An author’s manuscripts are recognized the same way writing is recognized, that is, through its stylistic hallmarks: stricken words, scholia written in the margins, scribblings, and quick memos like “must get some milk.” Such annotations, which are in many ways similar to those studding the early draft of a comic strip, have done much to disabuse us of the illusion of a text immediately cast in its final material form. Another obstacle, however, has arisen: what sort of criteria are there to evaluate the work of the manuscript? Indeed, to what extent is the manuscript guided by the work in progress (in which case the completed work would then be the criterium by which successive drafts ought to be measured)? Or to what extent is the manuscript guided by other forces at work? If we admit that the writing process is not only the transposition of a text which existed originally in the writer’s mind, then the role of the inscriptive gesture in the writing process has been generally and markedly underestimated, particularly by linguistics and semiology. I would like to develop such an approach here. The genesis of the text, as of any written mark (particularly that of drawing), must be considered from the viewpoint of the original spatial play which the hand stages. Neither the paradigm of the eye nor that of language allows us to grasp the meaning of “first draft” dynamics—the moment when its enunciation is born in distinction from what it enunciates. The paradigm of the hand, however, achieves such an understanding. Originally what is at stake in the hand is the very nature of the psychic investments which are bound up in it.

The importance given to hand gestures does not exclude the increasingly large share of textual creation which is performed by ma-
chines, starting with the home computer. In fact, the current technological evolution is drawing noticeably closer to the conditions presiding over the manual creation of a manuscript. The computer has gone beyond the limitations of the typewriter, which excludes the possibility of many operations quickly and easily performed by the hand, such as free usage of the full page and a variety of graphic marks. The computer allows for words and sentences to be moved with a few brief commands, for fragments to be stored, for multiple typographical fonts to be used, and even for graphics to be introduced. Whereas the earliest typewriter technology estranged the user from the process of marking, the current developments tend towards a reconciliation with it.

A. MANUAL PLEASURES

Although the necessary beginnings of the text, as well as the intention of writing it, admittedly are initiated in the psychic system, the inscription process involves first and foremost the hand. The initial moment of writing, as of any marking, is when "something" (for what does one call an original notion, an idea, an intuition, an inspiration?) which has neither extension nor duration is given both—a spatial existence (its marking) and a temporal existence (the time it takes for the eye to run across it). While this moment may entail numerous inscriptive instruments, ranging from a mere pencil to a computer, its actual realization is impossible without involving the hand. This manual process has been overlooked by linguistic studies particularly which are systematically interested in the end product of the manuscript. Yet the manuscript has its own requirements. For instance, insofar as it takes far more time to inscribe writing than it does to conceive it mentally, writing is often forced to create the whole project and each of its components at the same time. Thus, an erasure can have meaning with respect to the word or the sentence it eliminates, but also as an element inscribed in a larger invisible network, the breathing of the text as it were. Similarly, the fact that some sentences or parts of sentences remain unfinished does not necessarily mean that the thought underlying their inscription was lost at the same time. Indeed nothing proves that thought travels along in complete signifying units. A piece of a sentence provisionally left unfinished can act as witness to the question proposed by the suspended ending, a question that underlies the paragraph in which it appears, even the text as a whole. Lastly,
the hand imposes the logic proper to the particular investments standing at its origin.

The Freudian theory of pleasure is based on the distinction between "pleasure of function" and "pleasure of organ." The former is said to involve the satisfaction of fulfilling a vital function, such as quenching one's thirst, satiating one's hunger, and acting on sexual tension. On the other hand, the latter is said to derive from the autoerotic satisfaction of a partial impulse: the excitation of one erogenous zone finds fulfillment in the very same spot where it occurs, with no direct relation to the fulfillment of a particular bodily function, even if it supports it.

