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# Simon Amstell: Do Nothing

By Simon Amstell

Ladies and gentlemen,  
please will you welcome onto the stage  
Simon Amstell!  
Hello.  
Thank you.  
How are you? Are you okay? You all right?  
Well, this is fun, isn't it?  
This is sort of a fun thing to be doing.  
This is fun. It's fun, right?  
I'm quite lonely. Let's start with that.  
Nothing can be done about it,  
people of Dublin. Nothing can be done.  
I bought a new flat about two years ago.  
In this flat, in the bathroom,  
there are two sinks.  
I thought that would bring me some joy.  
It is a constant reminder.  
And so what I've had to do...  
This is what I'm doing now in my life.  
I'm actually doing this.  
I'm using both sinks.  
I now, every day,  
brush my teeth in the left sink,  
and in the right one, mainly cry.  
I think the problem comes from the inability  
to be purely in the moment without fear.  
I think we're all stuck in the past,  
and looking to the future.  
And it's in the moment where true joy exists.  
It's in the moment where love can occur.  
It's only in the moment where  
you can be fully at one with the universe.  
I was in Paris recently,  
with a new group of people,  
one of which was quite a sort of  
kooky, interesting girl,  
although, in hindsight, not that interesting.  
I always get fooled.  
I always think, "Oh, she seems fascinating."  
Is she, Simon?  
Or does she just have short hair?  
Completely fascinated, and I'm thinking,  
"Oh, I'll talk to her for the rest of my life."  
Bored after 10 minutes.

"You should grow your hair  
and stop misleading people."

So she suggests,

**at about 3:**

that we all run up the Champs-Elysee,  
to the Arc de Triomphe.

And I guess telling you about that now,  
it sounds a little bit exciting and fun,  
but at the time, I just thought,

"Well, why would we do that?"

And then, "What's the point?"

And then, "When we get there,

then what will we do with our lives?"

And I'm sort of analysing

what the point of it is,

and, "We live that way,

and it seems a long way to go."

And everyone else is just not analysing,

they're just running,

and I'm running as well,

because of the peer pressure,

because I'm fun.

And we're all running and running,

and everyone else, I think,

is just at one with the moment,

at one with joy, at one with the universe,

and I'm there, as I'm running, thinking,

"Well, this'll probably make a good memory."

Which is living in the future,

discussing the past with someone

who, if they asked you,

"Oh, what did it feel like?",

"I don't know,

I was thinking about what I'd say to you."

I think it comes from childhood.

When you're a child, you're free.

You're purely in the moment.

You're not worried.

It doesn't even occur to you

what other people might think of you.

You don't analyse every moment.

You just live, moment to moment.

And then something happens

where you realise  
you have to think before you act.  
We get taught we have to think  
before we act.  
When I was 15...  
And this happened when I was 15,  
but I think it's too odd a story if I was 15,  
so I think it's better if we say I was 11.  
I was in my grandparents' house,  
and I used to have quite a good relationship  
with my grandma.  
She used to really validate me and my life.  
I used to do little drawings and doodles,  
and she'd say, "Oh, that's nice."  
I'd do another drawing, "Oh, that's nice."  
Another drawing, "Oh, that's nice."  
And at one point, I distrusted  
the consistency of her reviews.  
So I did a deliberately bad drawing  
to see what she would say.  
She said, "Oh, that's nice."  
And I thought, "I can't deal  
with this inauthentic sycophant."  
So one day... And I know now that I did this  
because I wanted to do something  
where she couldn't validate it,  
where she couldn't say, "Oh, that's nice."  
But when I did it, it was purely unconscious,  
it was purely in the moment.  
One day, I ran up to my grandma,  
and I mooned my grandma.  
Well, I was only 11. I'm just 11.  
It wasn't even like a cheeky, playful  
little moon and run away, funny, funny.  
It was a violent bend-over,  
"Here's my arsehole, Grandma,"  
and apparently a bit of balls as well,  
a little bit of balls.  
She didn't say, "Oh, that's nice."  
Although I think she wanted to  
because she's generous and encouraging.  
She just couldn't quite get there  
with my arsehole in her face.  
She ended up saying, "Oh, okay."

But still encouraging, still a sort of,  
"Oh, I see what you were going for."  
So that's why I can't enjoy Paris.  
I did fall in love about five years ago.  
Fell in love five years ago,  
but with somebody I invented,  
which isn't ideal.  
And he was based on  
somebody who existed,  
but because I had such low self-esteem,  
I took every negative attribute  
I felt about myself,  
converted those into positive attributes  
and projected those onto him.  
Thus he would heal me  
and complete me in my life.  
Initially, I just liked him  
because he was really thin.  
I really liked that.  
Like, thinner than me, ill-thin.  
I don't know why I liked that.  
I just liked the idea I could  
go on a date with someone  
and it could be their last date.  
A lot of it is narcissism, really.  
My type... I realised my type is me, but better.  
Which I think is okay.  
I just need to find somebody  
who wants himself,  
but much, much worse.  
I went to see him in this play that he was in,  
and he was really vulnerable on stage,  
and I really like...  
Vulnerability, to me, is quite  
sexually appealing. I don't know if you...  
Like, you know there are people  
who are more like,  
"Well, we know what we're doing."  
"We've done it before, we'll do it again."  
Everything's fine."  
To me, it's much more sexy  
if someone's a bit more,  
"Oh, I feel faint." You know?  
It's hot, right? So...

