anthology of concretism

EDITED BY **EUGENE WILDMAN**

Second Revised and Enlarged Edition

$2.50

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Introduction by PETER MICHELSON

Afterword by EUGENE WILDMAN

Second Revised and Enlarged Edition

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CHICAGO

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This anthology is a revised and enlarged version of the volume 19, number 4 issue of the *Chicago Review*. Swallow Press' first revised and enlarged edition, entitled THE CHICAGO REVIEW ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETISM, contained additional contributors, an Afterword, and some slight rearrangements. Swallow Press' second revised and enlarged edition, entitled ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETISM, adds an Introduction and more pieces by contributors.

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to the *Chicago Review* and to the Division of Humanities of The University of Chicago for their very generous permission and cooperation in the publication of this volume.

Special thanks are due to Alain Arias-Misson, who was the main link with the poets and who permitted himself to be used as a kind of international postal clearing house when the original *Chicago Review* issue was being compiled. Leonard Shaykin, who was traveling in Europe at the time, helped initiate the original correspondence.

The calligraphy accompanying the poems of Seiichi Niikuni and Kitasono Katué is by Hiroaki Morino, formerly the ceramicist at The University of Chicago's Midway Studios.

contents

introduction

Crowding establishment perimeters as it does, the posture of an experimental poetry is, willy-nilly, nearly always aggressive. Perhaps, therefore, an introduction to a book of experimental poems should try to reduce this natural abrasion, hoping to get so exploratory an art and its audience past at least *that* fruitless idol. Because this is in effect *The Chicago Review Anthology of Concretism*'s third edition in the last two years, such a task has been in part already done. Still, concretism has its enemies. Erich Kahler finds in it the prime illustrations of what he calls "the triumph of incoherence," in his recent book *The Disintegration of Form in the Arts*. Mr. Kahler's able and probably representative attack on contemporary poetics reminds us that much new artistic theory and practice *is* exploratory and perhaps therefore even as yet incomplete. So it is likely to find a largely skeptical or hostile audience. That it may be construed to threaten traditional values is easy enough to understand, but that it *need not* should also be understood. What is true from our tradition will always survive. But there is no reason to suppose either that we do now know or that at any time we have known our tradition and its implications fully. Nor need we suppose that the tradition itself demands a single, univocal artistic theory. Even Aristotle, the very heart of traditional western poetics, acknowledged that poetic form was evolutionary when he said that he did not know if poetry had "as yet perfected its proper types." This problem—of dynamic form—has been one of the grand motifs in the history of literary criticism. Dryden's resolution of that long time issue provides intelligent principles of procedure for all ages. In preferring "moderns" to "ancients" he refers us to not only the refinements of craft that history has brought, but also to the cultural development of taste that will determine the nature of the artistic audience, without which there is no art. That much artistic sophistication even the law courts allow when they refer judgments of pornography to "contemporary community standards." And what good, after all, is a poetic tradition that doesn't give us improvement with time, that *future* test of past and present to which tradition unfailingly refers us.

The business of an experimental poetics is to explore radical changes and possibilities in both its vision and its manner. If we find, as many have, that our vision has lost confidence in a coherent and esthetically pleasing moral scheme, then we should not be surprised to find, as

many have, that the old mimetic modes have forfeited their ultimate authority. For many poets and critics the absence of convincing poetic or moral authority is itself a call for exploratory poetics. If such exploration looses our demi-urge, as Kahler suggests, then we must candidly know that Dionysius lives in us, as we have been forewarned by poets, prophets, and psychologists. And now that his weapon has nuclear power we needs must see him face to face. So we find a way. Kahler, fearing "anarchy" and "chaos," tells us: "We are confronted with an ever increasing mass of unmastered life-material, without and within ourselves. What we must do today above all . . . is to gather all our resources for the mastery of our world, which means directing our efforts toward establishing rather than dissevering and dissecting coherences." The "master" metaphor, however, is fascistic and humanistically self defeating. But if ever we can under any circumstances, it is certain that we *cannot* "master" our life-material by ignoring Dionysian energy or its anarchical and chaotic analogues. Such terms as *anarchy* and *chaos* designate archetypal evils that have never existed in fact, and never will. They are proximate concepts. If, therefore, we sense these qualities in modern life, we must, if we are not to make bogeys of them, distinguish between their material and their mythic natures. The proper historical context, then, in which to see concretism is as one instance in the poetic search for meaning in material—the stuff marking the difference, after all, between keeping and giving up the ghost.

Concrete poetry, as its name implies, is a poetry of material. At its best, its most ambitious (as in Jean Francois Bory's "veux," pp. 131 ff.), it is a visual metaphor of modern sensibility—the "red shift," the center falling apart. It may also be "literary," as Bory's poem is, but it is even before that *material*. For example, though I have "read" Bory's poem perhaps ten times, I have not yet read all its "words." Its first physical appearance gives coherence to, provides a center for, and thus defines, the page. Soon, however, it takes over the page—dominating it with shape, shade, and even the tease of imagery, symbolism, and other "literary" paraphernalia. But no sooner is it "master" than it explodes, moving our consciousness beyond the edge of the book, ending one step short of its logical conclusion—the denial of not only the arbitrary authority of *page* but of all perceptive possibility. That "charitable" ending is the ultimate artistic statement, the

artist controlling reality for his own purposes, intimidated neither by logic nor metaphysics, responsible rather to his own sense of reality than to rules of validity. Does such a poem—and we haven't even touched on its literary dimension—dissever coherences? Perhaps, but coherence, often called Beauty, is just where it has always been—in the eye of its beholder. The material presence of Bory's poem, like many concrete poems, alludes to and questions both the need for and humanistic *value* of "coherence."

For the other side of the "coherence" coin, after all, is system, bureaucracy, mechanization, and the whole modernistic programming apparatus by which personality is reduced to number and humanistic idiosyncracy is compressed into productive function. The concrete poet fights back. In declining to let printing efficiency rule his poem's physique or in declining to let spatial economy determine its physical density, he grapples with the possibility of true organic form, form not controlled by the systematic efficiency of the printing trade. In short, as the poet becomes his own printer (which literally is true in this book, where the poems are photographically reproduced from the poet's own "manuscript"), he is at one with not only its symbolic but also its material form. He has demechanized the material cause of his poetry. His Dionysian will has scattered the printer's type, shattered his plates, unlocked his page frames, and given the inevitable finger to economy. The poet has thus become united with his poem in a way that he has not been since the troubadors. So much so that the concretist asks his "reader" to stand on his head if necessary to read it. For now the poem is closer than ever to his pure imagination; and it may be responsible therefore to its essential self, not to such esthetic irrelevancies as gravity or overtime. If Industry's sensibilities—or those of the engineer—are dissociated, the poetic imagination has gone a long way toward putting body and soul together. Concretism, and the poetics of which it is a part, show us how we can come to humanistic terms with our technocratic ethos. When the bureaucrats have us up against the wall, as they always do, then simply deny their reality—write a round poem (pp. 131-43), or a design poem (pp. 71-3), or a pun poem (pp. 25 or 69), or a sound poem (p. 79).

