City University London

The Artist, the Muse, and the Library: Exploring ‘inspiration’ and the library’s potential role in the creative process.

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Abstract

Artists and designers are an under-researched group of library users. Even less has been written specifically about their need for ‘inspiration’, despite its importance to the creative process. This study examines how misconceptions have shaped the relationship between artists and designers and the library. The research seeks to further understand the concept of inspiration, and explore the potential role that the library could play in the creative process.

A qualitative, mixed methods approach was taken to suit the subjective, complex nature of the topic. The research begins with a four-stage literature review covering the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature on artists and designers, relevant information behaviour theories, a selective review of creativity in the LIS literature, and a selective overview of various historical, cultural, and psychological perspective on inspiration and creativity. To complement the literature review, six in-depth interviews were conducted with art and design librarians, tutors, and practitioners.

The resulting variety of perspectives help to shed light on the concept of inspiration and the library’s potential role. The study links the process of finding inspiration with other LIS research into browsing, information encountering, serendipity, and satisficing, highlighting the importance of these theories to understanding the behaviour of artists and designers. Inspiration is better understood by tracing the concept from its mystical origins, examining its changing place in history, philosophy, and psychology. Although this concept is ultimately too subjective for the research to concretely define the role of the library, the nature of the education, resources, organisation, and space in libraries place them in a unique position for facilitating creativity and inspiration.
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Introduction

From an artistic perspective, inspiration seems to be the key to the creative process. It is the motivating, exciting, and unexpected aspects of creation. Some even define it as ‘sublime’, or talk of forgetting to eat or sleep while inspired. Certainly, our view of artists involves some dimension of ‘inspiration’, whether we are aware of how to define that term or not.

When the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature talks about ‘inspiration’, there seems to be no need for definition. Artists need inspiration, that is a given from the LIS viewpoint. However, it is a divisive and controversial term, so weighted with connotations that it sometimes seems ridiculously old-fashioned or overly sentimental, depending on the context. For instance, ‘inspirational’ brings to mind saccharine quotes, self-help books, and motivational speeches. On the other hand, the term ‘inspiration’ itself may conjure up images of romantic writers scribbling away, enraptured by the beauty of the world, tormented painters struggling with their inner demons, or the poets of ancient Greece, reciting merely as a conduit of the muses.

Inspiration in the library

‘If only because of their sheer numbers, artists deserve the attention of information professionals; yet their information needs have been neglected [...] A probable explanation lies in the persistent appeal of certain preconceptions concerning artists – that they are intuitive, self-contained individuals who create via inspiration. [...] Such an individual, as he exists in the popular imagination, needs a library about as much as does a whirling dervish,’ (Cobbledick, 1996, p.344-345).

Numerous Library and Information Science studies of artists point to a lack of previous literature in this area (for instance Toyne, 1975, Cobbledick, 1996, Cowan 2004, and Hemmig, 2008). The research on the subject of artists is often anecdotal or fraught with misconceptions about the group. The methods and assumptions of the LIS literature in this area have only recently been reassessed. One of the most insightful studies of artists is William Hemmig’s 2008 literature review. From his
analysis of the literature, Hemmig found that one of the main reasons artists seek information is for ‘inspiration’. While studies since then have expanded upon the nature of inspirational information (Hemmig, 2009, Mason and Robinson, 2010), there has been little discussion of what role libraries may play in fulfilling this need, or even what ‘inspiration’ really means.

Susie Cobbledick wrote in her 1996 study of artists that she believed the poor relationship between artists and libraries could be partially due to the persistent mystical view of artistic inspiration. It is my view that the mystical origins of the term have contributed to society’s misconceptions about artists and the creative process, and hindered our understanding of the phenomena the term describes. However, that is not to say that the mystical view of inspiration is not a vital part of a full, complex view of the concept.

This is the bigger picture this dissertation attempts to present. Through a selective review of literature from the disciplines of Library and Information Science, history, philosophy, and psychology, as well as interviews with art and design practitioners, tutors, and librarians, this project endeavors to expand on the contemporary definition of ‘inspiration’. Additionally, through these methods, this research attempts to understand the potential role of the library in artistic inspiration.

As emphasised in Susie Cobbledick’s quote above, artists are an important, yet often over-looked subject of study for Library and Information Science. There is almost no discussion of what is purported to be one of the main information needs of artists: inspiration. Besides what it can be (anything) and where it can be found (anywhere), previous studies have neglected to question what inspiration really is, how it is found, and whether or not the library can help in this process. Because anything can be inspiring, and it can be found anywhere, it seems that previous writers have either implicitly or explicitly believed that inspiration was mostly beyond the remit of the library (Mason and Robinson, 2010). The purpose of this dissertation is to examine an under-researched group and topic, and in doing, potentially gain useful insights for LIS professionals.
Research questions, aims, and objectives

This project began with the assumption that libraries do play a role in artistic inspiration. Certainly in my personal experience this has been the case, and this would not have seemed an area worth researching if I did not guess that others shared this view. However, later in the research, it became obvious that this assumption must be questioned. Therefore, the initial research question became: does the library play a role in artistic inspiration? If this is the case, my follow-up question is: what could the role of the library ideally be?

This research also began with the assumption that inspiration, despite being a subjective concept, is something that most creative people experience as part of their creative process. Again, I feel that I have experienced inspiration, and based my choice of topic on the assumption that others shared this, or at least some type of phenomenon they personally defined as ‘inspiration’. As discussed in the literature review phase, the idea of ‘inspiration’ itself is not without controversy. Therefore, another question at the centre of this project is: what is inspiration?

From these research questions, two main aims were set for this project. The first, and most central aim is to explore the possible role of the library in artistic inspiration. To inform this, the second aim is to better understand the concept of inspiration.

To meet these aims, three objectives were set. In order to create a broader understanding of ‘inspiration’, the first objective of this project is to explore some of the various ways different historical periods, cultures, disciplines, and individuals defined the concept. The second objective is to collect the thoughts of those in the field (art and design practitioners, tutors, and librarians) on how information and the library are used in their/their students’ creative process. Finally, I will collect the opinions of these individuals on what their ideal, hypothetical environment for inspiration would be like, in order to glean some possible ideas for libraries.
**Scope and definitions**

Each section of this project focuses on a different perspective on the topic, and therefore the scope varies throughout. When looking at the Library and Information Science literature, this research focuses solely on studies of artists and designers, and their information behaviour. The following sections of the literature review expand in scope to discuss a selection of the relevant general theories of information behaviour, and selected LIS work on creativity. The final section of the literature review is concerned with the concept of inspiration, in its widest definition. This section is the broadest in scope, collecting various ideas from the disciplines of history, philosophy, and psychology. It is important to note that this final section is also selective, and a fully representative or comprehensive overview of this literature would be well beyond the scope of this project. Both the LIS and cross-disciplinary literature reviewed is limited to what is available in English.

In the interview stage, the research is limited to participants based in London and south-east England. My inability to travel outside of this area to conduct in-person interviews is the limiting factor. The focus of the interview stage is specifically on the visual arts. Because the creative processes of other groups, such as writers, actors, and musicians vary dramatically on a practical level, it is necessary to focus on one area of the arts. While this section is concentrates on visual art and design in and around London, I believe this research is applicable beyond just this demographic. London has an international reputation in the field of art and design for practitioners and students alike. For many, this city seems to be an ideal environment for providing information and inspiration. It seems to me to be an equally ideal place to conduct this research, while still providing a more general view of the topic that could apply to any location or creative group.

It is important to note that although this research began with a focus on academic libraries, the scope expanded in the process to include libraries and information centres of all kinds. Throughout the dissertation, they will simply be referred to collectively as ‘the library’. The initial focus on academic libraries reflected my own intentions for my future career as well as the environment
arguably best suited for assisting all aspects of the creative process. When I made the necessary decision to interview practitioners rather than students, the focus was shifted away from academic libraries. It was necessary that this more general view include public libraries, which are currently the only type used by the illustrators I interviewed. I feel this more inclusive view is much more in the spirit of this research, as it is my belief that creativity and inspiration is not limited to certain individuals or even certain disciplines.

There are two concepts central to this project. First, it is necessary to define ‘art and design’. ‘What is art?’ is a notoriously difficult question to answer, and one that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I feel it is just as subjective as ‘inspiration’, but for the purpose of this dissertation, it must be pinned down to some extent. The Compact Oxford Dictionary defines ‘art’ as ‘the expression of creative skill through a visual medium’ and ‘the product of such a process’ (Soanes, 2003). The closest relevant dictionary definitions for ‘design’ are: ‘the art or action of producing such a plan or drawing’, and ‘a decorative pattern’ (Soanes, 2003). The interview participants represented the disciplines of fine art, illustration, graphic design, and film, which in my opinion are all included these dictionary definitions. In the broader scope of the cross-disciplinary literature on inspiration and creativity, the definition of a creative product could be almost anything, for instance, a painting, sculpture, book, poem, building, piece of music, invention, or theory.

‘Inspiration’ is another slippery concept, and unlike ‘art’ I feel the point of this research is not to pin it down. Instead, this dissertation explores the many different facets of the concept. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘inspiration’ as ‘the process of quality of being inspired’, ‘a person or thing that inspires’, and ‘a sudden clever or timely idea’ (Soanes, 2003). ‘Inspire’ is defined as ‘fill with the urge or ability to do or feel something’, ‘create (a feeling) in a person’, and ‘give rise to’ (Soanes, 2003). Just from these two entries, one can interpret ‘inspiration’ as a process, an object, an idea, a feeling, and a motivating force. This variety of interpretations is also present in the literature, and in my interviewee’s personal views.
Perhaps the most problematic aspect of ‘inspiration’ is the word’s origin. It derives from the Latin word *inspirare*, meaning ‘breathe or blow into’, which is closest to the term’s current use in the field of medicine. (Soanes, 2003). This also points to the mystical origin of artistic inspiration, in which Greek poets were ‘inspired’ by divine forces working through them (Clark, 1997, p.40). As discussed below, the concept and understanding of inspiration has changed little in the intervening two millennia.

**Methodology**

The creative process and inspiration are highly subjective in nature, and it is necessary to explore these topics from an equally subjectivist perspective. In my view, there is no objective truth to be found in any part of this research, instead the goal is to explore these concepts through a variety of viewpoints.

The research into browsing, information encountering, and serendipity discussed below are not only relevant to the process of finding information for inspiration, but they also point to a useful method for researching an amorphous concept such as inspiration. Considering such slippery and difficult-to-research topics, importance must be placed on the personal and subjective, yet universal nature of these concepts. Perhaps the best way to consider a topic such as inspiration is to follow the lead of these studies, starting with a broad, cross-disciplinary literature review, conduct qualitative research, and attempting to develop a tentative, subjective framework.

This research approaches the topic from two, complementary, qualitative methods: a literature review and a survey, in the form of in-depth interviews. This use of triangulation attempts to make up for the weaknesses inherent in each method. (Gorman and Clayton, 1997, p.32)
The resulting exploration of the theoretical, historical, cultural, and practical views on inspiration, creativity, and the library’s possible role will attempt to provide a broad picture, and possibly new insights on these under-researched topics.

Methodology: Literature Review

The literature review serves as a precursor to the interviews, expanding my knowledge of existing research, theories, and historical, cultural, and cross-disciplinary viewpoints. With this preparation, I was able to identify and connect aspects of the personal discussions with the findings from the literature.

The first portion of the literature review focuses on the existing Library and Information Science research into artists, designers, and their information behaviour. After the initial idea for this dissertation arose, my supervisor pointed me to the MA dissertation and subsequent journal article by former City University Library Science student Helen Mason, supervised by Lyn Robinson. Mason builds off the work of William Hemmig, and by following the citation chain, I was able to quickly gain a fairly comprehensive view of the extant literature on the topic. Hemmig’s literature review was an invaluable resource in my search process, especially his identification of the handful of articles that discuss inspiration specifically.

I conducted extensive keyword searches of City University’s print and e-resources, as well as Web of Knowledge using various combinations of terms such as ‘inspir*’, ‘art’, ‘design’, and ‘librar*’ and, in the case of the latter, restricting the results to the LIS domain. This, as well as further citation chaining did not identify any notable sources written prior to 2008 that had not already been cited by Hemmig. The sources were deemed to be relevant or not by their title and abstract. A sense of the source’s importance could be gained by looking at the number of times it had been cited and by which other sources and authors. Through these searches, and the advice of my supervisor, I was able to add a few sources written
after Hemmig’s 2008 review, including Stephann Makri’s study of architecture students.

Due to the small amount of literature in this area, I was able to gain a good sense of the changing attitudes and assumptions of the LIS literature on artists and designers since these users first came into focus in the 1970’s.

The second portion of the literature review is much more selective than the first. For instance, much has been written about browsing, but it was much more useful in this dissertation to focus only on what is widely regarded as the most important and most cited work on the topic, such as that of Shan-Ju L. Chang. The book *Theories of Information Behaviour* provides concise explanations of current LIS theory from leading researchers such as Sanda Erdelez, Marcia J. Bates, and Brenda Dervin. With this valuable resource, I was easily able to identify areas which may be relevant to the information behaviour of artists and designers. From the brief chapters, I was able to delve deeper into the research through the bibliography, or by searching for the author’s other work on Web of Knowledge.

Having little prior knowledge of the domains of history, philosophy, or psychology, finding the best resources on creativity and inspiration were slightly more difficult. Susie Cobbledick’s supposition about society’s view of artists was informed by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz’s *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*. This landmark work of the early twentieth century meshed art history and the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis, and was an obvious starting point for my investigation. Browsing the small selections of books on art theory and creativity at academic art libraries such as Goldsmiths and Kingston universities helped me to identify a few recurring authors, such as Teresa M. Amabile, Mark A. Runco, and Robert W. Weisberg. I searched WorldCat for keywords such as ‘inspiration’ and ‘creativity’, as well as the authors I had already identified. This strategy led me to *Handbook of Creativity*, which provides an authoritative overview of the contemporary psychological viewpoint. This book’s contributors are an impressive list of leading North American and European researchers (including the three listed
above), edited by Robert J. Sternberg, then IBM Professor of Psychology at Yale University.

In the case of the LIS literature review, I feel that my search was comprehensive enough to show the originality of my research, and give backing to my position that this area of users, and their inspirational needs in particular are an under-researched topic in the field.

The later sections are necessarily selective, as they are covering areas of research far too large to be covered comprehensively in this dissertation. Therefore, the areas of creativity, information behaviour, and the history, philosophy, and psychology of inspiration are presented as only a brief overview. In the case of the last three domains, it was my goal to present the most authoritative and balanced view possible, despite the fact that these are not my usual area of study.

**Literature Review: Library and Information Science research into artists and designers**

The following section looks at the LIS literature on artists and designers, with a special focus on those mentioning inspiration. Because of the small amount of literature available on this topic, and the previous comprehensive literature review of William Hemmig from 2008, this dissertation is able to more closely examine the assumptions and themes of each relevant source. In addition to discussing the role of inspiration in the LIS literature on artists and designers, a few secondary themes, such as the use of alternatives to libraries, and browsing and other information behaviours are mentioned.

**Assumptions**

Derek Toyne, librarian at the Falmouth School of Art, wrote two journal articles in 1975 and 1977, which are recognized as the first published study of the information behavior of artists (Hemmig, 2008, p.344). In creating a new library service for the institution, Toyne found that there was no previous research to
inform what kind of library would best serve this enigmatic section of students. However, in his 2008 review of the library and information science literature, William Hemmig writes ‘anyone wishing to create an information service for artists today would be nearly as information-deprived as Toyne was 40 years ago,’ (p.344).

The intervening years have seen a handful of notable articles, including librarian Susie Cobbledick’s ‘exploratory interviews’. Her oft-quoted statistic that in 1995, there were more artists than lawyers working in the U.S., points to the oversight of such a large demographic being so little understood (Cobbledick, 1996, p.344). Cobbledick’s explanation is that the pervasive assumptions about artists make them an unpopular and difficult subject for research. She ascribes this perception mainly to the romantic idea of artistic inspiration. The quintessential artistic example is Jackson Pollack, who ‘appeared to create through a kind of spontaneous combustion, casting his innards about him. Such an individual, as he exists in the popular imagination, needs a library about as much as does a whirling dervish,’ (Cobbledick, 1996, p.345). While society, and artists themselves, may prefer to maintain this mystical idea of inspiration, most of us would concede that this is not actually typical of the creative process.

Society’s perception of artistic inspiration is not the only false assumption that plagues LIS research into artists. Many librarians seem to assume that art students should conform to the library and its systems and not vice versa. Toyne was aware that art students are often assumed to be ‘anti-literate’ and that the typical academic library of an art institution would be expected to serve as an ‘impressive status symbol,’ (1977, p.24). However, while trying to understand and aid these students, Toyne still ascribed to the belief that most art students are unsuccessful and uninterested in traditional academic study.

Deirdre C. Stam chose to learn about the information behavior of artists not from the group in question, but from arts librarians. Stam believed that artists would not be able to properly understand or articulate their own behaviour (1995a), a view that Hemmig (2009), and Mason and Robinson (2010) interpreted as an assumption that artists are verbally deficient. However, in another version of the article, Stam
attempts to make it clear that this lack of self-awareness was assumed of all users to some extent, and not only artists (Stam, 1995b, p.275). The views expressed by librarians in her article have been used as an exemplar in discussion of negative assumptions about this group (Cowan, 2004). Her list of ‘frustrations’ from librarians ranges from statements like, ‘artists expect to be presented with the ‘perfect’ answer to their queries,’ to annoyance at students not using the library systems and not wanting to learn how, to labeling some students as nearly illiterate or having reading disabilities (Stam, 1995a, p.22). It is hard to tell whether or not Stam agrees with these statements. She notes that catalogues are often a hindrance, especially in the case of Library of Congress Classification, which she calls ‘particularly inappropriate’ for art resources (Stam, 1995b, p.278), but the overall implication is that it is the artists who should adapt and not the library.

Stephann Makri and Claire Warwick’s 2010 study of the information behaviour of architects is worth a mention in this review of the literature, especially in light of Makri’s subsequent exploration of the concept of serendipity (discussed below). While architecture as a discipline is only peripherally related to art and design, there is considerable overlap both in terms of academic structure and information behaviour.

Makri and Warwick’s article finds a similar lack of literature on architects’ information needs and behaviour, which they sought to rectify through a naturalistic observation of nine postgraduate architecture and urban design students (2010, p.1745). Their literature review found many of the same elements discussed in the behaviour of artists and designers, including the importance of images, accidental discovery, monitoring, the need for information for inspiration, and the perceived irrelevance of traditional library-based research for their work (Makri and Warwick, 2010, p.1747). In their study, Makri and Warwick identified specific behaviours especially important to architects, but ‘rarely noted in other disciplines’, including encountering, exploring, visualizing/appropriating, and sharing (2010, p.1755). Video and image browsing, as well as information sharing, emerged as important, yet under-researched elements of architects’ information behaviour (Makri and Warwick, 2010).
Through their discussion with the postgraduate students, one finds some of the same elements that are indirectly touched upon in the literature on artists and designers. There is a friction between their actual behaviour and what the library has deemed to be useful to them. While architecture-specific library resources were used for academic tasks, they were not seen as relevant for design tasks. Additionally, the students were generally unsophisticated in their search strategies, and the librarians’ well-meaning attempts at showing the students more sophisticated resources and strategies caused a certain level of ‘library anxiety’. For instance, when performing their self-chosen design tasks, the students ‘made almost no use of the dedicated electronic architectural resources,’ (Makri and Warwick, 2010, p.1752). Google was the primary source of information for these students. An architecture subject librarian recalled trying to help a student who became ‘embarrassed’ when questioned about using Google, and ‘perplexed’ when asked about using architecture resources (Makri and Warwick, 2010, p.1753).

While domain-specific resources and more sophisticated search strategies are undoubtedly helpful in many circumstances, these are only a small part of the actual behaviour of such students and practitioners. Many libraries seem to be singularly focused on text-based, academic content, and traditional conception of an ‘information need’ satisfiable by one well-considered search query. Many students and practitioners are unaware and unwilling to take the advice of information professionals, because they have an equally narrow conception of the resources and skills relevant to their design work.

Criticisms

Sandra Cowan, writing in 2004, seems to be the first to criticise a library-centric approach to researching the information behaviour of artists. Cowan believes that previous research showed a convenience bias by only surveying students and staff who use libraries. Of the six studies she found about artists, only three actually collected their information from the individuals in question, instead of librarians. The three studies in which artists were consulted focused on their library use, which does not allow for the whole picture of their information behaviour (Cowan, 2004, p.14).
To remedy this oversight in the literature, Cowan interviewed an academically unaffiliated practicing artist about her overall ‘information seeking’. Despite using this well-known phrase, Cowan concludes that ‘information seeking’ is too narrow a term to describe the process of the artist in question, as it plays into the idea of information as an object (2004, p. 18-19).

William Hemmig’s aforementioned research, published in 2008 and 2009, provides a comprehensive view of the study of the information behaviour of artists up to that point. Following on from Cowan’s criticisms, Hemmig sees a real need for research of practicing artists without academic affiliation. His 2008 article reviews the existing literature and builds a tentative model based what was found. This is that artists need information for ‘inspiration’, ‘specific visual elements’, ‘knowledge of materials and techniques’, ‘marketing and career guidance’, and ‘knowledge of current trends in the art world’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.683). He also finds that the ‘information needs of individual artists are extremely idiosyncratic’, ‘artists require a great deal of information that has no epistemic relationship to art’, ‘for most information needs, browsing is the strongly preferred behavior’, and ‘social information gathering is also important, particularly for knowledge of materials and techniques, and for marketing and career guidance,’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.684).