I went to see this play on the press night  
so I could perhaps meet him afterwards -  
and weeks had been building up  
to this moment -  
and all I could manage when I saw him  
at the party was a kind of polite nod.  
And I don't know if he saw it.  
He didn't nod back.  
And then I felt awkward  
about approaching him at all.  
And an hour went past,  
and I couldn't approach him.  
And then I saw him leave.  
I saw him leave the theatre,  
his rucksack on his back,  
his little beanie hat on his head,  
and as he got further and further away,  
it became harder and harder to move,  
and he was gone, gone.  
Three weeks go by of sadness, pain, regret.  
I've turned him into the only person  
I can possibly be with in my life.  
A lot of it was ego.  
I just felt like he was going  
to become a great actor.  
He could make people cry.  
And I could become a great comedian,  
and make people laugh.  
And if we were together...  
...we could be like a two-man Robin Williams.  
All the talent of Robin Williams,  
but in two separate thin men.  
I didn't know how I was going  
to meet him again.  
And then I was in a shop in Covent Garden  
that sells vintage clothing,  
and he was there in the shop.  
I felt, in that moment,  
that God had brought us together.  
I don't feel that now so much because it feels  
like the thought of a deluded moron, and...  
And I don't want to attack religious people  
who may be here this evening.  
It feels like a sort of unkind thing to do,

to attack religious people, and it feels...  
You know, it feels too easy,  
and like the battle's already been won, and...  
No, but...  
But really, it just feels rude.  
Like, if you're at a party and someone says,  
you know, you get into a conversation  
and someone says,  
"I'm a Christian, I'm a Muslim, I'm a Jew,"  
it's very rude there to say,  
"Oh, how ridiculous!"  
I feel, at this point, we have to treat people  
with kindness and love and respect,  
in the same way you treat a child running  
around a party saying, "I'm a helicopter."  
Say to them... Say, "Good for you!  
We're all having fun! I'm a choo-choo train!"  
I'm not an atheist.  
Like, I'm a big fan of Jesus Christ.  
There's nobody more thin or vulnerable  
than Jesus Christ.  
And he's bleeding as well.  
It's very clever of them.  
But I'm not an atheist for this reason.  
This is the main reason I'm not an atheist.  
I think I'm God a bit, and here's why.  
And that's the sort of thing I can say here  
but I can't really say at a dinner party,  
because people will say, "Well,  
why have you got hummus on your chin?"  
Because it's sort of seemingly arrogant  
and blasphemous.  
I don't think it's blasphemous.  
Speaking as God, I'm not offended.  
But I feel...  
He... That actor was in that shop  
at the same time as me.  
I don't believe in coincidence.  
I think coincidence is a word we invented  
for something we don't quite understand yet.  
On the cover of this book is a blue feather,  
because the characterlauthor of this book  
believes in the philosophy  
"thinking makes it so.

"We create our own reality."  
He tests this by visualising a blue feather  
in his fingers.  
He believes, like Buddhists,  
that everything has already been achieved.  
Time is an illusion.  
So if he feels he has  
the blue feather already,  
it will come to him  
because there's nothing opposing that idea.  
Later in the book, the blue feather appears.  
I tested this myself with a white feather.  
I felt I had the white feather in my fingers.  
Not that I needed the white feather  
or desired the white feather,  
it had already been achieved.  
Later, I was at a picnic,  
I put my hand in a packet of crisps,  
which is something I wouldn't normally do.  
I pulled out a crisp with a white feather on.  
Which is disgusting.  
But there he was in the shop.  
And I don't know how you feel.  
Maybe you think,  
"Well, he walked into that shop  
"at the same time as you with his own legs."  
No, I put him in that shop with my God-mind.  
Now, some people will say, "Well, you know,  
if we do create our own reality,  
"what about the Holocaust?  
What about victims of child abuse?  
"Do they create that in their world?"  
And the thing you have to understand  
about that is...  
Shh!  
For whatever reason he was in that shop,  
I knew I had to approach him,  
because this was a moment,  
and I couldn't have any more regret.  
Um, I also knew I couldn't go up to him  
with my personality.  
I don't know if you can tell fully,  
from the tone of my voice,  
this is not a voice that lends itself

to getting sex or relationships.  
What you need is a less anxious,  
a cooler voice.  
Like, I don't know why there's still  
so much anxiety in my life.  
The other day, a guy approached me,  
and I wasn't sure if I'd met him before or not,  
and in the panic of the moment,  
I just said, "I've got that jumper."  
And I didn't.  
I went out with someone...  
I went out with someone for quite a while  
who wasn't that keen on that aspect  
of my personality.  
And we were in a supermarket together,  
and a friend of his, who I hadn't met before,  
approached us,  
and because I hadn't met this guy before,  
I got instantly nervous.  
The friend says, "Oh, what are you up to?"  
And I say, "Oh, a bit of shopping.  
We've got a pineapple."  
An hour passes, and then the boyfriend  
says to me, "What's wrong with you?"  
"Why do you always have to...  
"Why do you always have to try  
to be so funny all the time?"  
I said, "Well, it wasn't funny, it was factual."  
I said, "There was a pineapple."  
He said, "You deliberately chose  
the most humorous object in the trolley."  
"Well, I'm gifted."  
So awkward all the time,  
a ridiculous way to be.  
But there's this feeling of,  
even though I believe that we're all one,  
I still feel a constant detachment,  
even with people who I'm close to.  
Like, my mum and I have got  
a good relationship,  
but there's a detachment, there's  
an inauthenticity to every conversation.  
I feel like I should be able  
to tell her anything,

but there's a sort of awkwardness to it,  
on the phone.

And I think it's because I came  
out of her vagina, and that's...  
That's sort of always there, you know?

"Oh, have you done  
your council tax, Simon?"

"Mum, I came out of your vagina.

"Let's not pretend  
that's a normal thing to have happened."

"I came out of your vagina, I sucked  
on your tits, you want to talk about tax?"

And my grandma as well,  
whom I got on with quite well,  
still, an awkwardness,

I think because my mum came out of her,  
I came out of my mum,  
it's like a Russian-doll awkwardness.

I didn't want to be that person any more.

I didn't want to be that guy  
in front of this actor.

In my ideal world, I would have been able  
to go up to him, and just say,

"Hey, how are you?"

I saw your play the other week. It was great."

"Oh, thank you. Oh, of course.

I remember the nod."

"Why are you crying?"

"I've got too many sinks."

