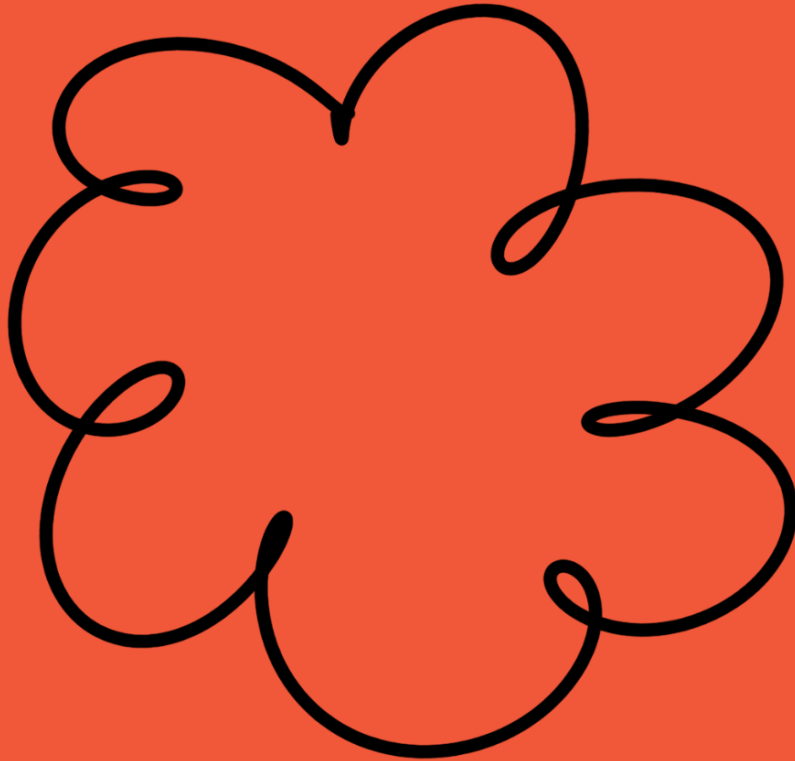


fonts
as
resistance





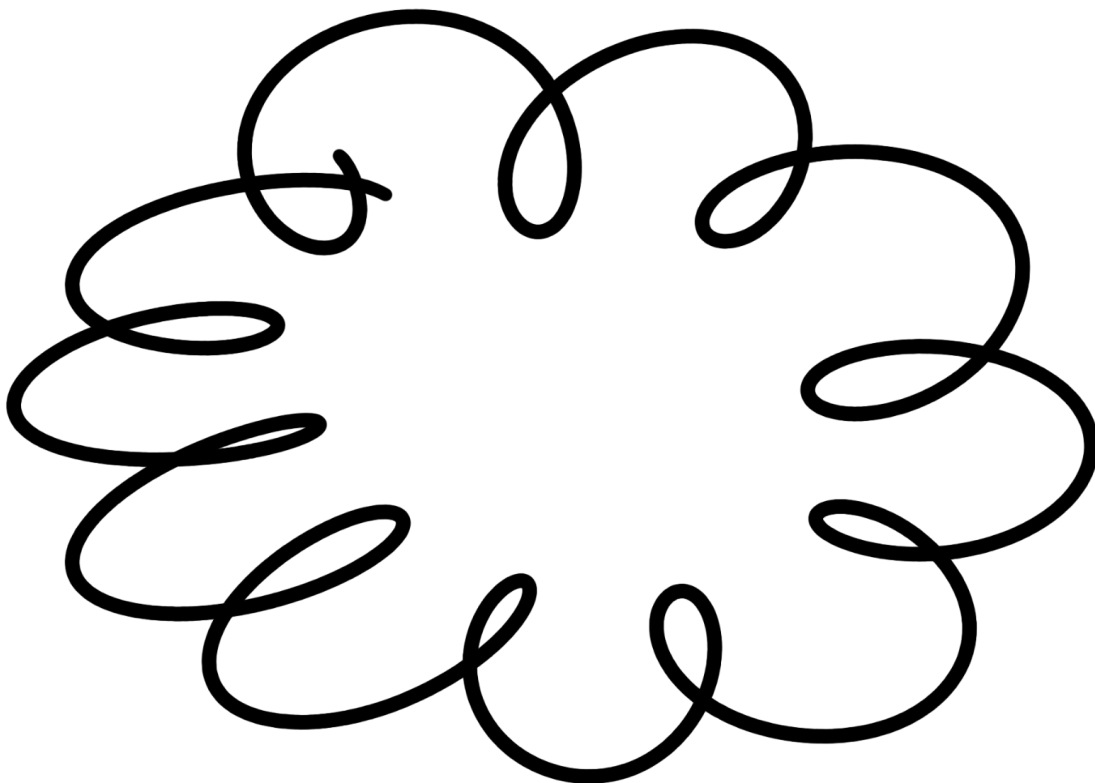
Welcome! This is a short research/thinking project based around the question: **how can typography be used as a form of activism?**

This project is structured as a series of questions, explorations, and case studies.

**WHAT DOES
A FONT HAVE
TO DO WITH
RESISTANCE?**

This is a question that's floating around in my mind for some time now. I've been fascinated with typography for years, and as someone who finds myself returning time and time again – in both classwork, design projects, and personal work – to issues of diversity and representation (*especially as a mixed-race woman*), the question feels a bit inevitable. At least once during every larger creative project, I end up at the same articles or websites about fonts and diversity, or fonts and decolonializing, or fonts and representation.

This is my attempt to put some structure into my thinking about this question, and to more actively explore the question about how fonts can be an intentional mode of resistance against oppressive structures.



Fonts, it turns out, have long been at the center of issues of colonialism and oppressive power structures. Part of this comes from their history; typesetting, historically, was mainly accessible to affluent men. Part of this comes from the fact that typefaces are usually developed on a client-based supply-and-demand model (Afshar), so they are implicitly entangled with capitalism. Part of it comes from the fact that the design industry – which includes typography – is 85% white (Seals). Part of this comes from the fact that Western design voices have determined what makes “good type design” and what languages and voices are taken seriously.

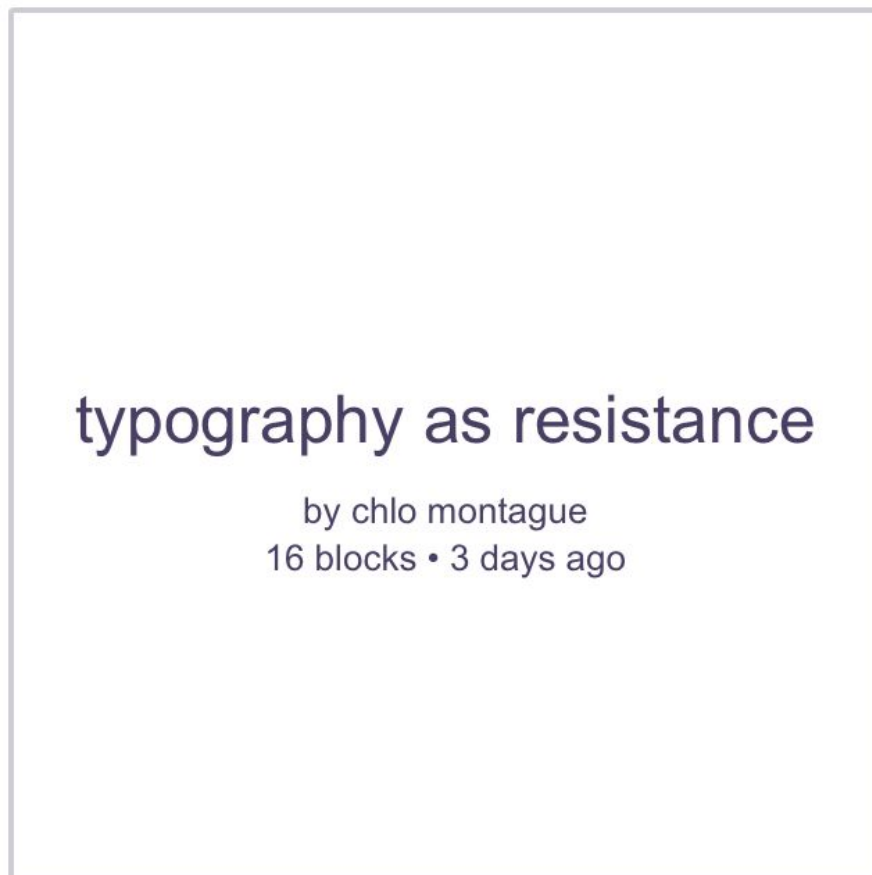
At the center of it is the fact that, as type researcher Ellen Lupton writes, “**typography is what language looks like.**” So typefaces get to decide how we interpret words and even what languages are represented. Our typography is a reflection of our society. They also provide structures for our ideas – how are ideas accommodated and contained by the type they are set in?

