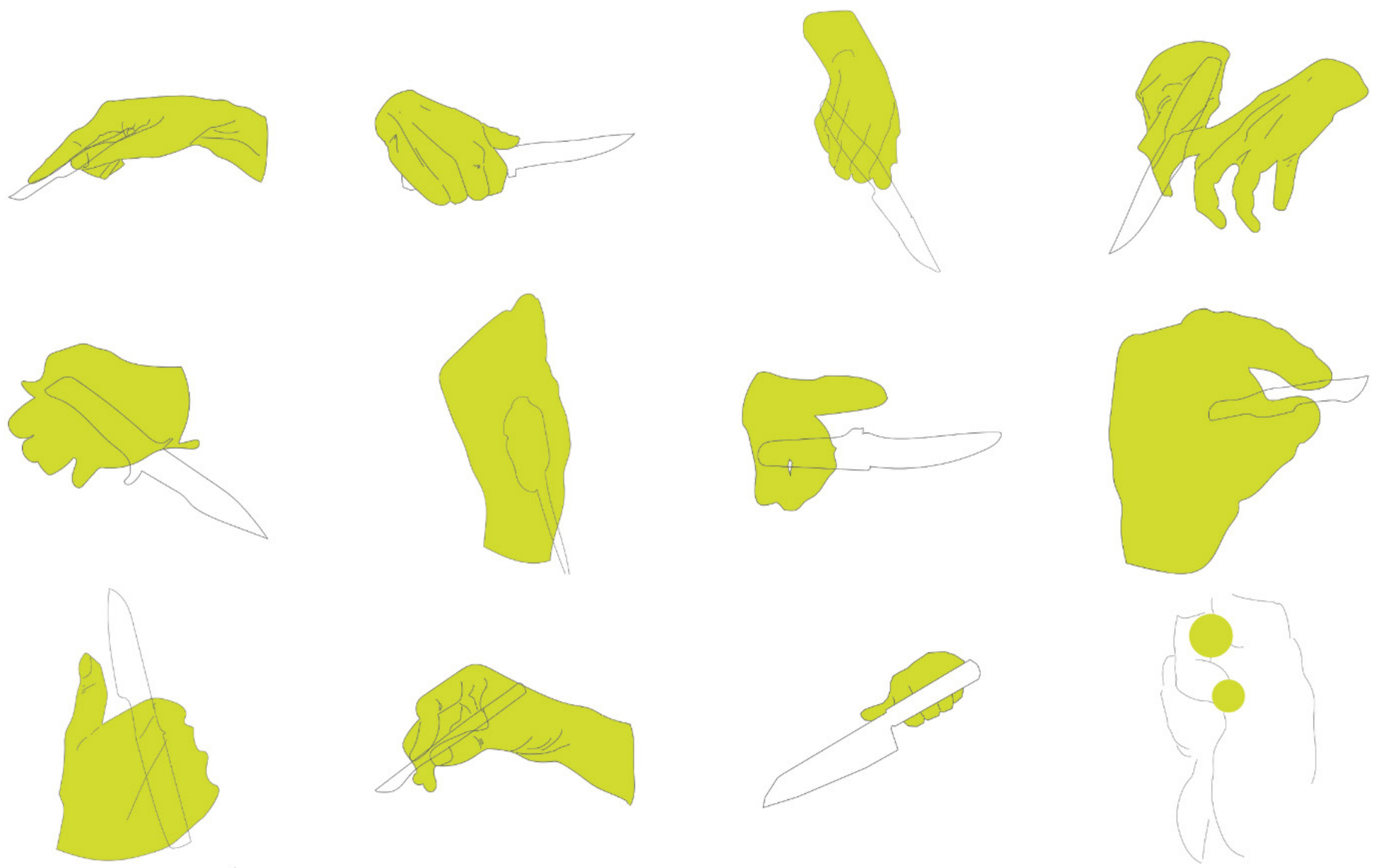


Negotiated Gestures

How Hand Movements Shift Meaning Across Tools and Time

Feedback:

- how gestures are used under different historical and technological conditions;
- and the relationship between gestures, tools, media, and recording methods.
- how technological changes (such as computers) continuously reshape how we understand and use our bodies.



001 Two people were secretly smoking in There are two paths to take the corridor

002 The battle is imminent. Unleash your magic moves

003 I want to extend the awning a little

004

005 Here is your change. Please keep it well

006 Squeeze a little body wash

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011

012 The mobile phone fell into the track and was crushed

013 Pointing at the blackboard, the teacher is lecturing seriously

014 A lot of people began to quarrel

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IDEA Shift

GUESTURES

1\ Non-verbal communication

2\ As an overlooked visual language

1\ The meaning of gestures does not originate from the movement itself, but from the interaction between gesture, tool, and context.

2\ From the interaction between gesture, tool, and context

“whether gestures are misinterpreted”

“how the same bodily movement acquires different functions and meanings across tools and historical contexts.”

(concretising my interest in non-verbal communication through the lens of gesture, tools, and history.)

This project investigates how hand gestures shift meaning across historical and technological contexts, using illustration and publication as a way to archive and compare gestures actions rather than explain them.

Medium

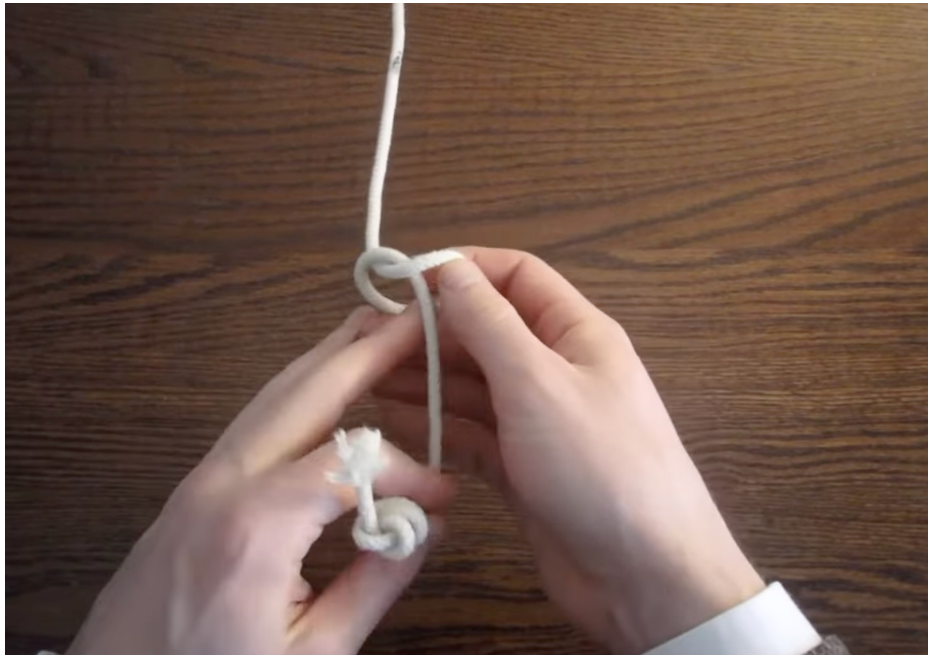
- Printed publication
- Archive-like structure
- Text-less illustrations

The choice of a printed publication as an archive reflects the intended audience, as it invites slow reading and comparison, rather than immediate consumption.

Target Audience

- Readers interested in hand gestures as non-verbal and embodied practices
- Designers and researchers involved in the standardisation of gestures within systems and interfaces
- And those studying the historical evolution of tools and technologies through bodily interaction.

TOOLS x GESTURES iteration



Iteration 1

The same gesture × different scene functions

TWO HANDS GRIPPING VERTICALLY

I selected the highly stable gesture of two hands gripping vertically, focusing on how the same bodily posture performs different functions across social contexts and historical moments.

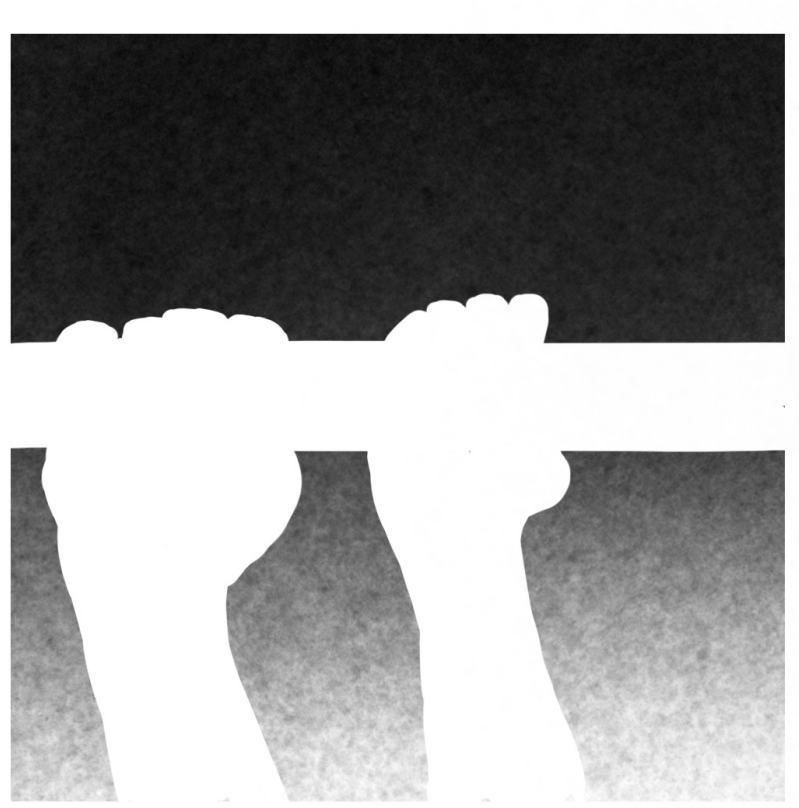
The gesture itself remains visually similar; what changes is its embedded context, bodily load, and degree of risk. The same gesture can be socially assigned entirely different functions and values depending on context.

