

**EPISODE 62**

[INTRODUCTION]

*"TGirard: There're so many good habits that you can get by studying things like graphic design and communication design, which ended up being really typographically-focused. With UX, we always say that it's about both the research and about talking to people, and understanding people, and creating something that's suitable for them. But you know, if you're working with a single entrepreneur, one client, one person, they might be judging you on that visual a little bit. So getting to a certain standard with your visual can be useful, too. And that happens a lot to protect our aim."*

**[00:00:38] TGarcia:** You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the bi-weekly podcast that shares the stories of people of color interface designers and researchers and their contributions towards creating user-centered experiences. And I'm your host Tolu Garcia, let's get started.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:00:56] TGarcia:** Hey, hey, everybody. Welcome back to the UI Narrative podcast. Let me introduce you to today's guest. Thomas Gerard is an assistant professor, Canadian scholar and TEDx speaker. He was accepted to attend the University of Oxford, and lectures equivalent to graduate coursework. He also teaches a design course at the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies in India.

Gerard has received several emerging scholar awards at the Design Principles and Practices Conference, New Directions in the Humanities Conference, and at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Everybody, please welcome Thomas to the UI Narrative podcast.

**[00:01:41] TGirard:** Thank you. Thank you for that intro.

**[00:01:43] TGarcia:** Yeah. So, Thomas, I want to start off with one of my favorite questions. Since we'll be heavily talking about typography today, what's one of your first memories of being interested in typ.

**[00:01:54] TGirard:** So I'm an old hat designer. So it would have been 20 years ago when I was first introduced to typography. I was taking noncredit courses at Emily Carr just finished high school and knew that I wanted to be in the art world. Kind of had some of these intro courses and kind of was just learning what typography was, and was just learning that there's a whole bunch of language around it. And there's a whole kind of community of people that supported and that kind of dedicate their lives to it.

After that, I got into the Degree Program and Communication Design at Emily Carr and was in first year of communication design and have my first typography class. And I kind of – I was in the crowd, and I knew the instructor because he had taught me a non-credit course before. So I'm kind of looking at him like, "Yeah, I've got this camaraderie. We know each other. This is going to be good." And that first class would have been the first type class that I took.

In that class, Professor Ken Hughes, he kind of threw everything at us about typography. Probably like everything that I know about typography today was condensed into that one class. So it was super intense and super scary, but also, like super eye opening, right? Because it was like, "Wow! There really is a whole world around this."

**[00:03:11] TGarcia:** Yeah, that's amazing. That's one thing I do love about like universities, is how they get into like the type history, the structure of creating your own typ. I'm not sure if you got to experience that in any of your classes. But it's not something you really get as much with like online courses that I see these days.

**[00:03:29] TGirard:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I teach a typography class right now called the Advanced Typography in Design. And we get into the history of type a little bit. And sometimes I say that like there has to be a poster project. Like we have to do a typographic poster. Because if you've never designed a typographic conference poster before, not really a designer, like you have to. That's like kind of baseline, I think. There are a lot of people who simply wouldn't know that that's important these days, especially going through the boot camps.

**[00:04:00] TGirard:** Yeah, definitely. I'd love for you to geek out a little bit about type history since we're on the topic. When it comes to like educating aspiring designers about typography,

what's like some of the design history that you see is being overlooked that you wish more designers knew about or more professors would teach?

**[00:04:18] TGirard:** Well, I think everybody gets introduced to the kind of obvious mainstream ideas about what typography is, serifs and sans-serifs. How do I pick a font? The jokes around Comic Sans, etc. But sometimes we don't get into like the type anatomy, the type classifications. Who designed a font and when? And what was it for? How do we pair fonts appropriately? Meaning like, how do we choose two fonts that were designed by the same type designer in the same time period? Like there's a lot of kind of a richness to typography that you really need to know if you really want to use it well.

With that said, there are some easy options. There's a great film called Helvetica Documentary. And in it, there's this one guy who's interviewed and he says, "If you don't know anything about typography, use Helvetica, bold, in one size. It looks good." And it's kind of true. There are some really good typefaces that you can't mess up. Helvetica kind of being one of those. But most type is a little bit harder to use.

And what people don't know often about typography is that it's not choosing a font from the list of fonts. But it's actually after you've chosen that font, how do you use it? It's the usage of the font. That is the typography in some senses.

**[00:05:39] TGarcia:** Yeah, definitely pairing typography. I'm thinking back to like when I was a graphic designer, that was something I struggled with a lot. Especially because I was trying to be, I guess, a little bit more like edgy with my type and get it to stand a bit. Do you have any like tips for people when it comes to pairing type? I know you gave one about like pairing the type appropriately with the same type designers. Anything else that comes to mind?

**[00:06:02] TGirard:** I mean, there's some really low-hanging fruit that designers don't know about these days, like use a serif with a sans-serif. Don't use two sans-serifs together. A lot of people don't know that. And these days, we get quite varied sans-serifs. They look quite different from one another. But the rule or the best practice is to not use two sans-serifs together. So that would be an obvious one.

**[00:06:26] TGarcia:** I know some people's minds probably are blown with that, especially if they're just getting into design interfaces for the first time. Because there's websites like Dribbble, I'm sure you've seen, to where it's like the focus of it isn't the type. It's more just like what's flashy to get people to like it, right? So I'm glad you shared that tip.

