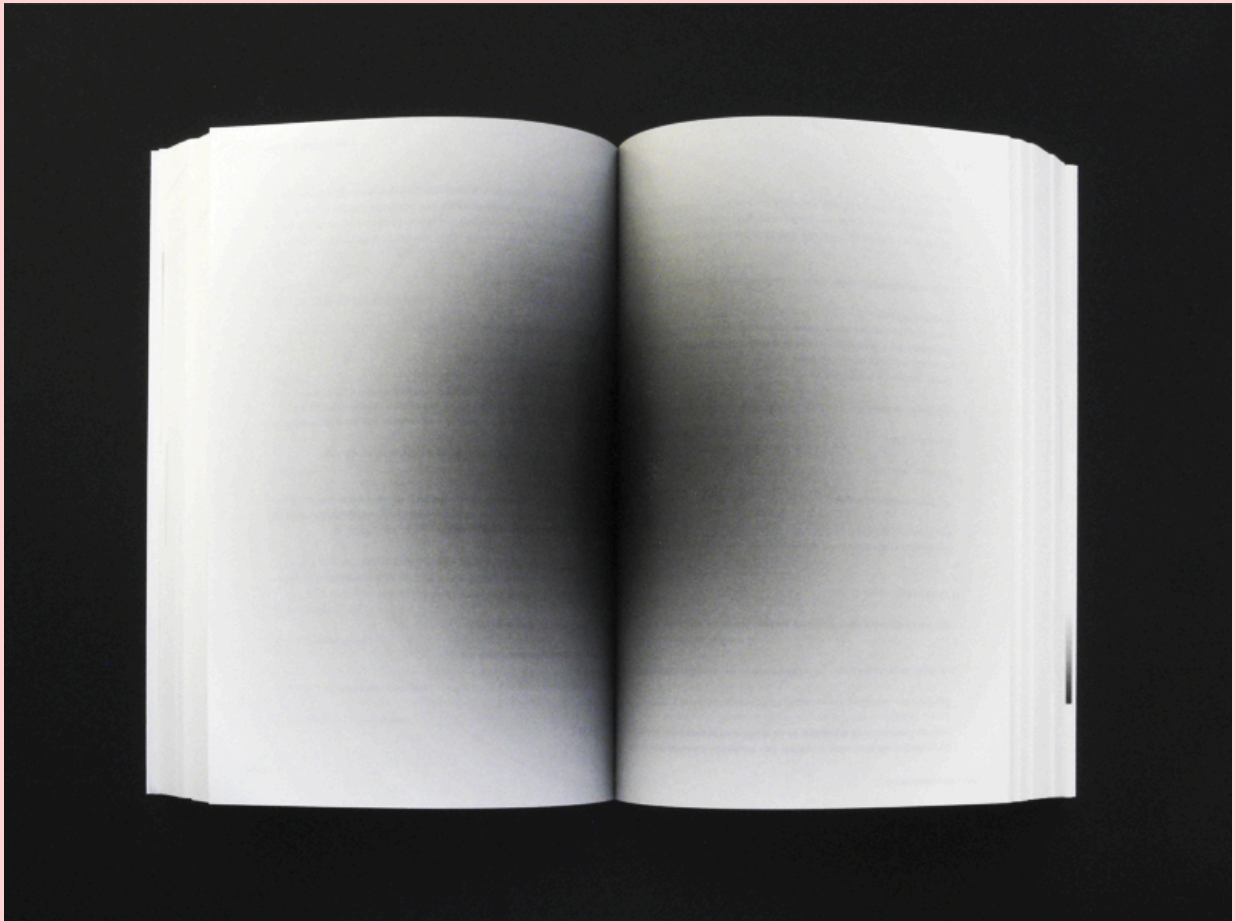


# STRATSCRAP

vol 100

a retrospective



Shout out to  
all who  
contributed  
their  
thoughts—  
even if they  
aren't aware  
that they did.

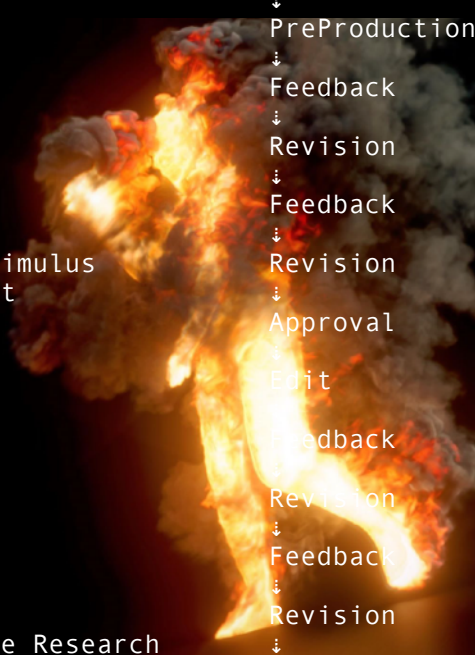


What gets built into the scope:

“We’re planning for ~3 rounds of review”

What actually happens ...

Agency creative brief	Approval	Feedback
↓	↓	↓
Feedback	Stakeholder Feedback	Revision
↓	↓	↓
Revision	Feedback	Approval
↓	↓	↓
Feedback	Revision	PreProduction
↓	↓	↓
Revision	Feedback	Feedback
↓	↓	↓
Approval	Revision	Revision
↓	↓	↓
Briefing	Approval	Feedback
↓	↓	↓
Ideas	Testing Stimulus	Revision
↓	Development	↓
Feedback	↓	Approval
↓	Feedback	↓
Revision	↓	Edit
↓	Revision	↓
Feedback	↓	Feedback
↓	Feedback	↓
Revision	↓	Revision
↓	Revision	↓
Feedback	↓	Feedback
↓	Approval	↓
Revision	↓	Revision
↓	Qualitative Research	↓
Feedback	↓	Feedback
↓	Debrief	↓
Revision	↓	Revision
↓	Feedback	↓
Approval	↓	Approval
↓	Revision	↓
Ideas to Client	↓	Final Post Production
↓	Feedback	↓
Feedback	↓	Feedback
↓	Revision	↓
Revision	↓	Revision
↓	Approval	↓
Feedback	↓	Feedback
↓	Director Search and	↓
Revision	recommendation	Revision
↓	↓	↓
Feedback	Feedback	Approval
↓	↓	↓
Revision	Revision	SHIP IT
↓	↓	👍



MAKE DEMANDS  
+  
BE AFRAID

OWN THE MOST  
EXTREME VERSION  
OF A TRUTH.

Play where  
you can win

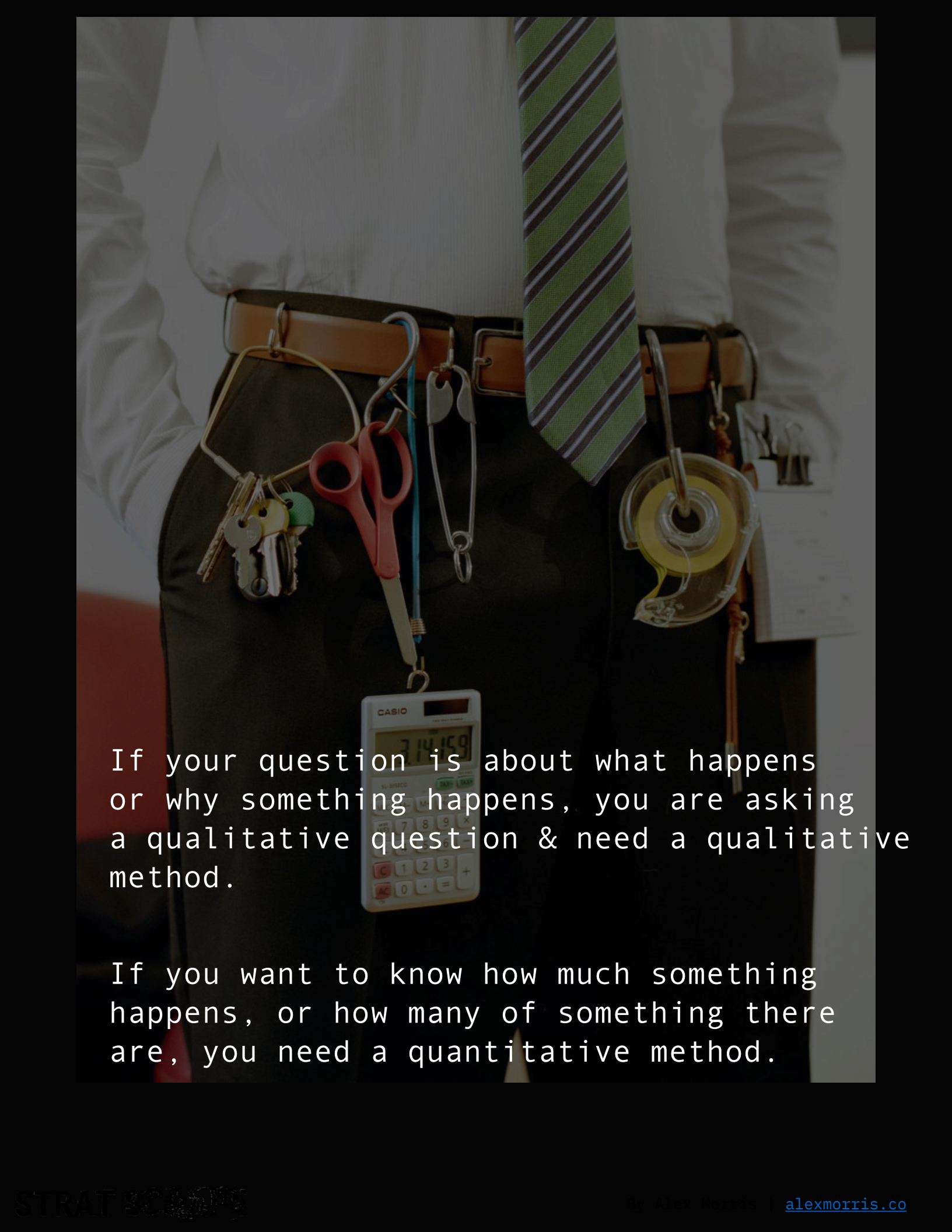
"The skills of the strategist are, with the best will in the world, unnecessary. In any organization the doers and the makers are essential... By contrast strategists and the discipline of strategy has no innate right to exist, it is an added value activity... This has always been a source of enormous strength to me, a planner by trade and strategist to the core. There is something immensely liberating and empowering about not being needed, not being mission critical and not being part of the machine... It exists only if and when it can add significant value"

