

TWENTY-ONE NOTES ON INSPIRATION

1: If I was asked out of the blue “Where do your ideas come from?” I’d have to think for a minute before answering “buggered if I know!” So here are some ideas and quotes that try to address that question. It’s going to be one-part manifesto and one-part grumpy old man; so here goes . . .

2: As artists, we should say in public what everyone else is too afraid to think in private.

3: If you’re still relying on tricks and gimmicks that worked for you years ago, you’re only phoning it in.

4: If you’re always trying to please everyone, you’re probably doing something wrong. (However, if everyone is pissed off, you’re probably just an asshole.)

5: When I was young and full of piss and vinegar, the relevant work that was being made reflected the chaos of a world coming apart at the seams. That was a time when every existing formulation was looked at with suspicion.

6: With the current panic over trigger warnings, I have only one thing to say – If you’re *Not* the trigger, you’re probably doing something wrong.

7: This issue is not *Only* about maintaining inspiration, but it's also about remaining relevant and up-to-date. Issues and approaches change very quickly.

8: The world is a fast-changing place. Your own life is a fast-changing place. So, if you're an artist living in the middle of this state of flux it's rather absurd to be doing the same thing today as you were doing last year (or last month). Inspiration comes from paying attention to this state of flux.

9: If someone *Already* knows what they'll be doing six months from now they might as well throw in the towel and get a job in a factory somewhere – if nothing else, the pay is waaaay better.

10: Brian Eno's advice for those who want to do their best creative work: "Don't get a job" . . . easy to say coming from somebody with rock-star money.

11: In "My Father and Myself", A.J. Ackerley wrote: "Much was expected of me, nothing was accomplished. I kept notebooks in which I jotted down ideas for works that never got written . . . I seemed unable to concentrate and got hopelessly stuck in everything I attempted . . ." How many here could have written this? Hands up.

12: Inspiration is not this airy-fairy thing. It's about gathering together everything you know and everything you've experienced and allowing

your brain to do its job. It's about how you take all that knowledge and all those lived experiences and connect the dots between them.

13: I don't think it's counter-productive to beat yourself up once in a while.

14: Renaldo Arenas said the Furies – the Greek Goddesses of Revenge – should be the only ones that inspire us.

15: Vincent van Gogh said “If one wants to be active, one mustn't be afraid to do something wrong . . . not afraid to lapse into some mistakes. To be good – many people think that they'll achieve it by *Doing No Harm* – and that's a lie . . . that leads to stagnation, to mediocrity.”

16: Arnold Schonberg said “The middle road is the only one that does *Not* lead to Rome”.

17: What is it that interferes with inspiration? Depression; anxiety; a broken heart; financial insecurity; physical and medical barriers; and of course, ageism (along with all the other isms). In other words . . . life.

18: But the trick is – the *Challenge* we face – and maintaining inspiration is nothing if not a challenge – is how to take all these obstacles and turn them into weapons. That's it.

19: Points raised during open discussion: On seeking inspiration, let me give an example of what would *Absolutely Not* work for me. Philip Glass sets aside the same three-hour block of time every day, then he sits in front of the piano and waits . . . maybe something will arise. If after three hours there's nothing, then that's it – end of workday. That would drive me INSANE! After twenty minutes I'd be beating myself up as a no-talent *LOSER*. I'd *LOST* it. I'd *NEVER HAD IT* to begin with. I'm just a *FAKE* . . .

20: What does work for me is walking. Will Self is a great walker. Charles Dickens was an even greater walker. Being in that state of unconscious movement allows your brain to wander – because you don't have to think about walking – so everyday I take a long walk down to the hospital and have a cup of coffee and make notes about where my mind had just wandered and then walk back (making more notes at the end. The whole affair is about an hour. The notes may be junk, but it's something. There's always tomorrow. But the most important thing to remember is to leave your phone at home! That evil little thing is a distracting time-waster – every second that you're on your phone is the amount of time you're not thinking about your work. Your work *MUST ALWAYS* come first.

21: Here's an idea if you're completely stuck: Don't do anything for a month; but always have a notebook with you – and remember to ditch that time-stealing succubus. Write down every thought you have no matter how idiotic it seems at the time. *Every* thought. At the end of the month review all your notes and do the one that scares the shit out of you . . . there's the unfiltered idea, and that's something you can build on.

Bruce Eves. October 15, 2019.

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