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## The Dismissive Actually

Alexander Egner

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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~~THE DISMISSIVE~~  
*ACTUALLY*



A SERIES OF CREATIVE PROJECTS by Alexander Egner

~~THE DISMISSIVE~~ *ACTUALLY*

*A SERIES OF CREATIVE PROJECTS* by Alexander Egner

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THE DISMISSIVE ACTUALLY a series of creative projects

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Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Design/Visual Communications.

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Bachelor of Fine Arts  
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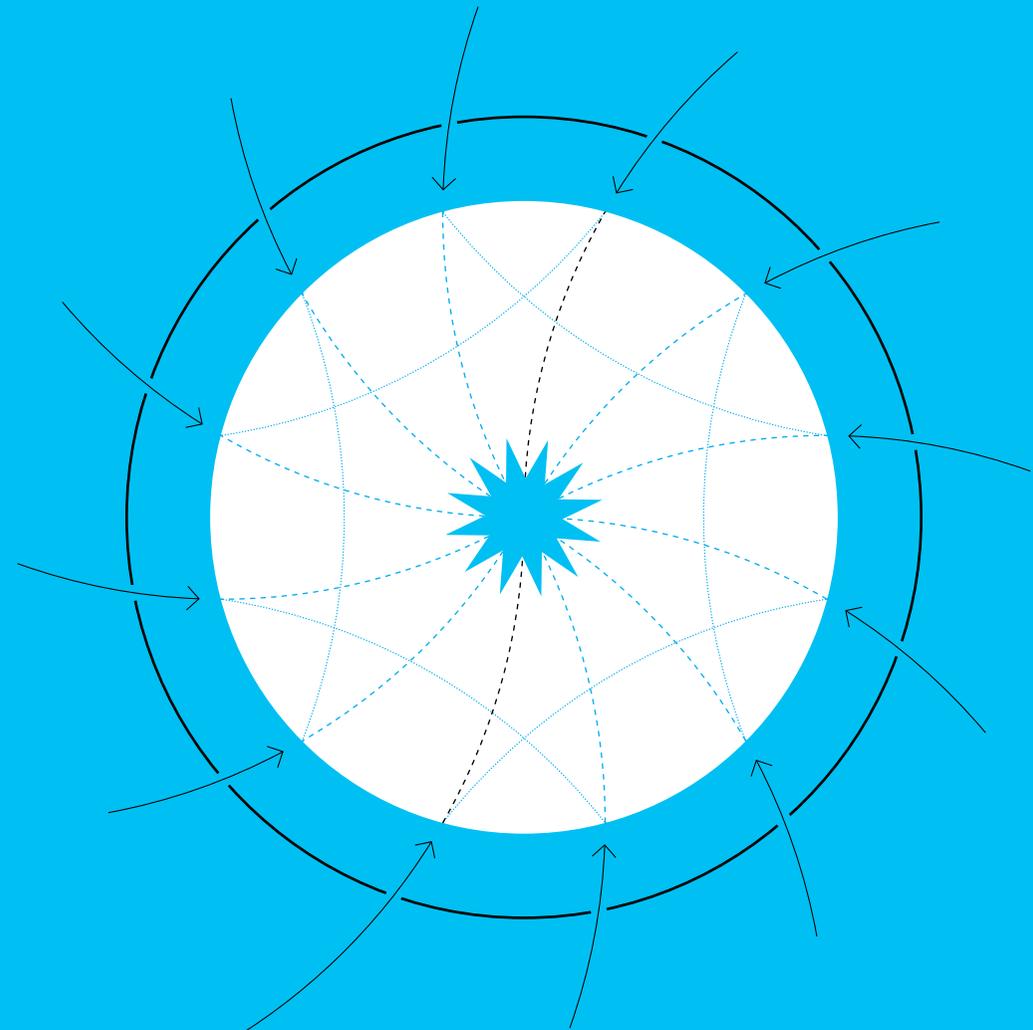
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*THIS PROJECT IS ABOUT GIVING IN TO THE IMPULSE OF IDEAS.*

My mind is a little messy and cluttered, swirling with bits of stimuli. The spark of an idea happens when the bits collide. I prefer not to initiate or control the process so much as keep it fed and active. Through graphic design, I bear witness to these ideas, giving them form as a series of visible, tangible objects. Viewed comprehensively, the work establishes an ongoing chronicle of my creative life and mind.

stimulus



THE IMPETUS FOR IDEAS

Stimulus enters the mind's semi-permeable membrane and rattles around like a combustible maraca. It can be difficult to predict how or when a spark will occur, so just keep putting stuff in and shaking it.

*“WHAT DO YOU  
WANT TO BE WHEN  
YOU GROW UP?”*

Adults, etc.

*What do you want to be when you grow up?*

There is a curious word choice in that famed question, the word *be*. What do you want to be, not what do you want to *do*. At some point in my life I answered: a graphic designer. Though it was not because I wanted to *be* a graphic designer, but because I wanted to *do* what I thought a graphic designer did.

Midway through high school — after receiving the results from a mandatory career aptitude test that detailed my strongest interests as Visual, Verbal and Communication, which, according to the accompanying list of cross-referenced careers, meant that I would enjoy working in advertising/graphic design — I began spending time in the library looking through back issues of *Communication Arts* magazine. The images contained therein encapsulated my aspirations exactly as the test had predicted. Creating visual ideas of that caliber was what I wanted to do.

However, after much schooling, training and interning, after landing a real job as a graphic designer, I made a paradoxical discovery: the realities of business were such that you could *be* a graphic designer and never actually *do* graphic design. Even after five or so years of working professionally, I'm not exactly sure what you'd call the stuff I was doing (the name would likely be unpleasant sounding) but it was certainly not what my younger self had aspired to.

I was thereby left with a choice. Should I do something new? Or should I actually *do* what I always wanted to do?

So, now I ask myself: *What is my graphic design creative project actually about?*

ac•tu•al•ly (as defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary*)  
*adverb, in fact; in reality*

---

THE THREE TYPES OF ACTUALLY (as observed by Alexander W. Egner)

**TYPE 1** *The Dismissive*

As in: actually it works this way.

The Dismissive Actually disregards the previous facts.

**TYPE 2** *The Mildly Incredulous*

As in: holy shit, it actually works!

The Mildly Incredulous Actually exhibits surprise towards the facts.

**TYPE 3** *The Reality Affirming*

As in: we know how it actually works.

The Reality Affirming Actually points to established facts.

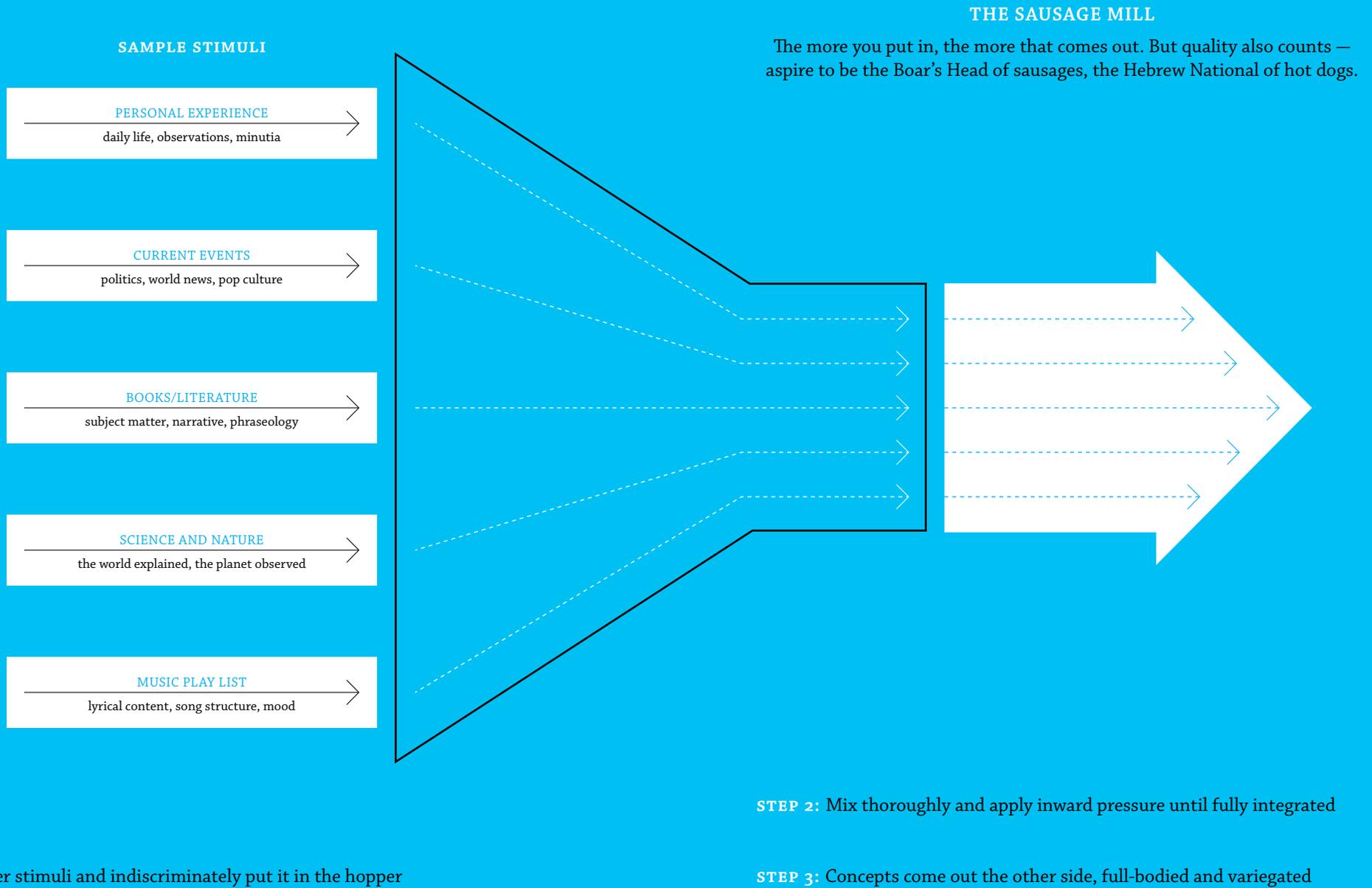
However, I would contend that there is actually only one kind of Actually: The Dismissive. It seems to be a quality inherent in the word regardless of its usage.

---

I am not interested in the reality found in *The American Heritage Dictionary's* definition, I am actually interested in reality as I choose to define it.

*“NOT EVERYTHING  
IS DESIGN, BUT  
DESIGN IS ABOUT  
EVERYTHING.”*

Michael Bierut



## WHAT DO I ACTUALLY WANT TO DO?<sup>1</sup>

When I initially developed this topic in the Spring of 2008, I took great care to neutralize its frivolity, the apparent focus on self-gratification, and ascribed its worthiness to the following:

*Too often the graphic designer acts solely in service of outside clients — organizing, clarifying and visualizing someone else's message. Practicing exclusively in this manner inhibits a designer's potential for innovation, exploration and growth, as these concerns will be restricted by their appropriateness to the client's needs. Certainly client relationships offer many unique and rewarding learning opportunities for a graphic designer, however that learning becomes a goal secondary to communicating the clients' messages. Implicitly, the designer's own capacity to create original content is subjugated.*

*This is a trend that, I feel, needs to be changed. The intent of my creative project is to bring greater awareness to the benefits of self-producing original design content. Practicing graphic design in this independent manner offers freedom from outside restraints to explore and innovate. This could raise the status of design from a service industry to an industry of intellectual and creative generation, offering greater independence and respect. With this freedom would come added accountability among designers to accept responsibility for the overall quality of our field's work. Clients will no longer serve as the go-to excuse for inferior content and aesthetics, as the results of a self-initiated project are purely the designer's.*

But now, over a year later and mostly drained of my pretense to serve the greater good of graphic design, I claim simpler motives:

*Often I have ideas and occasionally one impels me to take the next steps and turn it into something visible/tangible. The imagined idea wants to be a real object. There is satisfaction in beginning a new project and there is satisfaction in completing it. In between, for the project's duration, I get to spend time in the alternate world of that idea, like the immersive quality of a novel, a movie or a song. Each time I go through the process it adds a new layer of experience and richness to my life.*

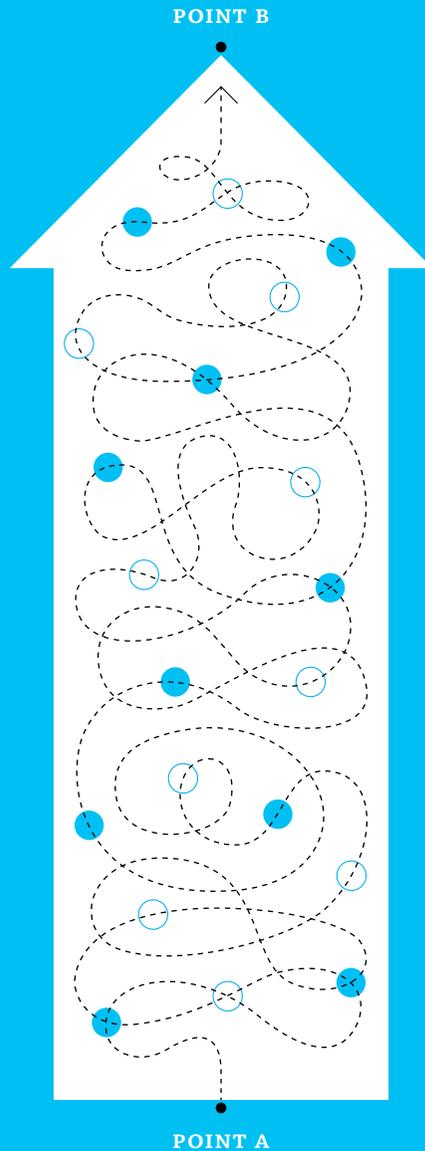
That is actually what I want to do.

---

1 Now that I am somewhat grown up

### THE DESIGNER'S PATH

Cut a wide swath and consume everything along the way



### THE SPARK

The moment a design idea occurs to me, when it generates that first spark, energy is released. The sensation may be no more than the static tingle of shuffling across carpet in wool socks or petting a really fuzzy cat, hardly causing notice. Other times, it's like licking a 9 volt battery — my stasis may be roused enough to put pencil to paper, but the motivation quickly peters out. However, when the spark is big enough, the energy jolts me into action like a cattle prod. The shock is enough to propel the process into a forward trajectory toward the finished product.

### THE SAUSAGE

While the spark provides the necessary initial thrust, the process must be continually fed and refueled. I try to maintain an insatiable appetite for knowledge and stimulation, all of which goes into my personal sausage grinder. As long as I pack loads of stuff into one side of my head, design will continue to be extruded from the other side. In the grand scheme, whatever that is, I am less concerned with any single project than the greater process and body of work. Each project is a link of sausage filled with a mixture of stimuli. When it's done, tie it off and start filling/extruding the next one.

### THE PATH

My graphic design process allows for ongoing exploration and freedom of movement, but I always keep one eye focused ahead. So what appears to be a straight path from POINT A to POINT B actually includes many detours and stops along the way. A seemingly simple project has underlying complexity.

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POSTMODERNISM poster series

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If asked to verbally describe the ethos of postmodern graphic design, I probably couldn't capture it. Not in 50 words, not in 100 words or even a couple thousand. But I'll gladly describe it in a single image. That was my goal in each of these three posters: to compress the maximum amount of information into the minimum amount of visual space.



# PostModernism

GROUCHO (opposite)  
*The perfectly modern square and flush-left Helvetica bold are befouled by a trope of pop-culture kitsch and misaligned italics.*

---

INFLUENCES

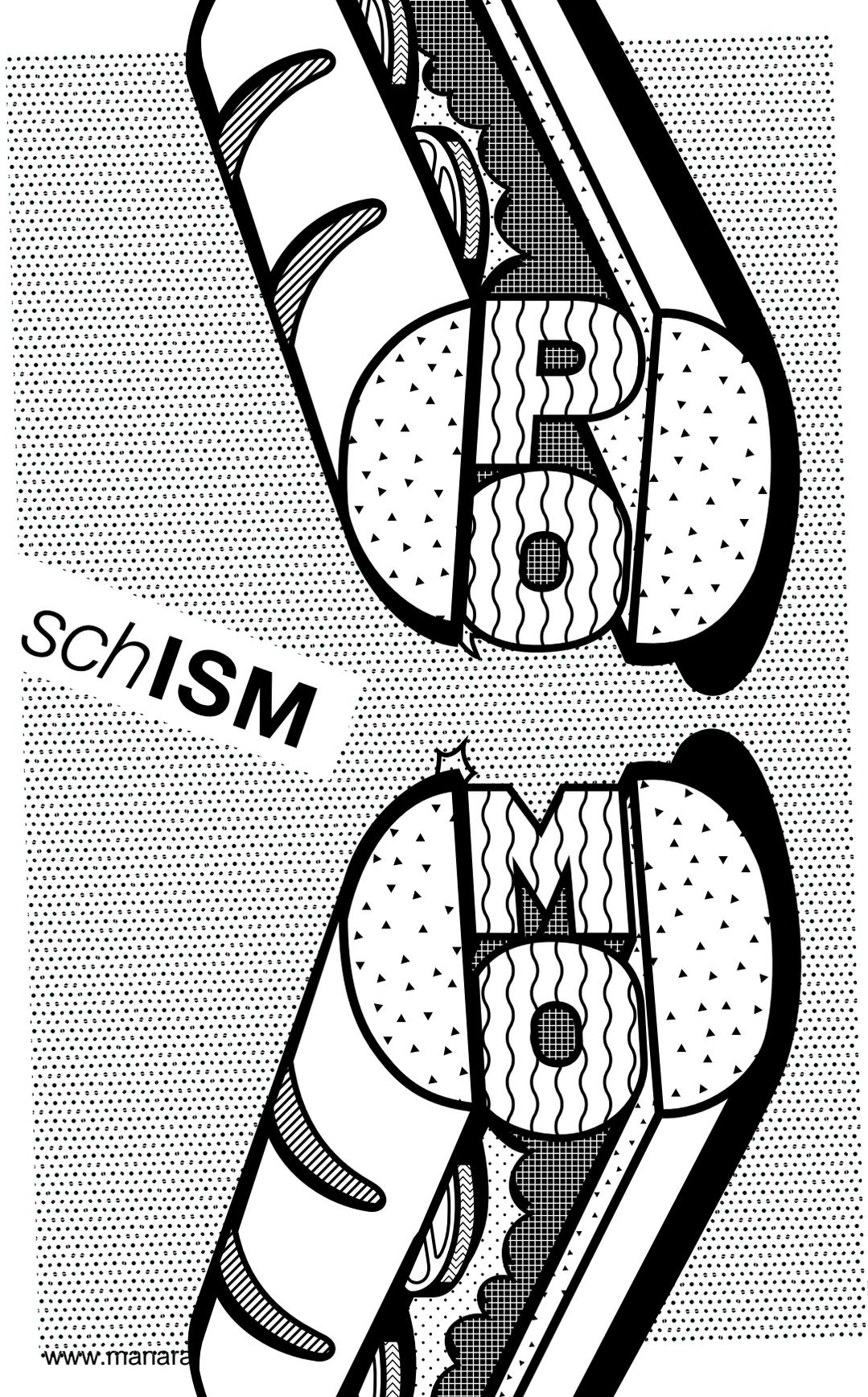
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<i>The Isms</i>	<i>Transition</i>	<i>Swatch watches</i>	<i>Bauhaus</i>
<i>Primary colors</i>	<i>Helvetica, the movie</i>	<i>Memphis design</i>	<i>Ideological schism</i>
<i>Geometric Shapes</i>	<i>Irreverence</i>	<i>Wolfgang Weingart</i>	<i>April Greiman</i>
<i>Design History</i>	<i>Groucho Marx</i>	<i>Contrast</i>	<i>Smoothies</i>
<i>Philip B. Meggs</i>	<i>Po' boys sandwiches</i>	<i>Saved by the Bell</i>	<i>Image = idea</i>



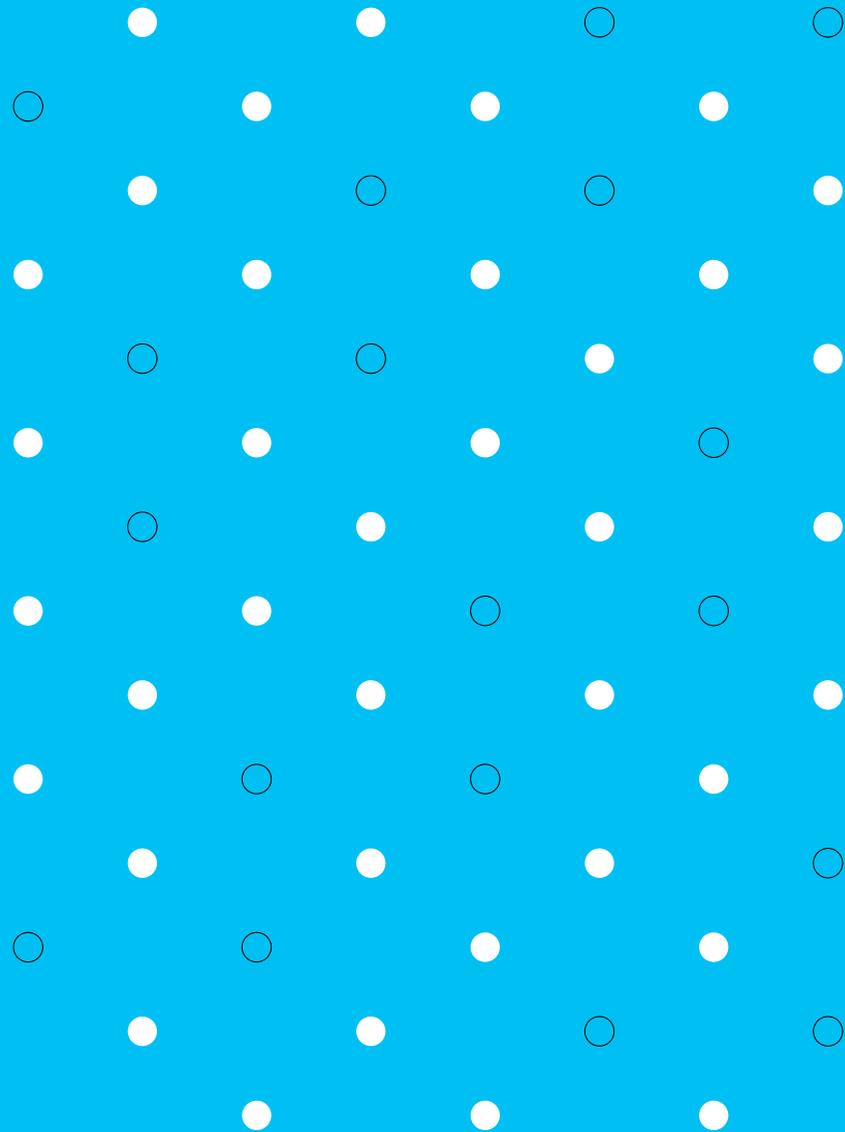
THE POSTMODERNIZER (above)  
 Primary colors and shapes, referencing the Bauhaus, are thrown into a blender for summary reinterpretation.