What I’ve found is that a conversation about fonts opens a much larger conversation about all sorts of issues. In talking about fonts as resistance, we implicitly begin to think harder about societal norms, colonialist thought structures, and issues of representation. And so while I initially imagined this as a conversation about fonts, it now seems to have become a conversation about the world into which fonts are merely the door.

In thinking about this, I've come across countless resources for thinking about typography and activism. I've collected them, including the ones I wasn't able to get to in this project, on this Are.na board (Are.na is one of my favorite research & visual platforms):

<https://www.are.na/chlo-montague/typography-as-resistance>

This board is a sort of resource hub for this project.



A note on the format of this project:

I've decided to format this as a Google Slides-based zine so that the images are clickable and so that it is more open-access.

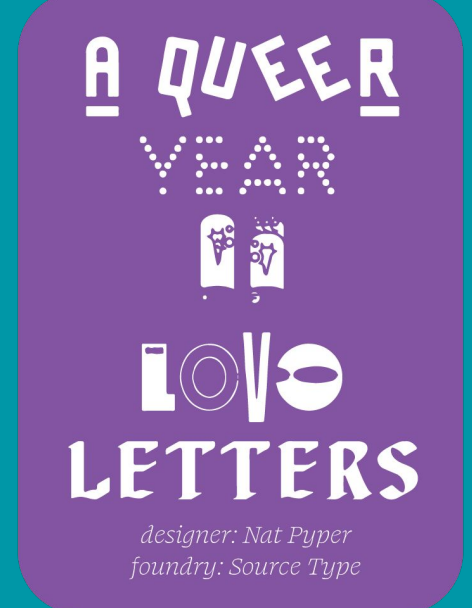
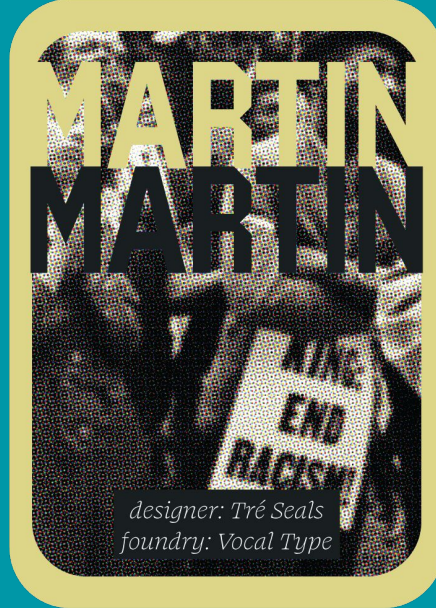
Though I considered (in the spirit of anti-structural-systems) not having a style guide, the majority of questions are set in Martin by Vocal Type (more about this font later). The copy is set in Nunito (designed specifically for open access) and Azeret Mono, which draws on 90s operating systems. In all transparency, I chose these fonts because I liked how they looked – not because they represent fonts as resistance.

This is a mix of typed and handwritten content. Some of the handwritten content is in the form of mind maps. In each section, I'll add to the map. **Red text** indicates the most recent contribution.

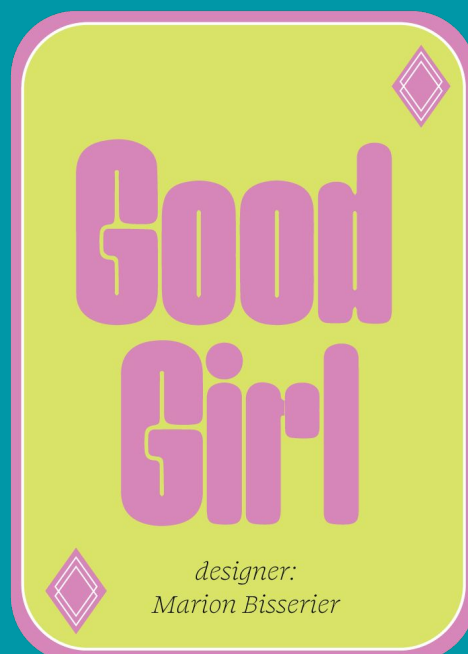
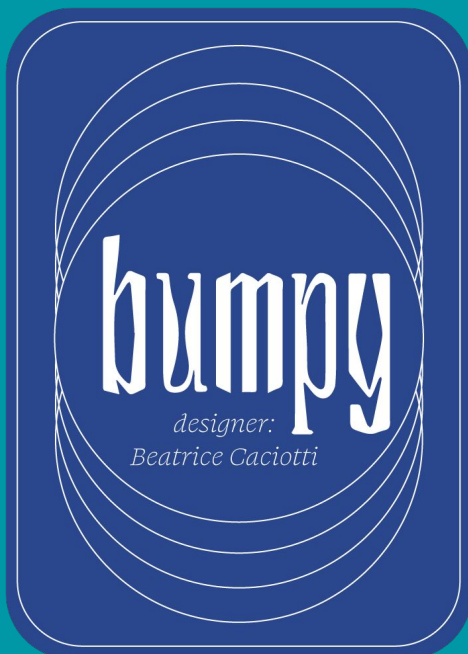
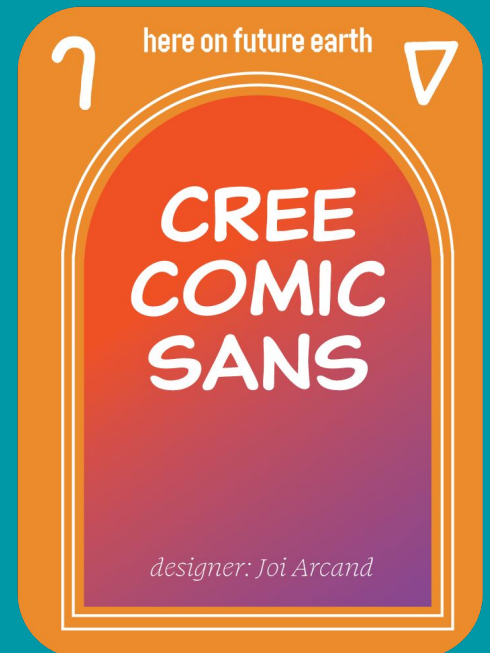
Mixed with my own research and thoughts on the topic is a series of case studies – fonts I've found that speak well to certain issues of typefaces and resistance.

On the next page is a summary of these case studies, and you can click on any one that sparks your interest if you'd prefer to navigate directly to those. Otherwise, just keep reading!

Case studies



These are the font case studies I will be looking at throughout this project! They speak to different aspects of using fonts as resistance.



Initial thoughts //

ELLEN LUTTON / TYPOGRAPHIC BINARY

italic vs ROMAN
 ↓
 conserve space / cheaper ↓ norm

↳ "is it a mere shadow of its roman master, or does it assert its own unique personality"

"OBLIQUE"

"NORM" → we always need to be critical of norms

READING LANGUAGE X READING BODIES

"serif & sans serif typefaces exist on a spectrum"

"patriarchy of the vertical"

BLACK VS WHITE BINARY

★ "hunger for contrast" ★ p67

THE SERIF

typography is MARINATING in binaries

"stems & strokes that swell, bend, pucker or flair resist neat binary categories"

ASPIRATIONAL
ATEMPORAL

Typeface case studies

STONEWARE SP

CHARVET

GLYPH WORLD

↳ but is this enough?
 ↳ what does this have to do w/ human handwriting vs machine typesetting?

cursive/pretty fonts relegated to "display" / "decorative"

↳ dismissed

first, let's talk typefaces
 p965 ↳ strokes fluid & relaxed
 ↳ how are ideas accommodated in letterforms?

a typeface to depict mania / bipolar? experience
 ↳ PARDON 4x4

typography that is ornamental & specific to what it is conveying resist "modernist, classical, eurocentric canons."