Give Caesar what's his. But do not under any circumstances forfeit the fun of mix-mattering media. Do not forfeit the fun of finding the

reality that made the computer that programmed the personality that told us to *produce* or go back where we came from. Don't, for any chimerical coherence, forfeit the fun that distinguishes *you* from the industrious role our ant-hill societies impose for their banal, destructive ends. When the order of the day is "Fall In," don't do it. Play games instead. Don't even make mudpies—that's just another kind of production line. Reality sandwiches, says the poet, can be eaten only by properly humane players. And if such playing seems evasive, remember what the poet has also told us—that feeling human in the midst of *things* is a useful form of political subversion. That's where concrete poetry is at—making *things* conform to the human imagination.

This book itself is an educative experience. It is more than a concretist anthology. It is, as the Afterword says, a concrete Book. That is the peculiar quality that distinguishes it from other concrete collections. The format, the book's plan and character, complement its substance. Thereby the editor's own education at the hands of his material is documented. All things being at rest, an editor puts poems into a book. The book, thus, *contains* the poems. Here, however, the book is itself a poem. As Eugene Wildman, then editor of the *Chicago Review*, gathered material for this anthology he responded to it in kind, and quickly recognized that this book could not merely be a container, but must be an environment integrating the poems with their physical location and that location with its audience. The editor learned the concretist's primer lesson: how to demechanize not only his editorial function but also the very machinery that produces his book.

I have already observed that this is the third edition of this anthology, which simply confirms that it is telling something to somebody. I know it talks persuasively to fellow teachers of literature. And I know it is saying important things to students. It says to those who suppose poetry had reached dead end: Look again. It says to those who thought poetry—either the tightly reined New Critical or the galloping Beat kind—was dull or pretentious or "hard": Have fun, play games, it will do you good. It says to those who have long been taught to lock their experience into categories: Loosen up, look around, poetry is an art that means to help you *live*, not an object certifying your own high brow. I have used this book as a text for courses in literary criticism.

Colleagues of mine have used it in modern poetry courses and in design and drawing courses. The results are uniform; concretism not only opens up students it also opens up teachers to new artistic perspectives. But, to put this testimonial on a properly high plane, let me indicate the instructive dividends of concretism by quoting a passage from an undergraduate paper:

> Now for a manifesto. From what I have seen and vicariously felt, I think most Concrete poets will agree: Now, friends, we are here to proclaim the word in space—in inner space and outer space. We proclaim the word as well as proclaiming the emptiness around it. When we say "line of poetry," we mean line as line and not as length of sound. And to "color a thought" is no longer a metaphor but real live color. If our words do not touch you, then you should touch them, feel them, even play with them. If our words do not move you, then you should move them. Poetry is not "in the air." It is not everywhere. Poetry, friends, is where it is at.

Finally, however, one should not read this book because it will teach him something. He should read it because it will be a pleasure. But, being pleased, if he should also be taught what pleases him and be encouraged by that pleasure to seek more gold in poetry's hills than he expected to find, well there is no harm in that.

Peter Michelson
April 1969

Peter Michelson attended Whitman College, the University of Wyoming, and The University of Chicago. He has been editor of the CHICAGO REVIEW, *has taught literature at Northwestern University and at Roosevelt University, and is at present on the faculty of the University of Notre Dame. He is author of numerous essays and of the book,* PORNOGRAPHY, AN ESSAY IN GENRE. *He is also represented in Swallow Press'* NEW POETRY ANTHOLOGY I.

Seiichi Niikuni

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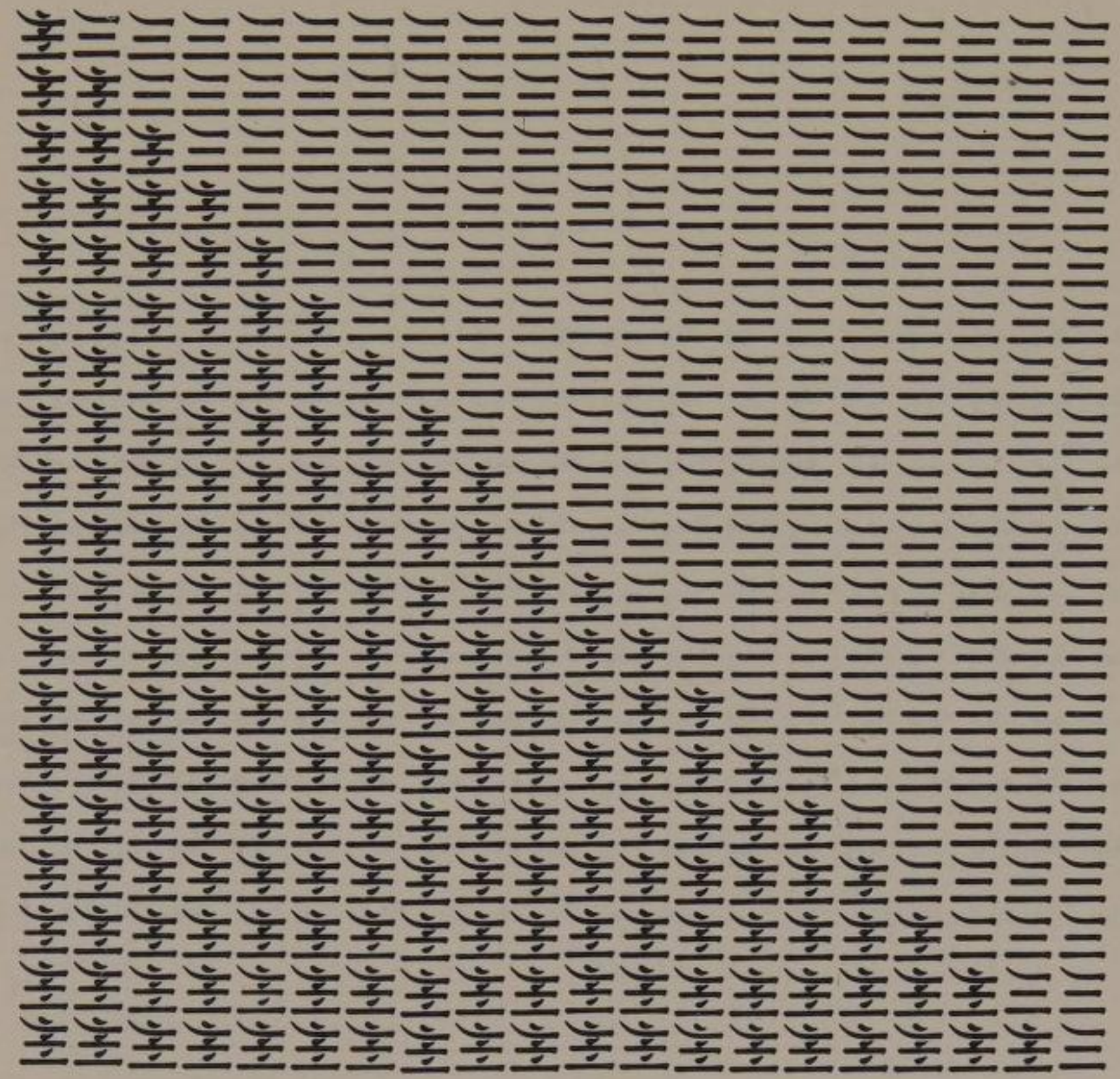