Hemmig believes that the best way to design a user-centered information system is to first research the characteristics of a community independent of the existing information systems. However, because his survey contains mainly questions with a preset range of answers, his respondents are forced to conform to the model created from the literature. His 2009 empirical study uses a modified version of Cobbledick’s proposed survey to test his tentative model from the literature on practicing artists. He discounts the last category of information need, ‘knowledge of current trends’ as redundant because he believes it is actually part of artists’ need for inspiration, knowledge of materials and techniques, and/or knowledge of sales and exhibition opportunities (Hemmig, 2009, p.683). Hemmig concludes that his literature-based model was confirmed by his survey of 44 practicing artists (2009, p.696).
Hemmig’s model was tested by two other studies, both of which confirmed his findings amongst differing groups. The first, by three MLA candidates at the University of Washington in 2006, compared the information behaviour of 26 academic artists (academic and support staff, but not students), and 70 unaffiliated artists. Their main findings show that there was no consistent difference in overall library use between these groups (Visick, Hendrickson, and Bowman, 2006). The second study, by City University London LIS student Helen Mason, investigated the information behaviour of ‘emerging artists’, defined as those who had left university in the last nine years. While confirming that emerging artists behave much like artists in general, Mason also notes that ‘the information behaviour of emerging artists can be seen as being governed to a significant extent by cost implications,’ (2011, p.178). As the image of the impoverished artist seems to be just as well known in society as that of the inspired artist, it is surprising that no previous studies had recognised this important aspect of their information behaviour.

Alternatives to libraries

Art librarian Philip Pacey writes that although art students ‘can get by without libraries [...] they will ‘get by’ far better with libraries, but the libraries have to be put in their way,’ (Pacey’s italics, 1982, p.36). By this he means that an art-specific library near to the students’ studios is preferable to having one central academic library to which they may not bother traveling. However, even when conveniently located, academically affiliated artists may prefer a public library instead, as did two of Cobbledick’s four interviewees (1995, p.357).

One may question whether Pacey’s assertion also applies to academically unaffiliated artists, who make up the majority of the overall group. In his empirical study of practicing artists, Hemmig found that 37 out 42 respondents had used a library in the past six months, with 11 of those having done so more than 10 times. 33 of the 37 had used public libraries, and 13 had used academic libraries. Hemmig believed these figures to confirm the view from the literature that public libraries are best suited for serving artists (2009, p.687, 696). In Mason and Robinson’s 2010 study of emerging artists, 65 out of the 78 survey respondents had used a library
since graduation. Public libraries were again the most popular destination, followed by university libraries (Mason and Robinson, 2010, p.165-166).

Although it the literature seems to point to already widespread library use by all types of artists, there is still the possibility to further adapt these services to better fit their needs. Jean-Paul Oddos proposes a more useful type of information centre in his 1998 article. Working at the documentation centre of the Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris’ famous Centre Pompidou, Oddos noticed a ‘phantom’ public of artists who are interested in the museum, but do not use its library. He writes, ‘the paradox is that a typical museum art library, in an institution concentrating on current work, is not really conceived as a resource for practising artists,’ (Oddos, 1998, p.18). His proposed information centre is somewhere between a large public library and a specialised art library.

This idea is reflected by a 1986 discussion with four artists about what they read, in which one of the panel members expressed his belief that funding for art libraries should instead go to enhancing public libraries. The artist was enthusiastic about librarians, saying that ‘an ideal library would consist of a series of knowledgeable reference librarians to direct people to other sources,’ (Ferguson, 1986, p.72).

The public library’s involvement in the arts is expanded even further in William J. Dane’s description of Newark Public Library from 1987. Dane discussed the wide range of resources and services provided for artists and designers, including a print collection that contains work from Picasso and Lichtenstein. Dane also noted the prevalence of exhibition spaces in public libraries, and the mutually beneficial nature of this collocation (1987, p.30-31).

One cannot overlook the importance of personal book collections to artists and designers. In their 2006 study, Visick, Hendrickson, and Bowman found that 70% of the academic artists they surveyed and 63.8% of the unaffiliated artists used their personal libraries more often than any other type of library (2006, p.22). Although Helen Mason’s survey of emerging artists did not specifically ask about book
collections, she believes that almost all the artists who responded to her survey had them (2010, p.166).

Bookstores are also mentioned more than once as an alternative to libraries. The artist interviewed by Cowan states that although she respects libraries, she actually uses bookstores more often (2004, p.18). Some respondents in Mason’s survey said that they used bookstores in the same way as a library, browsing the shelves, or reading a book without buying it (2011, p.166).

Information behaviours

William Hemmig’s study came to the conclusion that browsing is a preferred behaviour of artists (2009, p.684). However, to what extent and for what purpose is contested in the literature. As Deirdre Stam writes, artists ‘follow paths of association and creativity, with one thing suggesting another. Thoroughness is not characteristic of their approach in the was (sic) that it is in other scholarly endeavors. Artists are compulsive browsers. They need to “paw through” materials,’ (1995b, 277). Browsing is often seen as a less appropriate means of finding information, and artists’ tendency to browse as a symptom of their general information illiteracy (see Cowan, 2004, p.15).

Sara Shatford Layne’s 1994 article about the information behaviour of artists and art historians mentions the importance of serendipitous browsing as a way of finding inspiration (p.25). She even goes as far to suggest that these individuals ‘may in fact benefit from imprecise retrieval methods: one person’s irrelevant image may be another’s serendipitous discovery,’ (Layne, 1994, p.34).

Cobbledick found that although the artists she interviewed did browse, they did so within certain parameters, which were defined by searching the OPAC or other access tools (1996, p.364). She writes, the ‘importance of browsing can be overstated,’ (Cobbledick, 1996, 362). Cobbledick was equally critical of the importance of serendipity, which happened to the artists she interviewed in the studio, but not in the library (1996, p.362). These same views are expressed by Visick, Hendrickson, and Bowman, who found that although browsing was the most
frequently used means of finding information, artists browsed to find something specific, not in the hope of a serendipitous discovery (2006, p.30, 35). Helen Mason found that the most popular method of finding items in a library was to use the catalogue (43/78 respondents). 15 respondents browsed the whole library then decided on a certain section to browse, and 9 used a map or guide to find an area and then browsed. For Mason, this proved that browsing was in fact not the most popular library search method (2010, p.166, 177).

Polly Frank believes that the prevalence of browsing in her large-scale study of students points to its undeniable importance amongst artists. She writes that students often began by searching the OPAC, or looking for a specific media, type or artist and then began browsing from there. However, the process was sometimes even less predefined. One student said, ‘I get ready to find something in art books, but I don’t know what it will be, […] It’s important that I’m open to it. I may find something that isn’t anything like what I expected,’ (1999, p.448).

The importance of the aesthetic elements of a book were discussed by the students in Frank’s study. One commented, ‘You know that old cliché, ‘don’t judge a book by its cover.’ Try telling that to a design student,’ (Frank, 1999, p.451). However, some argued that this was not specific to artists, and simply part of our visual age (Frank, 1999, p.451).

In the same vein as the openness to unexpected finds mentioned in Frank’s study, Sandra Cowan identified what she called ‘attentiveness’ as a main theme in her discussion. Cowan writes, ‘her main strategy of information gathering is simply paying attention, being attentive to the world around her and her movement through it. […] Although it may be described as passive, true attentiveness and openness to the world around and within is something she has practiced for a long time. It is not an easy thing to maintain,’ (Cowan, 2004, p.18). William Hemmig identifies this as being very much like the concept of passive information acquisition. Helen Mason is the first to link this concept from the LIS literature on artists to Sanda Erdelez’s model of Information Encountering (Mason and Robinson, 2010, p.178).
Stephann Makri and Claire Warwick’s study of architecture students found that ‘inspiration was most often an outcome of “encountering” or “exploring” information,’ (2010, p.1766). As one of the subject librarians said, “for us as librarians, we expect architectural students to be comprehensive in their searching, but particularly for the use of images, they want to be led to and to come across things and for things to inspire them, which a comprehensive search wouldn’t necessarily do.”’ (Makri and Warwick, 2010, p.1766).

William Hemmig uses the concept of a ‘community of practice’ (COP) in his 2008 literature review. He writes ‘the artists themselves, their social networks, and the limitless range of information sources that contributes to the creation and sale of work – comprises the artists’ COP. We can now comprehend browsing as actually the most efficient means of seeking meaning in this highly ambiguous universe,’ (2008, p.357). Following on from this, in his 2009 study, Hemmig posits that perhaps artists do not report having trouble finding information because they do not need what they can’t find.

Inspiration

Hemmig’s literature review identified seven articles that discuss inspiration ‘(Toyne 1977; Pacey, 1982; Layne, 1994; Stam, 1995a,b; Cobbledick, 1996; Littrell, 2001),’ (2008, p.355). However, most of these do not discuss inspiration in any depth, except that it results in odd queries such as information on the lifecycle of a tent moth (Toyne, 1977, p.26) and a recognition that ‘art students use libraries to spark off their imagination’ (Pacey, 1982, p.36). As Hemmig writes, ‘there has been almost no acknowledgment in the LIS literature of the extensive psychological literature on artists and creativity,’ (2008, p.359). While a few writers, such as Littrell (2001) and Cowan (2004) seek to understand inspiration and the creative process further; they do not cite any of the theoretical literature on the topic, psychological or otherwise.
Sources of inspiration

To explore the range of inspirational sources, Hemmig provided a list of seventeen sources in his survey, as well as an option to add others. Respondents were asked to rank these from 0 to 4, with 0 being ‘not a factor’ and 4 being ‘highly significant’. ‘Each listed source except the one considered most significant overall was judged to be irrelevant by at least one respondent and highly significant by at least one other,’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.687). Six sources were of greater than average significance: ‘forms occurring in nature’, ‘personal life experience’, ‘works of art seen in person (includes architecture)’, ‘man-made objects other than works of art’, ‘images and/or text in art magazines, periodicals, newspapers’, and ‘images and/or text in art books (includes exhibition catalogs)’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.688). Hemmig points out that of these six, four are not associated with libraries. Some of the suggested additions to the list were ‘dreams’, ‘food’ and ‘light and sunshine; warmth’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.689).

Mason and Robinson’s study of emerging artists sought to further explore this range of inspirational resources. Nearly 300 examples were provided by the 78 survey respondents, which Mason grouped into the categories ‘books and writers’, ‘films/TV’, ‘magazines’, ‘places’, ‘people’, ‘objects’, ‘music’, ‘artists’, ‘natural world’, ‘social world/movements’, and ‘abstract’ (see Mason and Robinson, 2010, p.168-176 for the list of sources). The list is particularly illuminating, especially the ‘abstract’ category, which includes ‘boredom’, ‘things that frustrate/upset me’, ‘dreams’, ‘seeing things that are incongruous or out of place’, ‘autism’, and ‘taking a bath’. Perhaps most telling, one artist had written, ‘Everything!’ (Mason and Robinson, 2010, p.175).

Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson attempt to identify themes within the respondents’ inspirational sources. For instance, they find that ‘illustrators and fashion/textile designers were most likely to cite current trends and practitioners in their field as a source of inspiration, and were also influenced by other periods in fashion and older styles of inspiration,’ (Mason and Robinson, 2010, p.176). This
seems to suggest that there are differences, not just between artists and non-artists, but also between different artistic disciplines.

Stephann Makri and Claire Warwick’s 2010 article on the information behaviour of architecture students found inspiration to be a ‘key overarching theme’ of their research (p.1766). Inspiration functioned as both a potential driver and a desired outcome for information use. Inspiration was sought through image searches early on or mid-way through in the design process, and students could be either directly or indirectly inspired by the images they found. Direct inspiration came from the content of the images and ‘often combined with previous experience to trigger a thought or idea,’ (Makri and Warwick, 2010, p.1766). Students were indirectly inspired by the other attributes of the image, such as the style it was created in. Inspiration led to design solutions and design process decisions, but was not always connected to the project at hand; inspiring information could be used for something else in the future. As discussed in the literature on artists and designers, Makri and Warwick found that the architecture students’ inspiration came from everything and everywhere (2010, p.1766).

The nature of inspiration

Polly Frank, librarian and Assistant Professor in Library and Information Services at Minnesota State University, conducted 19 focus groups with 181 undergraduate art students from 12 different colleges and universities in Minnesota (1999, p.446). The subject of inspiration came up in most of the groups, with one focus group agreeing with a student who said that ‘inspiration is like having a kind of ‘ability’ to make unexpected connections,’ (1999, p.448).

Students in Frank’s study found inspiration in libraries and online, with one student noting that ‘if you flip through tons of books and WebPages, you’ll have all these images in mind you can pull from. Otherwise you just look at that blank paper. God knows what it’s like to stare at a black piece of paper!’ (1999, p.448).

Laurel Littrell, in her research at Kansas State University observed that while students immerse themselves in other artists’ work while learning the basics of their
field, some faculty members used the library to find original inspiration, away from the rest of the work in their field. Littrell uses the example of a set designer who wanted to get away from what other’s had created for the same play and looked to everything else in the library for inspiration. She also cites a music composition student who used the quiet of the library to free herself from others’ melodies and concentrate on her own work (Littrell, 2001, p.292-293).

Littrell recognizes that, ‘being an artist involves a delicate and individualized balance between internal and external factors. Creativity involves some external influences; gaining ideas, learning new things, seeing what is in the world that is worthy of exploring or emulating. Combining with this is a powerful internal process that requires time, energy, and concentration,’ (Littrell, 2001, p.293). From her observations, Littrell created a simple model of inspiration: ‘finding the inspiration’ leads to ‘finding the individual voice’, which leads to ‘producing the result’ (2001, p.293). To her, the library plays an integral role in the first stage, and can provide a suitable place to find the second.

After conducting her in-depth interview, Sandra Cowan also created a tentative model of the creative process. Cowan found that the artist’s process was motivated, not by a perceived lack of information, but ‘by curiosity, pleasure, or sensory feedback’ (Cowan, 2004, p.18). To her, it seemed that the artists’ processes were much like the hermeneutic circle, ‘fluid, interrelational, dynamic, and creative; they rely on the action of creating understanding, rather than finding pre-existing information,’ (Cowan, 2004, p.19).

Aside from these two personal models of creativity, there is little attempt to understand the actual cognitive or emotional processes behind inspiration in the LIS literature. While Helen Mason’s list of sources of inspiration makes for interesting reading, her research only tangentially deals with the concept. As William Hemmig points out, there is a wealth of information on creativity and inspiration outside of this domain, which has been largely ignored by the LIS literature. The focus on artists and designers’ overall information needs and behaviours means that no previous
research has been able to delve deeper into arguably the most important category of information need for this group.

**Literature Review: Relevant information behaviour theories**

The Library and Information Science literature on artists and designers’ information behaviour makes little reference to the theoretical literature. This oversight means that it was not until relatively recently, with the work of William Hemmig, and Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson, that the first connections to the broader LIS literature were made. The following is an attempt to further contextualise artists and designers’ information behavior within the current theories and models.

Marcia J. Bates posits four ‘Modes of Information Seeking’, which are either directed or undirected, and passive or active. Directed/active is called ‘searching’, undirected/active is called ‘browsing’, directed/passive is called ‘monitoring’, and undirected/passive is called ‘being aware’ (Bates, 2002, p.4). Bates writes that browsing and being aware provide an alternative strategy for locating known unknowns, and may be the crucial means of encountering unknown unknowns (2002, p.6). While much of the LIS literature has focused on the first quadrant, searching, there is a shift towards the other three. Bates writes that ‘it is not unreasonable to guess that we absorb perhaps 80 percent of all our knowledge through simply being aware,’ (2002, p.4).

Taking into account the importance of these other behaviours, there is now a need for further understanding. The areas of research discussed below, browsing, accidental information acquisition, information encountering, and serendipity, are relatively new and still in the tentative, exploratory stages. While searching may be the most prevalent information behavior for academic study, the LIS literature on artists and designers shows that they employ a variety of behaviours in their study and practice. Studies focused on quantitative data may be interested to find what
Behaviours are used most by this group, but the focus of this dissertation is on how to best serve all means of finding inspiration.

**Browsing**

Shan-Ju L. Chang and Ronald Rice have been investigating browsing since the early 1990’s. Beginning in 1993 with an extensive cross-disciplinary literature review, the researchers honed their model after observing and interviewing 33 library users (Chang, 2005, p.69). Browsing is defined by Chang as ‘an examination of unknown items of potential interest by scanning or moving through an information space in order to judge the utility of the items, to learn about something of interest in the item, or to satisfy curiosity about something,’ (2005, p.73). In Chang’s multidimensional framework, the browsing process is defined by ‘the level of scanning activity’, ‘the specificity of the information provided by the resource’, ‘the definiteness or specificity of the patron’s goal’, and ‘the specificity of the object sought’ (Chang, 2005, p.71). The framework describes various motivations and situations for browsing, and results in five general themes within which lie nine specific patterns of browsing. These are situational and opportunistic browsing (looking for a specific item); systematic, evaluative, and focus browsing (looking for something with common characteristics); monitoring browsing (keeping up-to-date); indicative and preparatory browsing (learning or finding out); and invitational browsing (goal-free) (Chang, 2005, p.71-72).

In her 2007 article entitled ‘What is browsing – really?’ Marcia Bates writes that ‘we generally know intuitively what browsing is, because we have engaged in it ourselves and observed it in others.’ In Bates’ understanding, Chang and Rice’s research into browsing has placed too much emphasis on scanning. She writes that scanning has a dual dictionary meaning, which can be seen as contradictory. In one sense, it is looking over something quickly, and in the other sense, scanning is examining something closely. However, for Bates, scanning is much more systematic than browsing. She writes, ‘browsing can be seen to contain four elements, iterated
indefinitely, until the overall episode ends: 1. glimpsing a field of vision; 2. selecting or sampling a physical or representational object from the field; 3. examining the object; and 4. physically or conceptually acquiring the examined object, or abandoning it,’ (2007).

Marcia Bates argues that web-based browsing function allow for scanning, but not browsing. In her view, ‘good browsable interfaces would consist of rich scenes, full of potential objects of interest, that the eye can take in at once (massively parallel processing), then select items within the scene to give closer attention to,’ (2002). Bates cites Elaine G. Toms’ 2000 study of browsing electronic text as implicitly understanding the optimal design for such a task.

While still only in the area of speculation, in a 2002 article, Marcia Bates found a tentative connection between information behaviour and the theories of evolutionary biology and anthropology. Jenna Hartel, then Bates’ doctoral advisee, identified several ‘sampling and selecting’ behaviours that can be seen as similar to browsing. These included Bates own metaphor ‘berypicking’, as well as ‘mingling, dating, shopping, nibbling, sightseeing, wayfinding, channel surfing, and Web surfing,’ (2002, p.7). Bates writes ‘browsing appears to be a manifestation of a fundamental animal exploratory behavior,’ (2007). She and Hartel believe that these sampling and selecting behaviours may have evolved from mating and foraging behaviour, pointing out that some of them are exactly that. This may be an example of ‘exaption’, in which ‘a feature that adapted for one purpose in a species is used for another purpose when the environment puts different demands on the species,’ (Bates, 2002, p.7).

**Satisficing**

Bates believes that this theory may be a possible explanation for the prevalence of what is known as ‘satisficing’. This is also known as Zipf’s Principle of Least Effort (1949), verified by Poole in 1985 through a meta-analysis of 51
information seeking studies. The Principle of Least effort says that ‘people invest little in seeking information, preferring easy-to-use, accessible sources to sources of known high quality that are less easy to use and/or less accessible,’ (Bates, 2005, p.4). Bates believes that the passive methods of finding information, monitoring and being aware, are so ingrained in us that we are reluctant to switch to methods such as searching. Sanda Erdelez believes that her concept of Information Encountering (IE) also feeds into the concept of satisficing. IE is such an appealing experience because ‘users are rewarded even when there is no apparent investment of effort to search for some information,’ (Erdelez, 2005, p.183). Bates writes that because there is an increasing amount of information, we have needed to create complex systems to deal with this influx. However, these systems require ‘declarative’ and ‘procedural’ knowledge, which clash with our tendency to satisfice. In Bates view, satisficing is prevalent even in individuals with doctorates, who one would assume to have the highest level of information literacy. She writes, ‘it is not surprising, then, that the methods of access designed by librarians are generally little used,’ (Bates, 2002, p.11). ‘People use least effort because they have always used it, and because, until very recently, it has worked adequately, if not optimally,’ (Bates, 2002, p.11).