TYPE AS RESISTANCE

typeface * faces imply diversity personality expression

font designed based on tree patterns?

deliberately some hand-written pages

Typography is what language looks like
 - Lutton

How can typing words be an act of resistance?
 How can typing be an act of remembering?
 Since typing/writing/thinking are active processes, how can typefaces contribute to this?

your handwriting changes based on mood

make visible language in danger of disappearing

A series of Qs to ask

geometric → can be a cultural aesthetic

reclaiming ownership of language

"Typography is designing a tool for others to use"

★ allow ppl to be creative

↳ "THE MASTER'S TOOLS WILL NEVER DISMANTLE THE MASTER'S HOUSE" ANDERSON

I started my research for this project with Vocal Type, a typeface foundry founded by black designer Tré Seals. I think that representation is a good place to launch into the conversation about fonts and resistance.

I read [this article](#) for the first time back in 2019, and it changed everything for me.

AOGA Eye on Design

DESIGN + DIVERSITY

Typography as a Radical Act in an Industry Ever- dominated by White Men

Tré Seals founded Vocal Type to tell the
untold stories in typography

Words by
Silas Munro

Published on
August 26th, 2019

Letterforms are loaded cultural objects—they often reflect the people who made them and the story they want to tell. In the history of type, not every story gets told, though, and Tré Seals wants to change that.

Seals started a type foundry called Vocal Type with the aim of creating typefaces that reflect a more diverse perspective. In his words: “This is a type foundry for creatives of color who feel they don’t have a say in their industry. This is for the creative women who feel they don’t have a say in their industry. This is for the creative who is tired of being ‘inspired’ by the same creations from different people and wondering why.”

Seals' work specifically addresses the lack of Black and other racially marginalized designers in the field (he cites the design industry as 85% white). Representation in type design is important, not just for creating space for marginalized designers, but also because fonts are cultural objects – and so diversifying the voices creating them diversifies the stories being told and even diversifies the thought and creations that come out of them.

Seals writes on his website:

When a singular perspective dominates an industry, regardless of technological advancements, there can (and has been) only one way of thinking, teaching, and creating. This lack of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender has led to a lack of diversity in thought, systems (like education), ideas, and, most importantly, creations.

**HOW CAN WE
INCREASE
REPRESENTATION
THROUGH TYPE?**



How do you represent diverse experiences and histories through typography?

Vocal Type's approach is to, as worded in that AIGA article, "take inspiration from typographic ephemera created for and by historical visionaries of color" (Munro).

Seals writes on the Vocal Type website: "Each typeface highlights a piece of history from a specific underrepresented race, ethnicity, or gender—from the Women's Suffrage Movement in Argentina to the Civil Rights Movement in America."

This is significant considering that most typefaces are created on a commission basis, and so often reflect the values of the company paying for them. In contrast, Vocal Type's typefaces reflect the values of communities, of dissenting voices, of people.

Also, making the active choice to support designers of color – it does make a dent in the larger structural and representation issues of the industry.

HOW CAN WE USE
TYPE AS RESISTANCE?



Supporting marginalized
type design voices

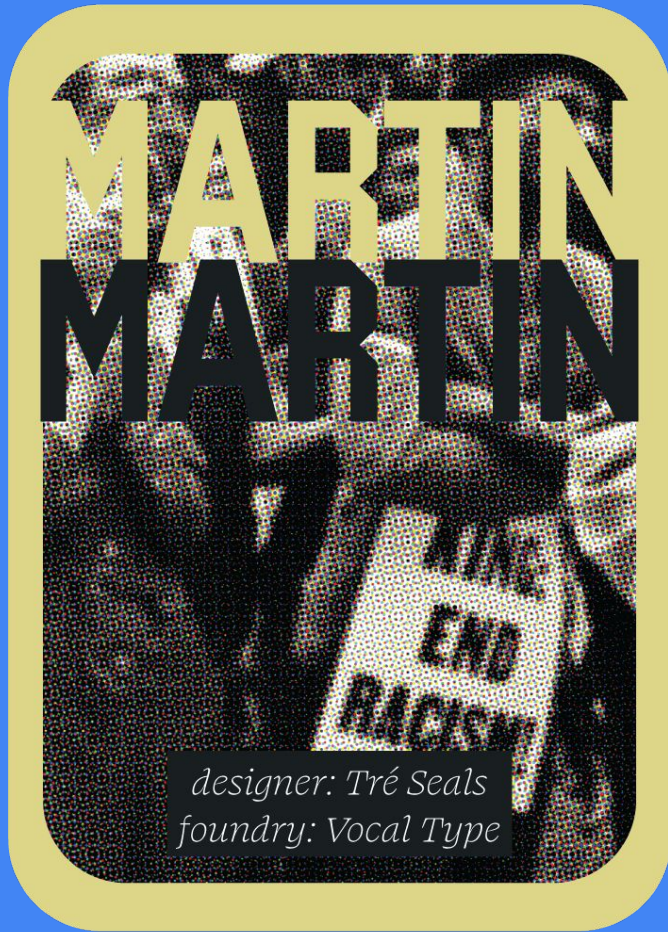
creates
space &
careers

diversifies stories
being told & voices
represented

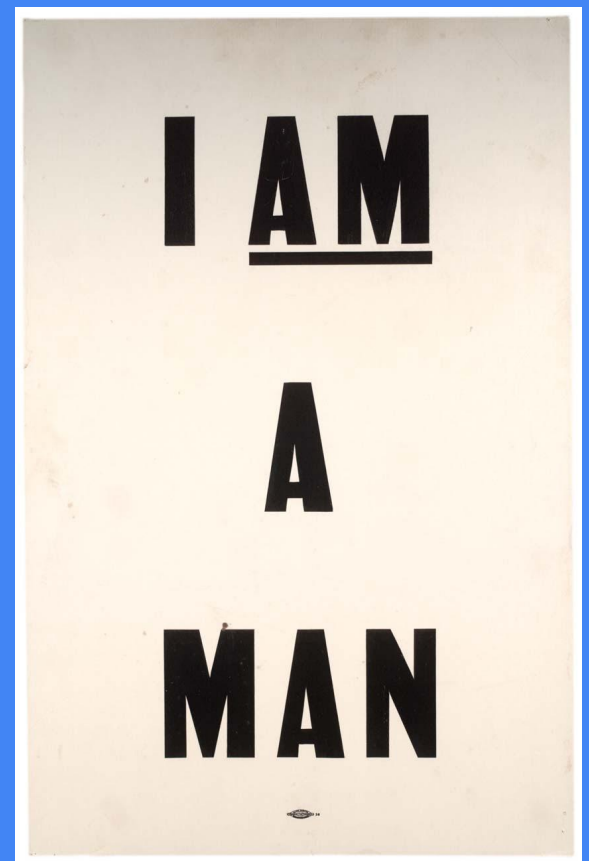
leads to diversity
of thought &
creations

(typefaces are
cultural objects)

CASE STUDY 01



One of Vocal Type's fonts (and my personal favorite) is Martin, named after Martin Luther King Jr. and based on Civil Rights Movement posters.



**HOW CAN
TYPING BE
AN ACT OF
REMEM
BERING?**

MARTIN, Vocal Type



Fonts historically associated with grassroots activist movements //

What does it mean to repurpose these fonts for modern usage?



Images:

"Girls Are Powerful," 1979, See Red Women's Workshop (a London-based women's collective)

Justicia Social en Mexico by Roberto Hinojosa, Segundo Congreso de Estudiantes Socialistas de Mexico, Mexico, 1935, via [Twitter](#).