**[00:06:43] TGirard:** Yeah, I mean, there are other things. I mean, don't use a typeface for what it wasn't intended for. If you're going to use Comic-Sans, use it for comic book and don't use it for a billboard in Times Square. There are some like obvious things like that also people don't know about. And I think this comes down to the richness of typographic history and understanding how those rules surface, kind of especially during modernism. How a set of rules was built for typography.

I think after we hit post-modernism in typography, we abandoned a lot of the rules. And these days, we never truly went back to this kind of rule-based typography. And I'm not saying that it has to be rule-based. But if you're going to break the rules, at least know the rules first and then break them.

**[00:07:33] TGarcia:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's a very good point. And I think, too, just getting into like the rules of type. It comes down to learning some of the histories. Like why did they create it? Some types of created like solely like for it to be accessible to certain people.

And I actually want to get into a story. So listeners, you probably don't know this. But like, Thomas, he's Japanese-Canadian. And one of your middle names is Japanese. And we talked a little bit about this the other day. But I'd love to discuss like how your lived experiences have influenced your typographic passion. So there's a story that he had told me off the podcast about the importance of inclusivity in type characters or diplomas. So I'd love for you to share that story here, too, Thomas. Because it really struck a chord with me, and I think others might relate.

**[00:08:19] TGirard:** I kind of love telling this story. But I never prepared to tell it. And then tell, it usually comes to me intuitively because it was so aggravating that experience for me. I got my degree from Emily Carr. And my name was on it with my middle name. And my middle name is

a Japanese name. It's Ko, with K-O. But the O has a line above it indicating that it's an O sound rather than an A sound. That glyph on the top of the O is actually really important.

What I assume happened is that you couldn't create that – I mean, from my experience, you couldn't actually create that glyph on a computer during that time. So they actually just wrote it in with a pen. There was a typeset document. But they wrote a line in overtop the O. And so whenever I show that, I have imposter syndrome – I have some sort of imposter syndrome because they're going to think this is fake, too.

**[00:09:15] TGarcia:** Yeah. I would, too. Yeah.

**[00:09:18] TGirard:** And it I came to the point where I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to order –" I didn't tell you this. But I'm just going to order another copy of my degree, right? And maybe it'll be a better one. What happened was the signature at the bottom that authorizes it from the president of the university, that wasn't render properly. Like, I guess, in InDesign, they didn't turn on the function to make it like a smooth shape. So it's actually like a digi-shape for the signature. So I have like two botched degrees, two copies of a botched degree. And I never know which one to use or what to do.

**[00:09:53] TGarcia:** Oh my gosh. That really does sound aggravating, because it's like you spent so much of your time and effort to get that degree and then they make it look **[inaudible 00:10:03]**

**[00:10:03] TGirard:** Yeah. But I don't know if it's me. Like, I look at it, and I'm sensitive to the typography. But like, do other people care? Or they're just like, "Oh, that looks a little bit weird. But this is legit." I don't know.

**[00:10:15] TGarcia:** I would care, definitely. Like, I'm mad for you, Thomas.

**[00:10:21] TGirard:** I get passionate whenever I tell that story. It's a knee-jerk reaction to that memory.

**[00:10:28] TGarcia:** So let's talk a little bit about accessibility in type. So that's one thing as far as like if you're creating – If you're using a typeface, that's going to be used for people of different ethnic backgrounds, then it's something you might want to consider if they have characters for people that have different – What's the name for like characters that have like the lines of of them? I'm not getting the term right here.

**[00:10:51] TGirard:** They might have different glyphs or – Yeah.

**[00:10:52] TGarcia:** Yeah, glyphs, which you need to account for in your type. Are there any like other accessibility tips that come to mind for you when someone wants to make type that is more accessible?

**[00:11:03] TGirard:** Yeah. I mean, it's kind of jumping into one of the other question that we plan to cover. But there's a typical – I mean, it really depends which typeface you use and how well the typeface has been designed. Some go quite far in designing glyphs sets for different languages and different sounds and different purposes like that. And some don't. The ones that are really kind of broad would be the IPA phonetic typefaces, which have 166 character or characters sets. So they're designed for use across languages and consider all of the possible glyphs that need to be used. Some weird ones, like Icelandic characters require a lot of different characters that the English language doesn't have. And so yeah, to be mindful of that.

**[00:11:51] TGarcia:** Yeah. So I want to get into the importance of phonetic type. I love this analogy that you had told me about opera singers and how they use it to differentiate between different tones. If you could educate us a little bit on what phonetic type is, I'm sure some people were hearing about that for the first time. And it's important in typography.

**[00:12:09] TGirard:** Sure, yeah. Actually, the personal story to this is that, for my graduation project, or my first graduation project anyways at Emily Carr in communications design, I designed a typeface. And I thought – I was young and super ambitious and wanted to do kind of the most difficult, but maybe the most impressive thing I could think of. And at that time, designing a typeface would be a one or two-year project for a season type designer. And I was like, "Okay, I can do that. I can do that in a semester."

And so I planned to do it. But I wanted to – I started researching and I was like, "What's a really impressive angle I can do with this?" And I found these phonetic typefaces, IPA phonetic typefaces. The first one I found is one called Gentium, which you might have on your Mac. It's a phonetic typeface. And it's a typeface that's made to be used across languages. It was a graduate project at the University of Reading in the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication there. A student did it for a master's project, and it was a big award-winning project. And I loved it right away.

