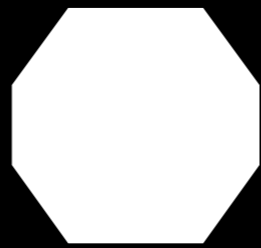
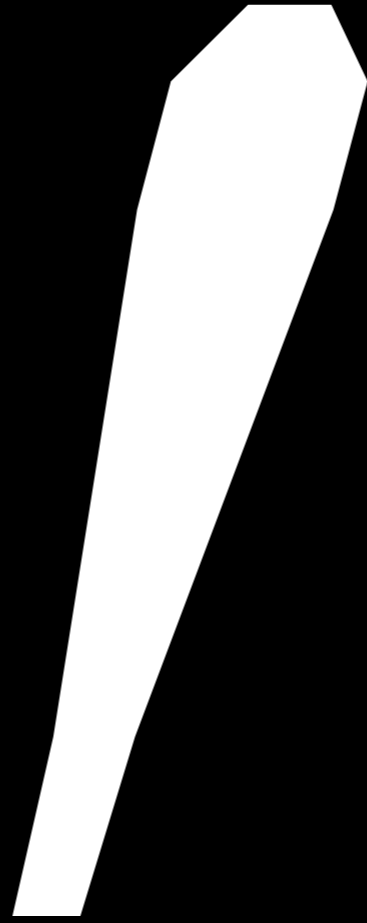


no



or

f

‘*P!DF* is a fascinating experiment in reading, writing, and publishing. Prem has transformed an invisible medium into a very special text—quirky, critical, and engaging.’

— Ellen Lupton, author,
Design is Storytelling

‘*P!DF* encapsulates a celebrated career of thinking and doing from a singularly talented curator and designer, and is—in typically Krishnamurthy fashion—strangely practical. It is, in short, a hell of a read.’

— Ben Smith, editor-in-chief,
BuzzFeed News

‘*P!DF* is a critical, curatorial exegesis packed with excursus (“bumpy” design, e.g.), pedagogic pathways, and a love story by Emily, all unspooling simultaneously sometime in the future and portalled into the present by a design prophet named Prem Krishnamurthy.’

