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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE®  **12**

YOU'RE THE STAR OF THE
STORY! CHOOSE FROM 30 POSSIBLE ENDS.

INSIDE UFO 54-40

BY EDWARD PACKARD

BARNES & NOBLE
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NOV-12 1975



ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL GRANGER

Foreword

Books change with time. Even when they appear static, the world around them shifts, transforming them in both visible and subtle ways.

The situation now is markedly different than in 2018, and so we must, by necessity, understand the past through this altered lens. Reading *P!DF* a decade after its writing reveals meanings that may have been hidden from its original makers.

For historical accuracy, we have retained the content and formatting of the last archived version of this document. Its errors and omissions remain fixed—as fixed as anything today can be—but we believe that they might be framed more clearly through the obvious contrast with our present times.

— The Editors, May 2028

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for your time.
Despite the events of these past weeks,¹
I'm grateful that you're able to meet in
person today to consider this: my
presentation, my *P!DF*.

1. The political gaffes, natural disasters, and troubling news of the past weeks come on the heels of nearly two years marked by Brexit, the new US Administration, violent conflicts,

nationalist surges, and global-warming-related catastrophes. In these circumstances, what can art, design, and curating actually accomplish? I've attempted one potential response in this

document. Perhaps education—which provides ways to read and produce meaning critically—is a useful initial step. I guess that's why I'm here today.

It's an attempt to articulate an identity in flux: an ever-evolving snapshot of my past work.² Having established cultural institutions, organized exhibitions, and collaborated with artists, architects, museums, universities, and more, I'm now left asking how these creative pursuits are relevant to the tasks of tomorrow.

2. Categories are tricky. I've never been quite sure what to call myself professionally, and am starting to wonder why I even need to do this. The final scene of John Hughes' *The Breakfast*

Club (1985) offers this wisdom: 'But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain... and an athlete... a basket case... a princess... and a criminal. Does that answer your question?'

In 2016, I spoke about my practice across multiple disciplines in a long-form interview for the Walker Art Center's blog, which gives some insight into my interests and approaches.

In the spirit of transparency, *P!DF* ‘proffers a particular proposition: that curating, design, and other artistic pursuits in our present times must eschew the promotion of perfect products, instead presenting the creative process itself, with its plurality of positive outcomes and periodic faux pas.’³

3. This alliterative attempt arrives via the curatorial statement for *P!CKER*, an exhibition that I organized in September 2017 with Stella Bottai at Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University

London. The timing of that text and project (still perhaps my best curatorial outing to date) also coincides with the release of *P!DF* at the New York Art Book Fair. With its preponderance of P’s,

the text was a fun, absurdist play with language, while also a pretty compact statement of principle. To check out my current conclusions, click to this document’s own concealed ‘Koda.’

At the same time, this interactive piece—a book without paper, a razor-thin exhibition—plays with the power of presentation itself. We each make different choices⁴ depending on the context. The frame *around* something—how it brackets or interrupts its contents—serves a critical role in our experience of the world.

4. Throughout this PDF, you will encounter selected pages from *Choose Your Own Adventure #12: Inside UFO 54-40* by Edward Packard, a core text of my childhood. Even within the genre of

interactive young adult literature, the volume is remarkable. It presents a novel system for reading that acknowledges its own incompleteness. By the time you reach the end

of this PDF, I hope that it will be clearer why I chose to follow this book so closely. For further explication, please refer to an [essay](#) I published some years ago in *Paper Monument*.

WARNING!!!!

Do not read this book straight through from beginning to end! These pages contain many different adventures you can have inside *UFO 54-40*. From time to time as you read along, you will be asked to make a choice. Your choice may lead to success or disaster! The adventures you have will be the result of the decisions you make. After you make your choice, follow the instructions to see what happens to you next.

SPECIAL WARNING!!!!

While you are on board *UFO 54-40*, you may hear about *Ultima*, the planet of paradise, and you may wonder if one of your adventures will lead you there.

Sad to say, many never reach *Ultima*, because no one can get there by making choices or following instructions!