The character sets are a little bit more narrow, but they're still a serif. And to find a narrow serif is kind of hard to find. But the key thing about it is that it can be used across languages. That means people like linguists, or your example of the opera singers, can use this. And if they're trying to decipher a document that's not in English, then you need the phonetic tight to be able to do that. And opera singers are often dealing with different languages. So they need the phonetic type for that.

Yeah, it is more rare. And doing it as my grad project, I had a great instructor at Emily Carr then who did his MA typeface design at Reading. His name is Keith Tam. I approached him and I said, "Can you help me with my phonetic typeface design?" And he said, "No, no, no. I'm staying away from phonetic type. I don't know anything about that. I just do regular typeface design."

And at that time, I had no idea that there's like different kinds of type design, and somebody might know one and not another. I was like, "If somebody knows how to design a type, they know how to design a type that's specific enough, right?" That's what why I assumed. But apparently not. So I was stuck there kind of drawing the characters myself, which is super terrifying.

**[00:14:34] TGarcia:** So you're an assistant professor at the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies in India. Can you tell us a little bit about like your career journey up to this point? Like what led you to education as a career path?

**[00:14:45] TGirard:** Sure. Yeah. I mean, I started as a practicing designer here in Vancouver after I finished my degree here at Emily Carr, my undergraduate degree. And I worked for a

couple years in the industry here. But people kept telling me that I should be teaching design. And I didn't realize at that time that they might just be trying to trick me into like going in the wrong direction, like making less money or something. I ate it up. I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'd be a teacher. That's cool."

So I got headhunted by a school in Shanghai to like be a lecturer at their design school there. And so finished a job as an interface designer in Vancouver and grabbed their plane ticket and got their offer and jumped on a plane with a couple of bags and went to start teaching design.

Of course, I had no idea how to do that. But gave it a try and really liked it. That was obviously a hugely career-shaping moment for me. For some reason, four years in China, and I felt like I wanted – For some reason, I felt like I wanted to teach in Mumbai. I had no idea. I probably couldn't find Mumbai on a map. But for some reason, something deep inside me said I needed to go to India and teach design there.

So I came back to Vancouver. And then very shortly after, I went out to New Delhi, which is the other big city. It's not Mumbai, but related. And stayed for a year in New Delhi teaching design. And later returned to India. And just now like, after finishing my master's here in Vancouver, I am offered a tenure track in Northern India in the foothills of the Himalayas, at University of Petroleum and Energy Studies. But I've already started on contract with them. Taught a course, teaching the second one now remotely that have to do with user experience and interaction design and all these areas I've been in. Because I am passionate about type, I do say that I can choose to type classes. But they tend to give me the ones that are typed on screen. So type related to interfaces and type related to all-screen-based mediums. But India somehow ended up being a real significant part of my career. And I don't know how that happened. I don't really have any connections to India. So somehow India called me.

**[00:17:02] TGarcia:** It's amazing, though, that you're able to go to India to work. That's something I have – Like, I don't know anyone at the moment like that's not originally from India that's chose to like go and teach over there. So it just says a lot about like your experience and how they value you to have you come from out of country to come and teach over there.



**[00:17:27] TGirard:** When I first arrived in Delhi in what? 2012? I like to write. I mean, a lot of it was hard. It's very polluted. It's overpopulated. But the people are very warm, and they're very welcoming. There are stories that people will tell you if you first arrived in Delhi that you might get invited into someone's home for a meal. They don't know you. And you sit down and you chat, and they feed you. And it's very nice.

They have the big wedding culture. So you might get invited to a wedding. And you might get kind of roped into that, and that's great. I don't know of a warmer people than people that I met in Delhi. And other parts of India are quite similar. It's hard in a lot of ways. And I know that people talk about culture shock and things like that. But I've always been a person who's been good at adapting to new situations and new environments and ways of doing things. So I feel like that was natural for me. And yeah, it's not natural for most people. But why not?

**[00:18:23] TGarcia:** Can you tell us a little bit about the class that you're teaching, which is called Digital Media in Society? I know that's like not originally, because you were saying that you don't mind teaching for digital interfaces. But I guess, is there any like a mind shifts you've had to have or adapting your teaching styles or anything like that to get students that are more interested in digital interfaces to get interested in type?

**[00:18:46] TGirard:** Sure, yeah. I mean, my undergraduate degree is a B.De, which is a Bachelor of Design. So mainly practice-based. Doing projects is the main piece for my classes during my undergrad.

And in 2019, I pursued a master's in liberal studies, and I'm just wrapping that up now here in Vancouver. This is the first time where I've been asked to write long papers. Writing always come naturally for me. So it's not it's not a problem. But now, yeah, with digital media and society, this is the first master's level design course I've taught and I've been asked to teach.

And it's different. Thinking about asking students to write long papers, especially students in India, especially during pandemic in a remote way, it's a lot to ask actually. But there are lots of angles that are good about the pandemic way of teaching. And writing really shines actually, I think, especially graduate level writing, during pandemic, because of things like Blackboard, and

Moodle, and Canvas. These platforms that allow us to share and talk about our writing more is really useful.

Now with digital media and society, I haven't started it yet. But I'm planning the course now. And I do want to make your writing-based and collaborative writing-based. And I know that's not easy for some of these students, even M.De students, master of design students, who might not be used to writing academic papers and long academic papers. I know it's a lot to ask. So I'm kind of trying to figure out how to smoothly do that for them.

