
Gray

Gray exists, well, in a bit of a gray area. Originally inspired by a mixture of illuminated manuscripts and type from the 15th and 16th centuries, Gray has an underlying blackletter influence but insistently tosses many of those expectations to the wind. While undoubtedly display, Gray is designed to feel as easy to typeset as a narrow sans while having the flair and editorial sensibilities of high contrast serif.

Published

TBD

Designed by

Matthew Smith

Distributed by

Morning Type

Version

0.020

Gray Thin
Gray Light
Gray Blond
Gray Regular
Gray Medium
Gray Bold
Gray Black
Gray Ultra

This weight range exists largely as a proof of concept. Although the medium and bold weights are what people come to expect from blackletter fonts, the lighter weights continue the trend of deviating from the blackletter model as shapes become unexpectedly round with more exaggerated proportions.

Sources

Extrapolated

Gray Thin
Gray Light
Gray Blond
Gray Regular
Gray Medium
Gray Bold
Gray Black
Gray Ultra

The medium style would be the primary point of focus in the beginning. Whether to go lighter or darker next would be for the customers to decide.

Gray Thin
Gray Light
Gray Blond
Gray Regular
Gray Medium
Gray Bold
Gray Black
Gray Ultra



While I am skeptical about whether or not the ultra weight is actually feasible, the extrapolation produced some rather interesting shapes that are worth exploring. With that being said, the black weight would be developed first, and the Ultra would be its own source.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789 0123456789
(.,:;-“_”‘—)

A glimpse at the current state of the character set. The texture of the uppercase still needs refinement. While they all tend to work in sentence-case, typing in all caps is fairly spotty at the moment.

I’ll be honest, the numbers are rough. And the old style figures are very much another proof of concept. A few more punctuation glyphs would likely be added to kick things off.

I am still waffling between the rounded and square dots—hence the discrepancy between the i/j compared to the punctuation. They will likely both exist within the font, but I am determining which will be the default.