— Richard Huntington, Chief Strategy Officer, Saatchi & Saatchi

# The Laws of Advertising

1. Nobody cares
2. If its not seen,  
its useless
3. You need risk to  
stand out
4. Don't bore,  
seduce
5. You can't create  
by committee
6. Fun > Serious





If your question is about what happens or why something happens, you are asking a qualitative question & need a qualitative method.

If you want to know how much something happens, or how many of something there are, you need a quantitative method.

Over time, briefs have become more focused on  
inspiring *the idea* than on strategic work to  
determine *the role* of advertising in achieving  
the stated goals.

("98% Pure Potato" by Griffiths and Follows, page - 274)



THIS RIGHT HERE.

This is the problem.

In an effort to be involved in creative thinking, we pushed our biggest asset out of the process - objective decisions around the role the advertising should play.

You know.. the strategy part of things.

When was  
the last  
time...

A client meeting was  
rearranged because  
you couldn't make it?

A client asked for  
your private opinion  
on an advertising  
matter?

Your POV changed the  
course of action?



Making hard  
things seem  
fun is a much  
better  
strategy than  
making hard  
things seem  
important.





The point is that advertising, at its best, is a little like vandalism.

It's naughty, in your face, and still there the next day unless the city takes it down. Shoot for that feeling.

Look evilly forward to your thoughts being unleashed on the world.

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## *The professionalisation of planning*

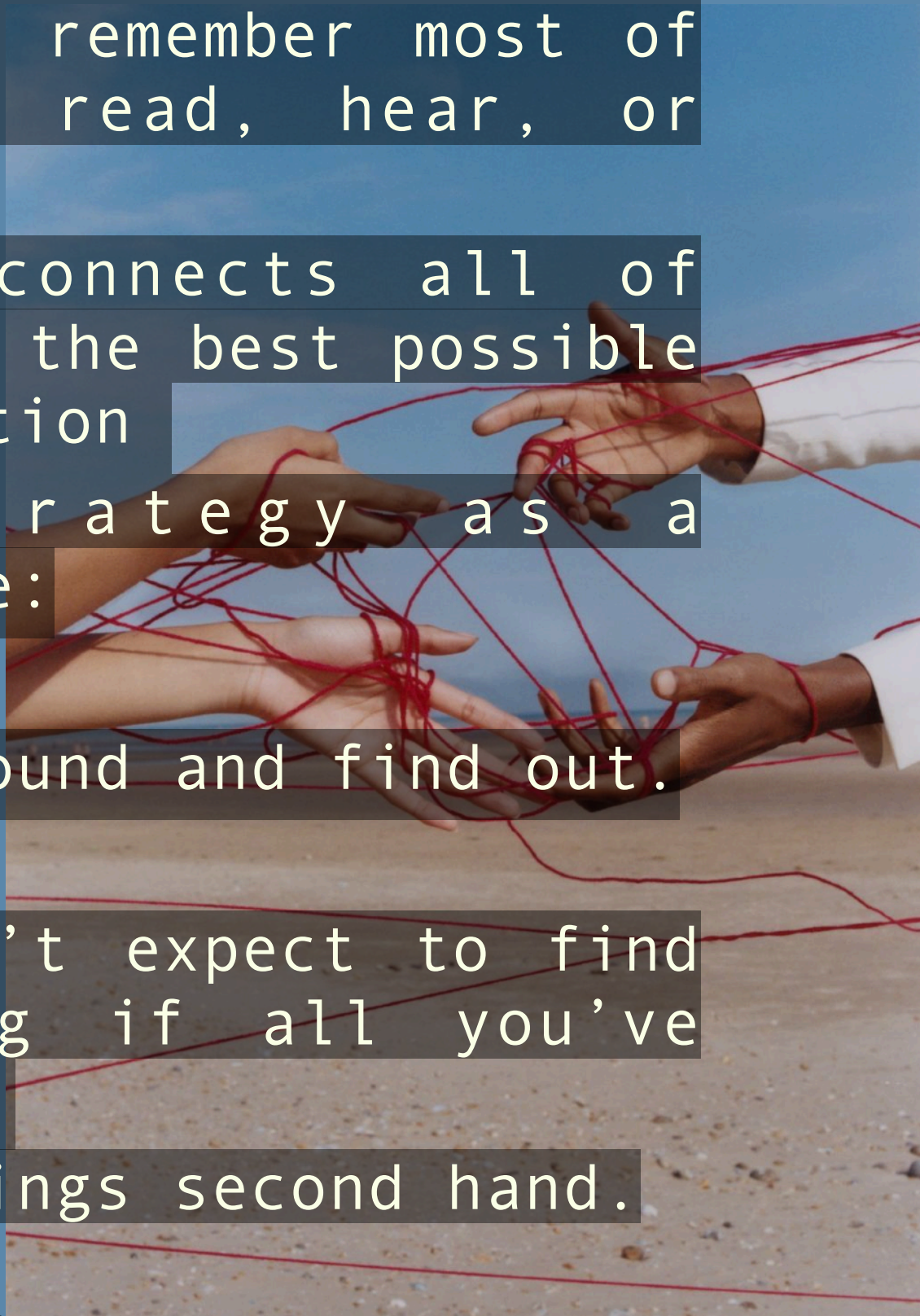
With the demise of the commission system planners found themselves having to justify their hours. They were expected to work on many more accounts. If this notionally increased productivity the disadvantage was that there was no longer time for the thinking and discussion which had made account planning such a game changer in the first place. And it was hard if not impossible to bill this thinking back to clients. So less a case of professionalising than industrialising the planning process. Doing, rather than thinking or challenging.

“How can I expect myself to arrive at something interesting through passive consumption, when I don't remember most of what I read, hear, or see?:

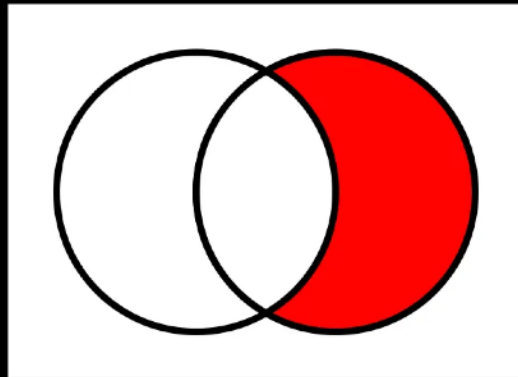
Which connects all of this to the best possible description of strategy as a practice:

Fuck around and find out.

But don't expect to find anything if all you've done is read things second hand.