— Ingrid Schaffner, curator,
Carnegie International, 57th Edition, 2018

p!df

EXPANDED EDITION

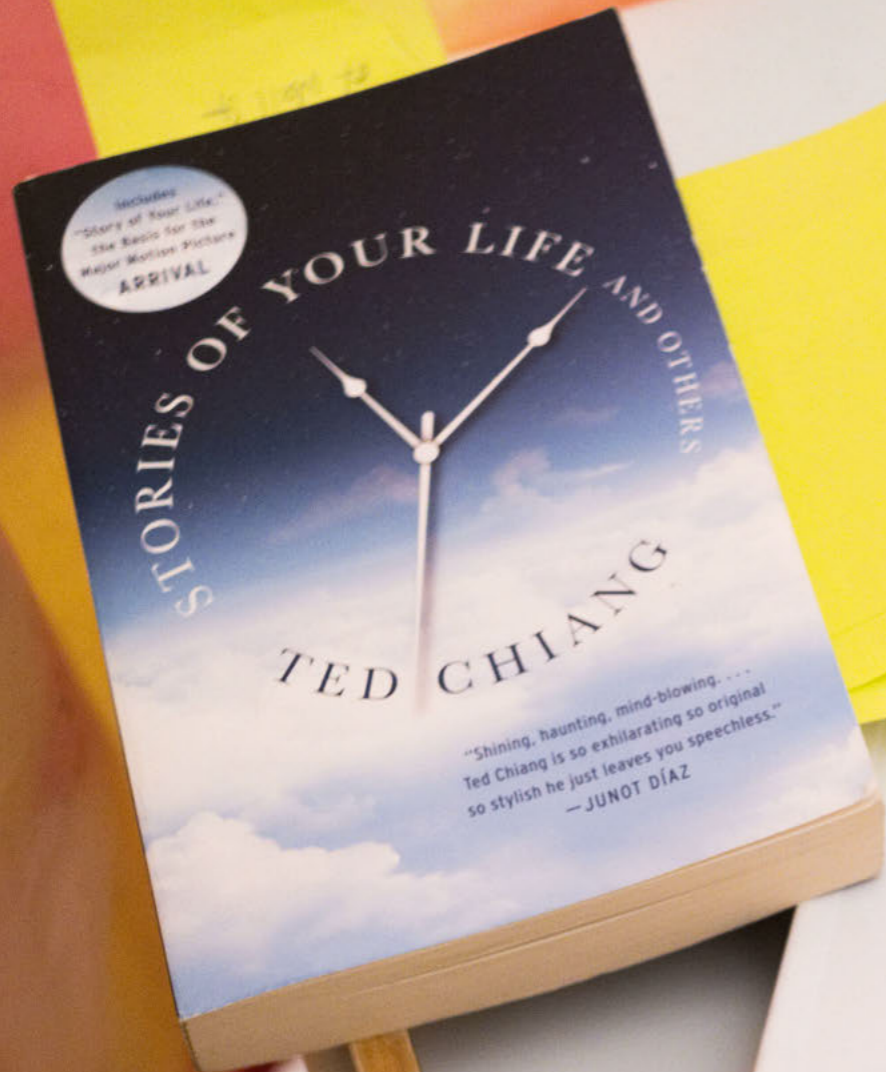
V.5.0.1

2019-04-05

Prem Krishnamurthy

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"Shining, haunting, mind-blowing. . . .
Ted Chiang is so exhilarating so original
so stylish he just leaves you speechless."
— JUNOT DÍAZ

STUDIO AND CUBE

On the relationship
between where art is made
and where art is displayed

Brian O'Doherty



Part I

Prologue of Prologues

P!DF, v.4.1.0

Prologue of Prologues

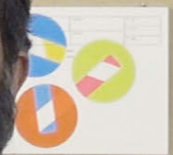
—

Before we begin, let's take a moment to stretch out our bodies and minds.

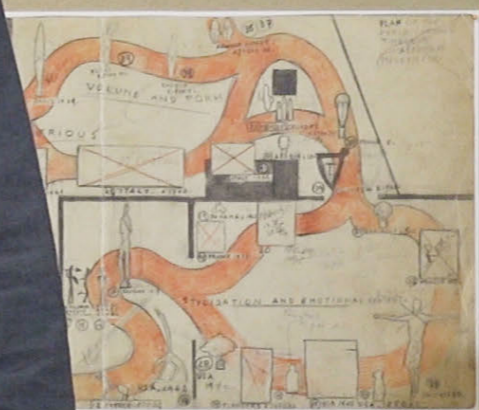
Usually, when I'm about to give a talk, teach a class, or speak in public, I take a moment to calm myself and focus.

1957

ready
pick up
your voice is
ready to pick
up my voice I
think because
you have a
magnificent



SEE HOW
LIFE
A SHINE



STUDIOS
STUDIOS
STUDIOS



I use a technique that social psychologist Amy Cuddy dubbed ‘power posing’. This involves stretching out your body with your feet planted wide. Your hands either rest on your hips or are extended into the air, taking up space.



Cuddy's recommendation is to hold this power pose for two minutes. Based on her research, she argues that it has both positive physiological effects and—even more importantly—it makes you *feel* more confident.*

* Cuddy demonstrated this 'power pose' in a 2012 TED Talk, which was subsequently expanded upon in articles, a book, and more. You can watch the original talk [here](#).

Some of the physiological effects that Cuddy claims have been challenged, but I still find her power pose very helpful before I start something public. When I'm presenting at an event, I often invite the other speakers and even the entire audience to join in.



Liked by jamesmtrainor and 98 others

land_arts The benefit and the return of @ingridschaffner starting the day with @wechselmann #powerpose — the glow and voices of last night still reverberating — viva #carnegieinternational #carnegieinternational2018 @thecmoa #pittsburgh

View all 2 comments · View hashtags

OCTOBER 13, 2018



So, if you want, stand up from your seat right now. Move your body. Stretch out your arms and legs, hold a power pose for a minute or two. Take this time to collect yourself. It'll put us both in the same frame of mind and body before we get started.

—

Every story must start somewhere. This one begins here:

My mother used to be a roboticist.
Our family's favorite movie in the 1980s was
Short Circuit.

Something wonderful has happened...
No.5 is alive.

SHORT CIRCUIT



TRI-STAR PICTURES AND PSO PRESENT
A TURMAN-FOSTER COMPANY PRODUCTION A JOHN BADHAM FILM
"SHORT CIRCUIT" ALLY SHEEDY STEVE GUTTENBERG
FISHER STEVENS AUSTIN PENDLETON G.W. BAILEY Music by DAVID SHIRE
Associate Producers GARY FOSTER and DANA SATLER Supervising Producer GREGG CHAMPION
Co-Producer DENNIS JONES Executive Producers MARK DAMON and JOHN HYDE
Film Edited by FRANK MORRIS Written by S.S. WILSON & BRENT MADDOCK
Produced by DAVID FOSTER and LAWRENCE TURMAN
Directed by JOHN BADHAM PANAVISION®

PSO VIDEO

AVAILABLE ON
VIDEOCASSETTE

CBS
FOX
VIDEO

Have you seen it? It's a cheesy Hollywood film about a robot that's struck by lightning and becomes sentient.* Ally Sheen finds the robot and takes care of it; Steve Guttenberg is its scientist-creator who tries to save it from capture and destruction. There's even a white actor in brownface playing a bumbling Indian engineer who mixes his metaphors

* This cute, awkward film also spawned the hit single, *Who's Johnny?*, by DeBarge, which reached number three on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and number one on the Hot R&B Singles chart.