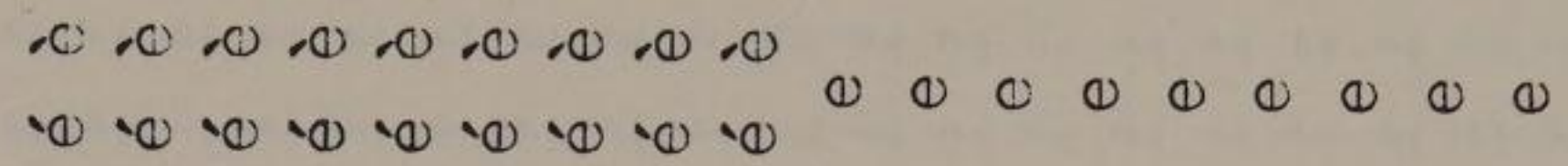

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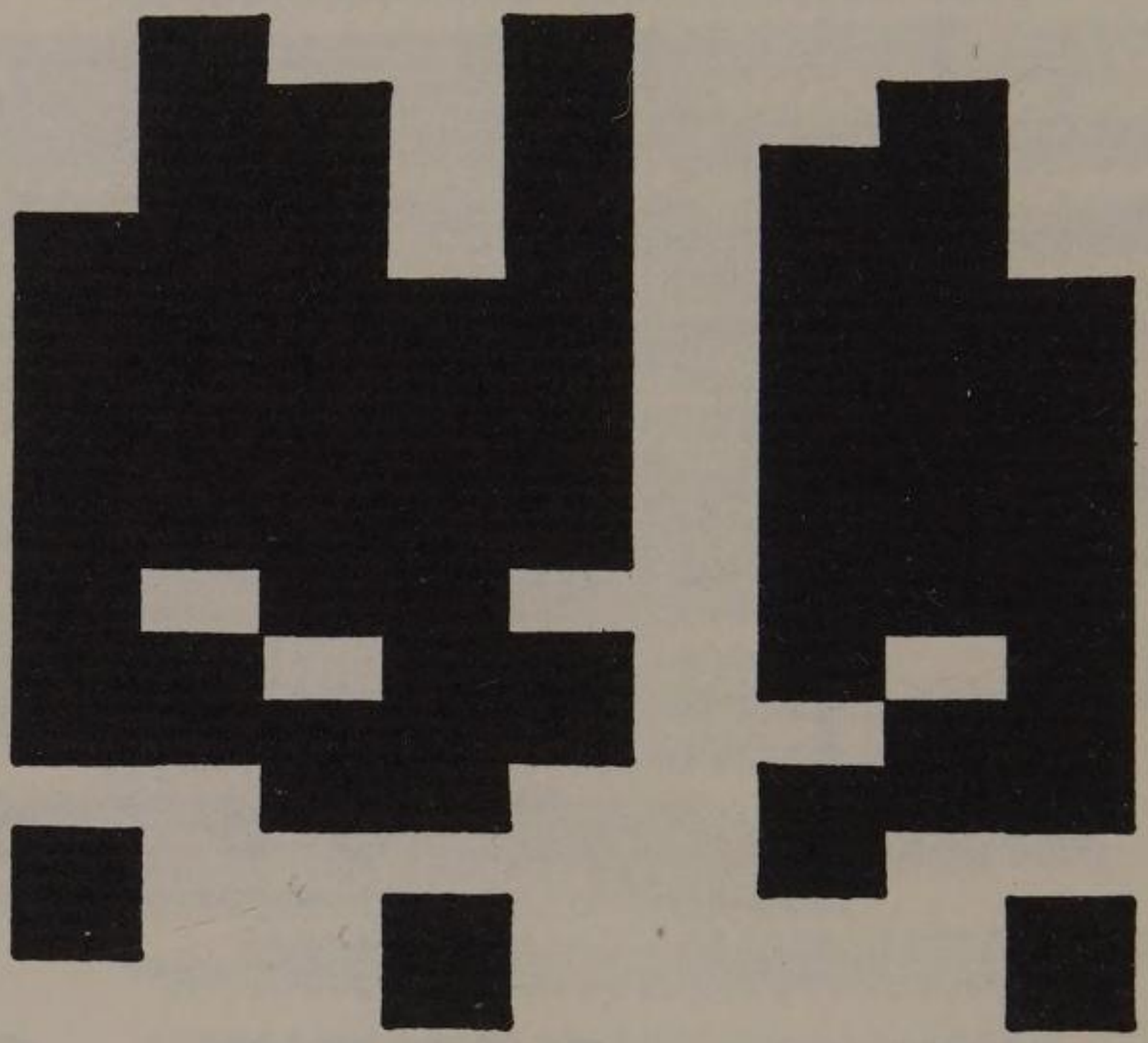

