help, and maybe even that it open up a dialogue with those who set themselves against it without careful consideration. Perhaps such instances of inspiration seem to be so rare because we either tend to dismiss them and are therefore not open to them occurring in the first place, or because we try to chase them down in a decidedly un-spiritual way therefore killing any chance of really experiencing them fully. I believe that our need to explain such things in rational terms inhibits our ability to take them in. This is where an existential approach to inspiration can be harnessed in order to explore the experience, to discuss what it is like and what it means to the artist, rather than to determine what the experience is objectively and scientifically. It is therefore the job of the existential coach to create a space for the artist to discover this subjective world of being inspired, with all of the contradictions and impossibilities it may hold. The coach must hold the space with as little judgement as possible so that these metaphysical, transcendent experiences can be openly discussed and engaged with. The more the artist is able to do this, the greater the chance that she will be able to allow herself to experience and value moments of inspiration rather than feeling ashamed of them and potentially pushing them away.

For me, this is the core of the creative problem: this philosophical and spiritual level which takes into account the oddness and impossibility of inspiration. If we can promote an engagement with this dimension of living in relation to the creative process, we can explore a range of experience that has been lost in history and embedded in shame. It is this aspect of inspiration which I find to be most inspiring.

Coaching Applications

The following are suggestions for the practical application of my findings within the coaching relationship. In many cases, they draw on current literature already highlighted in the previous chapters. The overall focus is on encouraging engagement with these specific findings while still allowing space for the subjective experience of the client.

The location of the coaching itself should be considered in light of the chapter on the Umwelt. It might be useful when working with artists to conduct sessions in the outdoors or while walking. Alternatively, the coaching room should be conducive to creative inspiration, not only for the client but for the coach. This could mean a variety of different things, such as experimenting with bringing some sense of the outdoors inside with the use of plants or art depicting nature.

Work can be done with the client to determine what kind of environment they are working in and whether or not this is facilitating inspiration. Particular attention should be paid to the meaning that they attribute to this environment. For example, if there is a particular room in which they tend to create, factors that could be considered are:

- Are they using this room for any other activity?
- What is the overall association with this particular room?
- How could the room be improved in order to create associations of creative inspiration?

Additionally, coach and client can explore how a change of location is used in order to create psychological distance. The coach can help the client to explore realistic opportunities for this based on their sense of meaning. For example, an artist writing a historical novel might specifically benefit from visiting a historically significant site or spending time in a museum. If the client has been visiting such sites and still feels creatively blocked, it could be that further psychological distance is required and therefore locations with no obvious link to their subject material would be preferable.

As well as examining location, care can be taken to determine how the artist relates to her tools, whether they be pens, paints or a computer. The coach can lead an exploration of how the artist feels that their work is embodied in the physical act of creating and whether or not use of a different tool, medium or method would improve their sense of embodied creation. It could be that in order to feel more connected to the creative act, and therefore in order to maintain a connectedness with their sense of inspiration, the artist would benefit from using a less efficient tool. For example, a

musician might prefer the use of a technically inferior instrument for the actual composition process, even though they may not use this for a final performance.

While it might not be preferable to address the notion of mortality with every client, there may be some occasions when this can be done in a sensitive and helpful manner, and it is important for the coach to be able to hold a conversation on this sort of topic. In fact, it is surprising how often the subject can come up if both parties are willing to indulge it. We have already seen how it can be a rich source of inspiration, but this will be difficult to explore if the coach is unwilling to enter into a dialogue around death. Questioning around the notion of death, such as imagining one's obituary or advice that they would give on their death bed, can be used to identify the client's sense of meaning in the face of death and encourage a connection with their sense of finiteness.

Nothingness, too, can be used to gain inspiration by a simple exploration of where the client sees ignorance or a lack. This could be a particularly powerful line of questioning for the coach based around what the client feels is missing in the world and how they could help fill that void, and this is likely to yield powerful results.

The practicalities of concentration and distraction can be examined in the artist's working life, establishing where distractions lie, whether these can be limited and indeed why the client might be choosing not to limit them. Additionally, the notion of a self-created distraction can be explored and experimented with.