For this context, though, the only Johnny who really matters is Jonny Bruce, an artist and constant source of inspiration. Thanks, Jonny!

Cut to Ridgefield, a bedroom community in western Connecticut. I was a hyperactive little brown kid. People called me a spazz. I had bowl-cut hair and couldn't control my volume levels.

For Halloween one year, my family built a robot greeter. From then on, my friends' joke went, *Prem's a robot, and his mother programmed him. So where's the OFF switch?*



So maybe it's only fitting that this book—my first as author rather than editor or designer—takes the form not of analog ink and paper, but rather as a 105mb PDF file. Designed for the endless scroll of digital devices, it's a bumpy emulation of a memoir, an electronic volume that tries to find emotions.

—

While living in Berlin at age twenty and interning for my first graphic design studio, I worked weekends as a bilingual bus tour guide to make rent.

It was a stressful job—telling stories about the city, its sights, and its complicated history in two languages to hop-on, hop-off, distracted yet demanding tourists. Sometimes German passengers would humiliate me by complaining about my grammatical errors. The bus drivers were often upset, too; they blamed their meager tips on my language mistakes.

But it proved a useful learning experience. I came out of that summer with new abilities. Although the multi-hour tour had a basic structure, I was also allowed to improvise—reacting to situations on the fly and filling up the space with humorous observations. By the end, I could turn a set of *facts* into a *story*.

I also realized the odd power of guides: up to a certain point, whatever they say, no matter how fantastical, can appear true. The right frame is often all that's need for people to believe in something.

A tour guide is similar to an artist, a curator, a graphic designer, an educator, or another kind of storyteller. They all weave together the interstitial areas between narratives, create trajectories out of seemingly-random points in space, and try to make the path entertaining along the way.*

* Emily Smith and I recently wrote an essay for a forthcoming book, *Curating After the Global*, called, “‘A Three-Hour Tour’: Toward a Methodology for Responsive Curating”. This

piece expands upon the relationship of the tour guide, the designer, and the curator, while outlining a methodology for what we call ‘responsive curating’ that ‘knows as it goes’.

The book is a collaboration between CCS Bard and LUMA Foundation and will be released by MIT Press in 2019.

This book is about and for tour guides, in the broadest sense of the term.

—

Amongst the many things I do today—
including curating exhibitions, designing
with institutions, writing essays, teaching
workshops, and trying to live life—the skill
that I’ve probably had to practice the most
over the past decade is *making
presentations*.*

* From the electronic trail on my computer, I can count around 188 discrete and unique talks or lectures over the last ten odd years. This does not include pitches and presentations to

potential or actual clients (which must number in the many hundreds, once you count them all), as well as public talks such as this *P!DF*, which has already been shown numerous times. All this

is to say: I’m pretty sure I’ve put in my proverbial 10,000 hours.

The contemporary world is driven by the necessity to tell people what you've done, what you do, or what you're going to do. To some, this demonstrates how our late capitalist society is driven by hype and rhetoric over the actual production of things—a symptom of rampant self-branding and unchecked individualism.

On the other hand, a more optimistic viewpoint might glimpse hope in this phenomenon: the ease with which people today can *share*—whether knowledge, money, or skills—is unprecedented. Just watch any YouTube instructional video to learn something new, and you’ve experienced this power.

P!DF comes out of a desire to share with others—to offer something of my experiences, ideas, and the tools I’ve learned along the way. I think it’s perhaps both self-centered and generous at the same time, one individual’s attempt to create something for collective use.

—

I recently read a compelling e-book called *Patterns of Decentralised Organising**. It's an unfinished book, a truly public work-in-progress. Each chapter indicates its completeness as a percentage and ends with bullet points for what the author still plans to write.

* The book is by Richard D. Bartlett, a co-founder of Loomio, an open source software tool for collaborative decision-making. *Patterns of Decentralised Organizing* is available for

purchase at <https://leanpub.com/patterns-for-decentralised-organising/>. Although it's unfinished, I recommend it as a starting point for collaborative methodologies. Since reading it

earlier this year, I have incorporated some of its ideas into the chapter, *Workshop of Workshops*. I have Claire Tolan of New Eelam to thank for this and other references such as Enspiral.

I won't go quite that far, but I'll take a cue from the transparency of Barlett's approach. Let me acknowledge upfront: what you're reading right now is not the end of a process of thinking and writing. In fact, it's just another beginning.

