## I am a partially qualified philosopher

I got a 2:1 in philosophy. And so I’ve decided that that’s enough for me to be able to carry a card. Look, I’ve actually got cards.

What did learn in philosophy?

[Jokes about philosophy]

## Know your power – actually know ***my*** power

[This is a physical activity – I step up and down off of a chair as many times as I can in 30 seconds]

[Jokes about power about work]

## The shame game

It’s not just game, but progressing with making something is, in my experience about dealing with negative emotions, like shame, fear and embarrassment, boredom.

The supposed distinction between guilt and shame is that guilt is something that you’ve done.

Guilt is when you’ve vandalised a bus shelter. Shame is when you look like a vandalised bus shelter.

If this were right, it wouldn’t be possible to feel ashamed of things that you’ve done. But there are of course things, that you should feel ashamed of.

## The Hero’s Journey

So, this is what the hero’s journey is. There you are, sitting comfortably in you village. It’s always a village. And somebody comes along and tells you that you have to leave the village?  
  
Why? Because you’re the chosen one. This bad thing is happening and you need to stop it, or this bad thing is going to happen and you’re the only one who can stop it.   
  
And you, you’re the only one who can do anything about it.

But our lives are full of abandoned quests.

[Jokes about Star Wars, Lord of the Rings]

## Wanton Go For It

This is an exercise from a very disreputable source. But I think it works – and we’ve left this bit until last because I want this to be the last thing that you’re thinking about before you leave the theatre.

### Hesitation

There’s something that you want to do. It’s something that you really want to do. But you keep hesitating. Maybe you’re putting it off, it’s a some-day maybe kind of thing. Maybe you get right up to the point of doing it. You’re looking at the sign-up screen. You’re thinking about downloading the app. You walk past the place every day, and you’re thinking about going in. You bought the book on how to do it. Maybe you’ve even bought the gear. But then. At the last minute, you don’t. You hesitate. You pull up short.

### Frustration

And this is very frustrating. This way that you’re behaving. It’s very frustrating. You’re annoyed with yourself. Maybe you’re annoyed with other people that you think are holding you back. Maybe you’re annoyed because

### Impatience

You’ve had it now. [Could I do this to Zadok the priest?]

### Wanton Go For It – sooner or later someone has to say fuck it

Some sociopathic tricks to help you say “Fuck it.”

## Heckling

This is shit

You are shit

Why should we list to you, you’re a fat old man?

I thought this was supposed to be comedy – tell us a joke.

These heckles are shit

You haven’t created anything!

## What are we gonna do now?

Nobody expects success. The great train robbers – they planned the robbery meticulously.

We’re terrible at imagining how we’ll feel.

[Jokes about feeling bad, emotions, unexpected things]

## All stories are about a man (a person) in a hole

One way to get a story is to put yourself in a hole. Jump and justify.

### Monkey Mind and Should-ering to a halt

Now you’ve made one biscuit, why not make a thousand biscuits?

You should be in business making biscuits. The most popular biscuit in the uk is the digestive biscuit. Maybe you could outsell that. And maybe you could do it ethically. Maybe you could make it a Vegan biscuit. Maybe it could use fair trade sugar.

A minute ago you were just making a biscuit.

This is what Buddhists call “Monkey Mind.”

And it’s what I call “shuddering” to a halt.

It’s your mind just making stuff up that you \*should\* be doing.

And notice what world this lives in.

It lives in the world of ideas.

You see monkey mind all the time in project management.

There’s this measure of how fast a project is going called velocity. And the only thing that anybody says when you tell them about velocity is “why isn’t it double that?”

When you show people working software, they mostly talk about what it doesn’t do.

And people talk software into existence. Do they do that in other parts of life?

I’m sure they do.

## Agreed activity

I got this idea from improv theatre Guru Keith Johnstone. It’s this idea of agreed activity.

The example I give – I think it’s the one that he gives in the book – is of a group of improvisers pretending to be on a ship and ignoring the pirate ship that’s on the horizon.

There was a response to this that I was kind of expecting that nobody ever mentioned.

Isn’t Agile agreed activity?

Stand ups, planning, show and tell.

Another concept from improv is “stakes” the audience are interested in stories where something is at risk.

If nothing is at risk – if there’s no danger for the crew because they’ve got an instant Pirate-destroying ray gun that works! Then that’s boring. If they have a ray gun that doesn’t work – or works in an unexpected way – they think it will shrink the pirates but it makes them bigger.

And it’s the same with agreed activity – there needs to be the right amount of jeopardy.

Too little – it’s just mopping the decks. Too much it’s just sparkling panic.

What you really want is calm, grimly determined preparation. With a constant eye on the pirate ship, where it’s going and what it’s doing.

[Jokes, about time-wasting, jokes about pirates]

## All creativity is a status transaction – all public action is a status transaction

Another thing that I learned from improvisation. All creativity is a status transaction.

When you do something. Especially when you do something creative, you will get criticism.

Most people have had one of these things happen to them. They’ve been singing and someone has suggested that they shouldn’t. They’ve been dancing, and someone has pointed and laughed. The brutal truth is that part of the reason for this is that when you do something. Especially something that is slightly more uninhibited, you’re shifting your status.

There are in fact whole television shows about this. The dark unpleasant side of talent shows is making fun of people whose talent isn’t as impressive as they think it is. This is essentially the same gag in Dragon’s Den and The Apprentice.