While Bates’ theory may be difficult to prove, she nevertheless presents a compelling argument for the link between satisficing and the importance of browsing, monitoring, and being aware. If Bates is to be believed, satisficing is prevalent at all information skill levels, but it seems that artists and designers may be even more prone to satisficing than those in other domains. It is my belief that especially when coming across information for inspiration, artists and designers must satisfice to deal with the potential ‘information overload’ associated with the limitless possibilities of inspirational sources. There is no one ‘right’ answer to satisfy their inspirational need, and there is no possibility of a comprehensive search, so the only way to limit the possible sources is to satisfice. For artists and designers, this may be, for instance, relying only on the results of their first Google image search instead of using a digital image library, choosing to buy one book over another because it is cheaper, grabbing a magazine off the shelf solely because it has more appealing graphics, or choosing to not use the library altogether.
It is also my belief that, while many artists and designers see the importance of academic research to their studies and practice, some tend to undervalue this area (perhaps because of the myths and stereotypes associated with artists, as discussed below), or rely on their selective, passive techniques to conduct this research. This section of artists and designers may be the ones that the aforementioned studies (such as Stam’s) focused on and thus undermined librarian’s attitudes towards this group in general. However, as art and design educators work to divorce themselves from the stereotypes of inspiration and creativity, and place more focus on the benefits of academic study and information skills, the perceptions of artists and designers may be changing in the field of LIS.

**Incidental information acquisition**

Kirsty Williamson writes that Bates 2002 article was a ‘breath of fresh air’ in the debate about information behaviour, opening the LIS literature up to the importance of non-purposive information seeking (2005, p.128). In forming her Ecological Theory of Human Information Behaviour, Williamson studied the incidental information acquisition of 202 Australians aged 60 and above, with a focus on their phone conversations. Williamson believes that the information behaviour models of Dervin, Krikelas, and Belkin et al, focus on purposive information seeking for a known information need. She found that most of the everyday life information her participants needed (whether they were aware of the need or not) was incidentally found through conversations with friends and family, newspapers, television, printed information, and radio. One example of this was a respondent who rang her friend to ask if the friend’s house had been damaged in a recent severe storm, and happened to ask her to lunch. At lunch, she incidentally learned of an alternative treatment for migraines that had helped the friend’s son. The respondent found this interesting, as her daughter suffered from migraines. Interestingly, libraries were not very high on her respondents’ list of information sources, and when used, they were used purposively, however the respondents did give some
examples of serendipitous discoveries (Williamson, 1998, p.23-34). Williamson’s conclusion is that ‘the notion of people “being informed” rather than “seeking information” often seems to be appropriate,’ (1998, p.35).

Information Encountering

Sanda Erdelez first proposed ‘Information Encountering’ in a 1997 article. Like Williamson and Bates, she found that the majority of information behaviour theories were based on problem-driven, active searching such as Belkin et al.’s Anomalous State of Knowledge. One of the exceptions to this was Marcia Bates’ well-known berry-picking model (which is supported by Information Encountering although it is across different problems, not just one) (Erdelez, 1997, p.412-418).

Throughout Erdelez’s research, Information Encountering (also known as IE), has been narrowed in definition to ‘an instance of accidental discovery of information during an active search for some other information,’ and a specific type of opportunistic information acquisition (Erdelez, 2005, p.180). Erdelez’s framework contains three key elements, the characteristics of the information user, the characteristics of the information environment, and the characteristics of the encountered information. She also tentatively categorised the information users in question as non-encounterers, occasional encounterers, encounterers, and super-encounterers (Erdelez, 2005, p.179). Erdelez’s model of IE identified the following steps, with some variations: noticing, stopping, examining, capturing, and returning. This involves a switch between a ‘foreground problem’ and a ‘background interest/problems/tasks’ (Erdelez, 2005, p.181). In her 1997 study involving a survey of 132 respondents and 12 in-depth interviews, Erdelez found that less than 20% of the information had not been used since it was encountered.

In her interviews with selected ‘super-encounterers’, it was found that IE brought satisfaction to their browsing habits, and therefore reinforced them. Several interviewees said that IE had ‘enabled them to see their information needs from a
different perspective,’ (Erdelez, 1997, p.416). These individuals described themselves as curious, with a desire for exploration, and an interest in different hobbies and various subject areas. The ‘super-encounterers’ were aware of their ability and believed that others could learn to similarly benefit from IE (Erdelez, p.419).

**Serendipity**

Serendipity is a concept that creeps into discussion of browsing, incidental information acquisition, and other information behaviours. Not only is work on this topic important to the LIS theory overall, but it also paves the way for research into other ‘slippery’ concepts, such as inspiration.

Like inspiration, serendipity is something which is intuitively felt by most people, but has eluded a satisfying definition. By conducting critical incident interviews with 28 inter-disciplinary researchers, Stephann Makri and Ann Blandford came to the definition of serendipity ‘as a process of making a mental connection that has the potential to lead to a valuable outcome, projecting the value of the outcome and taking actions to exploit the connection, leading to a valuable outcome,’ (2012b, p.706). For them, serendipity was a post hoc label given to an experience after it had occurred (Makri and Blandford, 2012a, p.692).

Allen Foster and Nigel Ford’s 2003 study of serendipity found that these encounters had an element of the unexpected, either in location or value. Going a step further, Makri and Blandford’s study sought to come as close as possible to a ‘recipe’ for serendipity. It is considered by them to be a ‘broad multi-dimensional conceptual space’, which they call the ‘serendipity space’ (Makri and Blandford, 2012b, p.707). The common elements of this space are ‘an amount of unexpectedness’, ‘an amount of insight’, and ‘a valuable, unanticipated outcome’ (Makri and Blandford, 2012b, p.707).
Foster and Ford’s review of the cross-disciplinary literature finds that serendipity is considered an integral part of the creative process, as well as helping to reveal hidden connections and analogies. The researchers conducted naturalistic interviews with 45 academic researchers working on interdisciplinary topics. They found that the impact of serendipity could be ‘reinforcing or strengthening the researcher’s existing problem conception or solution; or taking the researcher in a new direction, in which the problem conception or solution is re-configured in some way,’ (Foster and Ford, 2003, p.330).

While many would assume that serendipity is inherently uncontrollable, Foster and Ford found hints, especially in the scientific literature, at ways to control it. This may be through mental preparation, openness, and questioning. The idea of the ‘prepared mind’ also comes in to play in recognising when serendipity occurs. Foster and Ford posit that serendipity is cultivated through not only a prepared mind, but also appropriate retrieval systems and information seeking skills. In Foster and Ford’s interviews, the level of perceived control over serendipity varied between individuals. Many believed that it could be facilitated through a prepared mind or by making the conscious decision to take a broader view. Others found serendipity to be caused by the influence of information gatekeepers such as librarians and classificationists (Foster and Ford, 2003, p.331-336).

In the case of Makri and Blandford’s research, an element of control is assumed to be possible. The first stage in serendipity, making a mental connection, was found to be helped by being open, prepared, aware of the environment, willing to go outside one’s comfort zone, and ‘awake to the idea’ of serendipity (Makri and Blandford, 2012a, p.693).

By measuring each of the three key elements of serendipity, Makri and Blandford developed a classification framework, whereby it was possible to distinguish between ‘pure’ and ‘dilute’ serendipity (2012b, p.715). However, the researchers understood that these instances were always very subjective and personal, giving the example of how one interviewee called herself ‘the queen of
serendipitous events’ and therefore found randomness to be less unexpected than others may have (Makri and Blandford, 2012b, p.716). By creating such a framework, Makri and Blandford hoped to help individuals be prepared to recognise and harness the benefits of serendipitous experiences (2012b, p.715-716).

These areas of LIS theory: browsing, monitoring, being aware, satisficing, incidental information acquisition, Information Encountering, and serendipity are all important factors in the information behaviour of artists and designers. By looking beyond the traditionally focus on purposive, problem-driven, active searching, one comes to a fuller understanding of how this group come across information for their creative process.

**Literature Review: Creativity in the LIS literature**

To understand the library’s possible role in inspiration, one must step back to consider the broader context of the library’s role in creativity across domains. It is important to note that the following sections are only a selection of the relevant LIS literature, due to the significant amount of research done in this area. I have chosen to look more closely at the work of two individuals concerned with creativity in the LIS context, David Bawden and Nigel Ford.

David Bawden’s 1986 review article on the topic was one of the first to discuss what role information professionals could play in creativity. Since writing a speculative article on creativity and information systems in 1999, Nigel Ford and his colleagues have conducted further research into this topic, as well as serendipity’s role.

Through his review, David Bawden found five recurring themes: ‘the role of chance in discovery;’ ‘the great value of analogies;’ ‘the importance of careful examination of exceptions to, and inconsistencies within, the accepted scheme of things;’ ‘the damaging effects of commonly held ideas which are in fact false;’ and
‘the importance of inter-disciplinary research,’ (1986, p.205). While writing from a scientific perspective, Bawden’s suggestions regarding the content, systems and information behaviors that facilitate creativity are useful for all creative domains. The relevance of this article on scientific creativity to the current discussion of artistic inspiration only serves to reinforce Bawden’s belief in benefits of inter-disciplinary research.

The article highlights the importance of creating an ‘information-rich environment’, including ‘material of a peripheral or speculative nature’, interdisciplinary information, and reviews (Bawden, 1986, p.214). The use of blogs, Google, and other ways of finding broad yet shallow displays of information cited in Makri’s study of architecture students may be seen as a 21st century form of the review. From the work of Hemmig, and Mason and Robinson, it is clear that artists are already well aware of the importance of a wide range of non-art related information to their work, even if the typical art library is unable to fully cater to this range.

There seems to be an implicit belief amongst some artists that familiarity with others’ work is detrimental to their own originality, possibly a remnant of the divine view of artistic inspiration. This belief may lead to the tendency to disregard domain-specific information of any kind. Interestingly, this attitude is also found in the scientific literature as well. Bawden writes that the use of literature is essential, and cites the well-known Byron quote: ‘To be perfectly original one should think much and read little, and this is impossible, for one must have read before one has learnt to think,’ (1986, p.208). Reading in one’s domain also leads to the ‘prepared mind’ (a recurring theme in the literature on scientific creativity which comes the quote by Louis Pasteur: ‘In the fields of observation, chance favors only those minds which are prepared,’ (Pasteur, 2013)), which is better able to recognise serendipitous experiences and harness their potential. Additionally, becoming overly focused on one domain or area can actually work against creativity, so it is beneficial to read broadly and make use of social interactions. Seemingly foreseeing the rise of web 2.0, Bawden wrote in 1986 that new technology would aid the ‘convergence of
formal and informal information channels’ that is so important for creativity (p.214).

For both Bawden and Ford, serendipitous use of information was an important factor in creativity. Eaglestone et al’s 2007 study of electro-acoustic composers found that serendipitous accidents allowed for their subjects’ inspiration (p.453). Ford wrote in 1999, ‘there would seem to be a considerable mismatch between the element of serendipity that often characterises creative thinking and what IR systems are essentially designed to deliver,’ (p.537). Citing the work of Spink and Griesdorf, Ford argues that while highly relevant results are useful to convergent thinking, divergent, or creative thinking is best aided by the mid-ranked document. This search result may be just helpful enough without being completely unrelated (Ford, 1999, p.537-538).

Bawden found that systems for creativity should have the flexibility to suit the individual, and allow for their direct involvement. The results of Eaglestone et al’s 2007 study of electro-acoustic composers pointed to a similar need for more flexibility and personalisation in information systems. To aid the retrieval of interdisciplinary information, Bawden and Ford cite the importance of systems that facilitate interoperability between domains, especially in overcoming the barriers of domain-specific jargon (1986, p.209 and 1999, p.539).

Additionally, browsing is seen as the ‘single most important means of creative use of the literature,’ (Bawden, 1986, p.214). Far from being an unsophisticated information behavior relied upon by supposedly information-illiterate artists, this points to further evidence of browsing’s undeniable importance for creative individuals across disciplines.

Unlike the LIS literature on artists, Nigel Ford’s 1999 article on creativity and information systems, as well as Eaglestone et al’s 2007 study of electro-acoustic composers look to the current psychological literature on the topic.

In Nigel Ford’s model, creative thinking lies in the intersection of highly
abstract thinking and concepts of high dissimilarity to one another. Ford writes ‘creative thinking entails generating new ideas by identifying themes by which otherwise discrete entities become integrated,’ (1999, p.528). He notes that creativity is relative, and what is creative to an undergraduate student may not be the same as creative to the field’s leading researchers (Ford, 1999, p.530).

Ford looks specifically at the topic of insight, which may be a main part of many people’s conceptions of inspiration. He cites the many anecdotal examples of insight coming through serendipity and time away from the problem, including the famous instance of Kekulé discovering the structure of benzene by dreaming of snakes biting their own tails (1999, p.532). In Eaglestone et al’s study, the researchers found evidence of a short interruption from computer work helping the subject to create what they deemed to be the most ‘significant’ part of their composition (2007, p.454). This idea is backed by the psychological theory that during this time off, mental ‘incubation’ occurs, which allows for one to be unconsciously working through the problem until a solution emerges, unexpected and if from nowhere (Ford, 1999, p.533). However, as discussed in more depth below, the idea of unconscious incubation is not without its critics in the field of psychology.

Both Bawden and Ford provide numerous ways in which LIS services and systems may play a role in creativity. While this dissertation shies away from making such recommendations due to the highly subjective nature of inspiration, I feel LIS professionals looking for practical ways of facilitating creativity will find a wealth of suggestions in Bawden and Ford’s work.
Literature Review: Inspiration

‘Inspiration’ as a term, appears throughout the library and information science literature anecdotally, but it does not seem that the specific concept or meaning has been given much thought. I believe that most people do have some conception of what ‘inspiration’ is, whether they think they have experienced it personally or not. There is much overlap between creativity, insight, and inspiration, and one could debate how exactly these terms may fit together.

I believe that, like many concepts, inspiration is personal and subjective, eluding one concrete definition because of its nature. Therefore, all that I can do to explore this topic is to present as many viewpoints as possible. The idea of inspiration changes from person to person, but also throughout history. It is possible to attempt to trace the concept through the areas of religion, philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology. However, these accounts can only provide at best a limited view of the prevailing attitudes of the society and time in which they were written. One must remember that different views on such concepts as authorship, the individual, and the nature of truth and reality all factor into how art, artists, and inspiration was viewed.

The field of Western history and philosophy – ancient to modern views

Susie Cobbledick cites the work of Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz on the stereotyped views of artists found in their biographies since ancient times. Their book, Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist, originally published in German in 1934, finds strikingly similar anecdotes and stories from accounts of various artists’ lives that point, less to the actual lives of these individuals than to each society’s view of the artist. For instance, a popular rumour about Giotto, begun in Florence about a century after his death, held that as a young shepherd, Giotto sketched his animals with such obvious artistic skill, that when, by chance, the famed Cimabue saw the youth’s work, he organised his artistic training, nurtured his latent genius, and allowed him to rise in social status from his lowly beginnings. Through historical analysis, Kris and Kurz prove this story is a myth, and identify the potential
reasons behind these enduring archetypes of artists (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.8-9, 22-28).

In his book, *The Theory of Inspiration*, Timothy Clark writes that the term *enthousiasmos*, which is translated as ‘inspiration’ was first mentioned by Democritus in the sixth century B.C. Plato refers to the divine possession of the poets as being an old story, but there is no evidence to back up this claim. Perhaps this link between inspiration and divine possession is derived from Baccic maenadism, a Greek cult going back only as far as the fifth century B.C. (Clark, 1997, p.40). In ancient Greece, poets were thought to be inspired by divine possession from the muses, although painters and sculptors were looked down upon because their work was thought of as manual labour, and did not include any concept of inspiration (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.39).

Artists and sculptors, in Plato’s view, needed skill, knowledge, and a natural endowment, but were not inspired. For the ancient Greeks, it was difficult to reconcile divine inspiration and art created for pay. Poets were inspired but unpaid, painters and sculptors were paid but uninspired (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.43, 113).

Additionally, Plato’s conception of art as mimesis downgraded art and artists further. Philosophy and Jungian studies teacher Dr. Donald Mayo writes that the Western philosophical split between body and mind begins with Plato, and therefore so begins the devaluation of the non-rational path to truth (1995, p.16). According to Plato, art is inherently non-rational. ‘Not only does Plato dispute that inspiration and intellect go together in any balance to create art, he denies that intellect is even involved, only madness,’ (Mayo, 1995, p.17). For Plato, art is thrice removed from the true Forms, being only an imitation of nature. Those who believe they find truth in art are deceived (Mayo, 1995, p.18). However, there was also another view, present in the writings of Socrates, which held that art was greater than nature, and capable of making up for the deficiencies of reality by creating new images of beauty (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.43).

The fourth century B.C. was a turning point in this attitude, and artists became the subject of biographies for the first time. The artist is not only valued, but
famous and ‘frequently in most intimate contact with princes and rules, toward whom he comports himself proudly and at times even dismissively,’ (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.40). Aristotle took a similarly positive view towards art, disagreeing with his teacher’s position. He believed that the artists’ imitation was ‘at least of the true essence or form of the object,’ (Mayo, 1995, p.18). Poetry, in Aristotle’s view, is ‘an expression of the universal element in human life’, capable of showing truth and touching the emotions of the audience, creating a cathartic experience (Mayo, 1995, p.18). Despite the attitude towards art, there was still doubt for the ancient Greeks about the social status of the artists themselves (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.42).

This new view of the artist was ‘raised to the status of dogma in the philosophy of Plotinus’ (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.44). Plotinus was the first philosopher to recognise the subjective aspect of beauty. The beauty and form of a work of art was thought to be inspired by the soul of the artist, which is capable of such power because the soul originated from the One. Art, therefore, aspires to be a pure expression of the One, although it is always imperfect. Art was thought to show a truth that is not discoverable through empirical means only (Mayo, 1995, p.19). Plotinus’ philosophy thought that art was more than mere imitation, and the importance of the artists’ soul in creating art meant that they were now considered to be as creative as poets (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.44).

Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz write that although the ancient Greek conception of artists ‘failed to achieve concrete expression either in biography or in his social esteem,’ it was not lost in the Middle Ages and reemerged in the artists’ biographies of the Renaissance (1979, p.45). The effort spent on careful execution, which was prized in the Middle Ages, was now considered less important than artistic ecstasy, and an interest in the creative process, including artists’ sketches. Additionally, the nature of creativity and inspiration was more closely linked, not with divine sources, but something from within the artist themselves (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.18) With this view of artistic inspiration now at the heart of art theory, artists were honoured as divine beings in their own right, not only a conduit for them (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.48-49). Additionally, an artists’ natural endowment was still assumed, implying ‘that the artists is born an artist’ (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.50). In the Renaissance,
genius meant both the individual’s mentality, and also genius as an external existence (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.59).

The idea of the artist as a genius shows a further shift towards the more individualistic and secular belief that inspiration came from within the individual. Thomas Hobbes was the first to recognise the importance of imagination, and by the late 1700’s imagination was at the heart of artistic creativity (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.22). At this time, important distinctions could be made regarding the nature of genius; that it was divorced from the supernatural, was potential in every person, it was different from talent (which was considered more predictable and less extraordinary), and the creative output of genius and talent depended on the political atmosphere (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.22).

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Romantics, genius was innate and did not need education, so it would naturally flourish in a free society. In response to the Industrial Revolution and scientific rationalism, Romanticism placed an importance ‘on inner feelings as a natural and therefore democratic source of wisdom and artistic inspiration’ (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.23). These opposing forces in 18th – century society marked a break between intuitive art and intellectual science.

In 1735, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten finally gave a name to the philosophical branch of ‘aesthetics’, which had been present since Plato (Guyer, 2008). Immanuel Kant was one of the first to make his mark on this newly named area of thought. He believed that inspiration came from genius, although the source of genius was inexplicable and inaccessible, even to the artist. Kant thought that taste, in the artist and the audience, could be cultivated, but it was inherently tied to morality. Aesthetic judgment was similar to moral judgment, as both were believed to stem from the noumenal world. According to Donald Mayo, Kant’s aesthetic ideas had a profound and lasting influence on artistic thought (1995, p.31-33).

Friedrich Nietzsche believed that great art showed us the only truth we can know. For Nietzsche, there was a dichotomy between Dionysian and Apollonian forces, and a balance had to be met to create art. He believed that ancient Greece had best maintained this balance and in their tragic poetry, ‘the wild, formless
chaotic Dionysian instinct was structured into an Apollonian form and a work of art,’ (Mayo, 1995, p.48). Since Socrates, Nietzsche believed the Western world had favoured reason and repressed the Dionysian force, and this imbalance had created many of modern society’s problems. While writing *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche experienced a profound moment of artistic inspiration. In this book, he proposed the figure of the Ubermensch, who reconciles the two forces and brings salvation to Western culture (Mayo, 1995, p.47-52).

The turn of the 20th century saw a change towards ‘ antimaterialism, antielitism, antipositivism, and antirationality’ (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.26). Along with this, the work of Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx showed a return to belief in the validity of subjective, intuitive and preconscious thought (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.26).

*Non-Western cultures and philosophies*

Although a more comprehensive review of non-Western conceptions of creativity is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this section seeks to present a selection of these views, with a focus on the culture and philosophy of East Asia and the Asian subcontinent. For a more comprehensive review of contemporary creativity research from across the globe, see Kaufman and Sternberg’s *The International Handbook of Creativity* (2006), as well as the more traditional cultural views on creativity reviewed on a smaller scale in Todd I. Lubart’s chapter of *The Handbook of Creativity* (1999).

Robert S. Albert and Mark A. Runco write that there exists a fundamental difference between ancient Western and Eastern views of creativity. Early Hindus, Toaists, Buddhists, and Confucius believed that ‘creation was at most a kind of discovery or mimicry’ (Albert and Runco, 1999, p.18).