The other the topic is something that I have to ramp up on to. I really like a lot of the academic work that Ezio Manzini does. And I saw him speak in Barcelona at a conference and was really inspired by him. When everybody designs one of his books – Or *The Politics of Every Day*, I think I want to draw those to teach this visual media and society class. But it's been very open.

It's funny, I've been teaching for a while design and have been given the materials to teach most often. But slowly, it's shifted. And slowly people have said, "Well, what would you do? What do you want to teach with this?"

And now coming out the master's, I just get a course title thrown at me. And they're like, "Your course starts in this date. This is what is called. Good luck." So yeah, it's fun. It's exciting. Part of it is scary, because I want to teach the right material for it. And I want to make sure I cover my bases. But I also want to make it my own, right. So yeah. Yeah, it's exciting.

**[00:21:28] TGarcia:** Yeah, exactly. I love, though, that they give you that flexibility to pull in whatever books, resources or material that you think is most important for these students.

**[00:21:37] TGirard:** Yeah, for sure. It's weird, because my master's is in liberal studies. It's not in design. So I really am kind of imagining and being creative with the curriculum.

**[00:21:47] TGarcia:** So the majority of listeners are creating like digital products for webs, apps, games, etc. What are some of like your top recommendations for someone who wants to learn more about typography? Are there any like books, courses, or conferences that come to mind?

**[00:22:04] TGirard:** Yeah. It's been a few years now that I've been speaking with the Common Ground Research Networks Conferences, first at the Design Principles and Practices Conference as emerging scholar award recipient, which was in Barcelona. That was the first time that I kind of flew to a big city to be active in a design conference like that. And then started to join their other conferences there. One called the Arts and Society. Actually, just this morning, I found that I'm asked to speak at their conference in Poland in 2023.

**[00:22:34] TGarcia:** Oh, congrats.

**[00:22:35] TGirard:** Yeah. Super happy with that. They also have one called New Directions in Humanities. And it was really a stretch for me to consider speaking there, because I don't feel like I have any grasp of humanities. But through some of the writing about typography that I've done, I've been invited to speak at their conferences as well.

So I would say all of the Common Ground Research Networks Conferences, particularly the Design Principles and Practices Conferences is really great. Obviously, all the conferences have taken a big shift during pandemic. And you have to kind of consider if it's a blended format, if you actually want to go to Spain, or to Greece, to attend the conference, or if you just want to do it online. But I would say the richness of those is really eye-opening.

At the conference in Barcelona, being surrounded by 200 design academics, I didn't know that there were 200 design academic or design PhDs in the world. I didn't know that that was a thing. So to know that there's this richness in design, that there's this level of design that you can talk about it in a really nuanced way and really have it be eye-opening for you and really have it be inspiring for you. Because it's a topic that you can have depth of conversation with is really important, I think.

These days are really pushed for that academic side of design, because designs for so long been such a vocational topic. And I know that people have deeper ideas about it. And I think people need to share those and hear those. So yeah, I would say the conferences are a great way to do that.

I was a keynote speaker at UX India recently and attended their in-person conference in Bangalore a few years ago. Again, was really profoundly affected by this idea that, in Bangalore, there were all these UX people. Like how does that happen? I imagine that for other topics. But for something like UX, it's pretty interesting to know that you can go to – I mean, what seems like a random place on a map and find that there are all these people there that want to talk to you about UX.

**[00:24:43] TGarcia:** Yeah, that's fascinating, for sure. What are some areas that you've seen students struggle with when they're learning how to properly use type for digital interfaces? Some things that I've seen like just from like mentoring some people is size requirements for accessibility. Like, 16 point for digital. And making sure that someone doesn't have to squint, wonder looking at your digital interface.

**[00:25:07] TGirard:** Yeah, I mean, the old-fashioned kind of rule that gets broken is that students use a lot of typefaces. They want to decorate with as many typefaces as they can. There's a rule just using one or two typefaces. And that's enough. Yeah, what other rules? I don't know what other things do students get wrong?

I guess when I started teaching interaction design, material design, and the iOS human interface guidelines were really important. And that those brought in a new set of rules that were type specific that were really useful for students. Getting used to things like San Francisco and New York. Those typefaces is, I think, pretty important.

**[00:25:45] TGarcia:** Yes, super important. Something I always like tell people, too, is like look at these system design and books, like the one you mentioned for Apple, and then also, too, like material. Look at the type that they're using. Try to understand like why they use that type before changing it. Because, yes, we want to have that like freedom to make the app our own. But there's some system UI that just should not be changed, because it's accessible for different reasons that they've researched. But you can easily find out because they have all those documents easily accessible online.

**[00:26:20] TGirard:** And type these days is really well-designed for the most part. I mean, when I was a student, people struggled to make good type. It was quite difficult. You had to use a very

specific software, and you had to basically know a lot about typography to try to make a font. These days, it's quite easy. And libraries, like Google Fonts, have a lot of really well-designed type there. And you really can't go wrong with most of that.

**[00:26:46] TGarcia:** Yeah, it is incredibly hard to create a font. I just got a real visceral memory of trying to create it when I was in college. A lot of times when I would like create font, it would be for logos. But it's more of like a Frankenstein version of a font. Like you start off with the font, but then you might add shapes to it to create your own version of that.

