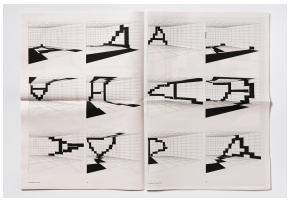
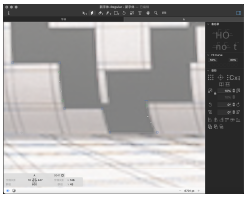


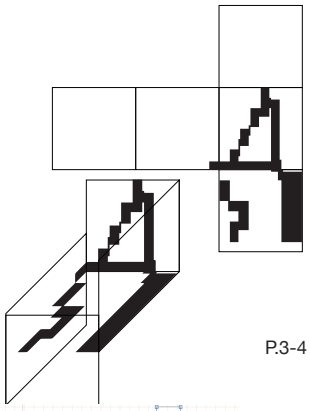
P. 1 *The Alphabetical Room*

In the project *The Alphabetical Room* [P.1], the designer built a three-dimensional grid and used the ***Shape-Builder*** tool in Adobe Illustrator to create letters by solely dragging the mouse. The look of the letters  sprawled across the grid was my starting point, and the possibility of reconstructing them within a three-dimensional grid in Glyphs, the font editor, is what I was trying to explore through these experiments.



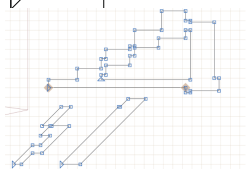
P. 2

Iteration [1]: Add images and use the ***Draw tool*** to draw paths.
A challenge arose as the original image was a photograph of the printed copy and the grid was no longer accurate. I took screenshots of the original image, and when I zoomed in, lines turned into indeterminate pixels[P.2]. At this point, I only replicated the image.

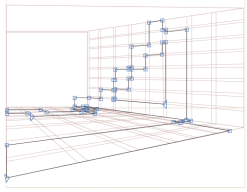


P.3-4

Iteration [2]: Could a three-dimensional grid be constructed in Glyphs? As imagining a three-dimensional space, I unfolded the gird into a plane graph[P.3]. I established a new ***Grid Spacing*** in ***Font info*** and used the ***Pixel tool*** to fill in the unfolded grids. Then I rebuilt the three-dimensional grid like folding a paper box. By using the ***Cursify*** option, I successfully reattached the letters onto the three-dimensional grid with an oblique angle of view[P.4]. Here, a noticeable issue emerged: there was an evident disparity in the angle of view between this iteration and the original work.

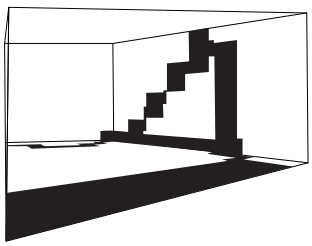


Iteration [3]: I attempted, yet failed, to find any tool or plugin capable of creating a variable grid system or enabling the free transformation of shapes, similar to Adobe Illustrator[P.6]. The issue was that In Glyphs, grid appeared to be defaulted to a straight configuration.



P. 5-6

Iteration [4]: Draw an identical three-dimensional grid using the ***Draw tool*** with as much accuracy as possible. Copy the grid into ***Background*** [P.6]. Draw the path along the grid and manually recreate the letters  . However, the process lacked efficiency and the hand-drawn grid was still not accurate.



It was a process of continuously treating a three-dimensional grid in a two-dimensional straight grid (with technical limitation) and attaching the letters  into an imaginary three-dimensional space. Although it didn't work out as I assumed, it still brought in some thoughts. One speculation was to work with various pixel patterns that create three-dimentional illusion with different angles, in the existing two-dimensional grid in Glyphs. Another interesting speculation invloved exploring how other letters could lie in various three-dimensional space, for instance, a cylinder grid or a ellipsoid.

