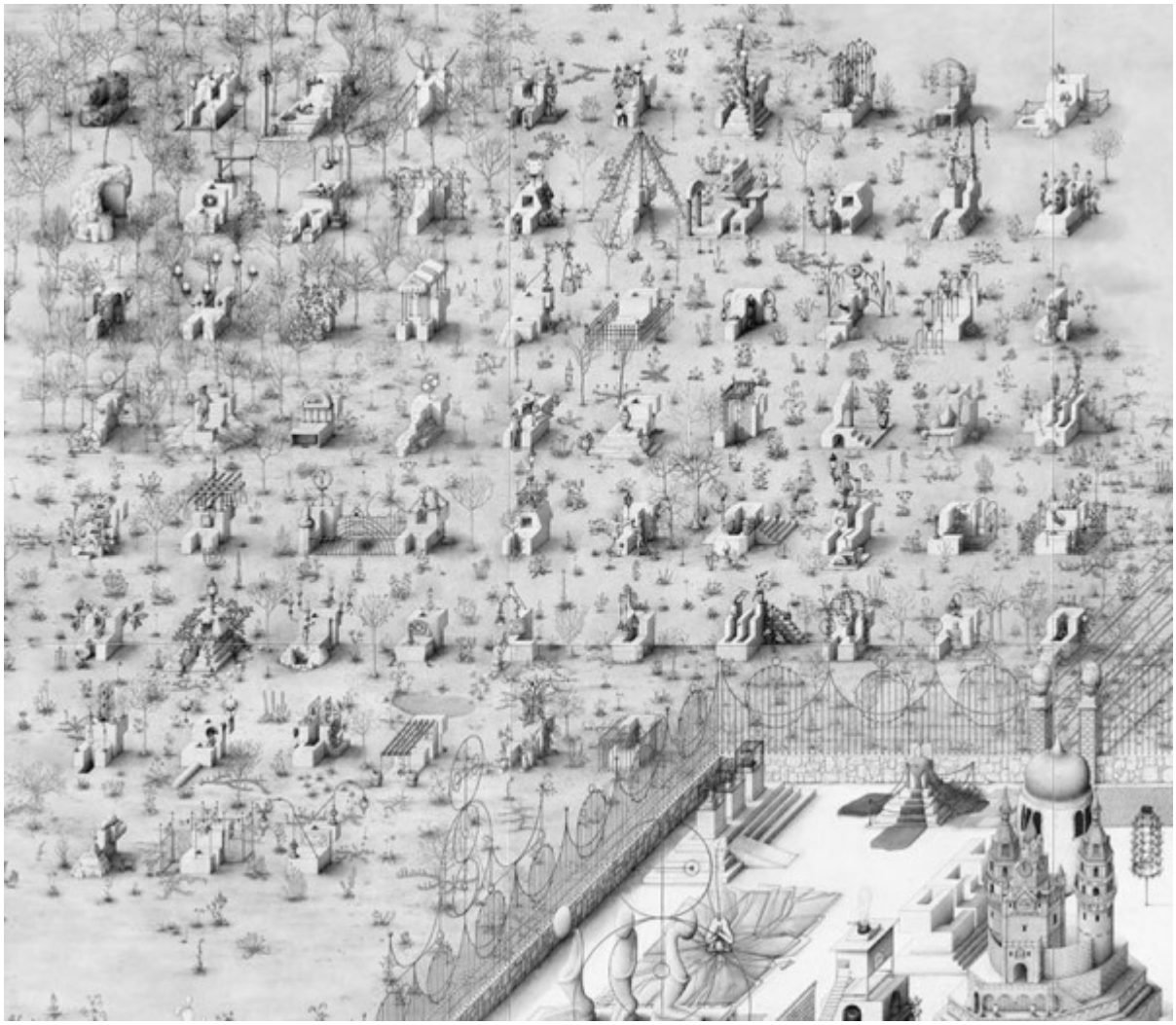
# HYLOGRAPHY

I am preparing with Paul Noble a guide to his work, as part of an upcoming exhibition at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

Paul’s vast drawn world (as well as sculpted material forms) – a place called Nobson Newtown (though it questions just what we mean by place) – has at its heart a kind of **fontography** – in the sense of a deep rumination upon giving form to words and meanings.