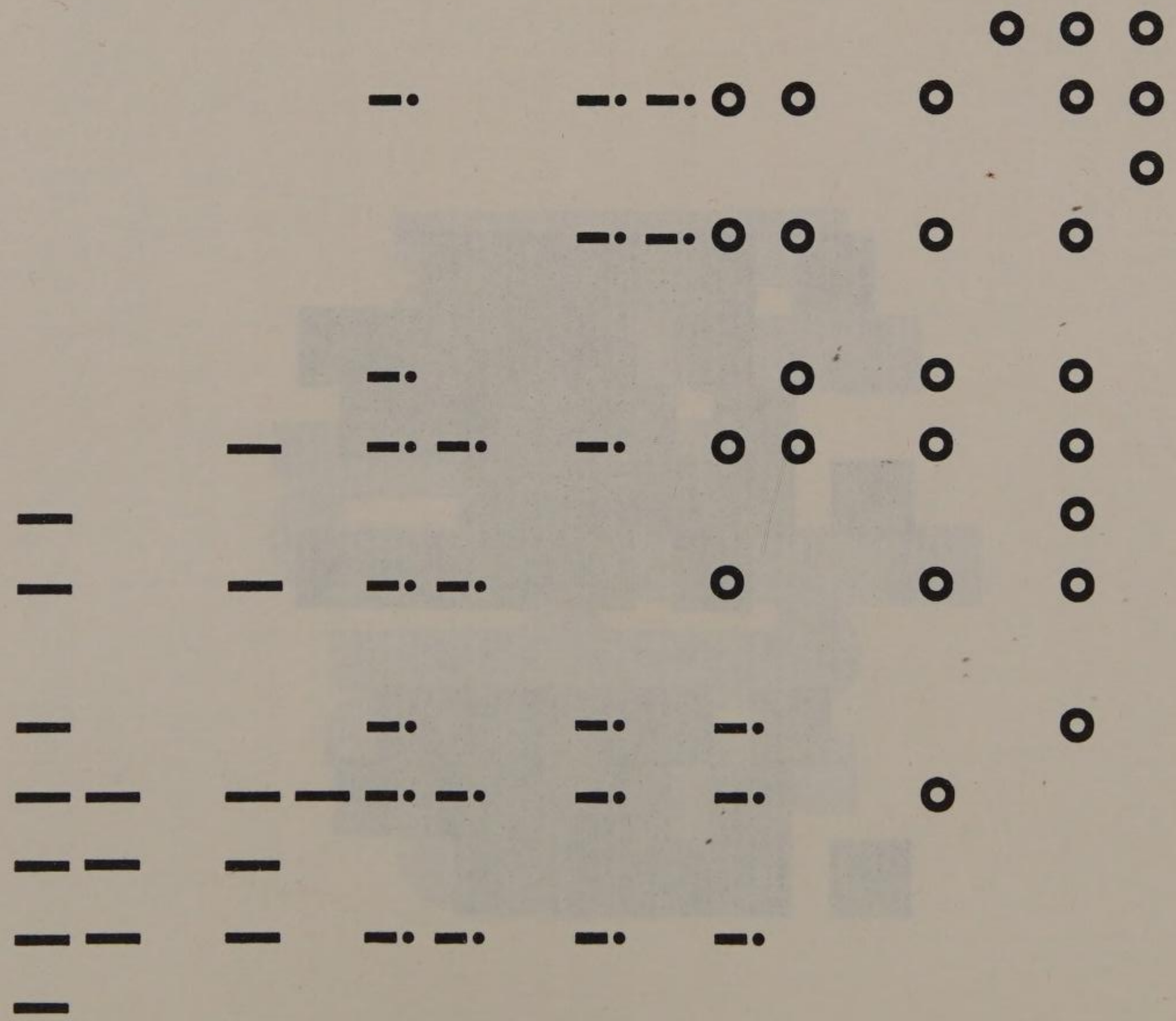

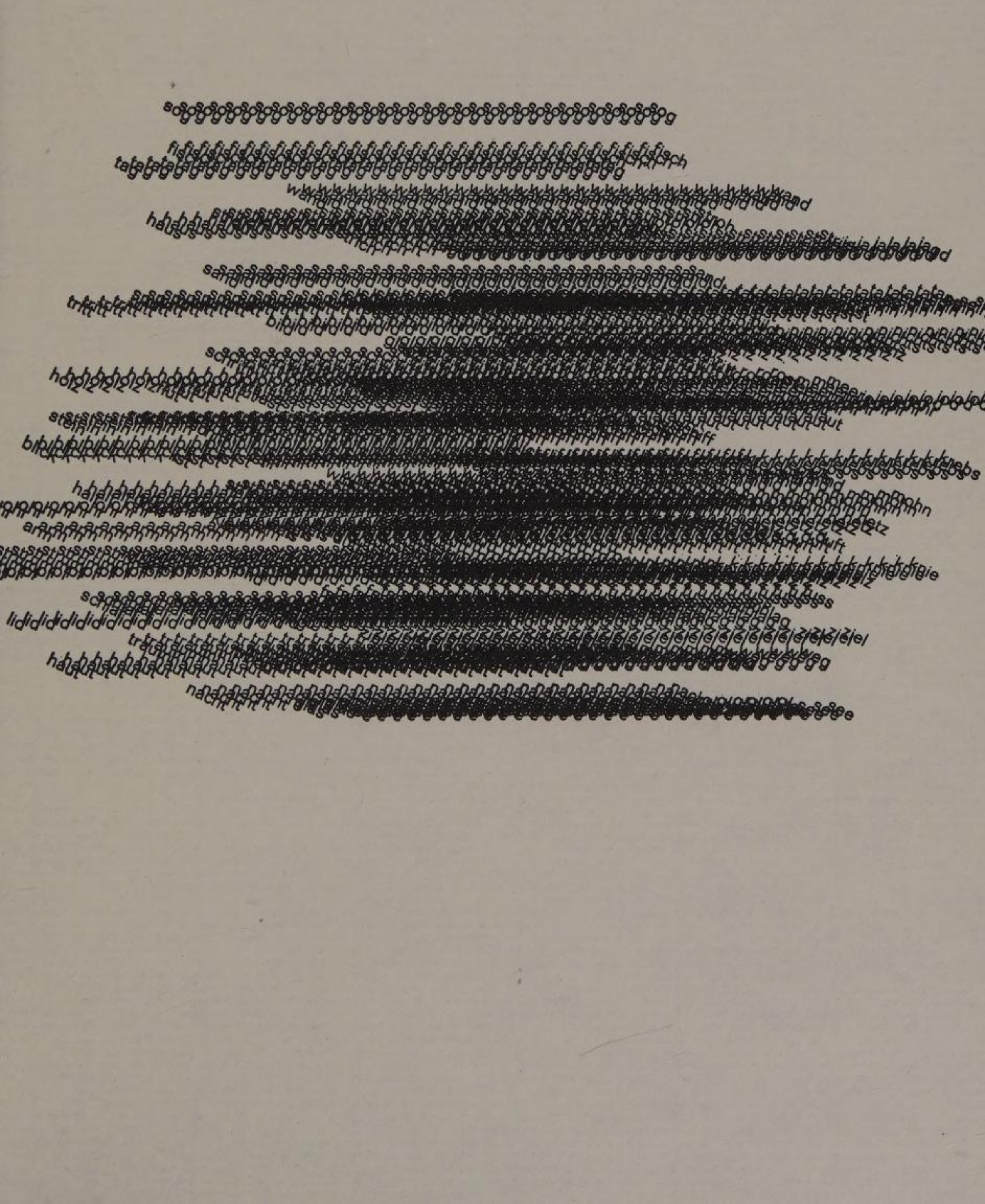