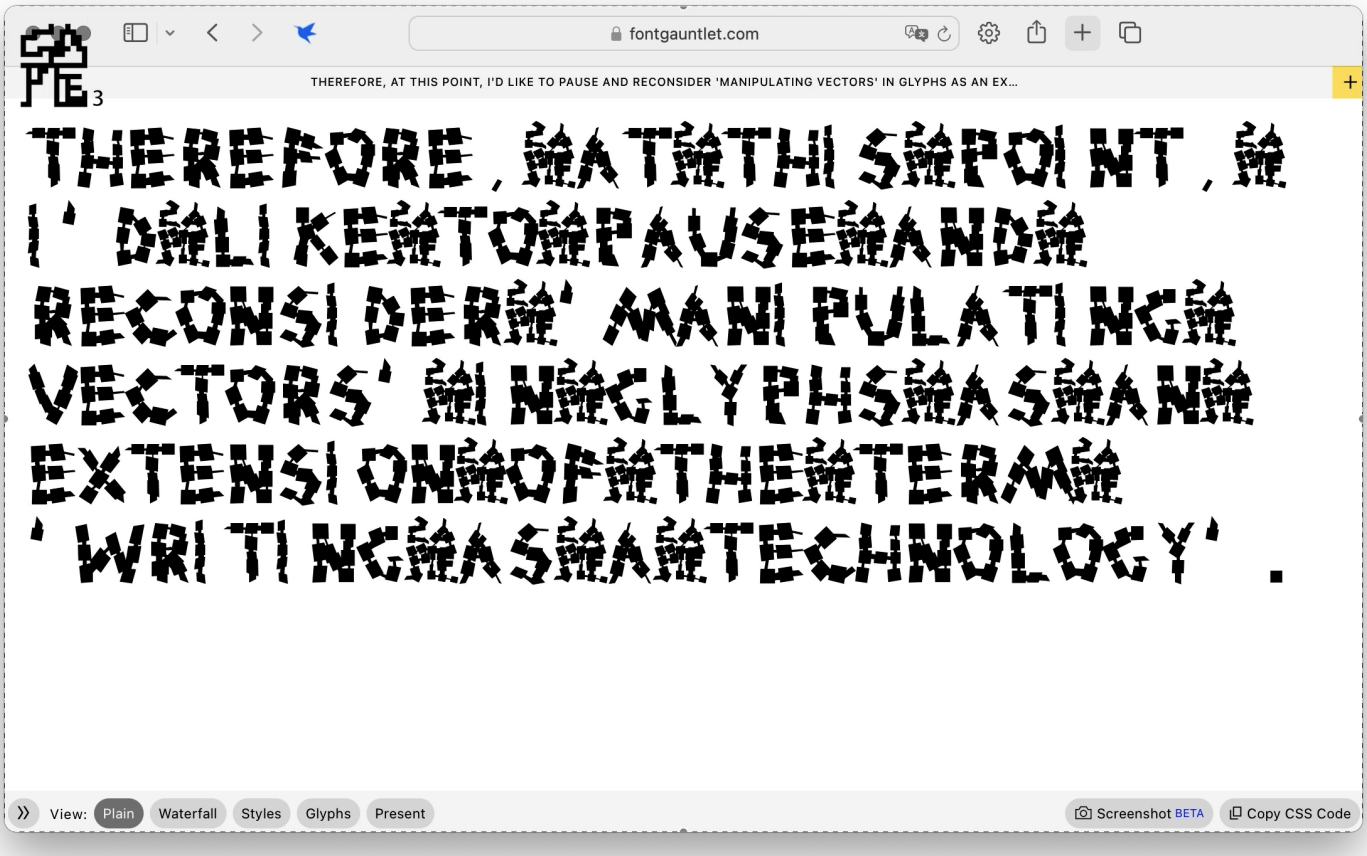
In 'The Alphabetical Room[1] ' project, the designer dragged the mouse from one margin of a three-dimensional grid. The path created by this movement of writing connected successive grids, forming a black trail that gave the illusion of the letter 'A' floating in a cubic space. While trying to recreate these specific letterforms in Glyphs, my experience felt more like repositioning black pieces on the walls within my own imaginary three-dimensional space than simply writing down the letter ‘A’. Such experience was quite intriguing, as treating the two-dimensional digital space as a three-dimensional space.

To continue exploring, I tried to hack this font editor by creating the pixel patterns within its default editing space. But these patterns weren’t random - they were based on a hypothetical letterform 間 that I created, following the rule invented by artist Xu Bing in his project 'An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy[2].' I used the newly crafted letterform, meaning 'space’ in English, as input for my iterative experiments, to minimize the influence that any known letter would cause. As this letterform was barely recognizable, I found myself somehow playing the role of an unspecified ‘scribe’. Unlike traditional copying, my approach was quite willful -- I wasn't overly concerned with reliability or legibility. Instead, I treated the two-dimensional editing tab as my three-dimensional exhibition space, where I continuously rewrote and displayed this new letterform 間. It's worth noting that, despite the accumulation of Opentype files in my laptop folders, they were neither intended for circulation, nor were they exhibits; rather, they were byproducts generated throughout the process. The sole content of this exhibition was the repeated display of 間, and my primary task was to scrutinize the limitations and conveniences of this 'exhibition room’ as a tool.

While experimenting, I always began the process by creating consecutive pixels, following a predetermined order of path as if I were writing the letter 間. Then I manipulated both the grid units and the components within each pixel to reshape the space. It was fascinating to observe patterns evolving in the two-dimensional digital space, like peering into a continuously upgrading kaleidoscope. I could continue this process indefinitely, exploring various combinations of shapes. And if ‘projecting forward’ and ‘make reasonable guesses’[3], this letterform 間 would gain more three-dimensionality. Even though the input for this experiment was not a known letterform, I could still tell that Glyphs, as a tool, were better at assisting me in painstakingly adjusting the shape and spacing of an existing structure. Therefore, at this point, I’d like to pause and reconsider ‘manipulating vectors’ in Glyphs as an extension of the term ‘writing as a technology’[4] (2007). Are the typeface always crafted with the intention of being incorporated into the language and script system? In other words, aside from creating hypothetical letterforms, are there any other scenarios where a letterform is intentionally designed not to conform to any established public system?

References:
[1] Liad Shadmi. The Alphabetical Room. [2022]. Retrieved from https://www.behance.net/gallery/151989635/The-Alphabetical-Room
[2] Xu Bing. An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy. [1996]. Retrieved from https://www.xubing.com/en/work/details/209?year=1996&type=year#209
[3] Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, Pages 51, Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation, [1972] 2013
[4] Ingold, Tim. Drawing, Writing and Calligraphy. Pages 120-151. Lines: A Brief History. [2007].

Draft 3



Click here to see Draft 3.