The significance of the hypnagogic state to inspiration could be built upon in two ways. Firstly, an examination into when the artist feels her state of mind is most likely to be able to surrender that sense of inhibition, and secondly an exploration of what kind of work she is likely to do when feeling less inhibited. By asking her to entertain this idea, it is possible for her to get in touch with a more essential stage of inspiration, before it is tainted by the inhibitions often experienced when she is confronted with the possibility of an audience. Of course, this entirely depends on the coaching

relationship, and if the client does not feel suitably trusting of the coach or sufficiently relaxed she is unlikely to be able to engage in a hypothetical question about a lack of inhibition.

The client can be assisted in exploring their sense of inspiration from the work of others, looking at both competitive and appreciative mindsets. If one particular outlook is favoured, the coach can encourage the artist to explore the alternative. For example, an artist who tends to feel inspired by their admiration for others' work might be encouraged to develop their sense of individualism by noting where they see a lack in this or other work. By contrast, someone who tends to note what is lacking from others' creations might be guided to look at what they appreciate instead. In doing this, the aim is not to decrease any current sense of inspiration, but rather to broaden the field.

In order to actively incorporate the observations outlined in previous chapters, special attention must be given to the coaching relationship itself. We have looked fairly extensively at the impact of relatedness on inspiration, and the relationship between coach and client is a microcosm for this. At the very beginning of the relationship there is an expectation that a significant level of intimacy will eventually be established, but that intimacy takes time and care and cannot be rushed into from day one.

After some time, and this will undoubtedly vary from client to client (and for some client's may unfortunately never occur) the trust and openness in the coaching relationship will increase and so too will the level of intimacy. The coach needs to be able to gauge how this is developing, and strike a balance between probing enough to be able to uncover a greater level of intimacy, and holding back enough that the client does not feel that she is being violated in some way.

In moving to this more intimate stage, the artist can be encouraged to bring work into the session and to share their thoughts and feelings about it. They can also begin to share their experiences of having been inspired. Of course, this may well occur early on in the coaching relationship, however the coach should be aware that for some clients it will take a while to develop enough trust and

intimacy to be able to do this in a productive manner where communication is more open and exploratory and less defensive. It is about finely tuning the relationship, so that the client can feel challenged yet supported at the same time.

Particular attention can be given to exploring how the client is communicating with those close to them, and how able they are to share their creative experiences and inner life with those people. If communication in this way seems inhibited, there is likely to be a problem of creative confidence which should be addressed within the coaching relationship. This could be done using a thorough and curious enquiry into the particular creative project with which they are currently engaging. By using the coaching relationship as a playground for creating such openness, the client can begin to gain confidence. Additionally, the client should be encouraged to assess the impact of their hiding of this side of themselves from intimate others. Questions such as 'how do you think ___ would feel if they knew you were holding this back from them?' confront the client with the reality of the perspective of the other. Phenomenological enquiry can be used to explore how the client is engaging with a particular experience, thus helping them to become more aware of their inner processing and meaning-making. Simply by engaging in the phenomenological process, the client will learn this new skill which can be used in their creative life in order to gain inspiration through their observations of the world. The coaching session effectively becomes a training ground for being open to the world and observing how and why an experience gives them a sense of meaning. This can be most powerful when the client brings a situation with a disclaimer such as 'I know it was stupid, but it really stayed with me' or some other declaration illustrating engagement and simultaneous dismissal of that engagement. Through phenomenological enquiry, the client can be encouraged to identify just why they felt so connected to a seemingly insignificant moment by uncovering the hidden sense of meaning which is undoubtedly buried somewhere within the experience.

This directly relates to the example of insufficient note-making in the chapter on the Eigenwelt, as awareness of one's sense of meaning-making will allow a more reflective attitude to inspiration. That is to say, one can learn not just to feel inspired, but to be aware of what the process is about. In the case of the forum user feeling disconnected from her notes, a greater awareness during the moment of inspiration could have produced notes that more accurately reflected her sense of connection with the project, and therefore would have produced something more likely to cast her mind back into that state.

Since emotion is such a personal experience, the connection between artist, emotion and inspiration should be handled with care. Just as with any aspect of existential coaching, the coach must be able to bracket her assumptions in order to work phenomenologically. I mention this particularly in relation to emotion, because of the mass of stereotyping surrounding emotion and the artist. The coach must help the artist to determine how they personally connect their emotional lives to the act of creation. Van Deurzen's emotional compass (2009) provides a framework of emotion which is flexible enough to account for the individual. It maps various emotions and their potential relationships with each other in a cycle, so that the reader can examine her own sense of her emotional patterns. This could be a useful tool to enable the artist to engage with this topic in a truly exploratory way, without relying on already-created inner narratives which might also be influenced by stereotypical views on the role of emotion in creativity.

