

## Line of Enquiry

This project explores the threshold where written language transcends its practical goal which is its linguistic function inspired from its primal state as a carved, physical object. My line of enquiry focuses on the structural and material intersections between the Latin letter "R" and the Chinese character "尺" (chi), treating them as morphological microcosms of their respective scripts.

I am investigating these questions through a systematic, 120-iteration experiment. By treating each stroke as an autonomous "holon"—a part that is simultaneously a whole. Using what Tim Ingold describes as "jerry-built" logic, I force these "immovable" letterforms into a state of mutual intrusion, replacing one component per iteration. This process intentionally violates historical canons to reveal the "Dents" or "scars" at the junctures of cross-cultural grafting. Through this procedural "de-shaping," I want to identify the moment of hybridity—the "Third Space"—where letterform becomes a record of the tension between programm-driven constraints and the self-assertive resilience of the stroke.

Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (1973). *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*. New York: Doubleday, pp. 43–45.

"The wheel is what I have termed a multivise or what Arthur Koestler termed a 'holon'—a member of an open, limited set which is waiting to be extended... The fact that it is an autonomous whole means that it can be transplanted from one context to another."

The concept of holon in *Adhocism* provides a critical framework for my practice of reconfiguring the Latin 'R' and Chinese '尺'. By deconstructing these characters into autonomous strokes—such as transposing the R's lobe into the *heng-zhe* (冂) of '尺'.

This reference forces me to negotiate the tension between the "utility" of a functional typeface and the "autonomy" of holons. In a traditional system, a stroke's utility is tied to its strict adherence to legibility; it must remain invisible to serve the act of reading. However, by treating strokes as autonomous holons, I liberate them from this communicative duty. The "tension" arises because as these parts gain independence as pure form, the character, as a larger system, begins to lose its legibility. This process allows me to explore a hybrid space where a stroke can exist as both a functional component of a language and an independent unit of visual expression.

Ingold, T. (2007) *Lines: A brief history*. London: Routledge, pp. 120-151.

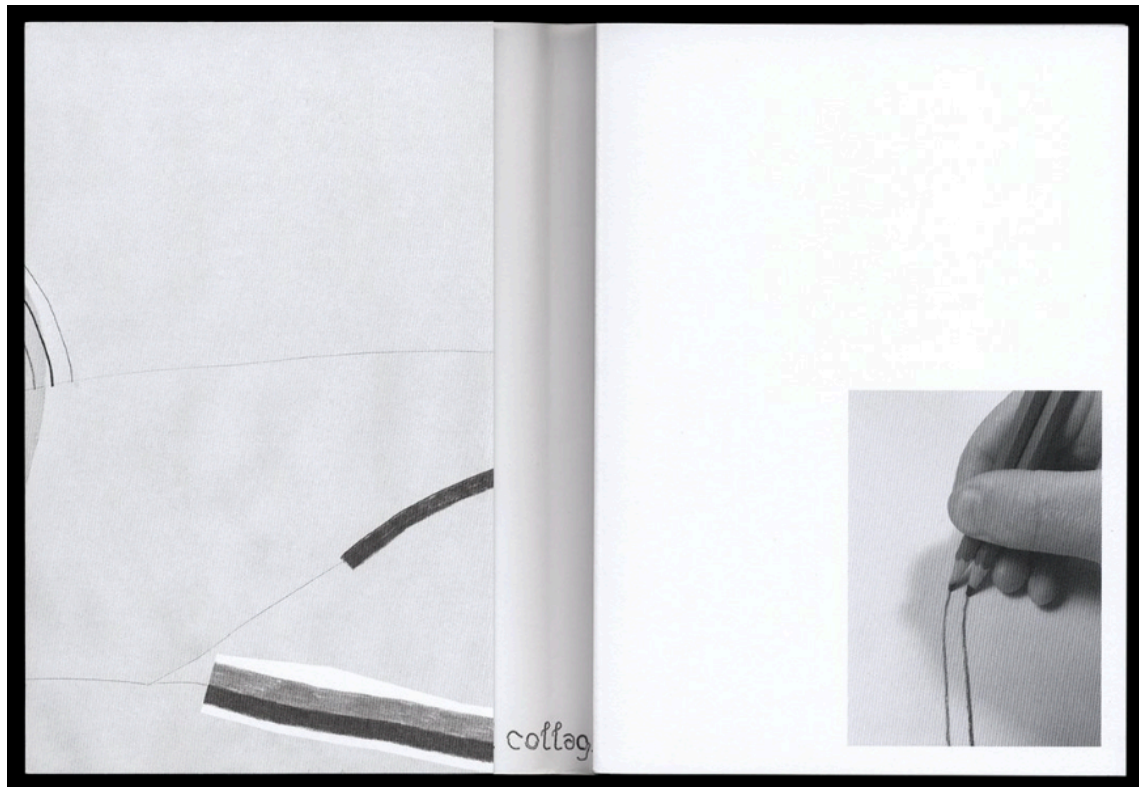
“Modern historians rather grandly call 'writing systems' undoubtedly developed as accumulations of expediences... they were, in short, more like Rube Goldberg devices... [or] 'jerry-built structures' that bear less resemblance to carefully constructed schemes.”

