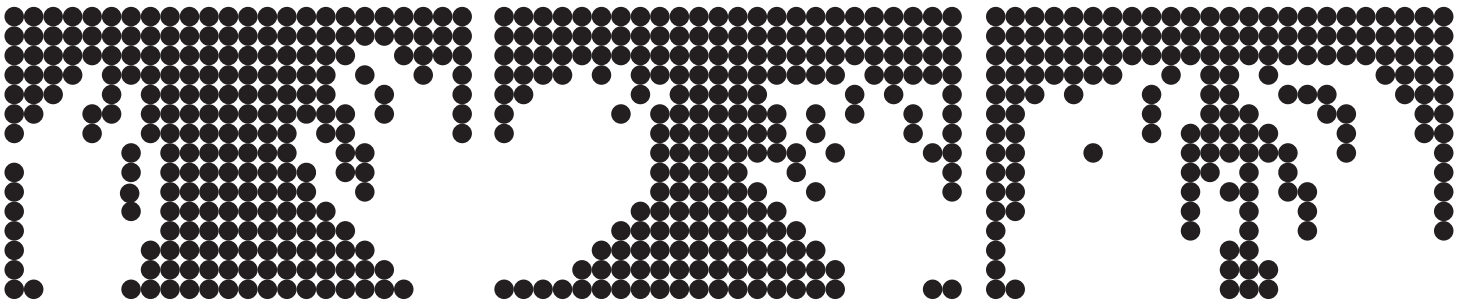
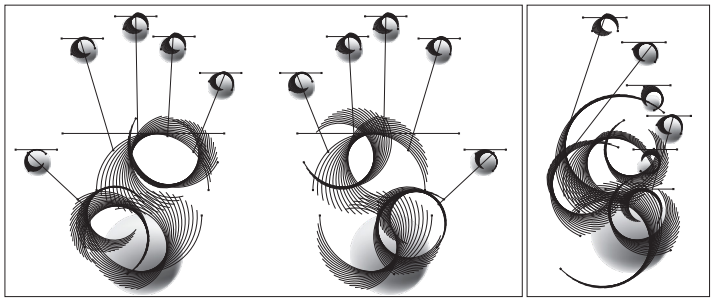
Between Input and Gesture: Writing Through Systems

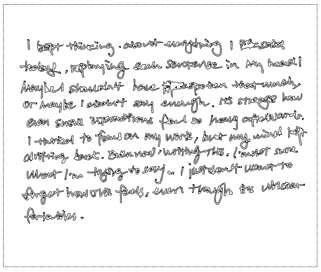
MAGCD 2026

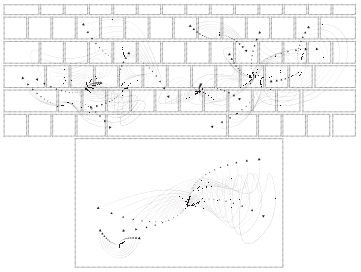
Xinyu (Anari) Wang

PROJECTION^2 _Unit 3_ Writing









This project mainly explores the transformation of individual expression methods during the interaction between hands and writing tools. In traditional writing, people mainly express and present their personality and emotions directly through the physical movements of their hands, including gestures, movement trajectories, force and stroke forms. Based on the usage habits of different individuals, one can intuitively sense the individuality behind them. However, in digital writing, the role of the hand has changed: the information carried by the gesture itself has been largely blurred and reduced, and its expressive power has also been weakened, thus leading to the concealment of personality. When it comes to electronic writing, individuality is gradually revealed layer by layer in standardized procedures, and further analysis is needed to sense the individual differences behind it.

This project observes how gestures gradually lose their original information volume and expressiveness in digital writing by comparing handwriting and keyboard input. When writing by hand, a person's emotions, habits and personality are directly reflected in their movements, strength and handwriting. However, during the process of keyboard input, a lot of information that originally existed in gestures is weakened. Although individuality has not completely vanished, we can still sense the user's state from details such as pauses, rhythms, and modification habits when typing. However, this information is no longer as directly visible as handwriting but is scattered throughout the input process and the system. In the early experiments, I first recorded and compared the differences between traditional writing and digital writing through visual means, such as gesture forms, the contact relationship between the hand and the tool, and the traces left. I find that compared with handwriting, the actions in keyboard input are becoming increasingly uniform. It is already very difficult to clearly judge a person's personality and emotions just by observing gestures. Based on this discovery, I began to further break down the typing process, including input rhythm, pauses, deletion and modification behaviors, key pressing logic, and the final system output, and attempted to present these processes using graphics and hierarchical structures. Through these experiments, I gradually realized that personality has not vanished but has shifted from a state directly existing in physical movements to a digital system and input process. Ultimately, I compiled these experiments and research into a publication, hoping to enable the audience to more intuitively observe the transformation from handwriting to digital writing, as well as how personality is reorganized and expressed in the digital age.