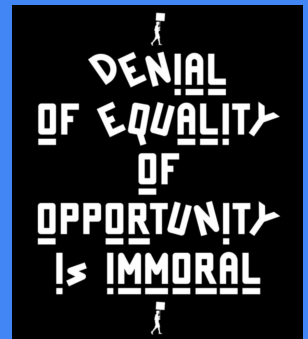
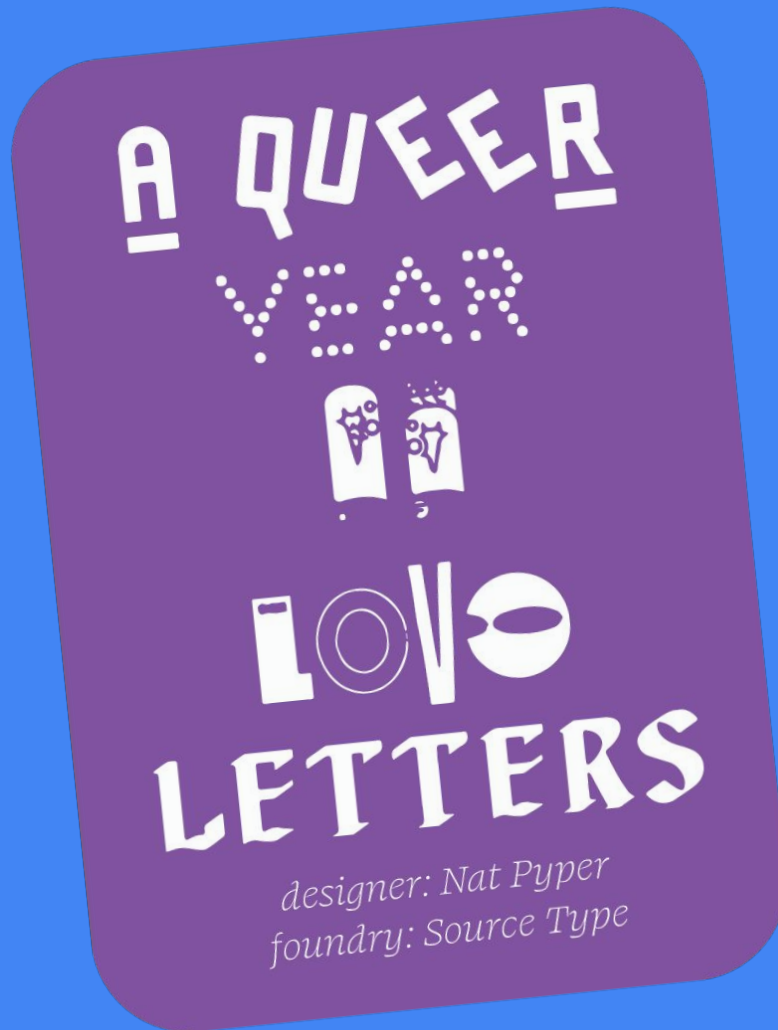
Women's demonstration in Buenos Aires in front of the National Congress by law for universal suffrage, 1947, via Wikimedia.

"March on Washington," Bayard Rustin and Cleveland Robinson, 1963, via [Wikimedia](#).

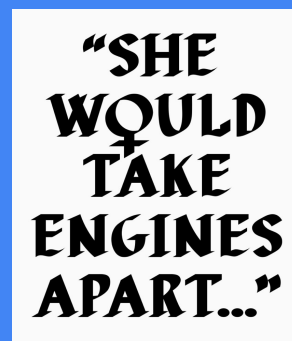
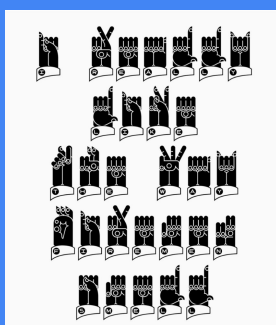
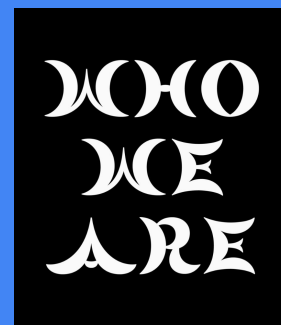
"Unite For Women's Liberation,"

"Viva La Mujer," [Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes](#), 2018.

In searching for protest posters, I came across this font commissioned by Library Stack, an archive for art, design, & theory projects:



It includes seven fonts by designer Nat Pyper. The fonts “remember the lives and work of “countercultural queers of the past several decades.”



For instance, [“Women’s Car Repair Collective.”](#) which is a font based on a 1970s initiative by the Lesbian Alliance of St. Louis, Missouri.

“SHE
WOULD
♀
TAKE
ENGINES
APART...”

Women's Car Repair Collective

A Queer Year of Love Letters

AUTHOR: Nat Pyper

REFERENCE: Women's Car Repair Collective

COMMISSIONERS: Counterpublic Triennial, Library Stack

PUBLISHER: Nat Pyper, 2020

LICENSE: SIL Open Font License (OFL)

The WOMEN’S CAR REPAIR COLLECTIVE was one of several initiatives organized by the Lesbian Alliance of St. Louis, Missouri, in the early 1970s. The collective was a “service by and for women” that offered repairs of foreign and American cars, workshops, and rentals of garage space, books, and tools. The Lesbian Alliance, formed in 1972, also opened a coffee house, offered counseling and legal services, and published a lesbian-feminist newsletter called MOONSTORM through their imprint Tiamat Press. In a 1973 issue of the local independent radical newspaper THE BRIDGE, the collective wrote that “we must create our own lesbian-identified structures.”

This font is based on the handwritten lettering featured on a flyer advertising the Women’s Car Repair Collective. The lowercase alphabet repurposes the Venus symbol used in an early title treatment of MOONSTORM. Gaps in the alphabet were filled by emulating existing forms as needed. This font was originally commissioned for use by the 2019 Counterpublic Triennial in St. Louis. It was completed in 2020 with the support of Library Stack. It is the fourth font in a Queer Year of Love Letters.

Here is the letter introducing the font, written by the designer, Nat Pyper:

Dear writer,

A Queer Year of Love Letters is a series of fonts that remembers the lives and work of countercultural queers of the past several decades. The series aims to make the act of remembering these overlooked and illegitimate histories accessible to other people, as easy as typing. Better yet: it aims to make the act of typing an act of remembering. That these fonts might be considered typefaces is incidental. They are an attempt to improvise a clandestine lineage, an aspatial and atemporal kind of queer kinship, through the act of writing.

!! →

"KINSHIP THROUGH WRITING"

I began making these fonts in order to rapidly document and disseminate the work and ideas that they cite. I pack these histories, or part of them, into fonts for a couple of reasons. First, font files are durable. OpenType fonts (.OTFs) have persisted in their ubiquity since the late '90s and maintain their utility as a nimble and reliable format. Second, fonts have the capacity to contain a hefty amount of information within a tiny package. In under 100 kilobytes, an entire alphabet! In the font's metadata, a manifesto! Fonts then function as a useful format for ferrying information from one place to another.

→ TROJAN HORSE FOR IDEAS & ACTIVISM?

I am using these fonts as time machines. These machines take me back—to Robert Ford and Black gay and lesbian underground publishing in early 1990s Chicago; to the Lesbian Alliance, a socialist-feminist enclave in 1970s St. Louis, Missouri; to G.B. Jones and queer punk filmmaking in 1980s downtown Toronto—but they also take me forward to unknown futures through the act of writing itself. In use, these fonts engage the past as a provocation. They engage the past as a verb.

Is this romantic? Yes.

Love,
Nat

→ the VERB as active, agency-granting, anti-colonialist

{ "Make the act of TYPING an act of REMEMBERING" }

SMASH
GAY OPPRESSION
COME OUT!
THE SISTERS

Feeld is proud to announce the release of Stonewall 50, a free typeface commemorating the 50th anniversary of Pride and the Stonewall uprising.

HERS OF THE
GAY
LIBERATION



There's also Stonewall 50 (free and open-source!), which commemorates the Stonewall Uprising. The font "aims to make an impactful contribution to LGBTQI+ visual culture" and "encourage action where inequality and oppression still exist." The font randomly generates one of three possible letterforms each time you type a letter, making it slightly different each time – a tribute to individual expression (Feeld.co).

HOW CAN WE USE TYPE AS RESISTANCE?



Supporting marginalized type design voices

creates space & careers



leads to diversity of thought & creations

diversifies stories being told & voices represented

(typefaces are cultural objects)



create & use fonts to commemorate radical movements & people

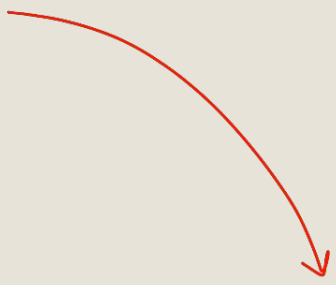


"engage the past as a verb"

foster "kinship through writing & design"

encourage action & uplift activist communities

change & contribute to visual culture



**HOW CAN A FONT
RECLAIM
MARGINALIZED
LANGUAGES?**

The issue of representing marginalized histories through fonts gets into another issue: representing marginalized languages.

