

# Speculative Characters *for* Visual Inflection

Mia Cinelli

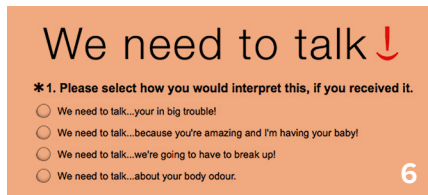
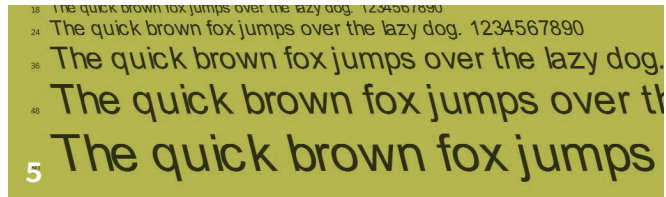
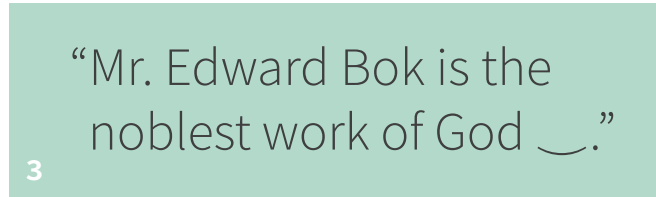
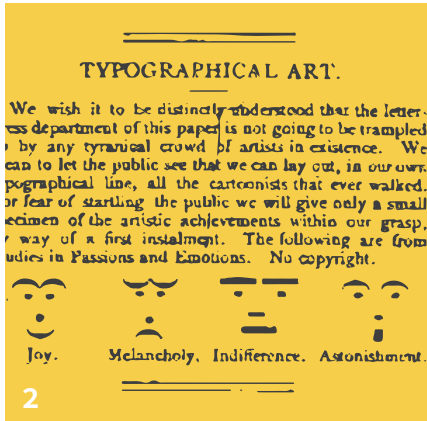
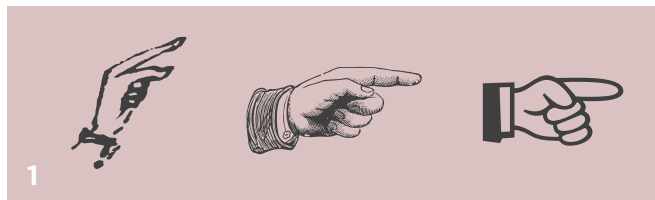


# heavy sigh

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## INSPIRATION

After a long day of teaching and designing type, I sat down and let out a deep sigh. My husband remarked “That’s a heavy sigh!” Normally this wouldn’t have been a salient observation, but I was struck by the word ‘heavy’—used both to describe the intent of a sigh, and also the weight of a typeface. I began to wonder: what a heavy (or semibold!) sigh look like its own letterform?



## A HISTORY OF DESIGNED FUTURES

Designers have long pondered the relationship of type and nonverbal communication resulting in a rich—yet not widely known—history of speculative typography.

- 1 **The Manicule.** Geoffrey Ashall Glaister “Encyclopedia of the Book”, (2nd edition) 2001 Shady Characters: “The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols, and Other Typographical Marks”, 2013
- 2 **Early Emoticons.** Puck Magazine, “Typographical Art” March 30, 1881
- 3 **Aabrose Bierce’s proposed punctuation.** Ambrose Bierce “For Brevity and Clarity”, 1887
- 4 **The Interrobang** by Martin K. Speckter, 1962
- 5 **Arial Sarcastic, The Sarcastic Font Movement** : <http://glennmcanally.com/sarcastic/>, ca. 2004 + <https://marzipanandmarmite.wordpress.com/2011/12/13/i-love-it-not/>
- 6–7 **Happy Mark and Sarcastheses.** Adam Stanway, “New Expressive Typographic Characters for Digital Communication”, The Salford Type Foundry—University of Salford , 2014



SELECT  
ITERATIONS

Many iterations took place to develop easy-to-write, recognizable letterforms. I considered: *in what ways are these similar or different from existing solutions and emojis? How might they reference corporeality without being anthropomorphic?* In type design, small changes have massive impact. Mathematically symmetrical characters can appear strange, and require tedious reworking to 'feel' correct. For example, *Calligraphic bias* (developed from centuries of using type developed from handwritten text) gives bias to weight in rightward sloping diagonal lines. Editing for optical compensation was important for making well-crafted and believable type.