Moreover, in Freud's perspective, the external world is perceived as a projection of one's own body. Consequently, according to him, the pleasure of manual activity can only be considered in reference to impulses sublimated after they have been invested in the body itself and bound to erogenous zones. In this perspective, manual pleasure adheres to the economic rule by which a sudden release of energy follows an accumulation phase experienced as painful. This release allows for the excitation to settle back down to its prior level. Manual pleasure is, under such conditions, related to various pleasure centers successively attached to various erogenous zones, oral, anal, and genital. Indeed, the hand can communicate pleasure to all of them by substituting for the primitive object of the impulse, such as when fingers enter the mouth to replace the breast or enter the anus to replace the tubular turd, or when they become a penis for the vagina, or when the hand becomes a vagina for the penis. Autoerotic satisfaction derives from the ability of hand to do onto oneself what the mother initially did for the infant. The various hand-related activities may then be said to derive from the various instances of sublimating their original impulses.

Some authors, however, question the status of the pleasure principle as the essential paradigm of psychoanalysis. They argue for a recognition of the "binding impulse" which parallels the sexual impulse and yet is independent from it. Although English psychoanalyst Bowlby (1978) gives the most cogent defense of this notion, it is Irme Hermann (1943) who should be credited for laying the foundations of the argument. According to him, along with the genito-sexual impulse, there exists a binding impulse (which Irme Hermann calls an "instinct") characterized by the desire to cling on to the mother's body. Unlike monkeys who can fulfill this instinct thanks to their powerful
gripping lower limbs and the mother's thick fur, similar efforts to fulfill the same instinct remain frustrated among human babies. According to Irme Hermann, a sizable number of human achievements are intended to signify this essential frustration for which they substitute compensatory achievements. Such an approach no longer presents the world as a projection of the body itself but as a projection of the maternal body from which every human being is originally separated.

This lost dual unity then finds genital and nongenital substitutes. In the former, the child's hand replaces some parts of the maternal body or hand and supplies the pleasure which the mother initially gave to the child. Those parts are sought through contacts with the world, nature, groups, and institutions. According to this view, the hand is no longer regarded in relation to autoerotic pleasures but in relation to the special role it plays in attempting to reconstruct symbolically the lost dual entity. At times, its actions can be related to the epistemophilic impulse (the hand is then used to serve the desire for knowledge); at other times, it is used for the sexual impulse (in which it acts as an instrument of autoerotic fulfillment). However, it can be driven by its own needs, namely those concerning the end of the dual unity which has been irretrievably lost. Gesturing, as a motional force distinct from the original stage of impulses, is a critical means of breaking away from maternal symbiosis. Gesture plays just such a role in the young child's development including the model of processes which childhood implements, as well as in any creative activity which calls for it, particularly writing, although this is independent of the signifying constraints of grammatical and syntactical rules.

B. THE HAND, BLIND NET

The sign used in ancient Chinese civilization to designate the gesture of marking shows a hand tracing out the four corners of a square. It thus harks back to the gesture which initially partitioned off the unbound surface of the earth, establishing agricultural property and the birth of agrarian culture. Yet the origin of this gesture in a collective history is paralleled by an individual psychic history which belongs to each of us. This history places the gesture of marking into a double process of appropriating space: that of the physical, as well as psychic, distance separating the infant from the mother after birth, and that of the surface of the body itself. In my opinion this double process may account for the processes of working the manuscript, namely, the way it is
treated by its creator, whether he or she is a writer or a graphic designer. Those processes find an origin, as well as their most delineated expression, in the first lines which a child draws on paper or any other marking surface, around the second year of his or her life. Thus the gesture itself, not the marks or the gaze, is what matters most.

A child's graphic activity goes through several phases which sharply distinguish it from the adult's graphic activity (Lurçat, 1964). When the child first begins to scribble, between the age of six and twelve months, he has not yet acquired visual control over his gestures, let alone the ability to draw. Visual control begins around the age of eighteen months: in such a case, it is control after-the-fact, since the eye follows the hand without yet guiding it. Only after the age of twenty-four months does the possibility of visual control over marking and gesture appear: the eye no longer follows the hand but guides it. Thus the earliest drawings are not guided by a visual exploration of space but by an exploration of movement. At its origin, graphic expression is blind. It is guided by muscular, tonic, and plastic sensations.