The typography industry is overwhelmingly obsessed with Latin scripts, leaving other scripts behind.

When you do a Google search for “decolonizing typography,” most of what you come across has to do with increasing access to non-Latin scripts, like this article:

SAHAR AFSHAR
THROUGH THE TYPOGRAPHIC LOOKING
GLASS: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT
OF “DECENTRALIZING” TYPE
PUBLISHED 08/04/2018

When we talk about “decentralizing” type, what do we define as the center? Type designer Sahar Afshar challenges the notion that Western innovation and education form the “center” of the type industry, while the rest of the world subsists in a “margin” whose only function is to consume the knowledge and technology generated by the West.

So decentralizing = questioning what occupies the “center” of the industry and bringing the marginalized into the center.

WHAT IS MULTI-SCRIPT TYPOGRAPHY & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

There's also multi-script typography, which is typography that supports a variety of languages under a single typeface. A well-known example is the Google [Noto Sans](#) project, which aims to support as many global languages as possible.

I've pasted this blurb from [this research project](#) based on multi-script typography:

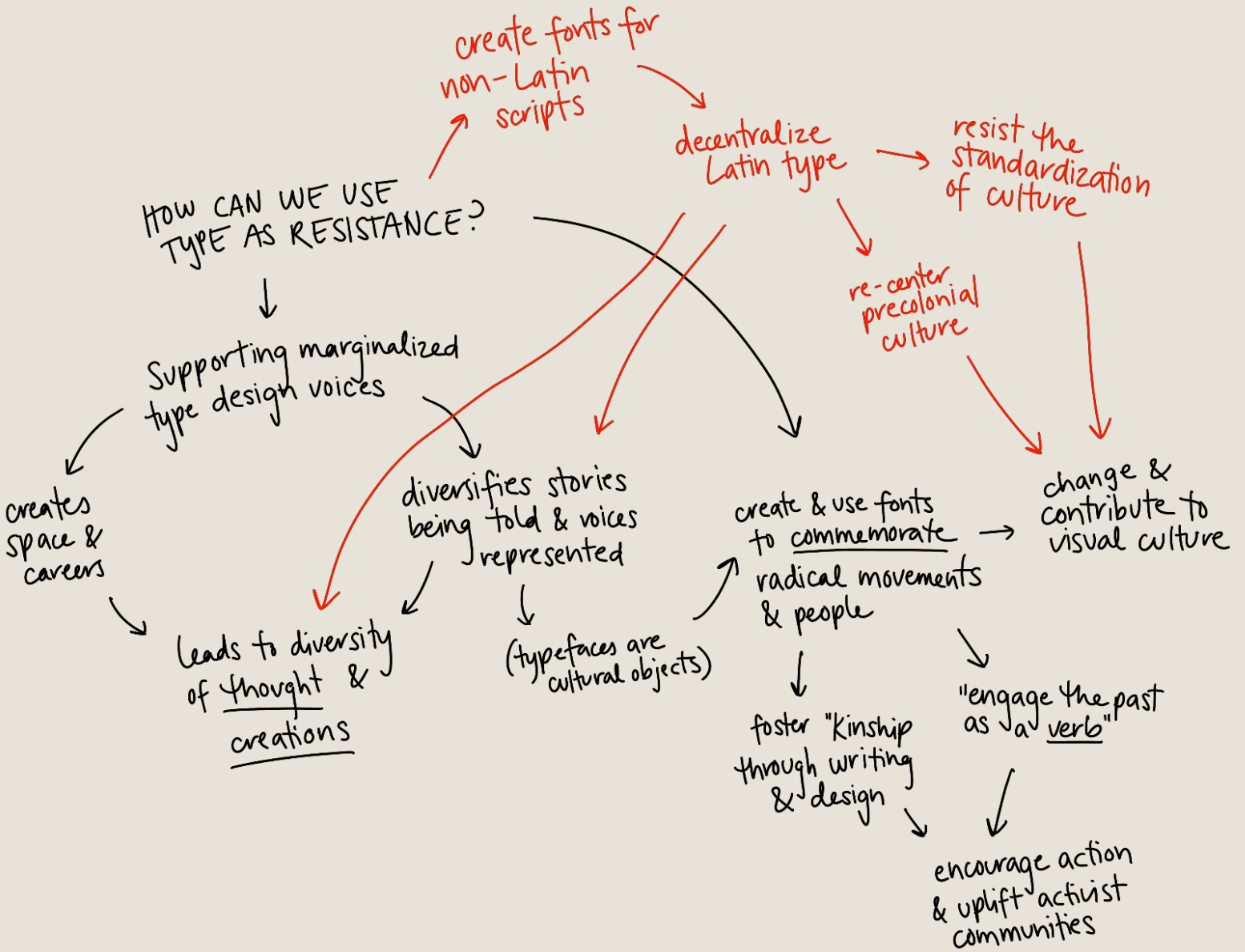
Multi scripts - Blended type family stories

LISA HUANG 黄丽莎, GARINE GOKCEYAN, LORAINÉ FURTER, NAÏMA BEN AYED.
ÉMILIE AURAT

The process of globalization in a post-colonial reality tends to generate uniformity at numerous levels. It standardizes cultures, ways of thinking and ways of seeing. As a central visual interface to culture, scripts — the visual representations of languages — are subject to this process. Latin, a globally successful script, has an outsize influence on the way languages are shaped and used, and its colonial heritage is reflected in its cultural and technological hegemony on a global scale. From the **keyboards we type on**, the way computers and (smart)phones **encode characters**, the way we **transliterate languages** (using another script to transcribe a language), the Latin script is always in the position of being the *default* in the different tools that shape communication today.

The hegemony of the Latin script influences the way letterforms of different writing systems are shaped and designed. In the world of typography, multilingualism often means having to deal with more than one script, and the term multi-script is used for typographic designs that contain several writing systems. The tools, trends, pedagogies and technologies that accompany the practice of type design are often based on placing the Latin script at the top of the ladder.

HOW CAN WE USE TYPE AS RESISTANCE?



In thinking about de-centralizing and de-standardizing, we get into an important term: **decolonization**.

**WHAT DOES
IT MEAN TO
DECOLONIZE
TYPOGRAPHY?**

Revolutionary type: Meet the designer decolonizing Chinese fonts

Julius Hui, who has done custom work for companies like Tencent, wants to radically rethink Chinese fonts.

Hui said that the point of the project is not just an exercise in aesthetics, but an attempt to “decolonize” Chinese type. He intends to take it back to its roots before the influence of Japanese designers, and to free it from the cultural gravity of the mainland, where even typefaces come under the purview of the state. His research and dedication to the history of Chinese typography is, improbably, a revolutionary act. “I think all typefaces should have a ‘traditional Chinese feel,’” Hui said. “I want my type foundry to be one that spreads this, so that it’s clearer for everyone what Chinese culture’s roots are.”

Decolonizing typography: creating a font for Afrikan writing systems



Tapiwanashe Sebastian Garikayi
April 12, 2022

I've been tentative so far to overuse this word because it's become a bit of a buzzword, and I think it's easy to toss around without having a full understanding of what it entails.

When it comes to design, decolonization is an important thing to think about. This AIGA article points out that it's important to distinguish between diversifying and decolonizing; decolonizing is structural. It means changing how we think.

The thing is, design has, historically, been a powerful actor in colonizing projects. So decolonizing design is absolutely necessary.

These are the main questions that come to me when thinking about decolonizing typography:

How can we create fonts that challenge western design principles?

How can we shift our thinking to stop “othering” non-Latin scripts and type aesthetics?

How can we resist what western design has deemed “good” and “ugly” and instead design for *people*?

How can we recenter typographical practice in indigenous language systems?

Speculative work has a role to play in this too. I came across this project, “Here on Future Earth,” in which designer [Joi Arcand](#) imagines a fictional landscape in which the indigenous Cree language, which is spoken by 117,000 people in Canada, populates storefronts and billboards on what is historically Indigenous land. Arcand used a font she had developed, [Cree Comic Sans](#). The project is “a way of making more visible a language in danger of disappearing” ([AIGA](#)).