There is a way to reach *Ultima*. Maybe you'll find it.

If you're curious about curating, turn to page 9.

If you'd like to engage with graphic design, turn to page 13.

If you're trying to figure out the role of the frame, turn to page 17.

If you're not sure what you're interested in, turn to the next page.

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Over the past decade, we've watched as 'curating' has turned into a trendy term. People now use it to denote any act of selection, whether for a dinner party menu or a Spotify playlist.⁵ This reveals a contemporary conundrum: in the age of mass consumption, choosing has some influence, yet it's dangerously limited.

5. A compelling article by Thomas Frank in *The Baffler*, '[The Revolution Will Not Be Curated](#),' connects the rise of 'curating' as an overused term to an insulated leftist position—the role of

curating in the so-called 'filter bubble'—which adds a new spin to a discussion that has been happening in professional circles for a while. As curating has moved away from its original

usage and become more generalized, I sometimes find myself favoring old-fashioned but more specific terms, such as 'exhibition-making,' to describe my own activities.

Curating is not only about today's choices; it creates historical and economic value for tomorrow. The authority of presentational norms and markers— from the 'white cube' gallery space to the standard biographical wall label— determine what's accepted as 'important' or 'natural.'



Group Material
AIDS Timeline, 1991
Whitney Museum of American Art

I'm compelled by curating that organizes with an intention to unmask. Rather than exhibiting seamlessly, such curating makes visible how the display of an object shapes its interpretation.

At the same time, let's consider how curating could return to its etymological roots. Here, it might consider anew how to 'care for' fragile things, from communities to conversations—even helping to imagine alternative futures.

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In our information-ridden age, graphic design is everywhere—even if it's so embedded that it appears nearly invisible. Anytime you caption a photo on Instagram, you're creating graphic design without realizing it. But although you have the illusion of agency, you don't control the look; the interface does almost everything for you, shaping your ideas in more and less obvious ways.

How something is communicated visually—through texts, images, typography, color, form, and motion—influences what to buy, whom to choose, and how to live. So why is graphic design still seen in some circles as mere ‘form-making’?



Women's March on Washington, D.C.
21 January 2017

Design exists not only as a tool for encouraging consumption, but also as a way to deliver timely ideas to new audiences and generate formats for interaction. Its effects operate under the surface, lending them a potent authority. How can graphic design help create meaning and frame crucial messages more effectively?

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These days, too many of our experiences in the world are meant to be *smooth*—including lectures, interfaces, magazines, exhibitions, art fairs, films, songs, and even social interactions. They're optimized to be utterly digestible and eminently entertaining. 'Click, click, click—I'll take it.' Smooth things go down easily.⁶

6. As design historians Beatriz Colomina & Mark Wigley note astutely, 'Good design is an anesthetic. The smooth surfaces of modern design eliminate friction, removing bodily and

