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**"Beautiful."**  
—Chris Anderson  
Curator of the TED  
Conference

# STEAL LIKE AN ARTIST

10 THINGS NOBODY TOLD YOU ABOUT BEING CREATIVE

AUSTIN KLEON

**Steal Like an Artist**

**10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative**

**Austin Kleon**

**WORKMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY • NEW YORK**

**For Boom—whenever Boom gets here**

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**“Art is theft.”**

—*Pablo Picasso*

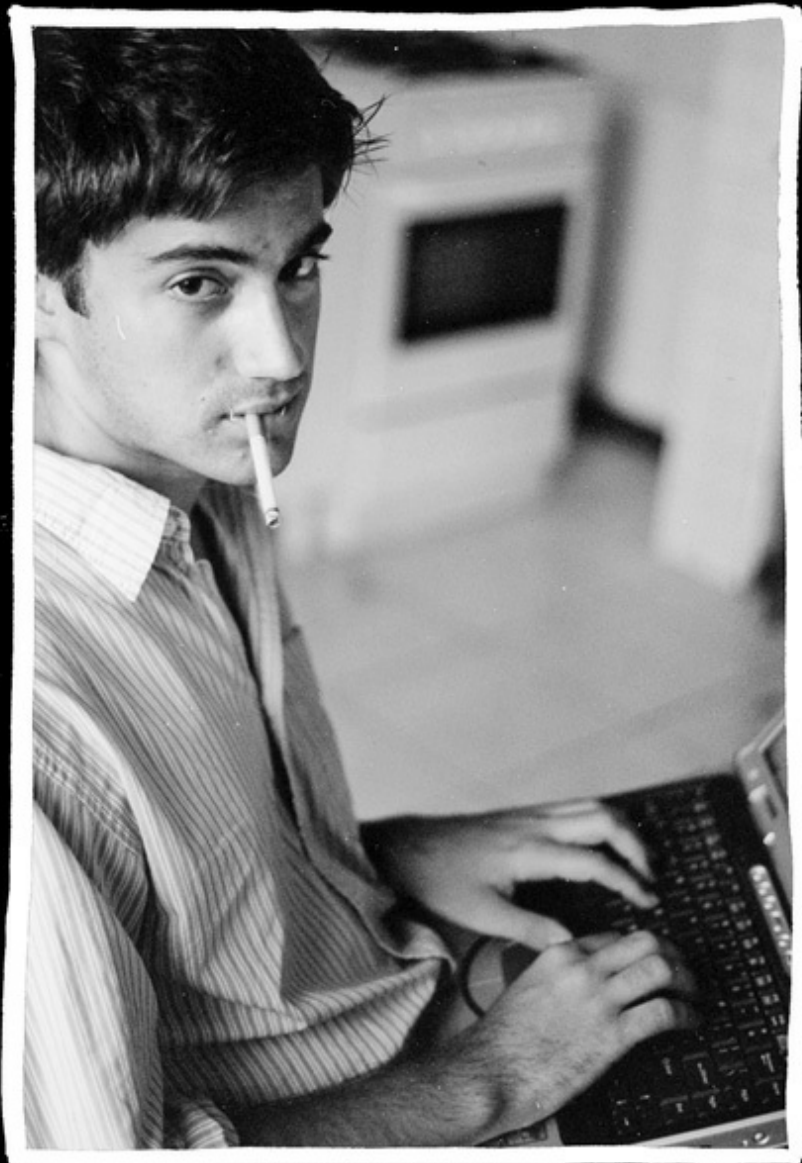
**“Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or**

**at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a**

**whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from**

**which it was torn.”**

—*T. S. Eliot*



19-YEAR-OLD ME  
COULD USE SOME  
ADVICE...

# ALL ADVICE IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL.

It's one of my theories that when people give you advice, they're really just talking to themselves in the past.

This book is me talking to a previous version of myself.

These are things I've learned over almost a decade of trying to figure out how to make art, but a funny thing happened when I started sharing them with

others—I realized that they aren't just for artists. They're for everyone.