CREE COMIC SANS

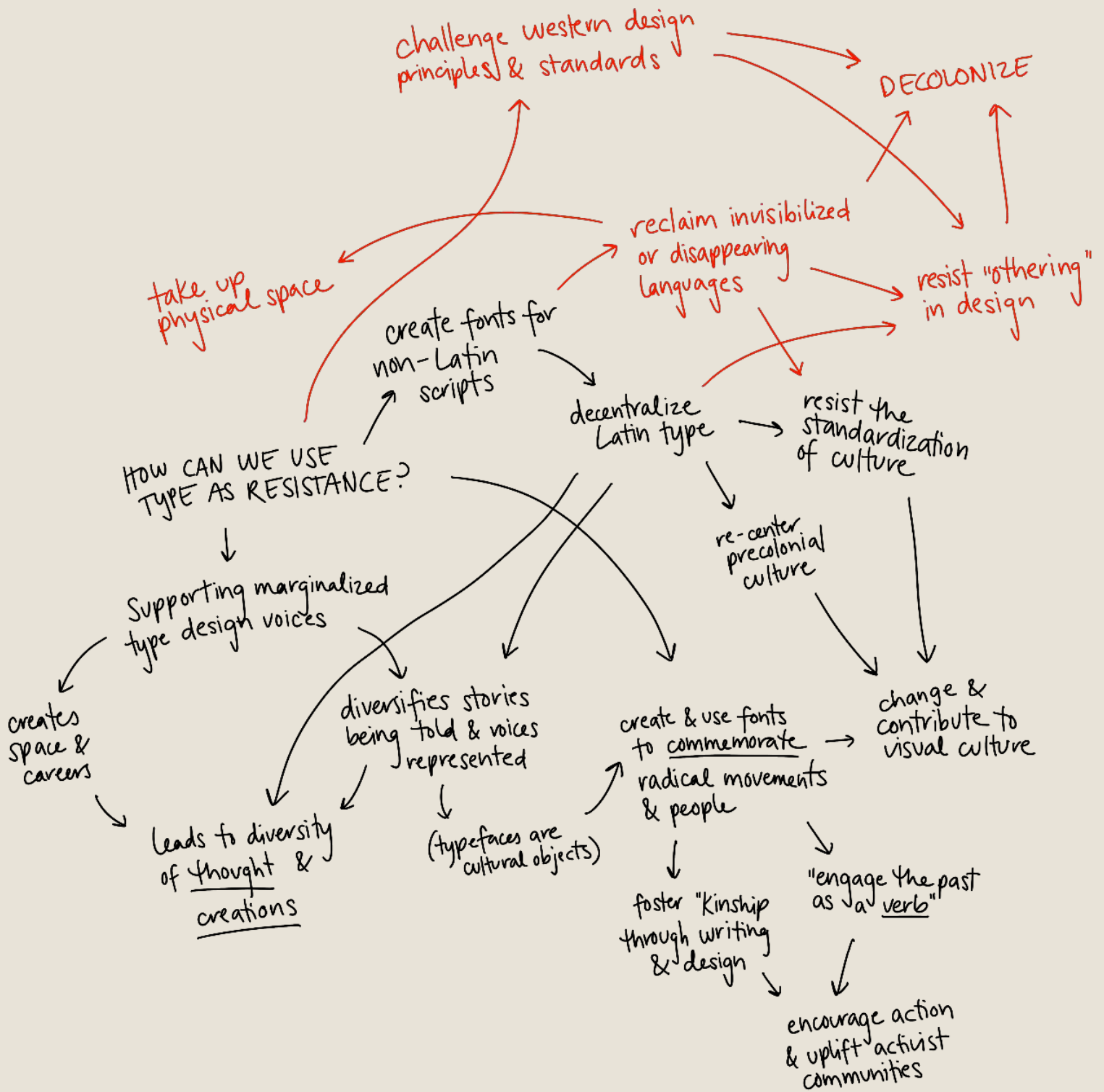
	ē	i	ī	o	ō	a	ā	
	▽	△	△̇	▷	▷̇	◁	◁̇	finals
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p	V	Λ	Λ̇	>	>	<	<	ı
t	U	∩	∩̇	∩	∩̇	C	Ċ	˘
k	q	p	ṗ	d	ḋ	b	ḃ	˘
c	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	-
m	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	c
n	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ
s	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ
y	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	ᑭ	ᑭ̇	+
	ξ	r	ᑭ	k(w)ē	ᑭ	h"	hk	x

This, to me, seems a powerful case study in decolonizing. There is power in enabling the language to take up physical space. And the fact that it’s speculative, for me, doesn’t detract from it. By seeing an indigenous language in places where we normally see Latin script, the script takes up space in our minds and in our understanding of what the built world *can* and *should* look like. It also helps reclaim a language that is disappearing due to colonization and globalization.



Good article/critique on *Here On Future Earth*

<https://canadianart.ca/features/optics-language-joi-t-arcand-looks-words/>



**HOW CAN A
FONT
CHALLENGE
WESTERN
DESIGN
PRINCIPLES?**

Though it's easy to say phrases like "challenge western design standards," the practical meaning of this seemed a bit elusive. When I think of "western design norms," what comes to me are things I've read about, for instance, the grid, or linear perspective, or "good" design determined by modernist movements – stuff I'd learned in design history classes. But what does this mean for typography?

This topic took a *lot* of time to research, in part because western design thinking is so wide-reaching. What “western design standards” all seemed to boil down to was the concept of *binaries*.

Binary thinking, as we know, is central to how colonization and oppressive thought structures work. inside/outside, white/black, good/bad, “us”/“them,” human/animal, intellect/bodily... the list goes on.

What binaries do that is problematic is that they file everything into *neat thought structures* that implant themselves deep in our collective thinking, and can then be intentionally or unintentionally be used as justification for oppression.

Since binaries are so infused into western thinking, it makes sense that binaries are baked into the very fabric of how western typography works. In “Extra Bold,” I read about, for instance, the “patriarchy of the vertical” – the hierarchy implied in capital versus lowercase letters. (bell hooks comes to mind.) And I read about how western type standards ignore the fact that all typography exists on a spectrum. Instead, it attempts to file it into neat categories: serif/sans serif, decorative/display.

These categories become problematic when, in the case of decorative fonts, for instance, expressive or culturally significant fonts are othered and get relegated as “lesser than.”

And it is problematic because it means we’re not questioning how we can design outside of these neat thought structures.

So what emerged is that a central aspect of using typography as resistance is **creating fonts that resist binaries.**

HOW CAN A FONT RESIST BINARIES?

Some of the typographic binaries I've come across:

feminine/masculine

- We have been conditioned to perceive delicate, decorative, thin-stroked letterforms as more “feminine” and bold, heavy, space-occupying fonts as more “masculine.”

serif/sans serif

- Serifs exist on a spectrum; they are, as Lupton writes, “an elusive thing.” They are also a Western invention. The issue isn't the serifs themselves, but how we categorize them.

roman/italic

- Like with serifs, roman and italic scripts exist on a spectrum. And italics are a fairly recent invention. But now, italics are used, for instance, to designate a “foreign” word.

decorative/display

- One of the effects of Western design on typography has been to relegate “decorative” fonts as “lesser than.” Ornamentation is a central principle of much of non-Western design.

uppercase/lowercase

- There is power that comes from capitalizing a word (bell hooks recognized this))

Shivani Parasnis, designer of the font used for the book *Extra Bold*, writes: “Just like binaries related to gender, traditional type design showcases a set of either/or binaries, like roman/italic or serif/sans serif. The preference for vertical stress is very Western.”

how are gender norms and stereotypes reproduced through typography?

"feminine" typeface stereotypes

ornamentation (display fonts) &
light
weakness/fragility

"masculine" typeface stereotypes

unornamented
/ "no-nonsense"
heavier strokes
dark, robust, bold

... "if we're not careful with our font usage, a font can reinforce the concept of a strict gender binary."
(Caciotti)



Bumpy was developed out of research “focused on the relationship between gender stereotypes and typefaces.” It “reclaims nonbinary space” by rejecting traditional feminine/masculine binaries within type; its glyphs are gender-neutral and adjustable, giving the user the power to design outside of gender binaries and *occupy the space between them*. It shows us how **typography can be radical** & on the front lines of changing the way people think about gender norms.

- Variable font: adjustable between 300-700 (fluid and rigid)
- Doesn't just flip the formal attributes associated with gender
- Doesn't reproduce and reinforce gender binaries



What does "gender-neutral glyph" mean?