Twisting clothes
Daily household

Carrying a pole
a labor tool

Holding an axe
Labor/risk

Holding the microphone
entertainment/ performance,



applying force/ squeezing

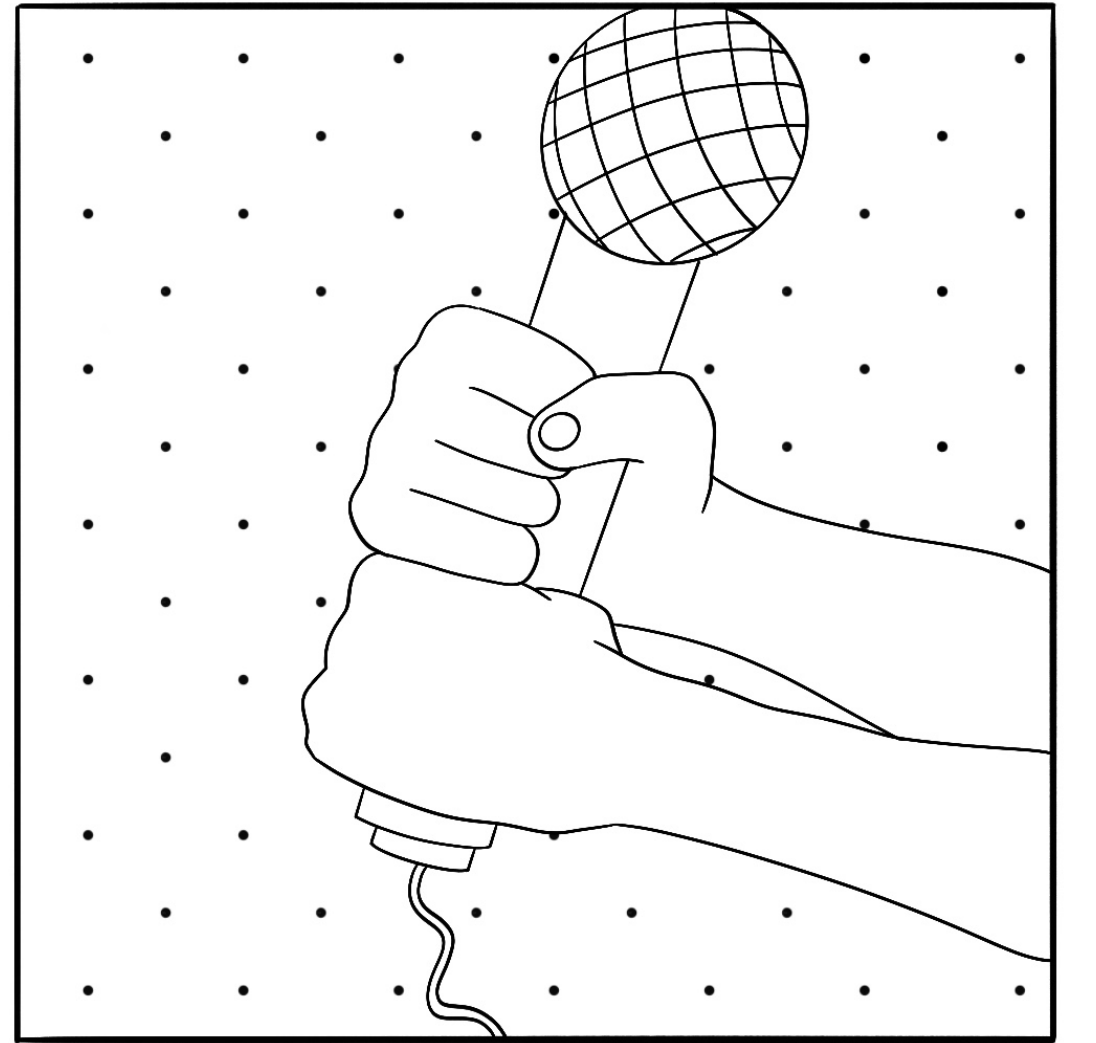
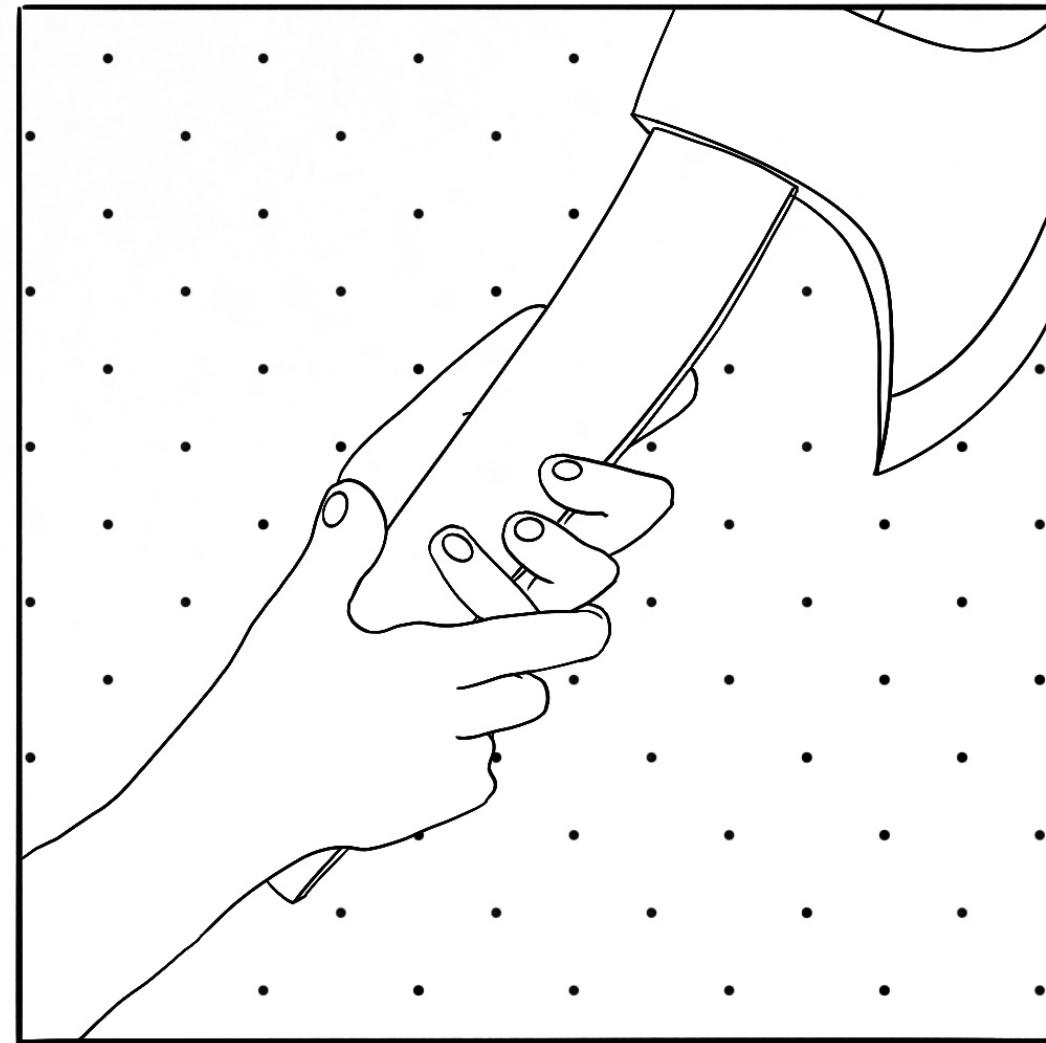
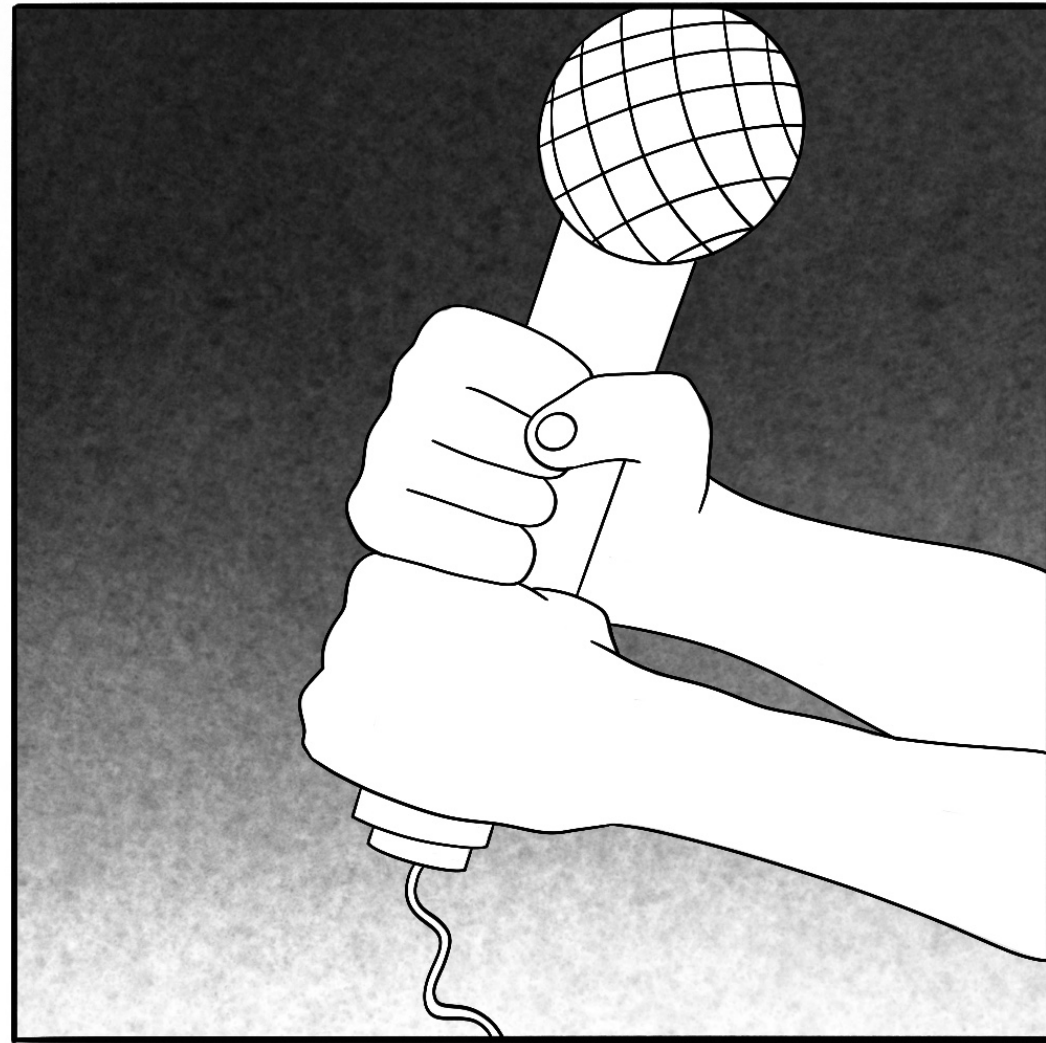
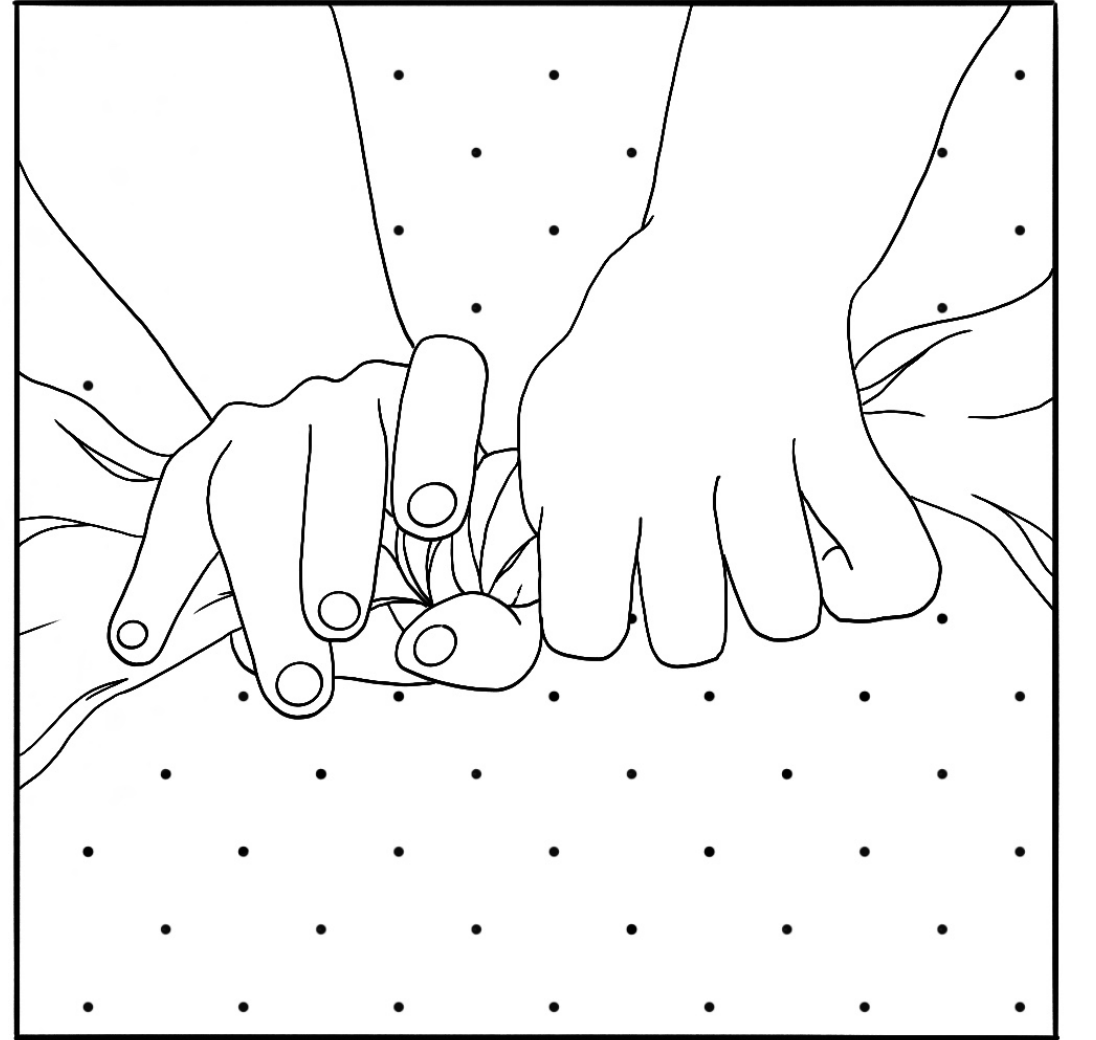
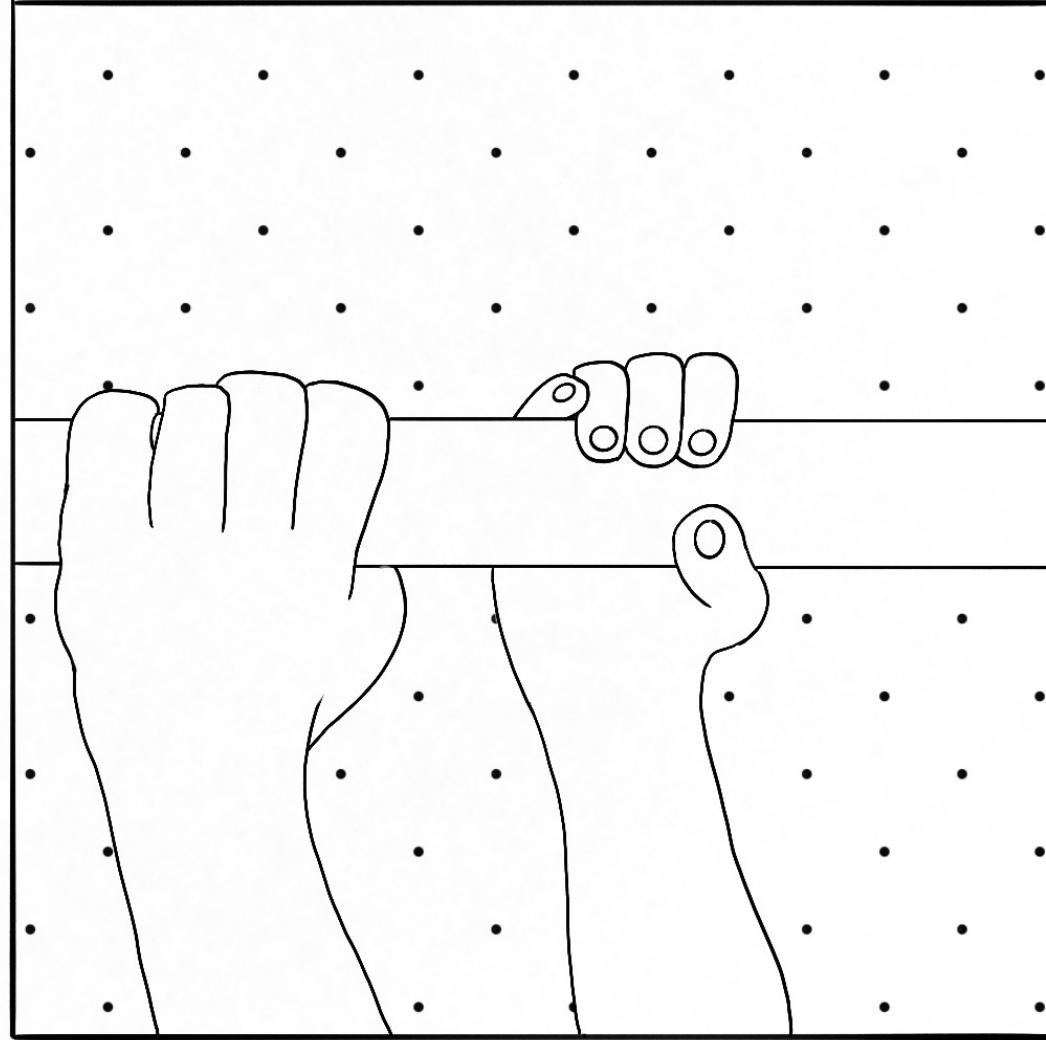
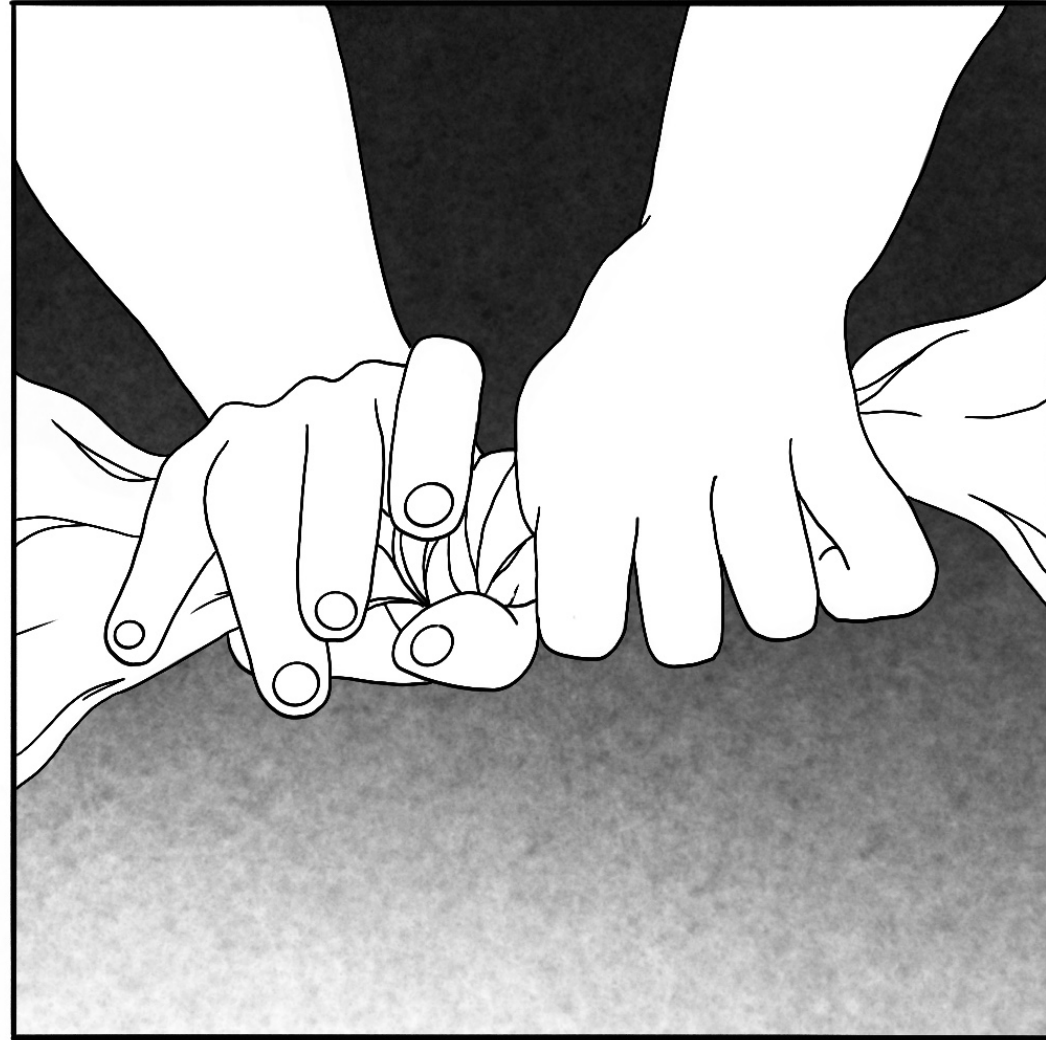
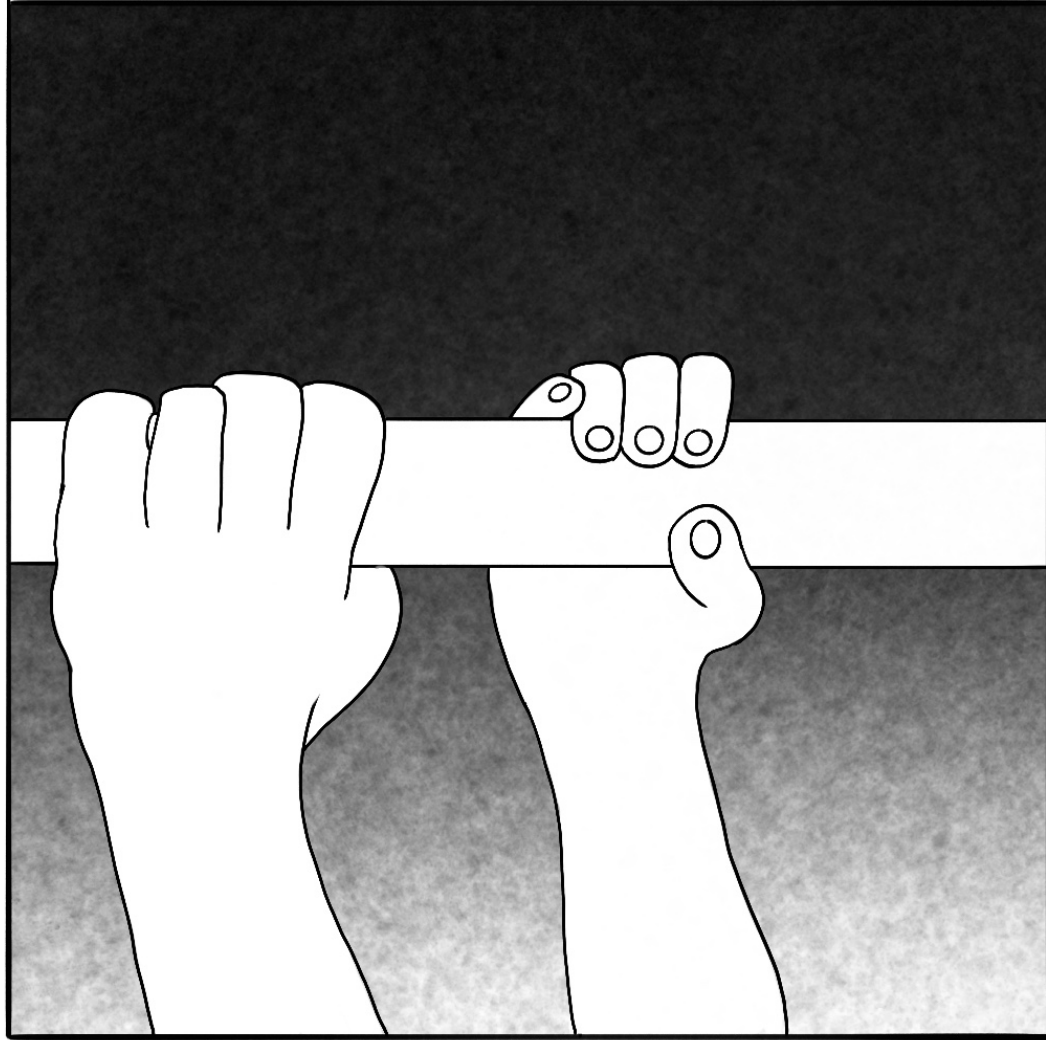
load-bearing capacity/ balance