## CONTEXT

The late Tobi Wong described his work as being *paraconceptual*, “of, relating to, or being partially conceptual.” I believe much of the expanded field of design—including speculative, critical, and discursive design—lives in this realm, as the production scale of these works is not intrinsic to their value. However, how they live in the world, even as a proposed concept, is important.



### posters for display:

24 x 36" (11), 19.75" x 19.75"

(3), 36 x 48" (1)





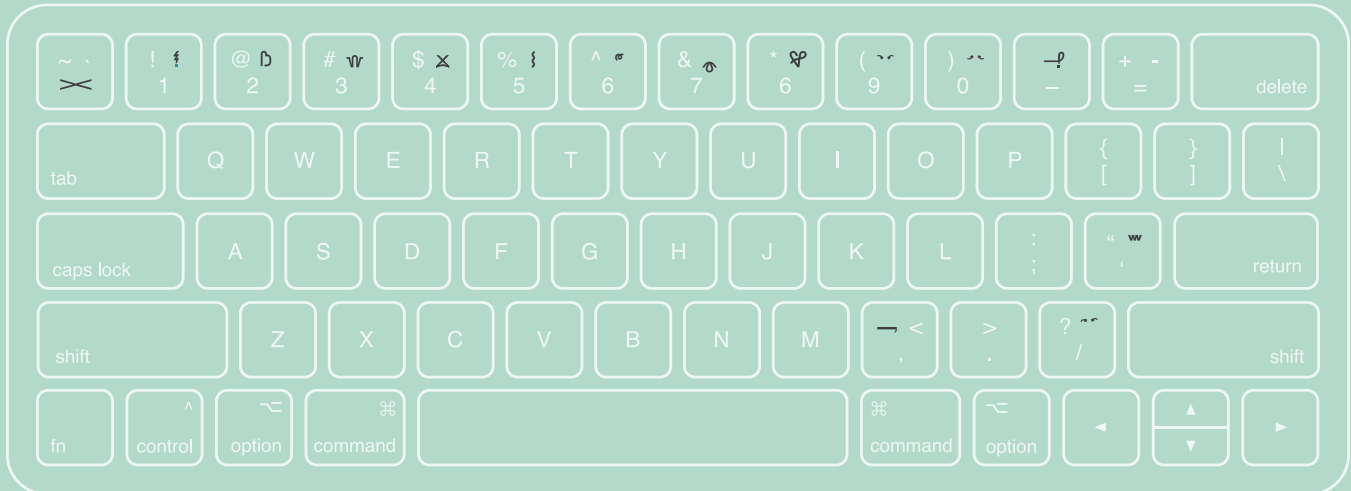
*Left:* Lexington Art League, Lexington, KY July 2019. Photo by James Robert Southard. *Above:* Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver, BC, Canada. February 2020. *Below:* Part of 'Future Retrospectives' at Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, ON, Canada, as part of DesignTO, January 2020. Photo by Brian Medina.



## CONTEXT

*Speculative Characters for Visual Inflection* have largely existed as prints in the context of contemporary galleries and design festival settings. These spaces have been constructed to be informative and educational for introducing these concepts, and have included expository prints of gesture and contextual wall vinyl or additional text demonstrating use. Their materiality (matte polypropylene posters and letterpress prints) is important and intentional, referencing ubiquitous advertising methods and historic movable type—but does not define the concept itself, which isn't tied explicitly to any one material. These works have prompted the expected question—*is this art or design?*—to which the answer is both or neither.

## typing guide: keyboard layout



Helvetica



Futura



Baskerville

### WHAT'S NEXT?

*Petitioning custom unicode? Hacking existing typefaces?* Science fiction has taught us that even the act of imagining futures can impact present solutions. By widely exhibiting these through art galleries, design festivals and conferences, I hope to catalyze conversation around speculative typography and the possible futures of communicating—all while introducing these characters to the public. If others similarly desire an expanded character set, perhaps they will begin to be used organically, creating a community driven need rather than a top-down implementation.

*Thanks for taking the time to read about and review this work!*