In China, from the Tang to Ming dynasties, religion was the dominant influence on culture and the prevailing artistic style during this time was a merger of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist ideas. The ancient Chinese thought that a painting captured reality. The influence of Taoism meant that the highest category of art
possible was an inevitable and effortless expression of harmony between the artist and the cosmos (Mayo, 1995, p.107). It was written of the artist Wen Yü K’o that while painting bamboo, he felt that his own body became bamboo, and Han Kan, who became a horse when he painted horses (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p.129).

In Hinduism, creativity is seen as a reinterpretation of traditional ideas, with less importance placed on originality than in the Western view. This reflects the cyclical nature of the Hindu view of the cosmos. In a 1976 study of 155 traditional Indian painters, it was found that the subjects described their creative process as a four-stage model based on the Yoga Sutras. The first stage involves mental preparation, including praying for inspiration from the god Vishvakarma, spirit of the creative process. The second stage involves identification with the subject matter, often to the point of becoming what is being painted. The third is personal insight, and the fourth is social communication of the personal realisations (Lubart, 1999, p.340, 342)

In contrast to the traditional Western view which places importance on the creative product, the Eastern view focuses on the benefit of the creative process. ‘Creativity involves a state of personal fulfillment, a connection to a primordial realm, or the expression of an inner essence or ultimate reality [...] Creativity is related to meditation because it helps one to see the true nature of the self, an object, or an event,’ creating a flash of illumination that causes artistic inspiration (Lubart, 1999, p.340, 342). Lubart finds this conception similar to humanistic psychology’s belief in creativity’s role in self-actualization. Kris and Kurz write that this conception of an artists’ state of ecstasy being an expansion of the ego ties into the Freudian ideas of art much more than traditional Western beliefs (Kurz and Kris, 1979, p.129).

Here is it interesting to note Lubart’s belief that there is a possible link between each culture and religion’s creation myth and their current conceptions of creativity. For instance Hinduism believes in the circular movement of the universe, leading to the importance of interpretation and process in society. The Judeo-Christian religions that shaped Western culture have a linear trajectory; a single,
finite act created the universe and therefore emphasis is placed on the originality and value of the product of creativity. It is important to note that a culture’s creation myth is only one of the cultural factors that feed into this topic. There is a multitude of other dimensions that may play a role in either facilitating or inhibiting creativity (Lubart, 1999, p.342-347).

The field of psychology

There was not a significant amount of research specifically into creativity until the second half of the 20th century (less than 0.2% of the entries in Psychological Abstracts up to 1950 (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.3)). While still a relatively small portion of the psychological research, creativity has been steadily growing in interest and popularity (up to 0.5% for articles from 1975 to 1994 (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.3)).

The Handbook of Creativity (1999), edited by Robert J. Sternberg, attempts to provide a comprehensive review of the field’s research. In the book’s concluding chapter, contributor Richard E. Mayer finds that the majority of the book’s other writers defined creativity by two important characteristics; as the creation of something both novel and valuable. However, Mayer sees room for improvement in this product-focused definition. In addition, there are numerous basic questions about the nature of creativity, which must be addressed further in the research. ‘Is creativity a property of products or processes or people? Is creativity a personal or social phenomenon? Is creativity common to all people or a unique characteristic of a select few? Is creativity a domain-general activity that is essentially the same in all contexts, or a domain-specific activity that depends on the context under consideration? Is creativity best conceived as a set of characteristics along which people may vary or as uniquely manifested in each creative individual?’ (Mayer, 1999, p.459). I believe that these questions are all important in distinguishing to what extent creativity research is applicable to inspiration, especially artistic inspiration.

Sternberg and Todd I. Lubart cite six ‘roadblocks’ and approaches or paradigms that have hindered and attempted to explain creativity. The first, most
ancient, and arguably, the most enduring paradigm is the mystical approach, already discussed in depth above.

**Early psychoanalysis and the psychodynamic approach**

Sigmund Freud saw art, specifically creative writing, as nothing more than wish-fulfillment. In Freud’s view, everything in the unconscious was once conscious and has been repressed. In childhood, play is our way of wish-fulfillment, but in adulthood, it is mainly relegated to night dreams and day dreams. He believed that the writer presents their most private fantasies in an aesthetic way, which prevents the audience from feeling the natural disgust that would come with such an intimate revelation. A work of art creates what Freud calls fore-pleasure, and the actual enjoyment comes from the easing of the audience’s own psychic tensions (Mayo, 1995, p.93-103).

Carl Jung defined two types of artistic creation, the psychological (sometimes called personalistic) and the visionary. The psychological work of art comes from conscious experience, which is then filtered into the artist’s work, deliberately creating a certain result. There is always an element of the rational in this work, in its execution, and in the audience’s understanding. Visionary art lacks rational explanation. Jung’s psychological theories include the concepts of symbols and archetypes, products of the collective unconscious, which are both employed in visionary art to allow a glimpse of the noumenal world. Unlike Freud, Jung believed that a work of art, especially visionary art, was psychologically autonomous from the artist. For Jung, true artistic greatness required a balance of the visionary and the psychological, the Dionysian and the Apollonian (Mayo, 1995, p.92-93).

The psychodynamic approach built on the work of Freud, but was hindered by its reliance on historical case studies, which could be methodologically flawed. Ernst Kris, co-writer of the aforementioned book on artists and a prominent psychoanalyst as well as art historian, developed the concepts of adaptive regression and elaboration to the field. ‘Adaptive regression, the primary process, refers to the intrusion of unmodulated thoughts in consciousness. Unmodulated thoughts can occur during active problem solving, but often occur during sleep, intoxication from
drugs, fantasies or daydreams, or psychoses. Elaboration, the secondary process, refers to the reworking and transformation of primary process material through reality-oriented, ego-controlled thinking,’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.6). Kubie argued for the importance of the preconscious, which may be the true source of creativity because it produces loose and vague, yet interpretable thoughts. Sternberg and Lubart write that recent work in the field have recognised the importance of both the primary and secondary thought processes (1999, p.6).

This work was mainly peripheral to the rest of psychoanalytical study at the time, with the possible exception of the Gestaltists. This group studied insight, which is only a part of creativity, and Sternberg and Lubart believe that their work only labeled, but did not characterise, the nature of insight (1999, p.6).

The pragmatic approach

Sternberg and Lubart believe that the pragmatic approach, which has been prevalent since the 1950’s, is equally as damaging as the mystical. The field of creativity research has been dominated, at least in society’s view, by researchers who were focused on practice over theory and experimentation. This led to Edward De Bono’s commercially-successful tools like ‘pluses’ and ‘thinking hats’, Osborn’s ‘brainstorming’, and von Oech’s various roles, such as ‘explorer, artist, judge, and warrior,’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.5).

The psychometric approach

Perhaps the most prevalent approach to creativity research in the field of psychology is the psychometric. In 1950, as a response to the case study approach used in early creativity research, Guilford proposed the study of everyday subjects through tasks that sought to measure their creativity. These tools included Guilford’s Unusual Uses Test (subjects are asked to name as many uses for a common object, such as a brick, that they can think of) and Torrance’s 1974 Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (where simple verbal and figural tasks are scored by fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration). While this helped the field along by easing the research process, this approach is also not without criticism. The main flaw often cited is the
psychometric approach’s simplification and objectification of what many researchers see as a complex and inherently subjective concept (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.6-7)

The cognitive approach

The cognitive approach is concerned with understanding the mental representations and processes in creative thought. Sternberg and Lubart cite the prototypical example of the work of Finke, Ward, and Smith in 1992, which produced the Geneplore (from ‘generate’ and ‘explore’) model of creativity (Nickerson, 1999, p.395). This model includes two main phases, iterated throughout the creative process, the first is a generative phase where ‘preinventive structures’ are created in the mind, and the second is an exploratory phase which builds upon the work of the first to form creative ideas. (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p. 7-8).

Similar to this is the famous cognitive model of creativity proposed by Graham Wallas in the early twentieth century. This four stage process is preparation, where one consciously works on the problem at hand, incubation, where the problem is set aside, but unconscious thought processes continue, illumination, or the flash of insight that one may call ‘inspiration’, and verification, where the solution found during the illumination stage is expanded upon (Weisberg, 1986, p.19-20).

However, these and other contemporary cognitive cognitive models are not without their critics in the field. Robert W. Weisberg argues against the presence of special creative thinking processes. For him, creativity involves normal cognitive processes, which create extraordinary products (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.8). Weisberg’s work on creativity, including the 1986 book Creativity: genius and other myths, deconstructs the famous examples of insight often cited by the psychological literature (see Brewster Ghiselin’s 1952 collection, The Creative Process). These ‘myths’ include Mozart being able to compose finished musical pieces seemingly without prior conscious thought, Coleridge’s ‘reverie’ while writing the poem ‘Kubla Khan’, and the leaps of insight experienced by scientific minds like Poincaré and Kekulé (Weisberg, 1986, p.1, 16, 18, 32).
The social-personality approach

The social-personality approach to creativity developed roughly the same time as the cognitive approach, but emphasises identifying certain personal traits and environmental factors, which may lead to creativity. In addition to many positive traits found by other researchers in the field, Amabile identified the importance of intrinsic motivation to creativity. Intrinsic motivation is ‘the ability to derive rewards from the activity itself rather than from external incentives like power, money, or fame,’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.196).

The above work of Todd I. Lubart on creativity across cultures is part of this approach. However, Lubart notes that many of the studies that explore creativity in non-Western contexts rely on the psychometric evaluation tool the Torrance Tests, which may be biased towards a Western perspective (1999, p.342-347).

Within the social-personality approach, I would like to discuss Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s work in particular, as he focused specifically on art students his in 1968, 1973, and 1976 studies. His work found that 'original art students tended to be sensitive, open to experiences and impulses, self-sufficient, uninterested in social norms and social acceptance. [...] Over the years, the trait that most consistently differentiated the successful artist from those who gave up a creative career has been the trait of cyclothymia, or a cold and aloof disposition.' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.192). Additionally, he believed that creativity is based more on problem-finding than problem-solving, and true originality is created by finding a solution to a previously unrecognised problem. The presence of intrinsic motivation in individual students was seen as a more helpful drive for their work than money or fame because they were more likely to persevere in the art domain, which is known for its lack of financial security and immediate social recognition (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.192-197).

However, Csikszentmihalyi came to believe that these factors did not present the full picture of creativity. Of the art students, women scored equal or higher than men in creativity, and the highest overall score was an African-American man, however, in follow-up studies, none of them had been as successful in their art
careers as the white male subjects. There seemed to be external factors that affected the success of these minority and women artists. Additionally, some students who had ranked low on creativity had become successful by what seemed like chance. This led Csikszentmihalyi to believe that if creativity was solely based on an individual's traits, these would be the same throughout history and across cultures, but this is not the case (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.198-205).

**The confluence approach**

Csikszentmihalyi is among a handful of other researchers to realise in the 1980's and 90's that a single approach to creativity, such as the cognitive or social personality approaches, only presents one part of the full picture. In a 1991 study of doctoral dissertations on creativity across domains, Wehner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Magyari-Beck came to the conclusion that research in these fields was approaching the topic like the fabled blind men feeling an elephant. This view led many researchers to develop the confluence approach to creativity research (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.9-10)

One confluence theory was developed by Csikszentmihalyi in light of his ongoing study into artists. He believes that creativity is developed by a system, which consists of three subsystems: the domain, the person, and a field. The subsystems are analogous to the evolutionary processes of variation, selection, and transmission. ‘Individuals produce variations in the domain; the field selects one variation among many; and adds it to the domain; and finally the domain transmits the selected variant to a new generation of individuals. In this sense, creativity is a special case of cultural evolution’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.204). The individual traits that facilitate creativity are dependent on the other two subsystems. Csikszentmihalyi gives an art-specific example of this, explaining that when abstract expressionism is the most popular style, artists who are emotionally imaginative and antisocial may tend to succeed in the field, however, when photorealism is popular, the favoured traits may be coolness, precision, and relative conformity (1990, p.205).
Although the findings of the literature review section will be discussed in depth towards the end of this dissertation, I would like to briefly reflect on the preceding selection of compelling and sometimes contradictory views. From the inception of the term ‘inspiration’, it has been weighted with mystic and mythical connotations. Even in ancient Greek, these connotations hindered the supposedly uninspired visual artists, and it is my belief that they continue to do so today. While demystifying and secularising creativity and inspiration, later philosophers and writers still placed an importance on genius and an artist’s natural talent. Only recently have Western thinkers and art and design educators attempted to make creativity an egalitarian concept, accessible to any practitioner or student. Through the psychological research on creativity, researchers have attempted a variety of approaches to further understand and facilitate this complex topic. I believe, regardless of their personal conception of inspiration, artists and designers will be able to find some interesting and useful aspect of the long and varied history of the term.

Personally, the most compelling aspect of this literature review for me is the Eastern conceptions of creativity. In my opinion, these seem to have always been more helpful than Western conceptions were to the Western artists and designers. A focus on the spiritual, meditative, and transformative creative process rather than the creative product so prized in Western cultures is in keeping with contemporary psychologists’ belief in the importance of intrinsic motivation. I believe that this perspective on creativity is much more helpful than the Western focus on the creative product above all else, which is too often at the expense of the creative individual. However, this is only my own view on what has been presented here, and other readers may find other elements equally compelling and useful.
Methodology: Interviews

To gain further insight into the library’s role in artistic inspiration, I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with the main stakeholders of the art and design disciplines; university-level tutors, academic librarians, and the artists and designers themselves. Because of the in-depth nature of the interviews, the scope was small; six participants were chosen, representing two of each category of stake-holder. However, while trying to be somewhat representative of the variety of art and design education, I was not attempting to find generalisable facts or gain statistical validity. This portion of the research was intended to explore in more depth a variety of the opinions and ideas on the topic of libraries and artistic inspiration. The creative process and inspiration are very subjective, and one must recognise that it is impossible to generalise about, or even fully encompass the range of possible experiences and views.

Sampling

For this part of the project, I chose to define art and design somewhat more narrowly than in previous sections. For instance, while writers and poets were discussed in the literature review, they would not have been included as an interviewee. My emphasis on the more traditional idea of visual art and design is ultimately due to my background in illustration, although I would not have discounted other artistic areas such as performance art. Definitions of what is art or design were ultimately not found to be a major issue. If potential participants chose to reply to an email looking for ‘visual artists’ they most likely identified themselves as one, and I did not have to question whether anyone met the criteria.

It was my own oversight not to specifically include designers in the wording of my adverts. I was not consciously disqualifying this group, because I was still contacting many people who would prefer to identify as designers rather than artists. I feel that my inclusion of two illustrators and one graphic designer in the sample has actually skewed it overall more towards design than fine art. After
gradually moving away from illustration, I had become less aware of the difference between the two, although the distinction is very important.

Because this research serves to collect a range of ideas and opinions, and not a representative survey of the field, my supervisor and I agreed from the proposal stage that a convenience sample of interviewees would suffice. Although not ideal, the main benefit of this method was that it fit into the limited resources available for finding potential volunteers. Using a convenience sample was not seen as a major issue, if the limitations were acknowledged. The potential drawbacks of such a method are that certain types of people may have been drawn to such a project, which could affect the discussion. For instance, the fact that these participants replied to an email about a masters level LIS project focusing on artistic inspiration and the library may show that they were already more interested and invested in libraries, academic research, and the topic of artistic inspiration than those who did not respond. However, it is worth noting that the variety of views and opinions on these topics seem to show that this was not the case.

A minor road-block in the process was the lack of response from current art and design students. In the proposal stage, I had identified the potential issue that students, especially undergraduates, would be out of contact during the summer holiday, which was the sole time frame available for conducting the research. However, I thought finding at least one undergraduate and one postgraduate to interview was still a feasible goal. One post-graduate design student replied to my email, but due to a busy schedule, it transpired late in the interview stage that she was not actually available until after the time for interviews had already passed. Despite my best efforts to find undergraduate art students, none responded to any of the methods of contact. In light of the over-abundance of LIS studies focusing on art and design students, I decided that it was not a major problem that this group was not represented in my interviews.

Because of my personal contacts with artists and illustrators, I decided to highlight a group that has been identified as under-represented in the LIS literature, emerging practicing artists and designers (Cowan, 2004, Hemmig, 2008, and Mason
The benefit of this choice was that I was able to interview friends and illustration colleagues. Because we had a pre-existing connection, the interviewees possibly felt more comfortable discussing their views on the topic with me, and less time was needed to explain the background and context on both sides. The main limitation of this choice was that I know only fellow illustrators, and therefore we may present a view specific to our discipline. Additionally, in using friends, there is a tendency for them to hold similar views and beliefs, which would hinder my goal of variety in that respect. Another possible disadvantage of using friends is that they may be more willing than other interviewees to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear. For example, when asking about their views on librarians, the illustrators may have felt pressure to be positive towards the profession knowing that it is my field of study. Although I cannot know for certain, I feel that both illustrators were not influenced unduly by our friendship, and I was surprised to find that their views were very different than my own in some cases. I feel that the depth of discussion achieved outweighed the disadvantages of a convenience sample.

**Finding participants**

Potential interview participants were contacted through a number of channels. My use of online adverts, art and design department mailings, and in-person flyering were all mostly unsuccessful. The art and design librarians were contacted by email through the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS) mailing list (see Appendix 1), and the interviewees were chosen from the several respondents based on their location and level of topic knowledge (in the case of arts librarian Alan). The arts tutors were contacted via email addresses found on their online staff research profiles, available on the University of the Arts London website. I began by contacting ten individuals based on their online descriptions, and the two interviewees were chosen from those who responded to my email (see Appendix 1). Finally, the two illustrators interviewed were the personal contacts most readily available and actively producing artwork at the moment.
**Interview questions**

The six discussions took the form of face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ institution, or in the case of the illustrators, at home in their studio spaces. The discussion lasted about an hour in each case, and was recorded in the form of both notes and an audio-recording. The participants had all signed an interview consent form prior to the actual interview and were aware of what the process would entail.

A series of interview questions was created, which served as a guide for the discussion. There were two sets of questions, one for the artists and tutors, and another for the librarians (see Appendix 3). Both covered roughly the same topics, although the changes took into account the varying perspectives and experiences of each group.

The purpose of these questions was mainly to explore the ideas and opinions of the individuals being interviewed, but they were free to speak more generally as well. Although while finding interviewees, I was mainly discussing the project in the context of the academic library, this was expanded to include libraries of any kind. Additionally, the inclusion of the two illustrators, who are both academically unaffiliated, meant that the discussion was further shifted away from the academic environment.

The structure of the discussion varied with each interview. In the case of the art and design tutors, I strayed from the pre-set questions considerably, because the discussion tended towards the conceptual. With the illustrators, I tended to stay with the pre-set structure of the discussion, which was more practically-minded.

When compiling and analysing the data, I found that my hand-written notes were sufficient, and did not end up using the audio-recordings I had made. The majority of each discussion is presented below, arranged conceptually. I have also chosen to present a selection of edited questions in the main body of the text, to contextualise the interview responses further. Little was left out of the final write-up, and what was not included was in the interest of brevity only.
Participants’ backgrounds

Despite being a convenience sample, I still attempted to collect a varied group of people. The six individuals interviewed come from range of disciplines and career levels. I felt that this helped to balance the fact that both practitioners had similar educational and artistic backgrounds. The personal information presented here was agreed in the consent form prior to the interviews.

The two art and design tutors interviewed were Stephen Carter, Joint XD Pathway Leader on the BA Fine Art course at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, and Dr. Russell Bestley, Course Director for the MA Graphic Design course at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London.

The two arts librarians interviewed were Alessia Borri, Assistant Academic Support Librarian at Chelsea and Central Saint Martin’s, University of the Arts London, and Alan, Subject Librarian at an art university in the south of England. Despite my original intention to limit the research to London-based interviewees, I decided to include Alan because of his experience and research in teaching information literacy to art and design students. I had come across Alan’s research earlier in this project’s process, and it seemed a fortuitous coincidence that he had responded to my blanket ARLIS email. This led to my choice to expand my parameters slightly to include one participant based outside of London.

I met illustrator Yana Elkassova while we were studying on Camberwell College of Arts’ BA Illustration course. After graduating together in 2010, Yana has been working in a design role at a sixth-form school and free-lancing in her spare time. Despite our similar educational background, I met illustrator Wiggy Cheung through a mutual friend after we had both finished our degrees. Wiggy completed her foundation degree in Illustration at Camberwell College of Art in 2005 and went on to do two years of a BA in Digital Media at the London College of Communication in 2006-2008. She is currently working in a non-art related role, and creates and exhibits personal work in her spare time.
It is worth noting that all the participants except Alan are either employed or have studied at one of the University of the Arts London’s colleges. Because of the popularity, size, and variety of the university, I feel this is still somewhat representative of the academic art and design stakeholders in London as a whole.

Interviews

Changing attitudes in art and design

Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of my interviews was discovering that graphic design tutor Russell Bestley does not use the terms ‘inspiration’ or even ‘creativity’ on his course. It was an oversight on my part not to include designers as separate from artists up to that point in my research. Russell and his students do not consider themselves to be artists, and therefore their creative process is thought to be very different.

Russell chooses not to use the terms ‘inspiration’ and ‘creativity’ because of their unhelpful connotations. ‘Inspiration’ implies the mystical idea of divine inspiration, or even inspiration purely from inside oneself. Additionally, ‘creativity’ has connotations that link it to the idea of ‘genius’, and imply a special, innate ability of an individual. Therefore, eschewing these terms is a way of empowering art and design students and making their practice more egalitarian.