Rusting mopeds darning tourism

Medium, 69pt

Strange damage formula

Medium, 100pt, Alt a

Artistry ragtime

Medium, 152pt, Alt g

Weatherman

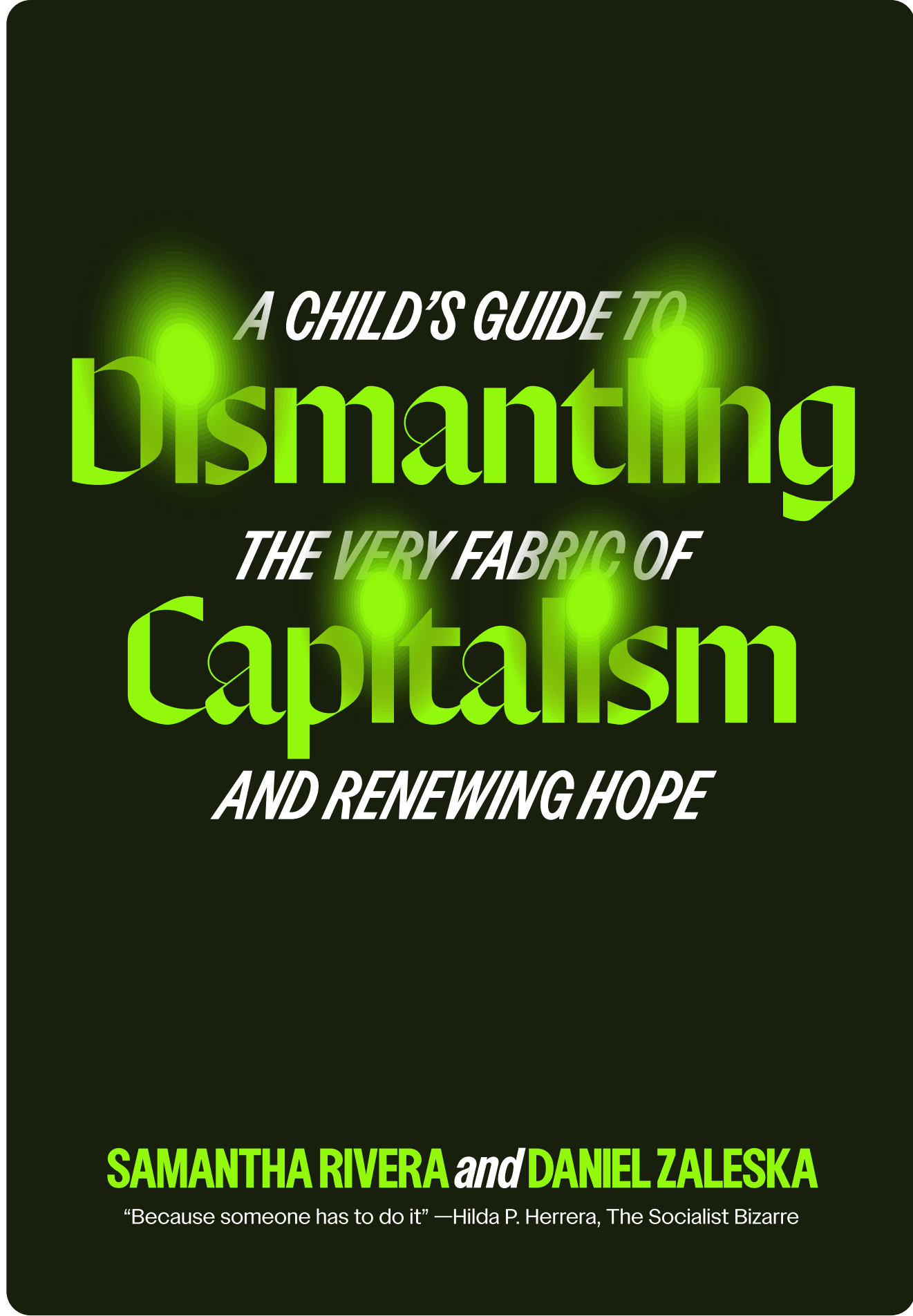
Medium, 192pt

Foxiness

Medium, 292pt

Medium, 190pt

Video Days is a skateboard
by Blind Skateboards released
considered one of the most in
videos, as director Spike Jon
is frequently cited as its defin



Example typesetting (no kerning)

Left:	Gray Medium paired with VC Nudge
Top Right:	Gray Regular paired with MD Nichrome
Bottom Right:	Gray Blond

L

optical

M

optical

S

optical

L

optical

M

optical

S

optical

In the current iteration of Gray, the thins are quite extreme which limits its use to large sizes. I am interested in exploring size variants with lower contrast, looser spacing, and—in some cases—less detail to make it more suitable for setting smaller text.

I am personally not particularly fond of overly prescriptive optical sizes, and would like to adopt a naming system similar to Rui Abreu from R-Typography. Their optical sizes are indicated by L, M, and S for large, medium, and small. The gaps between the optical sizes would then be accessible via the variable font for those that require more precision or nuance.

