Introducing the New Concept of Inspirativity: Reassessing the Concept of Inspiration from the Perspective of Rhetorical Theory

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Abstract
What inspires? What makes something inspirational? Recent research has already analysed the concept of inspiration through its tripartite conceptualization as the three core characteristics of the state of inspiration: evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation. Nevertheless, the key question on what makes something inspirational remains unanswered. The very quality and notion of inspirability is an elusive concept which scientifically has been scarcely analysed; though it is evident that inspiration has always been a key motivator and driver of creativity. This paper is an attempt to conceptually advance the notion of inspirability by applying rhetorical theory constructs to the existing theory of inspiration and criteria for creativity. The author argues that the quality of inspirability can be viewed from the rhetorical perspectives of *Logos, Ethos, Pathos,* and *Kairos*, thus giving birth to a new conceptual approach of inspirativity as a potential or a capacity to inspire.

Keywords: inspiration, creativity, rhetoric, inspirability, inspirativity.

Introduction

Artists, writers and different types of creators have long argued that inspiration is a key motivator for creativity. Inspiration is something that provides a creator with an initial power and enthusiasm to create, invent, and advance. Indeed, the term "inspiration" has been used in a variety disciplines (e.g., literary criticism, theology, psychology, etc.) and literatures within psychology (in the fields of social comparison, humanism, creative process); thus making connections to the field of creativity quite evident (Thrash and Elliot, 2003).

From the perspective of the Ancient thought and philosophy, people believed gods inspired all desirable innovations and creative acts. Creativity as such did not exist as the urge to create was a God-sent act. To the ancients, the mind was comprised of two chambers: one to receive ideas, and the other to express them. Therefore, a human was regarded as a transmitter of divine ideas and creative power. For instance, the ancient Greeks received inspiration from the Muses as each Muse was responsible for a specific sphere of creative activity. Etymologically, the word inspiration derives from the late Latin word "*inspirare*" which means "to breathe into" implicating that divine guidance breathed into the minds of creators and artists.

Indeed, creativity is a relevant yet elusive concept, and consequently there is a large range of methods to assess creativity in many different contexts. Broadly speaking, we can differentiate between creativity approaches on *the level of creative personality* (by analysing personal characteristic of creative people, such as the Torrance tests), the *level of creative products* (by analysing different criteria of creativity in creative products and acts), and *the level of a creative process* (by analysing different approaches and methods towards creative thinking, brainstorming, and creative ideation). It could be emphasized that inspiration has its expression and relevance in each trajectory of creativity, since inspirationality as a quality is relevant for the analysis of creative people, creative products, or creative process.

Today many authors agree that inspiration is a motivational state that compels individuals to bring ideas into fruition. Creators have long argued that inspiration is important to the creative process, but until recently, scientists have not investigated this claim. (Thrash and Elliot, 2003) introduced the tripartite conceptualization of inspiration that specifies the three core characteristics of the state of inspiration, thus contributing to the very definitional concept of inspiration: *evocation*, *transcendence*, and approach *motivation*. Evocation refers to the fact that inspiration is evoked rather than initiated volitionally by the individual. In other words, one does not feel directly responsible for becoming inspired; rather, a stimulus object (such as a person, an idea, or a work of art, etc.) evokes and sustains the inspired state. During this inspired state (episode), the individual gains awareness of new possibilities that transcend ordinary or mundane concerns. Once inspired, the individual experiences a compelling approach motivation to transmit, actualize, or express the new vision. This set of three characteristics is intended to be minimally sufficient to distinguish the state of inspiration from other states and advance the very definition of inspiration.

Despite that the tripartite definition of inspiration is a large step forward towards conceptualizing the notion of inspiration, it does not provide us with the guidance towards answering the key question: what inspires, or what makes something inspirational? In this quest, this paper addresses the possibilities of applying rhetorical theory for the further conceptualization of inspiration by arguing that the very ancient school and thought of *rhetorical* theory was partially based on the concept of *inspiration in the form of exalted persuasion.*

Rhetoric was defined famously by Aristotle as the "available means of persuasion" and since then it has been a central part of Western education to train speakers and writers to persuade their audiences. Aristotle (2010) argued about the relevance of rhetoric within every field:

"*Rhetoric* may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter; for instance, medicine about what

is healthy and unhealthy, geometry about the properties of magnitudes, arithmetic about numbers, and the same is true of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects."