"I don't know why,

but I feel I need to ask you

"if you'd like to go and get some coffee  
with me or a juice or something, and...

"And I don't know, maybe if that works out,  
we could move to the country together."

"Okay, well, let me just purchase  
this effortlessly cool cardigan

"and we can talk to an estate agent."

Here's what actually happened.

Because of my personality.

I saw him there, he hadn't seen me.

He was about a metre away from me.

There, that thin.

And what I thought... For some reason, what

I thought would be really cool and seductive  
would be to just stand  
in the middle of the shop  
and shout his full name.  
He turned round, alarmed.  
I could see the terror in his eyes,  
but because I'd started at a certain volume,  
I thought it'd be too odd to get any quieter.  
So I'm then just shouting about  
the good reviews this play has had  
and he's going,  
"Oh, I don't really read reviews."  
And he's all timid and vulnerable,  
which is why I love him.  
And I think the difference between us,  
because I think we were both  
quite shy as children...  
I say, "I think" - I did a lot of research on him.  
But he retained that shyness,  
and it makes him beautiful and sensitive,  
and I decided shyness  
was something to be overcome,  
and I think it's in our training.  
He went to a really good  
acting school in London  
where he was taught to nourish  
his sensitivity, to nurture his vulnerability,  
and that's what makes him a great actor.  
I went to Saturday-morning stage school  
in Essex,  
where we were taught that whether we were  
singing, dancing or acting, just do it loud.  
So I didn't become good  
at any of those things.  
But when I danced, people heard.  
So I'm there, still shouting at him.  
And I realise I've got to make some sort  
of lasting connection with him.  
I ask, it occurs to me to ask,  
"You must be very busy at the moment,  
but do you have a night off?"  
He says, "I have Monday nights off."  
"I know a very cool club night  
that happens on Mondays."

It's very cool to me,  
'cause it's such a contrast  
to the Essex nightclub I went to  
for three years, in Romford.  
Three years, between the ages of 18 and 21.  
Three years, every Saturday night,  
in Romford.  
Three years, every Saturday night,  
in Romford.  
Three years.  
Because nobody told me  
that London was close.  
And you had to wear black trousers to get in,  
black shoes, an un-tucked shirt,  
and I don't like it when the dress code  
is "basic dick".  
I think it's restricting.  
One time, I don't know  
if I was being rebellious  
or if I just thought it would be okay,  
I wore black trainers.  
I thought that would be all right.  
And the bouncer looked at me and said,  
"You can't come in like that."  
"You look like you've come from a gym."  
Which gym do I look like I've come from?  
He's such a basic human being,  
to him there's only two forms of dress,  
club and gym.  
I remember the last time I went there.  
I think I was 21, and I threw up.  
I used to throw up there quite a lot,  
'cause I used to drink a lot  
'cause I wasn't happy.  
I don't want to judge you  
if you're drinking tonight,  
but you know it's 'cause  
you're not happy, right? You know...  
"We'll have a good old... We're all right,  
we'll have a couple of drinks  
"and then pay for laughter. We're fine."  
I was trying to get to the toilet,  
and I didn't make it.  
I threw up on the dance floor.

I looked at what I'd done, and I was pleased.  
I thought, "That's what you deserve.  
That should be your logo."  
But now I was in London,  
talking to this actor,  
and I suggested this wonderful  
avant-garde club on a Monday night,  
which he hadn't heard of,  
which meant that I could say,  
"Well, I'll email you the details."  
That casual.  
He said, "Okay." I then had his email address.  
He gave me his email address.  
I'd triumphed over this fear of rejection,  
this fear of being in the moment.  
I had his email address.  
And then this final moment,  
where we seemed to level out.  
Up to now, I'd been his crazed, desperate fan.  
And then, just as I was leaving, he said,  
"Oh, do I know you from something?"  
And I said, in as quiet  
and modest a way possible,  
"I sort of do this small pop show  
on Channel 4."  
"But it's on very early in the morning.  
You probably haven't seen it."  
Thinking that he might say, "Of course!  
"You're really funny! You're really funny!  
You're really funny!"  
Not, "Oh, okay," in the same tone as  
my grandma when I showed her my arsehole.  
But I had his email address. I went home,  
and I composed the most beautiful,  
funny little email.  
Six friends confirmed,  
it was a beautiful, funny email.  
I pressed send,  
and this is very much the end of this story,  
he never emailed back.  
Thank you.  
Ideally, in this situation,  
laughter is better than pity,  
but you're quite right,

it's not a funny ending, is it?  
It's not funny.  
He didn't email back even, you know,  
even something negative  
that I could do something with.  
He just... Just indifferent.  
Not funny, is it? It's not funny.  
So, not only did he ruin my life for five years,  
he's ruined this.  
Fucking Martin Clunes.  
It's my fault for chasing this fantasy  
of this quiet, mysterious actor type.  
That's what I've always gone for,  
some sort of...  
And I didn't know what it was.  
I didn't know why I kept going for the same  
sort of weird, vulnerable, quiet person.  
And then I realised, it comes directly  
from being about 15 years old  
and watching  
the teen drama My So-Called Life,  
starring Jared Leto as Jordan Catalano.  
You may whoop and cheer,  
but that programme has left me damaged.  
Everyone I've ever gone for has been  
some version of Jordan Catalano.  
I watched the DVD to see  
what I was to do about this and, uh...  
I wanted to watch the DVD to see  
what it was about this character,  
and I figured it was about...  
It was these three things.  
Number one, he has about four lines  
in every episode.  
Number two, he has long hair,  
that sometimes falls over an eye.  
And he'll tuck it behind his ear.  
Which is amazing, isn't it? It's just amazing.  
And the third thing is that his main  
character trait is that he is dyslexic.  
And that's all I've ever wanted.  
A near mute  
with long hair and learning difficulties.  
And there's nothing wrong