Reflecting on my own experiences at Camberwell College, perhaps I should not have been surprised that terms such as ‘artist’, ‘inspiration’ and ‘creativity’ are avoided. As an illustration student, I would have cringed to call myself an artist, although I did recognise that many people did not know what being an ‘illustrator’ entails. I saw my discipline as closer to graphic design than fine art, because both usually work to paid briefs. However, after graduation, I became slightly more accustomed to identifying myself as an artist because I was doing mostly unpaid, personal work. Additionally, I remember my tutors consciously avoiding the word ‘style’ and instead encouraged us to talk about developing our ‘visual language’. I
believe these seemingly small changes are similar to the choice of terms that Russell uses on his course at LCC. Art and design is still so intertwined with its mystical past that within the world of art education, these changes make a huge difference to the way that students see themselves and their process. Although people outside these disciplines may not see the difference between an artist and an illustrator, or an artistic style and a ‘visual language’, it is important to use these terms to distance the domain from its mystical origins.

This progressive view in art and design education is echoed by fine art tutor Stephen Carter. Stephen’s job title is Joint XD Pathway Leader on CSM’s BA Fine Art course. The ‘XD’ portion of this is opposed to the 2D or 3D pathways that students may choose to follow. The XD pathway is concerned with the space outside of the gallery or institution, and the work is often in the form of site-based projects. For instance, Stephen’s own work is inspired by the city, and explores how people understand, create, and interact with their urban surroundings. Stephen believes that art and design education has changed for the better. When he began his career, teaching used to be activity-based, and he says it has now become about ‘areas of concern’.

*Information for the creative process*

*Where do you find the information you need for your creative process? How do you find it?*

Illustrator Yana Elkassova finds most of the information for her creative process from the internet. Additionally, Yana will sometimes go to a specific place for research, such as a recent visit to the Natural History Museum to do research for an educational computer game about extinct animals.

Illustrator Wiggy Cheung mainly uses photos to inform her creative process. She works from her own personal photos, candid shots from other people, and sometimes from those of professional photographers. Wiggy is drawn to interesting faces she sees in person or in portraits. Her work is created through a mix of imagination and reference photos. For her previous illustration work, Wiggy says
that she used to be inspired by old horror films, and this sense of the awkward and uncomfortable is still carried through to her current work in the imaginative additions to otherwise realistic drawings.

**Sources from across domains**

Graphic design tutor Russell Bestley sees the importance of using cross-disciplinary resources for his and his students’ work. He spoke of finding interesting materials in other areas of the university library while a student, and cited the example of the surrealists being influenced by mechanical engineering. Perhaps the only negative aspect he could think of regarding the LCC library was its lack of breadth. However, this may be an issue inherent in all specialised art and design libraries.

Russell Bestley sees an element of creativity present in the way students must approach their research. He gives an example that is coincidentally quite close to the one cited in Derek Toyne’s study; a student researching the lifecycle of a butterfly. Russell’s student chose this topic for her major project, but found that there were no books in the library showing this exact process. However, she was able to find analogous information from seemingly unrelated disciplines, which helped inform her work.

Fine art tutor Stephen Carter cites the inclusion of ethics on his course as a helpful addition to the students’ overall education. While ethics is considered to be a branch of philosophy and not necessarily a usual part of a fine art course, he feels that students must learn to understand their aesthetic judgments. The students find something exciting, or new, or cool, but they can’t explain why. Stephen says that there is always some point of view; ‘art is never just about nothing’.

While film subject librarian Alan is only responsible for the film-related books, he recognises the importance of these students looking to other sections of the library, such as fine art. The culture and psychology sections of the arts university library were also boosted recently.
The process of finding information

How do you find the information you need for your creative process?

Yana often begins with a set idea, and then does research which serves to expand on her initial concept, or take it in a different direction. At her design job, she often searches for images on Google, using the Advanced Search option to find ones that are large enough and free to use.

Wiggy finds information for her artwork by browsing through her personal photo collection. She will also look in magazines, sometimes cutting out images of people and collaging them together with drawn animals heads. Books with images of figures are helpful resources, whether they are meant for artistic reference or not. Wiggy says human anatomy books with interesting poses are an especially good resource, and she recently bought a copy of Grey’s Anatomy.

Wiggy also finds images on sites such as Flickr, but says she often ends up getting side-tracked while browsing online. Some days, she has a clear idea of what she wants to draw, and sometimes, she says she just can’t find anything. Wiggy says the internet tends to be too wide to pin down sometimes.

How do you find information in the library?

To find information in the library, Yana says she usually tends to put in keywords on a theme or search for a specific author’s name. She says that when looking for images, she will often look at all the books on the topic, because this is the only way to determine the quality and amount of imagery in each one. She finds little indication from the library catalogue on how useful a book will be in this respect.

Wiggy says that she finds information in the library by beginning with a vague idea and searching the catalogue for related keywords. She will often choose something from the catalogue or the shelves by picking the most interesting looking title. Wiggy tends to browse the reference section of the public library for books on subjects such as wildlife and medicine. She finds many useful images in older library
books that she would pass by if she was looking for something to buy. She doesn’t often go into a library looking for a particular book, however, in the local public library she used to visit, Wiggy found it too difficult to browse because the layout made it hard to glance at the books’ spines.

*Do aesthetic judgments about the library have an effect on how you use it?*

In answer to this question, Yana says that they do. If a library is laid out in a modern way, for instance with book-shop-like displays and armchairs for reading, she is more inclined to stay there. However, she realises that some libraries do not have the capacity for such features. Yana says that the way libraries choose to use their limited space affects the way she uses them. For instance, she finds that smaller libraries near council estates often choose to have more videos, and less of what she calls ‘niche’ items, such as graphic novels.

Wiggy says that the aesthetics of a library do affect the way she uses it. She is hesitant to go into older, unwelcoming libraries with few library users. Wiggy finds newer libraries to be more accessible, but even in these cases, she sometimes comes across ‘archaic’ computer systems, which completely hinder her search.

As someone who tends to browse, Russell Bestley finds that visuals are important. He calls himself and graphic designers in general ‘visual tarts’ who are affected by the aesthetics of the library. He agrees that consistency in the visual brand across the arts university is important, and that often the graphic elements used in the library need to be more carefully considered to appeal to art and design students.

*What does it take for you to be satisfied with the information found?*

In answer to this question, Yana says that it is different for different things. With visuals, she sometimes needs something very specific, such as a certain pose. If she cannot find a satisfactory image in print or online, she will sometimes ask others to pose while she sketches, or she will take a photo of them to draw from. Yana says
that in other instances, it is difficult to know when the information found will be enough for the project at hand.

Wiggy says she is only satisfied with the information found for her creative process when she has completed a sketch she is happy with. She says that sometimes a reference photo can be perfect, but the drawing itself may have no movement. More visual information may be needed in this case to be satisfied with how the final artwork will turn out.

**Do you think artists find information differently than non-artists?**

Fine art tutor Stephen Carter sees a difference in the information behaviour of artists and practitioners like himself and those in the field who focus much more on writing and theory. The latter tend to be more thorough and measured in their research process. Stephen compares himself to a magpie in the way he collects information for his work. He says he always has his ‘antennae out’, and is always looking for opportunities to see art.

Alan says that he thinks artists can ‘get away’ without doing research much more easily than professionals in other disciplines. For example, research is essential for scientists, but for artists, accuracy is less important. Alan believes this is different when students are learning theory, it is a lot harder for students to pass if they haven’t done the proper research.

For Alan, information literacy involves creativity; making connections between disparate concepts. As part of this, he gives students a ‘motivational talk’, which emphasises the importance of research in the creative process. While he thinks that the slides in his talk must appeal visually, there isn’t a ban on using text for art students, something he has seen at other arts universities. Alan asks the students to record their research journey in a journal. He says there is no restriction on using Google or Wikipedia, as some lecturers do, but he emphasizes the importance to students of being aware of the source of information.

Alan uses the example of a student drawing a samurai character. The student may not necessarily research what samurais actually looked like, but just draw the
character off the top of their head. Alan sees this as a lack of curiosity. He recognises that sometimes simplicity is better than complexity, for instance, there is such a thing as a drawing being over-researched. However, most importantly, he thinks that a student can’t decide what level of realism or simplicity to put into the character without first doing the research.

Alessia says that at the CSM and Chelsea libraries, they work as best they can to meet the needs of different art and design students. At Central Saint Martin’s, she supports the jewelry design students, but finds that this group rarely uses the library, although they do use the materials collection. From the feedback she receives, she knows that the fine artists at Chelsea College are satisfied with their library. They use it often, especially for theory-related work.

Working at both Chelsea and Central Saint Martin’s, Alessia was able to contrast the main library users at each college; fine artists and fashion designers respectively. For fine artists, the library seems to be their second stop in the creative process, after receiving recommendations from their tutors. The librarians can then expand on the tutor’s recommendations. Some fine artists browse in the library by an artist’s name, but Alessia believes that most of them know what specific item they’re looking for when they come into the library.

However, the emphasis on browsing is much different for the CSM fashions students. They frequently look through many images, pick things off the shelves, and leave them in a big pile, resulting in a marked difference in tidiness between the two libraries where Alessia works. To her, this shows a difference in the frame of mind of fashion students.

Library use

How often do you use a library of any kind?

Art tutor Stephen Carter uses his local public library, personal library, the British Library, and bookstores for his personal interests and professional work. His institution, Central Saint Martin’s also recognises the importance of a library
environment for its staff and students, and has consolidated all its collections into its new site near King’s Cross. However, Stephen feels that his students tend to do research differently than he does. They tend to rely on Wikipedia, and Stephen thinks that perhaps they need nothing more than a smart phone to conduct their research, despite the print resources provided by CSM. Stephen feels that it is important to see the physical object in question, for instance a painting in a gallery, or a part of London. After all, his students are paying a significant amount of money and sometimes traveling quite far to study in London, and he feels they should be taking advantage of what the city has to offer.

Illustrator Yana Elkassova uses a library one or two times per month. She says that this is mainly for her art-related research, since she does not have as much time to read for pleasure as she used to.

What do you use the library for?

Yana uses libraries mainly for finding images for her creative process. In some cases, she finds that the images in books are better to work from than the low-resolution images found online. Yana also uses the library for the textual research involved in many of her competition entries. For example, for a recent competition, it was necessary for her to read some of the work of Marcel Proust, which she found in her local library instead of buying.

In terms of images, Yana finds that art libraries are much better for such sources. She remembers finding a book at the library in Camberwell College that featured only images of children in various poses, a great help to her work at the time. She finds that public libraries usually have fewer choices in terms of imagery sources.

Wiggy says that she doesn’t use libraries very often, but feels she should do so. When she was studying, she used the academic library quite a lot, and says that such specialist art libraries are great resources. Wiggy now finds that public libraries don’t have as many image resources, and she tends to look online instead. She says she used to visit her local public library to look at the magazines.
Buying books

Arts librarian Alessia Borri provided an example of one international student who showed up at the library at the end of term with a considerable collection of books that she wanted to donate. The student had bought them throughout the year, but all the items could have been taken out from the library. However, because the student could afford to buy them, she had chosen to do this, despite the availability of her academic library.

Russell Bestley prefers to buy books over using public libraries, because of their lack of relevant items. However, he recognises that this is a privilege of his financial situation that he is able to do this.

Wiggy says that she will often buy textual information for her artwork online. For instance, she says that it is hard to find biographies of contemporary illustrators anywhere else. Despite the expense, she chooses to buy such books and has amassed a considerable personal collection.

Artists and designers’ views of libraries and librarians

Do you think that society’s view of libraries and librarians, artists, and the concept of inspiration have affected the way libraries and artists interact?

Arts librarian Alan works to break down the misconceptions held by art students about their creative process, and how research and the library can play a role. He believes that many art students have a fear of the library, and perceive it as only being applicable to their academic work.

Alan says he finds that students assume certain things about the library. For instance, some students seemed to think that the library only held books, and that it was always silent. At his university’s library, this is certainly not the case, as the majority of the space is considered to be a ‘group study’ area, with a separate room for silent study. The library also has a large DVD collection, which is especially helpful for Alan’s film students.
Alan found that academic staff also have misconceptions about the library. It was clear to him from a discussion with a faculty member about public library closures that they had very different views of the sector. To him, advocates of libraries need to do much more to break down these stereotypes.

Alan believes that his students are well provided for in terms of resources in the library, but some frustration that they do have may be down to their misconceptions regarding the nature of research. Sometimes, he finds that students assume a piece of information already exists somewhere, when there may be a good reason that it doesn’t. He gives the example of a student wanting to know more about the TV show ‘Game of Thrones’. Because it is a relatively new programme, nothing may have been written about it from an academic perspective. Alan tries to teach his students to be more creative with their research, and look to peripheral topics for the answer they’re looking for. He thinks that this belief in the one right piece of information existing for every question may be linked to the student’s pre-university education.

Alessia pointed out that because there is no obligation for schools in the U.K. to have a library, university may be the first place where students encounter one. While she recognises that students may initially believe in the stereotypes of libraries, Alessia thinks that they are quickly able to see the reality of libraries once they come to university.

Although Wiggy says that she can only speak for herself in this respect, she does feel that the stereotypes of libraries and librarians have affected her. She knows that these are untrue in the case of many of the libraries she has visited, but the stereotype is still her initial view of these places and people. She says she is hesitant to approach librarians because her initial idea of them is that they would prefer to sit and stamp books all day.

How do you feel about the library?
In answer to this question, both illustrators’ responses were positive. Yana said that she generally likes libraries. While she is usually precious about her time, when she visits a library, she feels she can relax, get lost, and not worry about wasting time. Wiggy believes that libraries are a valuable resource that she should take advantage of more often. She recognises that the library’s resources are especially useful for students and young children.

*How do you feel about librarians?*

When I asked this question of both illustrators, there was a difference in view that could be simply a matter of their extroverted or introverted tendencies. As a naturally outgoing person, Yana speaks from experience when she says that, on the whole, she finds librarians to be a friendly, helpful, and humorous group. For her, it is not a big leap to be able to converse with them, because they are educated and intelligent people, but still down-to-earth. On the other hand, Wiggy says that she has never really interacted with librarians, beyond the occasional person coming up and asking if she needs any assistance. However, she generally does not talk to librarians.

Although libraries are not a significant source of information for his work, Russell believed in the importance of librarians as cultural gatekeepers. While the increasing prevalence of web 2.0 and self-publishing is more egalitarian, the downside is that there is less quality control, because one can now circumvent traditional publishers. Russell sees the librarian’s role as guiding users’ selection and allowing for ways to navigate information. He cites blogs as another way of providing this, but concedes that bloggers are not usually paid for this service.

*Librarians’ views of artists and designers*

I was curious to see if the librarians I talked to were actually as negative towards their users as the ones cited in Stam’s 1995 study. However, as both librarians had some kind of art-related background, it seemed obvious that their attitudes toward artists and designers would not be as judgmental. Alan did his first degree in film and media and Alessia studied art history in her native Italy. However,
Alessia said that there was a large difference between the academic study of art history and working with art and design practitioners.

*Have you worked with library users who are not artists? How do you feel about working with artists?*

Having previously worked in public and museum libraries, Alessia finds a few differences between the artists and non-artists she has worked with. However, these differences were not as drastic as the ones cited in previous LIS studies of art and design students. According to Alessia, the art and design students she serves tend to be very nice and appreciative of help, but perhaps a bit forgetful and in need of extra guidance. In general, she finds that artists and designers are not as practically-minded as other library users, but she thinks that this may go along with the perception of artists as being ‘away with the fairies’. Alessia recognises that the stereotypes of art students are still very much alive outside art schools. However, she believes that there is an element of truth to some of these views, citing the example of art students tending to live in certain areas of London.

**Defining inspiration**

*How would you define inspiration?*

Fine art tutor Stephen Carter said that inspiration always comes from outside the artists’ head. He talked extensively about what was inspiring to him, such as the city, but not specifically about cognitive or emotional process involved in inspiration.

Russell Bestley, despite consciously not using the word ‘inspiration’, still finds certain things inspiring. For him, inspiration is a better understanding of the problem, and he agrees that it is about making mental connections. However, Russell also stresses that the creative process is iterative, and he is interested in the journey that one must take to create something. Serendipity also plays a role for Russell. This is accounted for by looking at a varied mix of resources and taking a ‘broad brush’ approach.
Alessia Borri’s first degree is in art history, so her lack of artistic background was perhaps a factor in why she initially struggled to come up with her personal definition of inspiration. For her, inspiration was much more about serendipity. She defined it as something interesting that you don’t expect to find, but come across in a book or in the street. In her view, inspiration happens when you don’t look for it.

Illustrator Wiggy Cheung described inspiration as a motivating ‘spark’. She said that when she is inspired, she feels like she could draw all day, forgetting to eat or sleep, but pleased with what she’s doing. For Wiggy, this could be triggered, for instance, by seeing an image, reading something, or visiting an exhibition or gallery. Wiggy says that being inspired is defined by the satisfaction and excitement she experiences.

Wiggy gave a recent example of inspiration from a trip to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. She said she saw an ‘amazing’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘intense’ painting of a bull by Glenn Brown. Although she was camping at a music festival on her trip, she had the urge to go home and start painting immediately. Wiggy said that she couldn’t stop thinking about the painting, and looking up everything about it online.

For arts librarian Alan, inspiration is always based on something that already exists. The only way to come across that inspirational thing is to do the research, keep an open mind, and look at other subject areas. Alan notes that the other important way the library can play a role in inspiration is to further document and archive what is being created now, because it could be inspiring in the future.

Alan has talked to students who seen to implicitly ascribe to a quite mystical view of inspiration and creativity. Some believe that their ideas come from the ‘ether’, so to speak. However, some students also perceive that there is much more to inspiration than this.

I found Yana’s conception of inspiration the most intriguing out of all the interviews. Throughout this research, I had developed a bias against the divine view of inspiration because of its detrimental results. However, Yana ascribes to what is best described as a version of this divine conception. Despite for the most part
sharing the same experience of higher education, on the surface, our views of inspiration deviated immensely.

Yana believes, much like the traditional view that inspiration comes from outside of one’s self, from an unknown place. She describes it as divine, godly, and magical. For her, inspiration is something you can’t pinpoint or define, but she feels that it is exciting and motivating. While Yana is not a spiritual person, she says that inspiration feels like how she thinks believers conceive of a religious experience. Yana remembers talking to a religious person who said that she couldn’t define God. For Yana, art is the closest she gets to such a concept. It is so big and encompasses so much. She calls the aesthetic experience ‘sublime’.

Despite this belief, Yana does not think that a more scientific approach to studying inspiration would take anything away from her view. She says she would be interested to know what the psychological research has to say on the topic, and she doesn’t want to be blissfully ignorant of such demystifying views on inspiration.

For Yana, the process of inspiration is a collection of things building up to a point of inspiration ‘where it all slots together’. She gives the example of visiting the spy museum in Washington D.C., and being inspired to create a new Russian doll series by both the virtual and physical environments. However, this was an instance where she was readily able to pinpoint the specific moment, and other times inspiration occurs as more of a build-up. She says that often, inspiration is part of the ‘summation of a life’s worth of visual intake’. For instance, when she is creating work for a competition in response to a brief, the inspiration for the project is often more in terms of stylistic or visual components, and not the subject matter of the work.

Time is another factor in Yana’s inspiration. When she is creating work for a short deadline, finding inspiration is difficult, but the same is true if the project is too prolonged as well. For a short time frame, often she needs to already have had the inspiration for the project from a previous experience; otherwise she says she is liable to create something she’s not happy with.
Finding inspiration

Alessia believes that the points of inspiration she witnesses in the library are different for fine art and fashion design students. Fine artists, in her view, tend to come into the library after they have already formulated an idea for their work, and the library helps them to follow up on that idea, or serves as the catalyst to change the idea. Alessia thinks that fashion designers tend to come into the library to find inspiration itself, mainly from magazines. However, this is difficult for Alessia to verify, as she is not the subject librarian for these students.

Do you think inspiration is more readily found in physical or virtual environments?

For Yana, inspiration happens in both physical and virtual environments. However, she says she is not quite a ‘virtual slave’ just yet, and does tend to find inspiration more in physical environments. She says that for her, inspiration usually happens in the real world, and she goes to the internet for research.

Wiggy says that she comes across her best ideas from inspiration found in physical environments. Seeing something with one’s own eyes and experiencing the atmosphere of the surrounding environment is very important for Wiggy, and she says that virtual environments will never live up to this. Her best drawings come from seeing something in person, and drawing it from a previous sketch or her own memory. However, she says that it is often easier for her to look for inspiration online, but she ascribes this tendency to laziness. That said, Wiggy says she does come across a lot of useful inspiration blogs, such as FFFound.com. These allow her to see more than she possibly could in person, and she finds them great for ‘leafing through’. Wiggy nevertheless feels that virtual environments tend to provide quantity over quality when it comes to possible inspiration.

Do you/your students intentionally seek out inspiration? Do you/your students unintentionally find inspiration?

For Stephen, finding inspiration is an intentional process, but not always as intentional as a proper search. Finding inspiration for him is a way of becoming ‘un-
stuck’ when he feels stuck in his work. He does this intentionally by, for instance going out to study a painting in a gallery. Stephen gave the example of a student who was from a northern Scottish island, and was inspired by growing up in those remote surroundings. For her, inspiration was not about going out and finding something in her current urban surroundings, she was able to be inspired by recalling her childhood. However, without knowing what helps them find inspiration, Stephen finds that students often don’t know how to become ‘unstuck’.