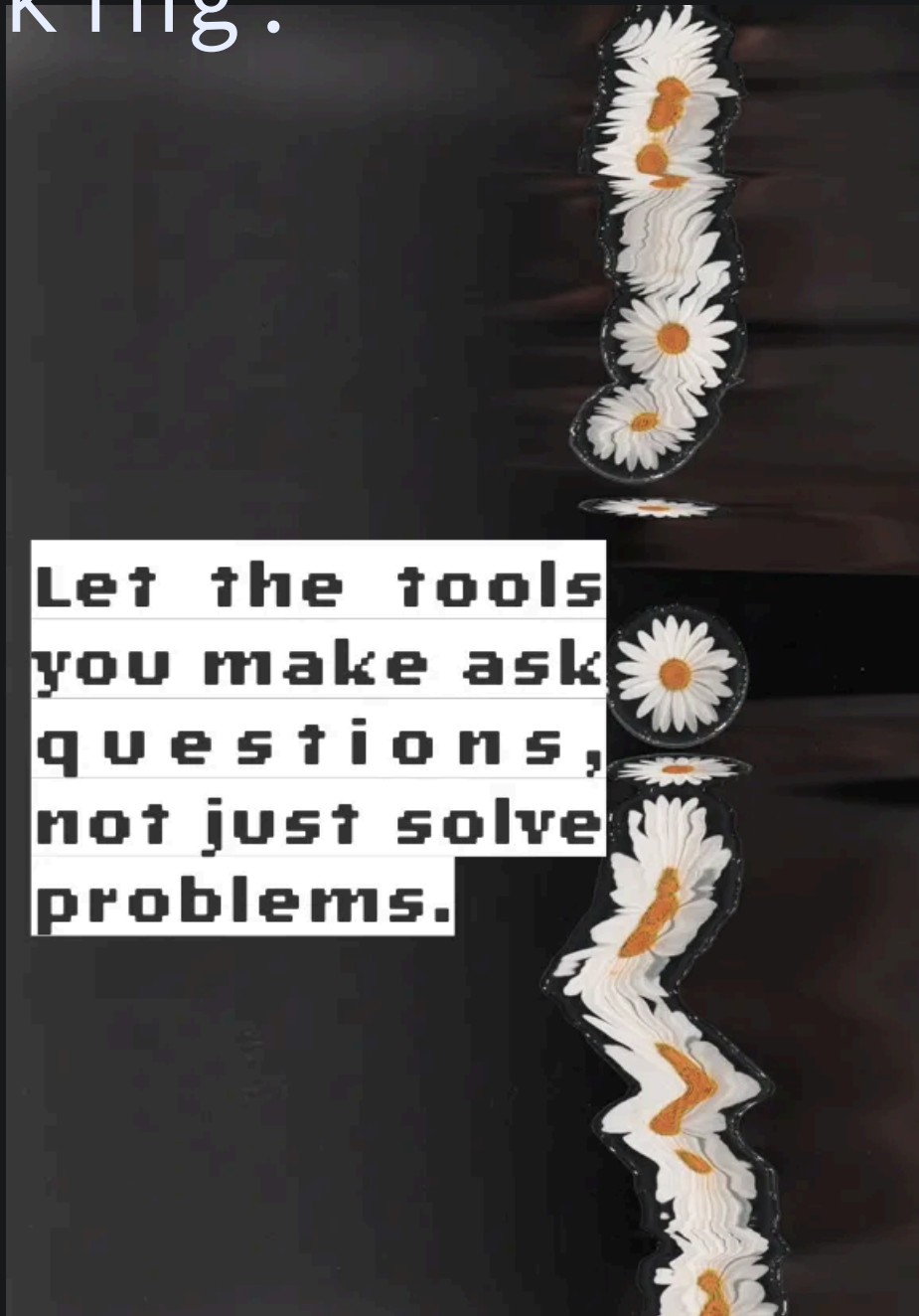
Why do we always assume the overlap  
is the most important piece of  
information?



Replace productivity  
with contribution.



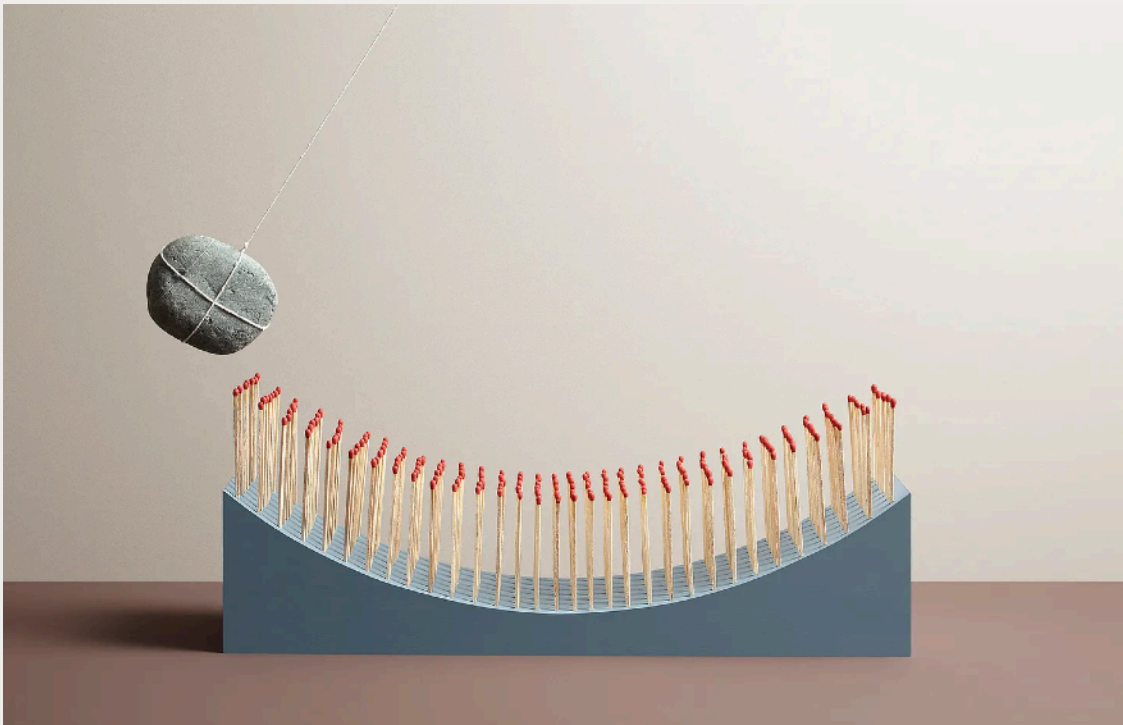
A discovery phase should explore what to ask, not aim to answer what you're asking.

A vertical strip of daisies is shown against a dark background. The daisies are arranged in a slightly wavy, vertical line. A central text box is overlaid on the daisies, containing the text: "Let the tools you make ask questions, not just solve problems." The text is in a bold, black, monospace font.

**Let the tools  
you make ask  
questions,  
not just solve  
problems.**

” Research is simply asking questions about how the world works. And asking questions about how the world works threatens established authority.”

If your research isn't asking questions that question authority, it isn't research, *it's theater.*



Selecting and formulating problems is as important as solving them; these each require different cognitive skills.

Problem formulation requires careful, non-formal observation of the real world.



ASK THESE QUESTIONS,  
IN THIS ORDER":

Evidence: how do we  
know what's true or  
false? What evidence  
counts

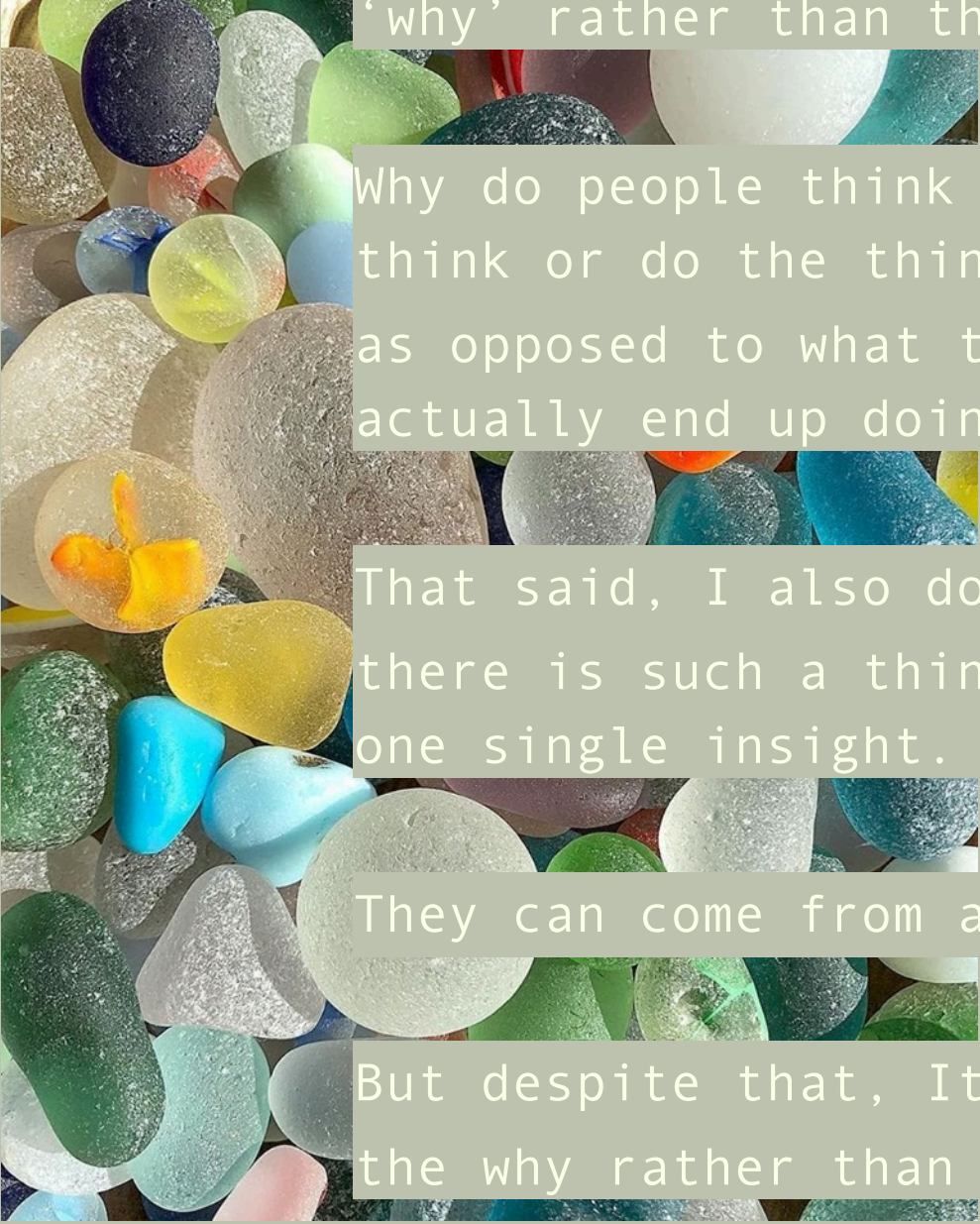
View point: how  
might this look from  
someone else's  
perspective? Or  
looked at it from  
different direction



Connection: is there  
a pattern? Have we  
seen something like  
this before?