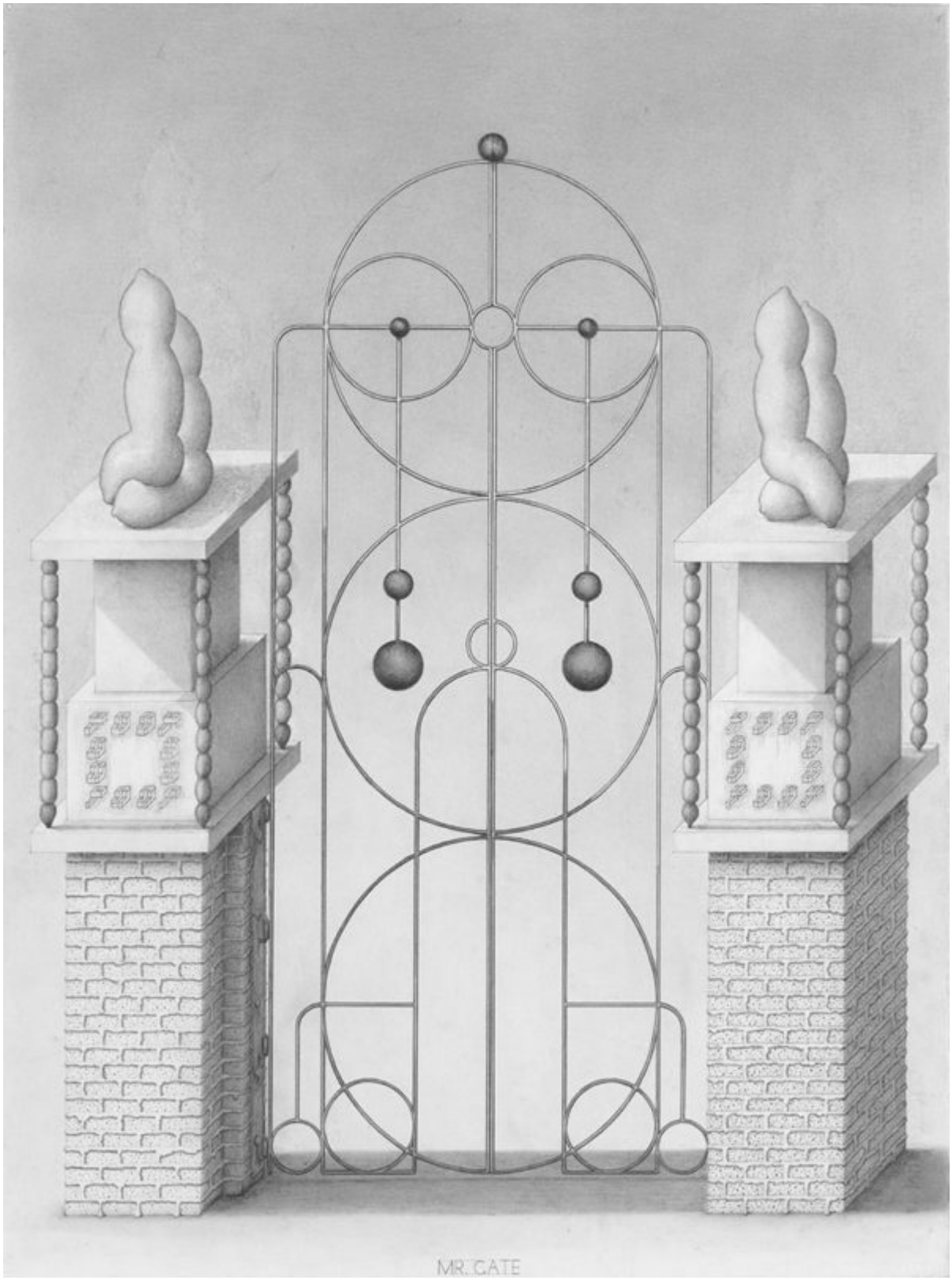
Buildings and structures give form to letters; things seem to be written in the architecture, in rocks and stones too, and they indeed are, though sense is evasive

and easily slips away, leaving a kind of anxious presence – they came and left. There are no living souls.