Although *P!DF* was first publicly released in 2017, it remains permanently unfinished. Its structures—including black backgrounds, running headers, large-scale typography, and full-bleed images—might make it look authoritative, yet the book is far from polished.

If you're looking for a complete, pat set of thoughts to quote at a dinner party, I'd recommend you pick up another book. Instead, what I can offer is an opportunity to *think out loud, together*: a chance to be in virtual dialogue, to try to construct collective meaning in the world.

—

This is the thirteenth public release of *P!DF*. It was only while preparing this most recent version that I realized: the entire book is about developing teachable *tools*.

Tools are not only physical objects; they can be mental models as well. Some tools take five minutes to learn, others take a lifetime. We employ and adapt such tools to help us shape ourselves and our environment, even as they shape us.

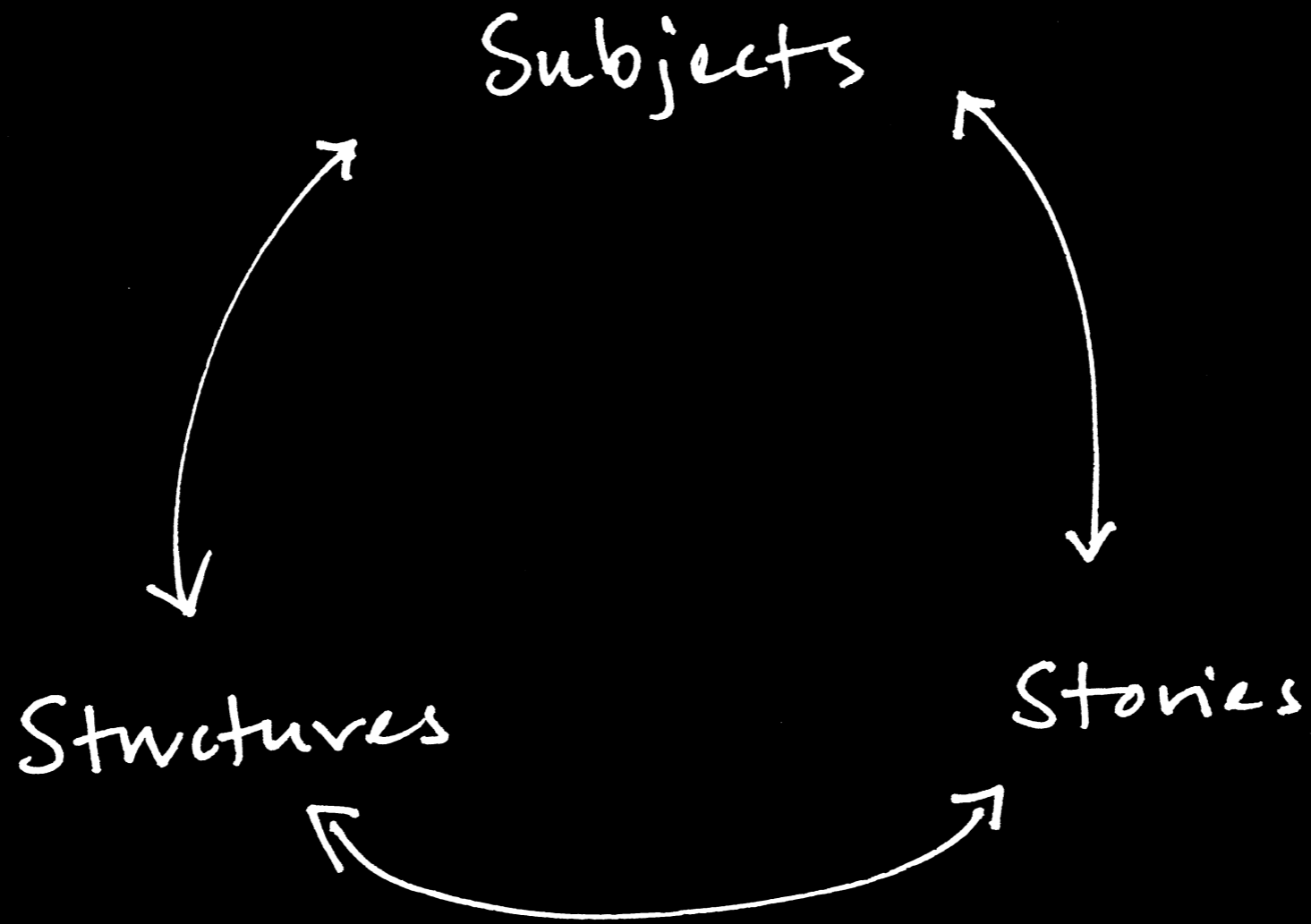
When people describe certain kinds of tools, such as works of art or design, they sometimes use the terms ‘form’ versus ‘content’. In vain, I’ve recently been asking my friends and colleagues: where does this dichotomy originate from?*

* If you know the historical origin of this terminology, please let me know. I’m more than happy to cite you! I can be reached via email at info@p-exclamation.org.

