

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow.

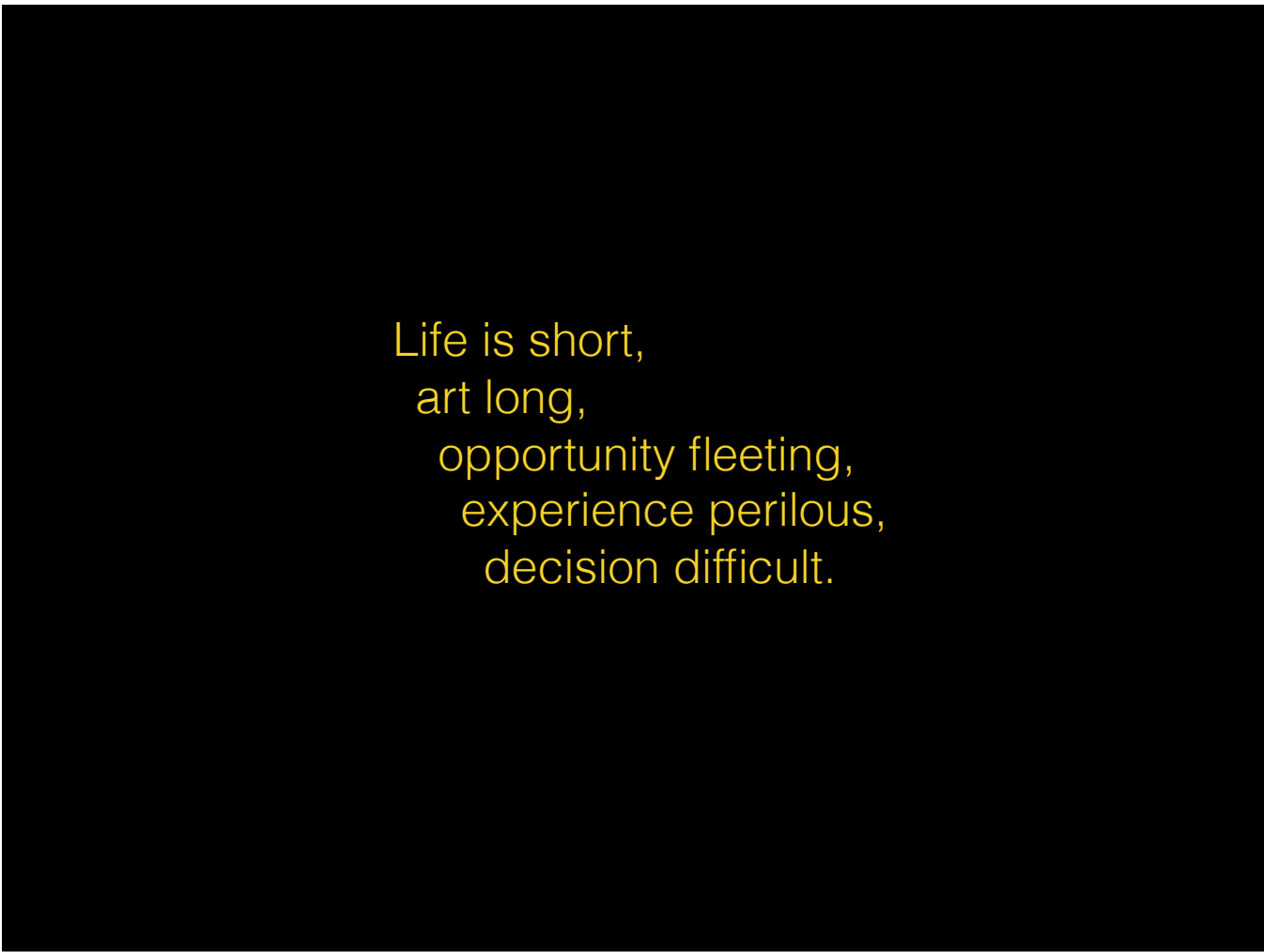
The poet T.S. Eliot wasn't talking about software when he wrote his dark missive "The Hollow Men". He was pointing out the hopelessness that seeped into the European consciousness between the world wars. Every practicing software engineer, however, would recognize in these lines the frustration that occurs when a good design turns into imperfect running code.



“The life so short, the craft so long to learn.”

–Hippocrates

It has become common for software engineers to pass around an ancient aphorism originally attributed to the Greek physician Hippocrates: The life so short, the craft so long to learn. The thought is so poignant, so applicable to our everyday lives, that it has been copied, twisted, translated, and repeated for nearly two and a half millennia. The Romans loved it (as “Ars longa, vita brevis”), as did the ancient Jews. Geoffrey Chaucer included it in a short poem even though he left it out of the Canterbury Tales. It has appeared in modern literature up through and including rap music.



Life is short,
art long,
opportunity fleeting,
experience perilous,
decision difficult.

Software engineers, perhaps more than most, would recognize their own struggles with the rest of Hippocrates' original sentence.

I am not in a position to increase your lifespan, nor to change the fact that software is a never-ending opportunity to create. It is possible to provide some clues to how happy and productive software teams work. It is also possible to give you new tools to understand the dynamics of your team, both by introducing technically-oriented concepts, and people-oriented ones. Having those tools will make decision making easier.

Some Balancing Acts

team focus	vs	company focus
group cohesion	vs	cultishness
keeping teams informed	vs	isolating teams from distractions
too many policies	vs	too few policies
innovation	vs	happiness
team needs	vs	individual needs
management needs	vs	your needs