This research is oriented towards the design field, especially visual designers engaged in interface and digital communication, and is also relevant to all users who use digital writing systems on a daily basis. This project aims to make this subtle yet significant change visible, thereby rethinking the way personality is expressed and understood in the contemporary environment.

This project is located in the cross-disciplinary context of graphic design and media theory, exploring how writing practice has transformed from a body-based gesture behavior to a system-led input process, and how this transformation has reshaped the way of expressing individuality. In the continuous iteration of writing tools, how is the personality of gestures blurred and how is it regenerated within the system?

Tim Ingold's theory of "thinking through action" provides an important foundation for this project (Ingold, 2013). He believes that the hand is not only a tool but also the place where thinking takes place. In the process of interacting with materials, thinking is generated through actions. In the context of handwriting, gestures, force, rhythm and movement directly shape the outcome of writing, and personality is embedded in body behavior. This makes me focus on the gestures, movements and interactions with materials in handwriting, thereby understanding the hand as a generator of meaning rather than a tool.

Vilem Flusser defined writing as a gesture for organizing thinking (Flusser, 2011), emphasizing that writing is not only an expression but also a structuring process. However, he also pointed out that writing is gradually moving towards mechanization and regularization, which is particularly evident in digital writing. The keyboard converts gestures into discrete input. The hand no longer directly generates meaning but executes system rules. It made me realize that gestures are not only expressions but also a kind of regularized and systematic behavior. So, the gesture becoming a command eliminating the existence of individuality became my further development direction, thereby driving me to analyze how the individuality of gestures is formed and exists in keyboard input.

Marshall McLuhan's media theory further points out that the medium itself reshapes human behavior and perception (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). This enables the project to expand from the hand itself to a larger system level, beginning to understand how writing tools change perception and behavior patterns. In this project, the keyboard not only replaced the pen but also altered the relationship between gestures and meanings, transferring the expression of personality from the hand to the system.

These theories not only supported the project but also promoted its shift from "gesture research" to an overall exploration of "systems and mediating mechanisms".

Through visual experiments, this project compared handwriting with keyboard input and found that gestures tend to be standardized in the digital context. At the same time, through the analysis of typing rhythm and pauses, it reveals that personality is distributed in time and process. Furthermore, through gesture abstraction and dual-perspective experiments, it demonstrates how the system participates in the construction of meaning.

This project is simultaneously embedded in contemporary digital writing systems, such as keyboards, touch interfaces and predictive inputs. These systems act as structured networks, regulating behavior and reconstructing expression methods. From a design perspective, this project combines information visualization and interface design to transform invisible processes into visible forms, responding to the contemporary design trend of shifting from "content" to "systems and processes".

Ultimately, this project raises a core question: When personality is no longer entirely expressed through the body, how is it reconstructed in the system? By visualizing this transformation, this project attempts to re-understand the relationship between personality and expression in the digital context.

McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*. New York: Bantam Books.

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

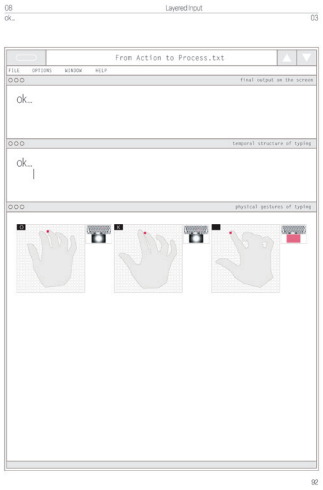
Flusser, V. (2011) *Does Writing Have a Future?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

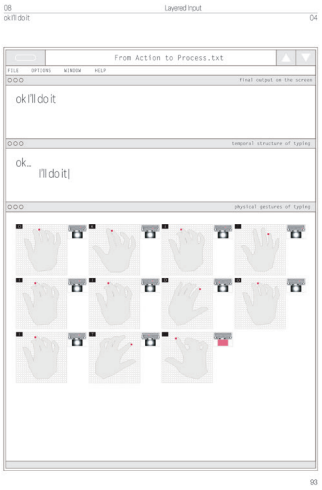
This project attempts to provide a new research perspective for graphic communication design by re-observing the “writing” behavior in the digital environment. It no longer merely focuses on the final text and visual results presented, but rather pays attention to the processes behind digital writing that are often overlooked in daily life, such as gestures, input rhythms, pauses, deletion and modification habits, and how the system handles these inputs. By transforming these originally invisible processes into visual content, the project aims to make communication design no longer merely about “results”, but rather focus on how individual personalities are expressed, hidden and reorganized during the process of digital writing.