force/ attack

expression

This iteration reveals contextual functionality but remains limited to social use, offering less insight into structural shifts driven by tools and technologies.

Across domestic, labour, entertainment, and physical work contexts, the gesture shifts between applying force, balancing weight, performing identity, and managing risk.



Iteration 2

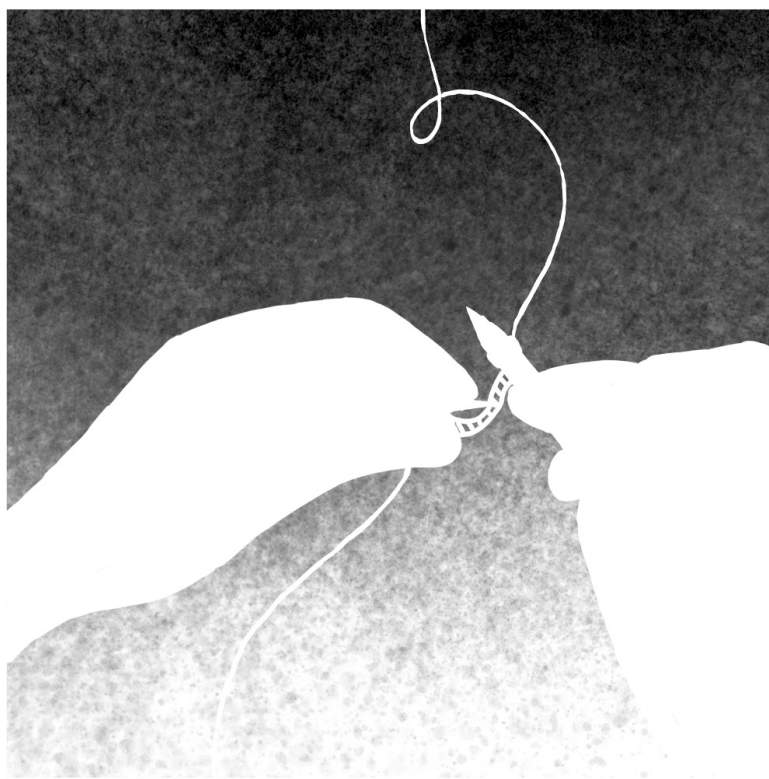
The same gesture × tool evolution

PINCH THE THUMB AND INDEX FINGER TOGETHER

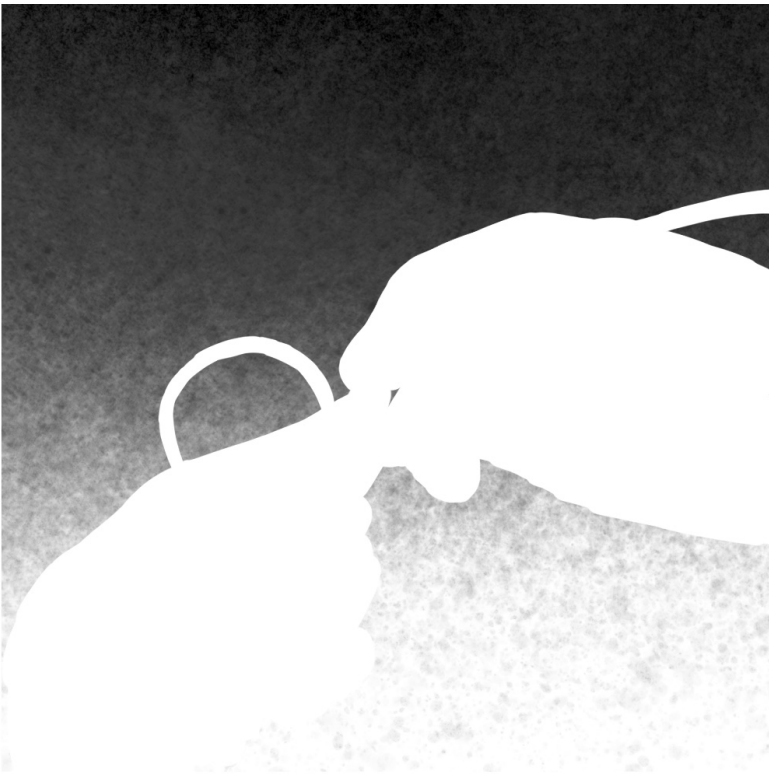
I chose the pinching gesture of thumb and index finger, focusing on how it evolves from physical manipulation to abstract command as tools change.

The gesture transforms from directly acting upon material to issuing commands within a system. As tools become less visible, gestures do not disappear but are re-encoded as interface actions.

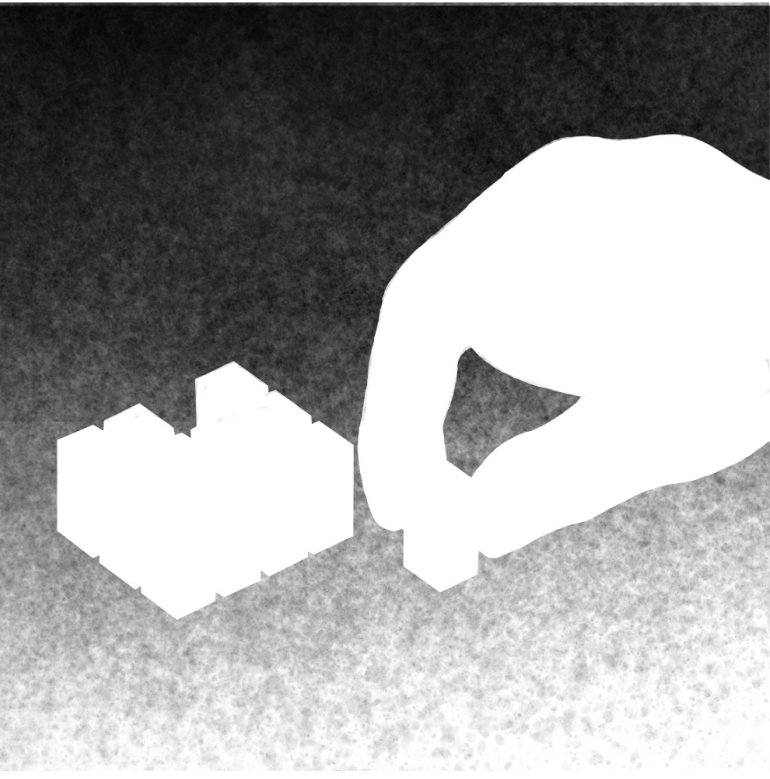
Handmade/Woven
Fibers, threads



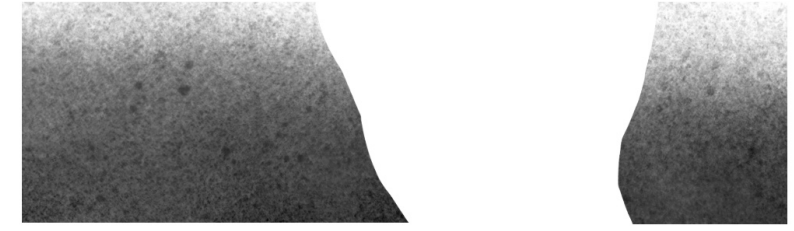
Knot-tying for record-keeping
Rope



Movable type printing
type mold



Touchpad
digital interface



processing materials/ making

recording information

select information unit

control ratio/command

This iteration critically reveals that so-called “natural” gestures are often the result of prolonged technological conditioning.

The gesture shifts from manipulating material, to recording information, to selecting data, and finally to issuing abstract commands.

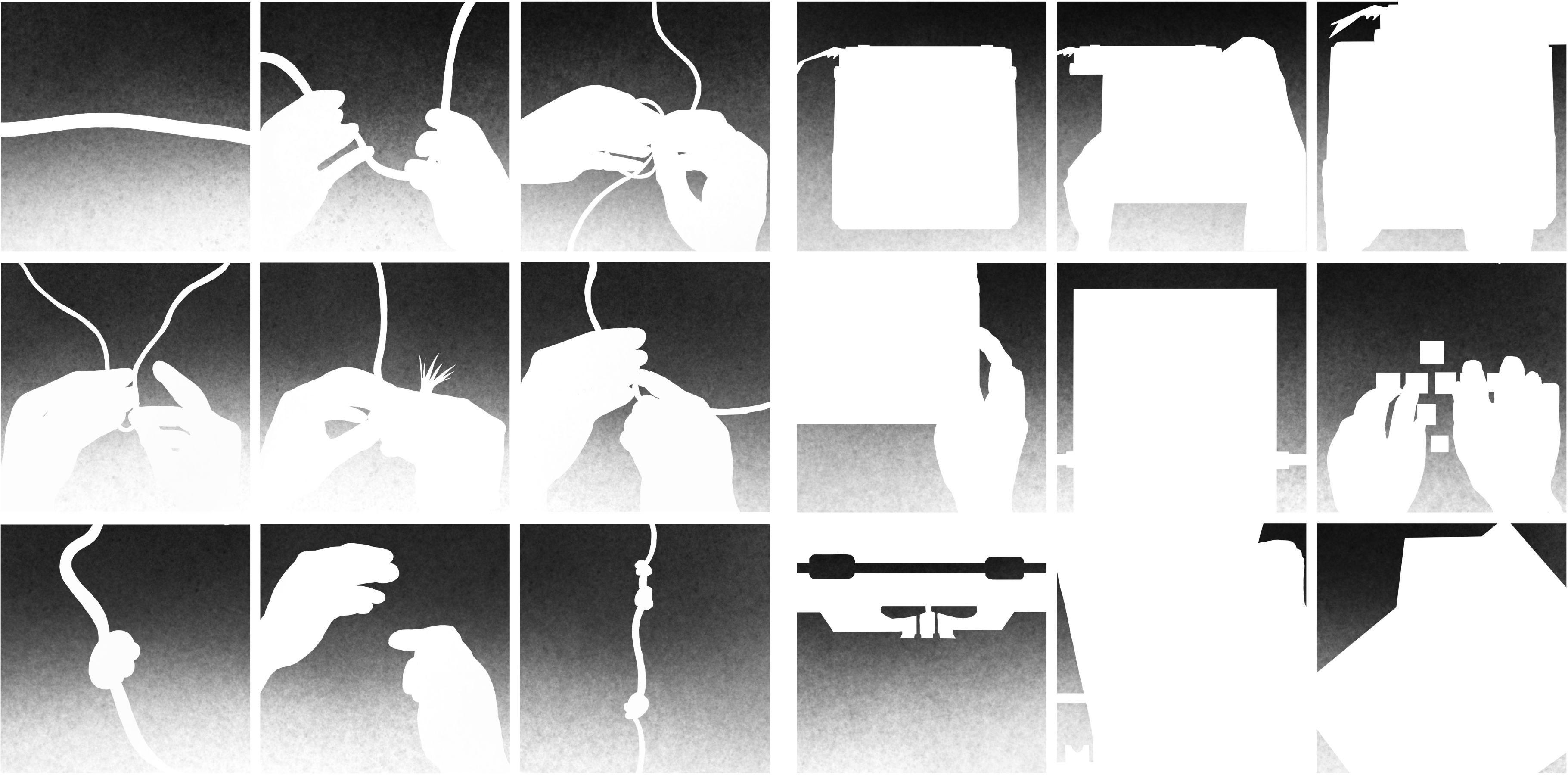
Iteration 3

Gesture × Tool × Information generation process (Comic strip)

Using sequential comics, I focus on how gestures progressively act upon tools to enable the emergence of information.