with any of those things.  
I don't want to offend anyone.  
If that describes you in any way,  
I'd like to meet you.  
Recently, I went to see a play  
in which there was an actor that I fancied,  
because if you don't seek some therapy,  
life repeats.  
This time I was slightly better connected.  
I knew the playwright.  
We went to eat after the play.  
I was sat next to the actor that I fancied.  
I was talking to him about some of the things  
we've discussed tonight,  
that thinking makes it so,  
that we can create our own reality.  
And even if you don't buy into that  
in a spiritual sense,  
you can still see that we live in a culture  
where you can order stuff online  
and it comes within the next day or two.  
We live like that now.  
So it's frustrating not being able to order  
a specific human being from the universe  
and have them come towards you.  
He says, "Well, what do you want?  
Who do you want?"  
I say - and I hadn't thought  
about this for a while -  
I say, "I want Jared Leto."  
He then says, in that moment,  
"I just did a film with Jared Leto  
"where I played the younger version  
of his character."  
I didn't know what to do with that.  
I'd only just ordered him.  
He then says, out of his mouth,  
"Do you want to see a sex scene I did  
as the young Jared Leto?"  
I say, "Yes."  
He pulls out his iPhone,  
shows me himself having sex  
as Jared Leto, with long hair, and naked,  
and I say, "Oh, that's nice."

And it's so close to the fantasy,  
I don't know what to do.  
That is the root fantasy.  
That's the young Jared Leto.  
It's even closer to the fantasy  
than the actual Jared Leto, in real life now,  
who, oddly, I did meet about three years ago  
in Thailand at a full-moon party.  
I didn't realise it was him. I thought  
it was just someone who looked like him.  
So I went up to him and said,  
"You look a lot like Jared Leto.  
Do you know who Jared Leto is?"  
He said, "I am Jared Leto."  
I wasn't ready for that.  
So all I could manage to say was,  
"Your beauty in Requiem for a Dream  
detracted from the narrative."  
He thanked me and walked away.  
This was so close to the fantasy.  
And also, there was, of course,  
the fear of rejection, as there always is.  
I felt there was a flirty vibe between us,  
but I wasn't sure, and I have to be sure.  
When I was running up the Champs-Elysee  
with the people in Paris,  
one of them asked if he could come back  
to my hotel room that night,  
'cause he said the Metro wasn't going  
to be able to get him back to his hotel.  
I knew he was sort of making that up,  
but I didn't know.  
I knew he liked me a bit, but I didn't know.  
It got to the point we were in my hotel room,  
both under the covers, half-naked,  
and I'm still going,  
"My God, but what is this?  
"What is this? I don't know what this is.  
What is this?"  
"What is this?"  
My penis is in his mouth, but is he joking?"  
It was too close to the fantasy,  
there was a fear of rejection,  
I didn't know what to do,

so I did what I always do.  
I ignored him completely, became friends  
with somebody he knows quite well,  
and now, every Sunday,  
she is teaching me piano.  
It was too close to the fantasy.  
It was too much for me.  
I should have remembered  
what my mum used to say  
about how you could be or do  
anything you want in this life,  
because everyone you see on TV, or on film,  
they all shit.  
She used to say that a lot.  
She would point at the television and say,  
"Shit comes out of them."  
"You'll be a star."  
I feel like we're all damaged in a way, right?  
We're all sort of damaged.  
You're damaged, right? We're all damaged.  
You look quite damaged. Are you damaged?  
A little bit, yeah.  
And I don't mind that so much.  
I feel like that's where  
the good stuff comes from.  
The only reason comedy exists  
is because we have tragedy.  
That's the way it works.  
Tragedy plus time equals comedy.  
Although that's not the...  
I realised what the formula really should be,  
is tragedy plus time plus joke.  
You can't just be involved  
in horrific tragedy  
and wait.  
And I feel special in some way,  
if I feel broken.  
If I'm broken, there's a journey to be healed.  
There's a journey to be fixed.  
I feel like I'm an interesting,  
unique human being.  
In the meaninglessness of it all,  
I feel unique, I feel special.  
I like that I've got an osteopath appointment

once a month,  
where I go because I've got bad posture,  
something happened in my past,  
and I guess this man is healing me  
each month,  
bringing me to some sort of neutral state,  
some pure, neutral state.  
And I asked him,  
because he's quite a sensitive, sweet man,  
"Why did I end up with bad posture?  
"Is it because when I was a kid,  
I was quite shy  
"and ended up trying to make myself  
invisible from the other children  
"and ended up all hunched over  
and scared?"  
And even though what I do now  
is extrovert,  
still inside, I'm the same scared, crying child.  
I said, "What's wrong with me?  
Why would that happen to me?  
"What's wrong with me?"  
And he said, "You have  
very tight hamstrings."  
"Yeah, but isn't it more  
that I'm a genius recluse? Isn't that the..."  
He said, "No, the tendons behind your knees  
are quite restricted."  
"Yeah, but isn't that just the  
physical manifestation of a tortured soul?"  
"No, it's your legs."  
Similarly, I got ill a few weeks ago,  
and this happened the day before.  
I've got a cat. Obviously I've got a cat.  
I really thought the cat  
would end my loneliness.  
It has only become a mascot  
for my loneliness.  
Because if anyone does come round, they go,  
"Oh, you've got a cat. Are you quite lonely?  
"What's he called?" "Solitude."  
I woke up, and the cat had peed on my bed.  
Because I was still half asleep,  
I ended up putting my hand in the cat's pee.