At the theoretical level, this project combines media theory and human-computer interaction to consider how digital systems gradually change the relationship between the body, expression and meaning. I find that in traditional handwriting, personality can often be directly seen through movement, force, handwriting and rhythm. However, in digital writing, the information that gestures themselves can convey is getting less and less, and many movements are gradually becoming more uniform. Personality has not truly vanished but has been dispersed across different levels such as the input process, pauses, deletion and modification behaviors, language selection, and system output.

In the practical section, I attempted to record and present these changes through various visual experiments, such as the rhythm, pauses, deletion and modification processes when typing, as well as the differences in the input process of the same content among different people. I hope to prove through these experiments that even though digital input makes actions increasingly standardized, the personalities between people will still exist in another way. It’s just that it can no longer be directly observed as it was in the era of handwriting, but is hidden within behaviors and system processes.

Apart from the course itself, this project will also continue to influence my subsequent design practice. It made me start to shift from merely focusing on visual outcomes to paying attention to how individual personalities are influenced and reconstructed within media and systems. I also hope that in the future I can continue to study the relationship between design, technology and people, and attempt to re-present those hidden but truly existing individual expressions in the digital environment through visual means.





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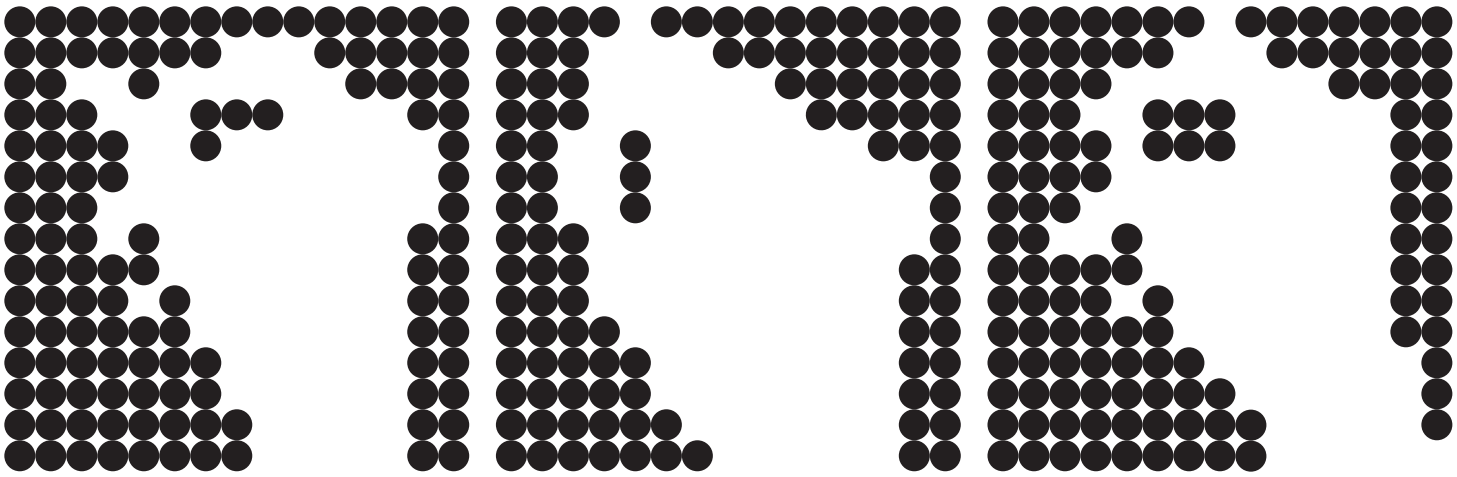
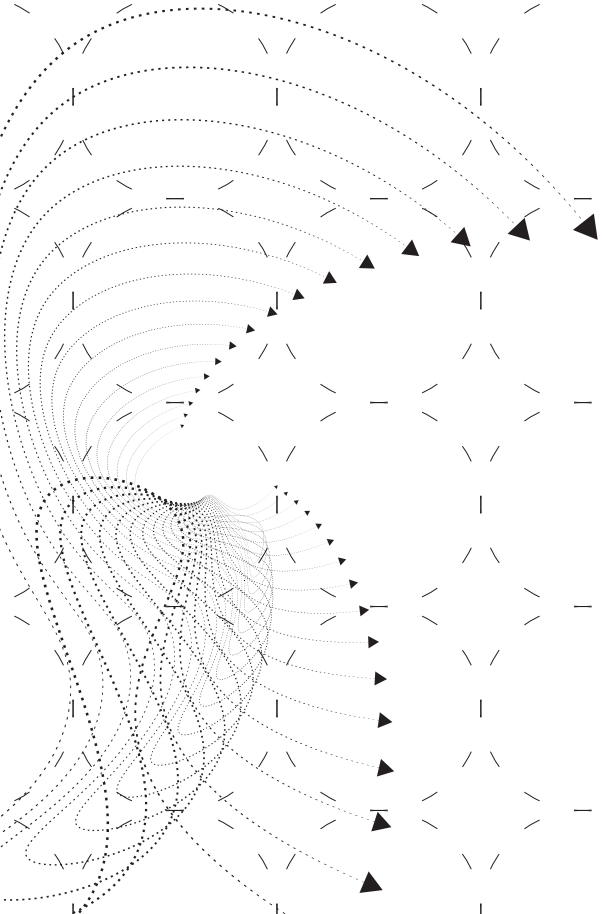