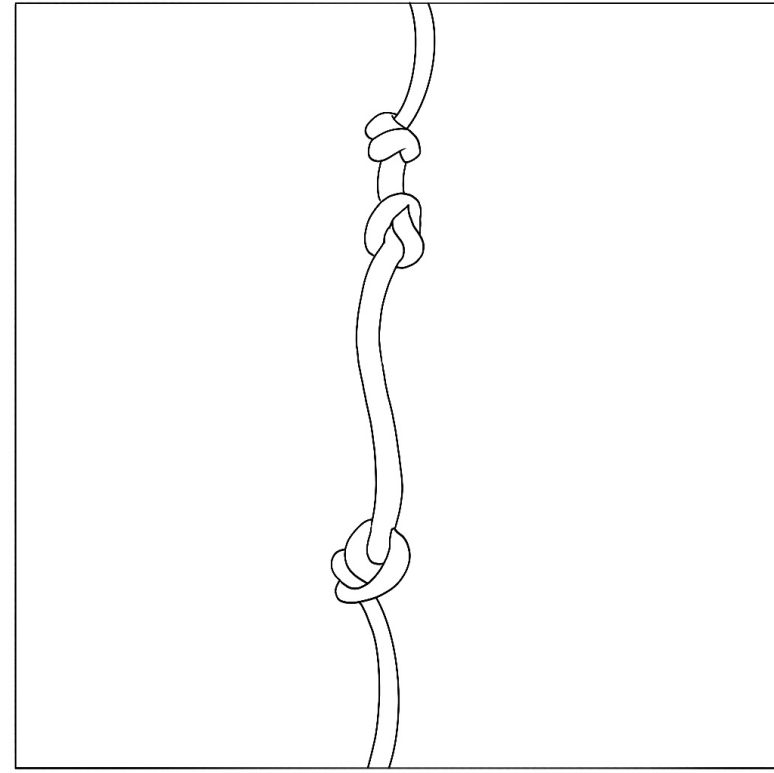
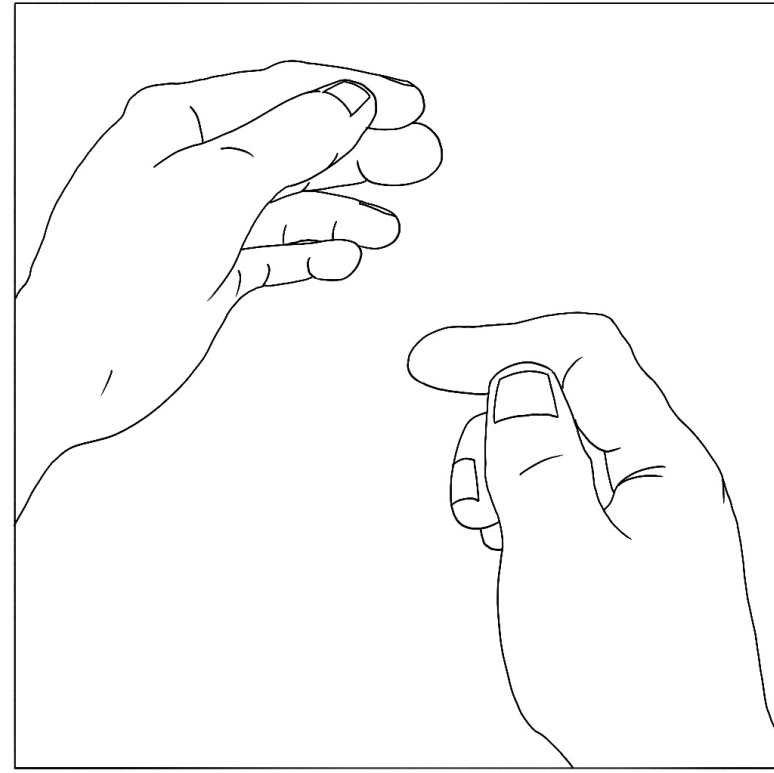
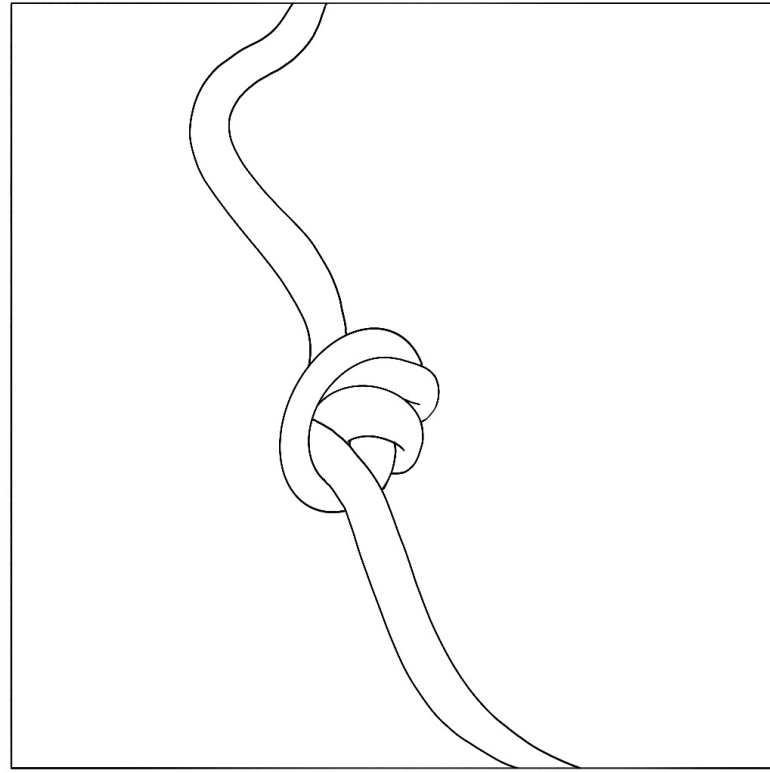
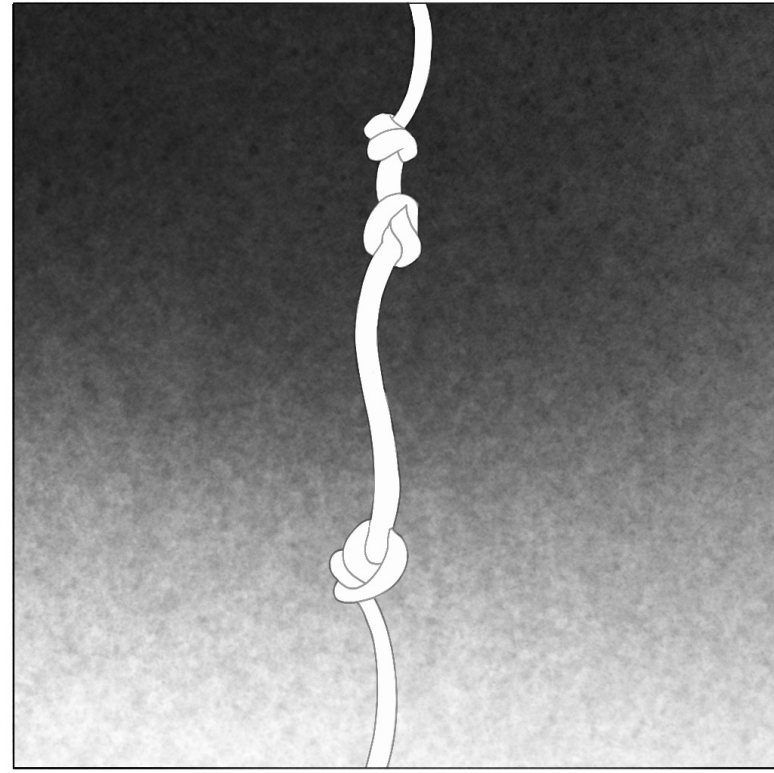
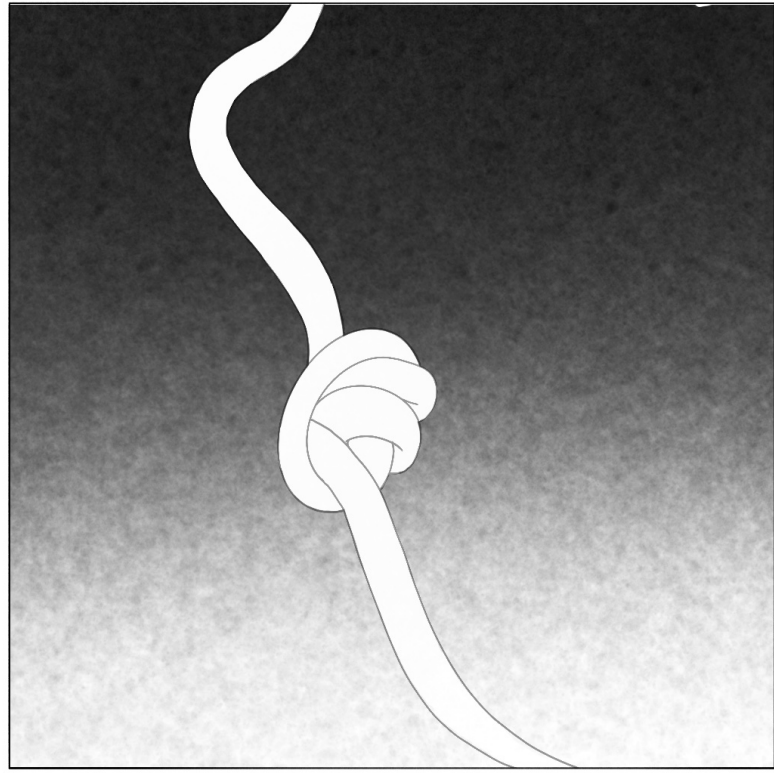
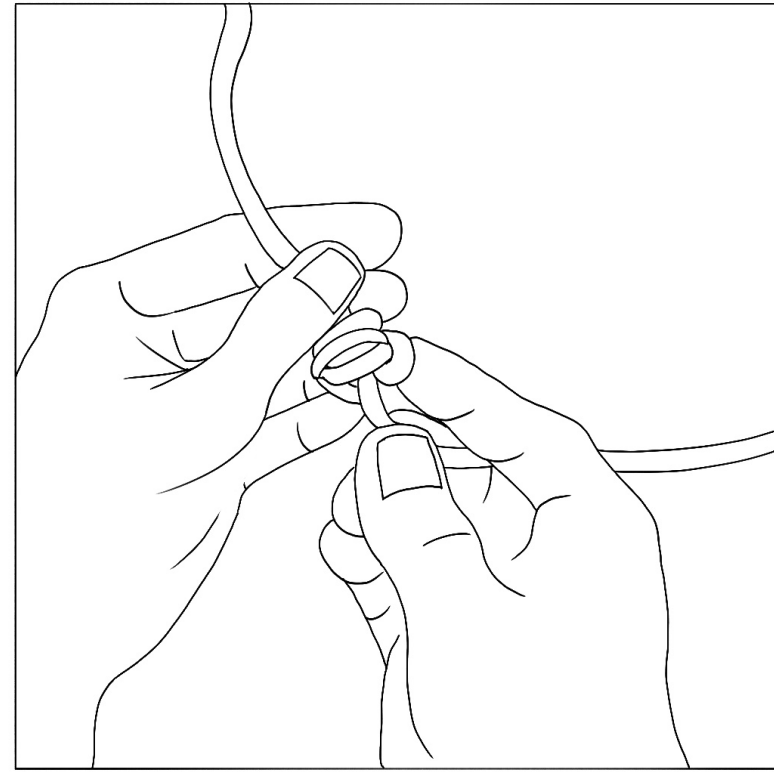
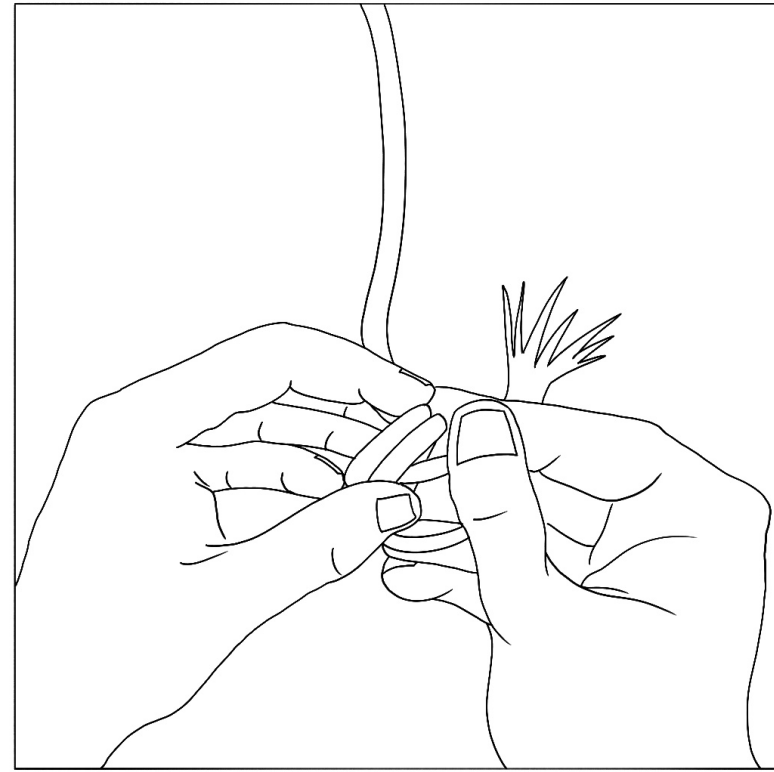
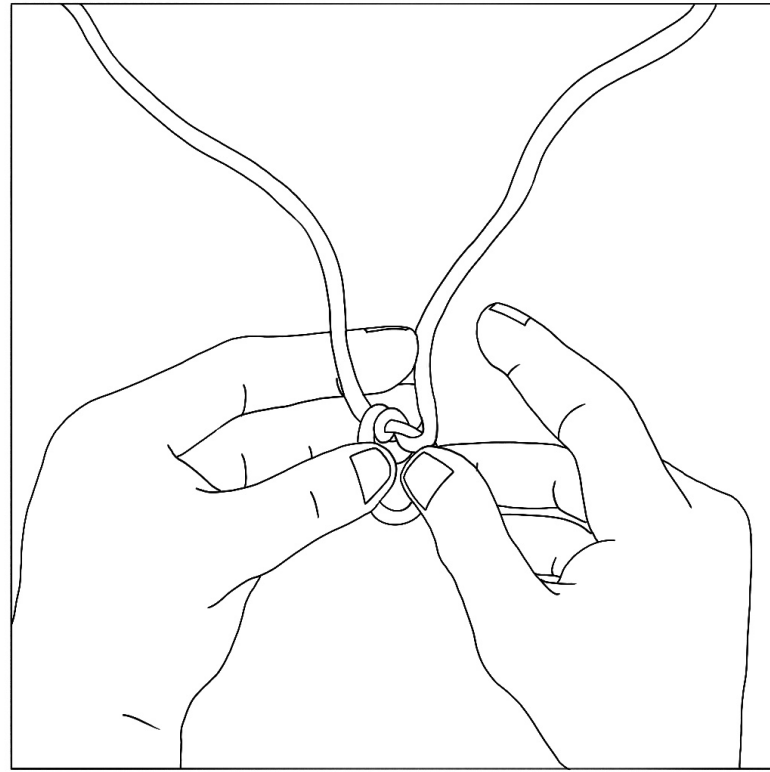
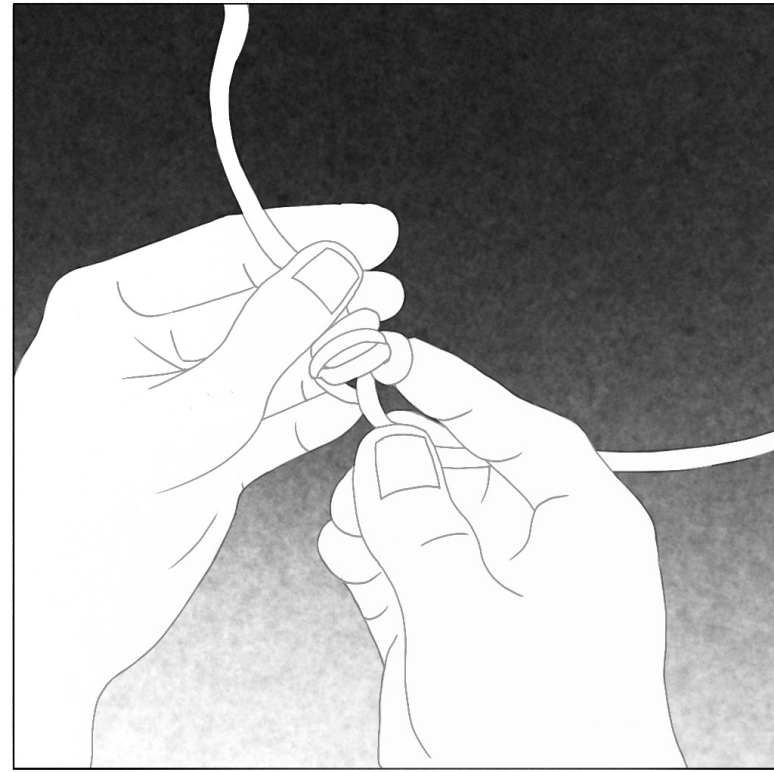
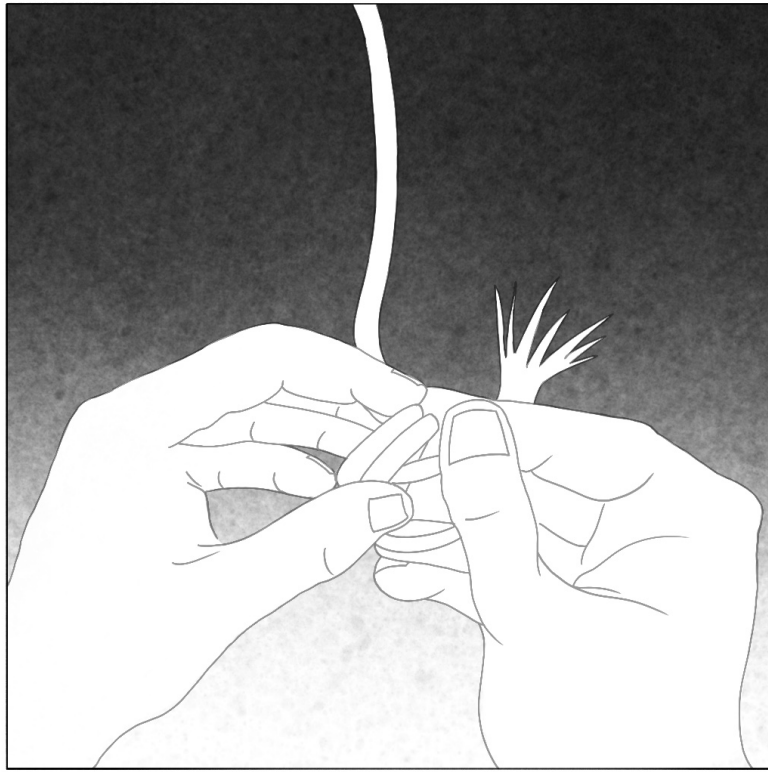