PO MO BOY (right)  
 Really just a riff on the name of one of my top five favorite sandwiches. But it also affects some PoMo stylings and references the split between two distinct, yet connected, "isms."

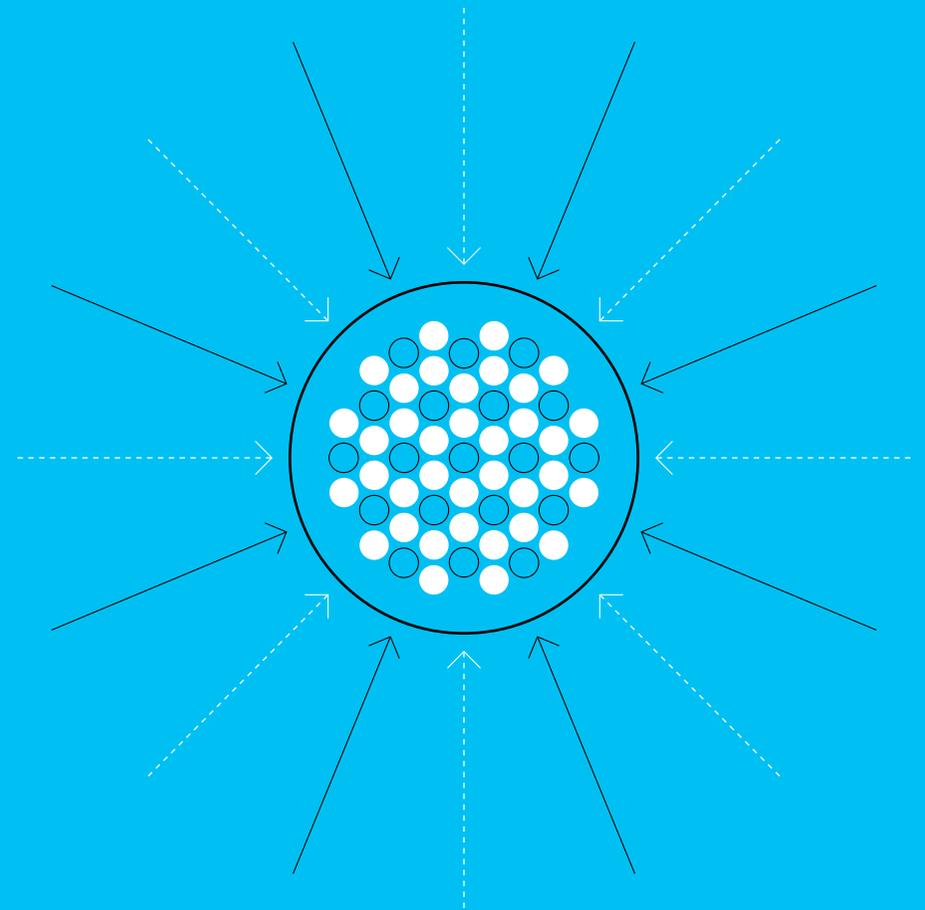


www.marrara

BEFORE: Stimuli are dispersive, floating freely and independently



AFTER: Applying mental compression creates cohesion and density



SAUSAGE CROSS SECTION

A good idea encompasses disparate parts and sundry offal and unites them into a single digestible entity.

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HAIRSTORY a memoir

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During my senior year of college, at the tender age of 22, I slowly realized that I was going bald. The initial signs were easy to ignore or deny: an increasing number of hairs found strewn across my pillow, littering the collars of my shirts and clogging the shower drain. I tried to assure myself, *Surely someone as virile as me has hair to burn*. And I did... all over my shoulders and back. Eventually, after going through all seven stages of grief, I gained acceptance and even hope. But not before spending long hours in quiet reflection (stage four), reliving the times my hair and I had shared. My *Hairstory* book is the physical manifestation of this reflection.

The design process began once I was able to summarize the story's narrative arc: *You abuse the hair, you lose the hair*. I therefore had to document my hair's (mostly ignominious) past to explain away its ultimate fate. It was like a visit from the Ghost of Hairstyles Past. While this documentation was going to be an attempt at objectivity — pure facts about length, color, applied products, etc. — the story was also a personal one, demanding some element of subjective contemplation. To achieve this balance I alternated between photography (objective) and editorial illustrations (subjective).

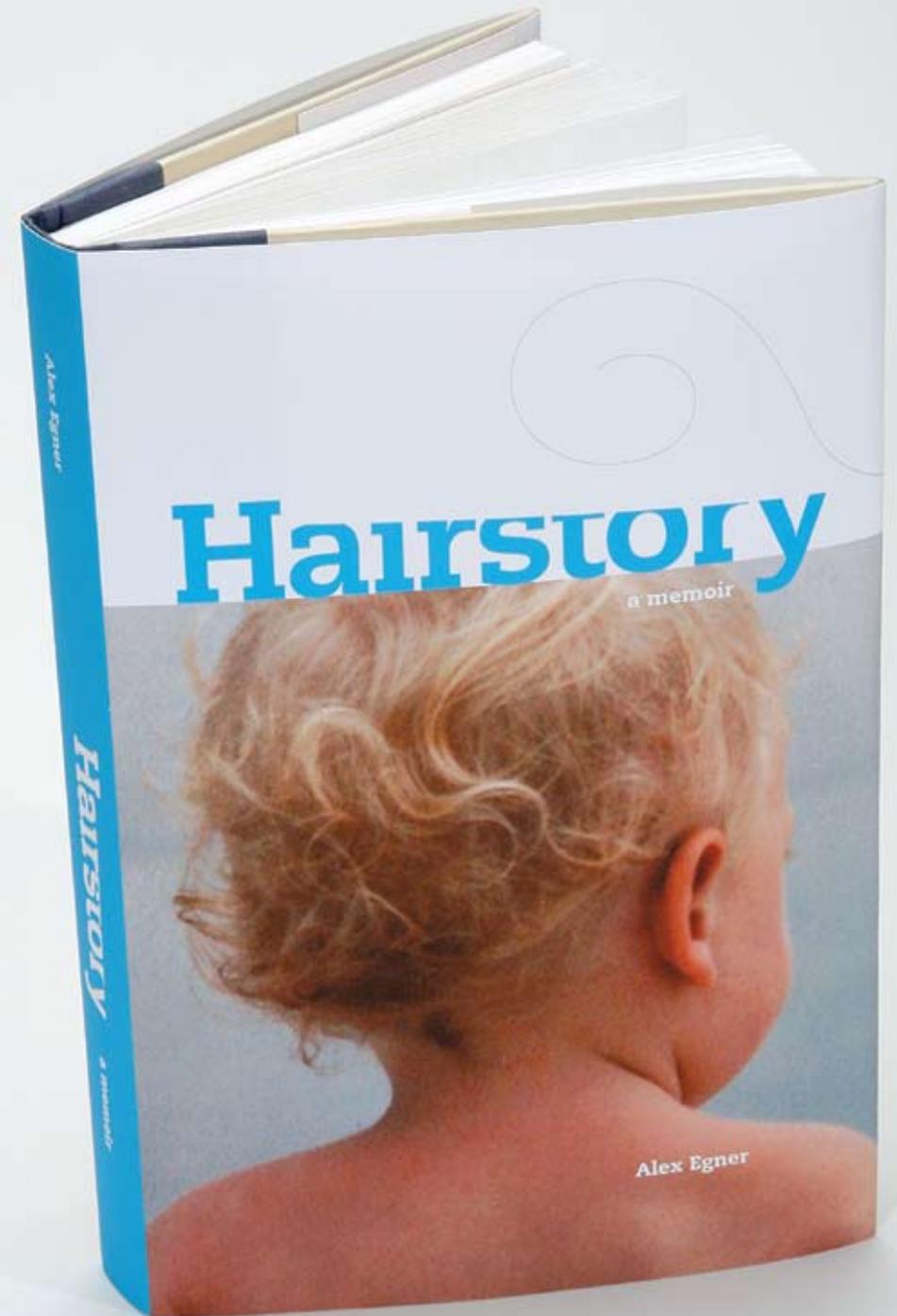
The final result is equal parts book and catharsis-as-object.

---

INFLUENCES

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<i>Losing my hair</i>	<i>The maturation process</i>	<i>Layers of information</i>	<i>Notions of self-image</i>
<i>Technical drawings</i>	<i>Bad haircuts</i>	<i>Objective vs. subjective</i>	<i>David Shrigley</i>
<i>Dave Eggers</i>	<i>Conceptual illustrations</i>	<i>Seymour Chwast</i>	<i>Designing yourself</i>
<i>Multi-page design</i>	<i>Edward Tufte</i>	<i>School yearbook photos</i>	<i>The haircare industry</i>
<i>Personal narrative</i>	<i>Family photo albums</i>	<i>Pop-culture trends</i>	<i>Mild catharsis</i>





# Hairstory

A Memoir of my Hair

Alex Egner

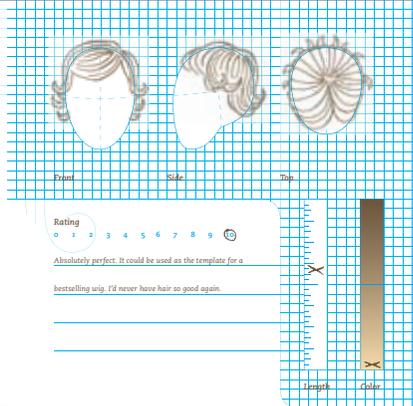
# 18 Months

It all started so well. Locks blonde and silky, I was on my way to becoming Thor.

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## Hair Specs

### The Curly Bowl

- Ⓐ Fine yet plentiful
- Ⓑ Tight curls around the bottom perimeter
- Ⓒ Bangs swept devil-may-care across the forehead
- Ⓓ Inspired by Bo Duke?
- Ⓔ Possessed a lively bounce enhanced by toddling
- Ⓕ Hair allowed freedom to dictate its own style
- Ⓖ The natural look, no fancy hair products



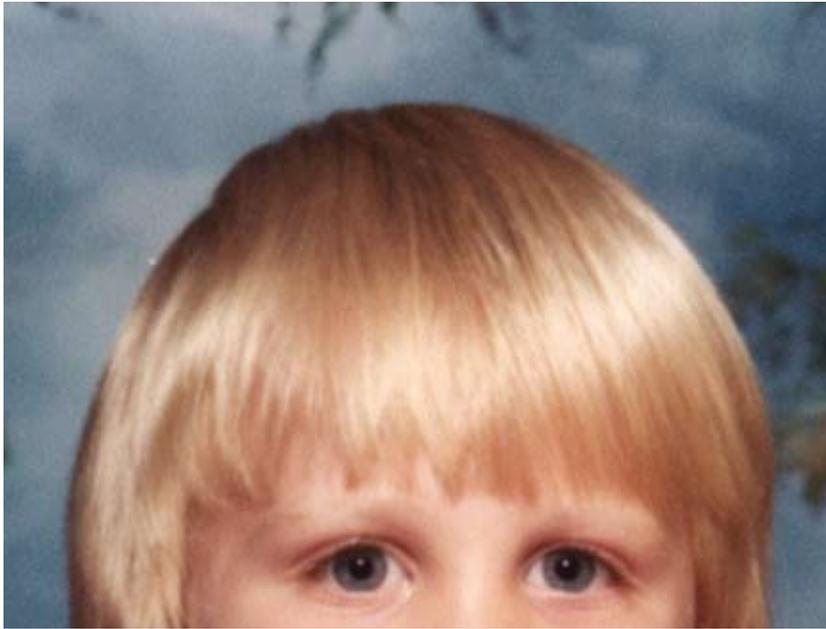
**INFORMATIONAL SPREAD** (opposite top)  
*Noteworthy hairstyles throughout my life are mock-scientifically documented. Pertinent information such as length, color and key stylistic attributes are detailed.*

**ILLUSTRATION** (opposite bottom)  
*Simple, idea-based illustrations are interspersed to contrast with the more objective data and provide an additional layer of communication.*

**PHOTOGRAPHY** (above)  
*Full-bleed photographic spreads give a sense of time and nostalgia while visually pacing the book. Tight croppings make the images more dramatic and focus on the hair.*

**INTERIOR SPREADS** (following pages)  
*I had no experience doing multi-page design beyond simple pamphlets. This project was conceived as a book to challenge myself in that regard. Excerpted spreads provide some semblance of the narrative structure.*





## 12 Years

**Quite simply an abomination.**

Lent lupat wis nibh eumsandip eu feugiat ad dolemit vullandit praesentibh eugiamc onullum modolom adiatem volore modolopercit et tinctrici blan hent lum vel ulputpat, quat augait lumsan ut nim ipsi ex exerit veli do-lore te faccum aliquisim deleniomod. San uret aliquam, commodo lor- peritorem dolore vulla facipisit als nibh exerota coeret inis adipit nim dolessectem ilan er si. Ut el utat. Susto conullumsan venim quipsum dit lam zzzit, quis non vericilla coero commodigna feugue magnim ver suscincipsam volobortie dolortin venit praesto et dolore mod te elesectet pratue tinit praesed dui blaoper am, quam, sismod molorem.

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**Rating**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 Centered part, dual symmetrical waves and gel grooves—  
 it resembles a contour line drawing of buttocks. Just ghostly.

**Length**   **Color**

**Hair Specs**  
**The Butt Cut**

- Ⓐ Deceptively thick
- Ⓑ Long on top, shaved on the sides
- Ⓒ I think the eldest son on Home Improvement had this cut
- Ⓓ That's some tall forehead
- Ⓔ Baleen?
- Ⓕ Early 90's Ken doll?
- Ⓖ LA Looks get mega hold this cut

## 8 Years

If the gel stayed crunchy until evening, I considered it a successful day.

Unfortunately, it usually wore off during recess as I ran away from a girl named Alicia who always tried to kiss me. So while the style was finicky, it did attract the young ladies. We'll call it a push.

**Rating**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Length**   **Color**   **Trim**   **Side**   **Top**

**Hair Specs**  
**The Spike**

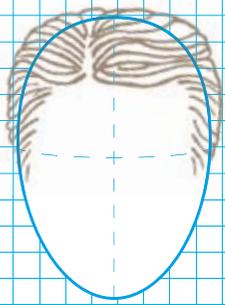
- Ⓐ Getting fuller by the year
- Ⓑ Straight, proud and tall
- Ⓒ Range upwards, there's a symmetry in the height of my forehead and hair.
- Ⓓ Billy Idol?
- Ⓔ When angry or scared, it bristled like a cat's back
- Ⓕ My first bold move away from naturalism
- Ⓖ The first introduction of gel, shattered by the palms full





# 16 Years

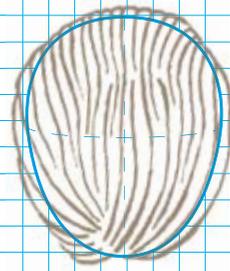
My brother made fun of the part in my hair. So I came up with this.



Front



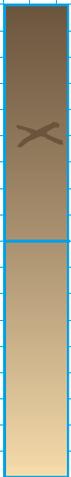
Side



Top



Length



Color

## Rating

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Though not entirely inappropriate for a politician, local news

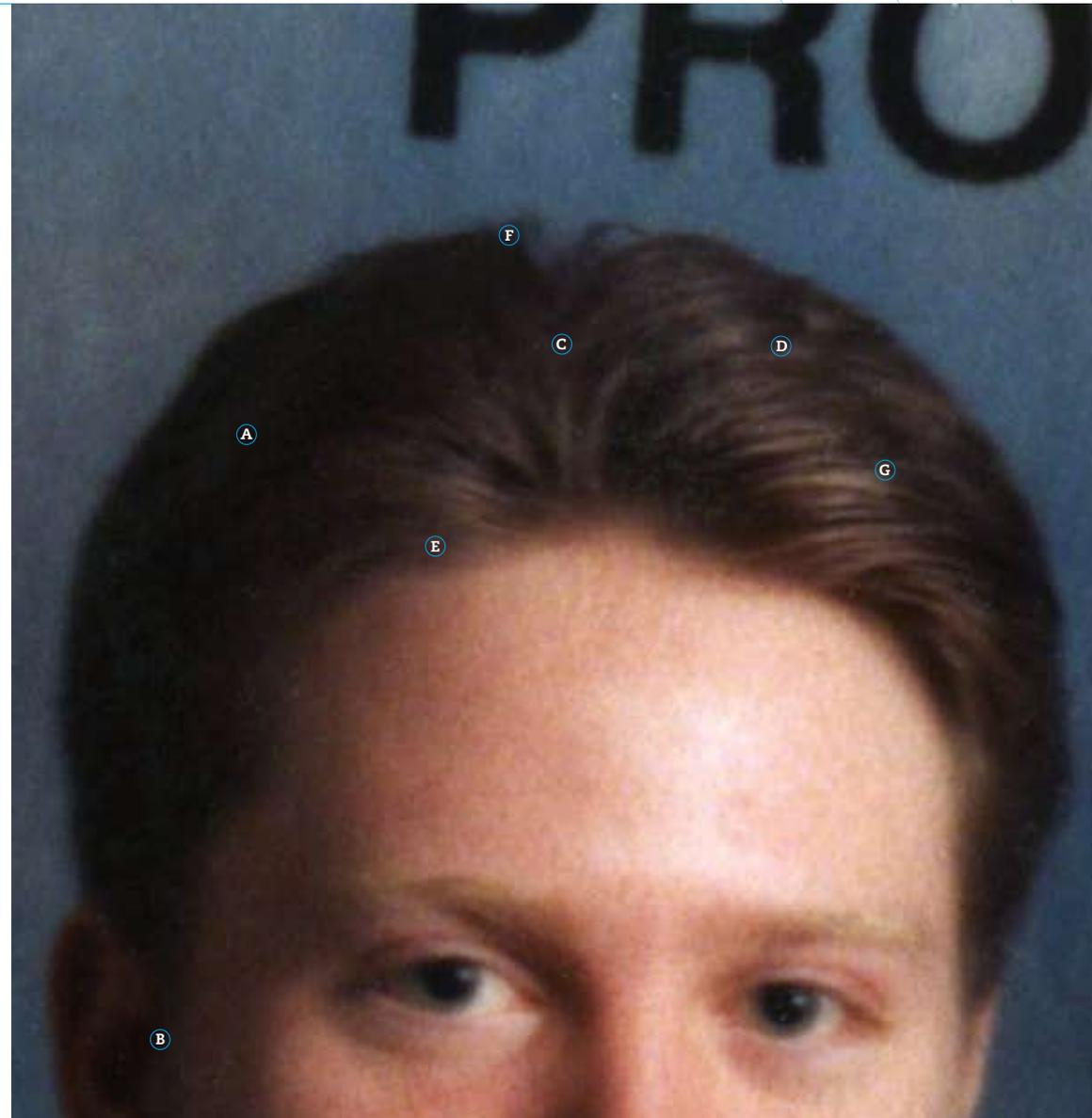
anchorman or televangelist, it is far too sculpted for a sixteen

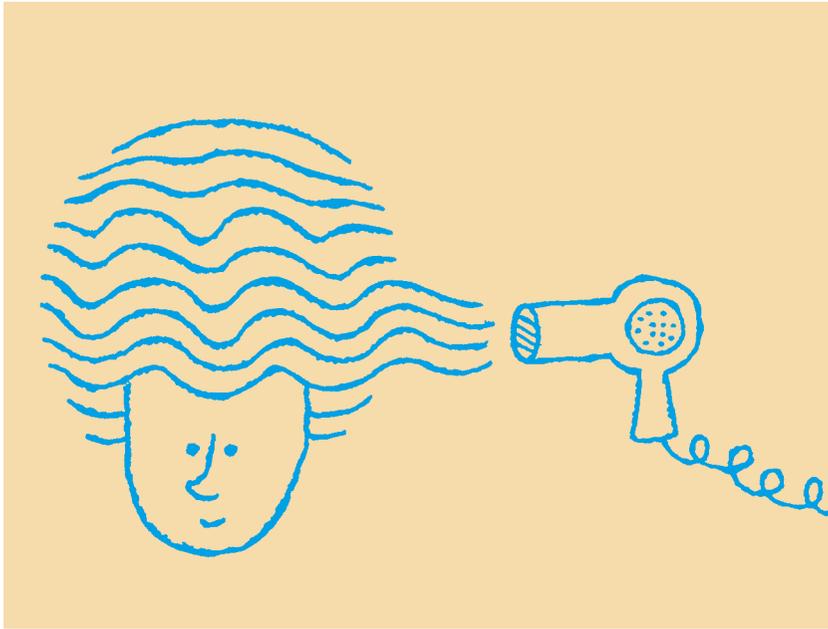
year-old boy on the prowl.

## Hair Specs

### The Puffwolf

- A** Turned my head into a fluffy, inverted triangle
- B** Sparse sideburns
- C** Sans part
- D** Appears to be absorbent
- E** Could be mistaken for a toupee
- F** Tall
- G** Coated with an even misting of Rave aerosol hairspray





## 20 Years

Strategically designed to conceal the two inlets in my hairline.

Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I paid \$3 for a haircut. At home afterwards, I noticed that exactly one-fourth of my hair was left untouched. From that day forth I cut my own hair, carefully shaping it to maximize held coverage.

**Length** **Color** **Trim**

**Side** **Top**

### Hair Specs

**The Self Cut**

- Hides a receding hairline
- Fluff mostly kept in check
- Rangs began curling in their final throes
- Mini come-over
- Choppy and irregular
- Embraced the natural waviness
- Moved towards more pliable products like pomade and wax

## 23 Years

Why fight it? I grabbed the clippers and embraced my skull.

Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Aesthetic considerations aside, I remember the nervous anticipation as the clippers moved down row after row of hair: how much bare skin will there be?

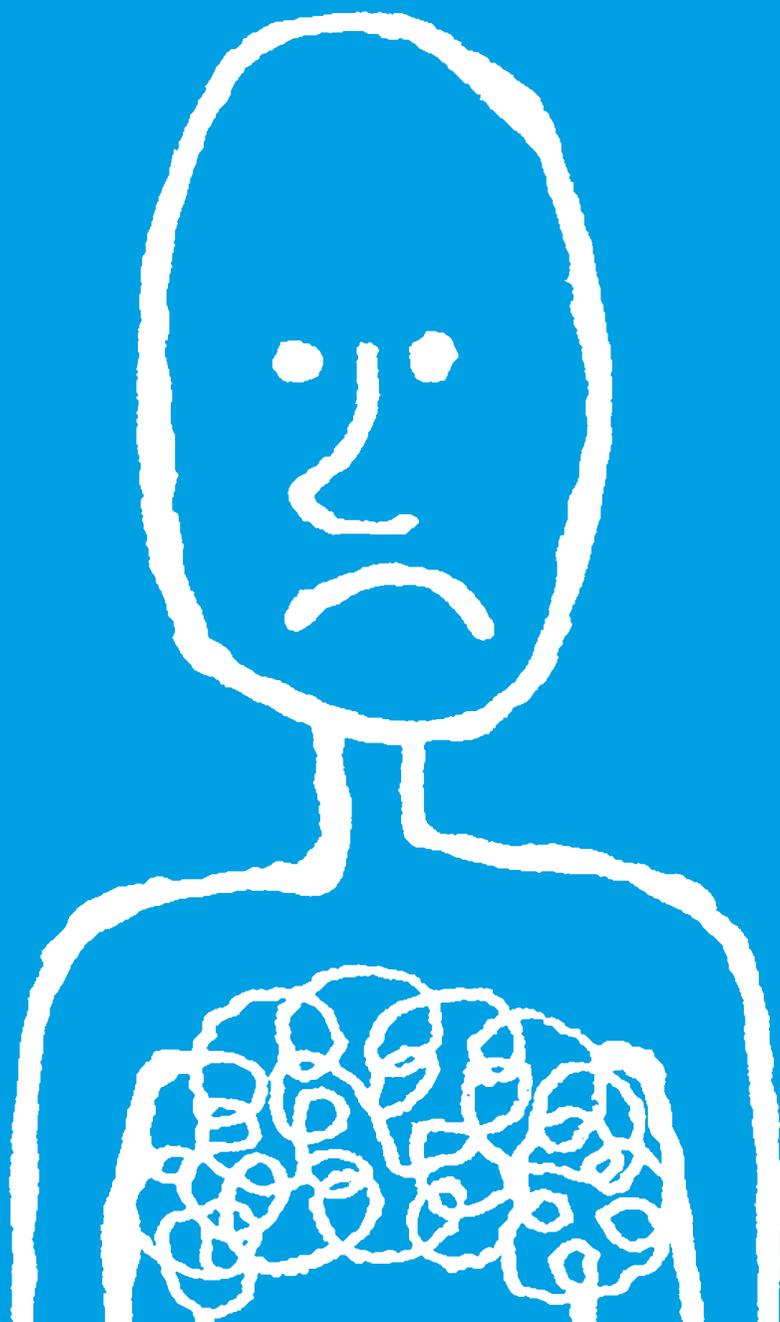
**Front** **Side** **Top**

**Length** **Color**

### Hair Specs

**The Buzz**

- Sides remain full, the top, not so much
- Uniform length, #3 guard on the clippers
- Forehead inlets
- Susceptible to sunburn
- Nicely rounded scalp
- Absence of style is the new style
- Occasional use of pomade to curb puff



Consumption of:

Shampoo



Facewash



## 27 Years

If this is now, what does the future hold?

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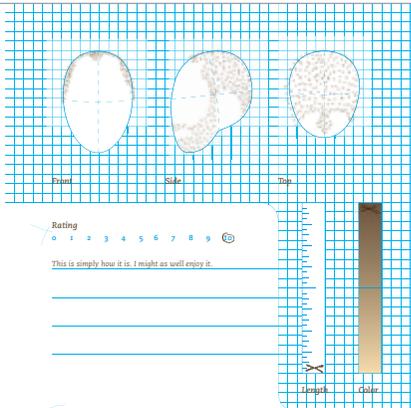
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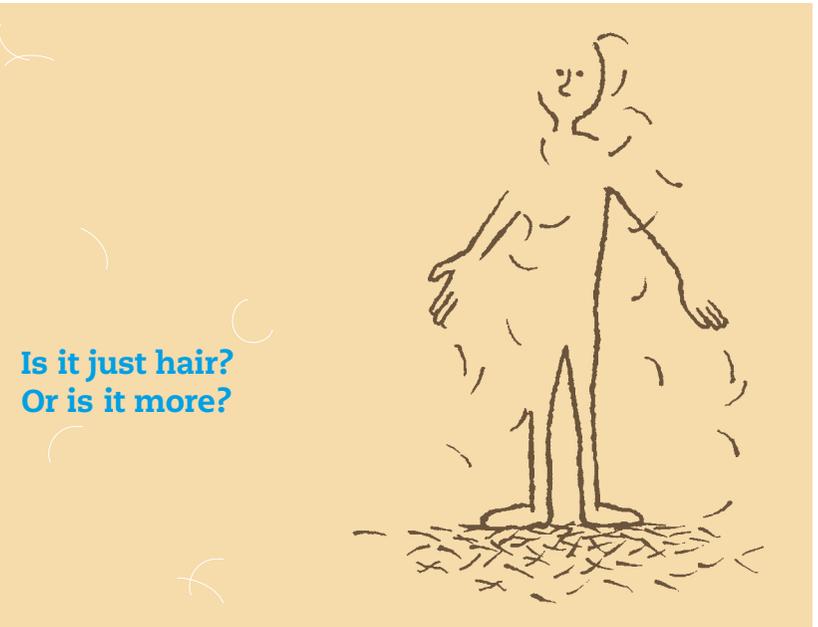
Quipit nos accusma vulpista nostrud dolore dolapta tumsan velesse tem dolorperatum nullamet nim velesenim et, sequis numsand recill sooret hamsandreec la conum vulput lobore vulla feugiamet, sequis diat acing et. La con ea faccum dolobor suscillit ulputpatin henisil. Uscillamet, conum illquat umsandit wisismo dionesequis aliquat nim velesenim.

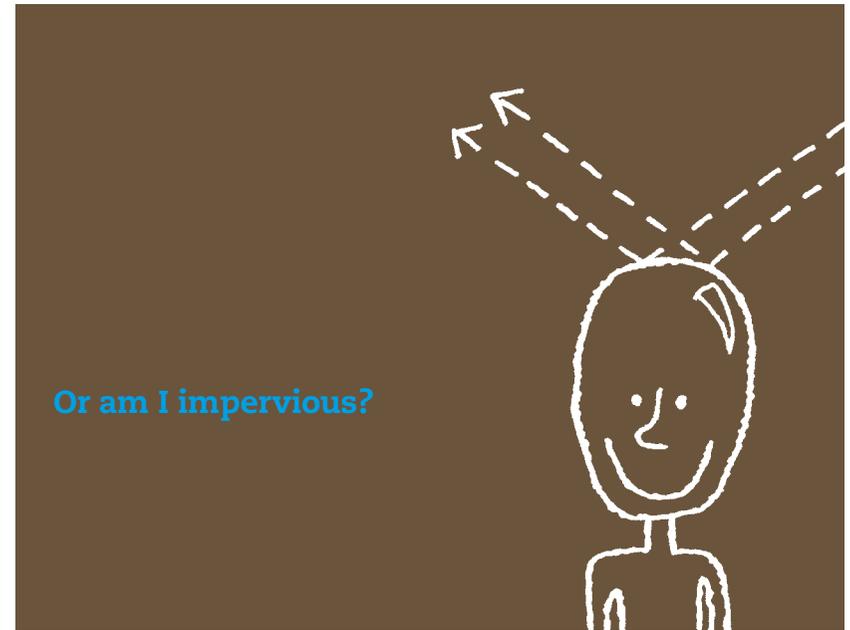
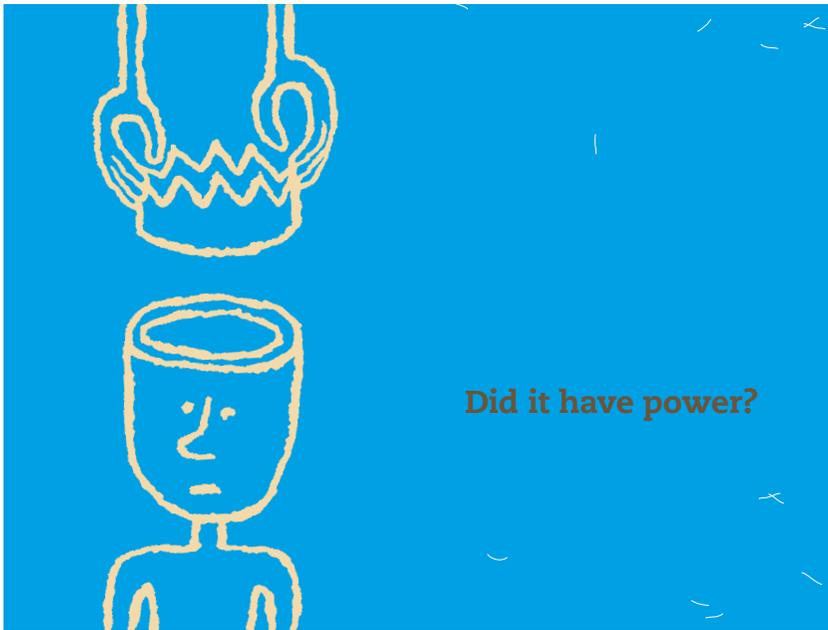
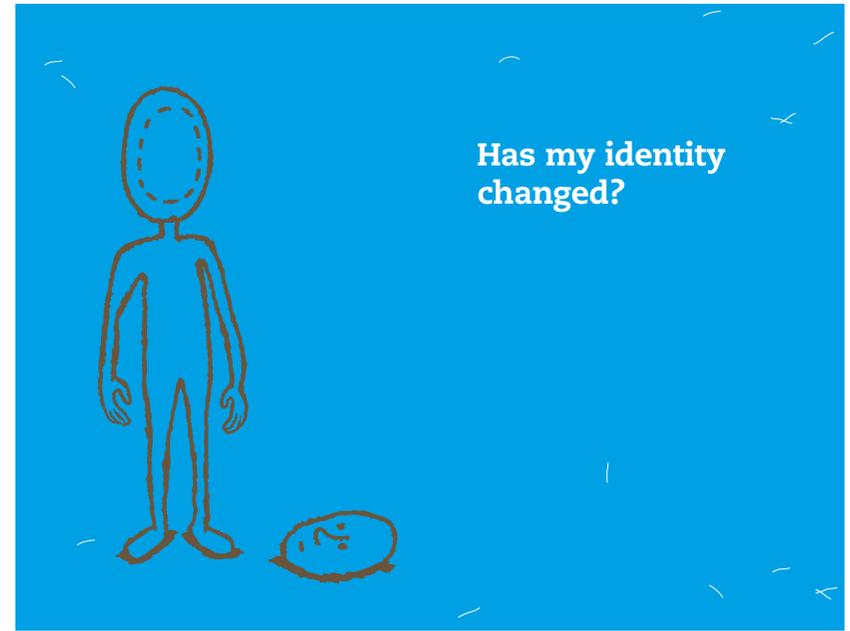


### Hair Specs

The Peninsula

- Ⓐ Tending towards classic horseshoe shape
- Ⓑ Seceding island
- Ⓒ Outlying hairs stranded in desert forehead
- Ⓓ Zero maintenance
- Ⓔ Extreme widow's peak
- Ⓕ Suffering from hair product withdrawal
- Ⓖ Florida?





## THE FOLLICLE GRAPHIC

### A Practical Guide to Grooming the Form of A. William Egner

He is a man given to opposite extremes of baldness and hairiness. This is nothing to bemoan or celebrate — judgment has no place in a proper grooming regimen. It is simply the single most important fact, among many, to bear in mind when grooming A. William Egner. Through careful analysis of given quantities and arrangements of hair, we may then begin to craft a plan that strikes an ideal balance between smart appearance and ease of upkeep.

Let us begin with the most highly visible, or at least most highly scrutinized, hair area (hereafter referred to as a hairea): the head. It is important to consider the head in both its individual haireas — scalp, beard, ears, nose, eyebrow, neck — and the gestalt they exhibit in combination. Improper and/or inconsistent grooming of any one of these vital regions can have a damning effect on the perception of a man's visage. (See: *Arthur, Chester A.*)

Starting with the scalp, we can begin to note the texture, color, density and placement of A. William Egner's hair. Along the scalp's lower perimeter, nearest the ears and base of the neck, the follicles are densely arranged, sprouting medium brown hairs, though peppered with the odd blonde, dark brown, grey or white strands. The overall effect is best described as taupe. Individual hairs are coarse (not quite *wiry*) and seem strongly inclined towards obstinate puffiness. Following the scalp upwards, to its top, we observe a relatively even, nicely rounded skull void of major dips, bumps or outgrowths. However, the previously observed follicular density begins to wane as we reach the forehead; indeed, the scarcity here is breathtaking. Two symmetrical inlets of pure hairless and oil-slickened skin — flesh fjords? — dip dramatically into the frontal hairline creating a widow's peak that would make Eddie Munster envious. A predictive guess could be made that the inlets will, in the coming years, see their ends meet to create an unfortunate outlying island hairea — imagine a unicorn's horn minus the majesty. This would be of less consequence were A. William Egner not a relatively youthful 27 years old at the time of this writing.

Which brings up the important issue of what influence social factors may bear on a grooming regimen. The public perception of a bald or balding person

changes with age. A bald 80 year-old man would be unexceptional whereas a bald 5 year-old boy might be assumed to possess a medical condition. The receding hairline of a 27 year-old falls awkwardly between these two extremes and could be expected to garner mild pity or distaste.

How might this reaction be minimized?

The simplest and most obvious solution, and in this case the correct one, would be to shave the hair, thereby downplaying the contrast between hair and skin. It is best to use an electric clipper, oiled liberally, beginning tentatively with a 3/8" inch guard. The groomer can continue to work the hair shorter, in 1/8" inch intervals, until it has reached the optimum length. While hair does grow back, the follicles of A. William Egner have proven sickly, so take special care and attention not to remove too much.

Beyond obscuring an undesirable affliction, a shaved head has many other attractive qualities. First among them is its low cost, as a shaven head is a do-it-yourself do. Depending on whether you frequent a low-end chain salon or stylist-to-the-stars Jonathan Antin, annual savings could range from \$144 to \$6,000 (tip not included). Pricey hair products are also a thing of the past — though sunscreen expenditure will likely increase. Shaved hair simply offers a maintenance-free lifestyle that is unparalleled.

Moving downwards from A. William Egner's freshly shorn scalp, we now consider his face. There appears to be enviable beard-growing potential — the whiskers are lush, with a clear propensity for rapid replenishment. However, the coloration might be labeled calico, as the cheek hair is red-hued compared to the upper lip and chin, which are transparent blonde. Medium brown fills the remaining gaps. Observing the weakish chin and slight jaw line, one begins to formulate a plan. In order to maximize cohesion with the 1/4" (which ultimately proved ideal) scalp hair, the same pair of electric clippers could be used to trim the beard to approximately three thirty-seconds of an inch. The reasons for this are four-fold. First, there is the aforementioned stylistic consistency between scalp and face. Second, a stubble beard will lend A. William Egner the appearance of a few added years of age, which thereby makes his receding hairline less ignominious. Third, the problem chin and jaw line are given added heft by an illusory stubble shadow. And last, the day-to-day maintenance of razor shaving is avoided in favor of twice-weekly trims. Once again a solution has been devised to meet visual and functional demands.

While remaining on the head, we can make brief mention of ear, nose, eyebrow and neck hair. Ear and nose hair of any sort should always be removed with extreme prejudice. Though a busy lifestyle may be blamed for an oversight in

grooming these problem spots, any visible ear and nose hairs are simply inexcusable. As for eyebrows, this is less of a concern for A. William Egner as his are a more or less invisible shade of blonde. Therefore, certain liberties may be taken but occasional trimming and separating is encouraged. Clear or not, eyebrows can become surprisingly unruly. Finally, a well-trimmed neckline is a sign of a successful man. Even though Mr. Egner has not yet proven himself in this regard, it is good practice to trim the neck on a bi-weekly basis.

We can now move to the upper torso, a region all but unseen by the general public except during the balmy summer months when A. William Egner dips into his collection of novelty tank tops. Society's attitude toward male chest, stomach shoulder and back hair historically has been *laissez faire* in nature. In more recent years, however, gentlemen have been proactively shaping, trimming or removing this body hair in an act colloquially referred to as *man-scaping*. Should any of these techniques be employed in our particular case study? Let's discuss.

Cursory analysis of A. William Egner's chest shows a woolen thicket of light brown hair densely arranged about the pectorals and (strangely tiny) nipples while gradually thinning upwards towards the neckline and shoulders. Delving closer, you will note that while the fur does become less intimidating near the deltoids it doesn't dissipate entirely. The hair merely becomes finer in texture, lighter in color and less fulsome. Observation over the course of several years has revealed a disquieting trend towards hair sprawl. One hypothesis predicts that A. William Egner's shoulders will be indistinguishable from a beaver's pelt within ten years' time. The stomach, with congregation particularly focused near the bellybutton, has also been unable to stave off this influx.

We are now left with a simple question with complex consequences: should nature be allowed to run its ravaging course or should intervening measures be employed? The best approach seems to be one of gentle management and hair guidance. Radical actions such as waxing or razor shaving are problematic for myriad reasons. Chief among them are cost and time investments, not to mention the social implications. A man who waxes his chest becomes a member, unwittingly or not, in a club with all fellow chest waxers. This is not a fraternity A. William Egner wishes to join at this time. Moderate and naturalistic trimming with electric clippers is the ideal alternative and will make bathing suit season more pleasurable for all involved.

While ultimately not of great import, it bears mentioning that shaving A. William Egner's armpit hair is dissuaded. Prior experience has uncovered the surprising revelation that the hair creates desirable friction between arm and

ribcage. When walking, a smooth armpit allows his arms to swing too freely and in an overly jaunty manner.

It is feasible that one might also want to in some way alter the miles upon miles of bushy blonde forest covering A. William Egner's arms and legs. The bizarrely long hair on his knuckles and big toes could also prove a tempting medium for experimentation. Yet, teeny-tiny dreadlocks, while possible, are also creepy. Simply leave it be and keep sticky foods outside of a reasonable perimeter.

This concludes our study of A. William Egner's hirsute form. A plan has been developed to maximize aesthetic potential while minimizing excessive maintenance requirements. The resultant grooming regimen may now be implemented with the utmost confidence that A. William Egner will rarely, if ever, be the victim of hair-based castigation.

THE LITTLE UTZ GIRL an unbound biographical book

Over the Summer of 2007 I moved to Richmond, Virginia, living outside of Texas for the first time in my life. Inevitably my new environment became a daily study in comparison and contrast. As a result, I found myself playing amateur anthropologist and thinking about regional cultures of America. I observed that Texas, while geographically further south, is not in fact a part of The South in the same cultural sense that Virginia is. And there is the additional difference between Western and Eastern states, which might have something to do with migration versus stagnation. Et cetera. Even my wife, who is legally bound to feign interest in the observations I make, openly ignores me when I riff on this subject, so I will leave it at that.

The point (and I assure you one exists) is that for reasons that can only be explained by my gut, The Little Utz Girl became symbolic of these regional differences. I grew up smack in the land of Frito-Lay, they of the most pulse-poundingly extreme snack chip flavors on earth (i.e. Doritos Collisions). The Little Utz Girl — oversized hair bow, rosy cheeks and all — was decidedly quaint by comparison. She was a holdover from the past, representing a simpler time and place.