How writing tools reshape the expression of individuality

From Gesture to System

The hand still acts, but no longer fully expresses.



Anari Wang
MA Graphic Communication Design

This project investigates how the role of the hand changes from direct expression in handwriting to system-mediated input in digital writing, and how individuality is redistributed across gesture, process, and output.

Drawing on Ingold, Flusser, and McLuhan, this project considers:

- the hand as a site of thinking (Ingold)
- writing as a structuring gesture (Flusser)
- media as a force that reshapes behaviour (McLuhan)

Fluid → Structured

Gesture shifts from free movement to rule-based input

Continuous → Fragmented

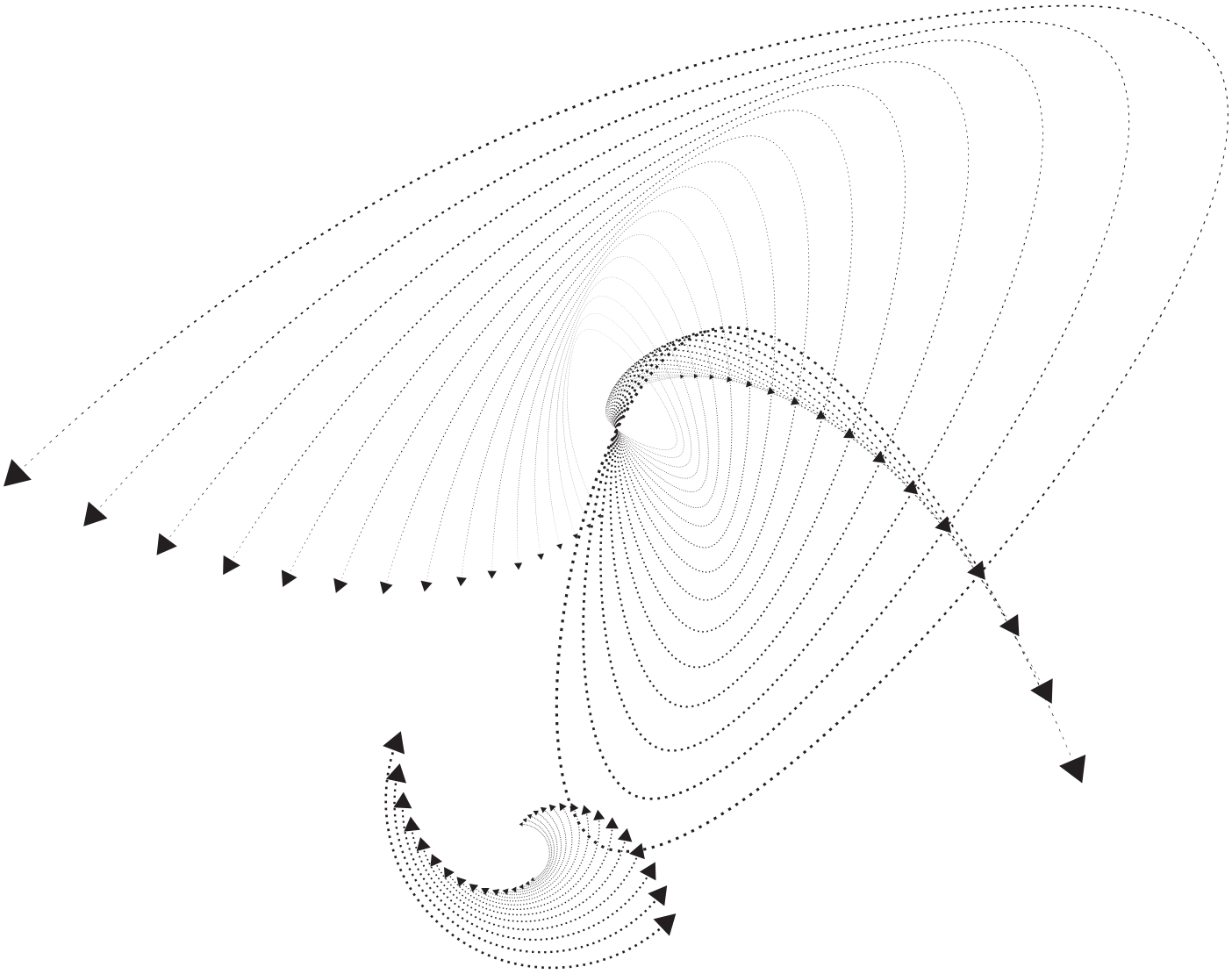
Writing transforms from continuous motion to discrete actions