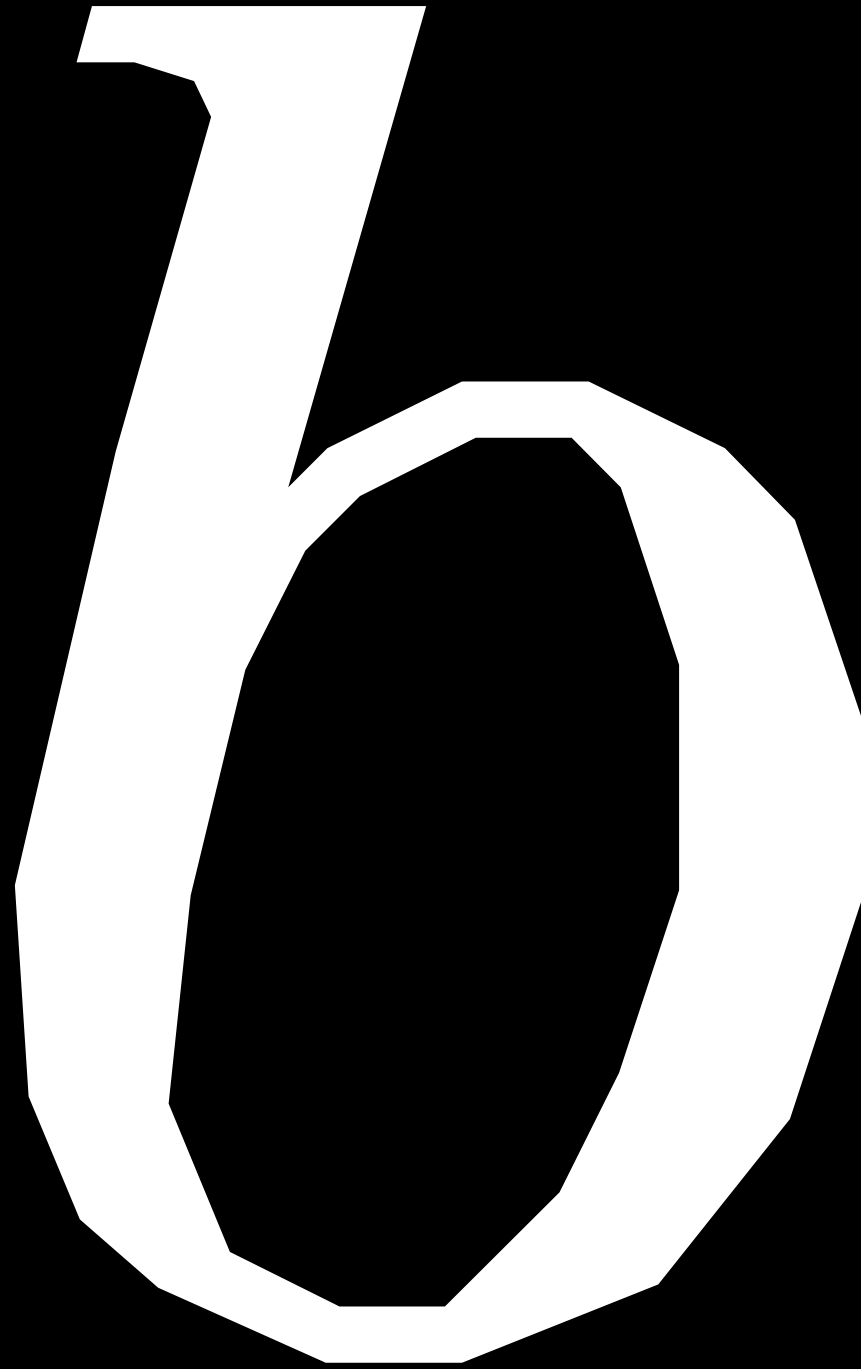
psychological sensation.' Their small-scale, high-impact *are we human? notes on an archaeology of design* is essential reading for the design novice and initiate alike. Although I encountered the

book well after developing the core ideas of this PDF, its synthetic scholarship now helps ground points argued originally from the intuitive position of a practitioner.

On the other hand, I think the power of framing disciplines such as curating and graphic design is that they can make even everyday things *bumpier*.

The idea of ‘bumpiness’—explored in multiple modes throughout *P!DF*—suggests roughness, resistance, and unpredictability, without falling into overt disruption. It’s slick enough to pass through a first filter, yet with enough texture to provoke a little bit of a reaction.