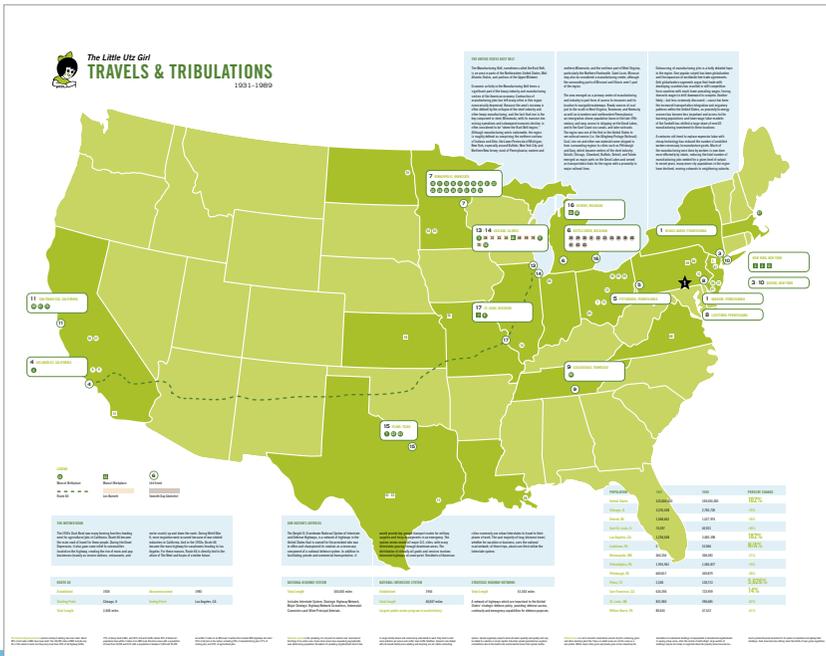
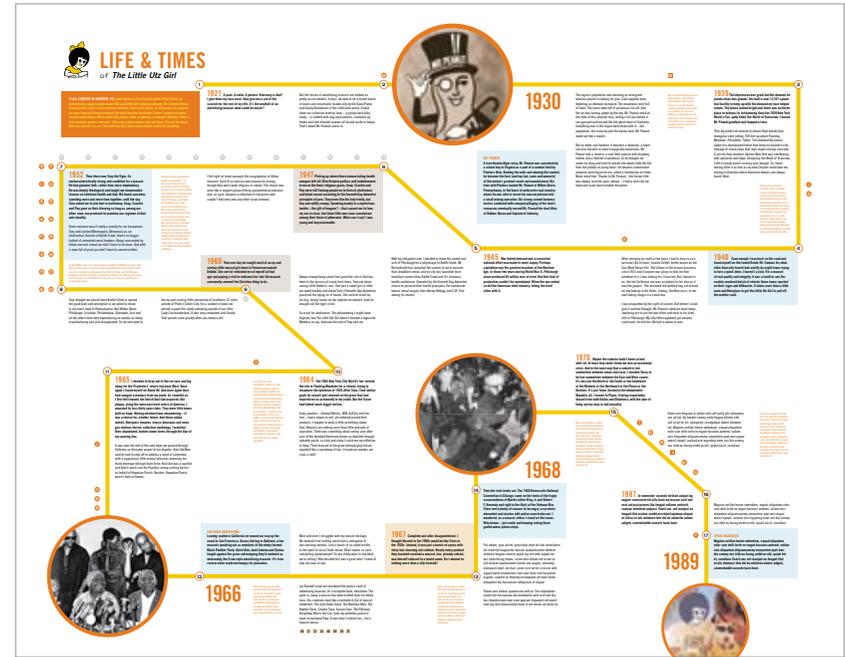
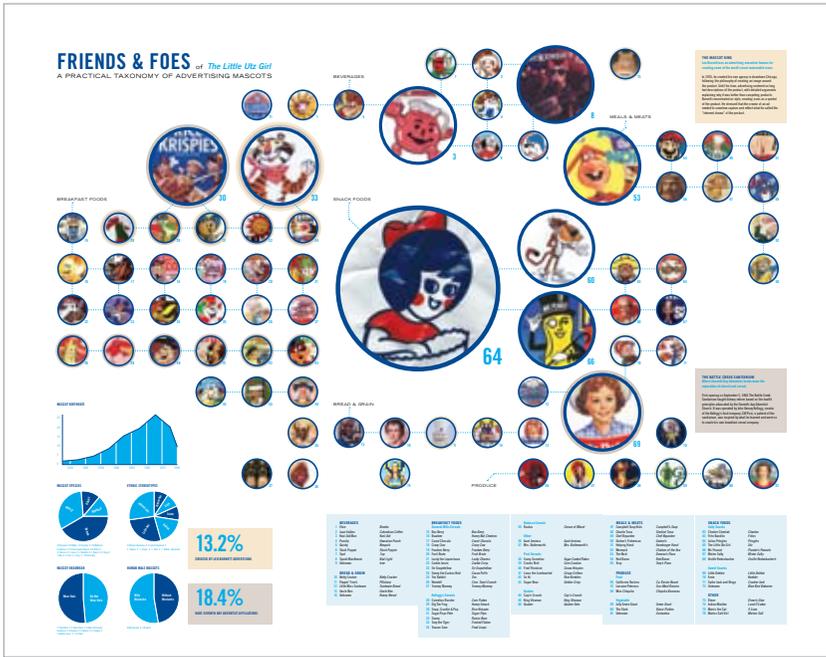
Therefore, it made sense that she should be my spirit guide in processing the sadness I feel towards certain aspects of 20th century America — including the rise and fall of industrial cities. As someone raised amongst the polished glass and blinding concrete of Dallas, seeing the abandoned factories and dilapidated mansions that can be found in Richmond dredged up feelings of nostalgia for the East Coast's industrial prime, for a time when snack foods need not be an adrenaline shot to the heart.

So I chose to tell The Little Utz Girl's story and, through her life's path, explore my sentimentality for America's past.

INFLUENCES

<i>Advertising mascots</i>	<i>Seventh Day Adventists</i>	<i>20th Century America</i>	<i>History of Route 66</i>
<i>The East Coast</i>	<i>The Rust Belt</i>	<i>Effects of capitalism</i>	<i>Edward Tufte</i>
<i>New York World's Fairs</i>	<i>The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier and Clay</i>	<i>Urban prairie</i>	<i>Visual complexity</i>
<i>Suburban sprawl</i>	<i>Leo Burnett Advertising</i>	<i>US Interstate System</i>	<i>Hanover, PA</i>
<i>John Harvey Kellogg</i>		<i>Rabbit, Run</i>	<i>Population trends</i>





**TAXONOMY (opposite top)**

A diagram of 76 food advertising mascots, many of whom play a role in the Little Utz Girl's life story. Includes numerous facts, both relevant and irrelevant, to the packaged foods industry.

**TIME LINE (above)**

Written as an autobiography, the time line describes the Little Utz Girl's life story and how it interweaves with 20th century American history. A numerical system is used throughout to cross-reference the other two posters.

**LIFE MAP (opposite bottom)**

This map of the United States traces Little Utz Girl's journey and documents the birthplaces of her cohorts. Pertinent information on Route 66, the Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways, suburban sprawl, the American Rust Belt and urban prairie is also included.

**FURTHER DETAILS (following pages)**

Close-ups of the posters give a taste of the story.



# LIFE & TIMES

of *The Little Utz Girl*



**IT ALL STARTED IN HANOVER, PA,** later known as the Snack Capitol of the World. An enterprising young couple named Bill and Sallie Utz began producing *Utz Hanover Home Brand* potato chips in their summer kitchen. Batch after batch, at 50 pounds of potatoes an hour, they laid the groundwork for what became the United States' largest privately owned snack brand. What makes Utz potato chips so special, so unique? Nothing. They're just potatoes, grease and salt—like every other potato chip out there. It's not the chips that are special, it's me: The Little Utz Girl. These rosy cheeks could sell anything.

1

**1921** A pose. A smile. A picture. How easy is that? I give them my face once, they give me a cut of the scratch for the rest of my life. It's the windfall of an advertising mascot: what could be easier?

But the stories of advertising mascots are seldom as pretty as our veneers. In fact, we tend to be a sordid bunch of losers and miscreants rivaled only by the Dana Platons and Danny Bonaduces of the child actor world. A walk down our collective memory lane—a greasy dark alley, really—is riddled with bug-eyed addicts, crumpled-up freaks and lard-bloated corpses all tossed-aside in heaps. That's where Mr. Peanut comes in.

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**1952** Then there was Tony the Tiger. So uncharacteristically strong and confident for a mascot. He had genuine faith, rather than mere dependency. He was deeply theological and taught me innumerable lessons on intestinal health and God. We found ourselves spending more and more time together, until the day Tony asked me to join him in matrimony. Snap, Crackle and Pop gave us their blessing so long as, among our other vows, we promised to maintain our regimen of diet and chastity.

Since romance wasn't really a priority for our honeymoon, Tony and I picked Minneapolis, Minnesota as our destination. Outside of Battle Creek, there's no bigger hotbed of animated cereal hawkers. Being surrounded by fellow mascots meant we didn't have to be alone. And with a maw full of grain you don't have to converse either.

General Mills began as a conglomerate of roughly 27 Midwestern grain mills. While over the years it grew to include many other food items and thus food mascots, including the Jolly Green Giant, Betty Crocker and the Pillsbury Doughboy, the bulk of the Big G crew dealt in cereal. The Cheerios bee, Lucky the Leprechaun, the Trix Rabbit and the rest were a nice enough bunch, if occasionally creepy.

Substance abuse seamed the biggest commonality—it's easy to get hooked on your own product. But the church's stringent rules created a shelter from temptation. Before Seventh Day Adventism, Toucan Sam had a three box-a-day habit, his life falling prey to the whims of his sniffing nose. The frenetic Dig' Em Frog, trigger-happy Sugar Pops Pete and crooning Sugar Bear were no better. Conversely there were the quiet ones, Cornelius Rooster and Sunny the Sun. You might not know it to look at them, but under the cheerful facades lurked a roiling mess of demons. I gave them each a wide berth, lest I get caught in the fallout of their inevitable meltdowns.

I felt right at home amongst the congregation of fellow mascots. Each of us had our own reasons for joining, though they were rarely religious in nature. The church was more like a support group offering guaranteed acceptance and, as such, became a collective of characters who couldn't find entry into any other social network.

**1947** Picking up where those enema-toting health mongers left off, Rice Krispies pedlars and (unbeknownst to me at the time) religious gurus, Snap, Crackle and Pop were still turning people on to lives of abstinence and bland cereal according to the Seventh-Day Adventist principles of yore. They were like the holy trinity, but tiny and mildly creepy. Speaking mainly in a mysterious burble—the gift of tongues?—that caused me to lean my ear in close, the three little men soon counted me among their flock of adherents. What can I say? I was young and impressionable.

6

19 27

8

Tony thought we should leave Battle Creek to spread the good word and proselytize so we opted to return to my home state of Pennsylvania. But Wilkes-Barre, Pittsburgh, Scranton, Philadelphia, Allentown, Erie and all the other cities were experiencing an exodus as heavy manufacturing and jobs disappeared. So we relocated to

the up-and-coming little community of Levittown, 22 miles outside of Philly's Center City. For a number of years we existed a quiet life, rarely venturing outside of our little Cape Cod wonderland. It was very convenient and livable. Time passes more quickly when you remain still.

9

**1960** Then one day we caught word of an up and coming little mascot girl down in Tennessee named Debbie. She sort of reminded me of myself at that age and paying a visit to welcome her into the mascot community seemed the Christian thing to do.

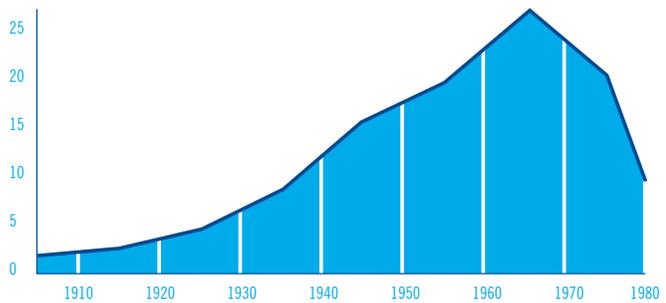
Always evangelizing about how great the role of God has been in the success of snack food items, Tony set about saving Little Debbie's soul. She was a sweet girl (a little too sweet frankly) and asked Tony if Seventh-Day Adventists practiced the laying on of hands. She said he could lay his big, strong hands on her anytime he wanted. Said he brought out the tiger in her.

So much for abstinence. The philandering I might have forgiven, but The Little Utz Girl doesn't tolerate a hypocrite. Needless to say, that was the end of Tony and me.

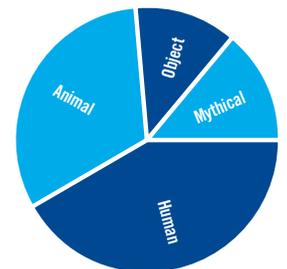
69



**MASCOT BIRTHRATE**

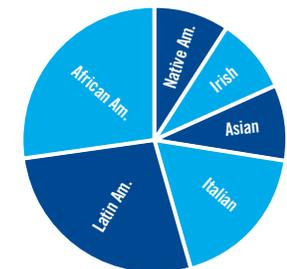


**MASCOT SPECIES**



30 Humans (19 Male, 11 Female) | 10 Mythical Creatures | 10 Inanimate Objects | 6 Birds | 4 Felines | 3 Cows | 3 Rabbits | 2 Bears | 2 Dogs | 1 Bee | 1 Fish | 1 Frog | 1 Prairie Dog

**ETHNIC STEREOTYPES**



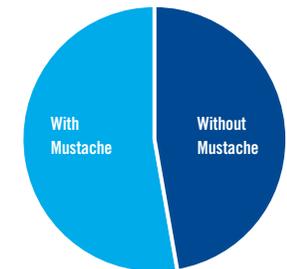
3 African American | 3 Latin American | 2 Italian | 1 Asian | 1 Irish | 1 Native American

**MASCOT HEADWEAR**



7 Chef Hats | 3 Sailor Hats | 4 Wide-brimmed/Sombrero | 3 Derbies | 2 Berets | 2 Crowns | 2 Aviator Caps | 12 Other

**HUMAN MALE MASCOTS**

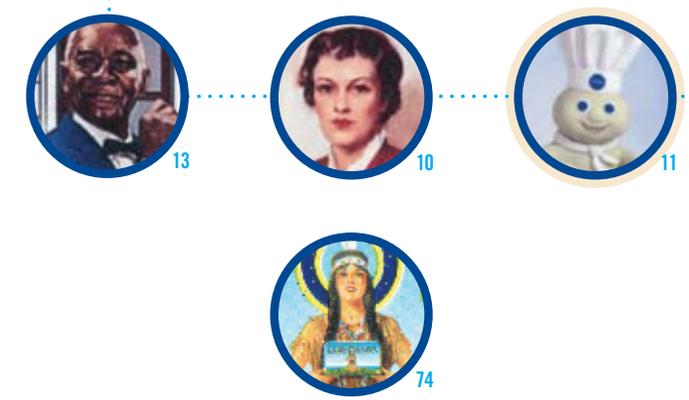


8 Mustaches | 2 Beards

**13.2%**  
CREATED BY LEO BURNETT ADVERTISING

**18.4%**  
HAVE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST AFFILIATIONS

**BREAD & GRAIN**



**BEVERAGES**

- 1 Elsie
- 2 Juan Valdez
- 3 Kool-Aid Man
- 4 Punchy
- 5 Quicky
- 6 Slush Puppie
- 7 Spot
- 8 Spuds MacKenzie
- 9 Unknown

- Borden*
- Colombian Coffee*
- Kool-Aid*
- Hawaiian Punch*
- Nesquik*
- Slush Puppie*
- Tup*
- Bud Light*
- Icee*

**BREAD & GRAIN**

- 10 Betty Crocker
- 11 Poppin' Fresh
- 12 Little Miss Sunbeam
- 13 Uncle Ben
- 14 Unknown

- Betty Crocker*
- Pillsbury*
- Sunbeam Bread*
- Uncle Ben*
- Bunny Bread*

**BREAKFAST FOODS**

**General Mills Cereals**

- 15 Boo Berry
- 16 Buzzbee
- 17 Count Chocula
- 18 Crazy Cow
- 19 Franken Berry
- 20 Fruit Brute
- 21 Lucky the Leprechaun
- 22 Cookie Jarvis
- 23 Sir Grapefellow
- 24 Sonny the Cuckoo Bird
- 25 Trix Rabbit
- 26 Wendell
- 27 Yummy Mummy

**Kellogg's Cereals**

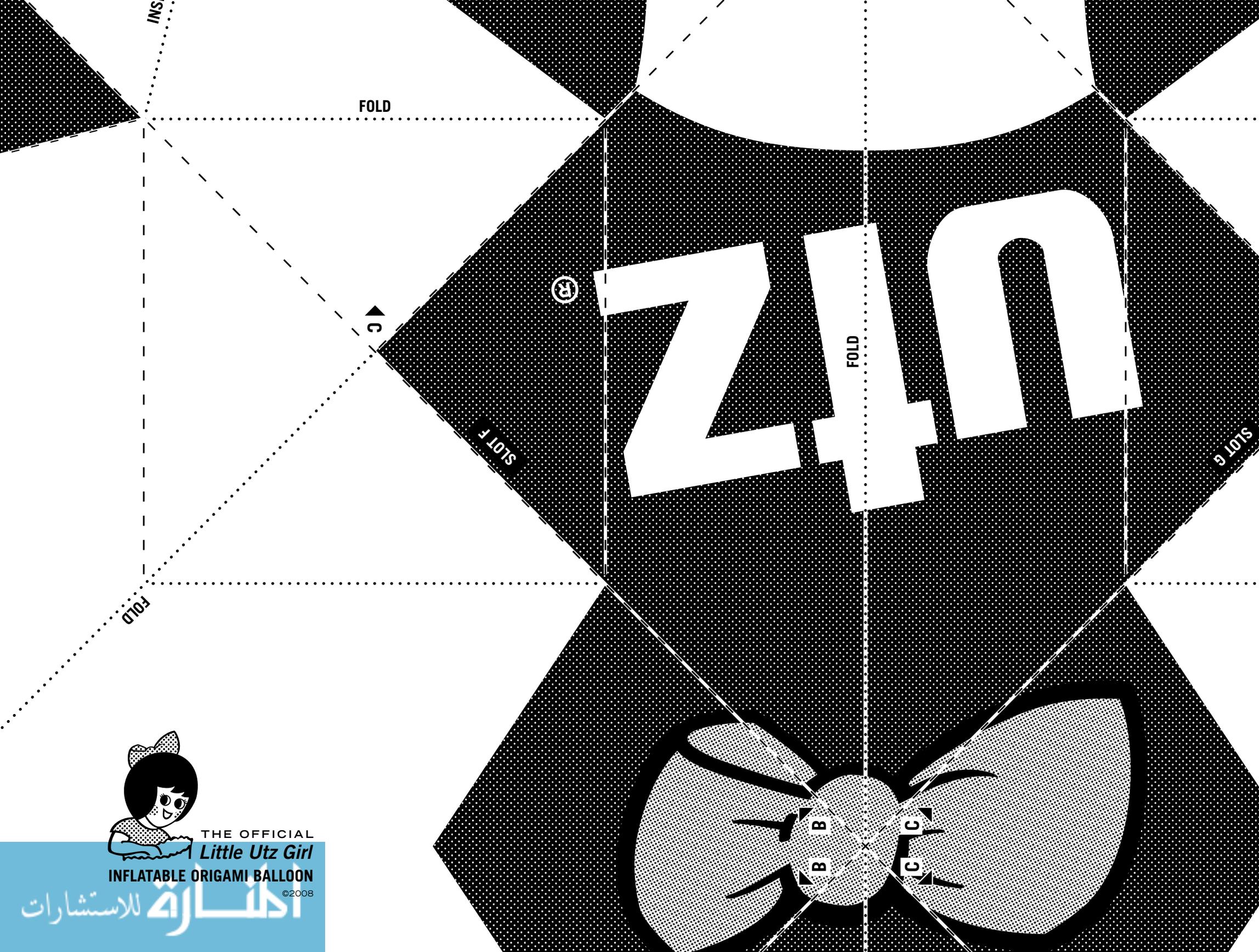
- 28 Cornelius Rooster
- 29 Dig'Em Frog
- 30 Snap, Crackle & Pop
- 31 Sugar Pops Pete
- 32 Sunny
- 33 Tony the Tiger
- 34 Toucan Sam



would provide key ground transport routes for military supplies and troop deployments in an emergency. The system serves nearly all major U.S. cities, with many Interstates passing through downtown areas. The

cities commonly use urban Interstates to travel to their places of work. The vast majority of long-distance travel, whether for vacation or business, uses the national road network; of these trips, about one-third utilize the

POPULATION	1931	1989	PERCENT CHANGE
United States	123,000,000	249,000,000	102%
Chicago, IL	3,376,438	2,783,726	-18%
Detroit, MI	1,568,662	1,027,974	-35%
East St. Louis, IL	74,397	40,921	-45%
Las Angeles, CA	1,238,048	3,485,398	182%
Levittown, PA	0	53,966	N/A%



INS

FOLD

Ⓜ

FOLD

SLOT F

SLOT G

FOLD



THE OFFICIAL  
*Little Utz Girl*

INFLATABLE ORIGAMI BALLOON

©2008

الاستشارات

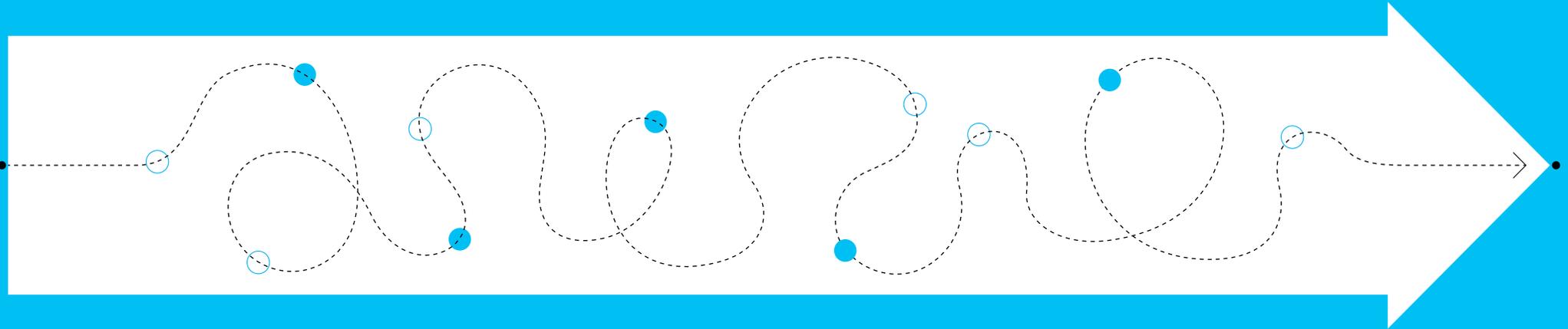


ORIGAMI BALLOON (above)  
Included in the book is a 34" x 34" poster that folds into a (somewhat) 3-d portrait of the Little Utz Girl.