Expressive → Controlled

Individuality moves from the body into the system

Gesture becomes instruction

The system sees more than the user



SOCIETIES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SHAPED MORE BY THE NATURE OF THE MEDIA BY

which men communicate than by the content of the communication.

The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak.

Words and the meaning of words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways.

The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and of detachment.

Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement.

It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes.

- Medium
- Fragmentation
- Standardisation
- Behaviour
- System

‘ SHAPED MORE BY THE NATURE OF THE MEDIA ’

McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*. New York: Bantam Books.

This text frames my project by showing that changes in media fundamentally reshape how meaning and individuality are expressed

The medium reshapes behaviour

McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*. New York: Bantam Books.

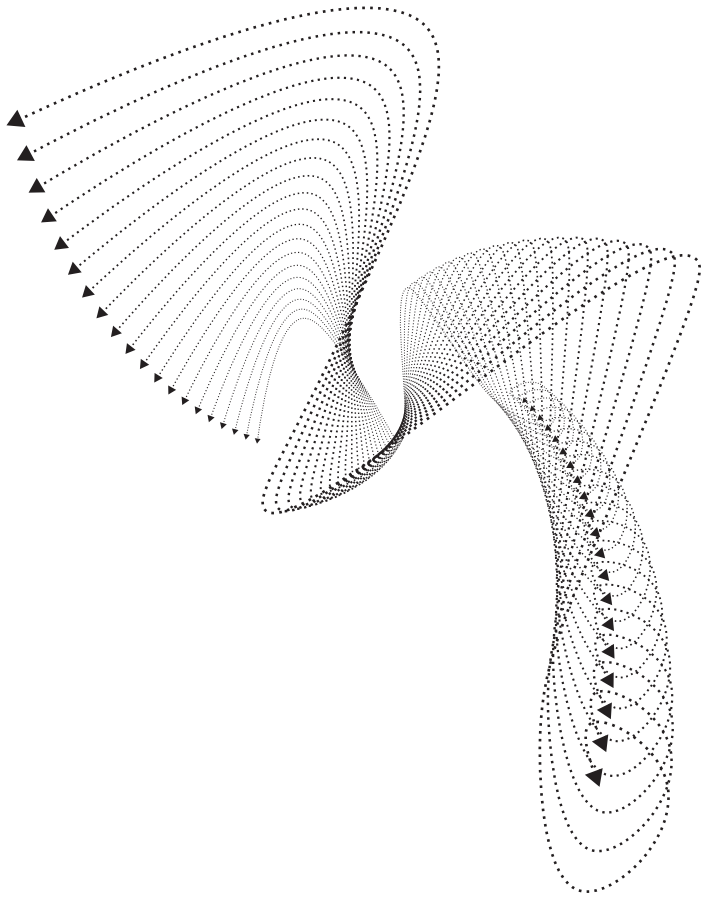
ALL MEDIA WORK US OVER COMPLETELY.

They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that THEY LEAVE NO PART OF US UNTOUCHED, UNAFFECTED, UNALTERED.