Nobson cemetery (in Ye Olde Ruin)

There are distinct experiences of order – fences, walls, arrangements of things. There are shrouded forms. And metamorphoses, monstrous hum-animals.




Then there’s the omnipresence, quite Dionysian, of faecal matter, all over Paul’s world. Garbage bags. Excrement. Waste matter? The Latin is *faex* – the sediment left in the wine cup, after downing the draft. Sediment? Sedimentary earth, clay – out of which Prometheus created humanity.

I'll have a lot more to say later. Currently it is all causing me to reflect again upon an old fascination of mine – the emergence of a signal, sense or meaning from background noise, the distinction between figure and ground [Link]

I need a new word for all this –

## hylography

If photography is writing with light, then hylography is writing with matter, on matter, through matter. Mark|matter in dialectic. As matter takes form it may reach a threshold of signification, when it seems to convey meaning. *Hyle* is Aristotle's word for matter (and typically associated with *morphe* – form). *Graphein* is to write in Greek: the compound -graphy here denotes processes or styles of writing, drawing, or graphic representation.

OK, so writing has to take a material form (ink on paper, scroll and codex etc), but we often overlook this, treat it as secondary, and assume that the ideal is when the process and materiality of writing is transparent, when we can simply read what is written. Hylography is not thereby tautological, because we also sometimes cherish *chirography*, handwriting, *calligraphy*, fine script, *typography*, the printed page, and the illuminated page, when letter forms can be so much more than just letters, and when material process, performance and gesture is as much our concern as signification.

So the notion and word hylography makes explicit those processes that occur at the threshold of sensing meaning – when marks, shapes, forms congeal and we think we recognize something. The mark/gesture challenges us and asks "do I mean anything"? Graphical forms can be experienced as more than their communicative content – when our attention is caught by the material forms themselves that letters, words, graphical marks may take.

Derived from hylography is *hylogram* – matter as mark | mark as matter. *Gramma* is a graphic mark, derived from *graphein*, to write, and expressing the result of the action of that verb. Both hylography and hylogram express the materialities of media, the ways we give material form to words, as well as the presence, accidental or intentional, of human origin or not, of graphical forms in matter/materials.

The weathering of driftwood and the action of waves upon sand may take on graphical

form, just as the chiseled forms of a stone inscription may ultimately dissolve in the rain.