Clients can be encouraged to explore their sense of self and meaning-making in a variety of creative ways. The notion of the soul can be used to introduce a deeper exploration of self, and creative media can be introduced into this process. For example, the client might be asked to try to draw a representation of their soul, bring in a piece of music that they feel touches something within them in a very primal way, or identify favourite poems, films or books. An exploration of this can be led by the coach with a view to uncovering what is at the heart of the emotional connection that the client seems to share with the piece of art in question.

Similarly to the proposed work with the concept of the soul, it could be useful to mirror this with the notion of a Muse or daemon. That does not mean that the coach should literally encourage the client to adopt a belief in a sort of mythical being, but that they might be able to enhance the understanding and engagement with the process if they have something in mind. By exploring images, personalities and even by naming the imagined harbinger of inspiration a sense of relatedness and familiarity can be fostered hopefully resulting in greater engagement. Again, the creative nature of this exercise is supported by the artist's capacity for imaginative thought, and could lead to some valuable insights into their creative process and their relationship with the act of being inspired, and is also likely to bring out any underlying conflicts within this. By assigning a personality to the imagined muse or daemon, much can be revealed about tensions, conflicts and anxieties surrounding the process. For example, an aloof, diva-like muse character who swans in and out of the artist's consciousness but can never be pinned down would give a very different flavour than a slightly unhinged, wild, beast-like daemon who resides always in the mind of the artist but rarely cooperates enough to focus her on the task at hand. Working in such an abstract way gives us access to tacit knowledge that can more easily be accessed if we appeal to the artist's creative nature and will give rich material that can be explored with curiosity, humour and awe by both coach and client.

In order to encourage the client to learn to sit with uncertainty, it is important that the coach is able to do this herself. There are many times in the coaching relationship when this can occur, and in particular, moments of silence can provide a good opportunity to explore it. Another opportunity for this is when a client is asked a question and responds with 'I don't know'. Instead of accepting this immediately as the answer, the coach can encourage the client to sit for a moment and examine it. It may still be possible that they will not gain any further insight after more careful consideration, but the practice of sitting with the uncertainty might be beneficial as a skill as discussed in the chapter on the Uberwelt.

The notion of responsibility can be explored within coaching, looking at the client's sense of responsibility towards their craft and how this might impact their ability to engage with it. In particular, an exploration of their sense of relatedness to their current project might be useful. This might be a fairly abstract exercise, examining to what extent they feel that their creation is an extension of themselves and to what extent it exists with its own will. It is likely that this will not yet have been considered by the client and they may find it difficult to engage with. Questions such as 'If your project could talk, what would it tell you?' or 'Is there a difference between where you want your creation to go and where it seems to pull?' could facilitate this discussion.

Lastly, it should be noted that coaching is in itself a creative process. Therefore, it is important for the coach to be aware of her own engagement with inspiration and how it influences her coaching process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to find out how artists might be encouraged to engage more actively with the experience of inspiration with the aid of existential coaching. What has emerged is a general need to take a holistic approach, thus focussing on the four worlds equally and recognising how they are connected to one another.

For an existential coach working with the four worlds model, it is essential to remember that the client will be more used to working within certain dimensions, and will find it harder to work within the less examined ones. There is great value in learning to observe which worlds the client is comfortable in, and using this as a starting point to enable the relationship to develop before plunging them into something less familiar. Likewise, there is a skill in moving fluidly from dimension to dimension which not only aids the work, but in turn teaches the client to do the same and therefore to access awareness and engagement with their less frequently examined areas.

In the coaching applications chapter I have outlined how we can use the findings in this thesis in a practical manner with clients. This should always be done with a view to creating a holistic awareness of how inspiration is found and engaged with, exploring all four dimensions with equal curiosity. Moreover, the client must always be treated as an individual, for whom there will be a unique sense of meaning and engagement within the creative process.

Since the current cultural focus tends to be on cognitive, self-directed action, it is hard to give something like inspiration breathing room, and hence it is usually ignored altogether. By placing inspiration at the forefront of our minds, there is great value to be found through focussing on our sense of connectedness to the world, rather than taking an approach of isolation and solipsistic individualism.

There are many ways to engage with inspiration as I have shown in this paper. However, perhaps the most important point is that without awareness of its significance, we are unlikely to invite it in or reap the benefits of inspiration in the first place.

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