The medium is the massage.

ANY UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IS IMPOSSIBLE

WITHOUT A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAY MEDIA WORK AS ENVIRONMENTS.



- Media
- Transformation
- Standardisation
- Behaviour
- System

‘ALL MEDIA WORK US OVER COMPLETELY. ’

‘THEY LEAVE NO PART OF US UNTOUCHED, UNAFFECTED, UNALTERED.’

‘ANY UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAY MEDIA WORK AS ENVIRONMENTS. ’

I selected this text because it emphasises that media does not simply transmit information, but actively reshapes human perception and behaviour.

McLuhan argues that media “work us over completely,” meaning that tools fundamentally alter how we act and perceive.

This idea is visualised in my experiments, where gesture becomes standardised, and individuality is redistributed across system processes and outputs.

The medium does not just carry meaning — it reshapes the way meaning is produced.

MAKING IS NOT

A MATTER OF

IMPOSING PRECONCEIVED

FORM ON RAW MATERIAL,

but of intervening in the world's becoming and of joining forces with the materials.

'MAKING IS NOT A MATTER OF IMPOSING PRECONCEIVED FORM ON RAW MATERIAL... '

- Making
- Gesture
- Movement
- Material
- Interaction

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

I selected this text because it redefines making as a process of thinking through action.
This aligns with my project, which considers the hand not just as a tool, but as an active site of expression.

INGOLD SUGGESTS
THAT MAKING
IS NOT ABOUT

APPLYING FORM, BUT ABOUT ENGAGING WITH MATERIALS THROUGH MOVEMENT AND ACTION.

This idea supports my experiments, where handwriting shows continuous, expressive movement, while typing fragments gesture into discrete, repetitive actions.

I selected this quote because it defines making as a cognitive process embedded in action.

It aligns with my project, where the hand is not just a tool, but a site of thinking and expression.

'TO MAKE IS TO THINK THROUGH DOING.'

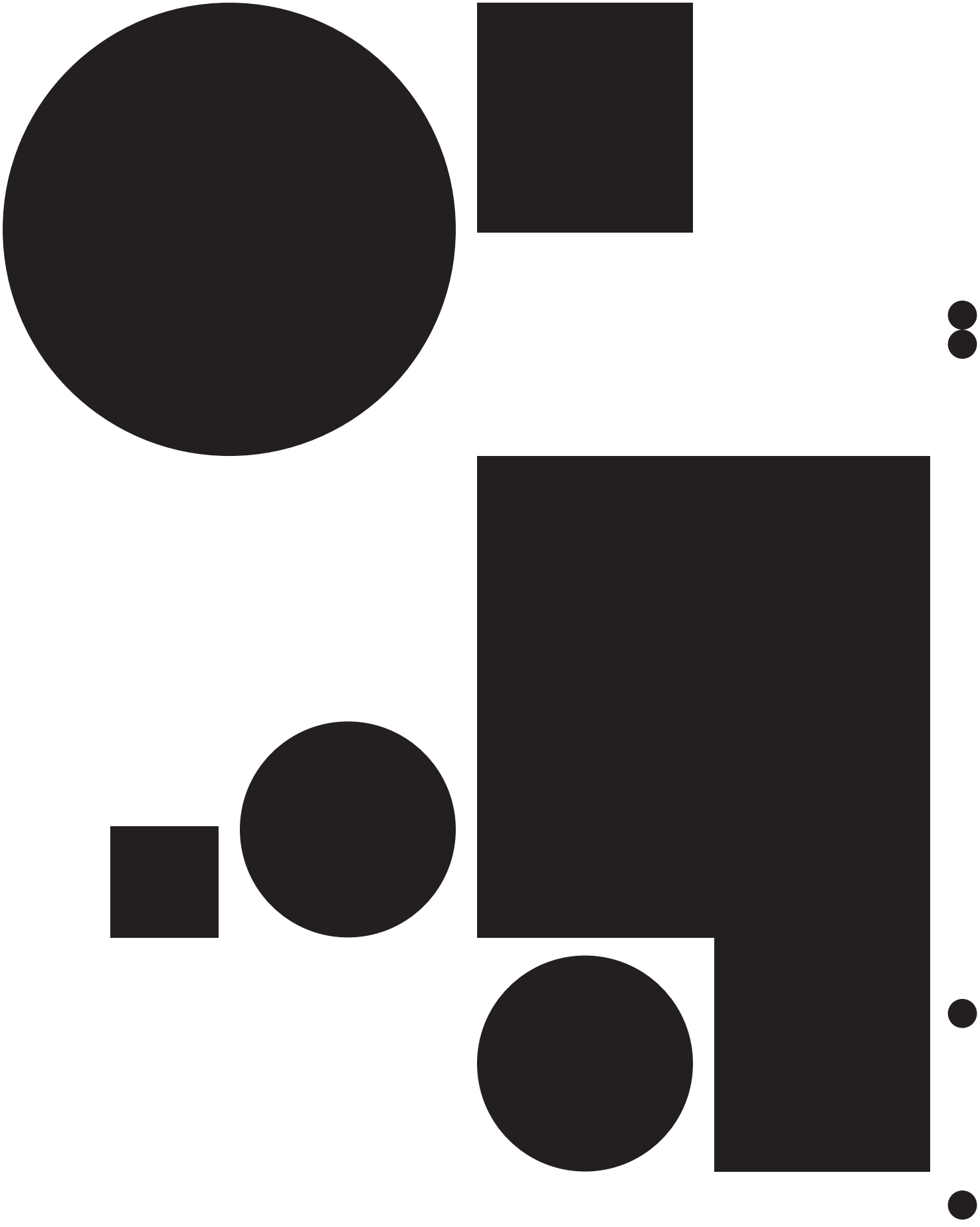
This text establishes the role of the hand as a thinking body.