I then went to grab the cat  
to put its head in its pee.  
Not as an act of revenge.  
My mum had just told me  
that's how you teach it not to do it again.  
It doesn't work. It doesn't remember  
the great moral lesson of Tuesday.  
It just ends up with a head  
covered in its own pee,  
wandering around, wondering how  
that could have happened.  
In the process of grabbing the cat,  
the cat scratched my hand,  
the same hand where the pee was.  
There was then some blood  
coming out of my hand  
and maybe some pee  
getting into my bloodstream.  
And I thought, "I've got cat AIDS."  
I tried not to think that,  
because I believe that thinking makes it so.  
I woke up the next morning  
and I couldn't stop vomiting into my toilet.  
So violent was the vomit coming out of me,  
it was going into my toilet,  
it was all around the toilet as well,  
sort of spattering all over the floor,  
my cat came, put my head in the vomit.  
I felt so weak and thin and pale.  
I saw myself in the mirror,  
I thought, "He's hot."  
On the way to the doctor, I wondered,  
"Should I mention  
what happened with the cat?"  
I felt a bit embarrassed about it,  
but I thought it could be relevant,  
it could be relevant  
to what's happened this morning.  
I got there, I told him about the vomiting,  
and I said, "I don't know if this is anything,  
"but my cat yesterday peed on my bed,  
"some of it got on my hand  
and then there was some blood."  
I said, "I don't know..."

I've heard about cat AIDS?"  
She looked at me in a way that I thought  
doctors were trained not to look at patients.  
"Uh, no, there's no way  
you could have cat AIDS.  
"You're not a cat."  
You all right? You having fun?  
You're quite thin, aren't you?  
What's your name? Colin!  
Okay. Colin... What, wait... Colin? Caitlin?  
Cathal.  
Go on, one more.  
Cathal.  
Cathal.  
I still don't know what his name is.  
What... Connor?  
- Cathal.  
- Cathal!  
Cohil?  
C- O-H-I-L?  
Oh, yeah, laugh at the idiot Englishman.  
Yeah.  
Yeah. I'm trying my best. I'm being polite.  
Yeah, go on, spell it, yeah.  
C- O-T-K-H-I...  
Hang on! I'm speaking to Cohil.  
He can do it, even though  
he may have some dyslexia issues.  
Let's hope. Let's hope so. Let's hope so.  
Go on, then.  
C- A-T-H-A-L.  
C- A-T-H-A-L.  
That's pretty fucked-up, huh?  
I'm Simon.  
I think that went quite well, don't you?  
Oh, God. What the hell was I talking about?  
Oh, yeah. I remember.  
I bloody remember. I can do this.  
The main problem is that we feel like  
we're living into the future.  
Really what we're doing  
is living into the past.  
We're constantly repeating  
moments from the past,

hoping for better endings.  
Whenever I'm with my family,  
I feel like if I could just heal the past,  
maybe then I can live in possibility,  
maybe then the future could be a blank page  
where anything could happen.  
Until that point, I feel like I'm going to repeat  
moments from the past.  
It was recently my grandpa's birthday party,  
his 70th birthday party,  
at this restaurant in Essex.  
Everyone was there,  
apart from my brother's girlfriend,  
who he's been with for about four years.  
She was not there, on account of  
a couple of the family members  
having a problem with her not being a Jew.  
We mustn't judge them for this.  
This is just because...  
It's just because they personally have  
a very strong belief in racism, so...  
And that's their belief. What can you do?  
There's nothing you can do.  
You're very lucky in Ireland.  
I don't suppose you've ever had any sort of  
religious conflict or anything, you know...  
It's a nightmare. It's a nightmare.  
You can't imagine.  
You can't imagine, Dublin.  
That's their belief.  
And, you know, we mustn't judge them  
because they live in Essex,  
where there's not much to do,  
and so there's a lot more time for racism.  
I live in London now.  
God, if I had the time, but...  
Every day, I'm walking through Oxford Street,  
I see people from ethnic minorities  
and think, "I should do something,"  
but I'm so busy, you know.  
And I... You know, it's unfair of me  
to just be on this stage attacking them.  
They have their perspective.  
They were just trying

to protect their children.  
They saw it... From their perspective,  
it was a bad example to their children  
'cause they could end up marrying gentiles,  
then their children's children  
wouldn't be Jewish,  
then they wouldn't be able to go  
to a Jewish school,  
and then where would they learn paranoia?  
So...  
And nobody's ever caused a drama  
about this in the family.  
We just sort of try to keep the peace  
and we try not to say anything about it,  
because it's genuinely believed in this  
family that when my mum got divorced,  
which was quite a drama, it was the direct  
reason for my grandpa becoming diabetic.  
So no one's allowed to say anything,  
so they say these sort of  
awful, offensive things,  
and I'm sat there going, "My God, if this  
was being televised, people would boo you."  
And then, near the end of the dinner,  
because I've been on a few courses  
to try and make my life happier,  
I say to these members of my family, in as  
sort of sweet and polite a way as possible,  
"Isn't it a shame that my brother  
couldn't bring his girlfriend tonight?"  
"It's sort of a shame."  
"Isn't it sort of a shame?"  
And they get quite defensive, of course,  
and say, "Well, why isn't she here?"  
"We thought she would be here."  
"Why isn't she here?"  
And I say, "Oh, isn't it... I don't know."  
"Isn't it because of that time  
that you said, 'She can't be here'?"  
I say... I ask, "Just explain to me  
why is the belief more important  
"than the feelings of a human being?"  
And it's so sad, 'cause she's a brunette.  
She could pass.

And then my brother comes over  
and just starts swearing at them,  
and it becomes a bit intense, and I say,  
"Oh, no, it's all right. Calm down.  
"I've been on a course, and..."  
And my grandpa... This is just the point  
where the cake is supposed to come.  
We should be singing happy birthday,  
and now my grandpa is crying,  
partly because of the drama that I've created,  
but partly 'cause he can't eat the cake.  
And, uh... Yeah, it's a tricky business.  
The whole thing's a tricky business.  
It is then suggested that we all go back  
to my mum's house and resolve this.  
And I feel very awkward  
about the whole thing  
because we don't have drama in this family,  
and now I've created one,  
and I've got to resolve it.  
We've got to have this whole debate  
about who's right and who's wrong.  
And I used to... As a child, I was quite into  
debate and opinions,  
and now I just feel like debate and politics  
is the opposite of truth,  
the opposite of beauty, the opposite of joy.  
When I was younger I went to see  
the Vanessa Feltz talk show being filmed.  
There's nothing we can do.  
It happened. It happened.  
The subject up for debate that day was,  
"Should I murder my husband?"  
At the beginning of the show,  
the floor manager told us  
that the best opinion of today  
will win a bottle of champagne.  
So there's everything to play for.  
Should she or shouldn't she  
murder her husband?  
Twenty minutes go by and people say  
some very interesting things,  
and I, at about 14 years old,  
stand up and say,