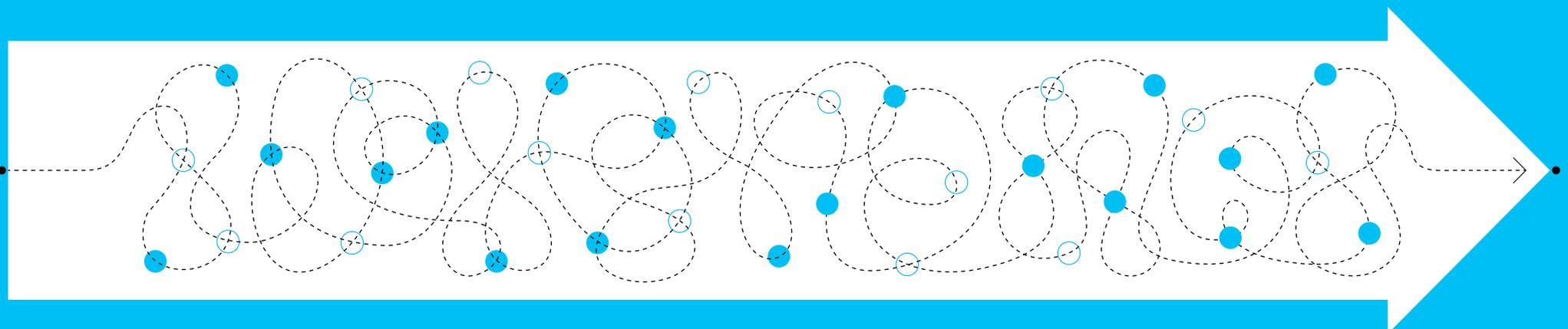


DETAIL SHOT (opposite)

**PATH 1:** Underdeveloped path is puny and one-note



**PATH 2:** Dense and twisty, like wrinkles on the brain of a genius



### COMPARISON OF PATHS

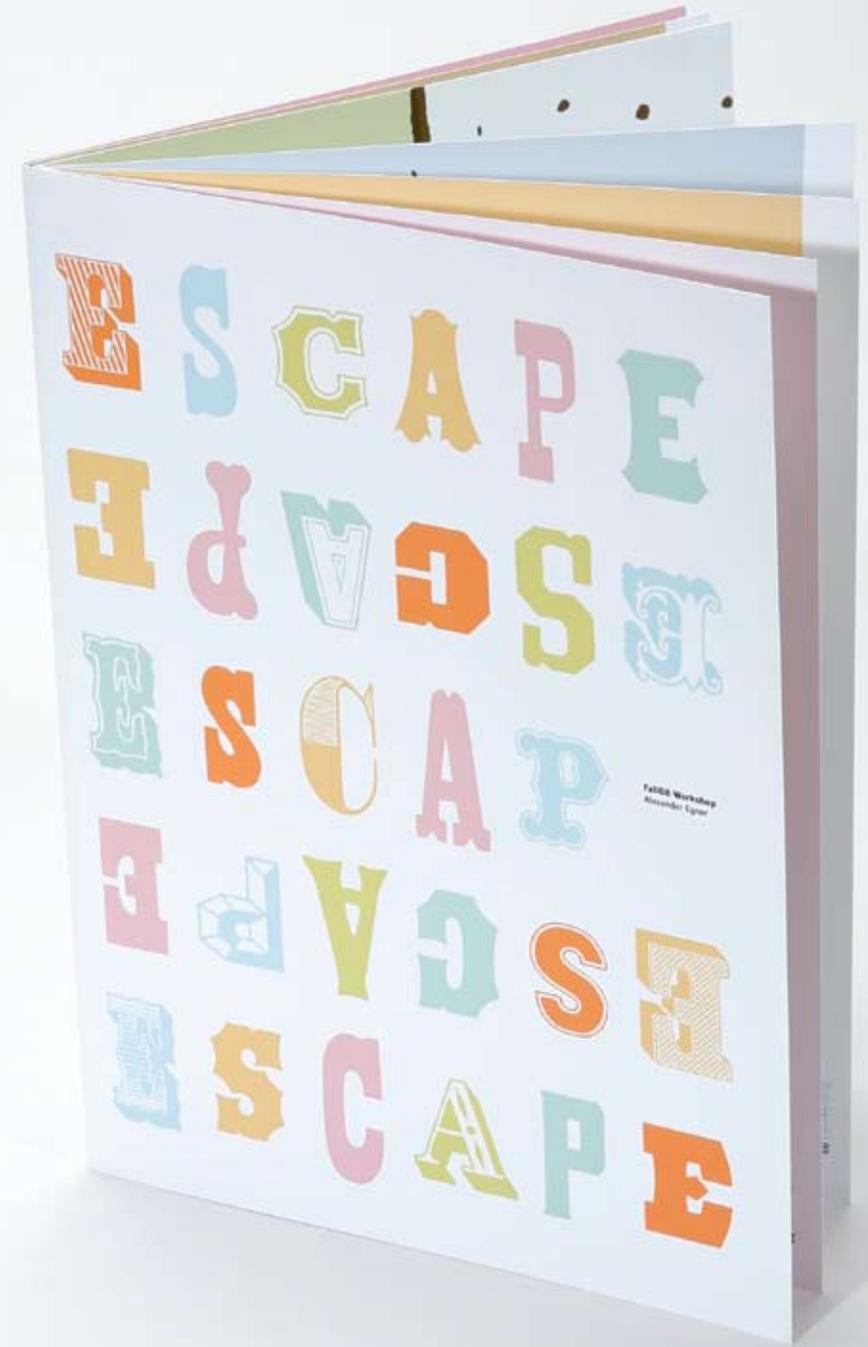
There are actually many paths between POINT A and POINT B. The route you travel is your unique voice as a designer. That route can be dull or interesting — the choice is up to you.

ESCAPIST FANTASY TOURISM BOARD pamphlet and poster campaign

My relationship with the news and current events has always been a cyclical one, typified by revolving phases of interest, burn-out, avoidance and guilt. In the Fall of 2008, with the United States facing a historic presidential election, two arduous wars and a desperate financial crisis, that cycle was sent into hyper drive. From minute-to-minute I couldn't decide whether to be a concerned and educated citizen or an apathetic and distracted one. Enter the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board, a fictitious organization I created that specializes in dissociative mental leisure excursions.

The EFTB and its supporting advertising materials allowed me to satirize my own impulse to flee the complex reality of this world for a more idyllic, if imaginary, one. Ignoring a problem, it seems, does little to help resolve it. Nevertheless, ignorance is the bliss an Escapist Fantasy peddles.

Included in the EFTB project are a creative brief (written more as a vacation brochure) and the resultant campaign of six tourism posters.



INFLUENCES

October–November 2008 Presidential Election	<i>The Daily Show</i> <i>The Colbert Report</i>	Circus lettering <i>Ostrich, head in the sand</i>	Travel posters Self-mockery
War in Iraq	Sub-prime mortgage crisis	Futility	Non-symbolic symbolism
<i>Dancing with the Stars</i>	Ignorance is bliss	Vacation brochures	Democracy Now!
War in Afghanistan	Financial bail-outs	Advertising copy writing	Consumerism as solution

**FOLLOWING IS THE CREATIVE BRIEF AND RESULTANT BRAND CAMPAIGN, DEVELOPED BY AN UNDISCLOSED INTERNATIONAL DESIGN CONSULTANCY TO INTRODUCE THE ESCAPIST FANTASY TOURISM BOARD INTO AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS.**

10 | *intermy*

**PRODUCT/SERVICE BENEFITS:**

**With Escapist Fantasies, the world inside your head is your oyster!**

*Imagine a vacation itinerary where every destination is better than the one before...*

...each ocean blur, each mountain taller and each harmony less comparable to get in and out of: imagine the three-headed low child of Shangri-la, Xanadu and Disney World. Then multiply 5 times infinity. You've just experienced the power of an Escapist Fantasy. The possibilities are endless! And it can all be done without physically deviating from your normal plotting file routine. The vacation is all a state of mind—you can literally circumnavigate the world in the blink of an eye.

We call this proprietary phenomenon the **Physically Present/Mentally Absent Paradigm**. Unlike souls of their human ilk, an Escapist Fantasy enables the traveler to gallivant unencumbered across uncharted realties—where criteria fluctuate through cotton candy meadows playing hopscotch with talking babies and enchanted land dolphins. It's a place where the Lisa Frank in each of us can run wild. Meanwhile, the body remains in a semi-animatized state, rarely broadcasting the bustling activities within.

Through liberal utilization of our patented PPM™ technology brought to you exclusively by the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board, even the most humdrum of situations can be transformed into Disneyan rumpus of limitless pleasure. Imagine the potential: How often you're stuck in an afternoon Jacuzzi of marshmallow pudding, eating your way to barely barely President fitting in traffic again on your morning commute? Whoosh! Now you're sitting on the beautiful features of a magical conch, soaring over the Seven Sacred Seas of eastern Nevada. All your problems are solved? It couldn't be easier!!!

At the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board, we put the You in Utopia!

1. Possibilities may actually be infinite, depending on your ability to imagine possibilities.
2. Figuratively.
3. If the word "dash" has been defined and accepted quite thoroughly.
4. Subject to this usage, it is worth noting that the ability to escape a problem actually creates a problem-solving strategy.

04 | *intermy*

**CLIENT:**

**THE ESCAPIST FANTASY TOURISM BOARD IS AN ORGANIZATION FOUNDED TO PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF DISSOCIATIVE MENTAL LEISURE EXCURSIONS TO THE AMERICAN POPULACE.**

**DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCT/SERVICES:**

*Face it. Everybody needs a vacation eventually. Life can be tiresome and death often isn't a viable solution.*

A simple little change of pace and scenery can do wonders to briefly ward off a daily onslaught of existential stressors. So we pack our bags and head south, or north, or wherever there are drinks served in halved coconuts by people more tan than ourselves.

Unfortunately popular travel destinations such as all-inclusive Caribbean resorts, Whistler Europe and Hawaii, Missouri only exist in the world as it actually is—with its raging wars, environmental catastrophes and vengeful gods. And if you're running away from all this problems, the last thing you want is for them to follow. When the entire planet is at fault, changing your location within it solves nothing. And while colonizing the moon may seem like a viable solution, interplanetary space travel is cost prohibitive to all but the financial elite.

But what if someone told you that, completely free of monetary charge, you could leave all the problems of Earth behind? No more bills to pay? No more jobs to slave over. And no more disheartening current events to ignore. What if all the weight on your shoulders was suddenly lifted away?

Now with Escapist Fantasies, you can avoid reality whole hog and create a new one of your very own, where the only weight on your shoulders is from the strong, city hands of an attentive masseuse!

1. Escapist fantasies of course.
2. There is no real money left to pay. You still will want to work.
3. Absolutely nothing.

05 | *intermy*

**OTHER GREAT FEATURES:**

*No more need to pay attention to the world outside of you.*

Travel alone or with people who don't know you know what they talk like. Or with family. Never physically go anywhere ever again! No packing required! Imaginary friends sometimes more inclined to like you than real ones. Live a completely consequence-free lifestyle. Everyone speaks English (plus the universal language of Eggnog and Dietrich's). Surgery free! Post-personal enhancements. Care-free, obnoxious and unimpaired facial hair. Instant and unparalleled athleticism, including the ability to drink a basketball and ownership of the World's Strongest Man title.

All you can eat Chinese buffet with salad bar and an gallon vat of ranch dressing. Also features built your own sandwich station with a previously unimagined kinds of meats. No more worries about responsibility or other man-made social conventions. A commercial free alternative to television that's better than most daytime programming. Breakfast is always by diploma and money. Never be concerned about money again. Perhaps we've reached a low based economy. Or maybe you're the richest person in the universe and land of men. The choice is yours! Two words: Carpe Diem!

**TARGET AUDIENCE:**

**The primary target audience is individuals prone to loneliness and staring, for whom the real world is a real bummer.**

**CURRENT BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES:**

*People often think that their options for escapism are limited*

...in film, music, live art, live dancers, literature, comic books, lifestyle magazines, celebrity gossip, variety shows, stand-up comedy, sports, opera houses, Nascar, cigar parties, crossword puzzles, vodka, reality television, angler television, internet chat rooms, internet social networking sites, internet avatar sites, role-playing video games, non role-playing video games, board games, religious, dancing, phone surgery, shopping.

Individuals find gambling, sex, drugs, alcohol and nature alike! They are both with a feeling of excitement towards a society structured to limit their ability to diverge from it. Popular culture is "get out of the rat race," "search for greener pastures" and "go really back wild" exemplify this pervasive attitude. The Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board sees an opportunity to fulfill society's cries for more diversion.

06 | *intermy*

**INTERIOR COVER (top)**  
Establishes the basic premise of the piece as a creative brief for the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board.

**EFTB DESCRIBED (bottom)**  
The organization's services are detailed. Each spread features an illustration from the final poster campaign. The images fall somewhere between allegory and complete nonsense.

**PRODUCT BENEFITS (top)**

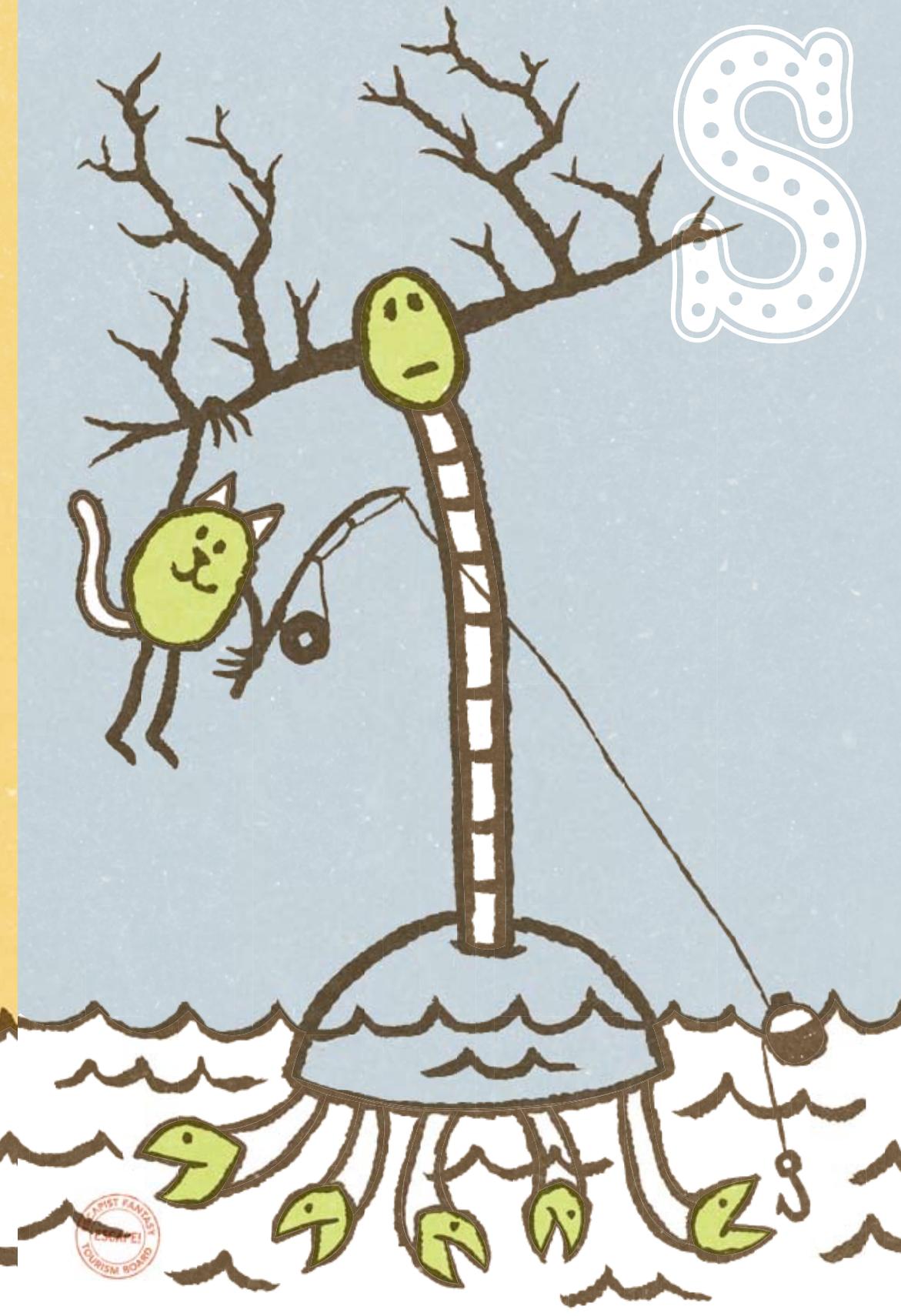
**TARGET AUDIENCE (bottom)**

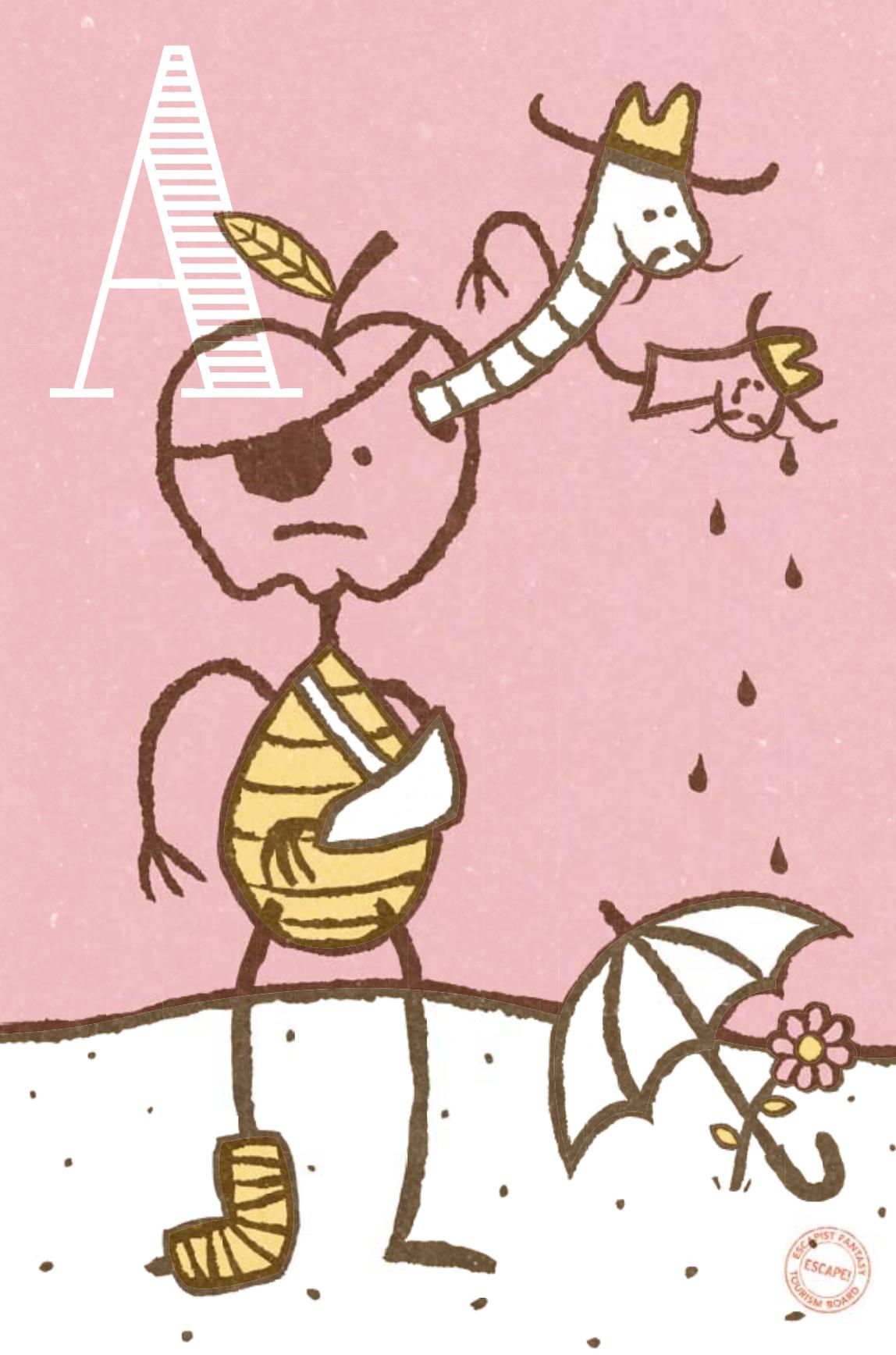
**POSTER CAMPAIGN (following pages)**  
Six posters developed from the creative brief, which form a continuous mural to spell the word ESCAPE.

F



S





P



F



## IN BRIEF

### The Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board

Following is the creative brief and resultant brand campaign, developed by an undisclosed international design consultancy to introduce the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board into American consciousness.

#### CLIENT:

The escapist fantasy tourism board is an organization founded to promote the benefits of dissociative mental leisure excursions to the American populace.

#### DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCT/SERVICES:

Face it. Everybody needs a vacation eventually. Life can be tiresome and death often isn't a viable solution. A little change of pace and scenery can do wonders to briefly ward off a daily onslaught of existential stressors. So we pack our bags and head south, or north, or wherever there are drinks served in halved coconuts by people more than ourselves.

Unfortunately, popular travel destinations such as all-inclusive Caribbean resorts, Western Europe and Branson, Missouri only exist in the world as it actually is — with its raging wars, environmental catastrophes and vengeful gods. And if you're running away from all life's problems, the last thing you want is for them to follow. When the entire planet<sup>1</sup> is at fault, changing your location within it solves nothing. And while colonizing the moon may seem like a viable solution, interplanetary space travel is cost prohibitive to all but the financial elite.

But what if someone told you that, completely free of monetary charge, you could leave all the problems of Earth behind? No more bills to pay.<sup>2</sup> No more jobs to slave over. And no more disheartening current events to ignore. What if all the weight on your shoulders was suddenly lifted away?