Paul’s *Nobson* font

Prehistoric rock carvings, Lordenshaws, Northumberland UK

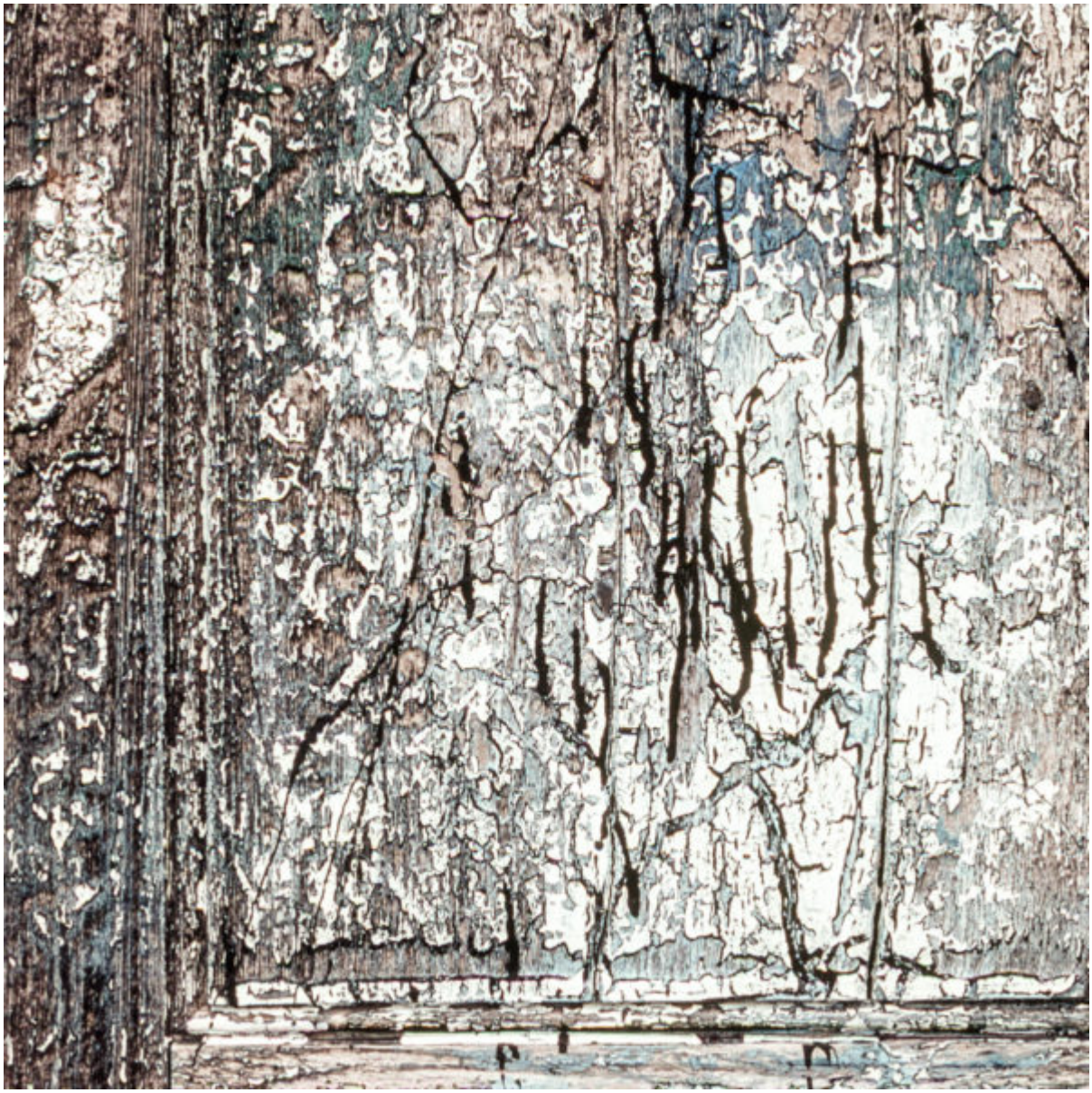
Routin Lin

Roman epigraphy, Hadrian’s Wall, Northumberland UK

Ambrotype, anonymous, USA 1860s

Daguerreotype, anonymous, USA 1850s

Gravestone, 18th century, St Aidan’s Bamburgh, Northumberland UK

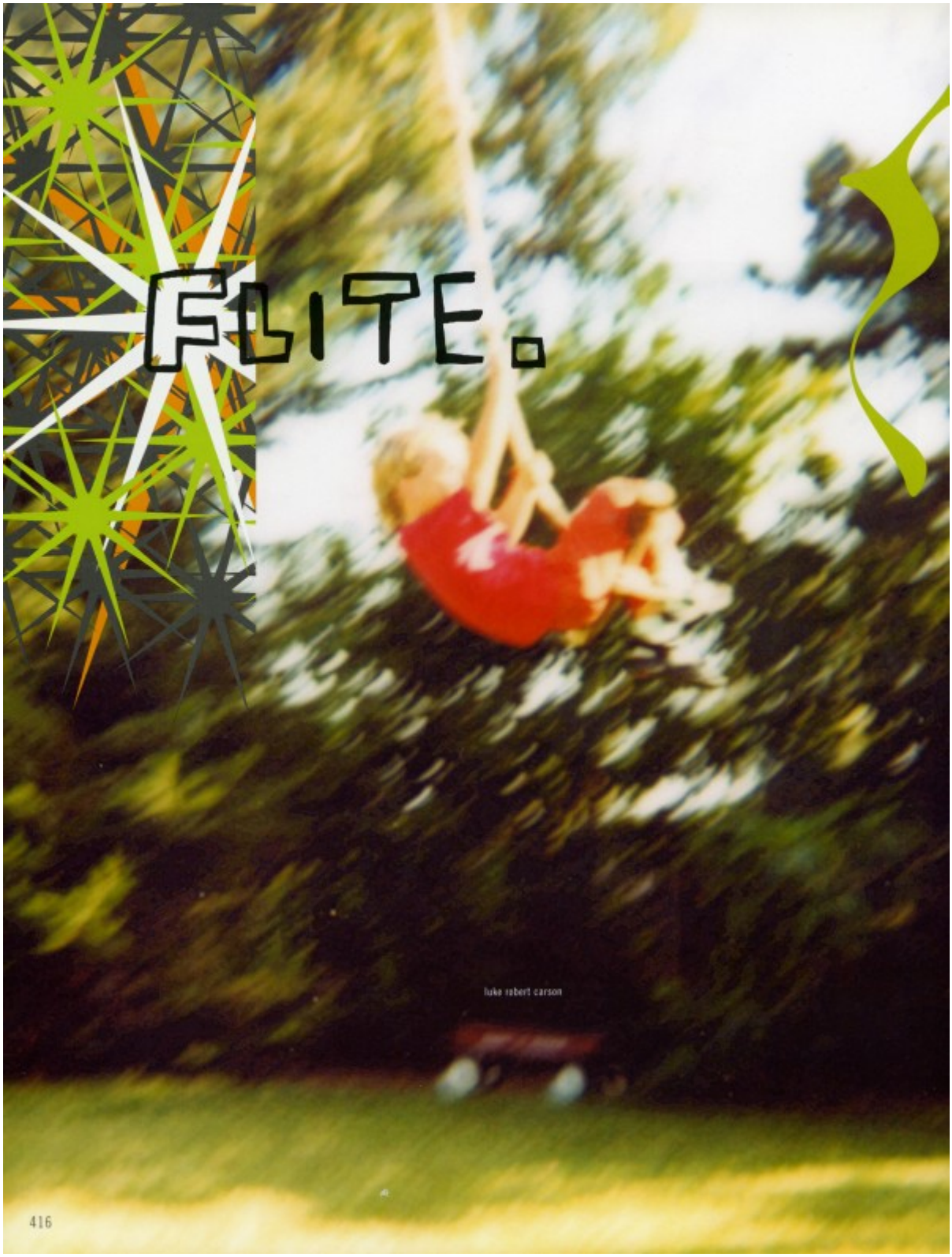


Door, fisherman’s shed, Lindisfarne, Northumberland UK

Fishing boat, Lindisfarne, Northumberland UK

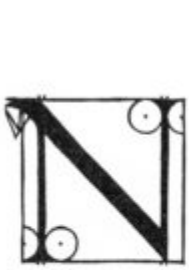
Contemporary layout and typography can be distinctively hylographic.

Here is David Carson and Cliff McLucas:


FLITE.
luke robert carson

Hylography is not uncommon in modern and contemporary art. I think of Robert Rauchenberg, and especially Jasper Johns. Here, in a more romantic sensibility is

John Piper, Lower Court, Kinsham, Herefordshire UK 1981 (where the key is the pen and brush mark)



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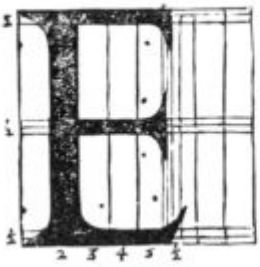

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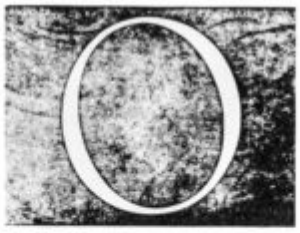

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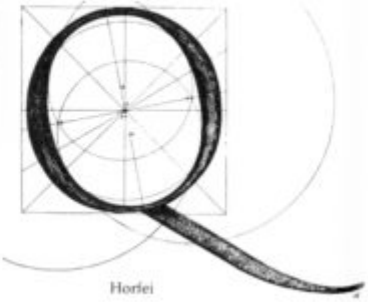

Horlei