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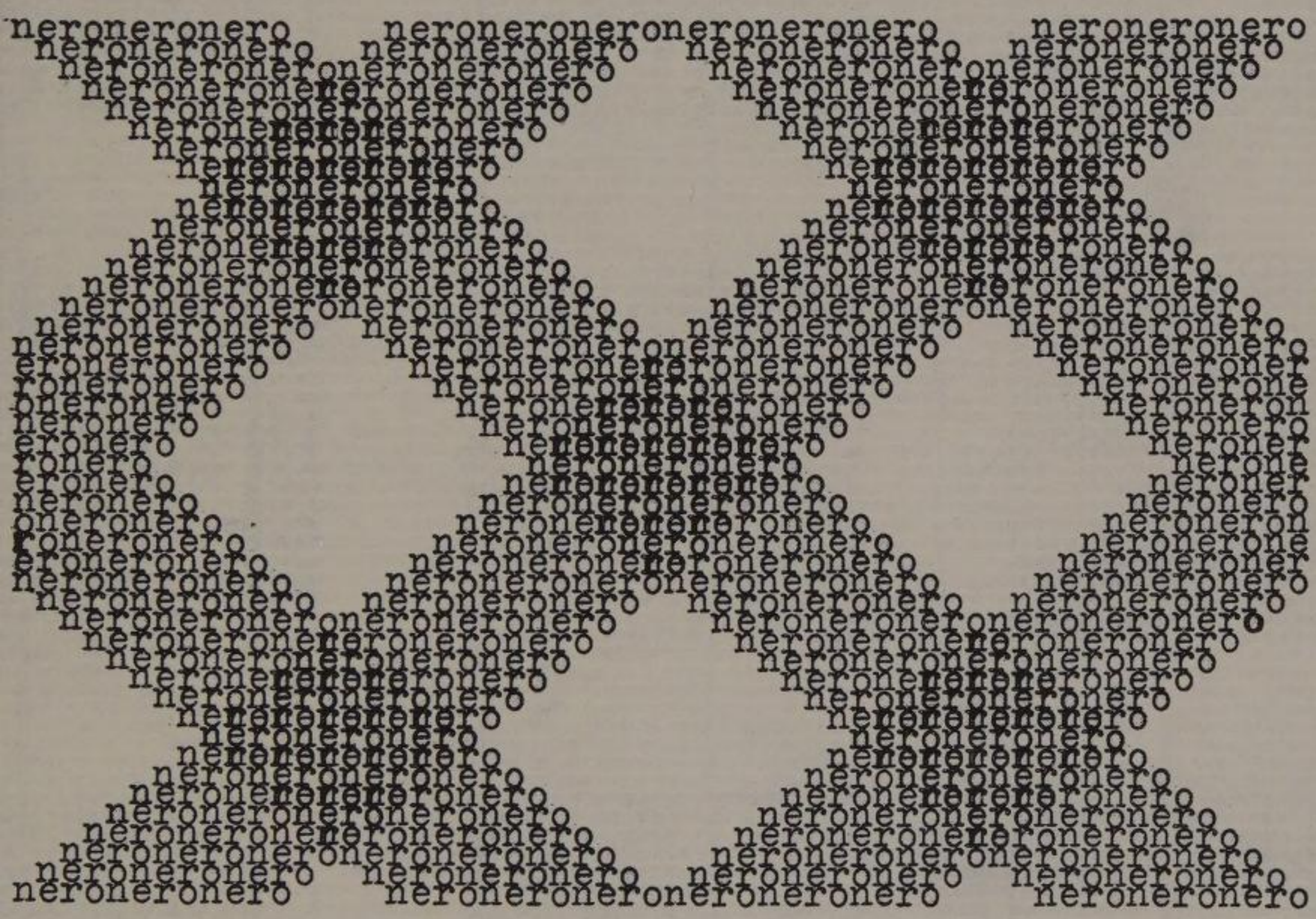