Now, with Escapist Fantasies, you can avoid reality whole hog and create a new one of your very own, where the only weight on your shoulders is from the strong, oily hands of an attentive masseuse.<sup>3</sup>

1 Excluding yourself, of course.

2 That is, no more imaginary bills to pay. Real bills will remain completely unaffected.

3 Metaphorically speaking.

#### PRODUCT/SERVICE BENEFITS:

With Escapist Fantasies, the world inside your head is your oyster! Imagine a vacation itinerary where every destination is better than the one before — each ocean bluer, each mountain taller and each hammock less cumbersome to get in and out of. Imagine the three-headed love child of Shangri-la, Xanadu and Disney World. Then multiply it times infinity. You've just experienced the power of an Escapist Fantasy. The possibilities are endless!<sup>4</sup> And it can all be done without physically deviating from your normal plodding life routine. The vacation is all a state of mind — you can literally<sup>5</sup> travel the world in the blink of an eye.

We call this proprietary phenomenon the Physically Present/Mentally Absent Paradox.<sup>6</sup> Not unlike souls of the newly dead liberated from their human bodies, an Escapist fantasy enables the traveler to gallivant unencumbered across uncharted realms<sup>6</sup> — where unicorns frolic through cotton candy meadows playing hopscotch with talking koalas and enchanted land dolphins. It's a place where the Lisa Frank in each of us can run wild. Meanwhile, the body remains in a semi-animated state, rarely broadcasting the bustling adventure within.

Through liberal utilization of PP/MAP<sup>6</sup> technology, brought to you exclusively by the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board, even the most humdrum of situations can be transformed into Dionysian romps of limitless<sup>7</sup> pleasure.

Stuck in another boring business meeting? Poof: now you're stuck in an effervescent jacuzzi of marshmallow pudding, eating your way to tasty, tasty freedom! Sitting in traffic again on your morning commute? Whoosh: now you're sitting on the luxuriant feathers of a magical condor, soaring over the Seven Sequined Seas of eastern Nirvana! All your problems are solved.<sup>8</sup> It couldn't be easier!!!

At the Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board, we can put the You in Utopia!

4 Possibilities may actually be limited, depending on your capacity for imagining possibilities.

5 Figuratively

6 Of the mind. Earth has been mapped and surveyed quite thoroughly.

7 Refer again to footnote 4

8 Solved, in this usage, is a relative term in the sense that bodily inaction solves the problem of having to actually make a problem solving attempt.

#### OTHER GREAT FEATURES:

- Travel alone or with people who don't know you know what they look like. Or with family.
- Never physically go anywhere ever again!
- No packing required!!!
- No more need to "pay attention" to the world outside of you.
- Imaginary friends sometimes more inclined to like you than real ones.
- Live a completely consequence-free lifestyle.
- Everyone speaks English (and the universal languages of Esperanto and divine tongues).
- Surgery-free bust/pectoral enhancement.
- Instant and unparalleled athleticism, including the ability to dunk a basketball and ownership of the World's Strongest Man title.
- All you can eat Chinese/Italian buffet with salad bar and 40 gallon vat of Ranch dressing. Features build-your-own sandwich station with 12 previously undiscovered kinds of meats.
- No more worries about responsibility or other made-up social conventions.
- A commercial free alternative to television that's better than most daytime programming.
- Weather is always 70 degrees and sunny.
- Cures acne, obesity and unwanted facial hair.
- Never be concerned about money again. Perhaps we've switched to a love-based economy. Or maybe you're the richest person in the universe and lord of men. The choice is yours!
- Two words: Carpe Diem!

#### TARGET AUDIENCE:

The primary target audience is individuals prone to loneliness and staring, for whom the real world is a real bummer.

#### CURRENT BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES:

Too often, people think that their options for escapism are limited to film, music, fine art, live theater, literature, comic books, lifestyle magazines, celebrity gossip, variety shows, stand-up comedy, sports, sports fandom, Nascar, jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, sudoku, reality television, regular television, internet chat rooms, internet social networking sites, internet avatar sites, role-playing video games, non role-playing video games, board games, religion, dancing, plastic surgery, shopping, indulgent food, gambling, sex, drugs, alcohol and nature hikes. They are left with a feeling of resentment towards a society structured to limit their ability to disengage from it. Popular wishes to "get out of the rat race," "search for greener pastures" and "go totally buck wild" exemplify this pervasive attitude. The Escapist Fantasy Tourism Board sees an opportunity to fulfill society's cries for more diversion.

#### KEY MESSAGE:

When Life gives you lemons, pretend they're cherries.

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*MENFINITE* boxed series of cards and poster

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Whenever my wife and I happen to go shopping for clothes together, we have an unspoken, yet well established, routine: upon entering a store we each go to our respective (women's/men's) sections. I finish browsing within a couple of minutes and stand around waiting for her. After repeating this in a few stores, I become annoyed with the constant waiting around and begin rambling about the disparity between women's and men's fashion.

Please note that I am not making the tired observation that women like shopping whereas men prefer beer and pork foods. The point is not that my wife and I have differing levels of interest in clothing or shopping, but that we have a differing number of choices. When you enter a store such as The GAP, there exists an invisible line separating the women's clothing from the men's. But rather than dividing the store 50/50, the break is closer to 70/30. And the lack of volume in the men's section is further exacerbated by a lack of variety. The fact is, there simply are not many socially acceptable styles of men's clothing (European men, it bears mentioning, are somewhat excluded from this generalization).

The *Menfinite* project, which focuses just on shirts, was an attempt to visually document my repeated verbal complaint. Why is it that my wife has her choice of all manner of innovative shirt cuts and configurations while I'm stuck in the same old polo year after year?

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INFLUENCES

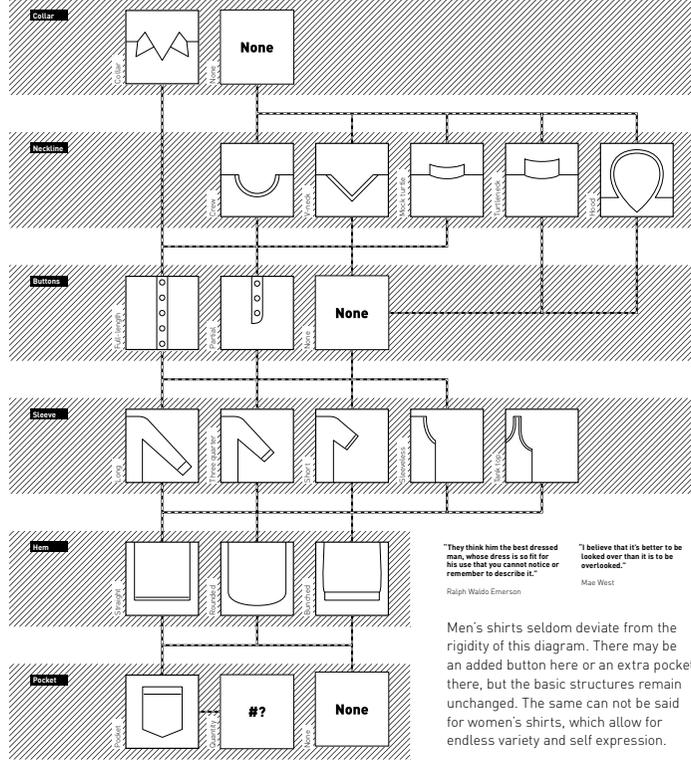
<i>Shopping with my wife</i>	<i>Fashion trends</i>	<i>German typography</i>	<i>Handmade boxes</i>
<i>The GAP</i>	<i>Clothing terminology</i>	<i>America's Next Top Model</i>	<i>Polo shirt disillusionment</i>
<i>Encroaching invisible line</i>	<i>Social acceptability</i>	<i>Photography</i>	<i>Fashion ambivalence</i>
<i>My paltry wardrobe</i>	<i>European men's fashion</i>	<i>Diagrammatic Analysis</i>	<i>Sewing patterns</i>
<i>Project Runway</i>	<i>Clothing envy</i>	<i>Gender identification</i>	<i>Outlets for self-expression</i>



# MENFINITE

Losing the wardrobe of the sexes

## Component Parts

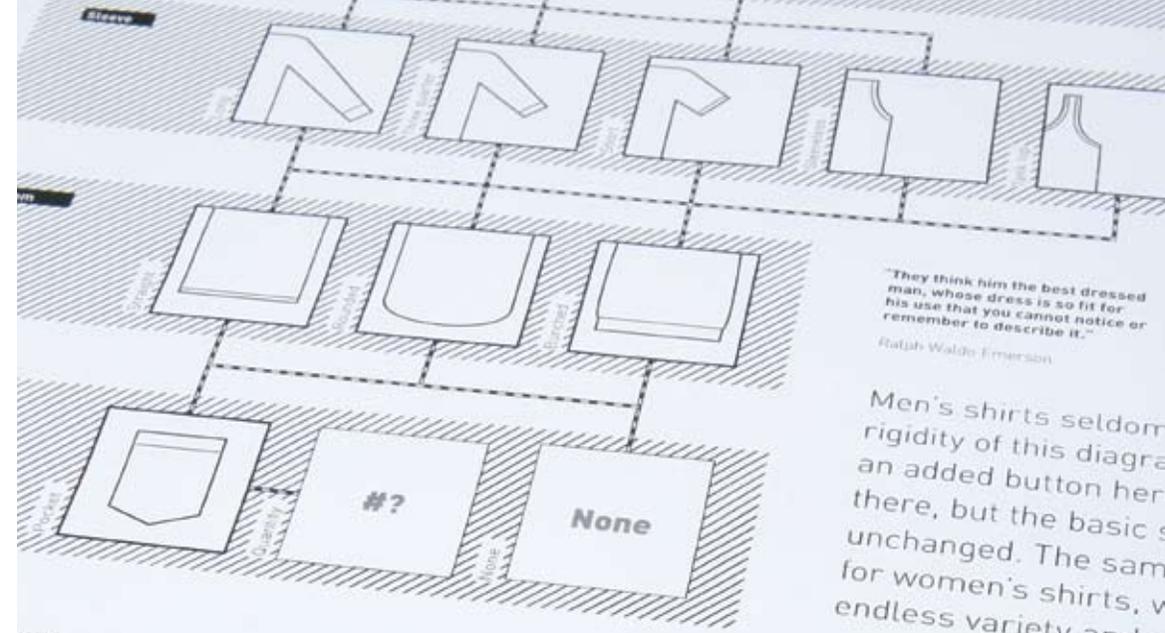
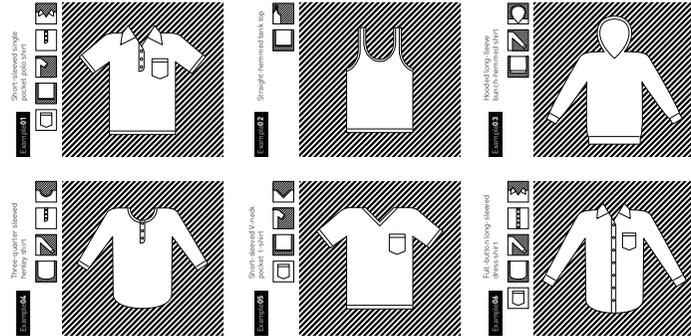


"They think him the best dressed man, whose dress is so fit for his use that you cannot notice or remember to describe it."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I believe that it's better to be looked over than it is to be overlooked."  
Mae West

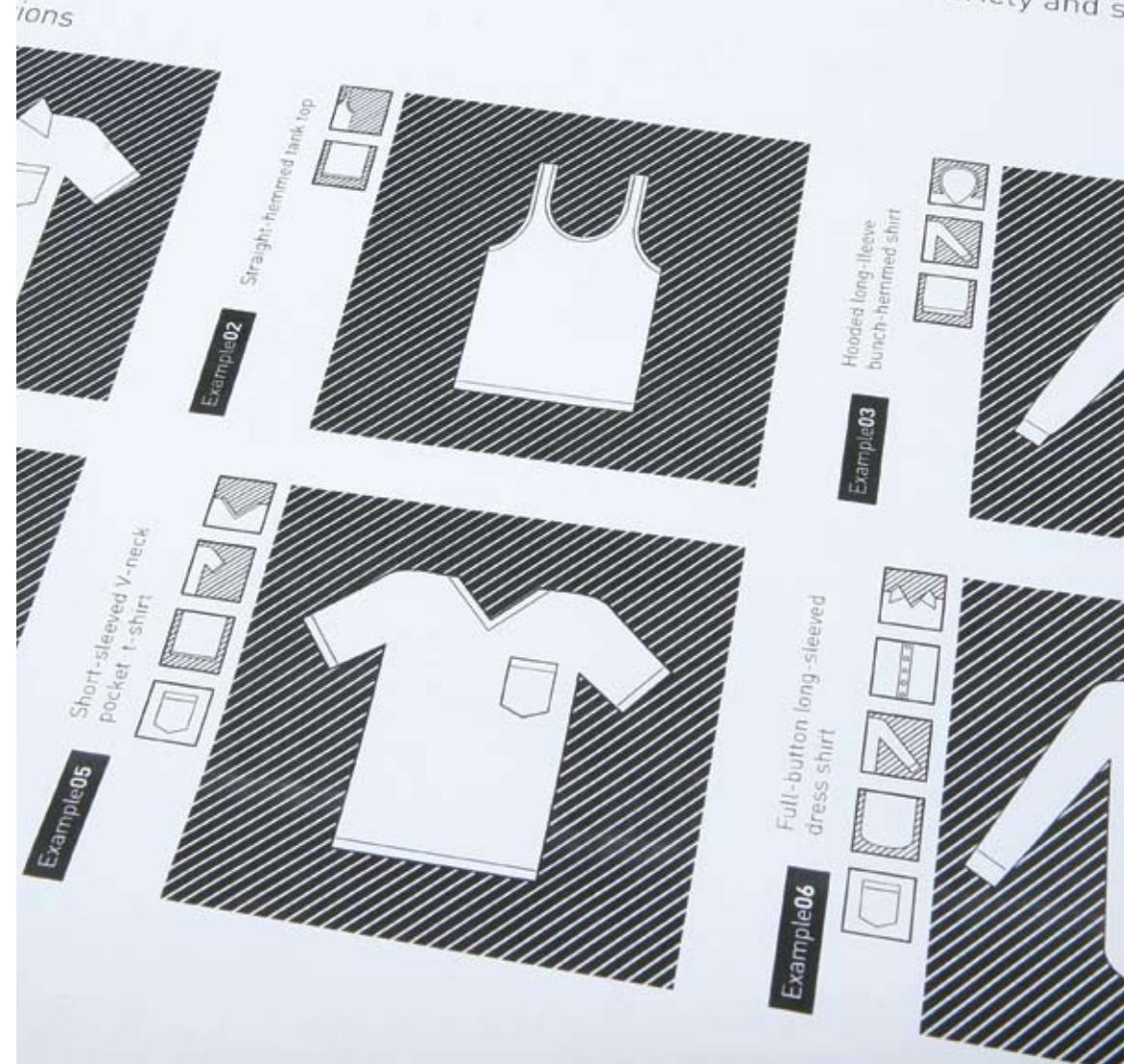
Men's shirts seldom deviate from the rigidity of this diagram. There may be an added button here or an extra pocket there, but the basic structures remain unchanged. The same can not be said for women's shirts, which allow for endless variety and self expression.

## Example Configurations



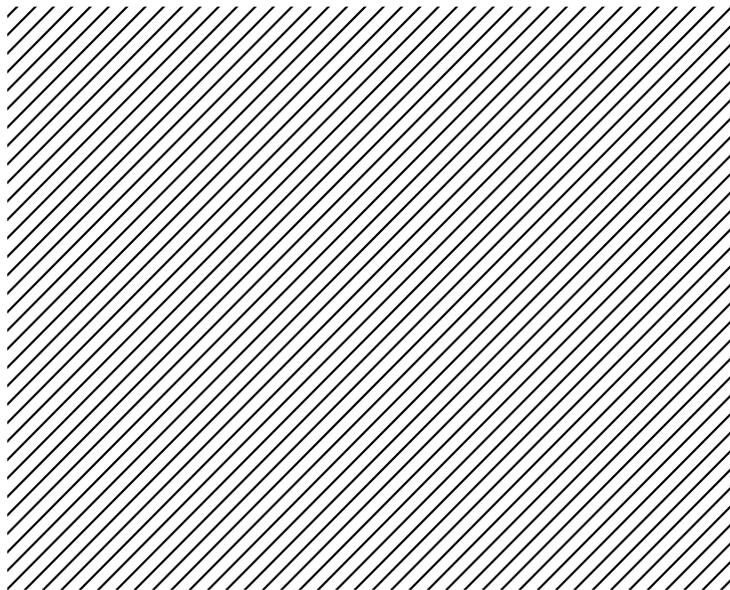
"They think him the best dressed man, whose dress is so fit for his use that you cannot notice or remember to describe it."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Men's shirts seldom deviate from the rigidity of this diagram. There may be an added button here or an extra pocket there, but the basic structures remain unchanged. The same can not be said for women's shirts, which allow for endless variety and self expression.



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# MENFINITE



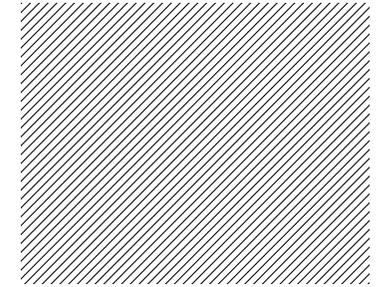
DIAGRAMMATIC POSTER (previous page)  
By breaking them down into a few component parts with limited variables, I created a model to describe the finite range of socially acceptable men's shirt designs.

SHIRT CARDS (above)  
A stack of cards included in the package use the diagram poster to analyze shirts from my wardrobe.



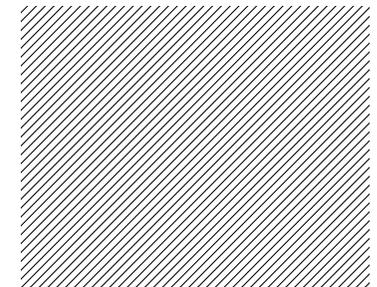
M01

Short-sleeved button down shirt with pocket



M02

Short-sleeved polo shirt with pocket

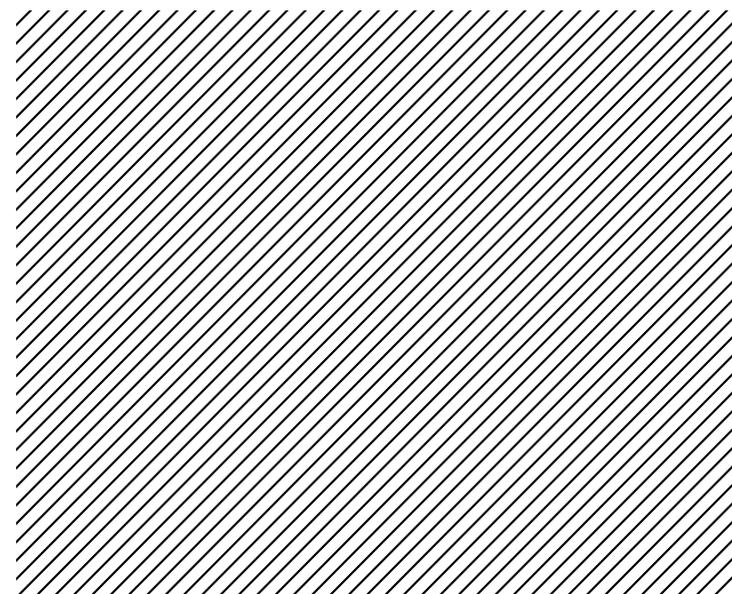


EXAMPLES (above and following pages)  
Each card features a photograph of a shirt on one side and the analysis of it on the reverse. Men's shirts are easily charted whereas women's prove the diagram to be insufficient.



**M04**

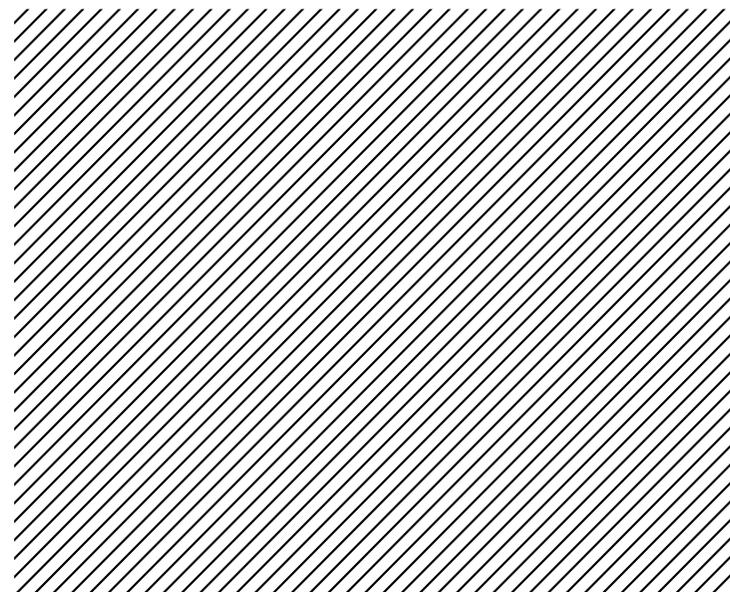
Crew neck t-shirt





**W06**

Floral print boat-neck blouse with string tie, flutter sleeves, banded waist and blouson silhouette





**W08**

Scoop neck spaghetti strap tank top with rouching detail

?? ? ? ?



**W10**

Deep V neckline elastic empire waist baby doll top with gathered cap sleeves

?? ? ? ?