To me, these terms feel linked to the aftermath of the 19th and early 20th centuries. They hint at how that colonialist, industrialist, capitalist epoch of expansion divvied things up: idea versus implementation, management versus labor, art versus design.

‘Form’ and ‘content’ have also gathered so many meanings over the past 100 years that it’s hard to pry them loose again. They are such smoothly self-evident words—although everyone uses them to mean something different—that they’ve lost their value as shared language.

So, instead, I've recently started to use a triumvirate of alliterative terms: *structures, stories, and subjects.*



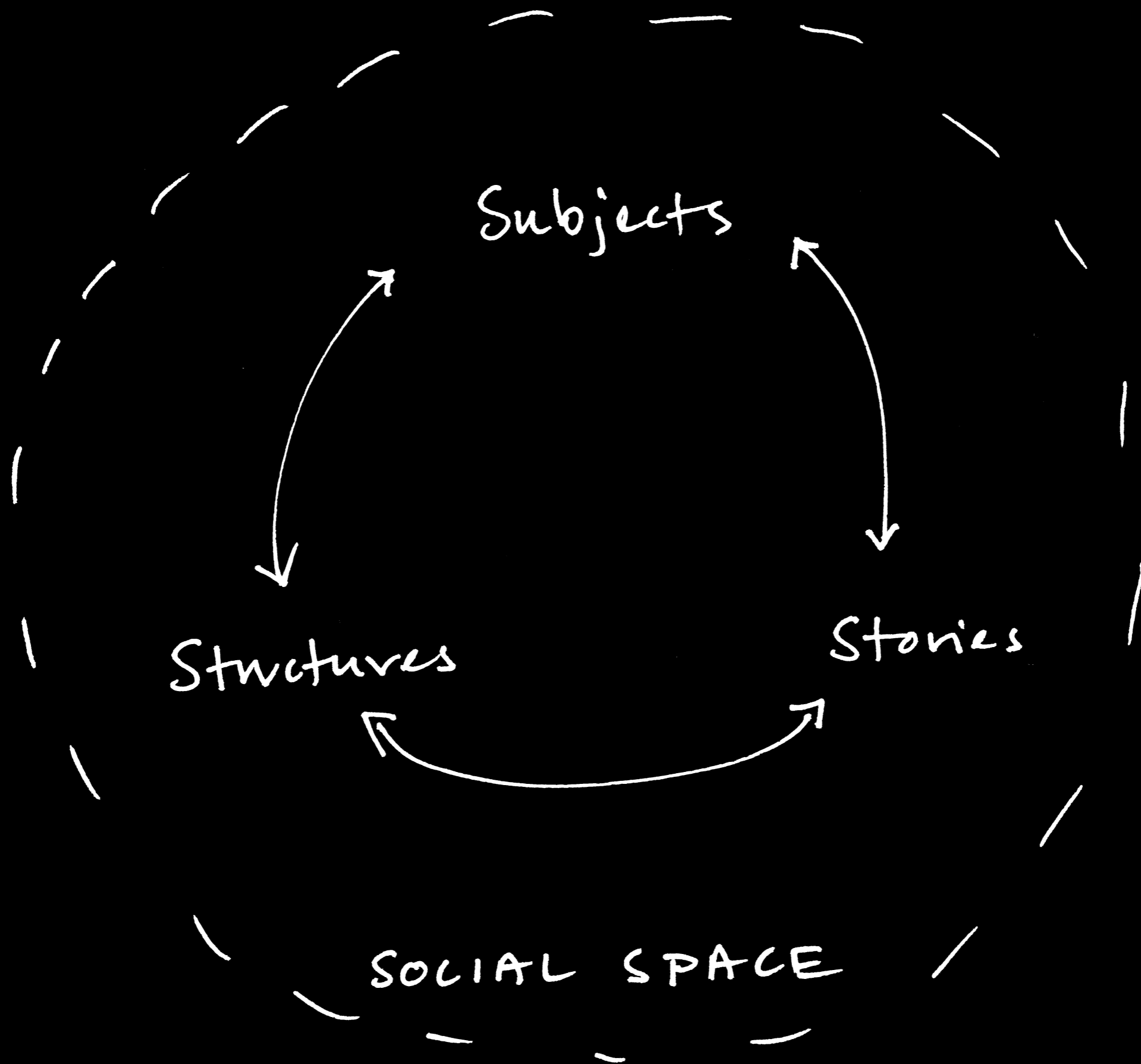
Structures underly every system. Counting to ten or a thousand represents one kind of structure. Whenever people, things, or ideas are organized in the world, their relations are controlled by a particular structure. Because they are often hard to see, structures can possess tremendous power.