Conjecture: what if  
it were different?

Relevance: why does  
this matter?



For me an insight is simply defined as understanding 'why' rather than the what.

Why do people think the way they think or do the things they do... as opposed to what they actually end up doing.

That said, I also don't believe there is such a thing as one single insight.

They can come from anywhere.

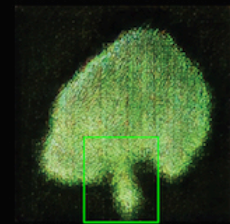
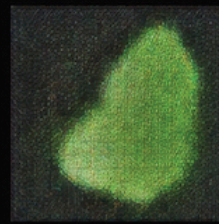
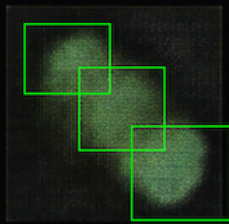
But despite that, It's still about the why rather than the what.

-Rob Campbell

Laugh by laugh,  
blow by blow,  
we're gonna make  
this garden grow.



How varies widely

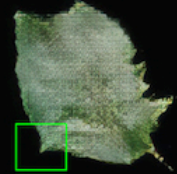
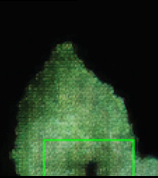
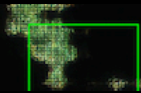
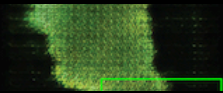


There are options when it comes to achieving your intent.

4

5

There are many ways to do just about anything.



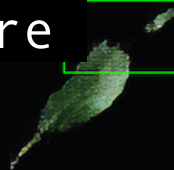
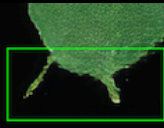
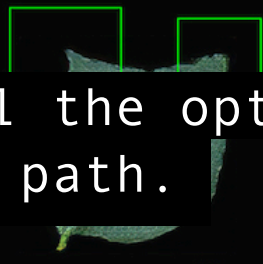
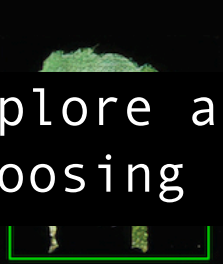
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10

Explore all the options before choosing a path.



11

12

13

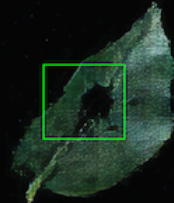
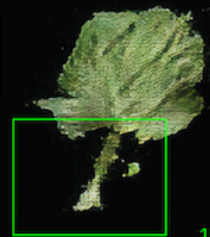
14

15

HOW is an ever growing list of directions we could take while staying true to our reasons why.

7

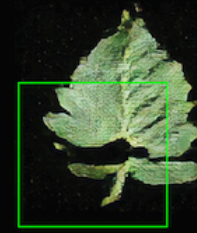
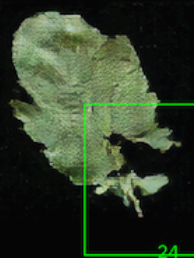
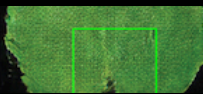
18



19

20

To look at your options, ask yourself:



How could we communicate our message?

11

22

23

24

26

How will this be maintained?

How will this be measured?

How will this be produced?



29

30

Theoretically yes  
**but actually no**



**Joe Dwyer**  
@JoeEDwyer



Still reckon this is the greatest written paragraph ever put to paper...

In the Apollo years, NASA sent military test pilots into space, not poets or preachers; they came back in possession of extraordinary knowledge that, by dint of personality or professional inclination, they seemed helpless to communicate. As the Gemini and Apollo astronaut Michael Collins once put it, “It was not within our ken to share emotions or to utter extraneous information.” Asked what it was like to go to the moon, Apollo 12’s Pete Conrad replied: “Super! Really enjoyed it!”

This is why  
we’re here.

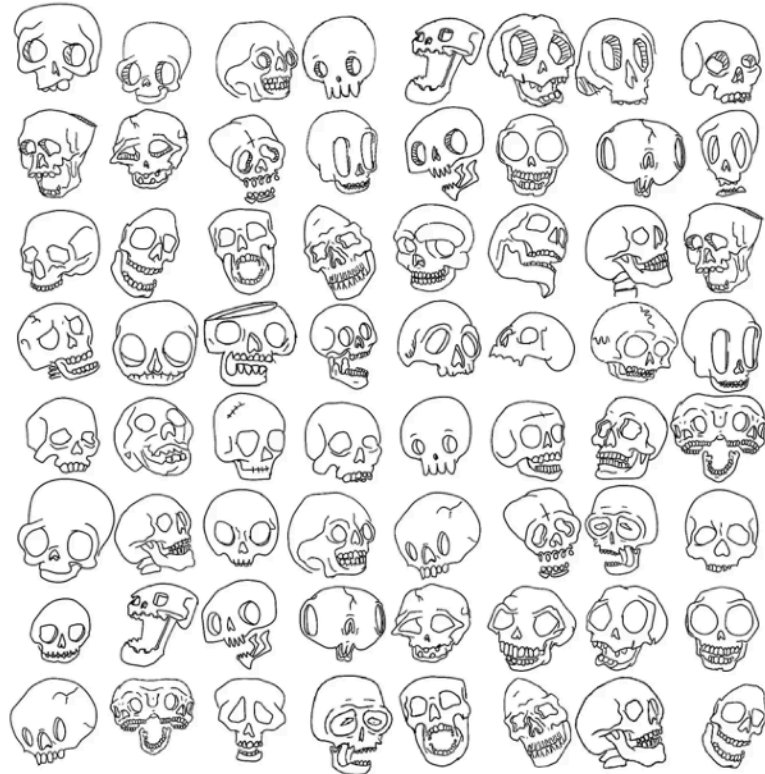
Don't let "know your audience"

become "pander to your audience"



We're always  
trying to  
prove, not  
negate.

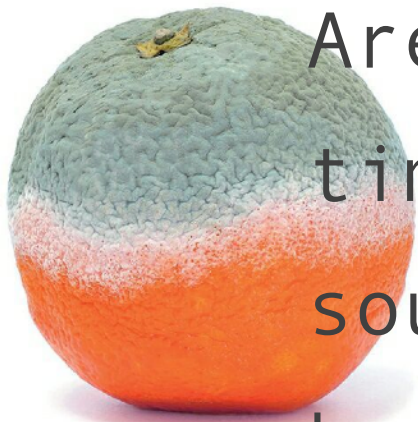
Why?



Strategy's job  
isn't always  
to write the  
strategy

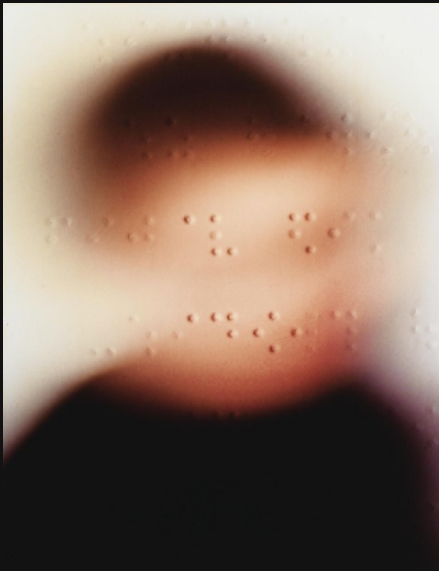


...but  
it is  
our job  
to make  
sure  
there is  
one.



Are you spending more  
time discovering new  
sources of light or  
keeping the lights on?

I don't see  
enough  
research where  
the questions  
you ask are  
different than  
the questions  
you're trying  
to answer.



# Estimating Time to develop a presentation

6-20 hours

Research and collect input from the web, client, colleagues, consumers, and the industry.

2+ hours

Write hunches and thoughts via sticky notes

1+ hour

Organize the ideas

1 hour

Have others collaborate/critique your thinking

1 hour

Write a concise point of view

2 hours

Sketch a structure to the presentation

20+ hours

Build the slides

(yes, actually it takes this long- especially if anyone else is involved)

3 hours

present it to someone not familiar with the subject

2 hours

final edits.

IN TOTAL: LIKELY OVER 40 HOURS: more than a week of dedicated work. Anything less is a disservice to the audience.





Sometimes the process of thinking looks like needless chaos from the outside.

I think about this comic a lot.

Half the time, my version of the last panel would say;

“well I’m not done. Just wait”

But the other half, it would read;

“I guess this wasn’t helpful, was it?”

But thats what planners should be doing. Banging on random objects just to see what it might shake out.

Planners need to make a mess in order to arrive at clarity.

Or maybe I’m just more chaotic than I should be.

The metaphor is strained, but regardless...

I think about this comic a lot.



We're not here to make clients happy.  
We're here to help them succeed.



Creative concepts are either going to be stronger in execution or weaker in execution.

The more time is spent perfecting the concept, the more the execution will disappoint.

Leave room for the act of production to impress.



Why are we  
doing this?

Regularly ask  
yourself this.  
Ask the room.  
Ask the client.  
Dig deeper on  
the answer.