"I think you shouldn't murder your husband  
'cause you could go to prison."  
And I won a bottle of champagne.  
And whether it's a lowbrow,  
stupid, daytime-TV-show debate like that,  
or a highbrow Question Time  
political debate,  
it's the same inane, nonsensical,  
cyclical, boring topics,  
and we go round and round in circles  
debating the same things  
over and over again.  
Somehow we take out logic and  
prior knowledge from our collective minds.  
And I think it's quite similar  
to what happened to me  
when I did magic mushrooms  
a few years ago.  
Somehow, I was able to say to my friend,  
on mushrooms -  
and I think it's this sort of conversation  
that we're all constantly having  
that stops us from progressing at the speed  
that we perhaps could -  
isn't it odd how, when you say to someone,  
"Oh, do you want to meet up  
for some dinner next Thursday?",  
the dinner is a lie.  
What you're really saying is,  
"It'd be nice to meet up with you.  
I haven't seen you for a while."  
Why do we have to have this dinner cover?  
How do you know how hungry  
you're going to be on Thursday?  
Why can't we just say,  
"It'd be nice to meet up with you"?  
And there should be a place  
where you could just meet,  
the meeting place, an indoor place,  
where you walk in and you sit down,  
there's nothing, just chairs,  
and you sit down and you look at each other  
and you meet, and it's truthful,  
it's authentic, it's beautiful.

And then I thought,  
after about half an hour there  
you could get a bit hungry.  
And I invented the restaurant.  
So I didn't want to have this debate  
with my family,  
who was right and who was wrong.  
Very difficult thing.  
We have to continue to debate things  
because there is no truth,  
there's only perspective.  
And their perspective was  
that it was a terrible misunderstanding,  
and the one time they did meet her,  
she hadn't said hello to them.  
And I had to explain that she was  
the shy, new guest coming into this family.  
We are hosting her.  
We have to say hello first.  
That's how it works.  
I don't know if I only know that  
from presenting TV shows  
where you start with,  
"Hello, and welcome to the show."  
You don't stare at the audience.  
I had to explain it to them  
like they were children.  
I said, "Why can't we learn from Lumiere,  
"the candlestick holder  
from Beauty and the Beast?"  
"Who sang Be Our Guest, Be Our Guest,  
not Is She a Jew?"  
But this is unfair, because I realised  
in everything that I was saying  
what was underneath my words  
was essentially,  
"Why can't you just be less judgemental,  
and more like me?"  
Which is judgemental.  
And arrogant, to try and change  
somebody else's perspective  
just so that the world  
can seem better for you.  
It's important that we have

these contrasts in life.  
Nothing ever got created  
from things being the same.  
It's from the contrasts in life  
that anything happens.  
I realised in the end that all I could do,  
I couldn't change them,  
all I could was change  
my perspective on them,  
and then move on with my life.  
All you can really do in your life  
is change yourself, and that's hard enough.  
I really wanted to change myself  
a lot last year,  
because I felt I wasn't getting enough sex.  
And that's a fun thing to do,  
it's a shame not to have more of it.  
And the reason I wasn't...  
The reason I wasn't achieving  
the getting of more sex  
was because I would see somebody  
at a party that I really liked  
and I'd think,  
"Gosh, well, he seems just about perfect."  
"Like, who knows what could happen?"  
"I could end up spending  
the rest of my life with him."  
And what I would do every time,  
to woo him, to beshoe him,  
to make him see that I was the one for him,  
is I would go home  
and hope that I saw him again.  
Because for me to go up to someone  
and say, "Hello, what's your name?"...  
Perfectly lovely question,  
"Hello, what's your name?"  
Nothing wrong with that question,  
"Hello, what's your name?"  
It's a delightful, curious question,  
but to me, it would definitely come out like,  
"Hello. What's your name?"  
Also, I developed a paranoia  
for talking to anyone  
because I felt like,

if the chat-up didn't go well,  
they would then have a story  
to tell their friends about.  
This came from being  
at the Edinburgh Comedy Festival  
and somebody coming up to me  
and reminding me of a gig  
that we'd done together.  
I said, "I remember the gig.  
"I went on a few dates with a poet  
who was on that show."  
And he said, "Yes, that's my friend."  
And he said that in a kind of smug way,  
like he knew something about me.  
And I said, "Do you know  
something about me?"  
And he said, "Yes."  
He then told me that his friend had told him  
that when we were having sex,  
and his friend climaxed, I said...  
"Well done."  
I think it's 'cause it took him a while.  
It's not my catchphrase.  
So I couldn't talk to people.  
I couldn't talk to people.  
And then I saw the film Waking Life.  
I don't know if you've seen it,  
but one line stood out for me.  
"Actual self-awareness is the knowledge  
"that you are a character  
in someone else's dream."  
I love this idea that it could all be a dream,  
and it's somebody else's dream.  
I makes everything so silly.  
There's no need to fear anything,  
no need to feel anxious about anything.  
It's all a dream.  
And if you're playing a character,  
and that character isn't serving you,  
that shy, anxious character  
who can't talk to people,  
let go of the character.  
Become a different character.  
I was out with a friend of mine,