According to Aristotle (1991), persuasion could be produced either through the character of the speaker (*ethos*), the emotional state of the listener (*pathos*) or the argument (*logos*) itself. In turn, some authors elaborate Aristotle's rhetorical theory through the perspective of persuasive appeals: *ethos* (i.e., appeal based on the character and credibility of the persuader), *pathos* (i.e., appeal directed to the emotions of the persuadee) and *logos* (i.e., appeal based on evidence and reason) (Shapiro and Schall, 1990). In parallel to Aristotle's theory, the category of *Kairos* was historically co-created within the framework of rhetorical theory as an appeal to timeliness. *Kairos* is the type of persuasion that pertains to "*the right place and the right time*." Kairos is defined as "seizing the opportune moment, choosing arguments depending on the demands of the situation" (McComiskey, 2002).

During many years of rhetorical theory development, the rhetoric theory has advanced and variated in many directions of its interpretation. Perelman (1982) argues that rhetoric is useful for undermining any claim to any form of knowledge that is absolute (and therefore beyond argument); instead knowledge arises through argument (persuasive rhetoric) within communities that share assumptions and beliefs. Bizzell and Herzberg (2001) provide a definition of rhetoric-as-method by arguing that "rhetoric is synonymous with meaning, for meaning is in use and context, not words themselves. Knowledge and belief are products of persuasion, which seeks to make the arguable seem natural, to turn positions into premises—and it is rhetoric's responsibility to reveal these ideological operations". Bitzer (1968) argues that "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action". Some researchers argued that rhetoric even holds the idea of omnipresence or universality; it represents "*a universal and architectonic art*" (McKeon, 1987), which organises and gives structure to the other arts and disciplines" (Booth, 1988) since rhetoric is not only how we persuade, but also how we organize our thinking. In turn, rhetoric is "*the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another" (Booth, 1988)*. This Booth's definition of rhetoric opens new areas of consideration, and it advances the potential of applying rhetorical theory towards many domains.

What about *inspirational rhetoric* that produces effects on one another? Indeed, the concept of inspiration, or even the very quality of inspirability, seems to serve fit within the rhetoric domain as inspiration could be a key driver for the persuasive appeals of *Ethos*, *Pathos*, *Logos*, and even *Kairos*. In other words, the quality of inspirability can be viewed from the rhetorical perspectives of *Logos,*

Ethos, Pathos, and Kairos, thus giving birth to a new conceptual approach of inspirativity as a potential or a capacity to inspire based on a specific persuasive appeal. In addition, the following conceptual analysis and literature review positions this paper within the domain of creativity research (i.e. criteria for creativity) by arguing conceptually that creativity and inspirativity may share common criteria in some cases.

The original, seminal contribution of this paper is to introduce how the rhetorical framework of *Ethos, Pathos, Logos,* and *Kairos* could potentially provide a systemic pathway to advance inspiration theory, especially by focusing on a new territory of research - the very potential (or capacity) to inspire, herein introduced as a new concept of *inspirativity*.

Kairos and the inspirational rhetoric of timeliness, novelty, and originality

Kairos refers to the persuasive appeal of "*the right place and the right time*." Some authors define Kairos as "seizing the opportune moment, choosing arguments depending on the demands of the situation" (McComiskey, 2002). Kairos appeal to timeliness and the emerging opportunities of the moment. It is some unique opening in time that is highly interconnected with the *context* of the argument. Indeed, many rhetoricians tend to argue if such opportunities can be created, or they should be recognized as such.

In this respect, it could be conceptually argued that *Kairos* is closely interrelated with inspiration (or its inspirational potential as *inspirativity* per se) since inspiration is conceptually interrelated with persuasive appeal of "*the right place and the right time*." Inspiration as a motivational state emerges at specific time (i.e. a unique opening in time); therefore, even the same inspirational stimuli may evoke different reactions through different time periods.

Kairos may infer novelty and originality that are necessary for the conceptualization of creativity (i.e. what makes something creative, and, probably, inspirational) as referring to *seizing the opportune moment even in evolutionary terms*. People are inspired by new and especially novel and original things or acts. While the concept of "new" is something that has been recently created, "novel" refers to something new to the entire human race; therefore, the concept of novelty encompasses both "new" and "originality". Indeed, the key feature of most standard definitions of creativity refers to novelty and its closely related property of originality (Kaufmann, 2003; Lubart, 1994; Ochse, 1990). It is not original, and therefore not creative (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). Some authors identify originality as ''the ability to produce ideas that are generally not produced, or ideas that are totally new and unique'' (Goff and Torrance, 2002).

Kairos may also infer the situational necessity to be different from others that are necessary for the conceptualization of creativity *as "being different or*

outstanding others" is tightly interrelated with "*the right place and the right time*" as well: what you consider bizarre and unique today, it may be a commonplace and the new normal in the future. For example, an artist or a musician is proclaimed creative when their style reveals novel and unique elements that were never encountered before (Kharkhurin, 2014). Furthermore, Niu and Sternberg (2001) perceived creativity as something contrasting with conformity that breaks out of a mould and is surprising in the light of what was known at the time of the discovery.