(A font that doesn't reinforce & reproduce gendered binaries)

doesn't just flip the formal attributes (that only perpetuates the feminine/masculine binary)

typography can be radical

gives the designer AGENCY & literally creates new spaces

TOGETHER they form a variable font that can be adjusted with values between 300-700.

300/"Fluid" contains flowy, "unexpected shapes" & is nonconforming

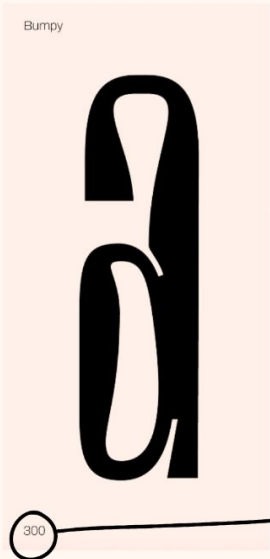
condensed

700/"Rigid" is condensed & geometric to reflect "external pressure" of societal norms

(what is the effect on the viewer?)

SOURCES

- 1 Beatricecaciotti.com
- 2 It's Nice That





Described as “Typography’s retort to manspreading,” Good Girl demonstrates the power of taking up page space. It also draws on Guerilla Girls fonts and, with its heavy stroke, challenges our idea of a “feminine” typeface. “Good Girl,” according to Bissier, “addresses the issue of female visibility within the field by exploring the occupation of space both in typographic form and political expression.”





Another way of resisting the neat filing system of binaries is by making things messy. Complicated, entangled, non-simplistic... the way the world actually is.





This is Glyph World.

Glyph World is made of nine different “landscapes,” all of which work together to form a typeface that is variable and expressionist.

FOREST	
MEADON	
FLOWER	
MOUNTAIN	
AirLand	
ANIMAL SOUL	
GLACIER	
DESERT	
WATERLAND	

This is what Lupton writes about how this typeface resists binaries:

“Systems of typeface classification often banish decorative display faces and cursive scripts to a catch-all anticategory such as “decorative” or “display.” ... today, many type designers are exploring irregular proportions, flaring strokes, horizontal stresses, and ambiguous stroke endings. These designs embrace typography’s ornamental history rather than its modernist, classical, and Eurocentric canons.”

“Glyph World rejects oppositions such as roman/italic, serif/sans serif, uppercase/lowercase, and bold/light in favor of a *weird and open landscape of ideas*. The fonts of Glyph World cohabit and coexist without obediently conforming to a master set of rules or *filling in spaces on a grid*.” (Ellen Lupton 70).

A WEIRD AND *OPEN* LANDSCAPE OF IDEAS

What effect do fonts have on ideas and creations?

How can we repopulate our built landscape with type that embraces weirdness and supports, rather than represses, radical ideas?



This conversation about “irregular proportions, flaring strokes, horizontal stresses, and ambiguous stroke endings” and typography’s ornamental history got me thinking about JOY.

Parasnis, in describing the font she designed, writes, “while some letters are reverse-stressed, some appear monoline and others have a more standard vertical stress. Playful counters and absurd anatomies resonate throughout the font.”

It seems like the best way to push against binaries within a font — like vertical stress, roman/italic, and serif/sans serif — is to ***emphasize playfulness and joy*** in the design process.

Is it possible that having fun and ignoring the rules is one of the most powerful forms of resistance against colonialism?

**CAN
RECENTERING
JOY
AS A DESIGN
PRINCIPLE
BE A FORM OF
RESISTANCE?**

YES. I came across this (non-type-related) course:



The instructor writes:

“In this course, we will explore the concept of joy as a powerful facet of anticolonial struggle through an engagement with works in art, literature, and music.”

Some examples of the modules/content:

Week 2 – November 12 2020

Decoloniality, Playfulness, Knowledge, and World-Traveling.

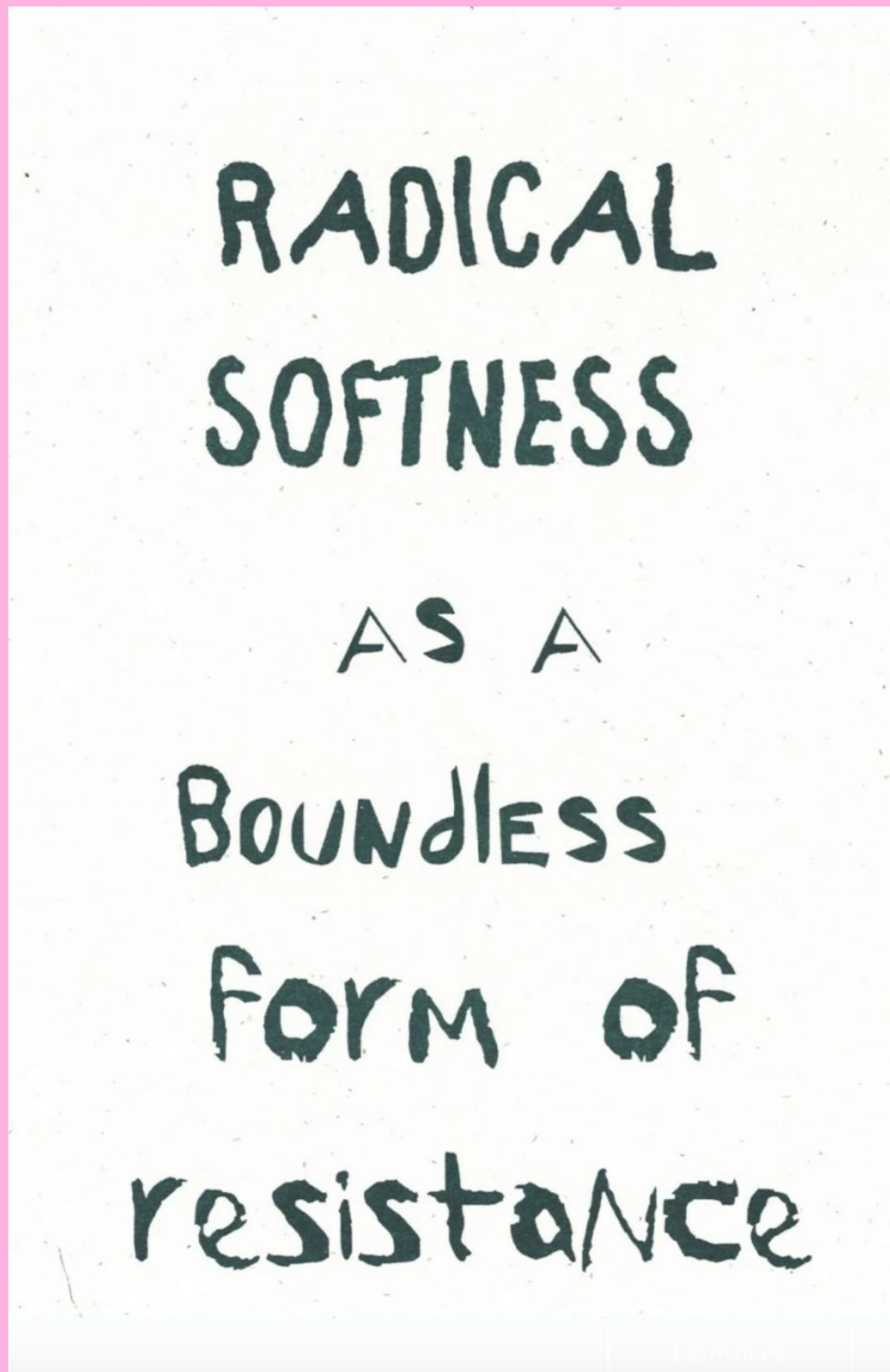
Introduction to decolonial thinking. Emotion in research; playfulness and context; history, knowledge, and narrative.