**[00:27:07] TGirard:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I have a workshop that I teach called The Helvetica Project, where I get people to typeset in Helvetica, and then change the glyphs slightly. Maybe they make an ascender a little bit taller, or a descender a little bit lower. They change the shape of the counter, and then it's no longer Helvetica, then it becomes a logo or a wordmark.

So yeah, I totally agree with you that, yeah, creating a logo is something completely separate from creating type. Type is meant to be read. And typically, if you're trying to create something memorable, it's not meant to be read. It's meant to be remembered, which means it's type that doesn't look exactly like that type is supposed to look like.

**[00:27:45] TGarcia:** Exactly, yes. Are there any like type faces that you recommend students use when they first start their projects? I know you've mentioned like Helvetica. Any other ones that come to mind?

**[00:27:55] TGirard:** I call the Matthew Carter fonts. I like Georgia. I like Verdana. I've always liked Helvetica. I think those are like – It's the early web safe fonts that I got so used to. In the early days, there were like four fonts that you could use on the web to be safe. And those ones really stuck with me.

Again, typography is all about how you use it. So even if you're picking a font, like Helvetica, that you think is boring, try using it in different ways. Make it gigantic or, or flip it upside down, or put it on an angle, or use the different weights. Get a feel for it. Because you can make it look like something completely unique.

I mean, a generous letter spacing for like a boutique brand, or a high-end luxury brand can really do it justice. If you do upper and lowercase with Helvetica, and you tighten the tracking a little bit, you can make quite a presentable wordmark that way or logo type simply by changing the spacing. Usually it's the subtle things that you do to type that really make a jumbo. It's not the choice of font that makes or breaks the design. It's actually how you use it.

**[00:29:08] TGarcia:** Yeah, I completely agree with that. And on that subject, like do you have any tips to make type memorable and a good way? I know that you can make type memorable on a project if it looks terrible. Everyone remember that, for sure. But for someone that's like trying to stand out, you gave some tips about like spacing, some kerning maybe just to separate the characters a little bit or maybe tighten them up. Any other tips there?

**[00:29:34] TGirard:** Yeah, I'll preface that by saying it takes a really long time to do a good job of this. You need to do a lot of big mistakes before you get to something that's actually working. But I'm reminded of the first time I saw a practical industry typography project. After first year of foundation at Emily Carr, I went to Hong Kong. My dad was living in Hong Kong, in Shanghai, at that time and interned with a – Or interned with an architecture firm in Hong Kong. And one of their clients was kind of the first interaction design company in Hong Kong, which was called Lemon.

And when Lemon saw that this architecture firm had this in-house designer that was essentially doing UX, they were like, "How is this even possible? We didn't know that we could find someone like this." So they called up the architecture firm and asked for me and said – And we had the conversation. And they're like, "How is this happening? Who are you?" And I was like, "Just happened to be here." And they're like, "Well, come into our office for a week and hang out with us and see if you can work on some client projects and do some stuff with us."

And so at one point we were critiquing a redesign of the Lemon logo. And it was just the Lemon logo at that time was just the word Lemon in upper and lowercase, in a sense thereof. And there is nothing special about it. And so they had one kind of senior designer who was trying to make really subtle changes that would make it memorable.

And often, it's those really nuanced, subtle changes that make something memorable. Making the L a little bit taller, or changing the negative space in the lowercase E a little bit – Making it a little bit bigger. Those things tend to be really noticeable. Especially when you blow it up really big, you can really see those those changes made to the type. And those can make for a really good logo situation.

It guess it would have been years later that I found out the one thing that they chose was for the word Lemon. In the word Lemon, there's a lowercase o. And so the lowercase o has a circular negative space inside it. And they just changed that negative space to look like the shape of a lemon. So they just put like little edges to it. So that it was a lemon shaped o. That was the logo. It was lemon with a counter that was shaped like a lemon. And when I saw that, I was like, "Wow! That's genius work." To me, that really subtle shift to what a typical typeface might be is the way to create a memorable situation. I mean, today when I think of the Apple logo and just a bite out of the side of the apple, that makes it so memorable.

**[00:32:17] TGarcia:** Mm-hmm. The FedEx one with the arrow between the letters. Yeah, sometimes it's not as – You don't have to make it as complex in order to have such an impact on the brand message within the logo.

I want to touch on the opposite side of this for making not memorable, but like normal, I guess, in not standing out for digital interfaces. I think it's important to look at existing applications that's like on your phone. Look through apps that have already been developed. Look at websites to get an understanding of like how can I make my type to basically fit in? When it comes to like creating paragraphs, sometimes you just need to change the line height spacing between how you're doing it to make it more legible. It could be different types of ways you can make it not stand out in any way.

**[00:33:10] TGirard:** Yeah, I mean, there's a typical kind of acid test for understanding a typeface. And that's to write out this word called hambugefonts, or hambugefontshiv. If you Google that – If you Google something like that, you'll find that it exists. And it's the way to test the spacing and the overall kind of flow of a typeface. And to kind of test how boring it is. Because if it's readable, and if it's a good typeface for text, it's typically really boring.

When a typeface designer first designs a typeface, typically there are a number of characters to the design. Usually it's the A, the E, the G, the N and the O. The lowercase a, and e, and g are the most unique characters in the typeface. The A, because it can be different kinds. There're two different kinds of A's in a lowercase a. There's one that's a circle with a line beside it. And then there's the one that's a little bit more complex with a more swag character to it.