Kairos may also infer *the rejection of previous ideas* that are necessary for the conceptualization of creativity. Indeed, some authors even take a more radical position on creativity criteria and proclaim that novelty should be complimented by a modification or rejection of previously accepted ideas (Kaufmann, 2003; Newell, Shaw, & Simon, 1979). Following the historical trajectory of Western art, one may notice its focus solely on novelty and on a radical rejection of existing paradigms (Kharkhurin, 2014). Many 20th-century artists purposely moved away from the artiness in their work and utilized mundane materials from everyday life since their intent was to establish an antithesis to traditional perception of art. For example, Dadaists concentrated their program on a rejection of the prevailing standards in art through antiart works in visual arts, literature, theatre, and graphic design (Richter, 1965).

The *Kairos* of originality is something novel at *the right place and the right time*, but a truly random process will often generate something that is merely original (Runco and Jaeger, 2012), but of no added value; therefore, we have to proceed to the next section of *Logos* – the function and the argument.

Logos and the inspirational rhetoric of reason, value, and appropriateness
Logos refers to the persuasive appeal of argument and value. It refers to having a sense of logic to your persuasion as logos-based rhetoric is founded in logic and reason rather than emotion, authority, or personality. In other mediums, *Logos* may coincide with Function as an argument what makes something work or function.

In this respect, it could be conceptually argued that *Logos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (or its inspirational potential as *inspirativity* per se) since *Logos* may provide *the argument to be inspired*. For instance, the persuasive, reasonable argument may provide an insight. In research the term insight has been used to describe the process by which a problem solver suddenly moves from a state of not knowing how to solve a problem to a state of knowing how to solve it (Mayer, 1992) or even apprehension of the inherent value of an idea. Within the creativity context, insight has also been conceptualized as the cognitive content that enters consciousness suddenly which we call the "aha!" moment (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer, 1995). As insight

research is an attempt to explain the cognitive mechanisms such as restructuring (Ohlsson, 1984), inspiration research is an attempt to explain the motivational response that often (but not always) follows creative insight (Thrash et al., 2010).

Logos may infer function, value, effectiveness, appropriateness, and adaptability that are necessary for the conceptualization of creativity (i.e. what makes something creative, and, probably, inspirational). The definitions summarized by Mayer (1999) described a creative work as valuable, appropriate, useful, significant, and adaptive (meeting task constraints); that is, this work can be put to some use (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). This line of thought is quite clear in the economic research on creativity as it indicates how original and valuable products and ideas depend on the current market, and more specifically on the costs and benefits of contrarianism (Rubenson, 1991; Rubenson and Runco, 1992, 1995; Sternberg and Lubart, 1991). Therefore, original things must be effective to be creative. Originality is vital but must be balanced with fit and appropriateness (Runco, 1988).

Logos may also infer the argument of practicality or adaptability that are necessary for the conceptualization of creativity. Hutchinson (1931) argued that creative thought makes real transformations in the world. Barron (1955) also indicated that to be called original it has to some extent be adaptive to reality. Therefore, creativity and inspiration are interconnected with the logos of value as relates to creative or inspirational acts.

Ethos and the inspirational rhetoric of character, credibility, and authenticity
Ethos refers to the persuasive appeal of character, authority, or credibility. To some extent, *Ethos* refers to a way of establishing credibility, moral character, sentiment, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution. In popular discourses Ethos may be created by celebrities, organisations, or brands at large. In turn, Ethos corresponds with any entity or pathway that strengthens the persuasive appeal as credible, inspirational, or trustworthy.

In this respect, it could be conceptually argued that *Ethos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (or its inspirational potential as *inspirativity* per se) since *Ethos* represents an inspiring source of authority. Today many celebrities, thought leaders and brands are viewed as inspirational sources due to their popularity, charisma or credibility that allows them fully tap into the persuasive potential of Ethos.

In turn, *Ethos* may infer a self-determining appeal to *authority* that is necessary for the conceptualization of creativity. For instance, Breton (1935) claimed that a work of art gains its status when the artists perceives it as such; that is, the significance of the creative work is in the eye of the creator. This seems to be a rather subjective perspective, which annihilates any objective evaluation criteria

of the relevance of the creative work (Runco and Jaeger, 2014). Nevertheless, Ethos has the power of credible self-determination.