IF YOU COULD TELL  
STRATEGISTS ONE  
THING ANONYMOUSLY,  
WHAT WOULD IT BE?

“Sometimes, it's not  
that deep.”

“Creating a life that reflects your values and satisfies your soul is a rare achievement.

In a culture that relentlessly promotes avarice and excess as the good life, a person happy doing his own work is usually considered an eccentric, if not a subversive.

Ambition is only understood if it's to rise to the top of some imaginary ladder of success.

Someone who takes an undemanding job because it affords him the time to pursue other interests and activities is considered a flake.

A person who abandons a career in order to stay home and raise children is considered not to be living up to his potential—as if a job title and salary are the sole measure of human worth.

You'll be told in a hundred ways, some subtle and some not, to keep climbing, and never be satisfied with where you are, who you are, and what you're doing.

There are a million ways to sell yourself out, and I guarantee you'll hear about them.

To invent your own life's meaning is not easy, but it's still allowed, and I think you'll be happier for the trouble.”

—Bill Watterson



When you look over a  
creative persons  
shoulder...

they stop working.

Advertising is a  
whole industry built  
on that scenario.



Expect the seat in front of you to recline. Prepare accordingly.



“Our offline surroundings, people, and conversations are the cues that show us what is culturally relevant. This is where the dialogue of the zeitgeist happens, and where we get in on it. Cultural imprinting is the mechanic for relevance that gets brands, organizations, people, movements into consensus reality, and thus become part of the cultural landscape.

So, what to do?

Poster a city instead of buying online banners.

Throw an event rather than paying for a social campaign.

Get over ‘influencers’ and prioritize face time with an audience you care about.

Empathize.

Question.

Make art and call it marketing.

Make marketing that gets mistaken for art.

Earn respect.

Build an altruistic space within the cultural landscape.

Focus on offline and enter the dialogue of what’s relevant.”



HOW TO BREAK  
THE HYPNOSIS?

WHAT COULD RUPTURE  
THE MONOTONY  
OF BORED-BUT-BUSY?

EVERYDAY SURREALISM.

A PRANK.


A CHALLENGE.

AN UNEXPLAINABLE  
STRANGENESS.

ANYTHING ABSURD.

ANYTHING  
WITHOUT REASON.

P085

A top-down view of a large group of koi fish swimming in dark water. The fish exhibit a wide variety of colors and patterns, including solid orange, white, black, and multi-colored (koi) patterns. The fish are densely packed, with some swimming towards the camera and others away. The lighting highlights the scales and fins of the fish against the dark background.

Find a balance  
between accuracy and  
expression, between  
tradition and  
experimentation,  
between direction  
and discovery.

Insights can  
distract from  
solutions right  
in front of you.



**Nothing Is Missing, Look  
Around You. Give It Form.**

## ***What before how.***

There are reasons it makes sense to wait to cook until after you know what you're making. For these same reasons, we all know not to construct a building without a plan.

When we jump into a task without thinking about what we're trying to accomplish, we can end up with solutions to the wrong problem. We can waste energy that would be better spent determining which direction to take.

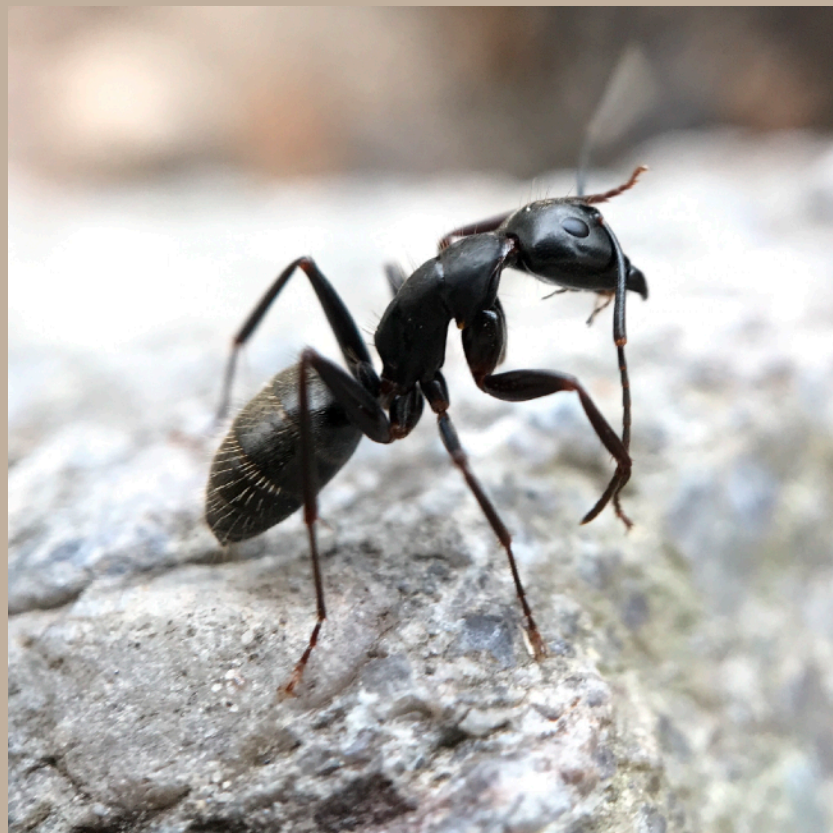
When deciding what you're doing, ask yourself:

1. What are you trying to change? What is your vision for the future? What is within your abilities?
2. What do you know about the quality of what exists today? What further research will help you understand it?
3. What has been done before? What can you learn from those experiences? What is the market and competition like? Has anyone succeeded or failed at this in the past?

An ant mill is an observed phenomenon in which a group of army ants are separated from the main foraging party, lose the pheromone track and begin to follow one another, forming a continuously rotating circle, commonly known as a "death spiral" because the ants might eventually die of exhaustion

a common phenomenon in ad agencies.

DON'T LOSE THE PHEROMONE TRACK.





If you are  
overthinking, write.



If you are  
underthinking, read.

But do both as much as you can.

Strategy is about  
minimizing and  
maximizing.

Minimizing  
mistakes



Maximizing (hidden)  
opportunity.



Most organizations are overly focused on minimizing risk. In creative agency land, we seem to be only focused on maximizing. Which should probably be our main focus, but when was the last time a strategy started with “here’s what will happen if we don’t do this” ?

Is there a single example of an ad that came from thinking about what the audience finds cool first?





The good strategists I worked with are partners.

They know a plan seldom survives first contact, and first contact to me is when creatives get hold of your precious strat or brief.

The good ones I worked with can flex and adapt the way creatives have to flex and adapt.

They can look at ideas and help tie them back to the strat or business challenge, and figure out how to position the ideas to sell them.

The worst strategists I worked with, for which there are many, are empty vessels who think they command the room, who pretend to hear but don't listen—repeat themselves condescendingly as though that will change people's minds,

As also pointed out, most strategists simply don't put enough thinking into the strat. It's all boiler plate.

And I'm not afraid to make this contentious comparison—there is a lot of interrogation and rigor applied to creative thinking and ideas. As a creative, I'm half strat too—I take the brief, come up with the ideas, ensure they're strategically on-point, or come at the business challenge in a different way, and I know the industry standards I need to hit or crack—Cannes, One Show, pick the poison.

But when it comes to strat, it feels like it goes through one round of review—which I know isn't true—and sometimes a month is wasted ruminating or whatever's being done—with very little filtering or attempt at breaking through to new grounds, before it ends up in a brief for creatives to ideate against.

**So if you're asking how to be a good strategist, think hard at it.**

Surfacing trends isn't enough, any creative can do that homework.

Do the competitive analysis, look at the landscape, the trends, find an approach at those intersections

that tells me something like Avis' We overcompensate because we're second, Snicker's You're not yourself when you're running on empty.

Not some generic cliches like, Let's celebrate blah, We want to empower blah.

And from the briefs I see, most strat seem to think doing the work needs to come through in how complicated it is, as though a simple strat will make the strategist look bad.

I have a suspicion that this is a major factor in the inevitable countless rounds of feedback. Every layer of approval wants to feel like they worked for it a little.

## The Psychology of the Labour Illusion

We might live in a short attention span economy, but we sometimes actually *prefer* things to take more time.

It makes us feel like we're getting our money and time's worth.

Researchers found that people searching for flights [preferred a slower website](#) that showed the available options loading on the page over the span of a few seconds.

**When the flight results were instant, they didn't like the experience as much.**

In another study, [covered on the Nudge Podcast](#), participants buying a house were divided into two groups.

The first group was told that a real estate agent had spent 9 hours meticulously scouring homes to find 10 apartments that fit their needs.

The second group was told that the agent used a computer program to find the 10 homes and it only took 30 minutes

Both groups were shown the exact same 10 apartments, **yet the participants rated the apartments they *thought* took 9 hours to find as 36% better.**

It turns out buyers *sometimes* value effort more than speed.

A parable:

In “How to Think Like a Fish” by Jeremy Wade (of River Monsters fame), Wade talks about his job being made up of different phases.

1. Deciding on a target. He and his team will decide that they want to try and catch a certain fish in a specific part of the world. Once a fish is picked, the most important step is deciding on a target location. There are obviously more than one lake or body of water that have the fish they are looking for, but they have to pick a destination.
2. Research. He'll then do months of research into that fish. Pulling from expected and unexpected sources. Local rumors as well as government data.
3. He goes fishing. When he's fishing, he is in charge. Not because he's the best fisherman in the world, but because he put in months of work ahead of time. So he calls the shots.