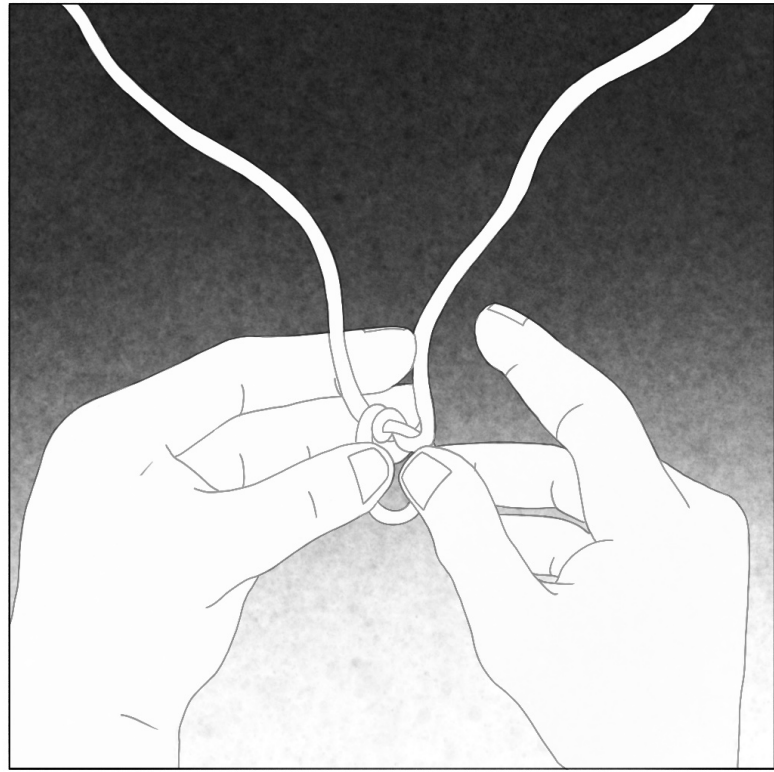
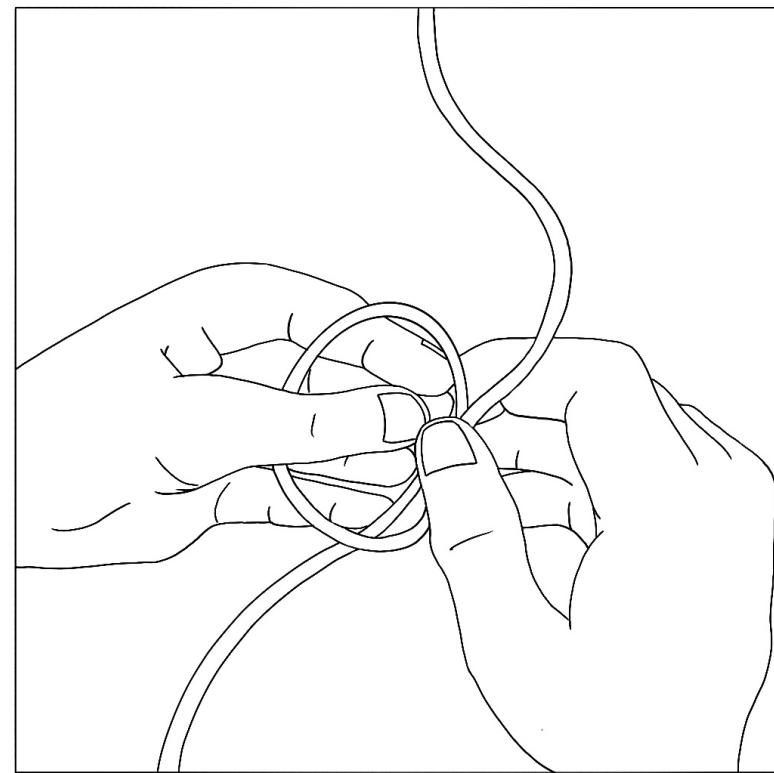
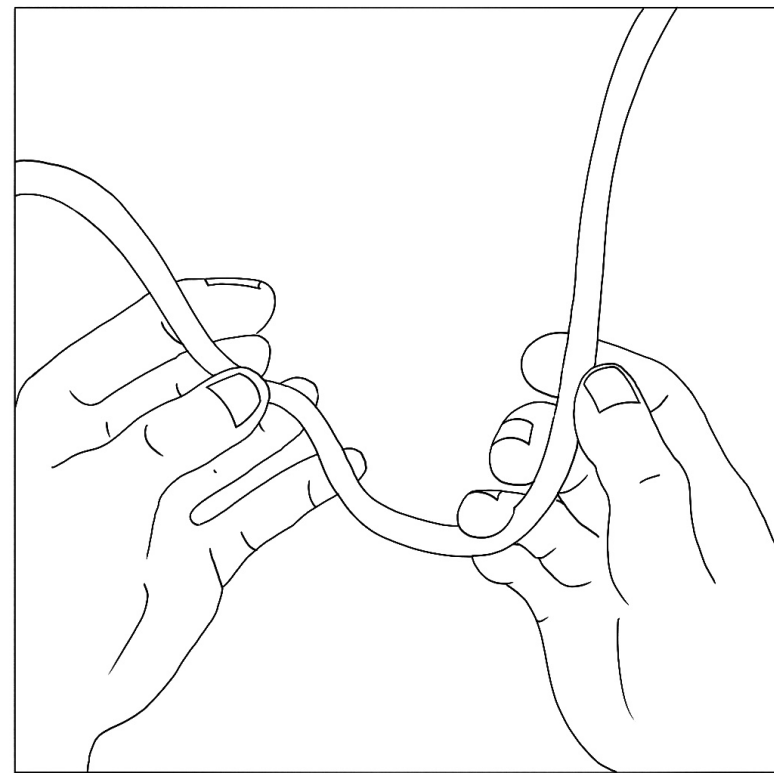
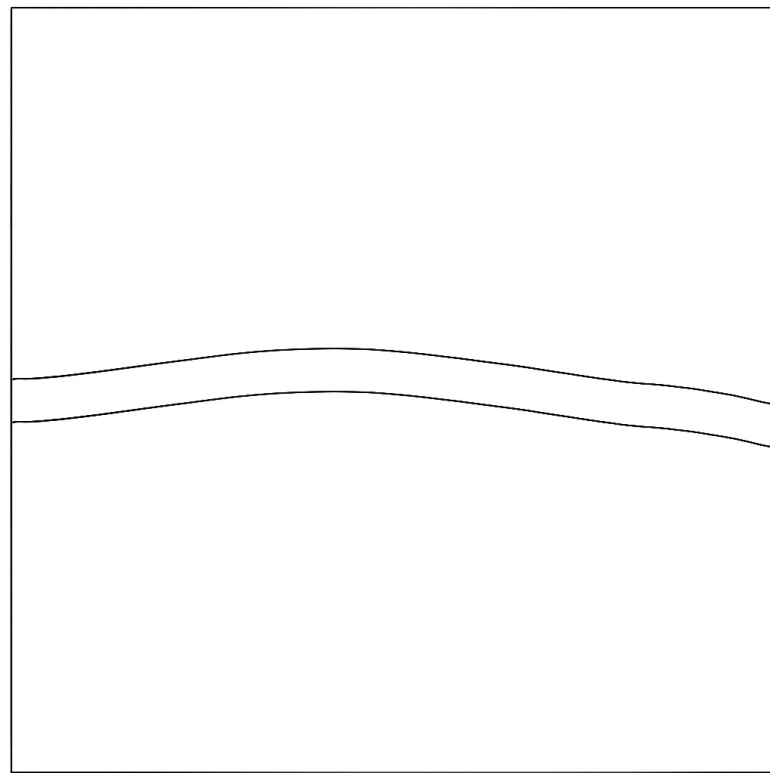
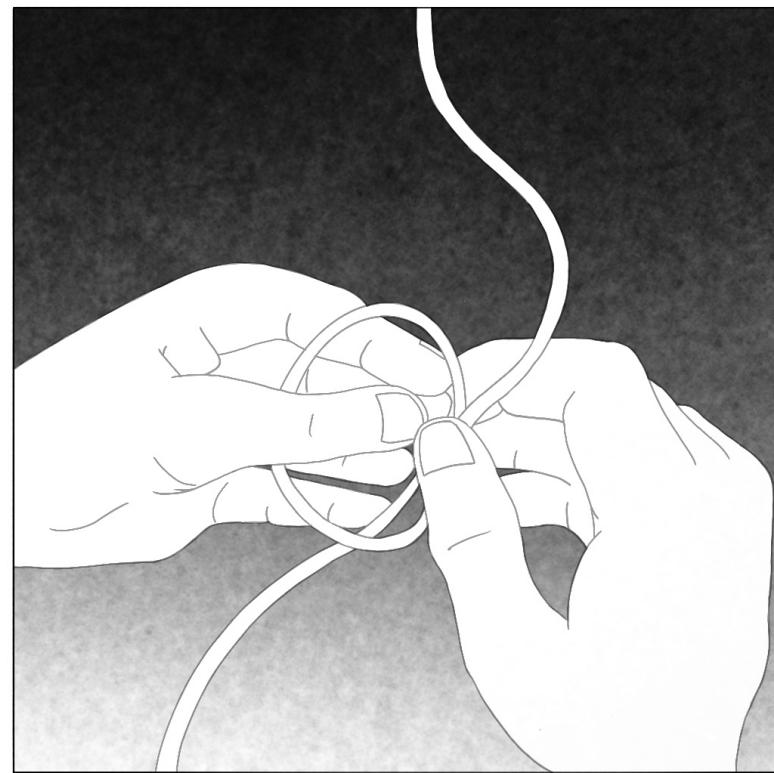
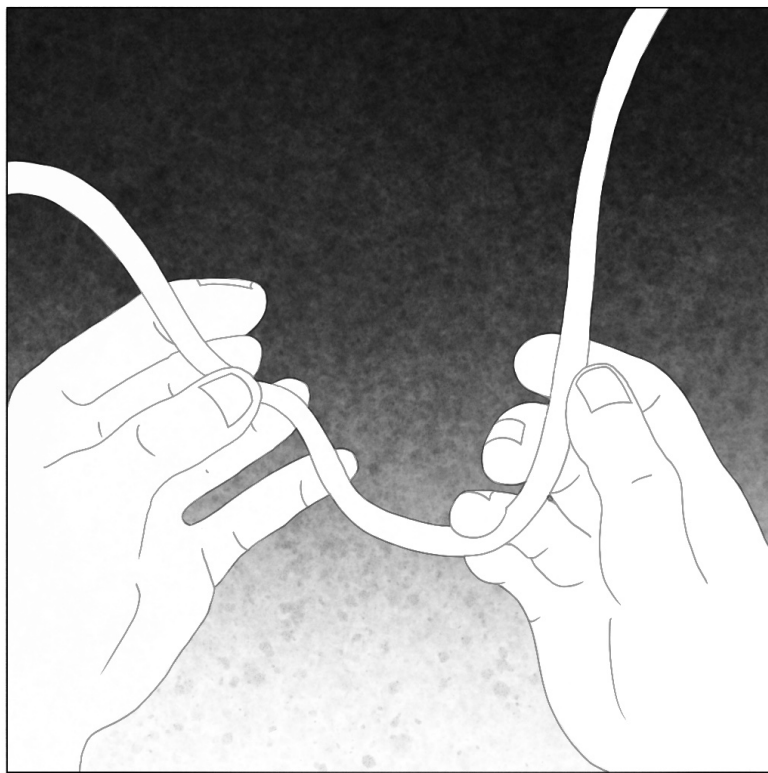
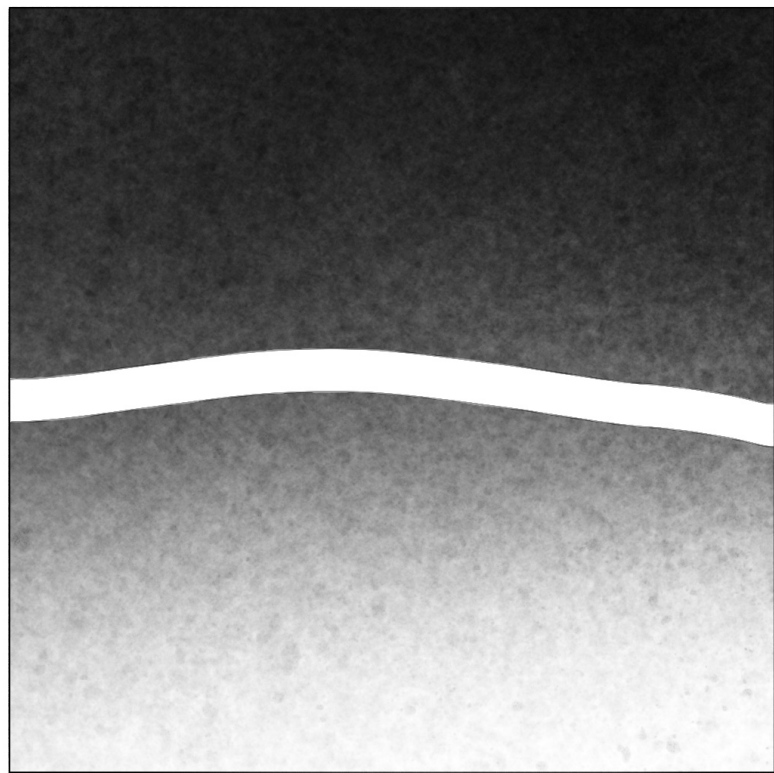
Gestures shift from continuous bodily movements to discrete, rhythmic, and standardised inputs.