The lowercase g also has two versions. There's the one with a circle and then kind of a bending stroke that comes down. Or there's a binocular G, which kind of has two circles attached. And so that's another one that's really memorable as well. And then the lowercase e tends to be a memorable one as well.

The most boring characters are the n and the o. The n is just a couple of stems with a curved part. And the o is just a curved part. That n and that o can give you the idea of what the straight part and the curved part is for any character in an alphabet. So if you understand what a curved part looks like and a straight part looks like, you understand actually most of the font, right? Because that's basically what it is, is straight parts and curved. With the only exception of the interesting things being that a, e and g.

So I would say if you're trying to understand if font is useful for your situation, type out the lowercase a, e, g, n, o and look at those, because that's probably what the type designer started with when they were designing the typeface. They were looking at those characters and saying, "Okay, if all of the DNA of the typefaces in these letters, what is the font going to be like? What is it going to communicate? Will it be readable? Will it be memorable?" Typically, the more readable tech space, typefaces are really boring.

There's a great example of typographic knowledge, which is the typographic color, which is not color, like red, blue, green, whatever. It's actually a gray color, that if you look at a paragraph of text and you squint your eyes a little bit, it'll create an overall gray. And if that overall gray is completely smooth and just one gray, it's probably a good text typeface. And if it's botchy with different kinds of grays there, then it's probably not a very good text typeface.

**[00:36:08] TGarcia:** I was going to say those are some wonderful tips. Just to repeat some of that, like a, e, g, n, o. Those are characters that you should definitely look out when using that



squint method. Like that's why there's accessibility testing for your types. There're so many good habits that you can get by studying things like graphic design and

**[00:36:22] TGirard:** That's right. Yeah, yeah. There are so many good habits that you can get by studying things like graphic design and communication design, which end up being really typographic. With UX, we always say that it's about the research and about talking to people and understanding people and creating something that's suitable for them.

But if you're working with a single entrepreneur, one client, one person, they might be judging you on that visual a little bit. So getting to a certain standard with your visual can be useful, too. And that happens a lot to protect our aim.

**[00:36:55] TGarcia:** Yeah, definitely. What are some typefaces that you're like absolutely tired of seeing on projects that like you do like a deep sigh when you see this one?

**[00:37:06] TGirard:** I love type so much, that for most times if I see some typographic usage, I would say if there's a lot of effects done to the type, then I get a deep sigh. I like type that's transparent, that's clear, that kind of invisibly communicates the language, the rating that doesn't distract from the content. So if there are a bunch of drop shadows and a bunch of like effects done – Stretch the type, that really annoys me. If it's embossed or whatever kind of effect you can do to it. If it's got a gradient on it. I really don't like that. I like type this just plain.

**[00:37:49] TGarcia:** So, basically, fonts that are on like that website thefonts.com, there's a lot of no-nos.

**[00:37:55] TGirard:** I don't know that one. But I know there are a lot of people that used to do it. I would say it's not as common these days. But yeah, just leave type alone. Don't do so many effects to it.

**[00:38:07] TGarcia:** Y'all heard it. And leave the type alone. It's doing its own thing.

**[00:38:11] TGirard:** You know, the thing is, people spend a year or two to make a typeface. And good type designers do that. And so if you make those ugly changes to it, you're really kind of

defacing the work of a really strong designer who spent a year or two doing something and did it purposefully that way. Type is such a privilege. It's such a privilege that we have access to type, because you're basically taking someone's really great design that's really perfected and really nuanced. And you can just use it.

I mean, you're not breaking copyright. You can just use it. So that's a huge advantage. So don't take that for granted. Instead, try to appreciate the type and try to use it for what it was intended for. I think that's the key thing.

**[00:38:59] TGarcia:** What would you like to see in the future type in products?

**[00:39:03] TGirard:** In digital products or –

**[00:39:05] TGarcia:** Mm-hmm. Digital products.

**[00:39:07] TGirard:** I would definitely like to see an appreciation of type. In the highlight of my experience in the industry, I work for the computer maker Lenovo based in their Beijing office, but also working in their Hong Kong office. And we're working on future-focused products and thinking about what those might look like.

Today to me, one thing that's really jumped out was Mark Zuckerberg's announcement that he really wants to focus on voice and make something that's better than Alexa or better than Siri. Like miles better than those in terms of voice UI. And to me, my first thought there was – Or my kind of lingering thought there was draw from typography. Draw from the way that type is simple, basic and it's made to be read. If you repurpose that, add something that's sonic, something that sound-based, something that is voice. What does that look like? How can we draw from what we already have historically in terms of design when we make something new? Even something, which is, I think, somewhat still innovative, like voice UI. Can we draw from the visual to make that? And can we learn from any mistakes we made there throughout history? Can we appreciate the kind of historical design in a way that finds its way into things like voice UI? I would like to see emerging technologies make use of things like typography, even if it's metaphorically or even if it's somewhat tangentially.

**[00:40:35] TGarcia:** So now I want to jump into some of your accolades. So you did a TEDx talk about how to feel at home in the airport. And I'll link the talk in the show notes for everyone to take a listen, too. What inspired you to do your first TEDx talk?