Yana says that although she intentionally seeks more visual information, she does not intentionally seek inspiration. She says that instead, inspiration finds her. Yana believes that inspiration can be found anywhere. She could be doing something boring, and while her thoughts are wandering, she may have an idea. Yana also finds that the time before going to sleep is good for revisiting an idea she’s already had. She says that her thinking is fluid, semi-conscious, and her thoughts lose their rigidity. Yana says that this is a task she sometimes sets herself to aid inspiration.

Wiggy says that she intentionally seek inspiration in such places as museums and galleries. However, she finds that the best inspiration is what she comes across accidentally. Wiggy believes that inspiration can be accidentally found in the strangest places.

The importance of awareness

Both art and design tutors spoke of the importance of being aware and open to inspirational finds. When asked about his ideal environment for inspiration, Russell spoke of an environment that allowed him to encounter information by chance when he wasn’t looking for it. This shows a clear link to the information behaviours discussed above, even down to the use of the same term.

Because of the importance of the city to his work, awareness and openness is an integral part of tutor Stephen Carter’s creative process. He finds inspiration all around him, and doesn’t think it is difficult to come across. However, one must open one’s senses to inspiration. According to Stephen, the enemy of this process is being
a creature of habit, going about the same routine each day. He agreed that being aware and open was a conscious decision on his part to help his creative process.

Interestingly, Stephen found a link between our discussion and an idea present in the work of Roland Barthes about the importance of re-reading. Barthes said that only children and the elderly are allowed to re-read something, and it was part of the consumer culture to only read a book once. Barthes was writing before much of our current media was invented, but it applies to newer forms of information as well. Stephen believes in the importance of going back to an item or a place, and finding more in it that was not discovered previously. He often revisits paintings in London galleries and often finds something new each time.

When asked if she thought her process of finding inspiration was tied to being aware and perceptive, Yana said it could be, but sometimes she finds that she is surprised at how unaware she is. She doesn’t necessarily take in more than anyone else, but she notices the things she wants to notice. Yana disagrees with what she calls the popular belief in a ‘creative filter’. She gives the example of seeing a rainbow on a recent trip to Russia, and her young cousin telling an elaborate, creative story of how he had painted it in the sky. His mother claimed that he noticed what she didn’t, and a relative said that Yana was like that as well. However, she is unsure of this, and says that often, people may simply prefer to believe in such a concept without any evidence of it.

For Yana, finding inspiration is less of a matter of a ‘creative filter’ than it is of taste. She says that on a recent trip to Prague, she made a point of observing all the beautiful architecture, but much of life is full of routine, and one stops noticing the new things in the environment. Perhaps as illustrators, we tend to put our own narrative on to what we see. Yana’s natural curiosity also leads her to notice and question things that others maybe would not. However, she doesn’t necessarily think that curiosity is a characteristic specific to creative people.
Teaching inspiration and creativity

Do you think it is possible to teach/learn to cultivate inspiration?

Fine arts tutor Stephen Carter said he believes inspiration is already being taught on courses such as his. During a three year course in fine art, Stephen thinks that students can develop as much as they would in 15 years on their own. Their experiences help them to understand much more than just fine art; he feels they learn to understand themselves, their materials, and their processes.

Wiggy believes that part of the reason people go to art school is to learn to facilitate inspiration. Studying different forms of art and learning how it is intended to affect people has helped Wiggy in her practice.

In Yana’s view, although the technical side of art requires practice, inspiration can’t be taught because it is a cognitive process. When asked if she thinks it is possible to teach or learn to cultivate inspiration, Yana said that it is only possible to create circumstances which increase its chances, such as directing someone to get out and see a certain place. In her view, inspiration, like love, must happen naturally and can’t be forced. Yana believes that everyone is inspired by something. For instance, she believes that science is also creative, and scientists seem to be inspired and have a sense of joy in their work.

Do you think that personal features affect the way and frequency with which individuals find inspiration?

Yana thinks that being inspired may be tied to one’s attitude towards life. For her, it is difficult to understand how someone can be bored, because, as a creative person, she is always thinking and doing something. People say that she is quite a happy person, and when unhappy she is at her least motivated. However, sadness can also fuel her creative work too, but in a different way. When she is happy, Yana tends to draw more, but sadness leads her to do more creative writing. She is not sure why her two creative outputs work in such a way. Being a social person also has its downsides too, says Yana. When she is sitting and painting in her room, she usually doesn’t have the chance to interact with others. She believes that less social
people can become a bit more ‘obsessed’ with their work, which in her view, helps the creative process.

**The library’s role in inspiration**

*Does the library play a role in you/your students’ inspiration?*

Fine art tutor Stephen Carter said the short answer to this question is yes. The library provides a quiet place to read and reflect, which serves an important role in the creative process.

Alan said that he personally finds the most inspiration from the internet and TV. While the library may be just one of the many places that his students find inspiration, Alan believes it is the best place to go to follow up on inspiration with the necessary research. Because Alan believes that inspiration always comes from others, he thinks that a hub of resources, such as the library creates a potentially higher chance of inspiration. However, Alan believes the same could be said of TV or the internet.

Alessia Borri believes that students do come across inspiring items where she works, especially in the archives and special collections. Students leave these areas very impressed and some say that they have been inspired. Alessia was even able to provide an example of this from earlier that day, when an artist had come in to look at a specific book. The item had a unique binding with rings, which the user found very interesting and wanted to replicate the technique. One project set to the students even asks them to create a postcard inspired by a chosen book in the special collections.

When asked if the library played a role in her inspiration, Yana said that it can, but generally doesn’t. The content found in a library can play a part in her inspiration, but with the exception of the element of quiet, the library environment does not play a role in Yana’s inspiration.
Wiggy says that the library still does occasionally play a role in her inspiration. As a student, she would use the academic library all the time, but she currently only ‘dips in and out’ of her local public library when she is stuck, and unable to find anything useful online.

The ideal environment for inspiration

If you could create the ideal environment for facilitating inspiration, what would it be like?

For Stephen Carter, his ideal environment could be in any space, for instance, CSM is now in an old building that had been reconfigured to suit the university’s needs. His ideal place would suit many different functions, supporting learning as well as the all-important quiet spaces. Despite the fact that libraries are often minimising these areas, as evidenced by the library that Alan works in, Stephen believes that it is important to preserve quiet spaces.

Russell Bestley’s ideal environment would be both physical and virtual. It would provide a broad range of materials and allow for information to be encountered.

Not altogether surprisingly, both librarians’ ideas of the ideal environment for inspiration were relatively close to an academic art library or a museum. Alan’s ideal environment would have as many things as possible to interact and engage with. He would be able to watch TV, look at the internet, and attend lectures. A silent area was also important. Alan had recently visited a library where there was a room just for ‘chilling out’, which seemed to play into the idea of inspiration coming through incubation. However, he recognises that this could easily be misused.

Alessia’s conception of the ideal environment would have both space for group work and individual work. She would place purely visual resources, such as TVs, in a separate room. Everything would be available in both print and online and everything could be taken out on loan. Although not an artist herself, she sees the importance of having a place for the practical work, such as a studio, near to the
inspirational space. However, she believed that if this was a real place, there would be many issues involved in collocating a studio space and a library-like space.

Yana’s ideal environment for inspiration was a balance of various factors. It would be quiet, but not too quiet, inside, but open up to outdoors, and allow her to view life but not be disturbed by it.

Wiggy’s ideal environment for inspiration would be ‘quite visual’, but also similar to what she has heard about her new local library. She has recently moved to a new area of London, and has yet to visit, but she says that the fact that it has a gallery attached is appealing. The library puts on many cultural shows that change often, and allows visitors to see a variety of different work. Wiggy likes to see actual objects, so her ideal environment would be much like a museum or gallery. It would also have imagery-heavy books and high-speed internet for research.

In each of these hypothetical, ideal environments, there are elements that make it startling similar to current libraries. One may see this as evidence of the incredible potential for the library’s involvement in inspiration, or there is perhaps another, possibly more cynical explanation for this similarity from the psychological literature on creativity.

Ward, Smith, and Finke’s overview of the cognitive approach to creativity research cites numerous studies which ‘attempted to characterize how the central properties of known concepts or recent experiences influence the development of new ideas,’ (1999, p.195). For instance, in a 1994 study by Ward, participants were asked to draw what they thought an imaginary animal from another planet may look like, and many of the results showed features that characterized animals on Earth, such as bilateral symmetry, two eyes, two ears, and two or four legs (Ward, Smith, and Finke, 1999, p.196).

I am not attempting to criticise my participants’ lack of imagination when asked to consider their ideal, hypothetical environment for inspiration, but I do feel that their answers are not necessarily the best way to judge the importance of libraries in inspiration. Our imaginative capacities are limited by what we already
know and experience. In the case of these individuals, when asked by a library science student to imagine such a potential place, their answers could have been skewed towards the pre-existing features of a library. If the same broad question had been asked by someone researching the potential role of studio spaces, or galleries and museums in facilitating inspiration, the interviewees’ answers may have been different.

Discussion: Linking literature, theory, and practice

Throughout the preceding sections, this dissertation makes links between the Library and Information Science literature on artists and designers, LIS theory, historical, philosophical, cultural, and psychological views on creativity and inspiration, and the themes present in discussions with art and design practitioners, tutors, and librarians. This section seeks to elaborate upon and reinforce the links and themes already highlighted above.

Mutual misconceptions

In the minds of many, the frenzied, anti-literate artist would have nothing to do with the reserved, book-stamping librarian. Most people would probably acknowledge that these are stereotypes. It is my belief that despite this, the relationship on either side has been hindered by these misconceptions. The artists and designers I spoke to all knew libraries were useful, but some did not take advantage of the resources and services available to them. Artists and designers must recognise that libraries are relevant to them, and librarians must ensure that their libraries work towards relevance. The system should fit the users and not the other way around. For instance, if artists and designers tend to find inspiration through passive and undirected behaviours, then libraries that cater for these groups should allow for this to happen. However, libraries must also recognise that these behaviours vary by individual, context, and purpose. I believe that the LIS literature’s focus on quantitative evidence of the prevalence of information behaviours such as browsing are ultimately of little importance. Perhaps the reliance of artists and
designers on browsing is over-stated, but the importance is that even if only a minority of library users browse, the library must still accommodate them.

Finding inspiration

The prevalence of specific information behaviours is the source of debate in previous LIS literature on artists and designers, although this dissertation seeks instead to focus on the role of previously under-researched information behaviour in finding inspiration. As discussed above, Maria J. Bates posits four ‘Modes of Information Seeking’, of which, I have focused on three: browsing, monitoring, and being aware (2002, p.4). The fourth mode, searching, is perhaps the main focus of most of the LIS literature, as most libraries in the past did not accommodate or even welcome other means of finding information, such as browsing. Therefore, while I am not denying that artists and designers also search for information, it is more useful here to discuss the increasing focus on alternative behaviours.

Firstly, being aware seems to be a crucial method for artists and designers to find inspiration. William Hemmig and Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson seem to be the first to link the concept of awareness present in the LIS literature with more general LIS theories such as passive information acquisition and Information Encountering. How all these terms fully fit together seems to be a complex matter. According to Bates, browsing is undirected and active, monitoring is directed and passive, and being aware is undirected and passive (2002, p.4). Incidental information acquisition, as researched by Williamson and developed into her Ecological Theory of Human Information Behavior, seems to include a level of serendipity or chance (Williamson, 1998, 2005). Information Encountering is defined by Erdelez as, ‘an instance of accidental discovery of information during an active search for some other information,’ (Erdelez, 2005, p.180) IE is categorised as a type of opportunistic information acquisition, as opposed to forms of intentional information acquisition, such as information seeking (Erdelez, 2005, p.180). Regardless of how one reconciles these various models of information behaviour, the importance lies in the push to further understand these concepts.
From the interviews, one can see that the artists and designers in question both purposefully seek out and unintentionally find inspiration. All four of Bates’ ‘modes’ seem to be employed in finding inspiration, but it seems to rarely be a ‘known-item’ category of search. Stephen Carter attest to the importance of being aware of one’s environment, but also about intentionally seeking out inspiration by re-visiting certain galleries, museums, and specific works of art. However the actual experience of inspiration seems to be elusive by nature. I agree with illustrator Yana Elkassova that because inspiration is a cognitive and emotional phenomenon, it must happen organically. Where inspiration is concerned, it is only possible to increase its chances; one cannot force it to happen. The need for inspiration may not be known to the individual, but instead may manifest itself as a kind of ‘artistic block’. Stephen Carter points out that he often sees students struggling because they do not know how to go about searching for or finding inspiration. As Stephen and Wiggy both said, this increased understanding of one’s self, creative process, materials, work, and even one’s conception of inspiration is potentially something already inherent in an art and design education. Yana says that she consciously tries to facilitate inspiration by thinking about an element of her illustration work while falling asleep. She also cites curiosity, and an active internal and external life as being helpful to her creative process. While these specific qualities and behaviours may not be the same for others, the process of practice and research involved in studying or working in art and design includes understanding more about what works on a personal level.

The process of finding inspiration is affected by numerous factors, including serendipity. Like inspiration, serendipity cannot be forced, only aided by certain strategies. What makes a ‘super-encounterer’, or a ‘queen of serendipitous events’ may be the same as what helps find inspiration, especially because inspiration is often encountered by chance when not being actively sought. Being open and aware, eschewing habit, going outside of one’s ‘comfort zone’, having a ‘prepared mind’, looking to a broad range of sources are all cited as elements that facilitate serendipity, and may be the same for inspiration.
Satisficing as a necessary filter

William Hemmig touches upon an intriguing theory in his 2008 literature review, when he writes, ‘we can now comprehend browsing as actually the most efficient means of seeking meaning in this highly ambiguous universe,’ (p.357). It is my belief that because of the vast amounts of useful information in their environment, artists and designers must construct ways of filtering out what they do not need. Inaccessibility and inconvenience may be just another way to filter their excess of potential inspiration. Perhaps, for this group, satisficing is a necessary and valid means of finding and selecting information.

Consider the behaviours that seem to put artists and designers at odds with librarians and the type of comprehensive academic-style research that libraries were first designed for. An example is Stephann Makri’s study of architects, which describes students choosing to use Google Images over dedicated architecture databases. Common sense would dictate that the images on the database would be more useful, but because accessing the database requires more effort than using Google, and perhaps because the students would be able to find a wealth of equally inspiring images in either place, they choose the method of least effort. As touched upon by fine arts tutor Stephen Carter, art and design practitioners conduct research for the creative process differently than their academic-focused counterparts. I believe the discovery of sources of inspiration is partially a reductive process in which factors such as personal taste, and the convenience and ease of accessibility are the most crucial ways of selecting information from a wealth of potential sources.

Perhaps the feature that most distinguishes the behaviours of artists and designers from other groups of library users is their potential to make judgments more heavily based on aesthetics. I believe that this bias is inherent in the domain, but as discussed in Polly Frank’s study of art and design students, this focus on visual appeal may be a general product of our visual age (1999, p.451). Certainly aesthetics have an effect on the way the interview participants use libraries. Tutor Russell Bestley stressed the importance of attractive graphic design for libraries as it had the
potential to influence students negatively or positively. Illustrators Wiggy and Yana both spoke of needing to see a book physically rather than simply its record on the OPAC before deciding if it was relevant. However, librarians must be wary of overly pandering to this group, as evidenced by Alan’s mention of other academic arts libraries using only images, and banning text from their presentations to users.

Another trend perceived in the discussion is the importance of seeing potentially inspiring sources physically, rather than virtually. Tutor Stephen Carter mentioned how crucial it was for him to experience London and its myriad offerings, and wondered at students who don’t take advantage of being in the city. Illustrator Wiggy Cheung spoke of the importance of the atmosphere and surroundings of an inspirational source. Perhaps this is a growing attitude of our society as a whole, and the reason many people are sentimental for paper books over e-books, still choose LPs over mp3s, prefer analogue to digital. The bit of art theory that stuck with me the most from my university days was Walter Benjamin’s idea of a material object’s ‘aura’, a particularly appealing justification for Luddite-prone artists and designers such as myself (Benjamin, 1999, p.215). However, perhaps this belief in the ‘aura’ of the physical is merely another facet of the mystification of art and artists.

Demystifying inspiration

Susie Cobbledick’s study of practicing artists mentioned above makes a point about inspiration and society’s view of the artist that I feel is one of the most insightful in the LIS literature on this group. Her belief that the divine origins of the concept have led to an assumption that artists have no need of libraries, or indeed any external worldly influence. I believe that this view is to some extent still prevalent today, possibly because so little research has been able to add to our understanding of inspiration and creativity.

As Cobbledick points out, these views are still encouraged by artists themselves. While shrouding themselves and their processes in mysticism and romanticism, artists boost their status and the status of their field. Is it human nature to believe that something we can’t understand is the sign of something extraordinary, be that a higher being or certain quality of the individual. Even
relatively recently, there are instances of creative individuals, especially writers and poets, still ascribing to a belief in inspiration stemming from the supernatural. Rudyard Kipling wrote of the ‘Daemon’ who lives in the writer’s pen, and when this force takes over, the writer needs only to obey without conscious thought (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.5). Another instance is Federico Garcia Lorca’s adoption of the Spanish myth of duende, first presented in a 1933 lecture in Buenos Aires (Hirsch, 2002). Initially associated with flamenco and Andalusian culture, the idea of duende has been used by the musician Nick Cave in a 1999 lecture on the dark force’s place in modern love songs, ascribing it to Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Van Morrison, and Lou Reed. When even contemporary artists feel the need to mystify and romanticise their creative output, one can see a return to the most ancient assumptions. While one can see how this view may be compelling for the likes of Kipling, Lorca, and Cave, it is also detrimental.

For instance, ‘inspiration’ in the divine sense, as well as the idea of ‘genius’, implies that creativity is a quality that individuals either have or they don’t. Divine inspiration and genius can’t be taught, learnt, or developed. Why then, would we need schools or information centres for artists? Why should artists look at other’s work, or art theory?

In his comprehensive review of creativity research, Robert J. Sternberg writes ‘the mystical approaches to the study of creativity have probably made it harder for scientific psychologists to be heard […] We believe that it has been hard for the scientific approach to shake the deep-seated view of some people that, somehow, scientific psychologists are treading where they should not,’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p.5).

Writer Johan Lehrer uses the example of magicians Penn and Teller in what I feel is an eloquent defense of the de-mystification of creativity by modern science. The two magicians found that despite giving away the ‘secrets’ to their illusions, the sense of magic still persisted. Teller says ‘In fact, the illusion becomes even more meaningful, because you realize that it’s all in your head. There’s nothing special
about these glasses and napkins. The magic is coming from your mind,’ (Lehrer, 2012, p.251).

**The nature of inspiration**

Jonah Lehrer presents a somewhat oversimplified explanation of the creative process in his book *Imagine: How Creativity Works*. Lehrer uses the dichotomy of the Dionysian and Apollonian to explain the difference between divergent and convergent thought. Both are important to the creative process, although the emphasis is different for each individual. Divergent thought helps creativity and sometimes leads to a sudden insight (which one may term ‘inspiration’), while convergent thought lends itself to analysis and concentrated attention (Lehrer, 2012, p.64-65). For instance, a poet may not be able to come up with an original idea for a new poem without divergent thinking, but when it comes to editing and honing the verse, convergent thought is all important. However, the use of a dichotomy as his explanatory metaphor implies that these are the two, mutually exclusive thought patterns or stages of creativity, which I do not believe is the case.

I agree with Lehrer’s assertion that creative people too often gloss over the many false starts, mistakes, failed drafts and unsatisfactory sketches that produced the finished product (2012). It is hard to focus on this necessary stage when there is often another, more compelling part of the iterative creative process. There is a certain stage where things ‘fall into place’, where it all makes sense, where one enjoys creating for its own sake, and above all else. Perhaps these are all different phenomenon that could be defined by myriad terms that are less encumbered by history, religion, and myth; however, we often choose simply to call these experiences ‘inspiration’.

Like Stephann Makri’s work on serendipity, I am tempted to create a tentative framework for inspiration. Perhaps this tendency to classify and categorise an abstract, subjective concept is particularly appealing to library and information science researchers. In other domains, the chaotic and messy is embraced, and perhaps this is how inspiration should be left. However, I feel that one can strike a
balance between seeking the order of a framework and classification and leaving a concept to be messy and subjective.

In my view, inspiration is a cognitive and emotional phenomenon. There is some external trigger, the inspirational object or experience, which helps form a new cognitive connection. This connection, in order to be seen as a moment of inspiration, must be creative. In ascribing to the belief that everyone is capable of creativity, I feel that this connection needs to be creative only to the individual who develops it, not to the field as a whole. Feeding into this moment of inspiration is the fact that this trigger often leads to a sudden sense of insight, as if the last piece of the puzzle is falling in to place (although this metaphor is not exactly correct, because it implies there is an objective puzzle-like truth to be discovered). Because of this moment of creativity, triggered by an external force, is seen as valuable and novel to the individual experiencing it, they feel an emotional affect, and after-the-fact they label the moment as inspiration.