Ethos also appeals to *personal beliefs and values*. Following Confucian aesthetics, creativity is a process of breathing in a new essence into existing ideas to reflect an individual's own values and beliefs (Tu, 1985). *Ethos* also appeals to *personal authenticity*. Averill and his colleagues (Averill et al., 2001) illustrated the relevance of this criterion with an example of a computer-generated fractal image which met the criteria of novelty and accurate task fulfilment, but missed an important component, which questions its overall creative value, namely authenticity. Arnheim (1966) argued that creativity involves ''*the pregnant sight of reality*'' as ''computers are lifeless: they have no inner vision, pregnant or otherwise. In a word, they lack authenticity''. So what is the role of authenticity in creative production and inspiration? This component seems to refer to ability to express one's inner self and to relate an individual's own values and believes to the world. It enables individuals to explore their own nature and to relate events in phenomenal reality to their own values and beliefs (Kharkhurin, 2014).

Pathos and the inspirational rhetoric of emotion, transcendence, and aesthetics

Pathos refers to the persuasive appeal of emotion, or evocation of emotions and feelings. It relates to the emotional experience by evoking specific emotions in your audience like desire or inspirational elevation. Furthermore, pathos is not just about creating emotion; it can also be about counteracting the unwanted emotion with the desired one.

In this respect, it could be conceptually argued that *Pathos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (or its inspirational potential as *inspirativity* per se) since the emotion of inspiration (manifesting as inspired elevation, passion, new desire, etc.) is an appeal of *Pathos* itself. Pathos provides the emotional background to be inspired.

Thrash and Elliot (2003) conceptualized inspiration as a motivational state and a motivational response to creative ideas that may have potentially relevant self-transcending emotions (i.e. elevation, awe, admiration). For instance, Awe has been defined as a responsiveness involving profound reverence to various kinds of threat, beauty, ability, virtue, or supernatural causality and is characterized by vastness and accommodation (Keltner and Haidt, 2003). Furthermore, being *inspired by* involves an "appreciation of and accommodation to an evocative object," and being inspired to which involves the "motivation to extend the qualities exemplified in the evocative object" (Thrash and Eliot, 2004).

The emotion or state of inspiration also entails transcendent emotions. Transcendence refers to becoming aware of possibilities that transcend the ordinary and mundane (Thrash et al., 2010)—a focus on or connection to things

that are better or more important than one's normal preoccupations. Transcendence thus implies a connection—to something beyond the self or greater than the limits of the status quo (Ashforth and Pratt, 2002).

Pathos may also infer the motion of beauty that is also necessary for the conceptualization of creativity since beauty (aesthetics) is conceptually interrelated with inspirational potential. MacKinnon (1962) stated that ''for the truly creative person it is not sufficient that problems be solved, there is the further demand that the solutions be elegant. He seeks both truth and beauty''.

Conclusions

This paper was a conceptual attempt to position the concept of inspiration within the rhetorical framework of *Ethos*, *Pathos*, *Logos*, and *Kairos* to address the potential of its application for the further conceptualization of inspiration by assessing the quality of *inspirability* and the very potential (or capacity) to inspire as a new concept of *inspirativity*:

- *Kairos* is conceptually interrelated with inspiration (*inspirativity*) since inspiration is conceptually interrelated with persuasive appeal of "the right place and the right time." Inspiration as a motivational state emerges at specific time (i.e. a unique opening in time); therefore, even the same inspirational stimuli may evoke different reactions through different time periods.
- *Logos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (*inspirativity*) since Logos may provide the argument (value, reason) to be inspired.
- *Ethos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (*inspirativity*) since Ethos may represent an inspiring source of authority. Today many celebrities, thought leaders and brands are viewed as inspirational sources due to their popularity, charisma or credibility that allows them fully tap into the persuasive potential of *Ethos*.
- *Pathos* is conceptually interrelated with the concept of inspiration (*inspirativity*) since the very emotion of inspiration (manifesting as inspired elevation, passion, new desire, etc.) is an appeal of *Pathos* itself. Pathos provides the emotional background to be inspired.

The original, seminal contribution of this paper is to introduce how the rhetorical framework of *Ethos, Pathos, Logos,* and *Kairos* could potentially provide a systemic pathway to advance inspiration theory, especially by focusing on a new territory of research - the very potential (or capacity) to inspire, herein introduced as a new concept of *inspirativity*.

Guidelines for Applying Research to Practice

The proposed rhetorical framework of *Ethos*, *Pathos*, *Logos*, and *Kairos* provides a systemic pathway and guidelines to analyse inspirational dynamics of

different discourses in research and practical situations. It may also function as a reference guide to enhance the potential or capacity to inspire, for instance, in in political rhetoric, etc.

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