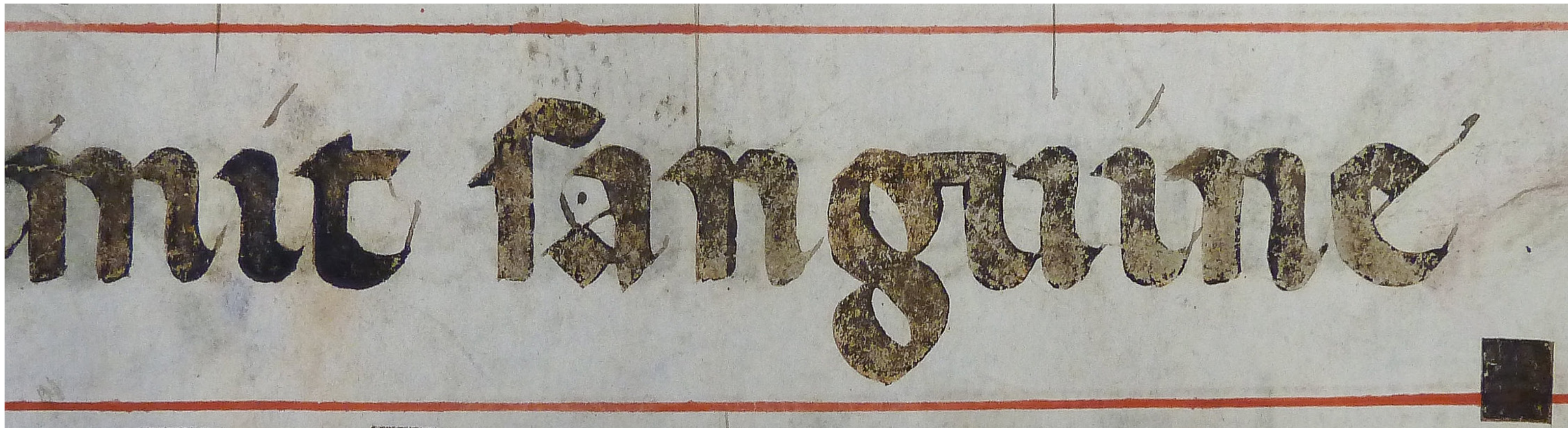
Titling Alternates

Titling Alternates

Gray takes on a bit more of a contemporary edge by largely making use of Roman constructions for the uppercase. However, I would also like to include a set of titling alternates that follow the blackletter model.



In 2017, while I was still in school, I had come across some illuminated manuscripts and type from the 15th and 16th centuries which absolutely blew my mind. These manuscripts featured broad nib lettering that felt strangely familiar and restrained—qualities I don't typically associate with illuminated manuscripts which more often felt maximalist and ornate. Instead I was seeing blackletter works without feet or hard angular lines, and at times the rhythm rivaled an art deco sans.



This portion of an early parchment leaf (perhaps from the late 15th century) was one of the sources of inspiration for the alternate two story g.



This binding waste featuring a post-Gothic hand from the 16th or 17th century served as reference material for the flat crossbar “e” and round dotted “i.”

Respira Black

Sharp Type, Lucas Sharp (2017)

Flecha

R-Typography, Rui Abreu (2019)

Canela Blackletter

Commercial Type, Miguel Reyes (2021)

Ergon

Commercial Type, Hrvoje Živčić (2022)

Throughout the industry, I have found that we love to tout historical reference but never contemporary influence. In January of this year, Lucas Sharp even tweeted: “Type designers: can we make citing contemporary sources a thing already? Why do we only give credit to certain sources and not others? Its all very disingenuous”

With that being said, I intend on being very transparent about Gray’s contemporary influences through the design process and even after graduation.

Respira Black being published right as I was starting to sketch Gray was both soul crushing and deeply inspiring. I felt super self conscious about it for a long time until I started to uncover Gray’s “sans” voice. Part of that discovery was a result of Rui’s incredible Flecha.

While Miguel’s Canela Blackletter and Hrvoje’s Ergon were both published well after the drawings for Gray were established, they no doubt share similarities and I wish to celebrate and recommend them to others.

I consider Morning Type a non-competitive foundry, but I sometimes struggle to articulate what exactly that means. As an example, with the permission of these designers, I hope to promote their fonts alongside Gray in case their fonts are better suited for the designer’s needs.

Short term goals

- Refine the drawing quality and improve spacing
- Improve texture and skeletons of the uppercase to improve all caps typesetting
- Implement Kern-On for improved spacing during development releases
- Expand Latin character set
- More punctuation and symbols

Long term goals

- Expand character set to include Latin S and Vietnamese
- Full range of weights from Light to Black, and potentially Ultra
- Titling alternates
- Explore interest in optical sizes
- If there is interest, I would love to explore an italic counterpart
- Kerning, of course
- Variable font

Thanks for reading