walking through the streets of north London  
on a Sunday afternoon a few months ago,  
and in the time that we were together,  
he got the phone numbers  
of about four different girls.  
His thing is he's able to go up to girls  
and say, "Hello. What's your name?"  
They exchange phone numbers,  
and then later, they have sex.  
That's a better system than mine.  
I said, "You've got to do this for me."  
He then spots this guy  
that I'd been looking at.  
And before I can run away,  
scared of what might occur,  
he just saunters up to this guy  
and says, "Hello, young man."  
"You look like a fun chap.  
What are you up to today in your life?"  
And this young student guy says,  
"I'm... I'm meeting some friends in the park."  
And my friend says,  
"Well, we must join you."  
And for some reason,  
this guy doesn't say, "Why?"  
I think it's 'cause my friend said, "we must",  
and so he just went, "Oh, well,  
if you're in charge of the world, okay."  
'Cause that's what my friend's  
putting out there.  
His character is he can grab  
someone from the universe,  
throw them in his hot tub and fuck them.  
We're now sat in this park with these people,  
and everyone's acting very nonchalant,  
like it's a normal thing to have happened.  
But at least in my head, I'm screaming,  
"But we're all strangers!"  
I try to chat up the one that I like.  
I say, "You look like the cool one  
in the group."  
Because I don't know how to talk to humans.  
The only way I can cope, it seems,  
is if I imagine I'm conducting a TV interview.

"Well, you're the cool one,  
and who dresses you?  
"And thank you for coming in today.  
And now Lady Gaga."  
Who I don't trust.  
So my friend then rescues me  
from my character  
and says, "Why don't you two  
exchange phone numbers now?  
"We must move on with our lives."  
So we do exchange phone numbers,  
because he's told us to.  
We walk away, and I acknowledge that  
what's happened has been quite special.  
Generally in life, we feel we're in control,  
but we're just like ants, wandering around,  
hoping to avoid bumping into each other,  
as humans, hoping to avoid doing anything  
that might embarrass us.  
And this was a moment of grabbing  
a moment from the universe without any fear.  
We're not in control of our lives.  
You're not in control of your lives.  
I'm aware that half the people in here  
are only in here  
because the person next to you likes me.  
Maybe more than half. Maybe...  
And I'm not in control of my life,  
even being here tonight.  
It's just that something happened  
in my childhood,  
where there was a moment of fear,  
I responded with something funny  
and that worked,  
so I carried on with that  
and now I'm here talking to you  
into a microphone, which I don't need.  
Just 'cause it gives the impression  
I'm definitely a stand-up comedian.  
Otherwise, I'm just a man standing.  
And unless you grab these moments,  
life just is cyclical and it is repetitive.  
Do you know what I was thinking about  
when I was in the toilet the other morning?

"Again?" It's always the same, isn't it?  
Once, about six years ago,  
I had a green shit. Once.  
And it looked at me, as if to say,  
"Perhaps everything will be different now."  
It wasn't.  
Goatee beard, huh?  
You think that's going to help?  
So, you know, you think,  
you shave that bit and that bit and...  
We're all still going to die.  
So I asked my friend.  
I said, "What do you want me to do now?  
"Should I text him next week  
and see what he's up to?"  
He said, "No. Just text him now  
and see what he's doing tonight."  
I said, "This is a bit keen.  
We just walked away.  
"Shouldn't I play hard-to-get a bit?"  
He said, "No, you don't play hard-to-get.  
You just picked someone up in a park."  
And he was right.  
This stupid game, based on fear,  
that we play, this hard-to-get game,  
we don't play it in any other area of our lives.  
You're in a supermarket and you think,  
"Oh, I quite fancy a potato,"  
you don't go,  
"Oh, best to avoid eye contact."  
You grab the potato, you bloody eat it.  
The only difference between a potato  
and a human being is the fear of rejection.  
That's not the only difference. Um...  
Everything's a choice between fear and love.  
We may as well choose love,  
because death is coming.  
Death is coming.  
Death is coming.  
That's my catchphrase.  
So I texted him, there and then,  
because death is coming.  
And he was free that night.  
He was free that night.

We were then going on this date, that night.  
We'd met that day.  
We're going on this date, that night.  
I feel alive. I feel like I'm living  
some sort of dreamlike existence.  
My friend then gives me tips  
on how to have sex with him that evening.  
Because that is what this is about.  
This is about grabbing this moment  
from the universe,  
without any judgement, without fear.  
We still judge ourselves on sex.  
And we add so much meaning to it,  
as we add meaning to everything in our lives.  
Sex can just be fun. It can just be fun.  
It can just be fun.  
No one ever says,  
"Oh, you're playing all that tennis."  
"Where's it leading?"  
"Did you enjoy your tennis game?"  
"Oh, it was just meaningless, wasn't it?"  
It was just..."  
It's joyful.  
His tips were, "Don't talk about the past.  
"Don't discuss the future.  
This is just about this moment.  
"Just keep saying the words 'spontaneous'  
and 'adventure'."  
Spontaneous. Adventure.  
"Aren't we spontaneous?"  
What an adventure we've been on today.  
"We met today and we spontaneously  
decided to be here right now.  
"What an adventure it has been,  
"and what an adventure  
it could continue to be.  
"Aren't you spontaneous?"  
Aren't I spontaneous?  
"When was the last time  
you did something spontaneous?"  
"We're so adventurous.  
What an adventure this is."  
It worked.  
He taught me two things that day.

One, some confidence, 'cause why be timid?  
Death is coming.  
And two, hypnosis.  
I feel like now we can just have  
anything we want in our lives,  
and the only thing to fear is death,  
and that's happening anyway.  
The real problem, I find,  
is that we're getting older,  
and we have to be here for that.  
I turned 30 last year, and it was  
a bit of a crisis leading up to it,  
culminating in this.  
I was at the theatre and I saw somebody  
who turned out to be 18.  
Okay? So he was 18. All right? He was 18.  
But he was so thin.  
And he was with a woman  
who turned out to be his mother,  
but she, it turned out, was a fan of mine.  
So that's good.  
She likes my work, I like her son. Great.  
Also, I've worked really hard  
since about the age of 14  
to get to wherever the hell I am today,  
so if she's taken any enjoyment  
from my work,  
I think I've earned her child.  
We get talking, and they're delightfully  
uber-middle class,  
and I'm from Essex, and this feels like  
a moment where I've arrived.  
We're talking about the play,  
we're talking about poetry,  
we're having a wonderful time.  
I don't like to caricature,  
'cause it feels crude and untrue.  
I wouldn't say this if it wasn't the case.  
He is speaking in that stereotypical way  
we imagine posh people speak,  
like that sort of, "Fa-fa-fa..."  
Like that, "Wa-wa-wa-wa..."  
He's actually speaking like that.  
Like there's no need for him

to be able to speak,  
like his mouth is full of pound coins,  
I don't know what it is.  
But I'm really having a lovely time  
with both of them,  
and then after the play  
I meet up with just him outside the theatre.  
We're sat on the steps of this theatre.

