

Creativity. Inspiration. Innovation



By [Mark Schefermann](#)

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AUSTIN, US: [Austin Kleon](#) is the author of two influential and best-selling books: "[Steal Like An Artist](#)" and "[Newspaper Blackout](#)". His third book, "[Show Your Work!](#)", was published in March 2014. He was one of the keynote speakers at SXSW Interactive 2014.

Here is some context about his book "Steal Like An Artist" and his keynote. Back in 2005 he had a serious case of writer's block. So while he was sitting at his desk, without words, he looked down and noticed the rubbish bin that was full of old newspapers, with lots of words.

He took out one of the papers and picked up his black marker that he uses for drawing and started putting blocks around the words that stood out to him and then started to connect these words to different phrases and funny sayings, and lastly he would black out all the words that he didn't need.

Creative work

He started posting his creations on his blog and called them Newspaper Blackout poems and slowly over time they started to gain traction online.

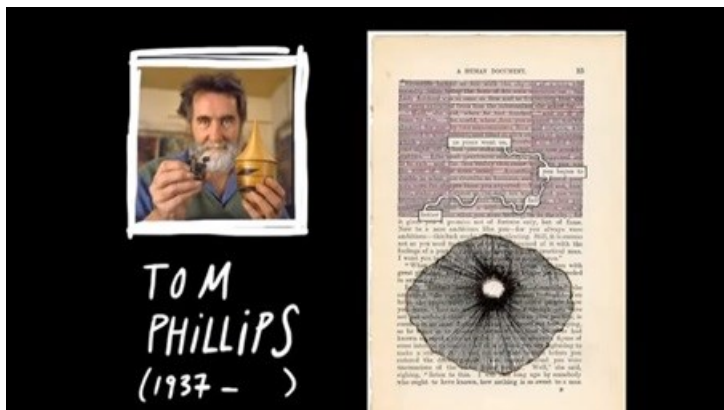
But then people started to get in contact with him to tell him that his work was un-original and that an artist by the name of Tom Phillips started drawing on pages in a similar way back in the 60's. This has been a life-long project for Tom that he has been doing for over 40 years.



However after chatting to Tom Philips, Austin discovered that Tom got this project idea from reading a Paris Review interview with the writer William Burroughs who was talking about his cut-up method of writing.

After researching further, Austin discovered that William Burroughs got his idea for the cut-up method from his friend Brion Gysin who was a painter and one day when cutting a canvas he accidentally cut through a pile of newspapers. The way the newspaper cuttings could be strung together gave him the idea of a different way to write poetry.

But Austin didn't stop there, he went on to do some more research and discovered that 30 years before that there was a poet named Tristan Tzara who got on stage with a hat and a newspaper and would then proceed to cut up the newspaper and put the pieces in the hat and then start pulling out the pieces one by one to form a poem.



Austin traced this concept all the way back to 1734 where a guy by the name of Caleb Whitefoord used to read the newspapers across the columns versus reading from top to bottom. He would get these funny combinations of phrases that he would share with his friends and then he went on to publish a broadsheet of them.

No original idea

Now this may seem like a lot of useless information, however this sets the scene for Austin's topic "how to steal like an artist". Essentially after doing this research he traced the concept of writing poetry from newspapers back 250 years before he posted his first Blackout Poem.

This just goes to show that there is nothing that is completely original, all creative works builds on what came before or is a remix of previous ideas.

A quote from Steve Jobs: "Good artists copy, great artists steal."



During Austin's keynote at SXSW Interactive 2014 he spoke about a concept called "Scenius". Scenius essentially means that creativity doesn't happen in a vacuum, a great concept comes from a scene of different people and bright minds. It is a collaborative effort even though some of the individuals indirectly involved in the process might not even know that they have contributed.

Sharing great work

Austin went on to explain how SXSW is essentially one huge Scenius setup, lots of innovative, entrepreneurial great minds, sharing in one place. We need to move away from being "hoarders of great ideas and work" we need to share great work that we love. If we do this we will eventually meet the people who love the work you share and those that create the work that you love.

Always give credit, this allows others to dig deeper and find out more and hopefully continue to evolve the "work".

Austin's keynote resonated with me because I have often thought there is no new idea or concept and that's just it, you don't have to come up with the "next big thing", you just have to find something that you love and then start "stealing like an artist".

You can find out more about Austin Kleon here: <http://austinkleon.com>

ABOUT MARK SCHEFERMANN

My knowledge and enthusiasm for the digital world enables me to think creatively and challenge briefs. My passion is strategy and showing how digital can open new opportunities for clients. Well conceived digital strategies and campaigns will push brands ever forward in the consciousness of their audiences and lead to long lasting adoption, advocacy and allow them to forge individual relationships with their audiences.

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