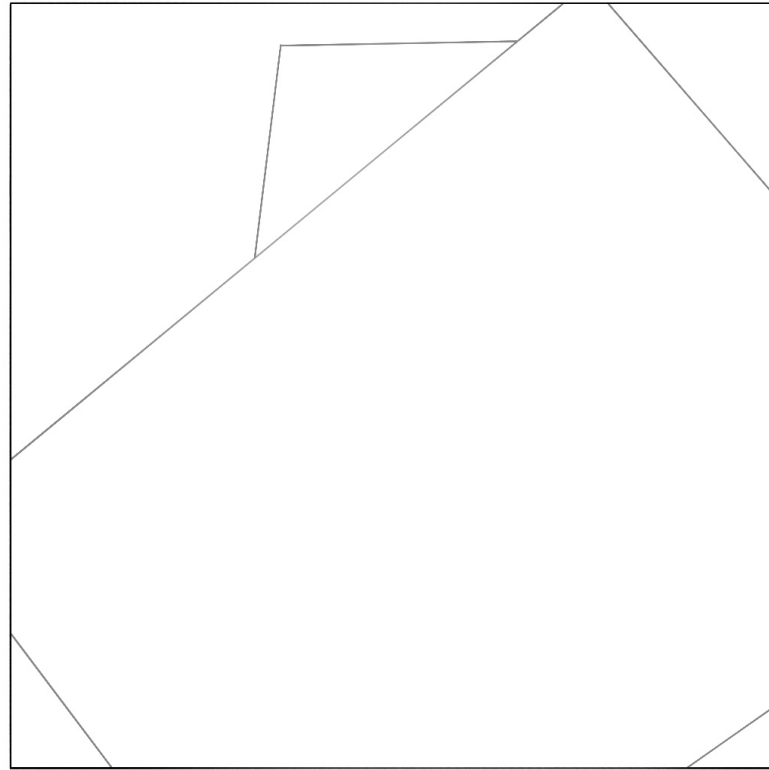
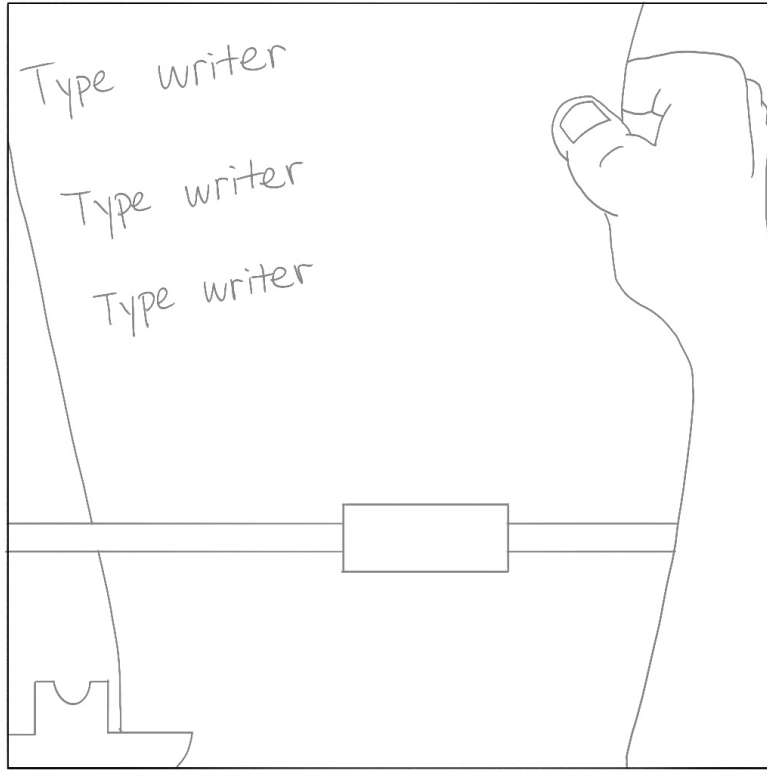
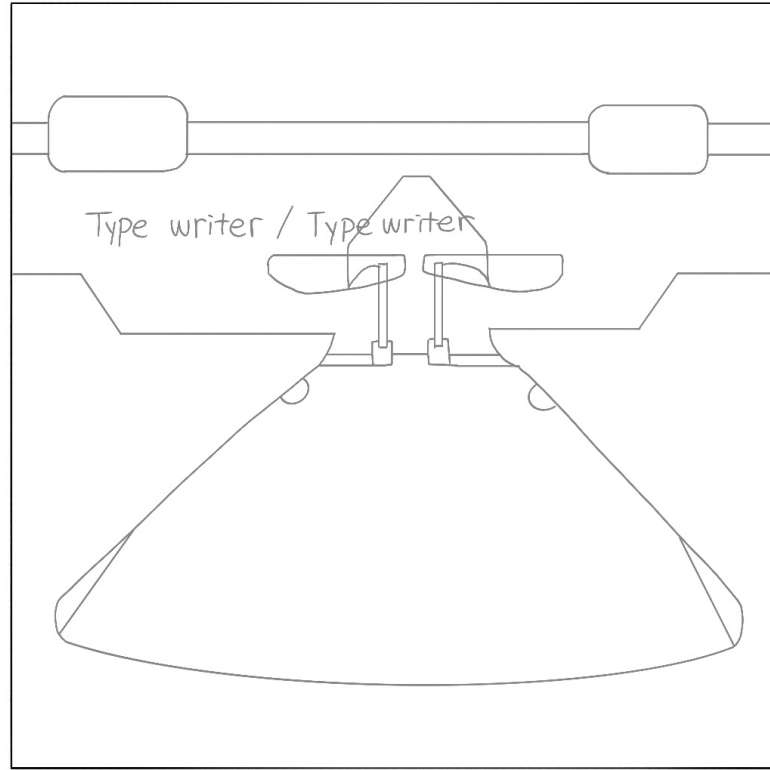
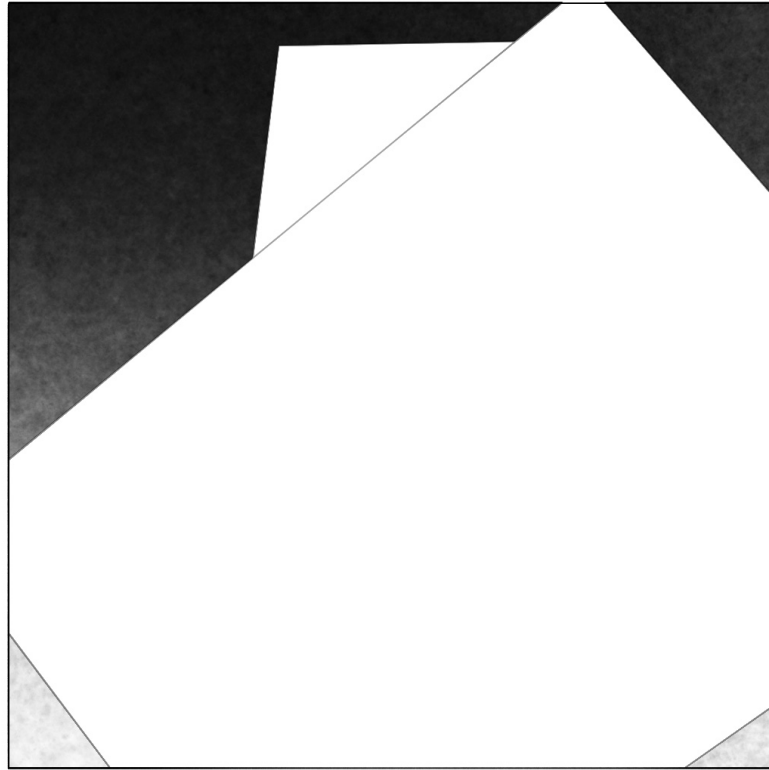
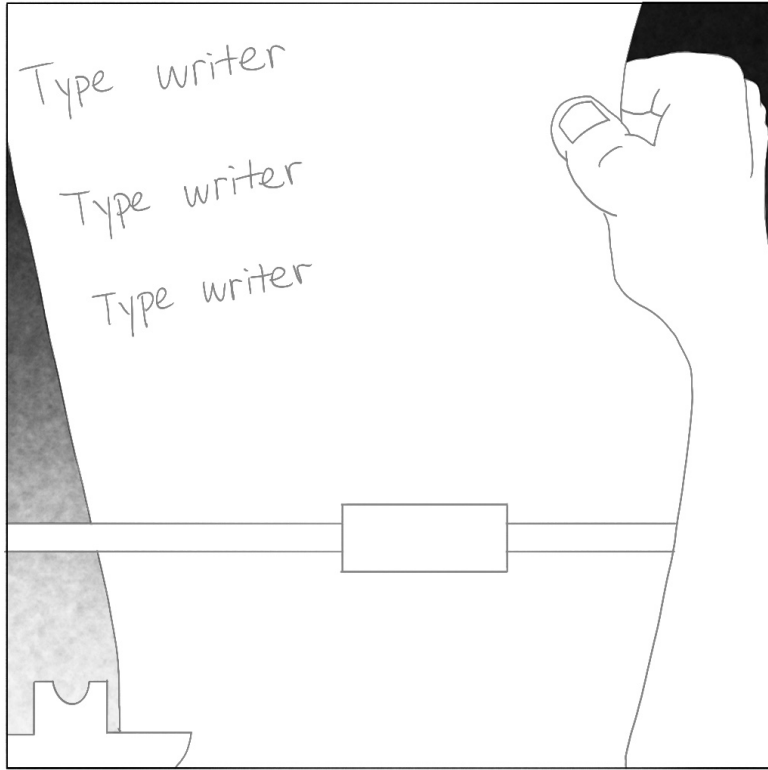
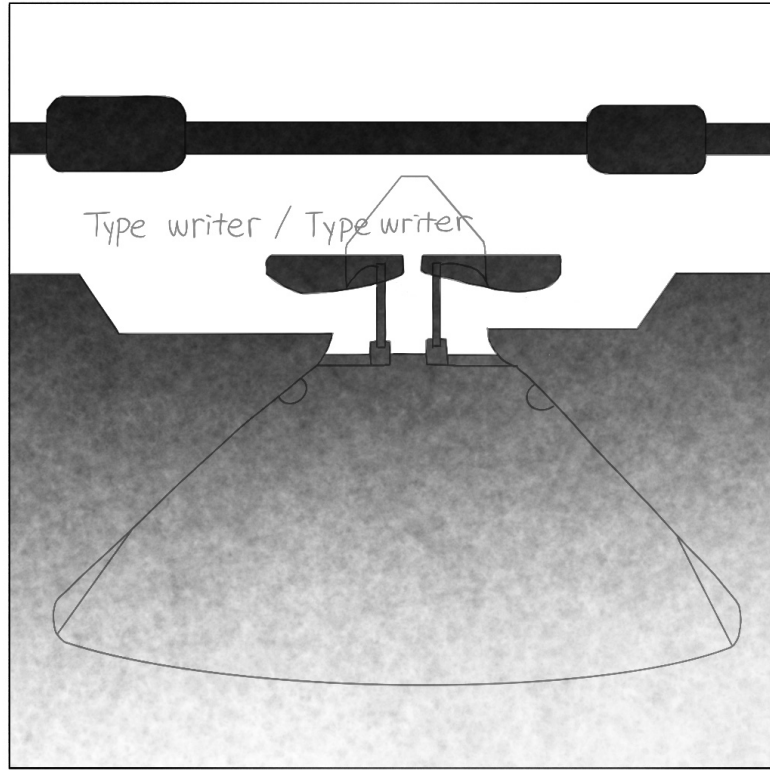
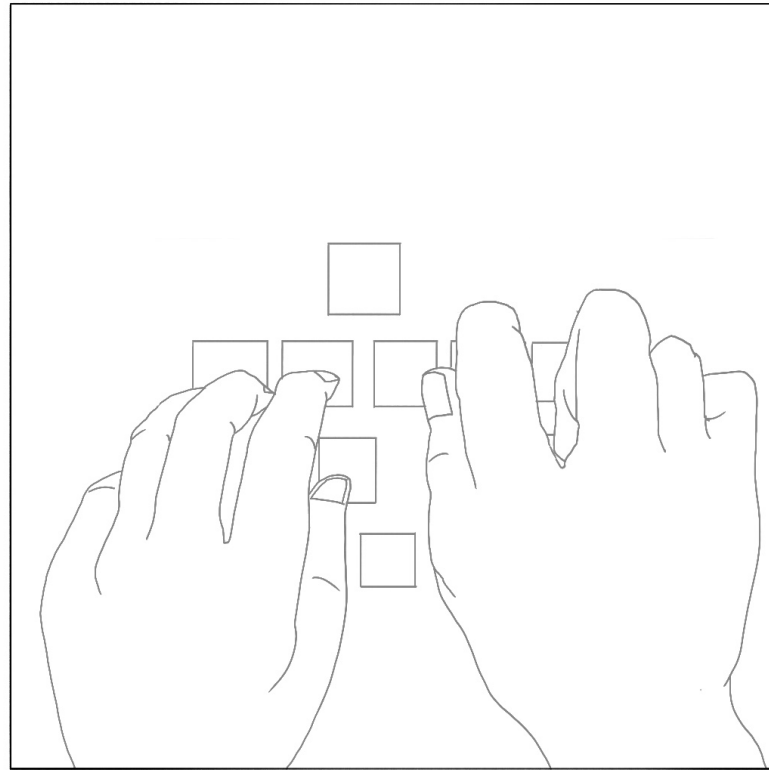
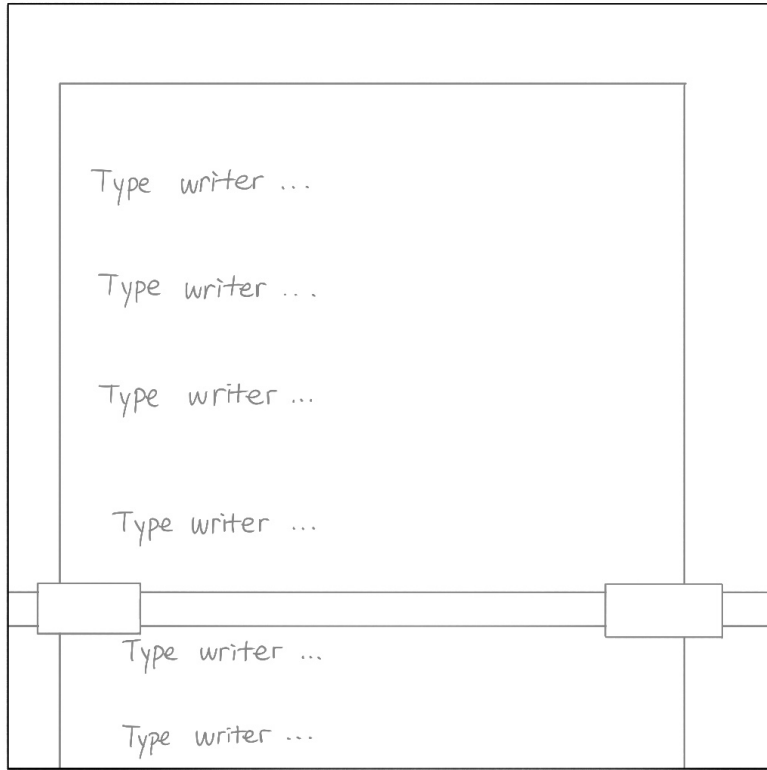
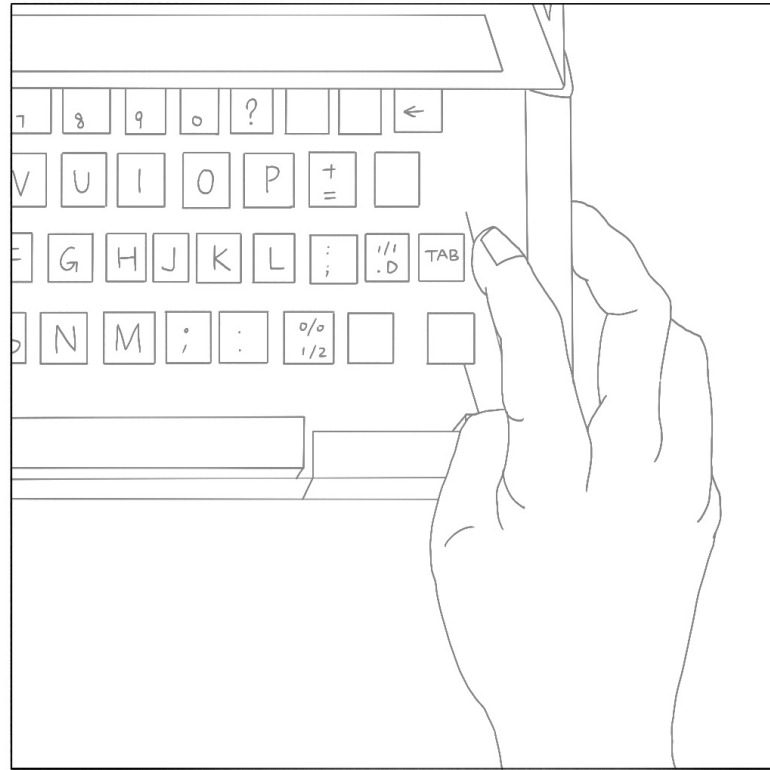
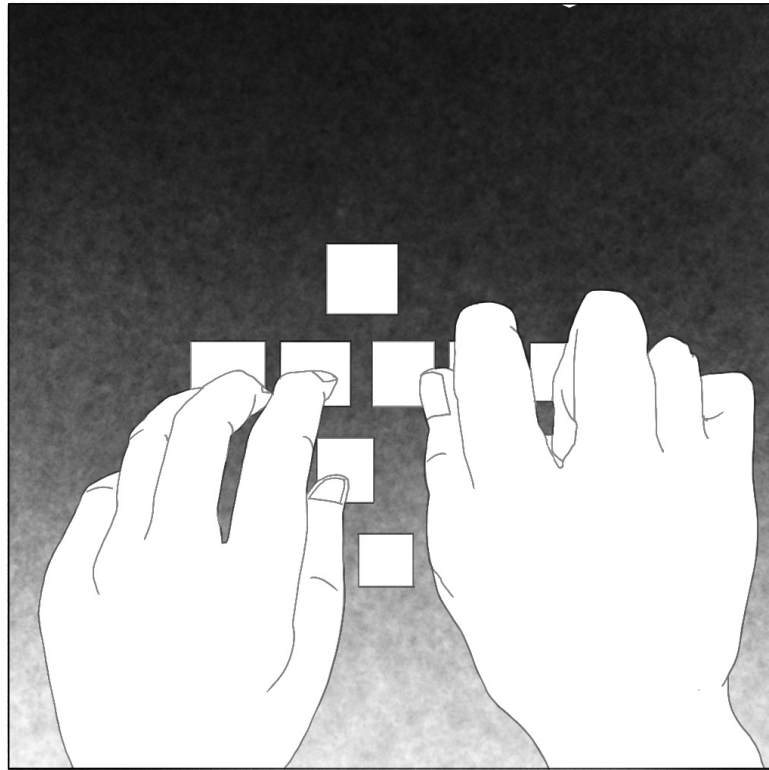
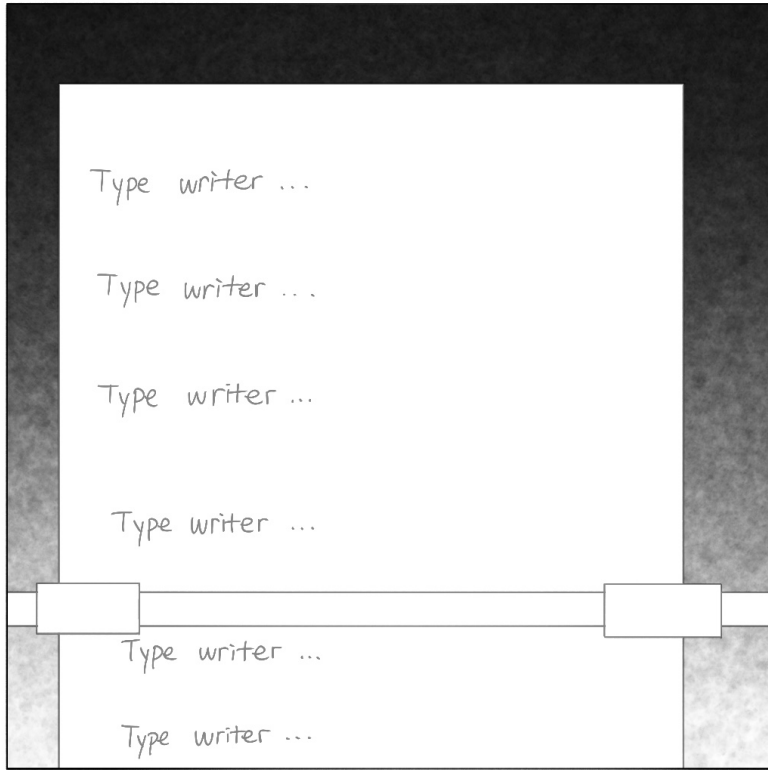
