

Both chimps and children like banging things and it is those objects which produce the loudest noise for the smallest effort that are preferred. Balls that bounce high when only weakly thrown, balloons that shoot across a room when only lightly touched, sand that can be moulded with the mildest pressure, toys on wheels that roll easily along at the gentlest push, these are the things that have maximum play-appeal.

When first faced with a pencil and paper the infant does not find itself in a very promising situation. The best it can do is to to the pencil on to the surface. But this leads to a peasant surprise. The tap does something more than simply make a noise, it produces a visual impact as well. Something comes out of the end of the pencil and leaves a mark on the paper. A line is drawn.

It is fascinating to watch this first moment of graphic discovery by a chimpanzee or a child. It stares at the line, intrigued by the unexpected visual bonus its action has brought. After viewing the result for a moment it repeats the experiment. Sure enough, it works the second time, then again, and again. Soon the sheet is covered with scribble lines. As time passes, drawing sessions become more vigorous. Single, tentative lines, placed on the paper one after the other, give way to multiple back-and-forth scribbling. If there is a choice, crayons, chalks and paints are preferred to pencils because they have an even bolder impact, produce an even bigger visual effect, as they sweep across the paper.

The first interest in this activity appears at about one-and-a-half years of age, in both chimps and children. But it is not until after the second birthday that the bold, confident, multiple scribbling really gains momentum. At the age of three the average child moves into a new graphic phase: it starts to simplify its confused scribbling. Out of the exciting chaos it begins to distil basic shapes. It experiments with crosses, then with circles, squares and triangles. Meandering lines are led round the page until they join up with themselves, enclosing a space. A line becomes an outline. During the months that follow, these simple shapes 116