The earliest gestures which pertain to inscribing, however, are movements drawing away from the axis of the body, that is with the right hand extending away from the bodily axis, from the left to the right, and the left hand extending from the right to the left. These are the very gestures by which the baby is separated from the mother's body or from any other adult whose contact he may have sought. They are consequently a way for the child to stage the mother's coming and going—really her frequent absences—so as to tame and master the experience in the imaginary, as an early form of kinesic symbolization. The earliest markings, the inscriptions of those gestures, are a form of kinetic symbolization which guarantees the transfer from the kinetic realm, the realm of visual representation. The new graphic forms which the child produces clearly demonstrate the possibilities of recent neuromuscular growth. In the act of tracing, however, the child acts out more than its growing neuromuscular possibilities. The child creates a game and the practice of this game produces meaning. Moreover, the appearance of the child's first markings coincides with the development of newly acquired skills: walking (the simultaneous appearance of the first steps and the first markings has been pointed out by Prudhomme as early as 1947), sphincteral control, and language development. All those skills have something in common: they demonstrate an active control over separation anxiety and open the way to the child's independence. Thus, marking, precisely because it emerges
at this time, has a privileged relation with the psychic process involved in the first separation, the separation of any human being from the mother or surrogate adult.

Considered in the context of separation processes, both actively or passively experienced by the child, the earliest markings are explained by Freud's famous "fort-da game" which he observed his grandson Ernst playing. The parallel between the two turns out to be particularly significant.

The child traces his first markings with a gesture he does not yet control, and it is only later that he visually discovers its production. In other words, with the fort-da game, the time of visual reunion follows a muscular action, whether it is throwing the spindle or drawing a mark. In both cases, the greater pleasure is bound to the second phase: the one which corresponds to the return of the spindle in one case and the discovery of a graphic concentration following the act of scribbling. What are, then, the psychic processes involved in those distinct moments?

In the time when he carries out the marking gesture, the child identifies himself with the departing mother; later, considering the outcome of his gesture, the child identifies with the trace which this movement leaves behind. Simultaneously, however, the child is free to be the one who also rejects the mother, as the trace which he sees becomes the mother separated from him. In this transaction, it is clear that what is at stake is the structural relationship rather than any of its representations, a structure which is organized around separation. The drawn mark is the first mode of image production in the individual's history, actually the first in the history of humanity. It stages the symmetrical separation process from beginning to end: the child passively separated from the mother who pushes him away from her, but also the child coming away from her by pushing her away. This whole scene is paralleled by the corresponding mental separation, even if verbal language cannot yet express it.

However, the role of tracing in creating the separation does not pertain only to the origination of the mark but also to the discovery of the trace. Every gap in drawing is also a bridge and vice versa. A trace simultaneously separates and binds the pieces of space which it delimits, much like the leaden line which separates and binds the stained-glass pieces on a latticed window. The trace is the reified symbol of separation. Hence, the choice of drawing over other forms of expression is particularly suited to the visual and mental exploration
of the space which *simultaneously separates and binds* the mother to the child. Moreover, the possibility of transforming a separating gap (across three-dimensional space) into a bridging space (across the two-dimensional page) is a property characteristic of drawing. Tracing is the privileged way of turning the pluridimensional experience of muscular and tactile activity into a two-dimensional experience controlled by the eye; only in this way is the separation gradually accepted and symbolized. Repeating the gesture reinforces the psychic posture of the depressive position [Melanie Klein, 1968] which has already been inscribed through the dynamic relation with the world from the age of six and a half months. Although graphic activity gives greater strength and stability to the introjections at work in the relations to the mother or the surrogate adult, it is not in a position to replace those relations. Each type of investments at play in graphic activity requires that the corresponding psychic phenomena already be constituted. Graphic activity only occurs and develops once the relation between mother and child already has been internalized. Only then can drawing help the child settle his relation to the mother into a psychic, rather than physical, space and into a different duration, that of his own history.

Finally, when playing the drawing game, the child is not alone. Not only does he treat those early inscriptions as though they were real live imprints (he talks to them, names them, etc.) but he also develops a deep and original relationship with the page. With his or her every gesture, the page answers back as his mother would, and even better than she since it does so in a religiously exact manner (*au doigt et à l’œil*). The child changes his hand movement and the paper returns the changes back to the child’s eyes, like an “ideal mother,” as it were. Yet is the page able to gain the child’s trust (without this initial contact of trust there would be no “inscriptive game”)? It can only come from the child itself. Thus the child trusts the page with the internalized mother which inhabits him. Through his or her gesture, the child secures her echoing answer that is the processes involved in the mother’s primary introjection and the internalized mother-child relation. At the same time, such echoing guarantees him that he is held within the maternal psychic system, which his own developing psychic system cannot forego.