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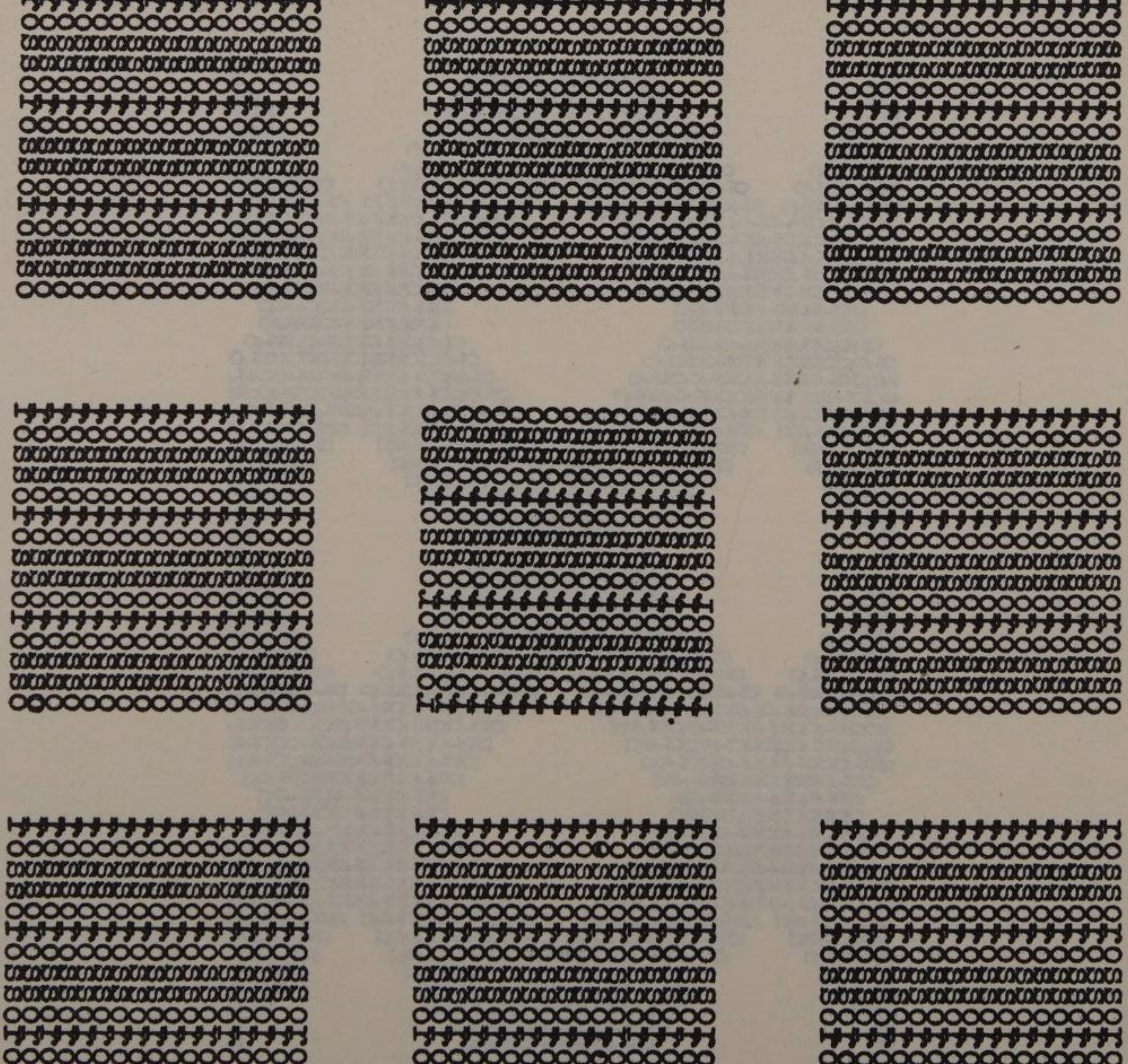

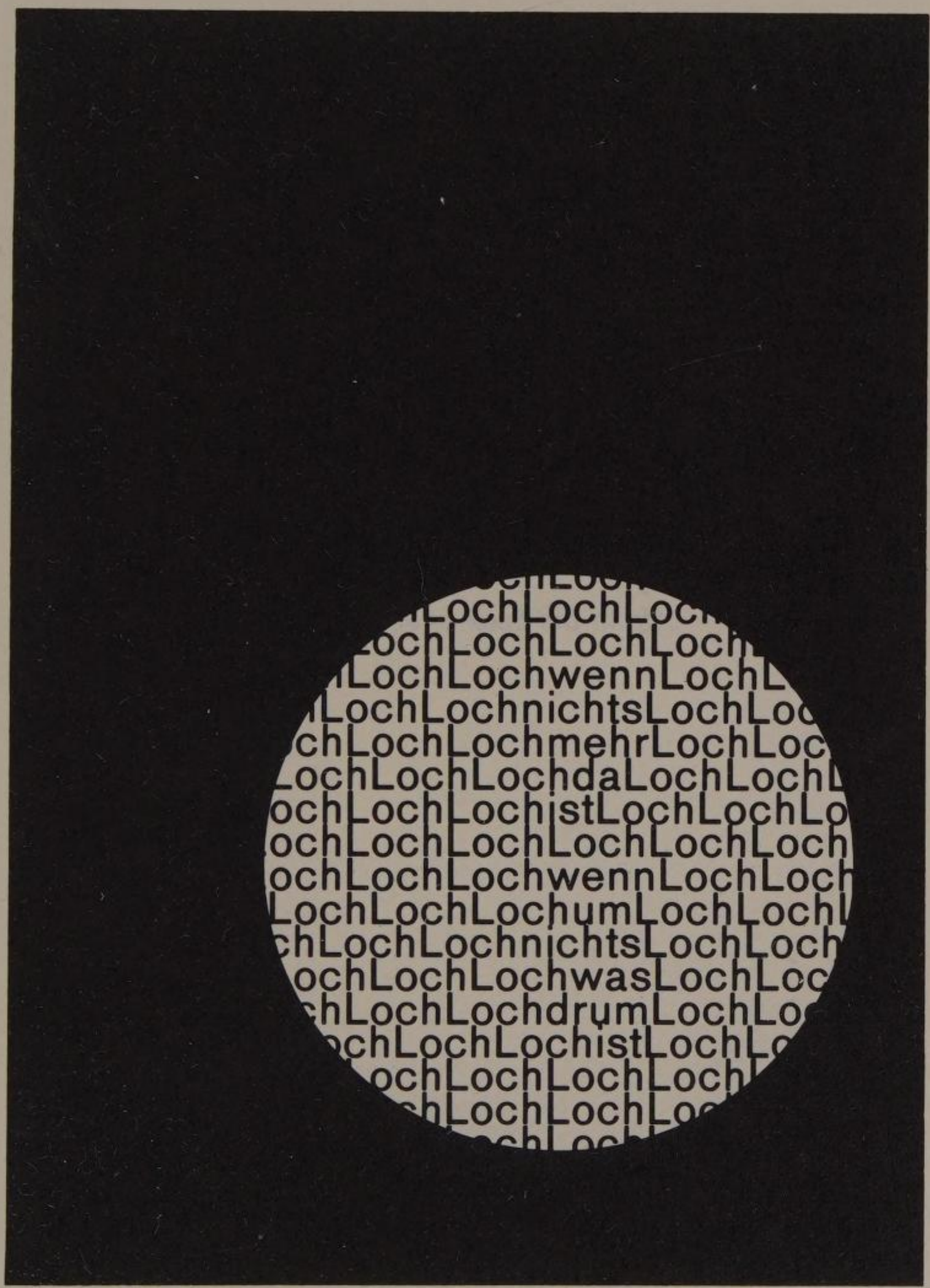
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The Old New

