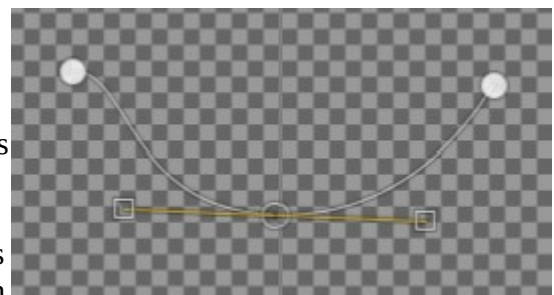JoinedUp Text Filter for Gimp 2.8 Help Sheet (Version 2.16)

The filter began life as tool for inserting joined-up handwriting style text into an image with Gimp using a small number of customised fonts. It now offers a number of options for adding text along a user defined path which can be applied to both my own handwritten style fonts and, largely to other fonts.

It is worth spending some time thinking about the path that the text is going to 'sit' on. The path may take the form of a shape that encloses an image or one that follows a feature within an image; generally smoother paths provide results that require less time spent on adjusting the text (usually with extra spaces) along its length. Where there is the need to follow shapes or features that require a number of 'sharp' changes of direction, it may be worth considering using a series of shorter paths.

For those new to working with paths, I find the best way to add a smooth path with the Gimp path tool is to press down on the mouse button (or pen) to add a path anchor point (the circles that appear along the path) and, while pressing down, to drag out the control points (the squares joined to the anchor points). You can then drag these control points about to modify the shape of the path. I find it really hard to adjust the control points when they lie on top of an anchor point – I have to then place the cursor on the path itself and drag to reshape that part of the path and then move the control points to reshape the path.

Control Points (square boxes) shown dragged out

I created a new image 2000 by 2000 for my friend, Mr Thumb, and drew a very simple path around him. The path was made with only three anchor points and, so that you could see it clearly, was stroked with the paint tool in his favourite colour.

All text added with the filter is placed along the path. The decision to position text with its mid-point on the path was made to minimise any distortion, caused by rotation, to the joined-up fonts that I wanted to use. There is no option to change this positioning.

I usually work with images of this size (before scaling down) and now have a feel for what size text will work on a given path (at least for the font I use most of the time). Here I set the font size to 100 and the step size was set to zero; I was lucky and only two characters fell off the end of the path. I wanted to use exactly 100 characters for this exercise, so rather than adjust the font size down I tweaked the path anchor points slightly to make the text fit along the path.

At 100% zoom you can see how the path distorts the joining strokes of my custom font on the top section of the path leaving slight gaps between the letters. Of course this wouldn't matter with a non-joining font.

To improve the situation I set the 'Try to compensate for changes in path direction' option to a value of 4.0. (Sorry about the catchy name for the option.) This will only work for fairly gentle bends in a path, sadly, but it is worth giving it a try.

I could also have tried reducing the space between the letters by using a negative value for the 'Adjust spacing between characters' option. Applying other filters such as 'Chisel or Curve' or 'GT Bevel' also help to eliminate this small gapping problem.