Week 7 – December 17 2020

Module II | Body/Movement | Rehearsing Revolution and the Joy of Not Giving A F*ck

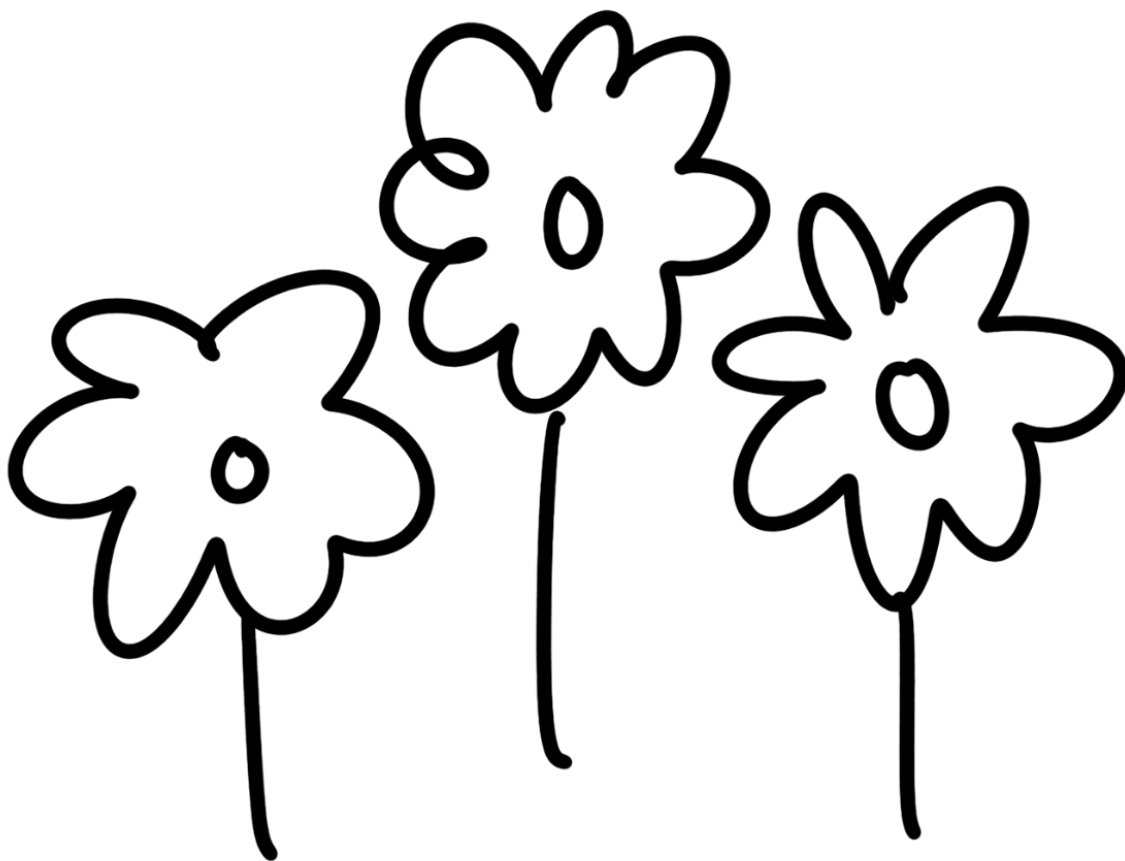
Non-normative bodies, movement, architecture; interstitial spaces and the body as archive; protests as dance and the making of futurities.

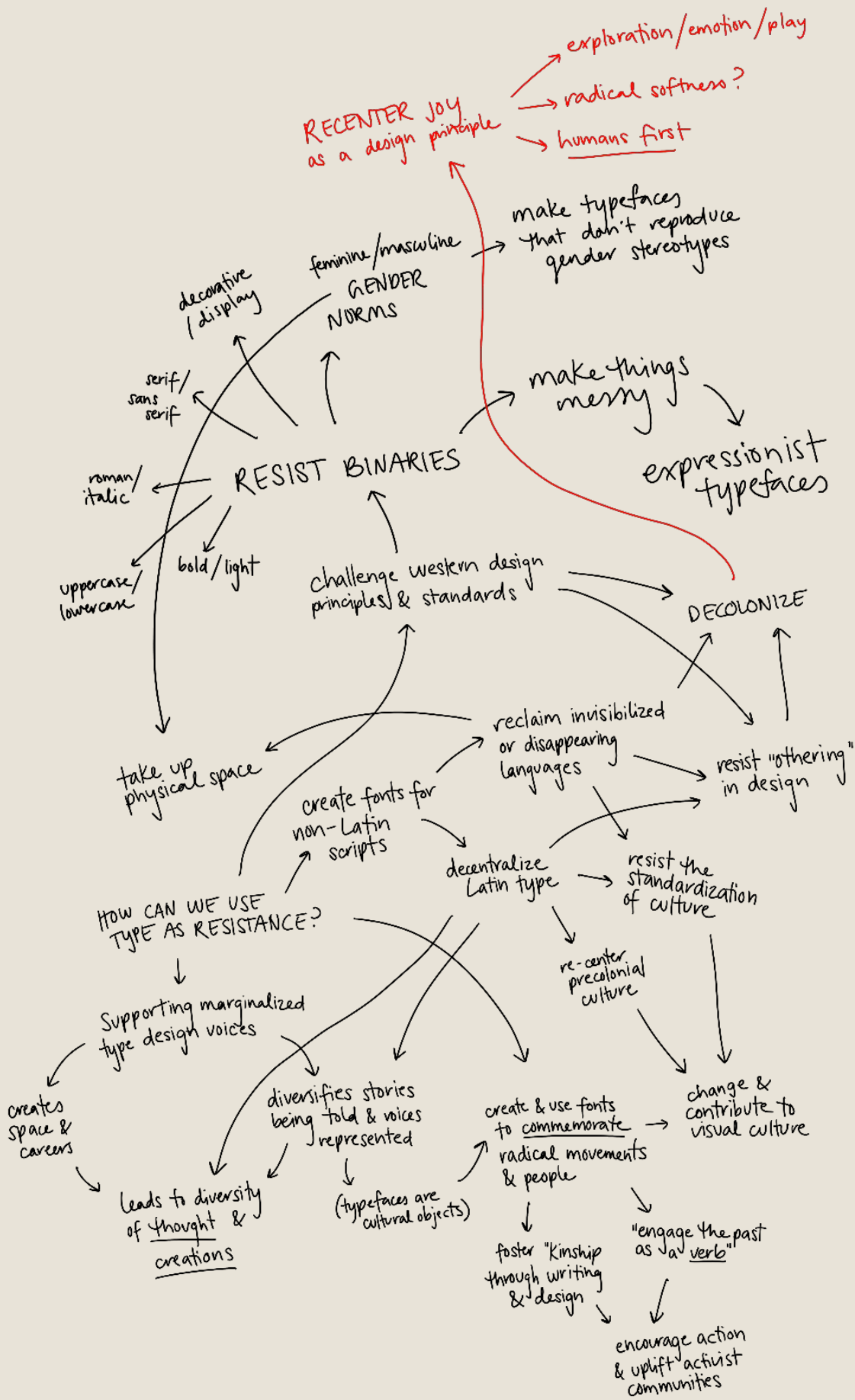
It also reminded me of this image that I had found on Are.na, my favorite inspiration platform:



How can a typeface be radically soft? How can it be more human? How can it be more expressive?

If a typeface is a form of art and expression, then the hand creating the typeface is the body. Maybe the interaction between human and letterform is a sort of dance. And it follows that centering emotion, activeness (rather than passiveness), and non-normative movement is a form of protest against any oppressive structure.





Back to Glyph World – this is what the designer writes about it. I think it speaks well to the expressionist and radical potential of type.

Experiencing a letterform is like entering a world within a world. Letterforms are the visual symbols of our speech; our speech, the auditory representation of our thoughts; our thoughts, the ethereal blocks that build our reality. With our writing systems we speak telepathically, transferring thoughts via little black marks. These black marks are part of our shared reality and are tools for recording and transmitting the past and the future. Letterforms live in a universe nested within our own, affected by what affects their authors. But they are their own creations.

The letterform is a product of our collective selves, but also a product of an individual self. To experience its form is to experience a layered set of impressions, first those of a collected perspective and later from a personal perspective.

Gardens are like this—existing because of the collaboration of the universe and the individual. As we walk through other people's gardens we see the universe: familiar things that might exist in other gardens, imagined or real. But we also notice the author, the gardener. We notice the gardener's choices, some practical, some decorative, we see the landscape that the author has created, but we understand the gardener must use the land that the universe has created. A typeface is this way. It's author is a gardener who creates something to sustain and adhere to a system that is beyond them. GlyphWorld is my garden. Each stylized letterforms has been planted and nurtured by me. I am their author, I grew them—but they will continue to grow without me.

-chlo (thanks for reading!)