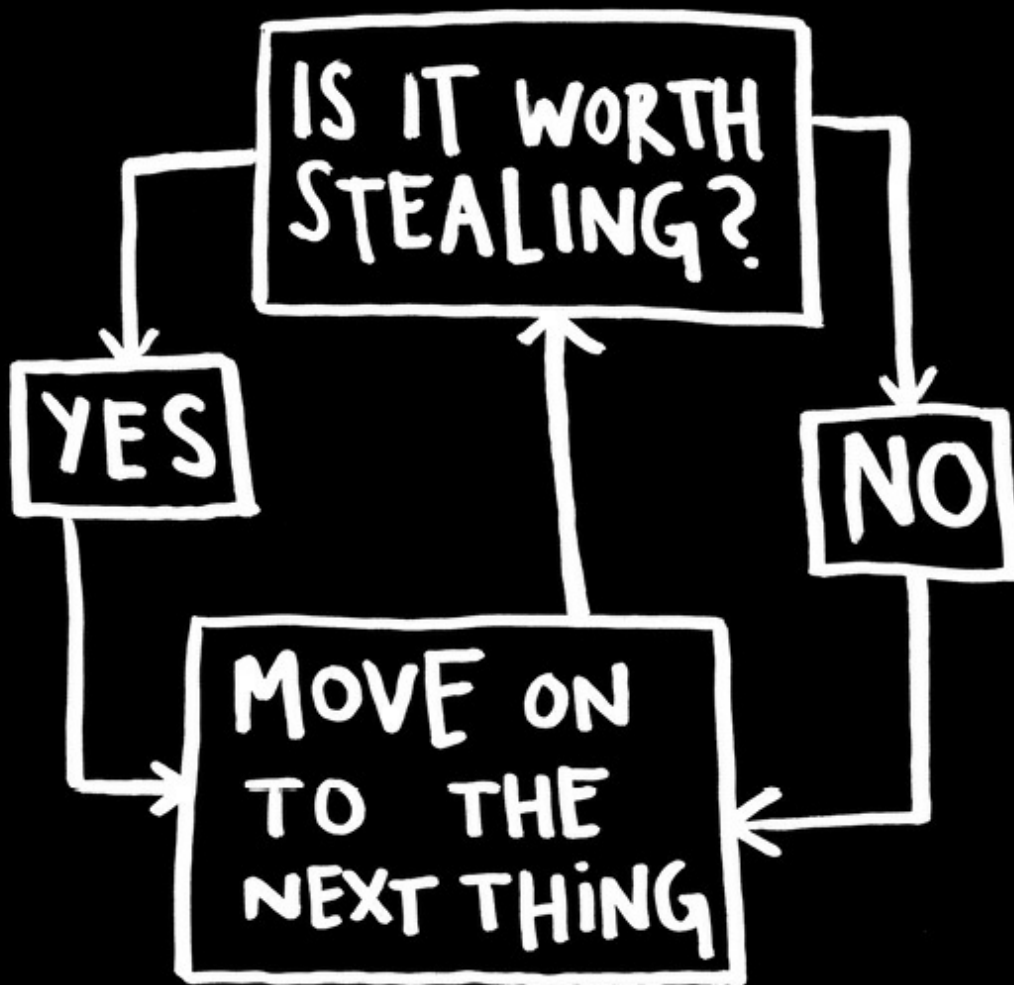
These ideas apply to anyone who's trying to inject some creativity into their life and their work. (That should describe all of us.)

In other words: This book is for you.

Whoever you are, whatever you make.

**Let's get started.**

① STEAL LIKE  
AN ARTIST.



# HOW TO LOOK AT THE WORLD ( LIKE AN ARTIST )

Every artist gets asked the question,

**“Where do you get your ideas?”**

The honest artist answers,

**“I steal them.”**

How does an artist look at the world?

First, you figure out what’s worth stealing, then you move on to the next thing.

That’s about all there is to it.

When you look at the world this way, you stop worrying about what’s “good”

and what’s “bad”—there’s only stuff worth stealing, and stuff that’s not worth stealing.

Everything is up for grabs. If you don’t find something worth stealing today,

you might find it worth stealing tomorrow or a month or a year from now.

**“The only art I’ll ever study is stuff that I can steal from.”**

—*David Bowie*

**NOTHING  
IS ORIGINAL.**

The writer Jonathan Lethem has said that when people call something “original,” nine out of ten times they just don’t know the references or the original sources involved.

What a good artist understands is that nothing comes from nowhere. All creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is completely original. It’s right there in the Bible: “There is nothing new under the sun.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Some people find this idea depressing, but it fills me with hope. As the French writer André Gide put it, “Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But, since no one was listening, everything must be said



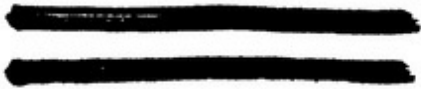
again.”

If we’re free from the burden of trying to be completely original, we can stop trying to make something out of nothing, and we can embrace influence instead of running away from it.