Stories are a basic impulse. They are intrinsic to any kind of communication—representing the desire to convey a myth, an idea, a feeling, or any other simple or complex narrative. Every story is told by someone or something; it has system of organization, a way it's told, and a response it seeks to evoke.

Subjects are the creatures, processes, and other actors that tell and receive stories. No narrative is objective or neutral; rather it arises from a subjective perspective. Similarly, every listener carries their own criteria. Subjects are changed by the stories they experience, as well as by internal and external structures.

There's an intentional interdependence and overlap between these three terms. Every structure organizes a set of things with a particular agenda. You can't entirely understand a story without examining how it's told and who tells it to whom. And every subject, no matter how quiet, has a narrative that unfolds over time—if only we want to listen.

Together, these factors produce *social space*: the shared environment where interchange, interplay, and interpretation occur. This use of ‘social’ is not limited to humans. It can exist between different subjects—whether people, animals, objects, or natural phenomenon—whenever the interaction is mutual.



Subjects

Structures

Stories

SOCIAL SPACE

While reading this book, I hope you'll take a moment to consider its structures, stories, and subjects in turn. Since this is the framework's first public premiere, it's still rough. But with your critique and feedback, these terms and their usage may start to smooth themselves out.

—

During the early phases of rewriting this book, one of my best friends came to visit me in the studio. I wanted to share my new ideas and make him lunch.

I showed him the new outline and multi-part structure for *P!DF*. He didn't understand it. I made him my favorite salad, which I eat nearly every day. He asked me why I hadn't told him it was an 'arugula salad', not a 'normal salad'. He asked if I could please hold the radishes.

It was a useful lesson for me: what is natural, clear, or delicious to one person is not to another. There's nothing wrong with that. When you don't see eye-to-eye with someone, the most important thing is to ask questions and try to understand their position.

He might not read this book, but that's also fine. This book is dedicated in part to Florian, a dear friend who always gives me another, well-needed, contrary perspective.

—

One final start, before we really get started. Once upon a time, there was a book called *P!DF*. It was a constantly evolving digital publication comprising many hundreds of pages.

It started as a portfolio, grew into a memoir, and morphed into a manifesto. The book was written—and constantly rewritten—over almost a year on planes, trains, and proverbial automobiles. It came to be an incomplete map of its author's mind at any given point.

It would be workshopped with different people, in classrooms, lecture halls, galleries, and design studios around the world. After each time it presented itself in public, it would change in response to questions, comments, and criticism.*

* A thorough account of the composition of *P!DF* (along with other related topics) can be found in *Parallel Projections*, an essay I wrote in 2018 for a book by 019 in Ghent, Belgium. They are the

parent organization of Kunsthal Gent, who have most recently acquired *Endless Exhibition*, my polymorphic-curatorial-manifesto-as-artwork.



RISD MFA Graphic Design Program
12 April 2017
The Design Office, Providence, RI
Photo: James Goggin

Eventually, *P!DF* slowed down. After multiple re-releases and edits, its rough edges had been smoothed away. It took on a more solid and definitive structure: an interactive book in which the reader can choose their own path.

Every book is actually many books.*
They consist of sets of narratives written at
different times by different versions of an
author, read by different people.

* This paraphrases an aphorism by my dear friend, colleague, and mentor, Brian O'Doherty: 'Every person is actually many people.' Given his many pseudonyms—including artist Patrick Ireland,

poet William Maginn, artist Sigmund Bode, feminist art critic Mary Josephson, and others who have not yet been revealed—O'Doherty embodies this phrase more thoroughly and self-

reflexively than most people. Early in my career, I read sociologist Erving Goffman's canonical *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which guided my own ideas on performative roles.

The current version of *P!DF* acknowledges this multiplicity of subjects and stories within its new, four-part structure.

Part I (where we currently find ourselves) introduces the book. It also includes within it the complete previous release of *P!DF*, version 4.1.0. You might think of this nested, interactive book-in-a-book as a 384-page prologue.*

* As embedded in this volume, *P!DF, v.4.1.0* remains unchanged from its last public release. This accounts for the chapter's independent page numbering, separate date/time header,

and particular interactive features, which are unique to the section.

Part II comprises five subchapters. The first is an approach for teaching introductory graphic design in a critical and collaborative way. The subsequent, related chapters present speculative frameworks for rethinking the timescales, stakes, and methods of exhibition making.*

* The last three chapters of this section, *Endless Exhibition*, *Interlude: Post-Play*, and *Future of Futures* each also functions as a standalone performance lecture, guided visualization

exercise, and exhibition making playbook, respectively.