What’s the message? Stay in your lane. Don’t stick your head above the parapet.

But here’s a confession that I have to make. One thing that you can imagine that you can do, is that, by creating something, you’ll elevate your status. Isn’t that the point of being famous?

But, for example, inside an organisation, there are power structures. And most of the people in those power structures, don’t spend their time creating, they spend their time reasserting those power structures.

Naively, you might think they’re going to be happy when you do something innovative and creative. The reality is that they’re only going to be happy with you doing something innovative and creative if they can use it to elevate themselves in the power structure.

And don’t play the innocent. That’s part of why you’ve done this thing.

This is the difference between wanking and having real sex. Wanking doesn’t change anything. Having sex can have real consequences – well I suppose, so can wanking if you do it in public.

[Jokes about something other than wanking]

## Paintable Turds

OK, I could probably come up with a better name for it than that.

But I suppose baked into the idea that you can’t paint a turd is the idea of inherent talent.

This is something that people can deal with. They can deal with the idea that someone can be naturally talented.

Get a something. No matter how little and then paint it, decorate it, add to it.

But of course, here’s the problem with a turd. It’s a turd. Initial attempts at things are going, very obviously, to have serious problems.

I had this idea for the “turding point.”

It’s getting something to the point where there is a something. Something that you could call a short story. Something that you could call a performance. Something that you could call a joke.

[Jokes about painting]

## Stories

When I was a lad university studying ‘t philosophy there were just two kinds of philosophers – Greeks and Germans, and nobody talked about any other kind of philosophy. Nobody talked about Buddhism or Zen Buddhism or Daoism. And nobody talked about the French.

But one of the things that I was thinking about when I started thinking about talking about making things, is a distrust of stories.

And when you research distrust of stories – it’s a bunch of French philosophers whose names come up.

So, I started reading a book – it’s a picture book actually - about Roland Barthes.

And there are some idea that I got from that, that are very relevant to what we’re talking about.

One that Barthes talks about is there being a kind of societal story (this is philosophy now, so I’d need to check the language). And we have no reason to trust these stories.

Like the idea that if someone is standing on stage talking about the difference between ideas and reality, well, then, he should probably be an expert on the difference between ideas and reality.

And that story – which we all kind of believe, could go one of two ways.

It could mean that people who do have something interesting to say about the difference between ideas and stories, but aren’t necessarily experts, will just shut the fuck up.

Or it could mean that some people who have some experience will be forced to dress it up and claim more expertise than they really have.

But then there’s another way that stories are dangerous and this comes directly back to the idea of the biscuit tin and the biscuit. The whole point of this show is that when you get the biscuit, it’s made of different stuff than the idea.

It will embarrass you, it will shame you. It will make you feel stupid. Or the climactic moment when it made you feel good will go by in a moment, but it will have made you stand out from everybody else and you will have to deal with other people’s resentment, and also, now, you might see, that to make this thing good, you need a bunch of talents that you just don’t have.

And in order to make this thing a success, you have to make some decisions. Some of which might be catastrophic.

And timing.

Stories can fuck about with timing. Especially, stories can edit out the boring bits.

And stories can do montages for the bits that are full of painful learning.

[Jokes about timing, jokes about fairy stories]

## Making sense of data

So, I wrote about this in another book. I wrote about it in the chapter that I wrote for bosses. Because, when you manage bosses – actually, that’s one of the main things that you do as a project manager, you realise that they don’t really like bad news. Especially the young, naïve ones. They see bad news as embarrassing, they see bad news as frightening, they see bad news as threatening.

And I think in that book, I was tempted to try to say that bad news isn’t any of those things, but of course it is. Nobody wants bad news.

So, in the best spirit of adding to that, “Yes, and ing” the bad news. Bad news is also something else. Bad news is also data. I was tempted to say information.

But data isn’t information. In order to turn data into information, we need to make sense of it and in order to make sense of it, we need to gather it. We need to pay attention.

And information isn’t enough. We need to decide on what that information means.

And meaning isn’t enough. We need to decide how we’re going to act on that meaning.

I’ve got to admit. I hate fake American-style positivity – and look where it’s got them.

But part of what’s so hard to take about it, is that I think most Americans, most of the time, are genuinely positive. They are enthusiastic. If I said it, I’d be being sarcastic, or over-correcting.

[Joke about being able to see things through things]

## OODA loops

Observe – look at things.

Orient – not Leyton – tilt your head, move your body, put on your big boy pants.

Decide – right, this time, I’m really going to do this.

Act – Do it, do it! Do it!

Why is this so hard. Why is inspecting and adapting so hard?

Here are some reasons that I can think of.

The strongest human urge. It’s not sex, it’s not hunger, it’s not water. It’s not even air. It’s to keep doing what you’ve always been doing.

Procession. This is an idea that I got from ecology. When you’ve got an ecosystem that’s in a certain state – like a rain forest that’s been cut down. It develops in a certain way. It’s very difficult to stop it developing in that way.

OODA loops that I can’t get started.

Losing weight – because I like food! I like the feeling that food gives me.

Dressing better – because I like comfortable clothes.

These two are connected.

How to install an OODA loop – a public aspect to it. You have to say it out loud.

Make the conflicts and contradictions clear. Accept there are downsides.

Guardrails that you don’t want to hit.  
Eating – heart attack or stroke.

Dressing – being treated like a bum.

[Jokes about needing an ending, what are we going to do now?]