And if he doesn't catch anything, other than a few misses here or there, his show will be cancelled.

Here is a link to [the whole chapter](#) which I think is worth a read. And [the full book](#) if ya like.

A few things he talks about that I think are relevant to planning:

- How to recognize that you may be in the right place at the wrong time.
- The importance of deciding on a target location when there are obviously more than one lake or body of water that have the fish they are looking for.

What I want is the chance to truly understand what I'm after- to dissect the problem, and then use that knowledge to go catch some big ass metaphorical fish.

The idea of my job is to get to the bottom of a problem.

To see things in new ways.

To learn a lot in a little amount of time and then put that knowledge to use.

To go hunt down some strategy river monsters.


And if I'm wrong too often, the “show” gets cancelled.

But at least research informs action/choice.

But instead, it seems that the job has become just the holding of the fishing rod.

To stretch the metaphor, most scenarios feel like I'm knee deep in a fast moving river, ignoring the research I've done and instead being yelled at from the shore- casual observers debating over where we should drop the line.





“When you compete to be the best, you imitate. When you compete to be unique, you innovate. In business, multiple winners can thrive and coexist. You don’t have to annihilate your competition. While imitation creates a race to the bottom, innovation promotes healthy competition & economic growth.

In that way, business is like the performing arts, not war. In the performing arts there are many entertaining singers and actors, each with a distinct style. The more talented and differentiated performers there are, the more the arts flourish.

This is the essence of positive-sum competition.”

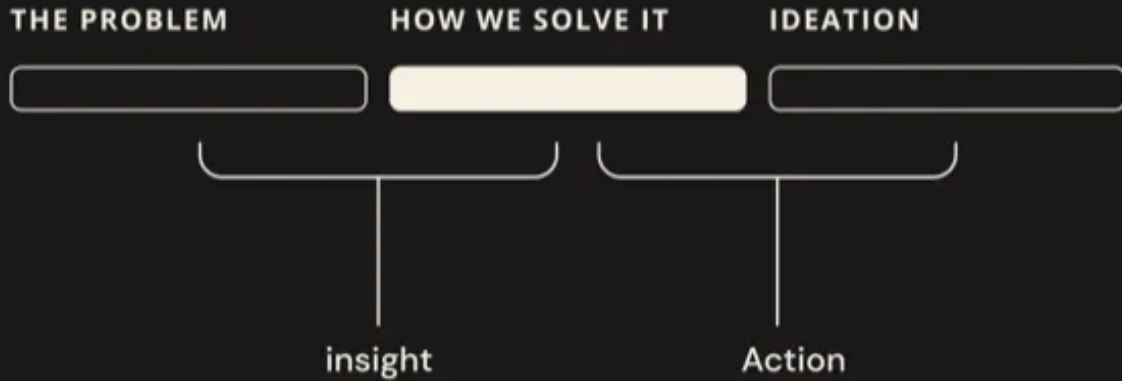


“Well, how should you actually get a group of smart people to do strategy?” And my first insight into this is that you start with challenges, not with goals.”



“Our cultural obsession with having “the best” of everything is a topic I’m endlessly fascinated by, but traveling is different from, say, spending hours on Wire cutter or prowling Amazon reviews to find the best cat litter. Everyone who can afford to buy the best cat litter is likely going to end up with the same formula; the same can’t be said for restaurants or hotels, which have limits on the number of people who can be there.

“The problem of travel at this particular moment is not too many people traveling in general, it is too many people wanting to experience the exact same thing because they all went to the same websites and read the same reviews.



Remember, an insight isn't "the thing" - its the thing that gets you to THE thing.

Theoretically, you don't even need it in the brief.

Logic is the key to  
scientific truths,  
but paradoxes are  
the key to  
psychological ones.





The four Cs aren't equal -  
and you can often guess which  
one may hold the answer.

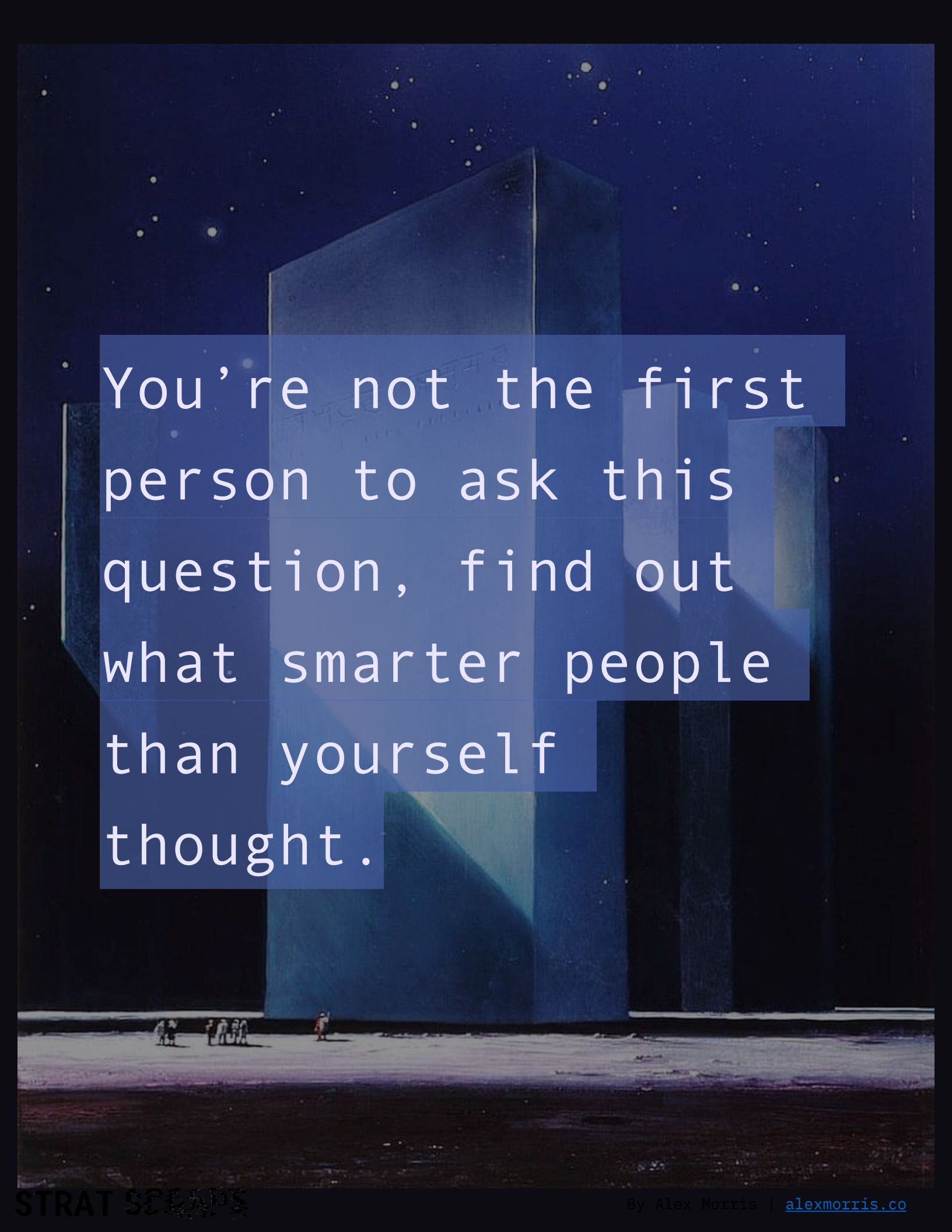


OPTION A

The brief is the question  
The creative is the answer

OPTION B

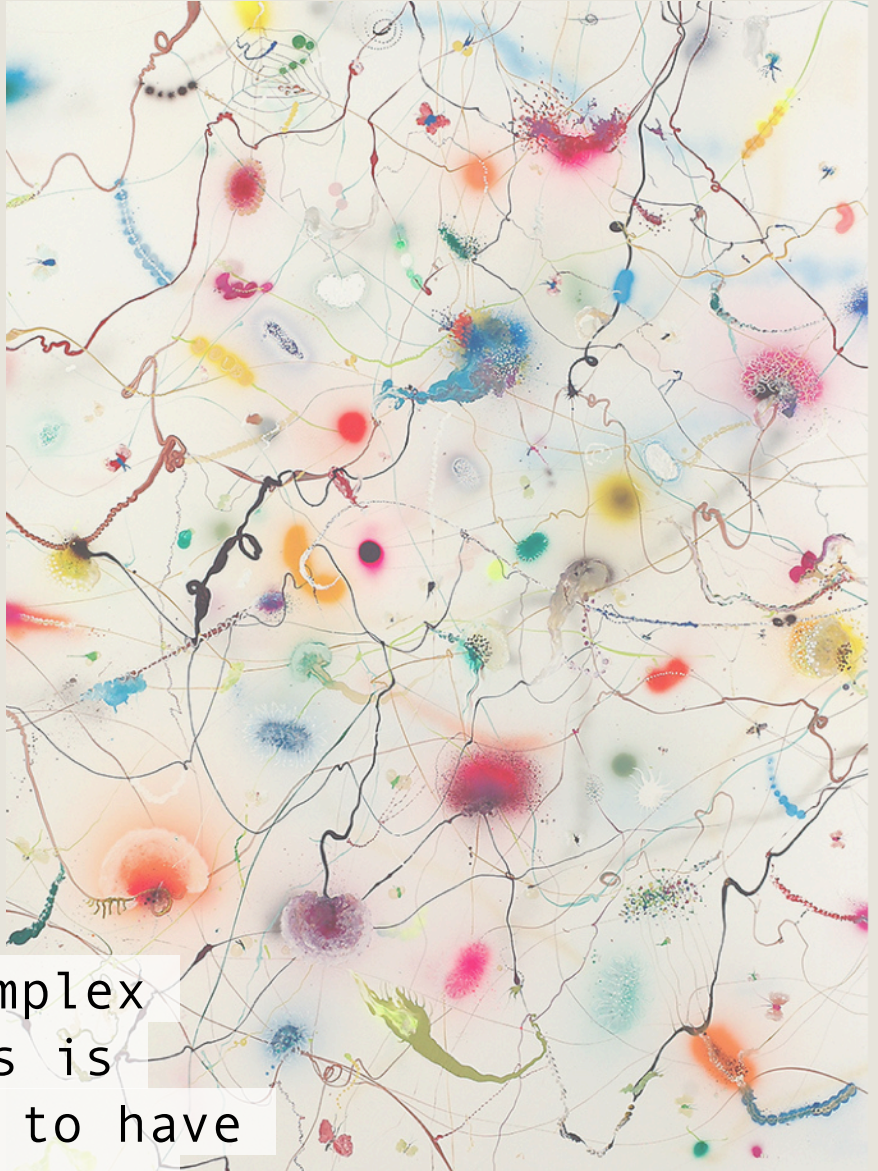
The brief is the "what"  
The creative is the "how"