The child’s earliest graphic activity thus constitutes a place where the processes of the early mother-child relation are reproduced and stabilized. It represents a first containing structure for the child, while movements serve the process of early symbolization. Words appear
later in gesture. Indeed, just as in the *fort-da* game, the child may add onomatopoeia to the marks he traces. Acting first as a “magic word,” this word brings together the body, the gesture, and the affect in the same movement, just like the trace on the paper. Only later, when those connections have receded somewhat, or even are discontinued, can the act of naming occur. The child names the contents of his drawing after the fact. This, however, does not involve the processes of tracing per se but other, later, forms of symbolization.

THE WRITER AT GRIPS WITH HIS OR HER TRACES

*c1. Tracing, Separation and Attachment: The Dual Space of Writing*

Just as the child draws outward, pulling the trace away from himself, the adult draws outward and pushes away what he writes. In writing as in drawing, the “thrown-out” gesture conjures up a trace, a line. This “line,” which seems tied to his movement, is used by the inscriber to pull back the thought that has been cast out in the act of inscription. Even better than the spindle tied to a string in the game described by Freud, arm and hand assisted by the pencil allow for a movement of casting and retrieving, of separating and binding. This back-and-forth motion, this tossing and retrieving, gives new life to the processes symbolizing the separation of mother and child and contributes to the constitution a mental framework capable of containing thoughts. The hand’s drawing gesture is an essential movement by which thought learns how to think itself through. At first it darts out like an unruly horse, which is later led back and tamed, bound to the line which the hand holds fast upon the paper. Only once this prior condition has been fulfilled can the production of meaning occur, with the ebb and flow of thought as it gets on and gets waylaid, multiplies, fades, and backs away.

However, the inscriber, the subject of all this throwing and pulling also becomes its object. He is not only the one who casts out his mark—his thought—across the paper; he is also cast out by it, thus at the risk of losing his identity. The movement by which the author disinvests himself from the self and transfers it to the text turns the text into the primitive mother to whom the child tries to stand closer as she represents for him the spring of life. The feelings of being “played out,” “beat,” or “undone” which the writer experiences after
intense efforts come from this motion of ebb and flow, from this casting and retrieving; he or she willing assumes the position of a swimmer, washed away from the boat by a wave while trying to hold on, pulling on the towline of writing just to remain afloat. Such is the trial of writing. Whereas the one who refuses to relinquish thought to it may continue to believe that he is still tightly secured to his thinking, the one who ventures into this trial agrees to lose, if only temporarily. Writing severs his moorings, casts him away like a swimmer trying to pull his way back to the ship with a rope while waves drag him away from his goal. As soon as we start tracing, only the trace guides us, what we call in its sophisticated form, “the thread of writing” (le fil de l’écriture). It is the only tie connecting the lone swimmer who has agreed to dive into the unknown, trying to reach the hypothetical target at the end of the way, not knowing whether he will ever succeed or whether the stakes are worth the effort, not knowing whether the thread leads to a treasure trove or a wreckage—no matter. The creator is the one who agrees to venture forth with no certainty and follow this thread unwinding ahead of him like Ariadne’s thread, and falling behind him like a spider’s web. The anxiety of the blank page may just be the anxiety that there is no thread to pull or follow, the apprehension of being left behind, with no link to anyone or without even the first half of the thread.