**[00:40:51] TGirard:** Yeah, it's a funny story. I feel like I tell it all the time. I was at Emily Carr. And I guess I didn't really know what TED talks were. But I found out that they were doing them at Emily Carr. And I approached the organizer. And I looked on their website and found that they were – Like it looked like they were struggling to find speakers. It looks like they were really short on speakers. So I approached them and I said, "If you're short on speakers, I'll do a talk to fill the gap for you."

And I always tell that story that I didn't realize that it was a difficult process to be able to do that talk. And you had to go through a level rehearsals. And you had to basically be chosen to do that. Instead, I was kind of problem solving, as designers do. And we had a chat. And he was kind of trying to push me away. And he said, "Well, what would you do the talk on?" And I just kind of spurted it out that I wanted to do something about spending too much time in airports.

And as the story goes, he was a person that spent a lot of time in airports. And kind we kind of geeked-out at that moment. And he understood it and I understood it what it's like to have to spend too much time in airports, and wanted to give me a chance on that. That's the short version.

There are a lot of processes that you have to go through to get that talk to go through. And there are a lot of ways you can do it. For me, it really started out with just problem solving. I was like, "Okay. They're short on speakers. Maybe I can do something."

And whenever you solve a problem for someone, they're pretty happy, I think. I mean, we designers, we know that, right? It's like, yeah, if we can make something better for someone, then they're gonna say yes. So that's what it was. That's how it started.

**[00:42:29] TGarcia:** So you also have some new books out from your Emerging Scholar Series. Can you tell us a little bit about what these books are about? And what inspired you?

**[00:42:38] TGirard:** Sure, yeah. It was inspired first, because I realized that people were paying tens of thousands of dollars for my classes. And I was only going to be able to communicate to certain people in that way. I did feel like it was worth it for the students that had that money to pay that. But I also wanted to be able to reach people who didn't have that kind of money. And I still wanted to be able to give them good ideas and give them inspiration.

I talk about this idea of people-first, being able to communicate to different people in different communities, and reach each kind of person in their own kind of unique way. And so I needed kind of a product or a service that was affordable for anyone who wanted access to my ideas. And I realized that a book was going to be that thing.

Also, to kind of refer to what I was talking about before. At one point, I think it would have been after the TED talk, people were approaching me and being like, "What are you going to do next?" And I was like, "Oh, I don't know. I'm trying to figure it out." And they're like, "Why don't you do a book?" What I didn't understand at that time was they were trying to tell me something that was going to be impossible for me to do. Like, "Thomas can never do a book. Let's tell him to do a book. That'll will get him." But I took it seriously. I was like, "Oh, yeah, a book."

And these days, sometimes those things that are overly ambitious actually ended up happening. So yeah, at that point, I was like, "Okay, I can create a product here that can reach all sorts of people who maybe can't take my classes. People are asking me to do a book. I should do a book." And so I did get that first one. It was a self-published. A bunch of copies went out all over the world and reached people, and reach people in a way that, for some of them, it was their first time kind of accessing some of my ideas, especially about typography, for example.

And so that kind of spiraled into wanting to do more books and wanting to give people more options that were affordable and that didn't require, like I said, tens of thousands of dollars to take a course from me.

**[00:44:46] TGarcia:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, I'm glad you went with it and you didn't listen to that imposter syndrome, and you listened to the people encouraging you to do it. I'll have all of Thomas's books listed in the show notes. And I highly recommend you check them out, especially if you want to learn more from Thomas. He has a lot more to share with you guys.

**[00:45:04] TGirard:** Yeah, definitely I could talk on and on, for sure.

**[00:45:07] TGarcia:** What's next for you, Thomas? Any conferences coming up or any other initiatives that you're pushing forward?

**[00:45:13] TGirard:** Yeah, I've been invited to speak in Greece, in Rhodes, Greece, and in Zaragoza, Spain this year at those Common Ground Conferences. The Spain Conference has been funded by Simon Fraser University by the Dean's Office. They've sponsored that trip for me. So that one's ago, for sure.

Next year, as I mentioned earlier, this Poland Conference came through. An invitation to speak there. And then an invitation to speak in Paris about typography, which is super exciting. That one in the humanities context. These are kind of a thing for me to try to really reach different people by switching up countries. I hope I can share ideas with people who have no idea who I am. And that's pretty exciting for me. I'm always looking for new people to share ideas with and to give access to my ideas, too. So scaling my ideas is really important for me right now.

Yeah, definitely, to reach out to your audience, if any of you have ideas about people who might not know about my ideas, but would benefit from hearing about them. I would love to hear that from all of you. Or if you just want to hear more from me, definitely reach out to me about that.

These international conferences are a big thing for me. I'm just wrapping up my master's degree here in Vancouver. So next month, I'll be done in that. And I hope that new avenues open up because of that as well.

**[00:46:35] TGarcia:** Sweet. So I want to wrap up with some listener questions. So I asked on Instagram what question do you have for Thomas? And here's what a couple of you guys had to say. So the first one is from Mia\_Christine, they asked, "What are some common qualities among some of the best designers you know?"

**[00:46:57] TGirard:** Design is a weird thing, because it's so secret in some ways. I mean, some people, even – It's slowly becoming dinner table conversation and things like design thinking.