**It's about 11:**

there's a frisson between us,  
there's romance in the air,  
and then his mother comes around  
the corner and I feel awkward.  
I think, "Oh, gosh, the mother must love him  
and is protective of him."  
And she just says to him,  
"Okay, goodbye, darling. See you later."  
Leaves me with her son.  
So I thought, "Well, she's given him to me."  
So I took him... Um...  
He actually took me to this restaurant  
that he knew. It was his area.  
We went to this late-night restaurant.  
We spoke for two hours.  
And he's actually much more mature  
than you'd imagine, for 18,  
much more intelligent  
than you'd imagine, for 18,  
and all those other things  
that people like me say.  
We started meeting up  
for these kind of dates.  
They weren't defined as such,  
but they were essentially dates,  
and eventually I invited him back to my flat.  
I felt strange and torn about inviting him.  
I wasn't sure if it'd be a bit too much for him.  
And I'm not very good  
at making the first move,  
like in terms of the first kiss.  
I'm not very good at that.  
And I thought I would have to,  
'cause I'm the responsible adult here.

And then we were sat  
for, like, three hours on my sofa,  
just talking and talking,  
and I couldn't quite make the move.  
I felt just awkward about it,  
I wasn't sure what...  
And it was hard for him as well,  
'cause he's straight, so it was difficult.  
But everything is seemingly leading  
towards this kiss.  
We're edging closer to each other, subtly,  
on the sofa.  
And at one point, I realised I had to kiss him  
because I found myself fiddling with his hair.  
And I thought,  
"Well, I've got to do the kiss now,"  
because that's a precursor to a kiss.  
If you don't then do the kiss,  
you're just a weirdo who likes hair.  
"Oh, it's been lovely  
touching your hair this evening."  
"Let yourself out."  
So I leaned in, and I kissed him on the lips,  
and said, "I've just kissed you on the lips."  
"Is that okay?"  
And he said,  
"Oh, yeah, that's fine, that's fine."  
And in that moment I won?  
I leaned in again, I kissed him again.  
I said, "I've just kissed you  
on the lips again,"  
because kids love repetition.  
But really we were having a laugh  
about it ourselves.  
Like, I kept sort of... You know, I tried to  
make it fun. I was making him laugh.  
He really liked...  
I kept doing, "Who is it? It's me."  
He really... He loved that. Loved it.  
And actually, it was a really  
lovely experience for both of us.  
Don't regret any of it. It was like a  
wonderful, beautiful, sensual evening,  
and there's no...

I don't feel any shame or regret about it.  
If there's one thing... There's one thing  
that makes me feel slightly odd about it,  
and it is that he did describe  
what we had done afterwards  
as "rumbly-tumbly".  
"Well, obviously, a bit nervous at first,  
but in the end, lovely bit of rumbly-tumbly."  
Now, I... Look, it's not ideal,  
being with an 18-year-old.  
Nothing we could do about the fact  
that he was 18.  
Nothing we could do about the fact  
that if I'd met him five weeks before,  
he would have been 17. Nothing we can do,  
nothing the police can do.  
No one can do anything.  
And I realise now that, as well as it being  
a worry about getting older,  
it was also an attempt to heal the past.  
When I was 18, at that stage  
it seemed impossible  
to be with another 18-year-old,  
so this was a moment of trying to heal  
that broken moment from the past.  
The great lesson in all of this  
came a few months ago.  
I'd received a big bill  
for something to do with my flat,  
and it was really frustrating,  
and it felt like an injustice.  
It was like this just stupid, boring bill,  
and there was nothing I could do about it.  
And I was really annoyed by it,  
and then I got in this minicab  
and started telling the cab driver about it.  
He said to me, "Well, is there anything  
you can do about this bill?"  
And I said, "No, there's nothing I can do.  
It's a real injustice."  
And he said, "Acceptance."  
"What do you mean,  
whispering, wise cab driver?"  
And he explained so absurdly simply that if

there's nothing you can do about something,  
then you do nothing.

And in that moment, the feeling of injustice,  
the frustration, it was lifted, it was gone.

There was nothing to do.

I realised I'd made it up.

I'd made it up that it was an injustice,

I'd made up the frustration, it was all a story.

And it's the same with the past.

You can't change the past.

There's no need to heal it.

It's only a story that you've created.

All you can do is let go of the story.

You can't change yourself.

All you can do is let go

of the story of who you are.

Let go of the character

you've created from fear.

And you can't change other people.

All you can do is let go

of your limited perspective of them.

I really tried hard with my family

on that stupid debate

about my brother and his girlfriend,

but they stuck with their perception,

as they have a right to do.

They said, "It's not our fault.

It's your mother.

"She would rather

that he was with a Jewish girl."

And my mum said,

"No, that's not what I've said.

"What I've said is in an ideal world,

he would be, but I'm happy that he's happy."

Which sounds more positive,

but she's creating a whole other world there

where he's with someone else.

So I said, "We've got to let go of this idea

of an ideal world.

"The world is how you perceive it.

It's ideal, if you want it to be ideal."

"And they're in love.

Surely, love is the ideal."

And I won a bottle of champagne.

Thank you very much for coming.