You're not the first person to ask this question, find out what smarter people than yourself thought.



Table Selection: This idea comes from poker, where you're advised to choose your opponents carefully. That means you shouldn't compete against the best people. You don't need to get good at doing difficult things if you get good at avoiding difficult things. If you want to win, pick an easy table and nail your execution.



Gall's Law: A complex system that works is invariably found to have evolved from a simple system that worked. A complex system designed from scratch never works and cannot be patched up to make it work. You have to start over with a working simple system.

All the “how to” books are by people who have experienced success. What about advice from experiencing failure?

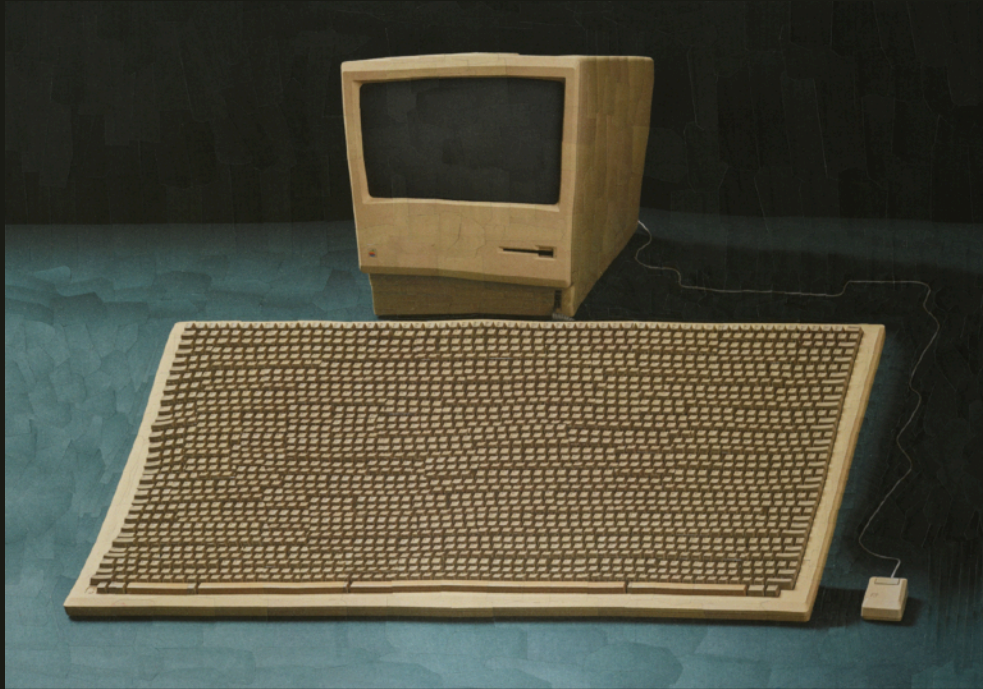


Speaking of answers,  
our job isn't to  
guarantee success.  
Advertising is about  
upping the batting  
average.





Become known for what  
you do – not who you've  
worked with.



A quote about UX that is about way more than UX

The most natural implementation of any feature request is additive, attempting to leave all other elements in place and simply inserting one new component: a new button in a UI or a new parameter to a function.

As this process is repeated, the simplicity of a system is lost and complexity takes its place. This pattern is often particularly obvious in enterprise software, where it's clear that each new feature was written for one particularly large customer, adding complexity for all the others.

Every feature request has a constituency - some group who wants it implemented, because they benefit from it. Simplicity does not have a constituency in the same way, it's what economists call a non-excludable good - everyone benefits from it."

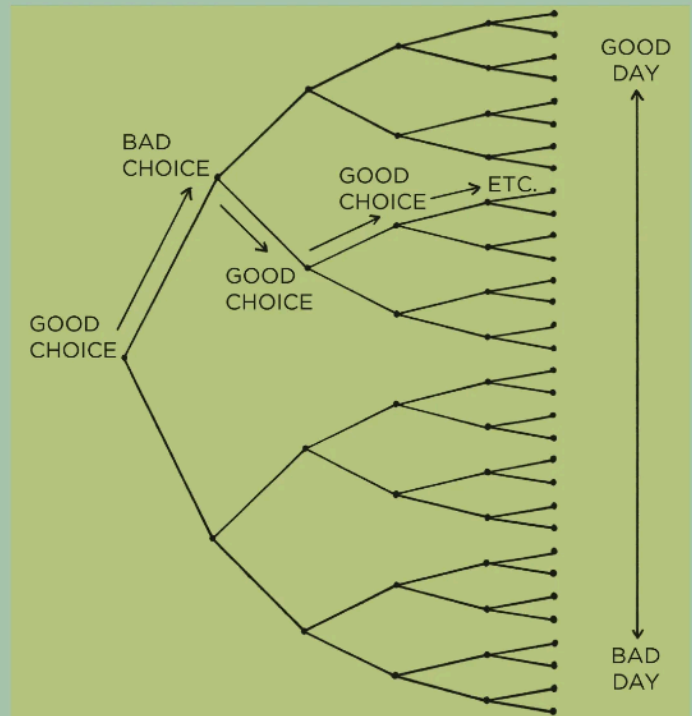
Simplicity benefits everyone.

One of the most important skills as a planner is being able to recognize decisive moments in the process.

The earlier they are, the more important they are.

Just replace “day” with “work” or “creative output” in this image and it illustrates the point really well.

### DECISIVE MOMENTS



A thought: We try to sell ideas and platforms while clients want to buy executions. Don't try to get approval on something abstract, give them something they can feel like they put into the world.