Basically, design is not like being an actor or being a writer. If you're a designer, maybe other designers know that you're good at what you do. But it doesn't go beyond that. I really like the designers that are able to extend beyond that and reach kind of the every person. In the academic world, that would be Ezio Manzini. He's just come forth as being a design academic and that he's kind of the most mainstream design academic. But I appreciate kind of really mainstream examples like John Maeda, Stefan Sagmeister, Paula Scher. I mean, these are kind of – Jessica Helfand, who is from the Yale world. Marian Bantjes, who's from my world, from the Emily Carr world. These kinds of designer – Jeffrey Zeldman, early Internet days, connected to School of Visual Arts. These are the celebrity designers, as I would call them. And these are the people that I appreciate these days, because they've been able to use design, but still reach a lot of people.

**[00:48:10] TGarcia:** Next question is from Hello Jadine. They asked, "Where did you get inspiration to write your book? How do you start writing a book?" I know you touched on this a little bit earlier, but if you could give maybe a little bit of insight of like how to start writing a book. I know that's a huge undertaking.

**[00:48:27] TGirard:** When people started asking me to do a book, and I started to look at what would go into the book, I was looking for low-hanging fruit. I didn't want to spend a bunch of time creating content for a book and then get stuck and have this manuscript sitting on my shelf that nobody published.

So first, what I did was I looked at stuff that had already been published of mine, which was stuff through my master's program in a literary journal called *The Ormsby Review*. They had published some of my essays. And I still had copyright for those. So I realized that I could republish those in a book. And that's what I started with.

I looked at my TED Talk, which was translated into a number of different languages. And I saw that this low-hanging fruit that I could include in a book. And quite quickly amassed a bunch of material that could essentially be a collection of essays for a book. That didn't require me to spend a bunch of time not knowing if the book would go through or not.

Pretty quickly, I started approaching people about publishing the book. Got a lot of rejections, which is really normal. And then was looking at self-publishing, but felt it was expensive. But kept talking to people and found a low-cost way of doing it. And that became an avenue that was very realistic for me.

Again, for me, the book was just about getting my ideas to people who couldn't have them otherwise. So I was just sending my book out to all of my connections on social media that I felt might benefit from the book and trying to get eyes on it as much as possible, trying to get feedback from it like a designer does. That's what the first book was, was just to get it out, to have the material as quickly as possible, and to find some way to publish it.

Slowly as the other books kind of got realized, I found that once you do one book, you kind of end up on this track to be turned books for the rest of your life. Yeah, you kind of didn't know what you're getting yourself into. But I would say, yeah, be brave. Everybody will tell you that there's no way you can do a book.

Because a lot of people have tried and failed, that doesn't mean you can't do it. So don't listen to those people. Just muscle through it. Get the book out. Get it in front of people. Talk about it. Talk about it with everyone. And it will become a real thing.

**[00:50:40] TGarcia:** That's all the listener questions for this week. As a reminder, you could be included in the next episode. Make sure to follow me on Instagram at UI Narrative. I randomly asked questions that could be featured in an upcoming episode.

Alright, Thomas. So I like to end the show with a random question completely unrelated to everything we've talked about today. So this question is what's something you want to do in the next year that you've never done before?

**[00:51:07] TGirard:** In the next year, I've never done that whole Europe trip that everybody does when they're in school, or whatever. And these conferences are really opening up that opportunity for me. I would really like to go to the Paris Conference and speak there. I've been to the Paris Airport, but I've never been in Paris.

I have friends there who were living in other places and now live there. I really wanted to see more of Europe. I really want to build an audience there. So definitely, that would be the number one for me.

**[00:51:34] TGarcia:** Yeah, I want to see more Europe, too. What's something I want to do? I want to go camping. So I've never been camping. I think I want to go. I'm still on the fence, though, because like I don't want to wake up to bugs on me or like a bear outside of my tent.

**[00:51:49] TGirard:** Camping seems like a good one. I have a good friend who has a startup called Camp NAB, where you can book a campsites, because apparently it's really hard to book campsites.

**[00:51:57] TGarcia:** Yeah, I've seen that. I've watched different like travel YouTubers. And that's something they said, like you have to book a week in advance, sometimes like a month in advance, depending on how popular the site is

Where can we connect with you online?

**[00:52:11] TGirard:** So I'm on Twitter. I tweet all the time. I actually repost across social media. But my Twitter is on @onthomas\_tweet. Again, check out my TED Talk. It's on YouTube. And it's also on ted.com. It sounds like there's going to be some access to that in the show notes. I'm on all social media. But you can find me mainly on Twitter.

**[00:52:30] TGarcia:** If people have any questions for you, what would you prefer they connect with you?

**[00:52:35] TGirard:** Add me on LinkedIn and send me requests there. You can contact me through most social media. That's probably the best way.

**[00:52:41] TGarcia:** Okay, sounds good. So guys, if you have any questions or comments about today's episode, make sure to tag Thomas on Twitter or send him a message on LinkedIn with his social channels. And I'll have all those linked in the show notes. And also, you can tag me @UINarrative on Instagram or @UINarrativeco on Twitter. Also, please don't forget to share



this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it. I'm sure you've learned a lot today about type. I learned a few new things as well. So please share with people, that way we can continue to share this wonderful education that we learned from Thomas.

Yeah, appreciate you joining us on today's episode.

**[00:53:19] TGirard:** Glad to be here. It was great.

[OUTRO]

**[00:53:24] TGarcia:** Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to show this podcast some love by commenting and subscribing where you listen. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook @UINarrative, or Twitter @UINarrativeco. I also respond to emails at [hello@uinarrative.com](mailto:hello@uinarrative.com) Talk to you later. Bye.

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