Tim Ingold's citation of linguist John DeFrancis, which describes the evolution of writing systems as an accumulation of "jerry-built structures" rather than perfect engineering designs, provides a core critical perspective for the "collaged" aesthetic presented in my 120 glyph iterations. In my practice, the evolution from the "Trajan R" to the "Songti Chi 尺" does not pursue a smooth structural transition. Instead, by randomly replacing isolated strokes (Holons) in each step, it simulates a series of local and temporary expedient solutions.

Ingold notes that writing systems are more akin to a "hodgepodge of mnemonic clues", a notion that challenged my initial concerns regarding the structural balance of the glyph designs. Inspired by this, these iterations can be defined as a form of "intentional jerry-building." This collage-like process serves as a visual manifestation of the essence of graphic evolution—demonstrating how form transcends the boundaries of culture and linguistic function through continuous patching and substitution. This methodology allows me to honestly preserve the conflicts and ruptures within the publication's evolutionary process, even when they appear unrefined.

Method:

Langdon, J. (2025) *Opacity Engraving*. Design by Karl Nawrot. Phantom Avantgarde #1. France: Phantom Avantgarde



Karl Nawrot's practice serves as a primary driver for the design procedure and medium transformation within my project. He approaches and deconstructs glyph structures by imposing tool-based constraints—such as using bundled double-pencils to fix the stroke trajectory when developing the NOVA typeface. This methodology has challenged and stretched the cognitive boundaries of my typographic practice. Inspired by his work, I established a rigorous procedural constraint: I forced myself to replace only one stroke per iteration in a fixed sequence, while compressing all components into a proportional framework extracted from six letterform samples.

Under this predefined program, the design process evolves into a near-automated progression. I operate with minimal subjective aesthetic intervention; the sole point of decision lies in selecting a replacement from a predefined set of three or four stroke options. This logical friction, born from systematic constraints, translates into a cross-cultural glyph sequence in my publication. It demonstrates how form spontaneously mutates and transcends cultural thresholds under the pressure of a carefully designed program.

Critical Position:

Koestler, A. (1967) *The Ghost in the Machine*. London: Hutchinson

The self-assertive tendency is the dynamic expression of the holon's wholeness, the integrative tendency, the dynamic expression of its partness... Janus-faced entity who, looking inward, sees himself as a self-contained unique whole, looking outward as a dependent part.

Arthur Koestler's concept of the "holon" serves as an interpretative framework to describe the relative relationship between a part and a whole—a "Janus-faced" entity that is simultaneously a self-contained totality and a dependent component. Koestler posits that every holon possesses an inherent tendency to persist in and assert its particular pattern of activity. In my practice, despite the layers of control programs I designed—ranging from predefined proportional frameworks to a mandatory replacement sequence—I found that these strokes, acting as "functional holons," always exhibited resilience to some extent.

This theory extends my methodology: regardless of how I applied "integrative tendencies" through mirroring, stretching, or repositioning anchor points to force these strokes into a desired structure, they persistently asserted their original formal identities. This "self-assertion" led to unexpected distortions during the iterations. It made me realize that the "collageness" of the glyphs is a dynamic visualization of individual strokes attempting to maintain their "unique wholeness". These unbalanced forms reveal the eternal tension between the part and the whole within a system.

Wildcard:

Bhabha, H. K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-18, 37-56.

"It is in the emergence of interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated... the 'Third Space' constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity."

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the "Third Space" and "Hybridity" provides a crucial conceptual framework for interpreting the glyphs in my project. Bhabha argues that cultural intersection occurs in a "liminal" space that displaces the histories that constitute it, creating a site where cultural meaning has no "primordial unity". I initially thought I could escape the contemplation of Identity and conduct a purely formal experiment, yet I realized that these evolving glyphs were, all along, articulating this very sense of Hybridity.

The "collageness" of the glyphs serves as a visualiazation of this process of mutual intrusion: the established authority of the Roman capital and the calligraphic gestures of Chinese script collide and permeate one another. Through Bhabha's lens, these iterations are a negotiation taking place within the "interstices" of written language. It demonstrates that at the precise threshold of crossing cultural boundaries, form loses its singular fixity and enters a productive, albeit unstable, state of "in-betweenness."

Topic:

Catich, E. M. (1968) *The Origin of the Serif: Brush Writing and Roman Letters*. Davenport, Iowa: Catfish Press, pp. 186-189.

“The dent... is a shape not consciously sought by the brush-writer. It is the juncture of two brush strokes. ... A Roman letter may not be written in mirror reverse, nor upside down, shortened, condensed, extended or varied in the relationship of its letter parts.”

Edward Catich's serif analysis provides the foundational technical logic for my project, particularly through his identification of the "Dent"—the unintentional, idiosyncratic shape formed at the juncture of strokes. This concept significantly stretches my practice: in my iteration experiment, as I graft strokes from disparate scripts, the resulting "Dents" at these cross-cultural junctures become visible "scars" of the hybrid process. These often strange and distorted junctions are a manifestation of what Catich describes as the inevitable physical reality of stroke intersection.

Furthermore, Katich established a strict set of rules for the Roman alphabet, stipulating that it could not be "shortened, compressed, lengthened, or varied." While these rules established the historical authority of the Roman alphabet, Katich's statement made me realize that breaking these rules was necessary for my current research. This process allows me to find that the structural authority of the Roman capital letters can yield to mixed cultural spaces, thus revealing a new vitality in alphabetic forms that transcends traditional rules.