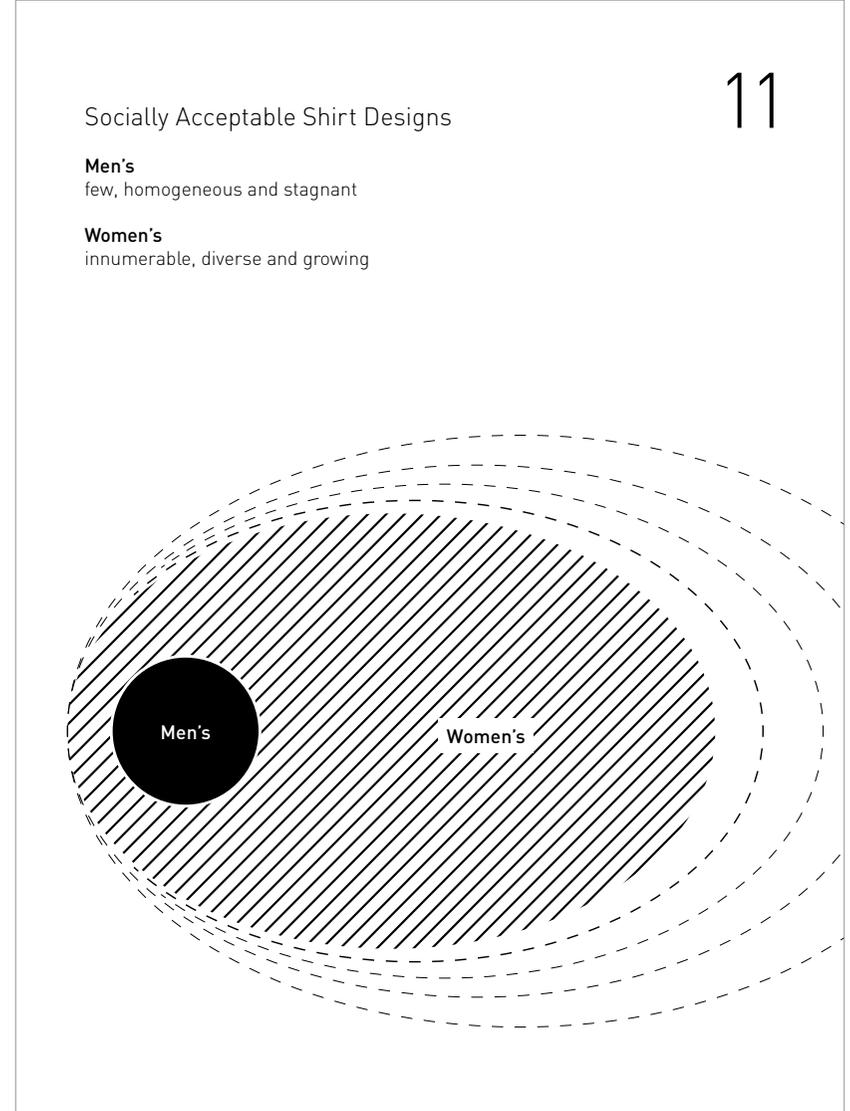


DIAGRAM (above)  
A simple description of the primary differences between the potential in men's and women's shirt design.

## ON KEEPING A CLOSED BOOK

*Spurred by the books Camera Lucida, by Roland Barthes, and On Photography, by Susan Sontag, this essay adopts their contemplative tone to address an aspect of my own relationship with photographic images.*

At the bottom of a mostly ignored bookshelf, just below a stack of dog-eared paperbacks, sits a row of photo albums. There are at least half a dozen albums, roughly one per year, documenting the evolution of my social mugging through the latter part of high school and college. When I was seventeen or eighteen, my dad purchased a new camera and gave me his old one, a simple point-and-shoot Pentax that would spend the sad remainder of its functioning life capturing snippets of my early adulthood. Simply receiving the camera served as impetus enough for me to use it and, for a while, quite frequently.

In large part these albums contain page after page of my friends and I engaged in the myriad inane activities our younger selves deemed photo-worthy — huddled about at parties, posing suggestively with inanimate objects and occasionally smashing fruit with tennis rackets. But amidst the blurry, red-eyed shots of puerile mischief, are more staid, formal photos of myself coupled with that year's girlfriend. The contrast is notable. Whereas photos of my friends have a haphazard documentary quality, the photos of my couplehood are uniformly static and staged:

In one, as a skinny-necked senior in high school wearing an ill-fitting tuxedo, I stood in front of the fireplace in my parent's house beside a prom date bedecked in butter yellow satin and glitter. I vaguely recall that, due to acne medication, my lips were redder than hers. In another, dressed in a snappy three-piece suit, my arm around the waist of a girlfriend in a strapless red gown, we smile together in our dorm hallway. Was it her birthday or Valentine's? Then on a beach, me and some other *her*, the two of us framed by sand and ocean. The list goes on: in restaurants, in parks, at family gatherings, always joined side-by-side, always smiling at the camera — just like every other photo of every other couple.

Young relationships, it seems, require photographing to establish their existence and confirm their validity. (Or why else would the photo booth survive

in a contemporary society?) We need the hard evidence. It's as if to say, to yourself and others, we are together and when we are together we are happy: I have proof. The photo can then be displayed where it will receive the most eye traffic — propped on your car dashboard beside the hula dancer, wedged in the frame of your bathroom mirror or bookmarking the Song of Solomon in your Bible — as a reminder of your membership in an exclusive two-person club. You can even become blinded, ending up with a panoply of these couple portraits coating the surfaces of your life, creating something of a visual/emotional cocoon. At that point, which matters more: the relationship or the comfort its images provide?

But what to do when the fog of young love dissipates and the union breaks? The photo instantly becomes a relic. Symbolically, if your union spawned the photo's creation, then your separation should spark its destruction. You should rip the thing in two and be done with it. Yet this has never been my course of action. Instead, I've always placed the photos in an album next to images of other behaviors I don't plan on repeating in adulthood. This is certainly not to say my photo albums are mere catalogues of mistakes. More, they are an acknowledgement of who I was, but not necessarily who I am or who I'm going to be. Photos are representative of memories — occasionally ones we would rather forget — but they are also moments that, when added together, form a semblance of your life's story.

In my case, it's a story I've preferred to keep intact, even if, like old paperback novels, it sits on a bookshelf unread. I didn't have to open the albums to describe the couple portraits mentioned earlier — they're simply recalled from memory. Which begs the question: if I remember the images, why keep the souvenir? My initial motivations for taking the photos are no longer relevant. In fact, they no longer exist. What, if any, power do the images hold?

Well, for one thing: guilt. Now that I'm married to only one of those old girlfriends, a vague feeling of unease passes over me each time I see that row of albums. The feeling is some mixture of vulnerability and shame — as though the bookshelf holds a deplorable secret from my past and the threat of blackmail is imminent. Perhaps if I paused and listened closely, I could hear the beating of a tell-tale broken heart emanating from the pages.

The odd thing is, my wife is fully aware of the photos and their contents. The secrets aren't actually secret and, even if they were, not particularly juicy. She knows all the names and most of the faces. Which is why I've made no attempt to hide the albums, why they sit out in the open for anyone to peruse. So, why then, is my subconscious still nervous?

My best guess stems from the assumption that, somewhere in our house, maybe in a musty shoebox that also holds some high school track ribbons and an old retainer, my wife herself probably has a forgotten photo of a former boyfriend. Chances are, I would know the guy's name and maybe even recognize his face. And while I might know of his existence — his role in my wife's story — for me he is merely a character closer to fiction than reality. But seeing a photo, with its insistence upon being viewed as absolute truth, has the ability to puncture this suspension of belief. The photo presents its details sharp and unflinching: the hand resting on a hip, the hotel bed in the background, the look of genuine happiness shared with someone else.

This is why my albums, gathering more dust each day, create such conflicting feelings. Though the photos tell a story I wish to preserve, the details overpower the narrative. So I prefer to hold them in the soft focus of my memory — just like all the dog-eared paperbacks I'll never read again.

---

*“IT’S FUN TO HAVE  
FUN, BUT YOU HAVE  
TO KNOW HOW.”*

The Cat in the Hat

#### ANECDOTE ONE

Nearly every night, at around 8:15, my son and I squeeze onto his small bed and read bedtime stories. His book collection is ever-growing and we further supplement it with frequent trips to the public library. It is one of the perks of parenthood that I have a valid excuse to lay around and read children's books again.

#### ANECDOTE TWO

Towards the end of my junior year of college, the game show Jeopardy! was scheduled to hold contestant tryouts in Dallas. I love trivia and would love to look smart in front of a national audience, so I applied for a spot. They set a time and place for my tryout, but I had something else going on that day and was unable to take the entrance quiz. But I probably would have passed it and won a whole bunch of money and made friends with Trebek.

#### THE PROJECT

A-Z: *Observations on Animals and Some Other Things* finally bridges the gap that once existed between children's books for adults and non-factual animal-based trivia. I developed the project as a creative exercise to see how many simple visual/verbal ideas could I come up with on a single theme. It was a problem designed to challenge and expand upon my current ideation methodologies.

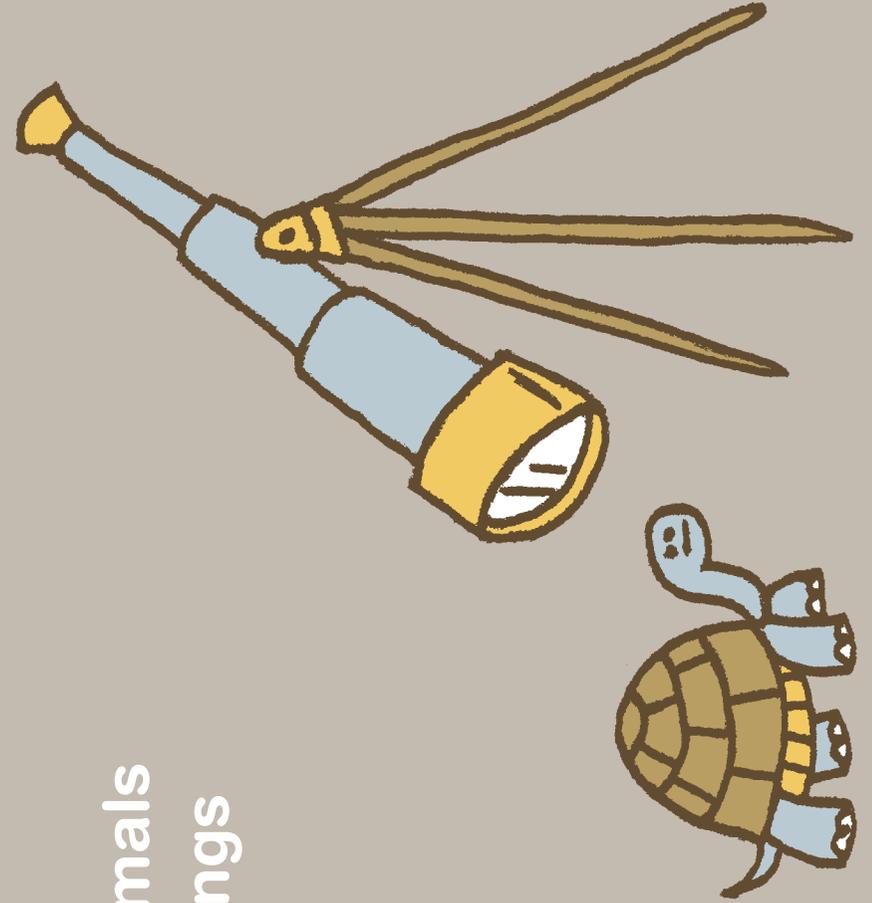
#### INFLUENCES

<i>Children's books</i>	<i>Shel Silverstein</i>	<i>Simple drawings</i>	<i>Typographic forms</i>
<i>Simon Egner</i>	<i>Curious George Learns</i>	<i>3-2-1 Contact factoids</i>	<i>Man-child</i>
<i>Type, image, idea</i>	<i>the Alphabet</i>	<i>Naiveté</i>	<i>Trivial information</i>
<i>Sketch books</i>	<i>National Geographic</i>	<i>Bedtime stories</i>	<i>The mundane</i>
<i>Ideation methodologies</i>	<i>Encyclopedias</i>	<i>Hand lettering</i>	<i>People-watching</i>

# A-Z:

## Observations on Animals and Some Other Things

By Alex Egner



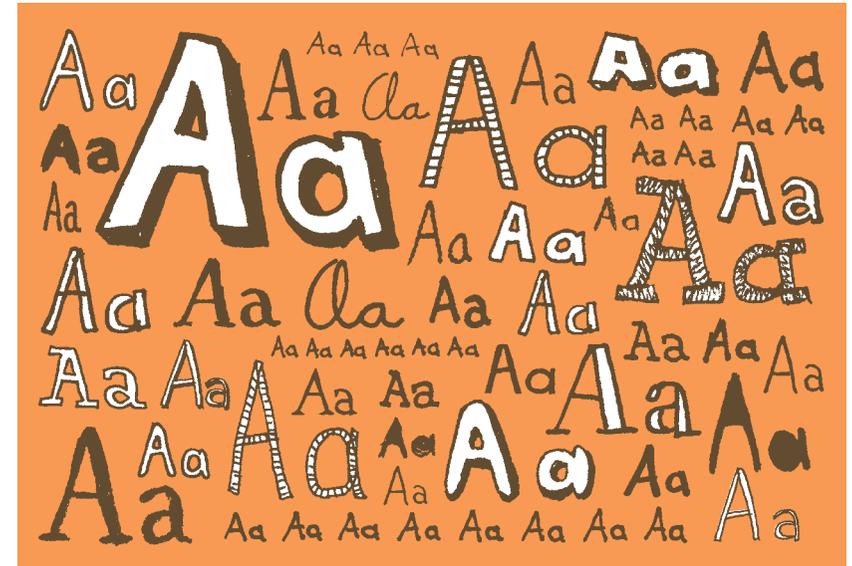
“In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.”

Aristotle



One of my favorite things about animals is looking at them. Judging by the popularity of zoos, other people must feel the same way. A select few, like Charles Darwin, John James Audubon and me, carefully draw and notate what we see. Then we call them *observations*.

This book is a book of those, alphabetized just like the encyclopedia.



QUOTATION PAGE (opposite top)  
Aristotle always imbues credibility.

INTRODUCTION (opposite bottom)  
More-or-less explains the premise of the book.

TYPOGRAPHIC PAGE (above)  
Compositions of hand-drawn letters are used throughout for divider pages.

ADDITIONAL SPREADS (following pages)  
A sampling of the book's alphabetized entries.