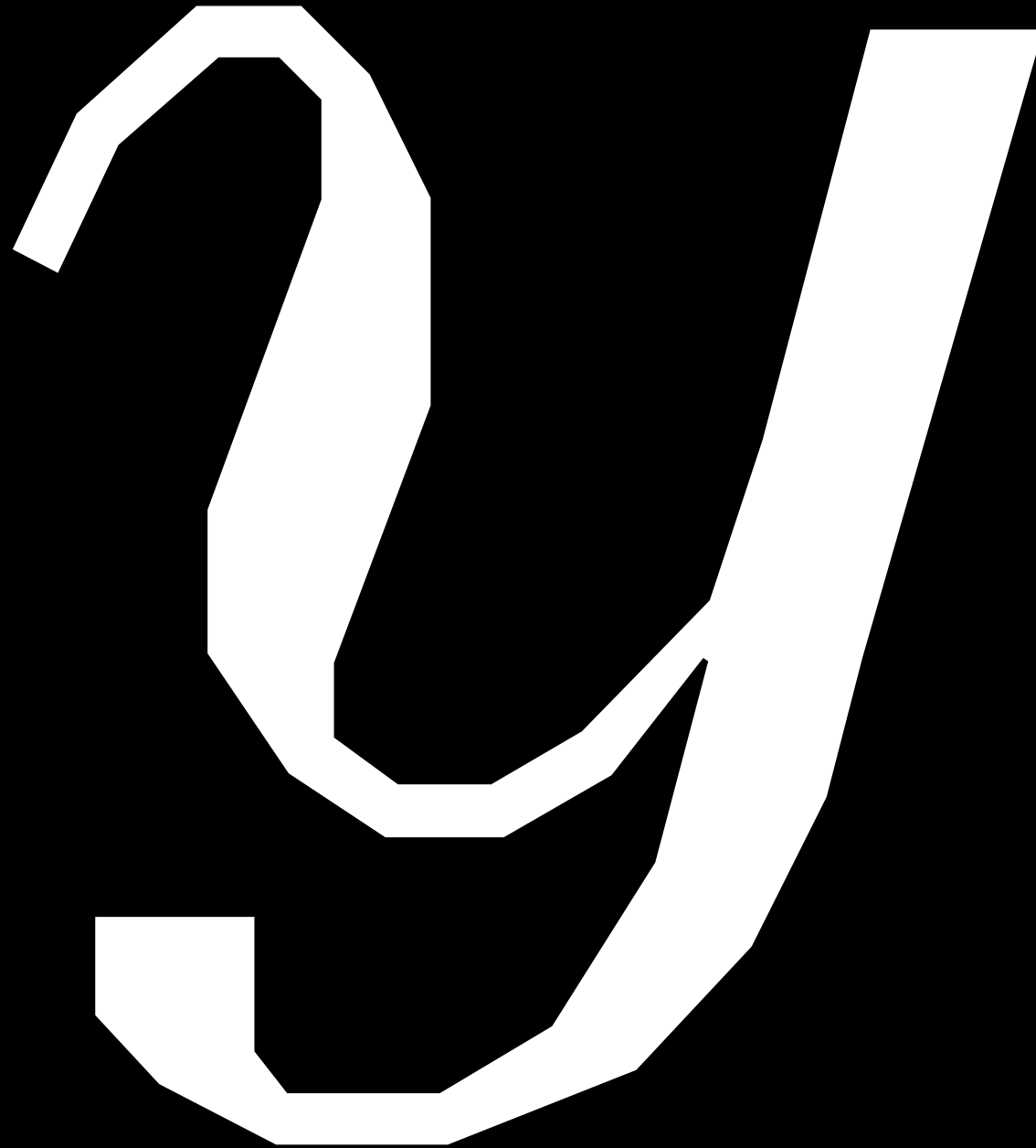
So, where does







no



leave us?⁷

7. I am often polemical about mixing typefaces, in response to monovocal modernist design. This PDF uses a number of typefaces, each specific to the subject being discussed. The face used for

my main narrative voice (as well as the large letters displayed just now) is Minotaur Regular and Italic (2014), designed by Jean-Baptiste Levée. Named in reference to Pablo Picasso and

Cubism, it features dramatic, rough-hewn strokes, which disappear at text sizes. A minotaur is also a hybrid—part man and part bull—which seems appropriate to *P!DF*.

Call me Emily.

Here in 2023, the oceans are rising and political instability has only gotten worse. All the HNWIs are hoarding their millions and retreating to armored towers. People have embraced pure self-interest, chasing after anything that seems stable or true.

Yet the world's changes have driven us to respond and react. To move forward, let's begin by looking backward.

To continue reading Emily's tale, skip ahead.
To read this PDF in order, turn to the next page.

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Curious what happens next? *P!DF* is
available at o-r-g.com/apps/p-df.