(from the book of JOB:BOJ)

JOSEF HIRŠAL—BOHUMILA GRÖGEROVÁ

(translated independently and simultaneously by Juliet McGrath)

The aesthetic of the old/new work of art is primarily determined by the subject./material. It has nothing to do with creation in the old/new sense of the word, unlimited/limited by the final concep-

tion of the completed work, but it is a matter of a range of interrelated events / impulses realizing / coordinating the predetermined goal of random process of development, / development, events which are realized / rhythmized through the known use / natural laws of learned signs. / used elements. This process may not / may be broken off at any time. It is not incumbent / is incumbent upon the artist to specify / estimate the "ripenesss," "unripeness," or "over-ripeness" of the works resulting from a given subject. / material. Beginning, labor, / rhythmization, and end—in this way one can characterize the role, the activity, of the old / new artist, the result of which represents an expression of the world picture / human condition by means of a conven- / an origi- tional / nal form. The subject / material and the event / form determined by it provide limited / numerous possibilities for constructive or destructive rapprochements, for harmony or dishar- mony, for the preordained or the accidental.

DÉCIO PIGNATARI

(*adapted*)

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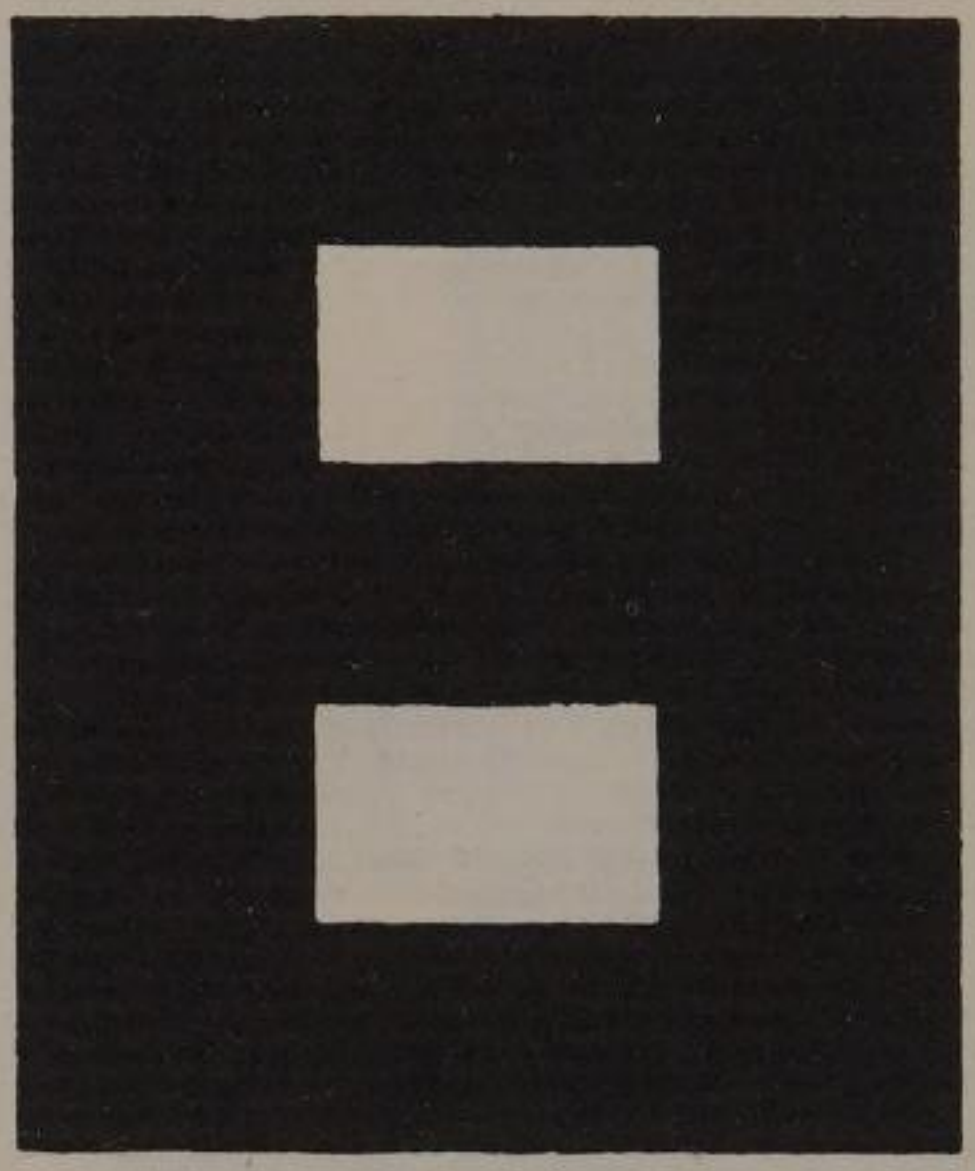