Part III synthesizes many of the earlier sections' insights into a new, hybrid model—a creative workshop for working and learning with others amongst the world's uncertainties. The second chapter considers what's important aside from work.*

* *Workshop of Workshops* takes an autoethnographic approach to understanding my relationship to structures of work and community in order to articulate its new model.

Living Life looks at one subject that is mostly missing from the rest of this book: life. It's still got a long way to go.

Finally, *Part IV* offers two tools that you can use to improve your everyday life and beyond.*

* The first one, *Counting*, is a simple meditation tool that's easy to learn and practice. *Communing*, the second tool, is a virtual,

distributed, collaborative, streaming jukebox and will be included in *P!DF* later this year.

Of course, this structure is just for now. Like everything else in the world, *P!DF* is always in flux. The only constant is change itself.*

* Greek philosopher Heraclitus still said it best: 'You cannot enter the same river twice, because it's not the same river and you're not the same person.'

So without further ado: thank you again for joining me today. Let's begin our tour.

*P!DF, v.4.1.0**

* What follows is the complete and unexpurgated PDF of *P!DF* from its release on 11 July 2018. Please note that this 384-page document uses

own page numbering system, independent of the rest of the book's unfolding sequence.

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23175-8 ★

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
NO REFUND #10 LABEL
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, July 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 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 such 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*, a multipart exhibition that I organized in September 2017 with Stella Bottai at Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University

London. The timing of that project (still perhaps my best curatorial outing to date) also coincided with the launch 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 principles. To consider 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.

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.

—

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’?

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?

—

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

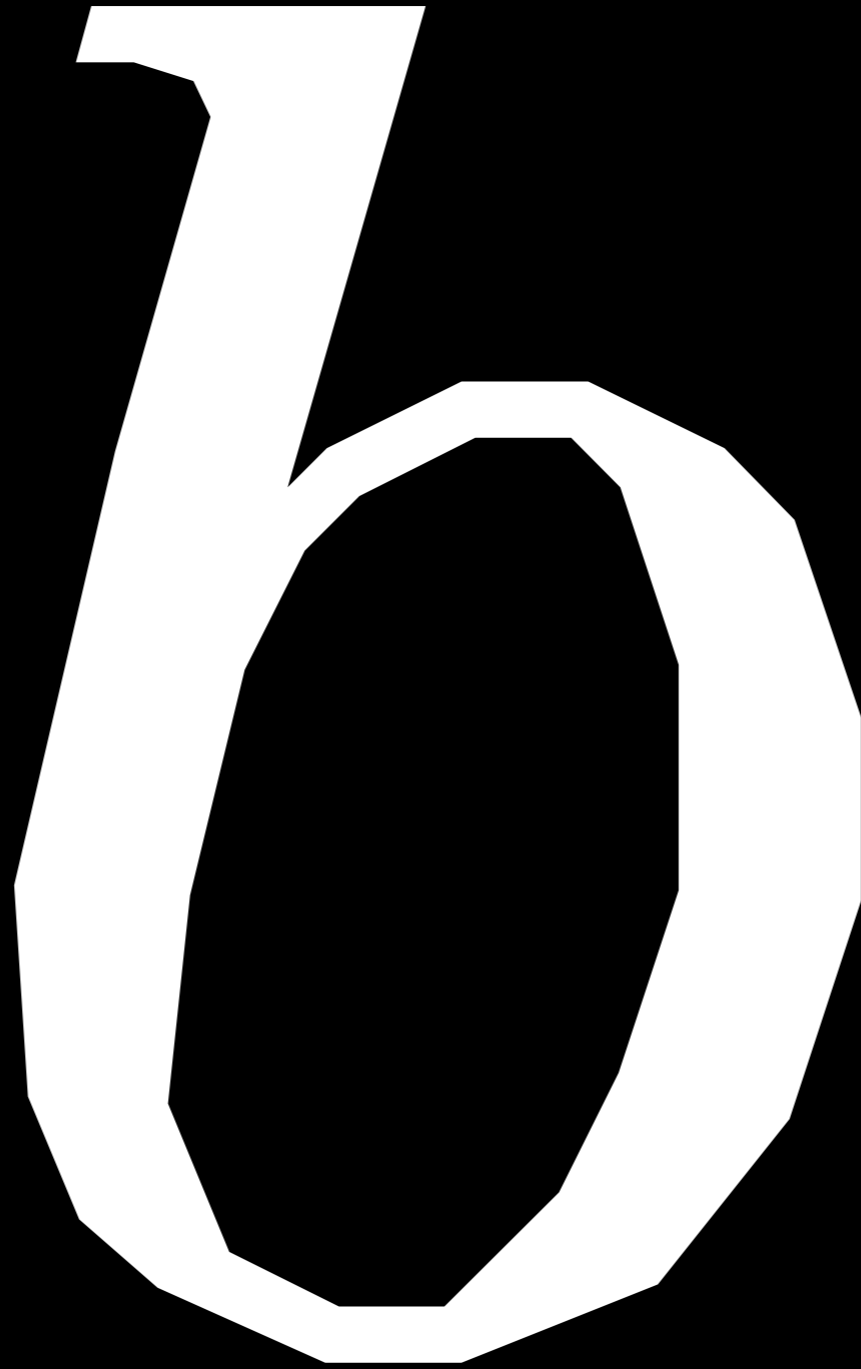
psychological sensation.' Their small-scale, high-impact *are we human? notes on an archaeology of design* is essential reading for the design novice and initiate alike. Although I encountered the