**“What is originality? Undetected plagiarism.”**

—*William Ralph Inge*

# THE GENEALOGY of IDEAS



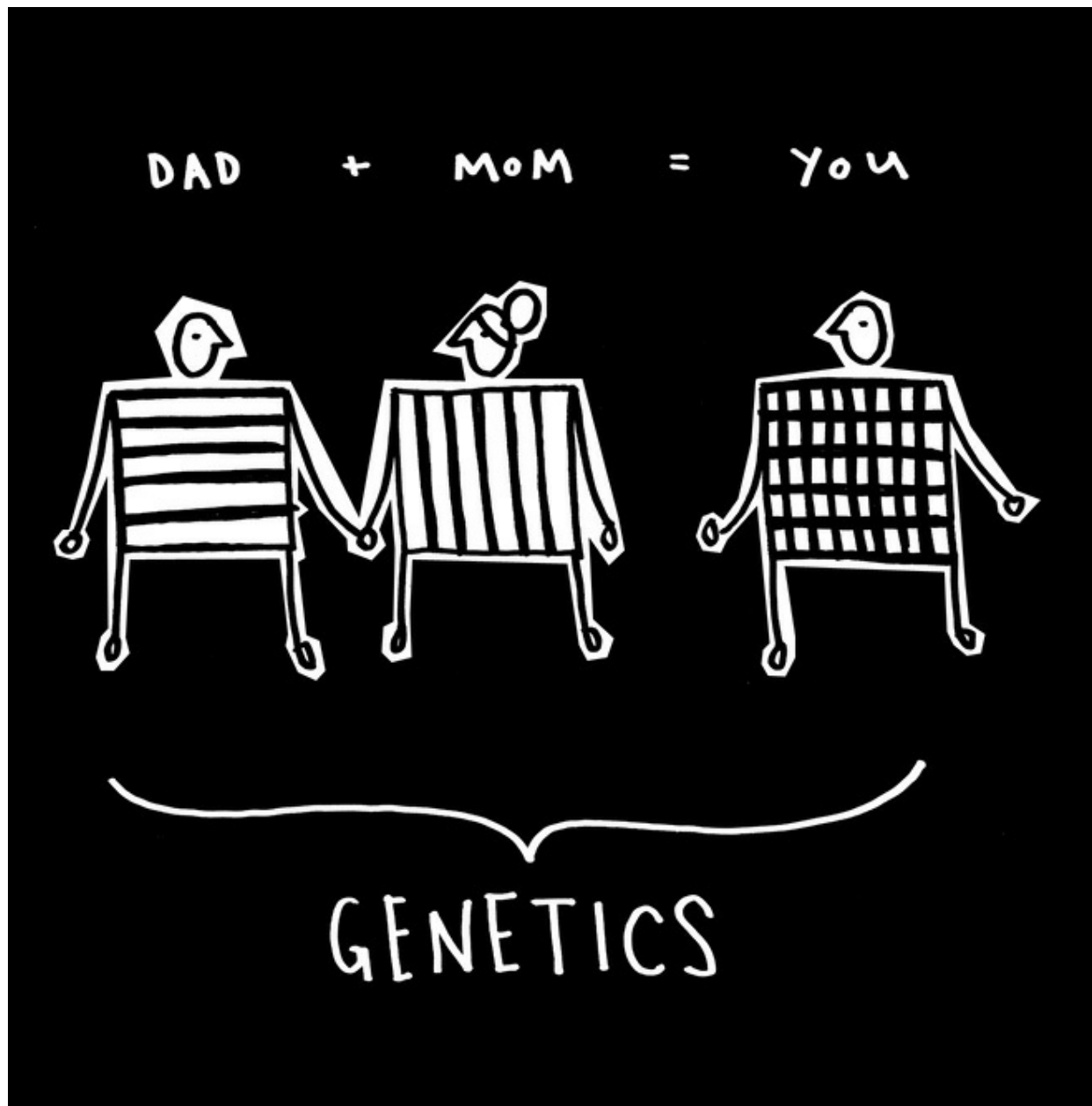
Every new idea is just a mashup or a remix of one or more previous ideas.

Here’s a trick they teach you in art school. Draw two parallel lines on a piece of paper:

How many lines are there?

There’s the first line, the second line, but then there’s a line of negative space that runs between them.

See it?  $1 + 1 = 3$ .



A good example is genetics. You have a mother and you have a father. You possess features from both of them, but the sum of you is bigger than their parts. You're a remix of your mom and dad and all of your ancestors. Just as you have a familial genealogy, you also have a genealogy of ideas. You don't get to pick your family, but you can pick your teachers and you