After compiling my own views on inspiration, I encountered the more sophisticated analysis of Timothy Clark. Despite coming from different viewpoints on the topic, I feel our views are in agreement, and his conception is able to add a dimension of psychological explanation of the phenomenon. Clark believes that the cause and effect of inspiration and enhanced creativity should be reversed; inspiration is not a precursor to creative work, it actually stems from it.

‘That is to say that any emergent material that seems of a quality to trigger some sense of anticipation, the corroborating of personal fantasy, intention, or ambition, will necessarily be accompanied by a sense of ease and confidence. The crucial affective dimension of inspiration, I believe, should be characterized in private terms, i.e. as the removal of blocking agents. There may be a release from inhibitions, possibly accompanied by a sense of speed or of being overwhelmed by all the emergent possibilities that proliferate in the space of composition,’ (Clark, 1997, p.31).

Clark goes on to write that the experiences vary by individual, but ‘at its most intense inspiration may bear comparisons to aspects of states of ecstasy studied by
psychoanalysts of religious experience, states constituting a regression to an infantile sense of seeming total self-repletion and omnipresence, the sense of objectlessness or fusion known in the earliest stages of involvement with the mother, before any differentiation of self and object,’ (Clark, 1997, p.31). Clark finds examples of this extreme inspiration in the work of Rousseau, but he also cites cases of milder inspiration, apparent in writers such as Wordsworth and Dickens. He writes, ‘the experience of empowerment and enhanced fluency can seem contradictory and elusive, as is witnessed by the masculine myth of the fickle muse,’ (Clark, 1997, p.32). Here I see a link between this explanation, and the examples from the literature on artists and my own interviews. Illustrator Yana Elkassova compared inspiration to a religious experience, and the ancient Chinese artists cited by Kris and Kurz, who were said to sense that they were, or literally became the subjects of their paintings.

However, I recognise that both explanations are subjective views of inspiration. As shown in the interviews, some would not label this as inspiration, and perhaps others would not appreciate the somewhat condescending attitudes of Freudian psychoanalysis. I believe the real importance lies not in generalisable ‘truths’ but in personal reflection on one’s own creative process, informed by knowledge of the large variety of theories and views on inspiration and creativity. When one considers, for instance, the behaviours, systems, emotions, thought patterns, stages, and personality traits that facilitate inspiration for oneself, one is then better suited to take control of the creative process.

At the beginning of this dissertation process, I believed that there would be some practical ‘tips’ to be gleaned for libraries from this research. However, I now believe that such an attempt would be just as damaging as the pragmatic approach taken by psychological research into creativity, which favour practical results above theory. In the case of creativity and inspiration, I believe that the theoretical as well as the practical is highly subjective. For instance, a mystical view of inspiration may be a powerful impetus for one individual, but for another, it may cause them to sit idly by, waiting for an external, uncontrollable sense of inspiration that never comes.
The potential role of the library

While I am hesitant to attempt to gather ‘tips’ or ‘findings’ for libraries, I can identify three main ways the library can peripherally aid inspiration. These are education, resources and organisation, and space. Many of these are features inherent in most libraries, but I believe this section serves more as an argument for the importance of a library in artists and designers’ study and practice.

In my view, teaching information literacy is a crucial part of the library’s mission. Librarians such as Alan work to correct the misconceptions that many art and design students hold about libraries and research, and help users understand the role the library can play in their study and practice.

Both Alessia and Alan explained the importance of research using the metaphor of the iceberg. The student creates something, which is the tip of the iceberg that is visible, but research is the rest of the iceberg, hidden beneath the waterline. This metaphor is derived from Ernest Hemmingway’s ‘The Principle of the Iceberg’, which relates not only to the research process, but also to the importance of awareness and taking in seemingly irrelevant information, which may ultimately inform one’s creative work (Hemingway, 1958). Perhaps just by providing a useful metaphor for the importance of research, librarians may help students see the role of the library and librarians differently.

Despite the highly personal, subjective nature of inspiration, tutors and librarians may serve to prompt further investigation of one’s own conception of inspiration. It may be argued that teaching an understanding of inspiration is already part of the art and design tutor’s role, but I have yet to come across a librarian who teaches inspiration in the same way. Librarians currently teach how to understand, collect, and use information, so why not the same for inspirational information? I feel I have shown in the previous sections just how much information there is about this topic from such a variety of perspectives.

The ‘traditional’ view of the library is one of books and their meticulous organisation, sometimes prized by librarians above the actual users. However, the
resources, classification, and cataloguing are at the heart of librarianship. I believe the strength of a library lies in its unique role as a microcosm of the universe of knowledge. Through a classification system, the links and relationships between subjects are made physical and visual. I have always found the uniquely Victorian belief in the ability to collect, classify, and arrange the entirety of the world in one space as being both profoundly compelling, and tragically futile. Although a library could never realistically hope for comprehensivity, most allow the user to see, sometimes even at a glance, their whole selection of resources, spanning a variety of subjects. For artists and designers, a general library provides an easy entry into the work of other disciplines. It is not a stretch for interested users to dip in and out of other domains just by browsing the other sections of the shelves or virtual environment, as Russell Bestley spoke of doing during his time in education.

However, the crucial difference between a library’s physical or virtual environments and the expanse of information on the internet (which is so convenient and accessible for satisficing artists and designers), is organisation. Feeding in to what tutor Russell Bestley said about librarians and bloggers as cultural gatekeepers, these individuals play an important role in selecting and presenting information. As illustrator Wiggy Cheung said, there is a lot of useful information to be found online, but it’s often a matter of quantity over quality. A library represents quality over quantity, seeking to present the most authoritative, important, interesting, and diverse work of each area. All this same information may even be accessible on the internet, but chances are, it will be harder to find due to lack of organisation or accessibility.

Additionally, it is easy for the privileged to forget that, for many, libraries are the only source of internet-access or print material. Judging from Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson’s findings about the significance of cost-based decisions to emerging artists and designers, it seems obvious that this group can and does benefit from the free services of libraries.

Space is perhaps the most self-evident and uncontrollable aspect of the library. The stereotype of the ‘shushing’ librarian points to the traditional role of the
library space, as a silent area for reading and study. However, contemporary libraries often allow for multiple ways of using space, such as group areas, function rooms, cafes and shops, as well as silent areas. The emphasis on quiet in the library may seem to be in decline, pushed out by the more appealing and popular areas of the library. However, tutor Stephen Carter believes it is perhaps the most useful feature of the library where inspiration is concerned. In her study, librarian Laurel Littrell wrote of students and staff using the library as a space for contemplation and escape. I struggle to think of another free, public place, which fulfills such a need.

Illustrator Yana Elkassova points out that libraries are often restricted by their resources, both spatially and financially. Despite this, even the smallest, most ill funded library can serve an important function as what sociologist Ray Oldenburg called ‘the third space’ (Lehrer, 2012, p.151). Most people have a home (a first place), and a workplace (a second place), but they also need a ‘third place’, which could easily be a library as it could for instance, a pub, café, or bookstore. The emphasis here is on social interaction and relaxation, elements that often directly or indirectly enhance creativity (Lehrer, 2012, p.151-152).

If we go by Jonah Lehrer’s simplistic model of the modes and thought processes involved in creativity, we can see that the library has the potential to facilitate either convergent or divergent thinking, the Dionysian or the Apollonian. Libraries allow for the quiet needed for focused concentration, as well as the resources, people, and atmosphere that allow for new insight and inspiration.

**Conclusion**

The subjective nature of inspiration means it is difficult and unwise to attempt any concrete ‘findings’ on this topic. Instead, this dissertation presents a range of views, any of which may prove useful to artists, designers, or library professionals. If there is one recommendation to be taken away from this research, it is the importance of understanding one’s personal view of inspiration rather than labeling one view as ‘correct’.
Inspiration is a concept that is constantly in flux, adapting to the current views of the society and the individual in question. It encompasses everything from divine possession to the most mundane mental connection, and is sometimes consciously avoided because of the detrimental effects of its connotations. The mystical origins of inspiration may be the cause of the lack of understanding and research into the concept. Additionally, the misconceptions about artists and the creative process caused by these origins may be why, until fairly recently, librarians had very little information or interest in the behaviour of this group. However, the mystical aspects of inspiration are not only a hindrance. Contemporary artists, writers, and musicians still embrace this divine idea, and perhaps art maintains its standing in society partly because of this self-mythologising. This dissertation attempts a balanced view of all aspects of the term, and the reader is free to form their own opinions on the concept.

From an LIS perspective, it is important to remember that the library and its systems must be fitted to its users and not vice versa. Alternative behaviours to searching such as browsing, monitoring, and being aware, as well as the element of serendipity and instances of information encountering all play an important role in finding inspiration. I feel that because artists and designers may rely on ‘satisficing’ as a necessary filter for inspirational sources, librarians should not attempt to change this behaviour. Regardless of which type of information behaviour is most prevalent amongst this group, I feel that the real importance lies in the library catering to every means of finding information employed by its users.

Because inspiration eludes one concrete definition, the role of the library can only be discussed in the most general terms. From this project’s literature review and interviews one may collect a list of certain environmental features and personal behaviours, which seem to facilitate the creative process for many people. Some of these include a ‘prepared mind’, openness and attentiveness, escaping the habitual, going outside one’s comfort zone, looking to a broad range of sources, social interaction, and quiet concentration. The library may not be everyone’s idea of the best environment for inspiration, but it does bring together many of the elements often cited as helpful for creative work. These include the library features discussed...
above: education, sources and organisation, and the space. Most libraries will already exhibit these features, although that does not mean there isn’t room for improvement in the way libraries provide for artists and designers. I feel the crucial change that librarians can make is working towards further understanding this consistently over-looked group. Attitudes may be changing on either side of this relationship, but there is still more that can be done to attract artists and designers to the library.

The view from librarian Philip Pacey that artists and designers ‘can get by without libraries,’ is not untrue (Pacey, 1982, p.36). Libraries are certainly less crucial to the creative process than they are to academic study or research. However, I believe the critical part of Pacey’s quote is that, ‘they will ‘get by’ far better with libraries,’ (Pacey, 1982, p.36). The domain of contemporary art and design is a difficult area to ‘get by’ in, considering the many roadblocks one faces from the beginning of education and the creative practice, through to a successful career in the field. Artist and designers need all the support available to them, and the library is perhaps one of their most helpful advocates along the way.
References


Appendix 1: Emails sent to potential interview participants

1.1 Art librarians:
Email sent to the ARLIS-link distribution list on 24 June, 2013

Subject: seeking art librarian for an interview

‘Dear all,

My name is Cait Peterson, and I am currently on City University's MA Library Science course, pursuing a career in art librarianship.

I am seeking an academic art librarian based in London who would be willing to be interviewed for my dissertation project, which is on the subject of the academic library's role in artistic inspiration and creativity. Through a semi-structured interview, I would like to explore the librarians' experiences, ideas, and opinions on the topic. The project will also include interviews with an arts tutor and 2-3 arts students from London higher education institutions.

The interview will last no more than an hour, and take place at the volunteer's convenience at their institution any time between 15th July and 9th August.

If you are interested, please email me at cait.peterson@gmail.com, including your name, position, and institution. To what extent this information is included in the final dissertation is up to the interviewee, and will be agreed prior to the interview in a consent form.

Thank you for your time.

Best wishes,
Cait Peterson’

1.2 Art and design students and staff:
Email sent to various art and design departments at London institutions (including the Royal College of Art, Slade School of Art, and Goldsmiths College) on 1 July, 2013.*

Subject: seeking students and staff for library research project

‘Hello,

My name is Cait Peterson, and I am currently working on my dissertation for City University's MA Library Science course. The project is on the academic library's role in artistic inspiration and creativity and I am looking for visual art students and staff to interview on this topic.

Would you be willing to forward the following message to the school's students and/or staff?

Many thanks,
Cait Peterson

I am a City University MA Library Science student and University of the Arts London graduate seeking
visual art students and academic staff based in London to be interviewed for my dissertation project. Through a semi-structured interview, I would like to explore the participants' experiences, ideas, and opinions on the topic of the academic library's role in artistic inspiration and creativity. They do not necessarily have to use a library regularly for their practice, but they must at least be aware of what is offered at the library where they study/teach. The project will also include interviews with arts librarians from higher education institutions. The interview will last no more than an hour, and take place at the volunteer's convenience at their institution any time between 15th July and 9th August.

If you are interested, please email me at caitpeterson3@gmail.com before 15th July, including your name, course, and institution. To what extent this information is included in the final dissertation is up to the interviewee, and will be agreed prior to the interview in a consent form.‘

*although departments at the RCA and Slade both forwarded this email, I received only one reply from a student, and it did not lead to an interview due to the individual’s availability.

1.3 Art and design tutors:

Email sent to a selection of 10 University of the Arts London staff on 9 July, 2013

Subject: inspiration and the library dissertation project

‘Dear [tutor’s name],

My name is Cait Peterson, and I am a student on City University's MA Library Science course and a UAL graduate. I am currently working on a dissertation on the academic library's role in artistic inspiration and creativity. As an academic in the field, I was hoping that you might grant me an interview on the topic.

This discussion would take the form of a semi-structured interview lasting about an hour. This would be conducted at the place and date that is convenient for you, any time before 9 August. Your involvement in this project would be greatly appreciated!

Thank you for your time.

Best wishes,
Cait Peterson’
Appendix 2: Interview Consent Form

The below draft copy of this form was sent via email to all the participants prior to their interviews. They were asked to look over the form and decide how much information they wanted included in my final dissertation, change the form accordingly, and email the document back to me. I then deleted the relevant information to reflect their choice and asked them to sign a printed copy of the amended form when we met in person, before the interview began.

‘Consent Form for Interview Participants

I have volunteered to be interviewed for the dissertation project of City University’s MA Library Science student Cait Peterson. The project seeks to explore the role of academic libraries in artistic inspiration and creativity. Four to six interviews will be carried out with students and staff at various institutions offering visual arts degrees. I understand the following:

- I am participating voluntarily and will not be paid. I may discontinue my participation at any point in this process without penalty.
- The interview will be conducted by Cait Peterson at my home institution. It will last between 30-60 minutes, and Cait will take notes and an audio recording of the discussion.

I consent to have the following personal information included in Cait Peterson’s final dissertation (please delete those that you do not want to be included).

   - my first name (optional)*
   - my surname (optional)*
   - my job title (optional)*
   - the name of my home institution (optional)*

As well as:

   - the content of the interview

All other personal details will be kept confidential and deleted from Cait Peterson’s records after the dissertation deadline on the 27 September, 2013.

By signing, I declare that I have been given a copy of this form, and read and understood its content. All my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I have volunteered for this project, and give my consent for the information listed above to be used.

Participant’s signature        Date

Participant’s name (printed)        Interviewer’s signature

Cait Peterson
Email: cait.peterson@gmail.com

*This information will be changed to reflect the preferences of each interviewee in the final draft of the form, which will be signed at the interview.’
Appendix 3: Interview questions

Note: As the interviews were intended to be semi-structured, these questions are merely guidelines. The sequence and question asked varied from interview to interview. The questions printed in grey were considered non-essential, and easily changed or dropped due to time constraints.

3.1 Questions for the tutors and practitioners

‘Interview questions - artists (tutors and students)

Introduction

I will briefly explain the context and purpose of my research:

- Despite the working title, I am not just focusing on academic libraries or a specific library, but all types of libraries. Therefore I will use the general term ‘the library’ to encompass them all.

- While I do assume that some part of you or your students’ creative process includes ‘inspiration’, there are many different ways to define this. (Ask interviewees: Would you agree with this assertion?) I am not, however, automatically assuming that the library plays a role in inspiration. The purpose of this interview is to explore your own definition of ‘inspiration’ and whether this relates to the library.

- This research is focusing mainly on the interviewees own personal views and experiences, but if you believe you can reliably relate examples from your colleagues and students, please do so.

Arts background

1.0 Please briefly describe the nature of your artwork and how you go about creating it.

Information acquisition

2.0 Where do you find the information you need for your creative process (for inspiration or otherwise)?

2.1 How do you find it?

3.0 How well do you think you do at finding this information?

3.1 What does it take for you to be satisfied with the information found?

Library use

4.0 How often do you use a library of any kind (for your creative process or in general)?

4.1 What do you use it for?

4.2 How do you find information in the library?
5.0 Do aesthetic judgments about the library (e.g. the environment, the catalogue, the books) have an effect on how you use it? (For instance, choosing between books you are unfamiliar with based on the cover design)

6.1 How do you feel about the library?

6.2 How do you feel about librarians?

The concept of inspiration

7.0 How would you define inspiration?

8.0 Do you have an instance of inspiration you could briefly describe?

9.0 Do you think inspiration is more readily found in physical or virtual environments?

10.0 What about these environments is most inspiring for you?

11.0 Do you/your students intentionally seek out inspiration? How and where? Is it successful?

12.0 Do you/your students unintentionally find inspiration? How and where?

13.0 Do you think that personal features (e.g. personality, ways of thinking) affect the way and frequency with which individuals find inspiration?

Teaching inspiration

14.0 Do you think it is possible to teach/learn to cultivate inspiration? Why?

14.1 (For tutors) If possible, would you teach it on your course?

14.2 If possible, how would this affect artists’ work?

Inspiration and the library

15.0 Do you think that society’s view of libraries and librarians, artists, and the concept of inspiration (for instance, its origin in divine inspiration) have affected the way libraries and artists interact?

10.1 If so, how?

16.0 Does the library play a role in you/your students’ inspiration?

16A If yes, how do you/your students find inspiration in the library?

16.1 What features of the library help you/your students do this?

16.2 How else could the library help to facilitate inspiration for artists?
168 If no, why do you feel this way?

16.3 Do you think the library *should* play a role in inspiration?

16.4 How could the library do this?

**Ideal environment**

17.0 If you could create the ideal environment (library or otherwise) for facilitating inspiration, what would it be like?

18.0 What sort of features or developments would further help artists to find inspiration?

19.0 Is there anything else you would like to say?’

### 3.2 Questions for the librarians

‘Interview questions - librarians

**Introduction**

I will briefly explain the context and purpose of my research:

- Despite the working title, I am not just focusing on academic libraries or a specific library, but all types of libraries. Therefore I will use the general term ‘the library’ to encompass them all.

- While I do assume that some part of you or your students’ creative process includes ‘inspiration’, there are many different ways to define this. (Ask interviewees: Would you agree with this assertion?) I am not, however, automatically assuming that the library plays a role in inspiration. The purpose of this interview is to explore your own definition of ‘inspiration’ and whether this relates to the library.

- This research is focusing mainly on the interviewees own personal views and experiences, but if you believe you can reliably relate examples from your colleagues and students, please do so.

**Arts background**

1.0 Do you have a background in the arts or do anything else you consider to be creative?

1.1 If yes, please briefly describe the activity and its process.

**Artists and libraries**

2.0 Have you worked with library users who are not artists?

3.0 How do you feel about working with artists?
4.0 Do you think artists find information (in general, not just for inspiration) differently than non-artists?

4.1 If yes, how so?

4.2 Do you feel that your library adequately accounts for this difference?

The concept of inspiration

5.0 How would you define inspiration?

6.0 Do you have an instance of inspiration you could briefly describe?

7.0 *Do you think that personal features (i.e. personality, psychology) affect the way and frequency with which individuals find inspiration?

Teaching inspiration

8.0 *Do you think it is possible to teach/learn to cultivate inspiration?

8.1 *If possible, would you teach it?

8.2 *If possible, how would this affect artists' work?

Inspiration and the library

9.0 Do you think that society's view of libraries and librarians, artists, and the concept of inspiration (for instance, its origin in divine inspiration) have affected the way libraries and artists interact?

9.1 If so, how?

10.0 Does the library play a role in you/your students' inspiration?

10A If yes, how do you/your students find inspiration in the library?

10.1 What features of the library help you/your students do this?

10.2 How else could the library help to facilitate inspiration for artists?

10B If no, why do you feel this way?

10.3 Do you think the library should play a role in inspiration?

10.4 How could the library do this?

Ideal environment
11.0 If you could create the ideal environment (library or otherwise) for facilitating inspiration, what would it be like?

12.0 What sort of features or developments would further help artists to find inspiration?

13.0 Is there anything else you would like to say?
Appendix 4: Dissertation Proposal

Dissertation Proposal

Working Title: The Academic Library’s Role in Artistic Inspiration

Introduction

Inspiration is key to the creative process, and therefore a vital part of an artist’s practice. However, the role of academic libraries in artistic inspiration is not a subject that has been researched in-depth in the Library and Information Science literature. The assumption behind this project is that libraries can indeed play a role, and therefore, the main question the research will address is what this role could ideally be. To inform this, one must ask two other questions, firstly can anything be added to our current concept of inspiration? And secondly, are academic libraries fulfilling art students’ inspirational needs at the moment? A mixed methods approach that combines a historical and conceptual literature review, and four to six in-depth face-to-face interviews with academic art library stakeholders will provide a wider picture and further insight into the topic.

Aims and Objectives

For the proposed research project, I have identified four aims in total. The first, and most central aim is to further understand how libraries can facilitate inspiration for art students. This aim necessitates three underlying aims. The first is to better understand the concept of artistic inspiration. Following on from this, the next aim is to explore the role libraries have previously played in artistic inspiration. The final aim is to investigate to what extent academic libraries are currently meeting the inspirational needs of art students.