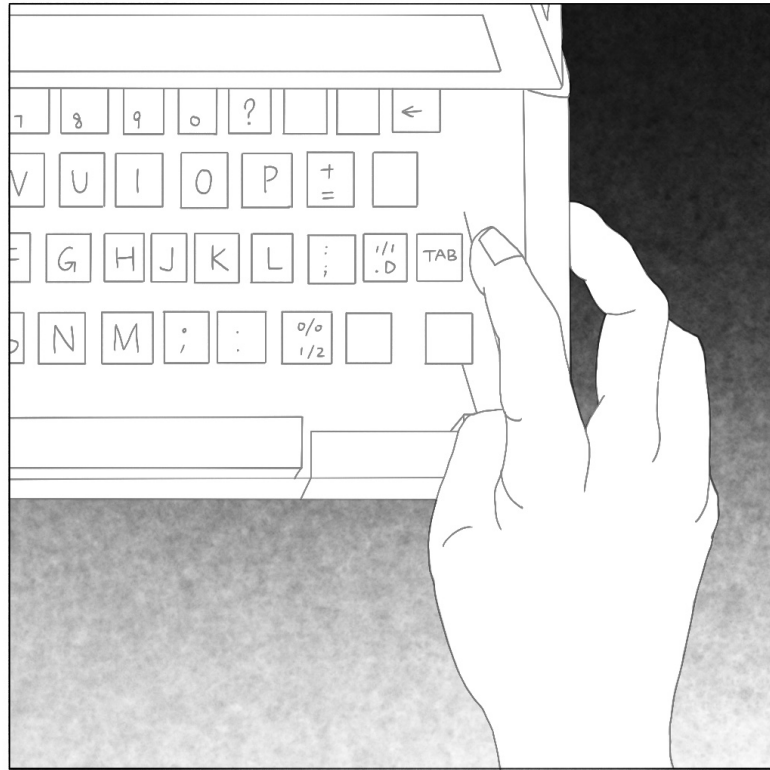
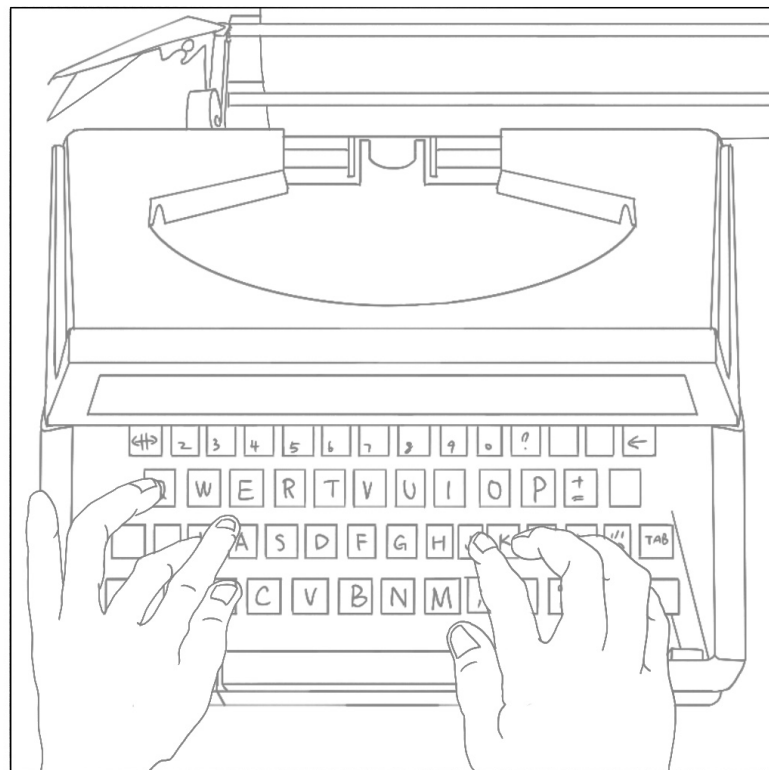
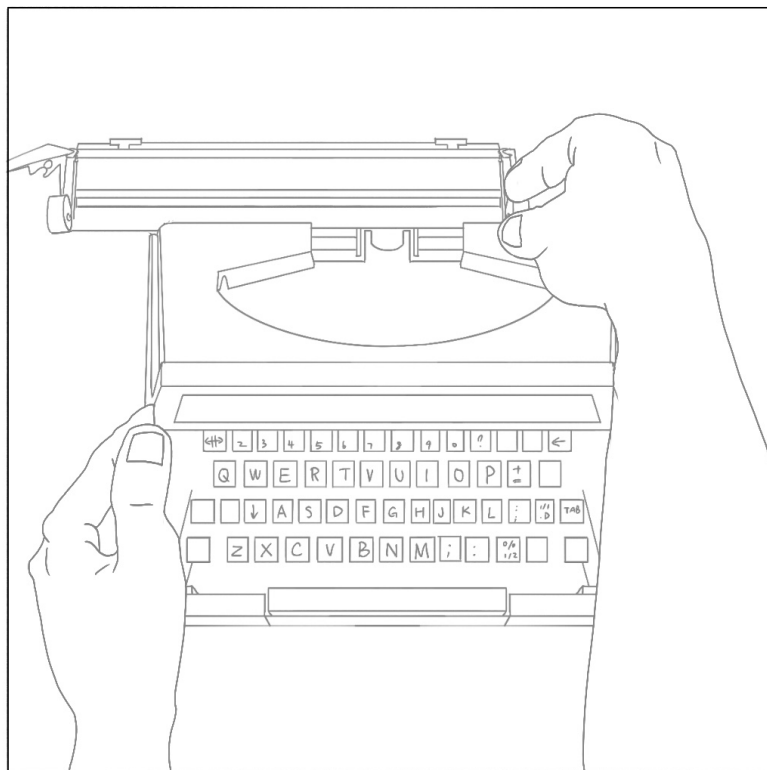
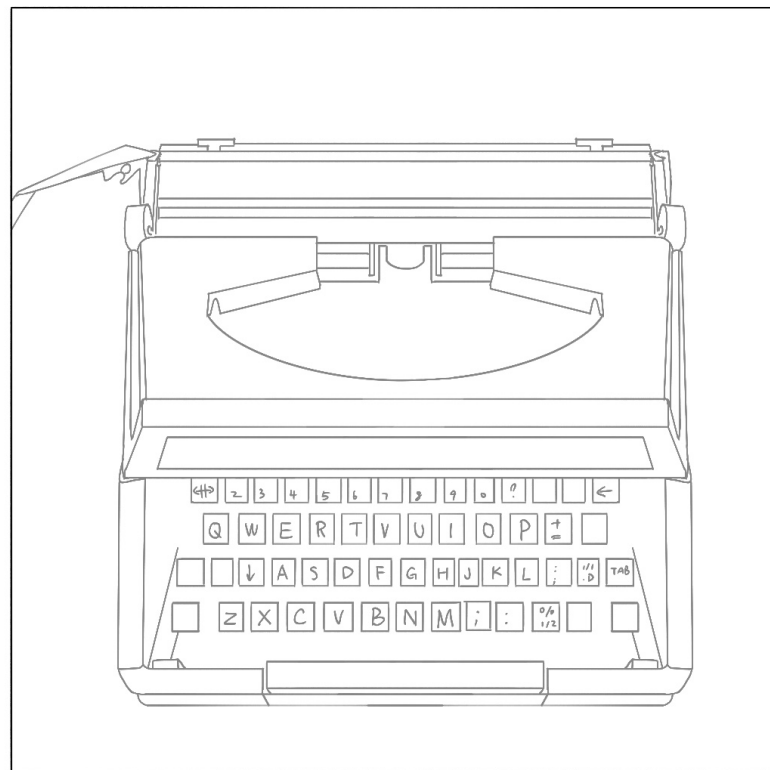
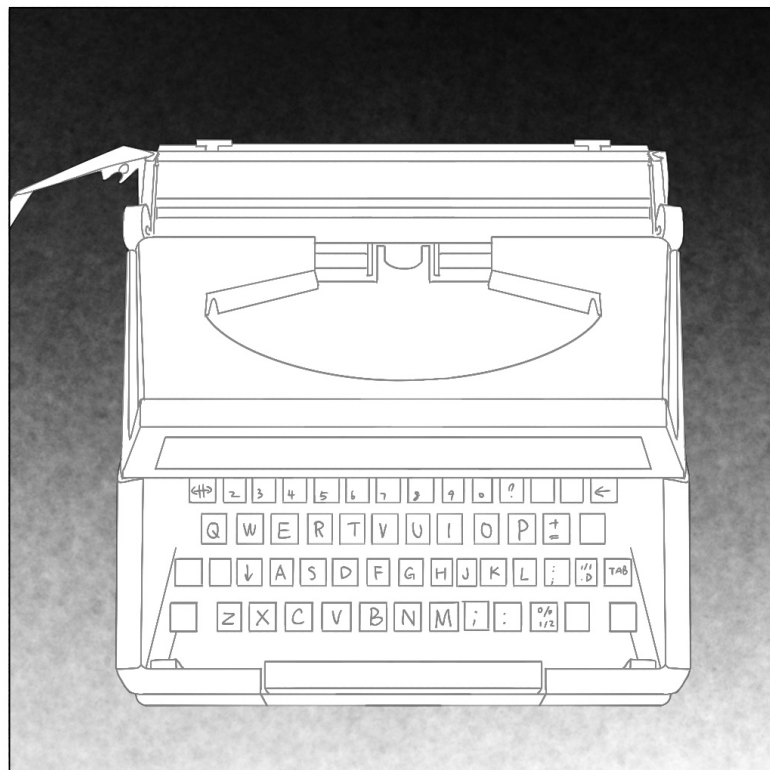
Despite cultural differences, bodily actions converge structurally within tool-driven information systems. This iteration challenges simplistic cultural determinism, highlighting the dominant role of technology in shaping bodily behaviour.



