

2 Reinterpreting the classics - it has all been said before, but that doesn't mean anyone has ever heard it the way you are going to say it

I was 16 and walked up to some friends and proudly laid a new joke of mine on them. I told them and then laughed myself, because I thought it was funny and from the delight of having come up with it. One of them turned to the other and said, "I know that one. Didn't Mark tell us that one once?" They agreed that he had and turned back to me and said, "Paul, you didn't make that one up, it's old." I replied, "Ok, but I made it up... for me!" and I laughed some more.

We're not looking to recycle old stuff because we all have original ideas. Right? Well...

Many of the Greek tragedies and comedies touched on the gamut of themes and story arcs and most modern stories are retellings of one of them, or a blend of a few of those great ones from so long ago. Heroes, archetypes and flawed decisions. It's all there, so use it!

Actually, in all likelihood, everything's been done before in one way or another by someone somewhere. And that is a great starting point for our work, because it doesn't have to be about finding the thing no one has ever done, but instead can be about our own unique take on the world. Maybe, when creating something from a less megalomaniacal point of view we might have that vision of some brand new invention. But while we can keep that secret wish tucked away at the back of the mind, we can embrace our own individualism and join the rest of the humans here, and kick in with our very special and unique blend of sensibilities and training that make our work special.

The corollary to this is the question of where to ethically draw the line when it comes to using other people's work. This is a personal moral decision first, and will also be scrutinized by others when you put it out there. I think you know when you make something yours, and also know when you are leaning too heavily on someone else's ideas. In defense of the concept of the intellectual world conscience I offer a funny perspective from Martha Graham, the famous modern dancer and choreographer. Martha approached a dancer friend and asked, "Why don't you ever let me know when you're performing?" The friend responded, "I don't want you to steal my ideas." To which Martha replied, "then why put them onstage for anyone to see?" The unspoken lesson here is this: is it more important to deprive the world of your ideas because there's a chance someone might then take them? What's that again about imitation being the highest form of flattery?

Maurizio Cattelan, considered a joker in the art world, contributed to a show titled *Crap Shoot* at the de Appel Arts Center in Amsterdam by breaking into the nearby Galerie Bloom, stealing the entire contents of their current show (along with the filing cabinets and fax machine from the gallery), and installing it in his own space under the name *Another Fucking Readymade*. He was forced to return it all under legal threat by the local police, but let there be no doubt that Mr. Cattelan's thievery does fall within the bounds of "appropriation" as art, considering not only his reputation, but to a greater degree his overall approach

to social commentary, work, rules and obligations, and the status conferred upon certain artists by the galleries themselves. If he didn't also create quality original works, it would be easy to question his integrity.

It's about the action and the thought behind the action.

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