From this perspective, the act of creating a manuscript—with all its scribbling, its crossed-out words, and sometimes its memos—has the same function for the writer as it does for the cartoonist. Such work is the means whereby the creator tries to escape the fate of inexorable distance opened by the tracing gesture and simultaneously opened and closed by the trace. Whereas the parallel between reading a text and reading a drawing remains largely unresolved, the fact that writing and drawing follow the same creative logic at the time of tracing is a matter beyond doubt. Modelled after the child’s early tracings, the inscriptive processes are always of a sensory, emotional and motional sort. They are also involved in the symbolization of a containing form potentially capable of receiving the thought contents. Without the early symbolization of “casting-out” and “pulling-up” establishing the inscriptive gesture, the process of instilling meaning in the trace, either drawn or written would be impossible, particularly the production of meaning which revolves around the mirroring function of the trace and the various representations of the body itself. The sensory and motive processes at stake in the inscriptive gesture
precede all its other processes and accompany them through each of their phases as a necessary condition.

* c2. Traces and Proper Bodies

Once the child leaves the womb, he experiences a far more diverse and violent group of stimulations than before. The digestive system awakens the erogenous zones around the mouth and the anus, while at the same time it brings along a group of other stimulations, those of smooth internal muscles, and sensations of hunger and satiety. Also the exchanges with the surrogate mother and with the primary maternal environment (involving people, cultural habits, climatic constraints, etc.), work to focus investments onto other areas of the body proper. Once invested with the contacts to the primary maternal environment, those areas become the object of an autoerotic stimulation in which the hand “plays” the part of the Mother and the Child, stimulating other parts of the body, based on the model of the initial stimulations coming from the early surroundings.

One of the first tasks of the new-born child’s psychic system is to gather those scattered areas of sensory focalizations by ascribing each part of his body, which has been felt and invested in and for itself, to a single group. A subsequent task involves bringing each part of the group which has been thus constituted to a specific function. In other words, the child will have to give meaning to the part. Throughout the task, the child is helped along by his environment which is instrumental in totalizing the various areas of the body and giving meaning to the sensations experienced by the newborn: for instance, a mother covering up her child because he is cold teaches him how to recognize as a feeling of coldness what had been only an undifferentiated, uneasy sensation, disconnected from any particular cause. The child’s hands, however, play a critical role in this achievement. Exploring his own body, grabbing and touching his various body parts, the child throws hitherto missing bridges across the scattered sensory centers which correspond to more loosely innervated areas of the body, or parts which have just been neglected by the mother’s hands. The child’s hands slide over the body, exploring its limits, bringing together the scattered parts and then, more daringly, slowly replace the adult’s hands in bringing the pleasure which the child originally received from them.

Thus, the hand reaches out to take hold of space and of the world. In some respects, the initial building of the text is similar to the initial
process of gathering, by means of the hand, the sensations which are for now scattered across the body. For instance, the writer first jots down his ideas on different parts of the page. Or else he divides up—often by means of a color index—groups of words recalling thoughts, sensations, and feelings into separate blocks. And even when writing starts out on a seemingly organized thread, oftentimes during the process, the writer feels the need to break off writing to scribble down ideas and thoughts which spring up with no apparent, or at least immediate, connection to the object of his work and without his yet knowing their use and position in the overall construction.

In any case, do we not speak of "the body of the work"? An artist's various intuitions and perceptions are assembled together on the page in much the same way as the various cutaneous, muscular and aural sensations are progressively integrated into coherent units. In both cases, the gathering involves a movement from the depth up to the surface. The innermost body is held out on the surface periphery of the psychic system while inner sensations are pulled out of the deep onto the body's surface (internal perceptions, particularly pain, are perceived as being surface pain precisely because they are projected onto the surface of the body). Similarly the writer's various intuitions, stimulations, perceptions, and thoughts are projected onto the surface of the page. The work is, however, not a static surrogate to the artist's skin (its mere projection onto the surface of the page) insofar as it does not reproduce the sensory points characterizing the skin. Nonetheless, the work is a dynamic surrogate insofar as the processes regrouping the work into a continuous whole parallel those smoothing over the surface of the bodily shell: each sensation is first inscribed and precisely identified for its own sake; those inscriptions are then connected together; finally the process of their connection brings out channels of meaning which receive favored status as starting-points for subsequent developments.

My hypothesis is that each of those three moments, which are building blocks in the creation of the psyche, corresponds to a group of specific practices in the creation of the text.