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.

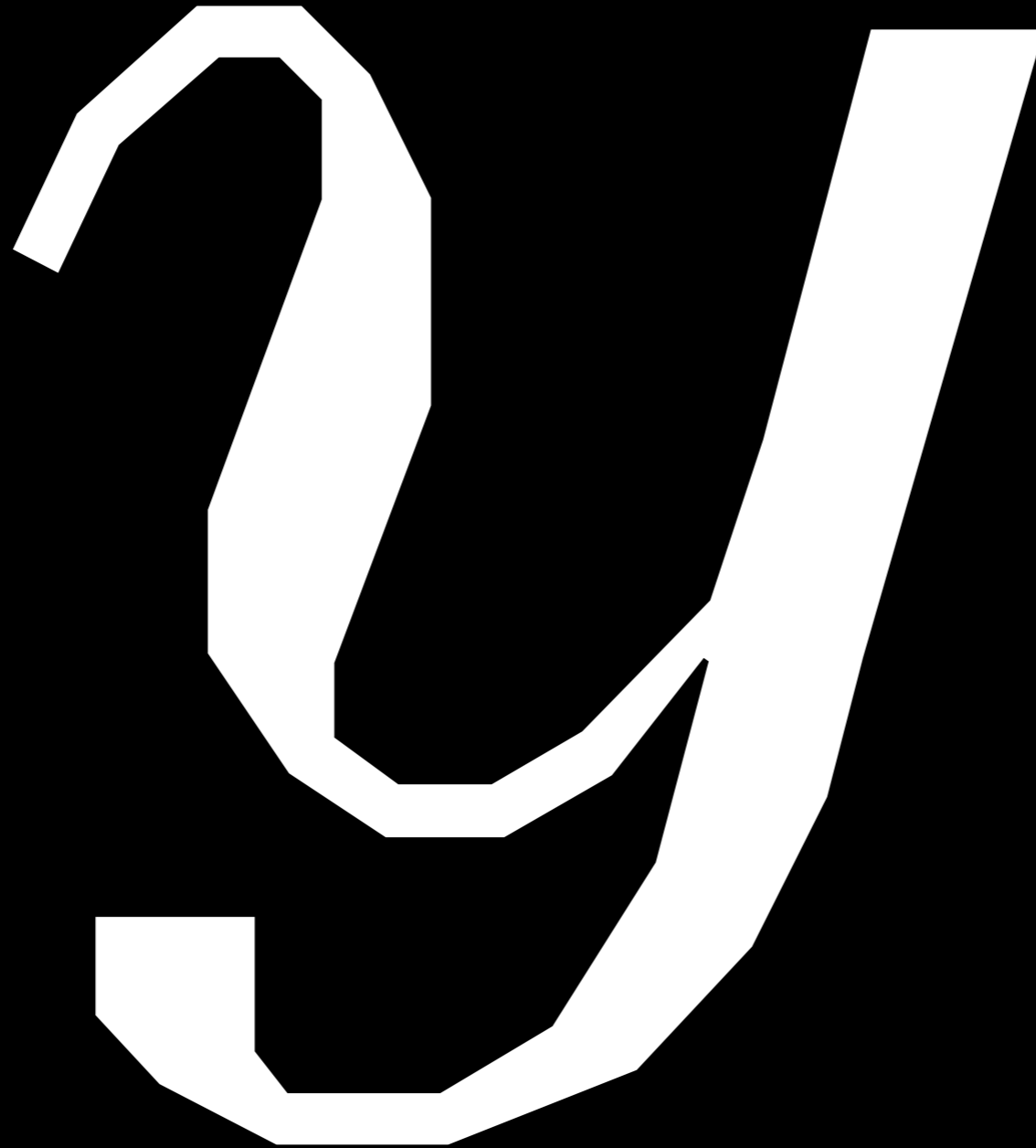
So, where does







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.