Cc



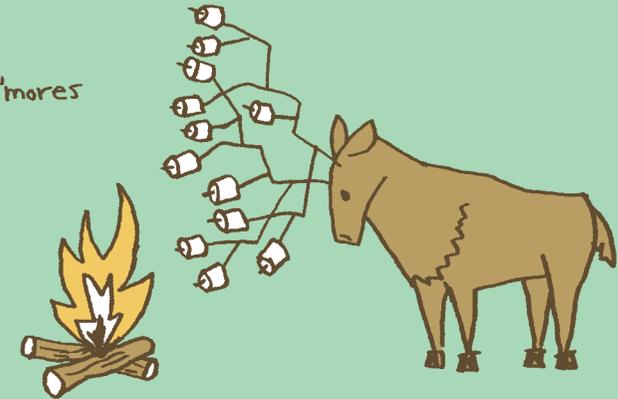
Cyclops glasses



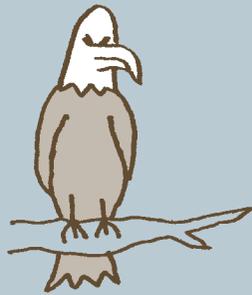
Pirate glasses

Ee

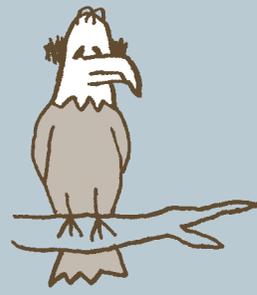
Elk s'mores



Ee



Bald eagle



Balding eagle

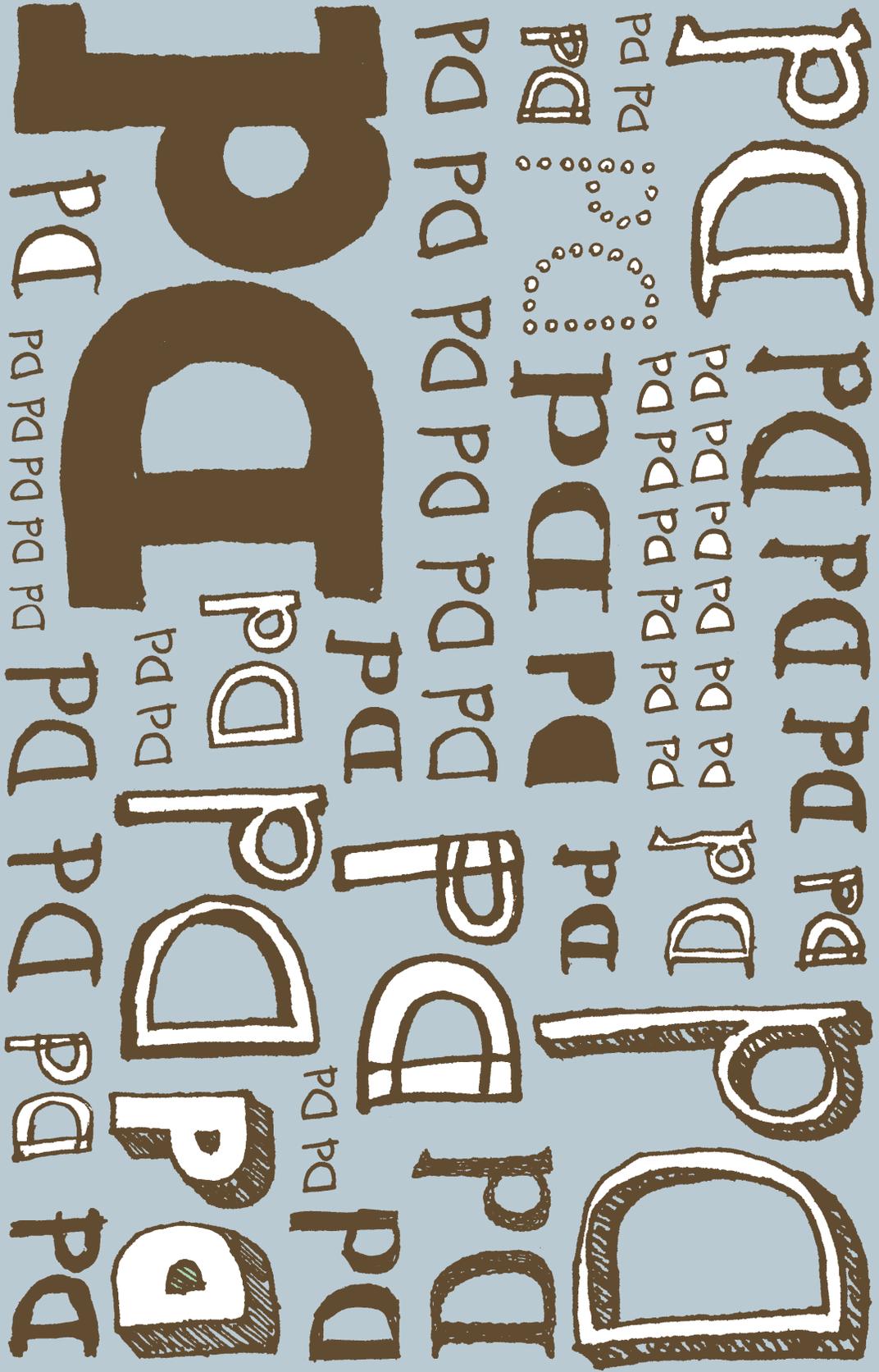
Gg



This species of gecko has a detachable tail



This one has leprosy



Dd

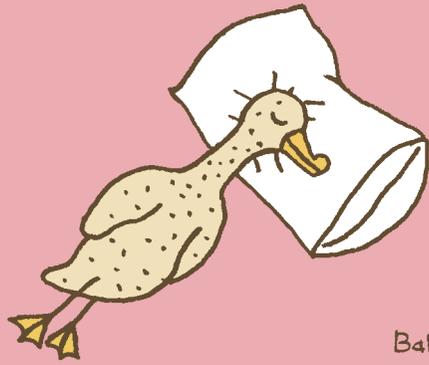


Yes

No

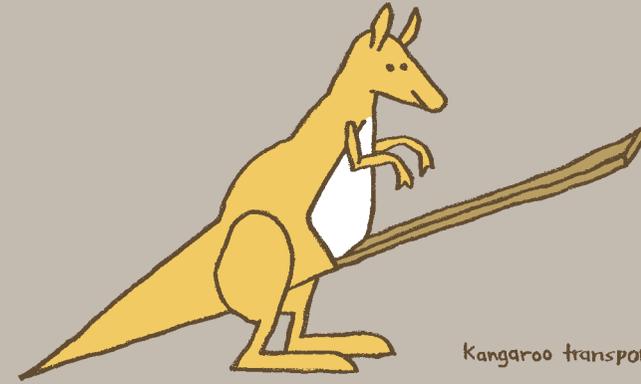
Dog doesn't want to be your best friend

Gg



Bald goose sleeps soundly

Kk



Kangaroo transports lumber

li



Inch worm can't help  
but feel emasculated

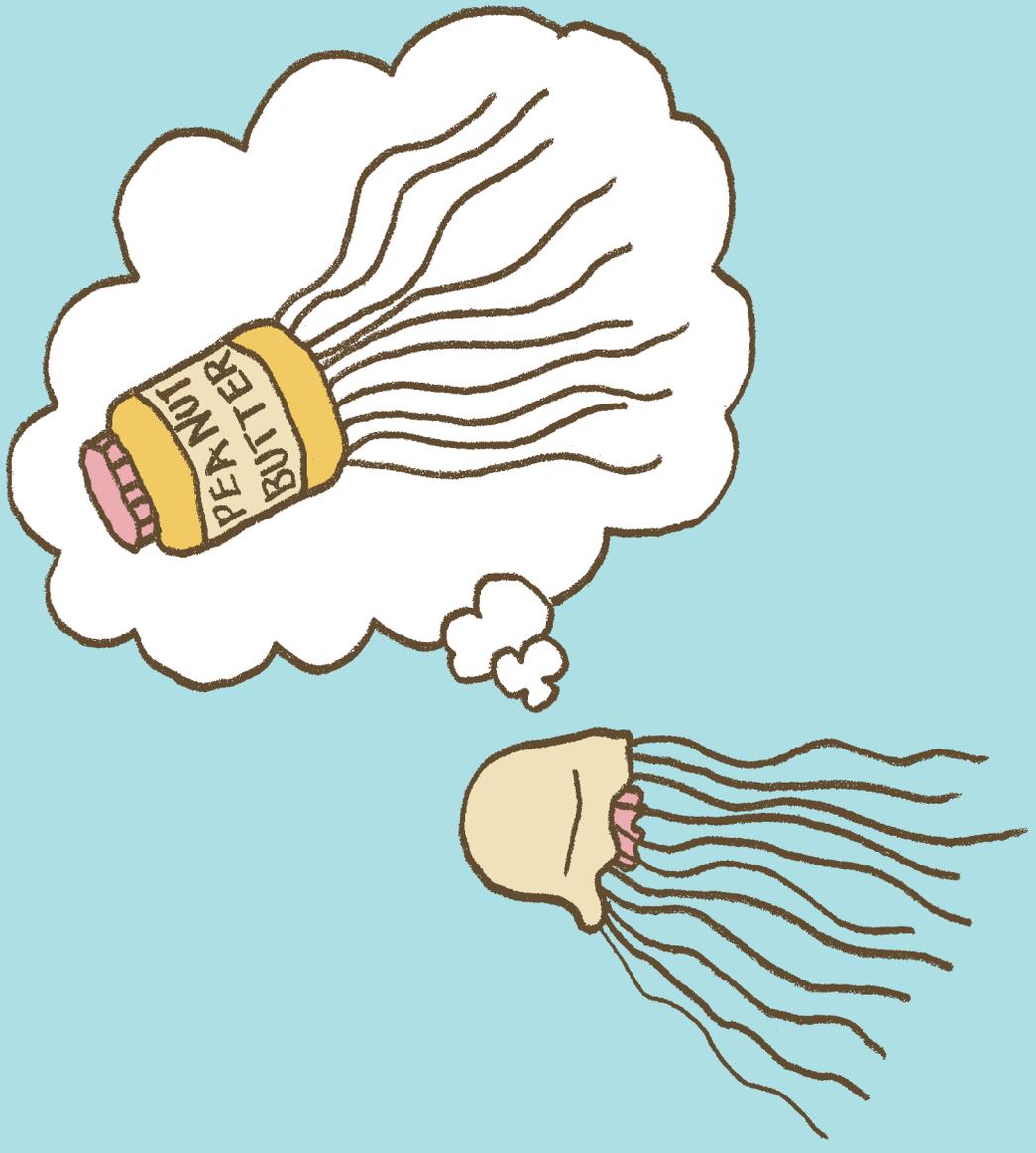
Mm

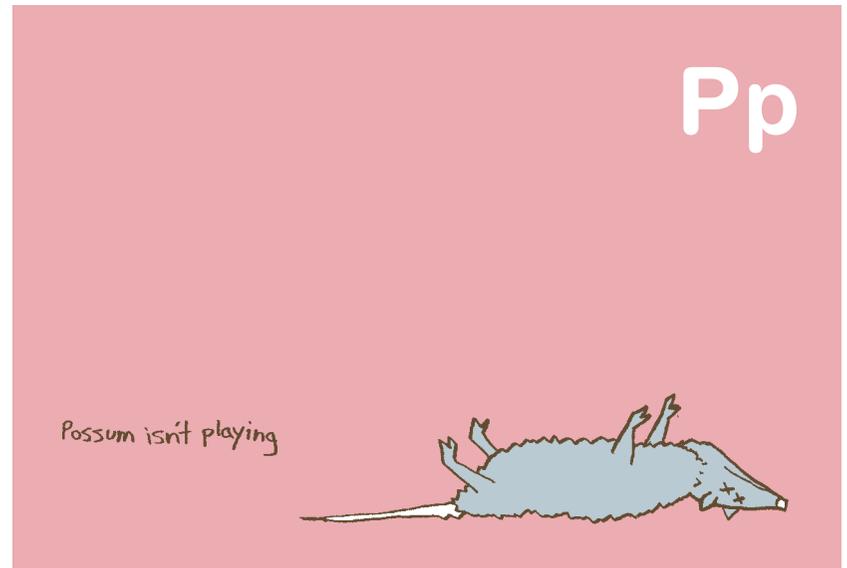
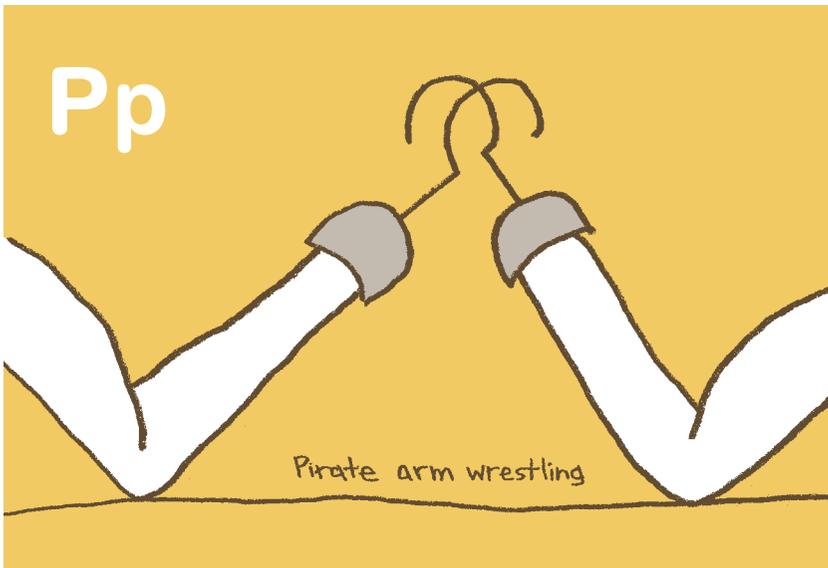
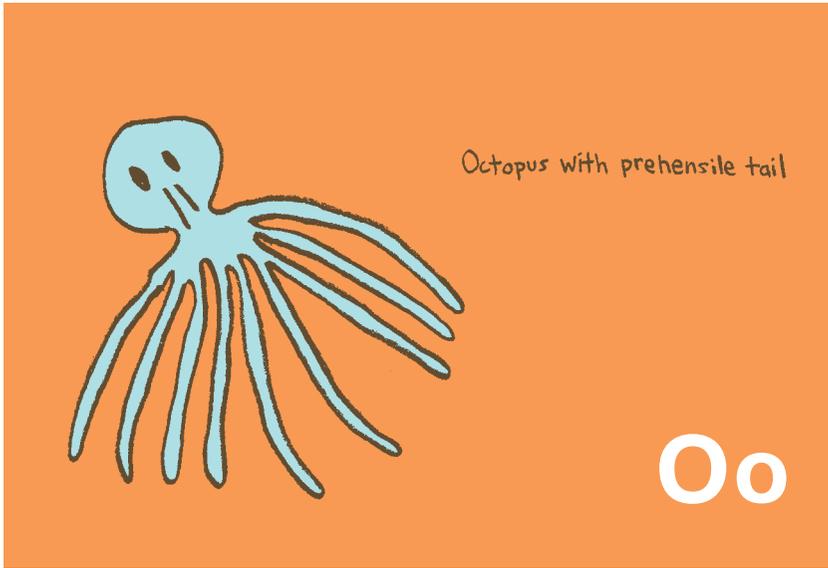


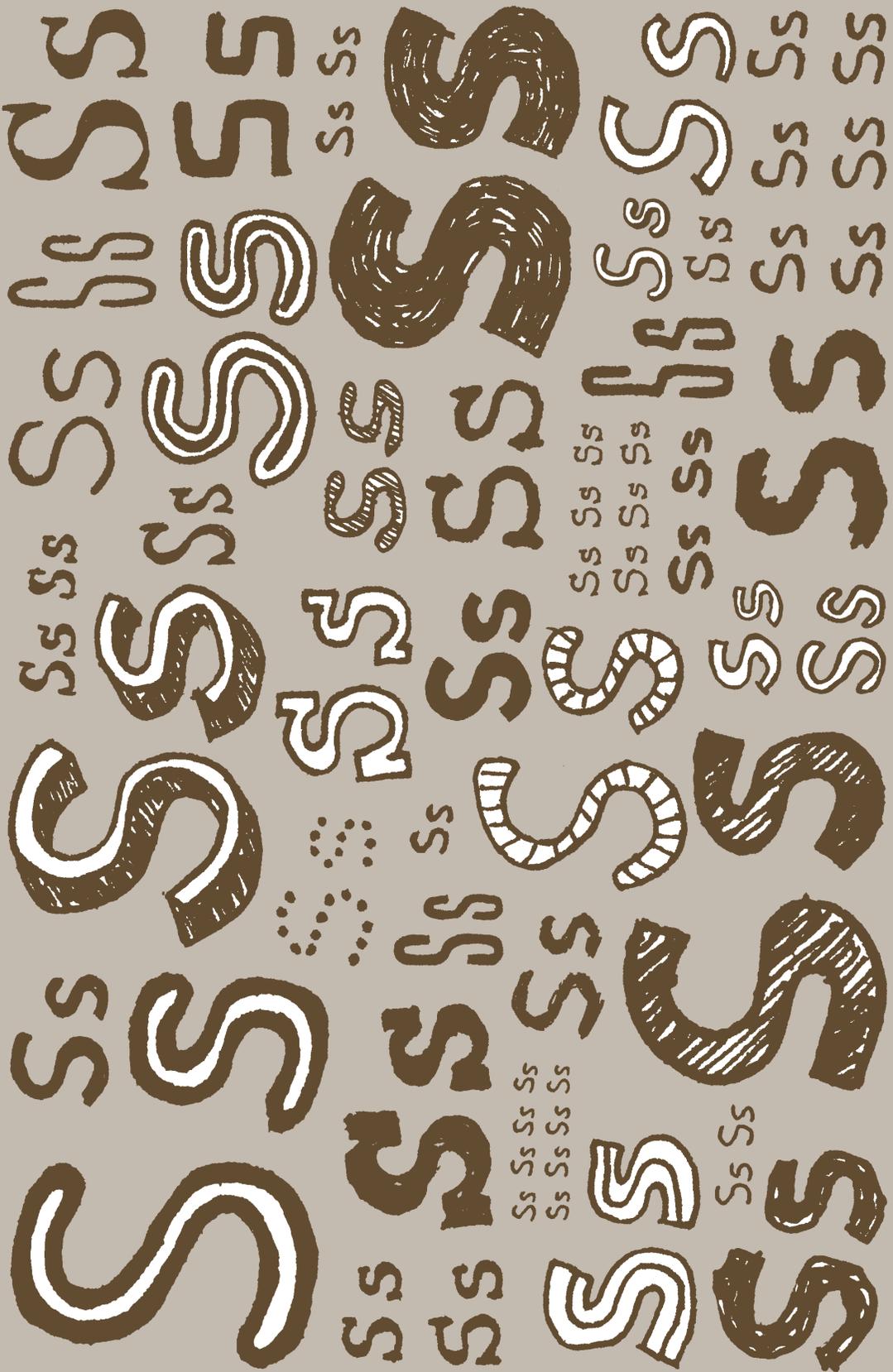
Uncoordinated Millipede has 1,000 left Feet



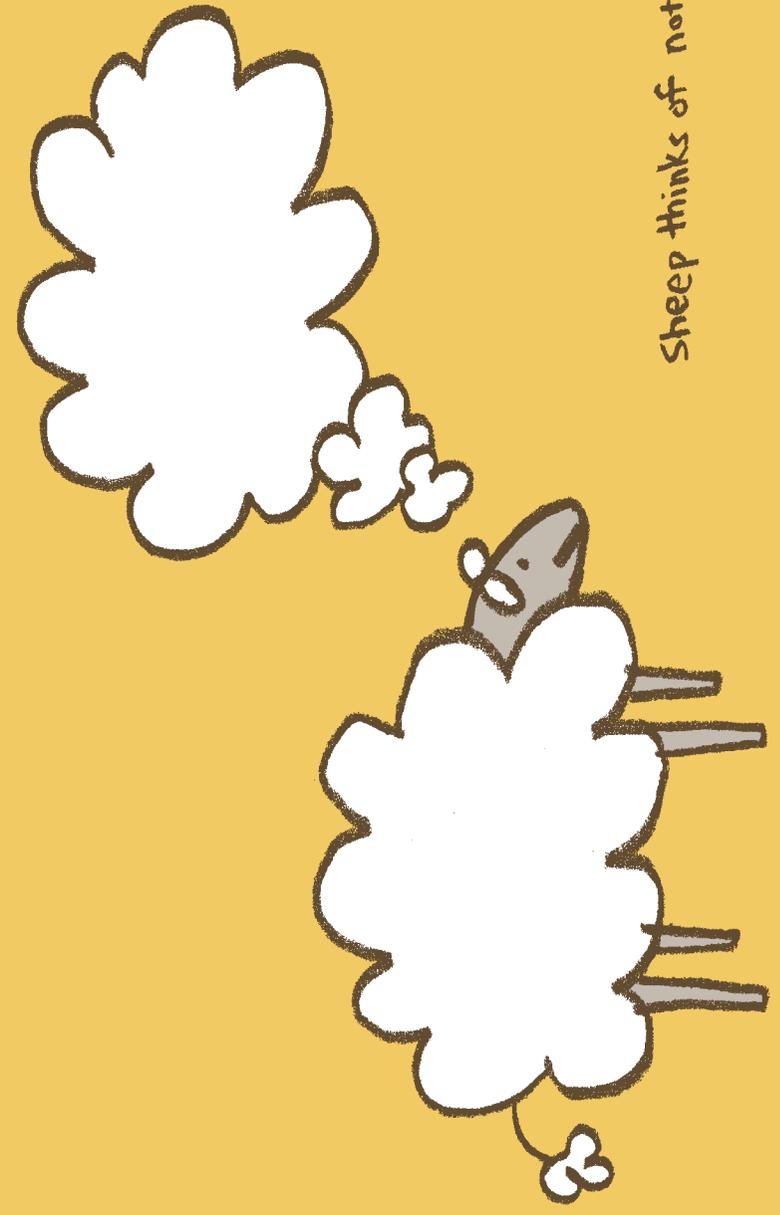
字







Ss



Sheep thinks of nothing but wool

Anatomy of a Snake

Ss



Woodpecker with osteoporosis



Ww

Fat vampire courts hemophiliacs

Vv



Zz



Zebra wears leopard print

*COME INSIDE, IT'S COZY* an exhibition

Over the last few years, the final resting place for most of my self-initiated design projects has been either a file on my computer or a shelf in my closet. Other than emailing images to a few friends and family members, I made no effort to publish or exhibit my work. The process was its own reward. But this February, I displayed my work for all the world (actually, it was just a few dozen people in Richmond and my parents) to see.

EXHIBITION POSTER (opposite)  
*An illustration of myself wallowing around inside of my head invited others to do the same. The attendance was moderate, so the appeal was perhaps mixed.*

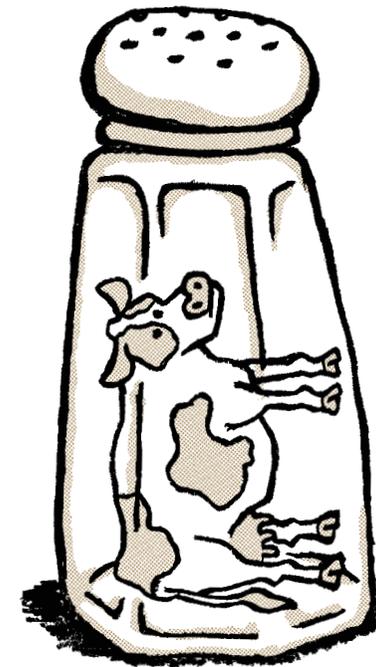
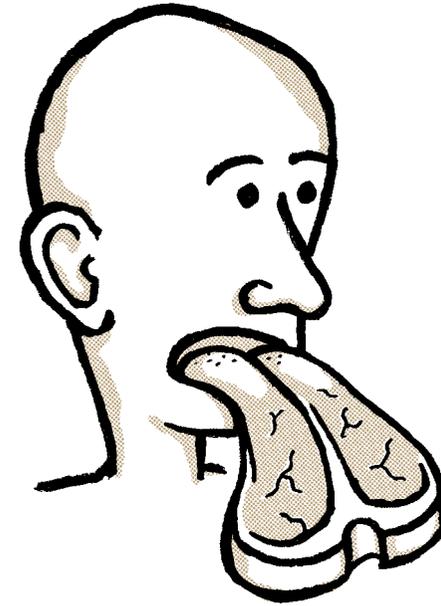


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*BEEF FLAVOR* two drawings

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While walking through a wooded park I found a piece of litter resembling a sugar packet, except that it was labeled BEEF FLAVOR. Unaware that beef flavor was not only a taste sensation but a physical object, I felt compelled to draw these two pictures. Inspiration is everywhere you look.



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INFLUENCES

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*Beef flavor*

*“WHEN YOU STOP  
LEARNING, YOU DIE.”*

Paul Sahre

## THIS IS ACTUALLY JUST THE BEGINNING.

Now that I have completed this series of creative projects, it is time to look ahead. It is also time to sleep longer nights, eat normalized meals and relearn a mindfulness of personal hygiene — while looking ahead. Where could this path of exploration possibly lead next?

### PUBLISHING

What is the potential for publishing self-initiated graphic design projects such as these? I.e., does anyone want to buy my books?

### WRITING

How can writing play a greater role in future projects? Can design writing be aligned more closely with creative writing?

### TEACHING

What are the potential teaching applications, specifically with regard to idea generation, creative methodologies and design authorship?

### DISSEMINATION

How might other graphic designers be encouraged to generate their own original content? What effect, if any, would this have on the field?

### PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Could this approach to graphic design have a professional application? Are there businesses that might benefit from sharing their personal narratives?

### SPARKS, SAUSAGES & PATHS

Keep generating, extruding and exploring. That's actually not a question, but an imperative.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY with annotations

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*So I should probably be honest: my creative project didn't really require much in the way of fact- or theory-focused research. My research, if I am allowed to call it that, is more of a broad-based gleaning of vague feelings, inspirational ideas, odd notions, cultural trends, societal interactions, political affairs, visual/verbal fragments and general et cetera from the world around me. Or something to that effect. Here are the sources that stand out in my memory:*

BIERUT, MICHAEL. *Seventy-nine Short Essays on Design*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.

*These essays present an array of subjects related (occasionally only tangentially) to graphic design. I appreciate his approach to writing, which manages to be simultaneously though-provoking and easily digestible.*

BLECHMAN, NICHOLAS, AND CRISTOPH NIEMANN. *100% Evil*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.

*Though I only discovered this book after I had nearly completed my A-Z project, it is an example of what I had been aspiring to: simple visual ideas and numerous variations on a single theme.*

BURTON, TIM. *Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*. New York: Rob Weisbach Books, 1997.

*It's pretty much what you would expect from a children's poetry book by Tim Burton. His work succeeds by being neither entirely adult nor child-like, but in an uncomfortable place in between.*

CHWAST, SEYMOUR. *The Push Pin Graphic*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004.

*Some of my favorite graphic design themes (self-initiation, authorship, big ideas) as realized by some of my favorite graphic designers (Seymour Chwast, Milton Glaser, et al.).*

DIDION, JOAN. *Where I Was From*. New York: Vintage International, 2003.

*Ruminations on her home state of California, its history and ethos. Full of thoughtful and richly layered arguments.*

EGGERS, DAVE. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

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FERRIS, JOSHUA. *Then We Came to the End, a Novel*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2007.

*A work of fiction about the daily life of working in an advertising agency.*

GILL, BOB. *Graphic Design as a Second Language*. Mulgrave: The Images Group, 2003.

*He's a "big idea" guy. The way Gill describes his thought process makes the resultant ideas seem so self-evident that I now call him "Badda Bing Bob." Problem? Badda Bing! Solution.*

HELFAND, JESSICA. "The Art of Thinking Through Making." *Design Observer*. 21 Apr. 2006. 4 Feb. 2008 <www.designobserver.com>.

*It's a short article, but one that I found reassuring for my design process.*

HELLER, STEVEN, AND GAIL ANDERSON. *Graphic Wit: The Art of Humor in Design*. Minneapolis: Watson-Guption Publications, Incorporated, 1991.

*A collection of (often not particularly) humorous design work (written about in a not particularly humorous way. Just joking. But seriously, a good look at the role wit can play in visual communication.*

JACOBS, A.J. *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004.

*A book written about the literal process of reading the entire Encyclopedia Britannica from start to finish in a somewhat figural quest for knowledge.*

KALMAN, MAIRA. *The Principles of Uncertainty*. New York: Penguin Press, 2007.

*A lovely and poetic little book. I found myself wanting to lend it to my mother — whatever that means.*

KIDD, CHIP. *The Cheese Monkeys. A Novel In Two Semesters*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

*A graphic designer who parlays his visual storytelling skills into verbal storytelling. Results: not half bad. One night, while my wife and I were on our honeymoon in NYC, we happened to sit next to Chip Kidd at Schiller's Liquor Bar. I apologized for interrupting his dinner and told him I was "a big fan." He was very nice.*

MYERSON, JEREMY. *Beware Wet Paint: Designs by Alan Fletcher*. London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1996.

*Just gobs and gobs of Alan Fletcher — it's big mess of a book that you can wade around in.*

NEW, JENNIFER. *Drawing From Life: the Journal as Art*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.

*A look at some (relatively) famous people's sketchbooks.*

PILKINGTON, KARL. *Happyslapped by a Jellyfish*. London: DK, 2007.

*I admire it when a person's personality is unique and engaging enough to become a saleable product.*

ROUMIEU, GRAHAM. *In Me Own Words*. San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2003.

*The nicely illustrated autobiography of Bigfoot's rise to and fall from fame.*

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SHRIGLEY, DAVID. *The Book of Shrigley*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005.

*Naive drawings and terse statements.*

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WALLACE, DAVID FOSTER. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1998.

*An amazing collection of essays.*

And so on and so forth.

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