Out of those three, the first moment would correspond to the inscriptive rhythm (fast, slow, even, or erratic) and to the manner of writing (smooth, hurried, or erratic, riotous even) whose patterns reproduce those of the various types of physical and psychical stimulation. At this time, the muscular and cutaneous aspects of writing would operate as a way of symbolizing, by means of the hand, un-
focused bodily sensations which are not yet identified into representations. Parallel to the exploration of scattered centers of thought and representation there exists the corresponding use of different pages marked by just a few words, scribblings in the margins and the corners of the text, puzzling scholia (designed to avoid losing the particular thread of writing the writer is following at the time, and the corresponding train of thought occurring then), ellipses designed to point out that thought is still to follow a logical development which is eclipsed for the moment, while something requires the author’s undivided attention elsewhere, etc.

The time when the originally scattered sensory centers are connected together on the surface of the body and in its depth could correspond, in the manuscript’s arrows, to the paragraphs postponed or displaced, to the developments which are added in the margins or between the lines to bind two separately identified fragments which are still far apart.

At last, in a third development, and in the same way as the child first grasps the imaginary whole of the body upon perceiving himself in the mirror before he realizes its perceptive unity, it is possible that the writer anticipates the imaginary whole of his text, created after the image of his own body as a whole. The outline of his work—or fragments of drafts corresponding to various parts of the project—fulfill, even if they remain incomplete, the function of anticipating fantastically the projected totality.

The writer at work thus reinforces, confirms, and objectifies his own mental framework and his psychical relation to the primitive mother, and he or she does so independently of the work contents, solely by virtue of the processes involved in creating a text. The spatial lay-out of the text on a two-dimensional flat support enables various series of supplementary investments to come into play: the release of threatening stimuli and representations; the connection of those stimuli to a gesture leaving a trace, (that is the earliest form of symbolization which substitutes the mere kinetic release for the possibility of its representation); the constitution of a thought content through the metaphoric ability for the white page to take it in and contain its traces; the exploration of the gap separating the child from his mother which the trace seeks to fill in through its hallmark movement of binding and breaking away, of coming and going, of throwing away and grabbing back. Only then can the signifying process of the text occur,
according to the grammatical and syntactical rules of the language being used.

These steps do not occur in succession but simultaneously. The process of turning thoughts into forms requires the possibility of a containing form in which the creator’s thought can be cast and then retrieved. Such mechanism requires the possibility for the containing form to be invested both as: a) a metaphor of the mother’s body, which is everyone’s primal container, psychically as well as physically (the realm of bonding investments); and as b) a metaphor of one’s own body (the realm of narcissistic and sexual investments).

These various functions of writing explain why seemingly useless and interfering activities take place under the creator’s pen, parallel to the process of producing meaning itself. These occurrences are the necessary moments when the support of writing and the act of writing are reinvested so as to allow for a renewed production of meaning. Such activities as the author’s darkening certain letters in his text and introducing repetitive graphic patterns or scribblings, are not only procedures of waiting for inspiration or ways for the mind to find some distraction. They are ways of investing the page as a metaphor for the container of thoughts. In other words, they are a way for the scriptor to make sure the page and his gesture are fulfilling their roles, and that the process of bringing meaning upon thought may enjoy further the support of the more archaic production of meaning which is represented by the investment of the page as a metaphoric container of one’s own body and the mother’s body. In this respect, anxiety before the white page may just be an anxiety about a lack of a container to receive the contents. It is not the white page that is used to contain the text, but rather the outlined page which is already inscribed, be it by a trace, a word, or a drawing. The habit of drawing or writing, calligraphied words in the margins corresponds to processes of appropriating space. And the advice about writing just anything—as long as you get something written!—in order to trigger off the writing process can be understood as the necessity of creating a first container even if later it must submit to considerable modifications. Contents and container are created in mutual reference throughout the text. In fact, linguistic models are often ruffled in the earliest drafts and, here again, the writing guidelines advocating disregard of syntax and grammar rest on good intuition.

Thus, the inscriptive process is above all the hand exploring a given
space and organizing it according to its own possibilities. The process of the inscriptive movement first transforms physical stimulus into image and into representation; it then gathers those representations into a whole and hierarchizes them in order to connect them to a single purpose which will provide the cornerstone of the whole: sensation in the poem, illusion in the novelistic story, idea in the essay.

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