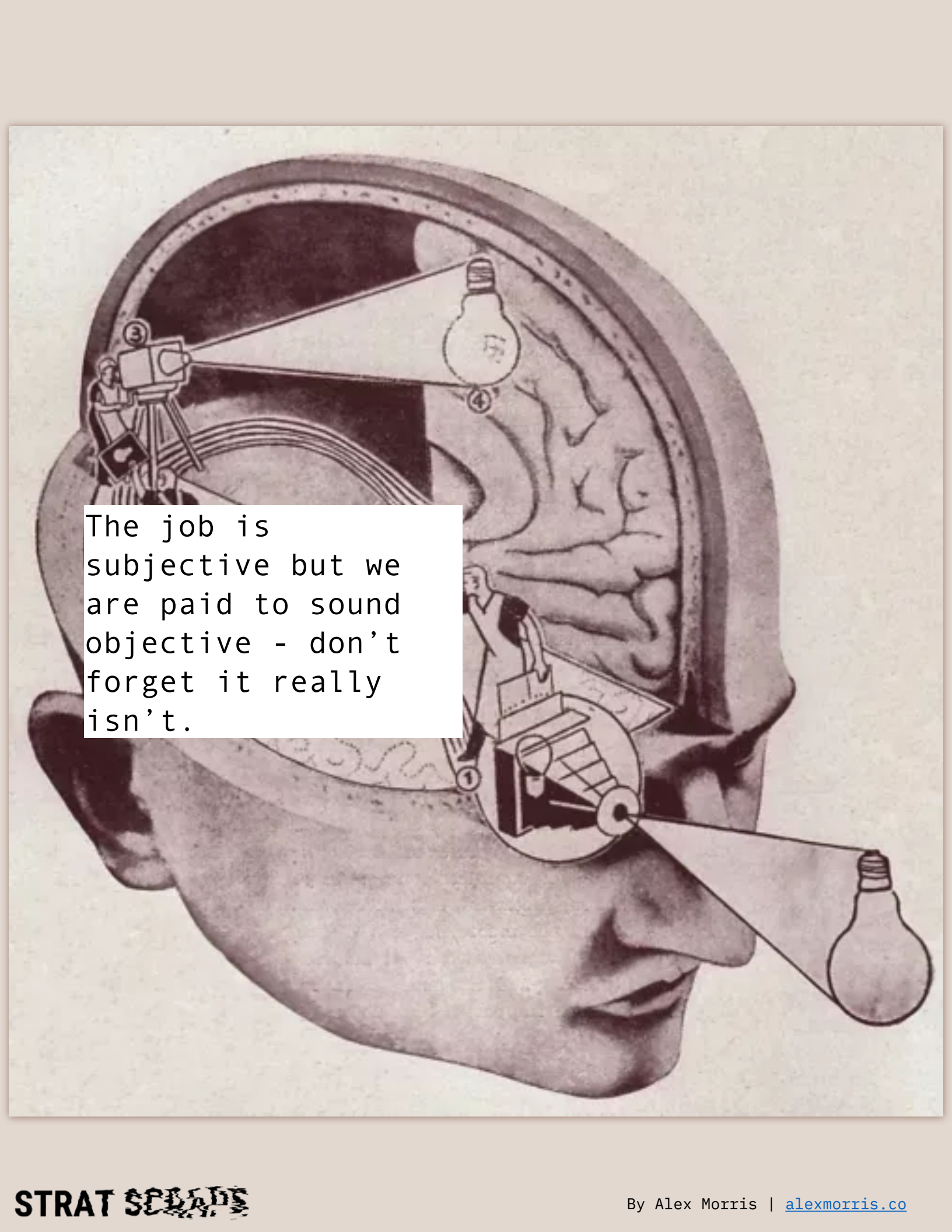
Bad playground





Willingness to fail and high output is more important than genius.

These are the only two accurate predictors of success. This is proven.



The job is subjective but we are paid to sound objective - don't forget it really isn't.

Hypothetically...  
if your job security  
depended on the  
success of a  
campaign, and  
clients weren't  
allowed to give  
input...

Would you give  
different creative  
feedback in internal  
reviews?

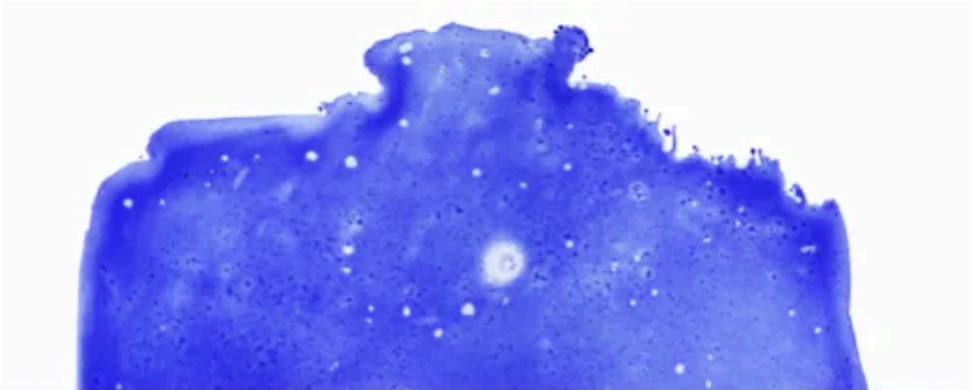


There are noun problems and there are verb problems.

We need a new web site, or better sales collateral, or a campaign that features our new identity. These are noun problems. Noun problems often require noun solutions – that is, things and stuff and content.

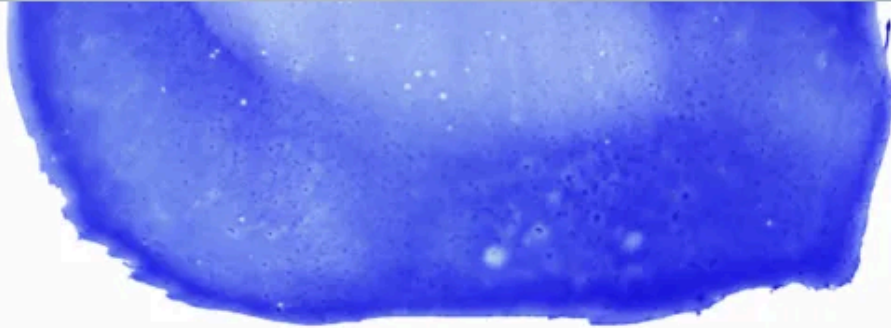
We need our sellers to make better decisions, our marketers to market consistently, or our executives to explain our vision. These are verb problems. Verb problems often require verb solutions—that is, workflows between things and stuff and content.



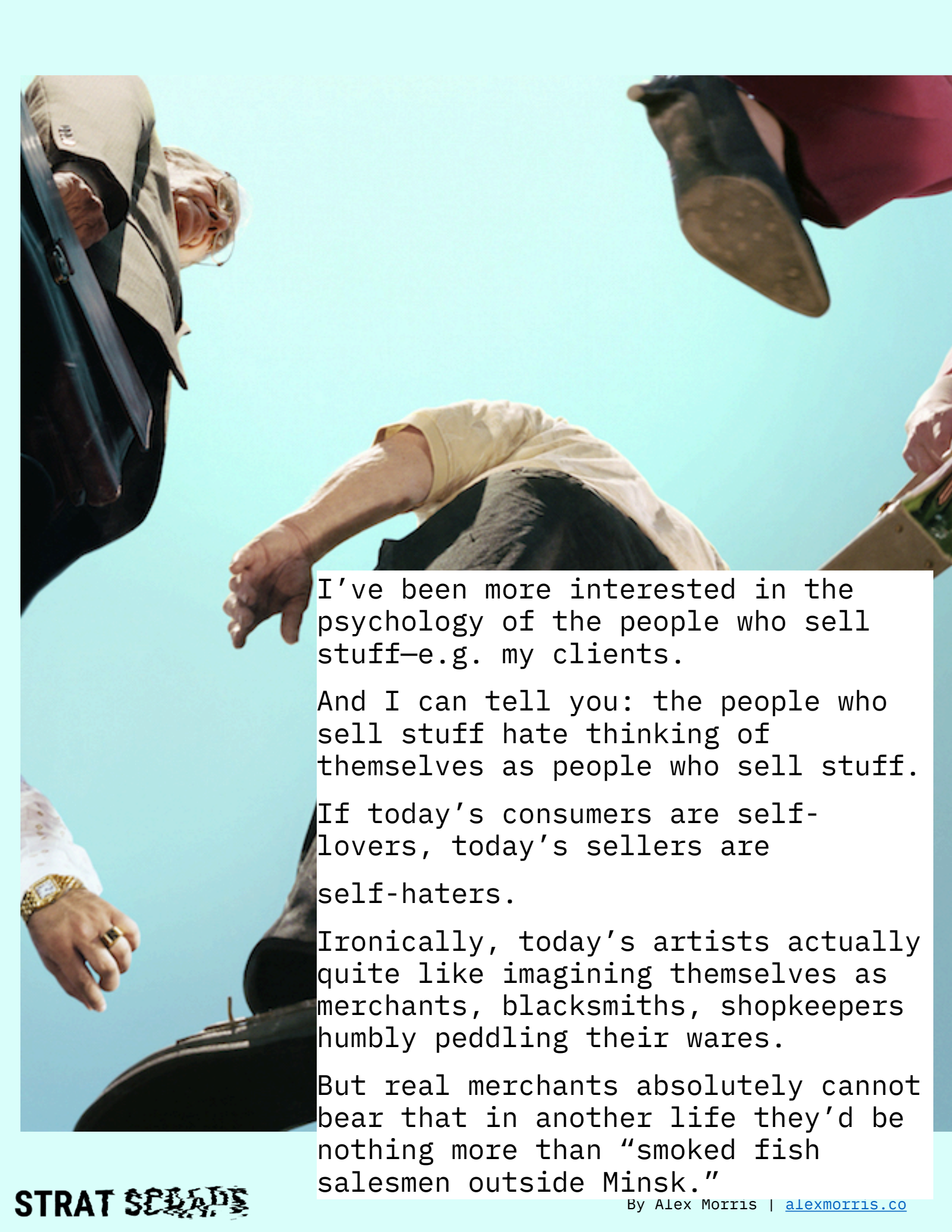


**A presentation is a commitment by the presenter to help the audience do something. Simultaneously, throughout the presentation, the audience is evaluating the presenter's ability to deliver—to make good on the commitment.**

Most speeches have very little impact because they don't ask you to *do* anything. I asked an ex-boss of mine what he wanted to accomplish in an upcoming speech. He said, "Oh, I just want to open their minds up." Fine. Great. Admirable. But most people are not sitting around waiting to have their minds opened up. They are waiting for you to drive home a specific point or idea *that they can really use.*



"pleasantly unreasonable"



I've been more interested in the psychology of the people who sell stuff—e.g. my clients.

And I can tell you: the people who sell stuff hate thinking of themselves as people who sell stuff.

If today's consumers are self-lovers, today's sellers are self-haters.

Ironically, today's artists actually quite like imagining themselves as merchants, blacksmiths, shopkeepers humbly peddling their wares.

But real merchants absolutely cannot bear that in another life they'd be nothing more than "smoked fish salesmen outside Minsk."



Do you serve  
the client's  
interests or  
the brands?

Most importantly:

Are you  
having  
fun?



# STRAT\_ SCRAPS

say hi:

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say thanks:

[buymeacoffee.com/alexmorris](https://buymeacoffee.com/alexmorris)

See more:

[alexmorris.co](https://alexmorris.co)