Inka Khipu

Typewriter

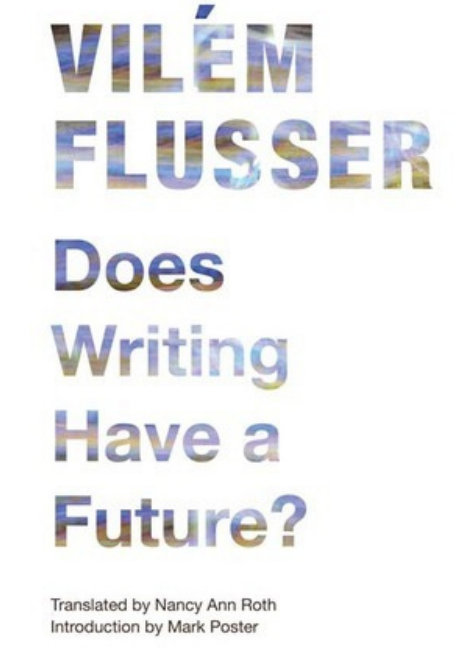




*Across three levels — social function, tool operation, and information systems — these iterations reveal the instability of gesture.
They collectively point to a core conclusion:
gesture meaning is not universal, but continuously negotiated through tools and use.*

Updated annotated bibilography

5 new text references



Flusser, V. (1987) Does Writing Have a Future? Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

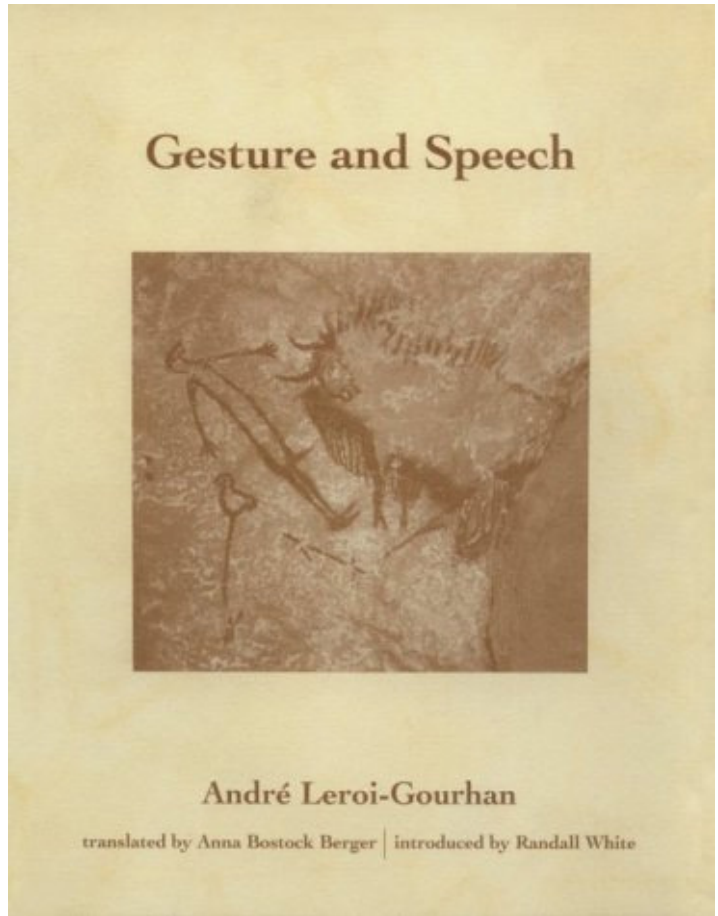
“When the hand no longer leaves traces, thinking itself is transformed.”

In this article, Flusser mainly expresses that with the development of The Times, technological media are constantly iterating and updating, and human writing methods, body movements and ways of thinking will also be reshaped accordingly. He believes that writing is not a neutral form of expression, but rather a physical movement regulated and restricted by media devices.

In his research on gestures, he mentioned that the transformation of writing gestures has also changed along with the meaning behind the iteration of tools. When our gestures have evolved from traditional calligraphy to the current clicks on the keyboard, the information we write with gestures is no longer as well-considered as the “linear writing” of the past. And it will transform into a technology-dependent way of choosing the answer from the preset options from linear to programmatic. Gestures have become standardized and abstract, hidden behind the electronic interface.

In connection with my project, Flusser provided me with the theoretical basis for the project: gestures are not fixed meanings but technical movements that are constantly rewritten by the medium. It inspired me to consider some experimental categories that could be chosen in the process of thinking about the development of gestures and tools. For instance, the set of experiments in my illustration where the thumb and index finger are pinching together precisely corresponds to what Flusser said: from physical manufacturing to information manipulation.

Flusser argues that writing and gestures are not neutral, but are reshaped by technological media. His theory helped me understand gestures as technical actions rewritten by tools, which directly informed my experiment on the pinch gesture shifting from physical making to information control.



PERCUSSIONS		linéaire		punctiforme		diffuse	
		longitudinale	transversale				
perpendiculaire	posée	41	42	43	44		
	lancée	45	46	47	48		
	posée avec percuteur	49	50	51	52		
oblique	posée	53	54	55	56		
	lancée	57	58	59	60	Voir figure page 317.	
	posée avec percuteur	61	62	63	64	Voir figure page 317.	

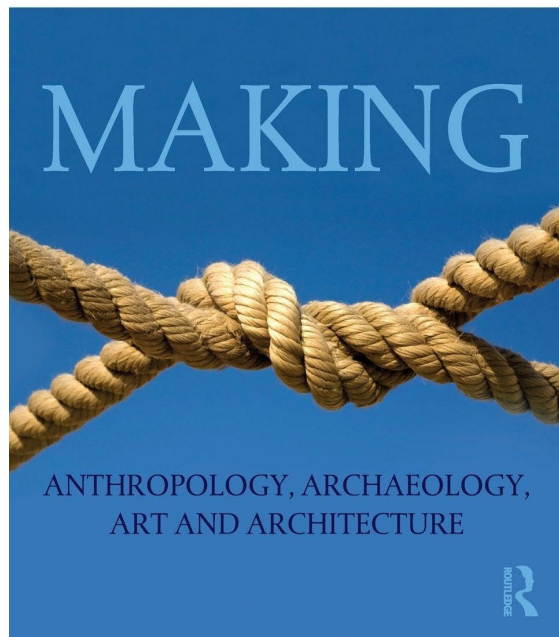
Leroi-Gourhan, A. (1993) Gesture and Speech. Translated by A.B. Berger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Leroi-Gourhan explains gesture as an extension of the body through tools, where physical complexity decreases as technology advances. This helped me analyse how the same gesture changes meaning across different historical conditions, from precise manual action to abstract operation.

In the book Gesture and Speech, it mainly discusses that the evolution of human civilization is essentially a process of the “externalization” of physical functions to technological tools: from walking upright to release hands to create tools, to speaking to release the brain to generate symbols, and ultimately evolving into a history where technology replaces human actions and memories. In terms of gestures, Leroi-Gourhan mentioned that the tool is an extension of the hand, just as the hammer is the externalization of the fist - the part of the tool transformation. After people evolved to walk upright, the hand part was released, thus undergoing a major transformation from biological instinct to technical operation in the development of gestures. In connection with the iteration of tools, the complexity of gestures has also decreased at the physical level: from the Paleolithic era, people’s hands needed to be integrated with tools, and the hand provided direction and power for the axe. In the current digital age, gestures represent the contact of pointing points, so when viewing modern gestures, they become extremely abstract. Therefore, in the author’s view, the iterative history of tools is a kind of retreat by humanity in exchange for higher technological power by giving up the complex physical gestures.

In connection with my project, this has greatly inspired me to analyze the meaning of the same gesture when placed in different era conditions. Depending on the different backgrounds of The Times, early gesture operations were more complex and required a higher degree of precision. However, with the transformation to the modern collaboration between gestures and tools, gestures have become increasingly abstract and no longer impose significant restrictions on the operation methods. Therefore, when comparing gestures with the same meaning, it can be found that gestures from hundreds of years ago are quite different from those of today.

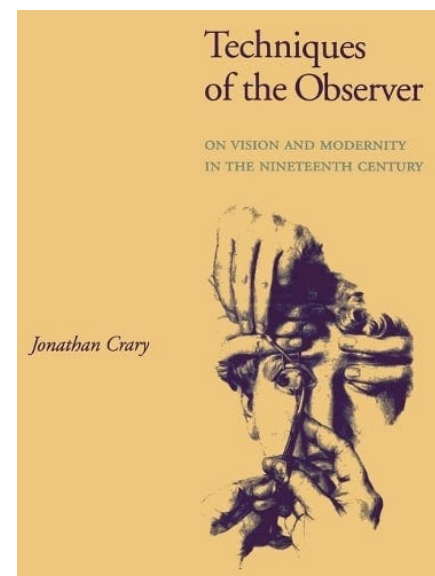
TIM INGOLD



In his book “Making”, Tim Ingold advocates that people should think through the process of making, not to produce a pre-set result object, but a process of constantly generating new concepts and inspirations. Therefore, he believes that people should experience the formation of this world through hands-on practice, and all meanings are generated in the continuous interaction between the body and materials and tools. This has inspired me in the selection of experimental media for my project exploring the iterative relationship between gestures and objects. Just like what I do with my comic strips, I’m not describing a situation or using illustration to present something. Instead, I’m more about the process of hands, tools, and the emergence of underlying information. It is precisely because this is an ongoing matter that I am thinking about using a series of paintings to express my thoughts. In addition, in Ingold’s view, abstract patterns do not mean reducing meaning but rather eliminating interfering parts while still retaining the movement trajectory. Therefore, the simple color blocks and line drawings in my illustrations also correspond to the author’s viewpoint: Rather than de-stylizing images, try isolating the conditions of making.

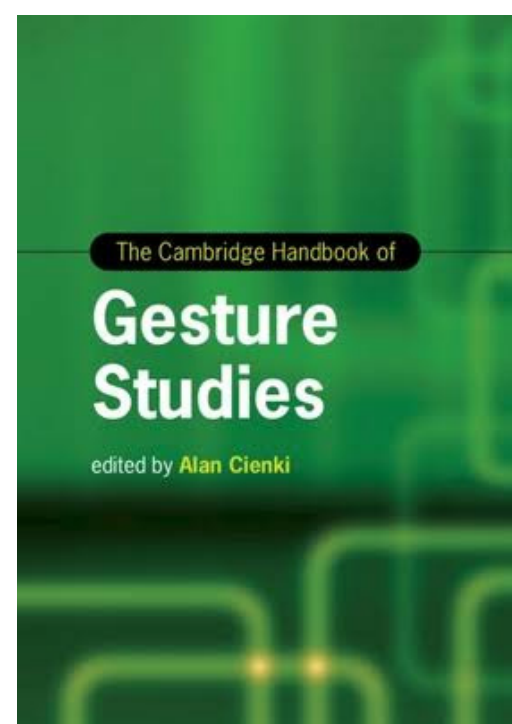
Ingold, T. (2013) Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture. London: Routledge.

Ingold argues that meaning emerges through the process of making rather than from a finished result. This influenced my use of sequential illustration to show gestures as ongoing interactions between hands, tools, and materials.



Crary, J. (1990) Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Crary shows that vision is historically trained by technology rather than naturally given. His work parallels my project by supporting the idea that gestures, like vision, are techniques learned through technological environments.



Cienki, A. (ed.) (2023) The Cambridge Handbook of Gesture Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

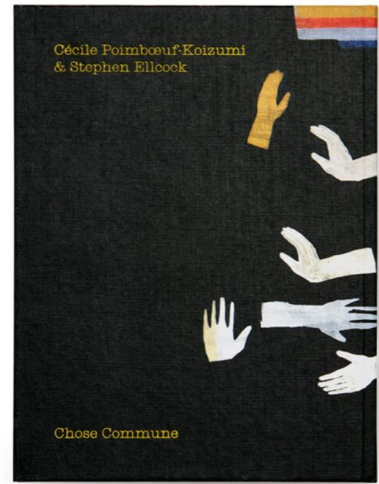
This handbook establishes gestures as structured and meaningful bodily actions within communication. It helped me position my project beyond gesture classification and toward examining gestures in relation to tools and technology.

This book mainly tells how modern visual experience is constructed by technology, devices and institutions. He believes that vision is created by different observers in different eras and technological stages, rather than determined by nature. In the 19th century, the emergence of various visual technologies such as photography enabled human vision to be trained, and this way of perception based on vision was also exercised. As a result, observational behavior became a manageable and trained behavior. In connection with my project, I drew “How hands are trained by iterative tools”, while he wrote “How eyes are trained”. When Crary tracks how modern technology generates new ways of viewing, my project studies how tools and media generate new behavioral patterns through hands. This interpretation of how gestures follow the results of technology training and the author’s research forms a contrast of different parts but the same logic. Crary made me believe that gestures are not a form of expression but a technique learned through a technological environment.

Alan Cienki’s “The Cambridge Handbook of Gesture Studies” is a work centered on the contemporary field of gesture studies, systematically sorting out the main theoretical frameworks and research methods of gestures in linguistics, cognitive science, anthropology and cross-cultural studies. The author regards gestures as a kind of physical behavior closely related to language and society. He believes that gestures do not occur randomly but are a behavior with an analyzable structure. In my project, this book, as an authoritative reference material, helped me clarify what kind of information gestures can convey and how gestures, as a non-verbal communication means, participate in communication. It helped me complete the research positioning of the project, considering not to add new gesture classifications or create text explanations for gestures, but to consider a deeper relationship with the tools.

Updated annotated bibliography

5 new practical references



“JEUX DE MAINS” is an archival collection of illustrations, photographs, sculptures... from the 19th to the 20th century. It covers various scenarios related to hand movements, which may have appeared in different eras and for different uses. The author presents gestures as a physical practice that lies between function, movement and culture through juxtaposition, repetition and visual contrast, more like a hand encyclopedia. In my project, this book has provided me with important experimental methods and media-related inspirations, making me think that illustration can be used as an archival practice approach, focusing on the relationship between different approaches and tools in different periods, allowing viewers to establish connections and think among different illustrations on their own. This archive format also reminds me that under the differences in hand and tool usage, they can be integrated together for more convenient access.



Flusser, V. (1987) *Does Writing Have a Future?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

JEUX DE MAINS presents gestures through visual archives rather than explanation. It inspired my use of illustration as an archival method, allowing gestures and tools to be compared without fixing their meaning through text.