To meet these aims, I have set four objectives for this research project, which I believe to be attainable with the time and resources available. The first is to create a broader definition of ‘artistic inspiration’ across time and different cultures. The second is to find evidence of what role libraries have played in artistic inspiration in the past. The third is to collect information on how art students, librarians, and tutors feel inspirational needs are met in their experiences of academic libraries. Finally, I would like to collect the participants’ ideas on how an academic library could facilitate artistic inspiration in their ideal, hypothetical situation.

Scope and definition

The scope of this project will be very broad in the literature review stage, and specific in the interview stage. I will first limit the review to the Library and Information Science literature on the information seeking behavior of artists, and expand slightly to include some aspects of information seeking behavior in general. For the section of the literature review that addresses the topic of artistic inspiration, I will be searching a wide variety of subjects, including religion, philosophy, and psychology, and across many different cultures. However, I intend this section to be selective, based on what is useful for the purpose of my research,
rather than seeking to be a fully representative or comprehensive overview of the
topic. In both cases, the literature reviewed will be limited to what is available in
English.

For the interview stage, I will limit my research to institutions offering higher
education visual arts degrees in or around London. While the literature review may
take quite a broad view on what is deemed to be artistic output, those selected for
the interviews will be concerned primarily with the visual arts only. Facilitating
inspiration for other groups that may be considered artists, such as writers, actors,
and musicians will vary dramatically on a practical level, so it is necessary to focus on
one area of the arts. As the interviews will be conducted in person, preferably at the
participant’s place of work or study, my inability to travel outside London is a limiting
factor. This portion of the research will provide quite a specific view of academic
libraries that cater to art students in London. However, as this city is
an internationally renowned hub of art education, this research will be applicable
beyond simply this specific demographic.

Two concepts must be defined in my dissertation, ‘art’ and ‘inspiration’. The
question, ‘what is art?’ is notoriously difficult to answer. However, I will not touch
upon this debate in my dissertation, and instead choose to define art in narrow
terms. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘art’ as ‘the expression of
creative skill through a visual medium’ and ‘the product of
such a process’ (Soanes, 2003). However, when considering the literature, it is necessary to take a broader
approach to what may be produced through ‘artistic inspiration’. This may take the
form of painting, drawing, sculpture, craft art, performance art,
literature, poetry,
drama, dance, and anything else where creativity and inspiration may be present.

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘inspiration’ as ‘the process or
quality of being inspired, ‘a person or thing that inspires’, and ‘a sudden clever or
timely idea’ (Soanes, 2003). ‘Inspire’ is defined as ‘fill with the urge or ability to do or
feel something’, ‘create (a feeling) in a person, and ‘give rise to’ (Soanes, 2003). However, this quite prosaic, modern dictionary definition of inspi-
ration does not
show the full range of the concept’s history and its role in the arts. The only hint of
this is given in the word’s origin, from the Latin inspirare, meaning ‘breathe or blow
into’, and consequently, the term’s meaning in context of medicine (Soanes, 2003).
This gives a small indication the divine and metaphysical beginning of the concept.
This depth of definition is what I will explore in my research.

Research context

The originality and necessity of this project lies in the fact that it is an area
rarely covered in the Library and Information Science literature, yet an important
reason for library use among art students. From my personal experience as an
undergraduate art student, it seems as though academic libraries do not consider
the huge breadth of what is needed by students for artistic inspiration. Consequently, while art students still find them useful, it is my belief that libraries
will become increasingly less relevant to their studies and practice. To help address
this problem, I would like to collect the ideas and opinions of the some of the key
stakeholders: students, tutors, and librarians. By asking these creatively minded
individuals to consider their ideal version of an academic art library, I hope to help libraries understand what their role could be in facilitating artistic inspiration.

**Literature Review**

Many of the sources found in a review of the literature write of a dearth of research into artists and their use of information and libraries. Librarian Susie Cobblewick speculates that this lack of literature, despite statistics from 1995 showing that there were more artists than lawyers in the U.S is perhaps due to the prevailing romantic notion of artistic inspiration (1996, p.343-344). Using the example of Jackson Pollock’s method of creating through 'spontaneous combustion’, Cobblewick writes, ‘such an individual, as he exists in the popular imagination, needs a library about as much as does a whirling dervish,’ (1996, p. 345). However, while it is true that many of these working artists are not of the explosive, tortured variety such as Pollock, one must still acknowledge that artistic inspiration exists, and is therefore an important part of the artistic process in which libraries can and should play a part.

The small amount of extant literature on library use by artists is covered comprehensively by William Hemmig’s 2008 review article and 2009 empirical study. He identifies five main purposes for library use in the literature: ‘inspiration’, ‘specific visual elements’, ‘knowledge of materials and techniques’, ‘marketing and career guidance’, and ‘knowledge of current trends in the art world,’ (Hemmig, 2009, p.683). Additionally, Hemmig’s review shows four main findings from the literature: ‘information needs of individual artists are extremely idiosyncratic’, ‘artists require a great deal of information that has no epistemic relationship to art’, ‘for most information needs, browsing is the strongly preferred behavior’ and ‘social information gathering is also important, particularly for knowledge of materials and techniques, and for marketing and career guidance,’ (2009, p.684). Hemmig’s review provides not only the main themes present in the literature, but also a helpful starting point for further research in this area.

Helen Mason and Lyn Robinson’s research on the information seeking behaviour of emerging artists is an invaluable resource upon which this proposed dissertation will seek to build. Mason’s survey confirmed some of the beliefs found by Hemmig, and provides an interesting array of examples that shows the true breadth of sources of artistic inspiration.

The most recent literature on the information seeking behavior of artists is generally specific to certain groups, such as architects (Makri and Warwick, 2010), theatre artists, (Medaille, 2010), and crafters (Torrey et al., 2009).

The LIS literature specifically on providing inspiration for artists is even less prevalent. Searching for articles in this area shows that most of the discussion is anecdotal, and does not fully explore the concept or theory of inspiration. Recent examples include articles by arts librarians regarding their own academic arts libraries. Mariëtta Dirker (2009) discusses art students’ use of the library space and books themselves as artistic inspiration and objects to be incorporated into art in several art academies in the Netherlands. Martin Aurand (2011), librarian at
Carnegie Mellon Institute for Architecture has utilized the university’s extensive archives for inspiration for students, and adopts the Professor of Art, Lowry Burgess’ idea of the library as a ‘wunderkammer’. However, Aurand is in the special position of having a library containing such treasures, and a department that encourages the librarians to lecture to the students and influence the curriculum. These accounts do not fully examine what is possible or needed in a library environment to facilitate inspiration.

Carrying on, my task for beginning the literature review portion of the dissertation will be to further familiarize myself with the previous research on the information seeking behaviour of artists. The resources cited by Hemmig’s article provide a good starting point for this reading, although this area of literature will only be briefly touched upon in my dissertation.

The second area of research will be a brief overview of the more general literature on information seeking behaviour. From the perspective of the pharmaceutical industry, David Bawden’s 1986 article on creativity proves to be equally applicable to inspiration for art students. There are a few authors in the field of information seeking behavior who are especially relevant, including the work of Brenda Dervin (1998) on ‘Sense-Making’ and Sanda Erdelez’s (2005) theory of ‘information encountering’. It will not be necessary to provide an overview of the whole area of information seeking behaviour research, but I will instead focus on areas such as serendipitous browsing which have been identified as relevant to artists by the first area of literature review.

Methodology

I will be approaching this project from a subjectivist perspective, which I feel is suitable for the highly personal nature of artistic inspiration. I have chosen to combine two qualitative methods, a literature review and a survey, in the form of a small number of in-depth interviews. The literature review is intended to be a precursor to the interviews, expanding my knowledge of the history of the concept and its relation to libraries, and helping me to think more broadly and creatively about the topic. The interviews will be a testing ground for this information, and the opinions and ideas provided by the interviewees’ different perspectives on academic libraries will help to address my research questions. The resulting exploration of the historical, conceptual, theoretical, and practical aspects of the academic library’s role in artistic inspiration will attempt to provide a broad picture, and possibly new insights on the under-researched topic.

Literature Review

To provide a broader definition of inspiration, it will be necessary to look into the history of the concept, how it has changed over time and how it is different in other cultures. Inspiration began as a product of divine intervention, whether from the muses, or God, and then became progressively more secular, until becoming the focus of philosophical writing and psychologists. The entry on ‘inspiration’ in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) has proven to be a good starting point for this investigation, albeit from a non-visual art perspective. Because I am
seeking to provide as diverse a view as possible, this conceptual analysis must be a broad overview of the information available. I hope to that by exploring the various definitions of inspiration, I will be able to better understand what role libraries can play.

Secondly, I will look for evidence in the literature of how artists used libraries throughout history. This research will draw from artist biographies, histories of famous libraries, and other sources. The resources in this area may be understandably patchy, as many artists do not record their own work textually. However, some specific examples may prove enough to paint a picture of how this link was manifest in the past.

Interviews

The second part of my research will be four to six in-depth, face-to-face interviews. This will include between two and three interviews with art students, including at least one undergraduate and one postgraduate. These individuals must be doing a visual art degree at a London-based institution. It may be useful to choose, like Cobbledick (1996) in her interviews with American artists, at least one fine artist and one craft artist. Additionally, I may choose to interview a more commercial artist, such as a graphic designer, who would expect to regularly work from other’s briefs. In addition to the students, I will interview at least one art librarian and one art tutor, also based at a London institution. I will research ways of contacting university students and staff, and then advertise online, either through posting on websites or via email. As potential participants will be away from the university for part of the summer, I will rely more on online methods than physical advertisements in the university buildings, but this means of contact may also be necessary. The participants must be available to meet with me in London during July or August.

When replying to my advert, I will ask potential participants to include their institution and course, and if they are aware of the library services available. Based upon these answers, I will attempt to collect as varied a sample as possible, within the limit of such a small number of interviews. Ultimately, these interviewees are based on a convenience sample of London-based art students. Because these individuals have chosen to respond to my call for interview participants, they may tend to be more active and involved than other art students, and possibly already more interested in their academic library. These limitations will be acknowledged in my dissertation, although I do not believe they are a major issue, as I am only seeking to collect ideas and opinions, and not attempting a representative survey.

The interviews will be semi-structured, with a mix of open and closed questions to provide a rough guide for the discussion. During the interview, I will take notes on the given answers, which will also help me to clarify each point with the participant. If all interviewees consent before our meetings, I will be recording the audio of our discussion as a way of ensuring that I have not missed any crucial points. The recordings will not be transcribed in full, but I may use them to more accurately capture quotes for my dissertation. It is important that all the participants consent to these audio recordings, if one of the participants does not want to be
recorded, I will not record any of the interviews. This will not be a major loss to the
data recording process, as I am able to rely on my own notes, but for the sake of
consistency, I must either record all or none of the interviews.

Work plan

As shown in the Gantt chart above, I will concentrate on my literature review up
until the halfway point, 15 July. Alongside this research, I will also be doing
preparatory work for the interview stage. I have chosen to begin my research as
soon as possible, although I fully understand that this project is still subject to
approval. The reason for beginning so early is that I would like to maximize the time
available, and make up for potential time lost while I am visiting family in the U.S. for
two weeks in June. I have factored in time for posting advertisements in the
university, although this step is only necessary if the online adverts fail to attract
enough respondents. It is important to begin recruiting interviewees as soon as
possible, because students and staff will inevitably be away from the university for
some part of the summer months.

After 15 July, my focus will shift from the literature review to the interviews.
The timing of each of the interviews is subject to the participants’ availability, but it
would be best to schedule them earlier in the allotted time frame and with enough
space in between to allow me to write up each interview. During this time, I will also
be writing the other sections of my dissertation. After the interview period is
finished, I have allowed myself two weeks to concentrate fully on writing, and two
weeks on editing my dissertation. The final week before the deadline will allow for
any last-minute changes and time for printing.

The three minimum checkpoints with my supervisor will occur throughout
the process. The ‘start-up’ checkpoint will be most useful after receiving project
approval, but before beginning to advertise for interview participants. The ‘mid-
term’ checkpoint will most likely fall slightly before 15 July, when the literature
review stage will be finishing, and the interviews beginning. The ‘final’ checkpoint
would be most helpful towards the end of August, after the interviews have been completed, and during the final write-up of the dissertation. In addition to these points of contact, I will most likely seek further advice and guidance from my supervisor throughout the process.

Resources

For the literature review section of the proposed project, the resources needed will be minimal. Most of the relevant literature will be available either through public libraries, university libraries, or the British Library, in London. While traveling to the U.S. in June, I may find it necessary to seek access to resources that I find to be only available in America.

The interview stage of the project will require travel costs, possible printing costs for the advertisements, access to a recording device, and space to conduct the interviews. As most of the advertising for, and communication with, potential interviewees will be done online and via email, this stage will require time but little to no money. If it seems necessary to advertise within the buildings themselves, printing and travel costs will be incurred. The interviews will be conducted in a quiet and private place, preferably at the interviewee’s home institution. This may be an office, a classroom, or a designated section of the library. The interviewee will be able to identify suitable places in the university for this meeting. An audio recording device can be loaned from my workplace, and as the recordings are digital, the only additional requirement will be batteries. Recording the data from the interviews may be time-intensive, but as the interviews will be limited in number, I will be capable of carrying this out in the time allotted.

Ethics

The Research Ethics Checklist has been completed and included in the appendix of this proposal. I do not foresee any serious ethical issues arising from this project. Participants in the interviews will be made fully aware of my project beforehand, and they will have the ability to choose how much of their personal information is given in my final write-up. Only my supervisor and myself will have access to the participants’ full personal information during the dissertation process, and it will be kept privately and securely on my personal computer and email account, and then deleted after the final dissertation deadline. After I have selected my four to six interviewees, I will not keep any information on the other individuals who contacted me about the opportunity. I have drafted a letter of consent for the chosen interviewees to sign, which is also included in the appendix. This will be sent out at least a week prior to the interview, and the participants will be asked to sign a copy for me to collect on the day. Withdrawing from the research at any point is within the rights of the interviewees and they will not be penalized in any way. The interviewees will be sent a copy of my final dissertation to read prior to the deadline.

Confidentiality

As stated above, an acceptable level of personal information to be included in my final dissertation will be agreed between the interviewer and the interviewees. This
will not include the interviewee’s name, but at most, their course, job title, and institution. However, if they object to having this information included as well, I will further anonymise their identity. The level of information I am allowed to give in the dissertation will be formally agreed in the appropriately revised consent form prior to the interviews.

References


Appendix 1 (of the proposal): Research ethics checklist form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the answer to any of the following questions is YES, you MUST apply to the School Research Ethics Panel for approval and your application will be likely to be referred to the University Research Ethics Committee for consideration (You should seek advice about this from your project supervisor at an early stage)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Are the research participants under 18?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Could the participants be classified as vulnerable adults?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Do the participants have learning difficulties?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Does the research involve animals?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Does the project involve pregnant women or women in labour?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the answer to the following questions is NO then the project needs to be modified</td>
<td>Delete as appropriate</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Does the planned project pose only minimal and predictable risks to the researcher (student)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Does the planned project pose only minimal and predictable risks to other people affected by or participating in the project?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Is the project supervised by a member of academic or research staff of the School?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the answer to any of the following questions is YES, you MUST apply to the School Research Ethics Panel for approval (You should seek advice about this from your project supervisor at an early stage)</td>
<td>Delete as appropriate</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Could the research uncover illegal activities?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Could the research cause stress or anxiety in the participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Will you be asking questions of a sensitive nature?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Does the research rely on covert observation of the participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following questions must be answered YES, i.e. you MUST COMMIT to satisfy these conditions and have an appropriate plan to ensure they are satisfied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 Will you ensure that the participants taking part in the research are fully informed about:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including informed about how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long the data will be kept?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The purpose of the research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Consent forms from the participants of your research will be necessary if the research aims to gather personal, medical or other sensitive data about them. Will consent be obtained by the participants?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If YES, provide the consent request form that you will use and indicate who will obtain the consent, how are you intending to arrange for a copy of the signed consent form for the participants, when will they receive it and how long the participants will have between receiving information about the study and giving consent, and when the filled consent request forms will be available for inspection (NOTE: subsequent failure to provide the filled consent request forms will automatically result in withdrawal of any earlier ethical approval of your project):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have included the consent request form along with this checklist. The form will be emailed to the participants at least a week prior to our scheduled interview. They will then be asked to return a signed copy of the consent form to me at the interview. The full information about the project will be emailed to them when they are chosen for the interview process, which will be a minimum of a week before the interview. The signed consent forms will be available for inspection after the end of the last interview, which will take place before the 16 August 2013.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 When the individuals have agreed to participate in the research, will it be made clear to them that they may withdraw at any time without any penalty?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Have you made arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals remain confidential?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If YES, provide details of how the confidentiality of private information collected from participants will be preserved:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information on the individuals will only be accessible by my supervisor and myself. It will be stored on my private computer and in my private email account. This private information will be deleted from all my records after the dissertation’s final deadline.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Will the research be conducted in the participant’s home?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Will the data collected be sent or used overseas?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 If the research is taking place in the participant’s home, or other non-University location, has the safety of the researcher(s) been considered?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If YES, provide details of how the safety of the researcher(s) will be preserved:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 (of the proposal): Consent Form for Interview Participants

I have volunteered to be interviewed for the dissertation project of City University’s MA Library Science student Cait Peterson. The project seeks to explore the role of academic libraries in artistic inspiration. Four to six interviews will be carried out with students and staff at various London-based institutions offering visual arts degrees. I understand the following:

- I am participating voluntarily and will not be paid. I may discontinue my participation at any point in this process without penalty.
- The interview will be conducted by Cait Peterson at my home institution. It will last between 30-60 minutes, and Cait will take notes and an audio recording* of the discussion.

I consent to have the following personal information included in Cait Peterson’s final dissertation

- the name of my course (for students)/job title (for staff)*
- the name of my home institution*
- the content of the interview

My name will be omitted from the final dissertation, and all my other personal details will be kept confidential and deleted from Cait Peterson’s records after the dissertation deadline on the 27 September 2013.

By signing, I declare that I have been given a copy of this form, and read and understood its content. All my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I have volunteered for this project, and give my consent for the information listed above to be used.

Participant’s signature Date

Participant’s name (printed) Interviewer’s signature

Cait Peterson
Email: cait.peterson@gmail.com

*This information will be changed to reflect the preferences of each interviewee, as agreed prior to emailing them this form.

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Appendix 5: Reflection

Although some important aspects of this dissertation have changed since the proposal stage, I feel I really could not have done better in choosing a topic. I believe it is clear from the sheer length of this document that inspiration was a fascinating concept to me, and I could easily write many more thousands of words on its various manifestations throughout time, and across different cultures and domains.

The most significant changes made since the proposal are outlined in the methodology section for the interviews, and were necessitated by my inability to find students to participate in this research. The positive aspect of this issue was that I came to the realisation that my efforts could be better spent focusing on the under-researched demographic of emerging artists and designers. Perhaps if I had taken the intended route of interviewing librarians, students, and tutors, I would have fallen in to the trap of so many previous studies that focused exclusively on academically affiliated artists and designers. This change brought about a more general view of libraries, expanding on my original intention of focusing solely on academic libraries. During the course of my interview with graphic design tutor Russell Bestley, I also realised that it was important to include designers as a separate group from artists, and not to assume anything about the presence of inspiration in the creative process, or the role of the library in this. Additional changes included dropping a section of the proposed literature review about the previous role of the library in artistic inspiration. I had been relatively unenthusiastic about this section from the beginning, and when I realised just how much could be written about inspiration in itself, and the potential difficulties of researching this peripheral section, my supervisor and I agreed that it was best to remove it altogether.

In discussing Ernest Hemingway’s Principle of the Iceberg, about how stripping away all but the essential strengthens one’s writing, the irony of its inclusion in a roughly 30,000 word MA dissertation was not lost on me. I fully recognise that this dissertation could be much shorter, and possibly better off that way. After writing the majority of this text with the idea of doing major editing afterwards, I came to
the conclusion that cutting away any section would be taking away from the full picture I worked so hard to depict.

Although I am indebted for the help of my interviewees, and interesting aspects of the topic were undoubtedly uncovered, I am uncertain whether the literature review and interviews fit together as seamlessly as I had hoped. Perhaps they would be better as two separate projects. I feel that my inexperience as an interviewer may have let down the process, or perhaps the focus of the questions was too scattered. Without being able to judge this dissertation with the advantage of hindsight, I feel that the literature review is stronger than the interviews. I think that perhaps time spent struggling to find interview participants was really only time taken away from creating an even stronger literature review section. However, I may feel differently if I re-read this work in the future.

Ultimately, I feel that this topic served its purpose well, researching and writing this dissertation was fascinating and exciting for me, and I think this contributed to the final length. I experienced a few personal revelations about my own work as an illustrator, and why I should still be continuing with that seemingly failed pursuit. I do think that this project made me reflect more about my own creative process than three years of art school did. I also feel that I touched upon the heart of a long-standing intellectual struggle of mine to reconcile my scientifically-minded upbringing, which had instilled an instinctual belief in an objective truth, with my own intellectual, artistic belief in subjectivity, chaos, and messiness. A favorite quote of mine comes from Kafka’s letter to his father (by way of Zadie Smith): ‘naturally things cannot in reality fit together the way the evidence does in my letter; life is more than a Chinese puzzle.’12 I found that when it comes to studying inspiration, one cannot sit around waiting for the pieces of the ‘puzzle’ to fall in to place.

1 Or how I learned to stop worrying and love the subjective.