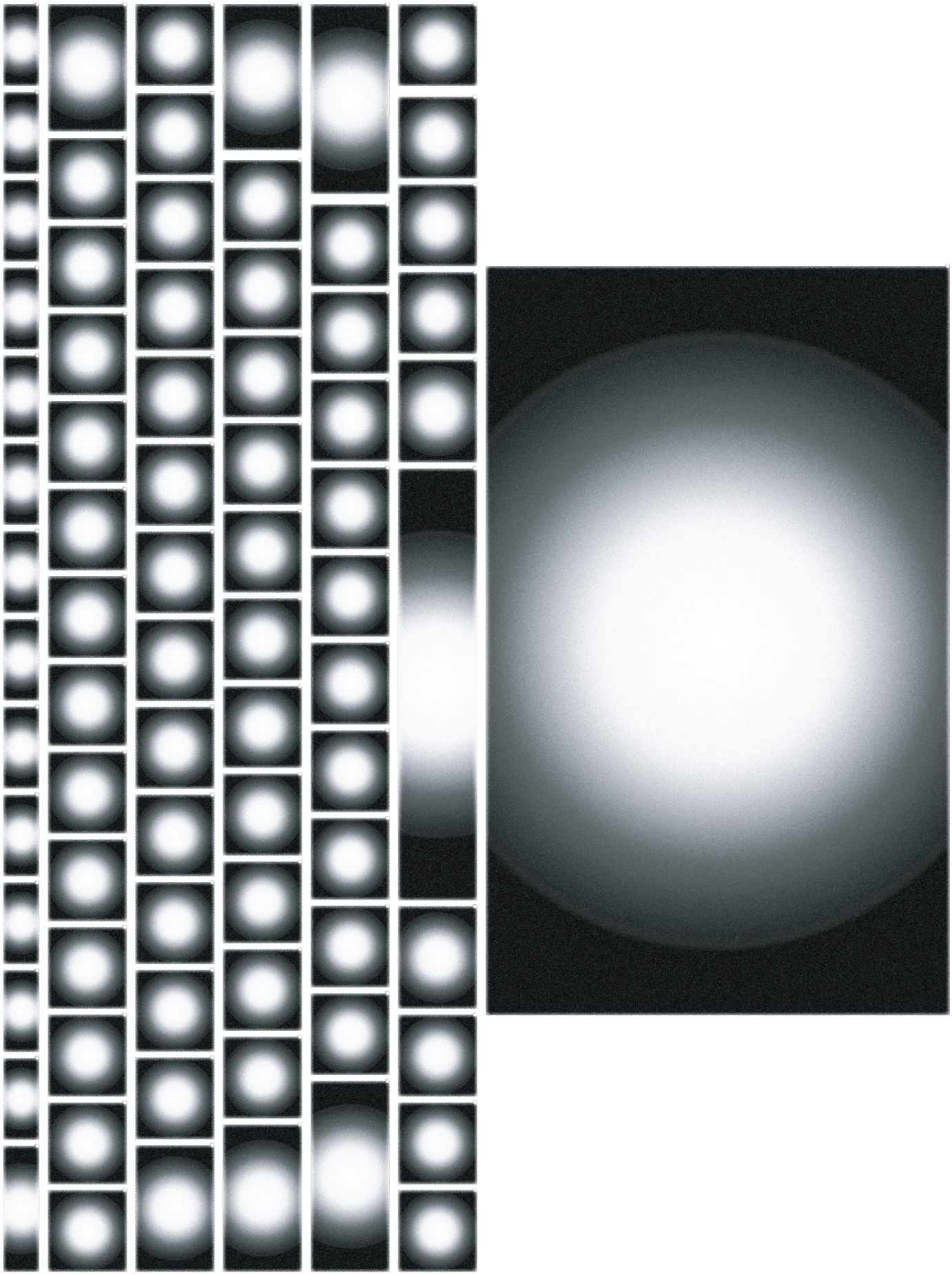
This idea supports my experiments:

handwriting shows

continuous, expressive thinking-in-action,
while typing fragments this process into standardised inputs.

- Making
- Thinking
- Action
- Gesture
- Continuity





ALL WRITING IS “RIGHT”: IT IS A GESTURE OF SETTING UP AND ORDERINGWRITTEN SIGNS.

And written signs are, directly or indirectly, signs for ideas. So writing is a gesture that aligns and arranges ideas. Anyone who writes must first have thought. And written signs are the quotation marks of right thinking. On first encounter, a hidden motive appears behind writing: one writes to set one’s ideas on the right path.

‘ALL WRITING IS ‘RIGHT’: IT IS A GESTURE OF SETTING UP AND ORDERING WRITTEN SIGNS.’

- Writing
- Gesture
- Order
- Structure
- System

I selected this text because it defines writing as a gesture that organises thought. It connects physical action with cognitive structure, which is central to my project.

This idea is reflected in my experiments, where continuous handwriting gestures are fragmented into repetitive keystrokes.

Flusser, V. (2011) *Does Writing Have a Future?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

For there is something mechanical about the ordering, the rows, and machines do this better than people do.

One can leave writing, this ordering of signs, to machines. I do not mean the sort of machines we already know, for they still require a human being who, by pressing keys arranged on a keyboard, orders textual signs into lines according to rules. I mean grammar machines, artificial intelligences that take care ofthis order on their own.

'THERE IS SOMETHING MECHANICAL ABOUT THE ORDERING, THE ROWS, AND MACHINES DO THIS BETTER THAN PEOPLE DO.'

I selected this text because it describes a shift from human-controlled writing to machine-controlled systems.
It extends my project beyond typing, towards automated and AI-driven writing.

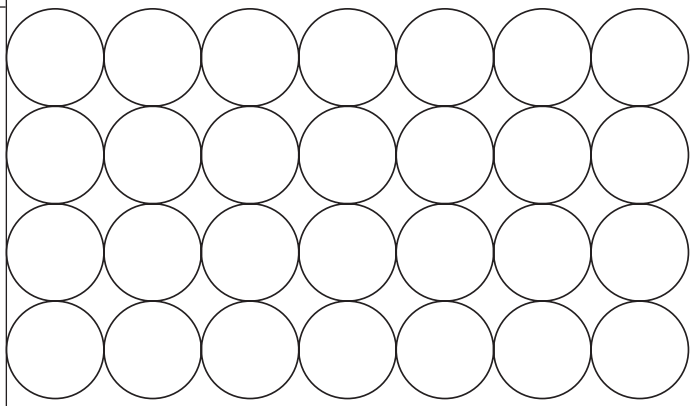
Writing becomes mechanical, and machines can organise language more efficiently than humans.

This idea extends my experiments, where gesture is already reduced in typing, and suggests a future where even this minimal gesture disappears.

- Machine
- Automation
- System
- Control
- AI

I do not mean the sort of **machines** we already know, for they still require a human being who, by pressing keys arranged on a keyboard, orders textual signs into lines according to rules.

'MACHINES REQUIRE A HUMAN BEING WHO, BY PRESSING KEYS ARRANGED ON A KEYBOARD, ORDERS TEXTUAL SIGNS INTO LINES ACCORDING TO RULES.



I selected this sentence because it captures a transitional moment: the hand is still present, but it is already operating within a system of rules.

The hand no longer freely expresses, but follows predefined rules through the keyboard.

This idea is reflected in my experiments, where typing gestures appear similar across individuals, while meaning varies only in the output.

- Rule
- System
- Instruction
- Selection
- Control

Flusser, V. (2011) *Does Writing Have a Future?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.