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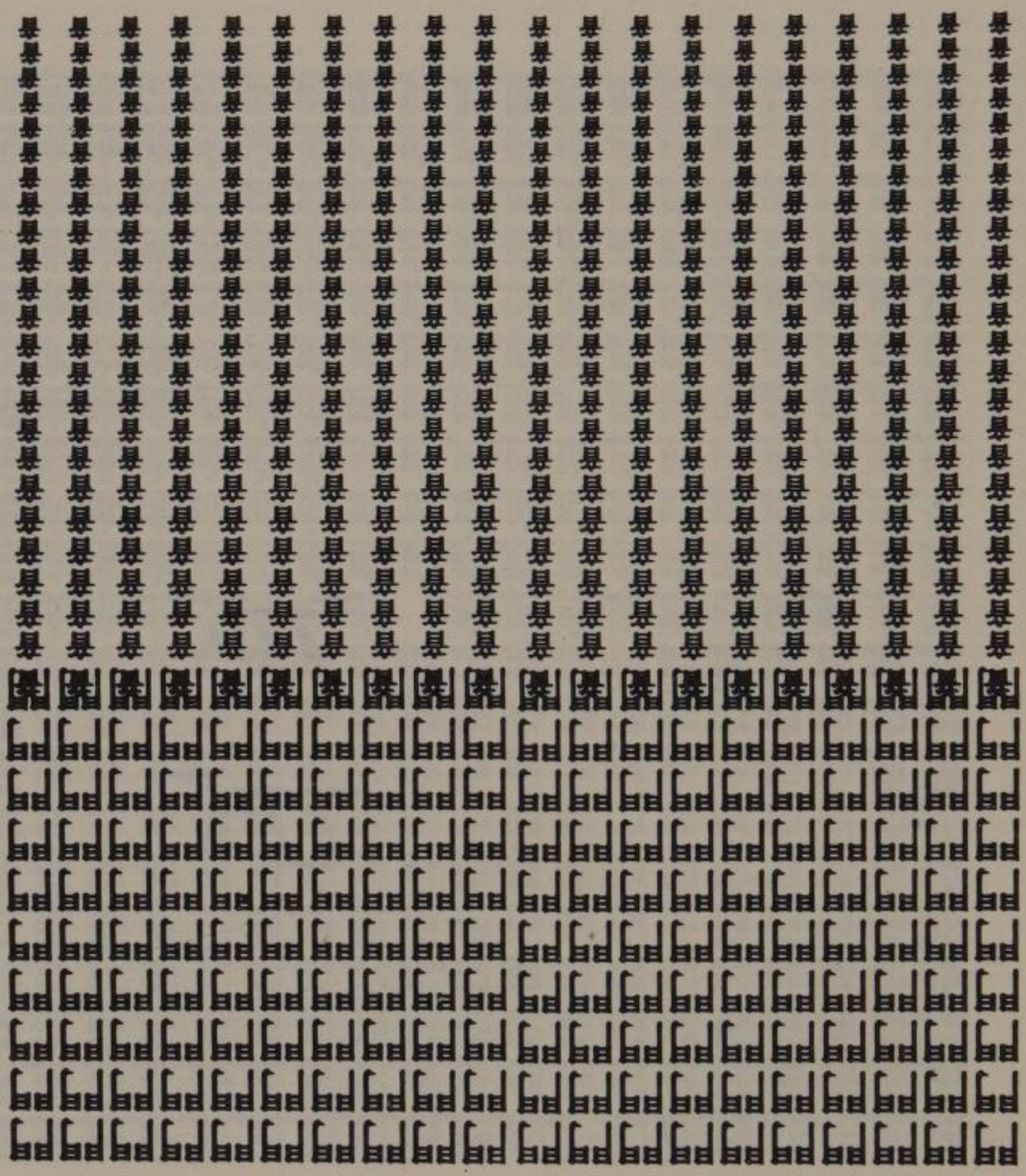

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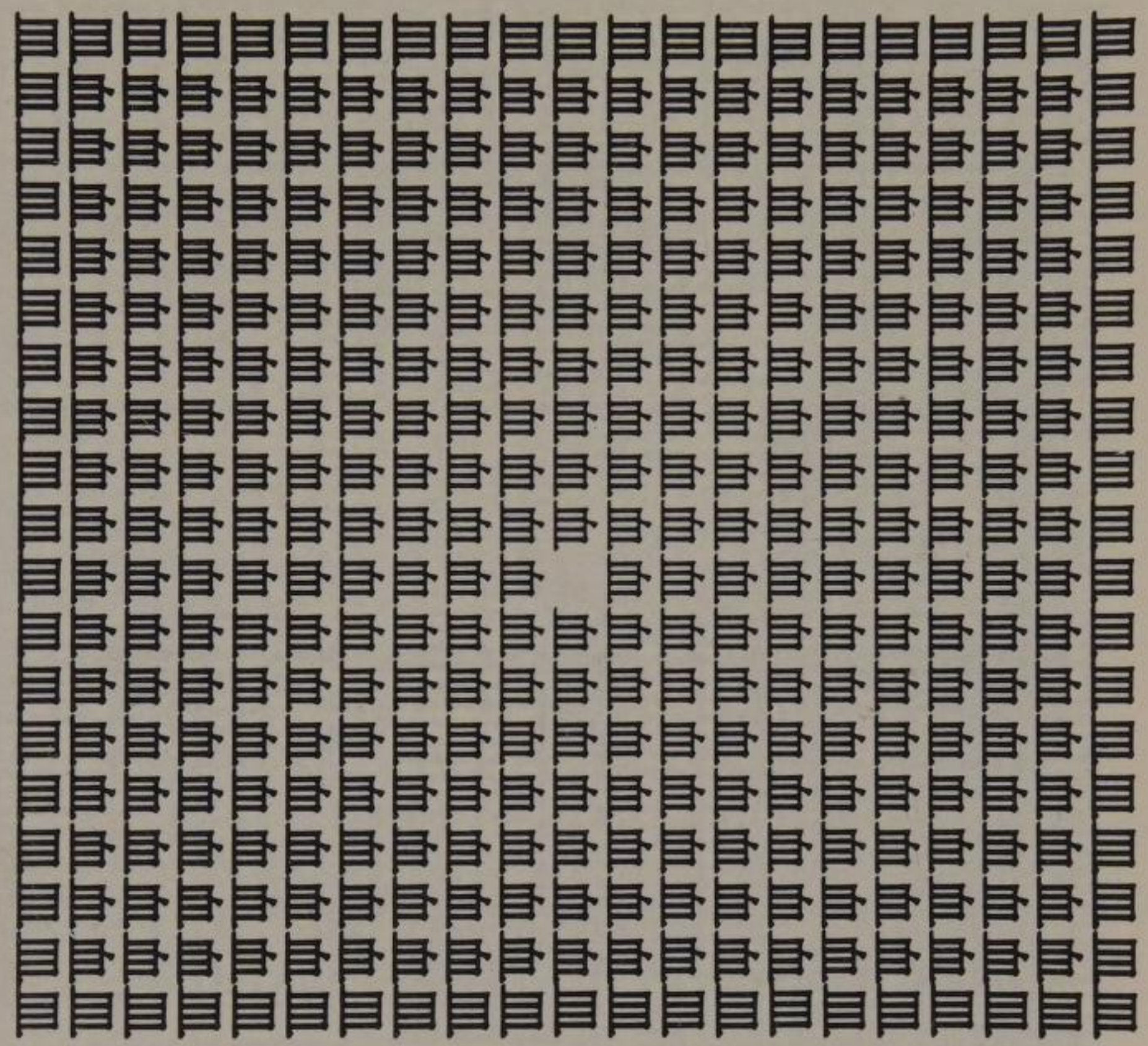

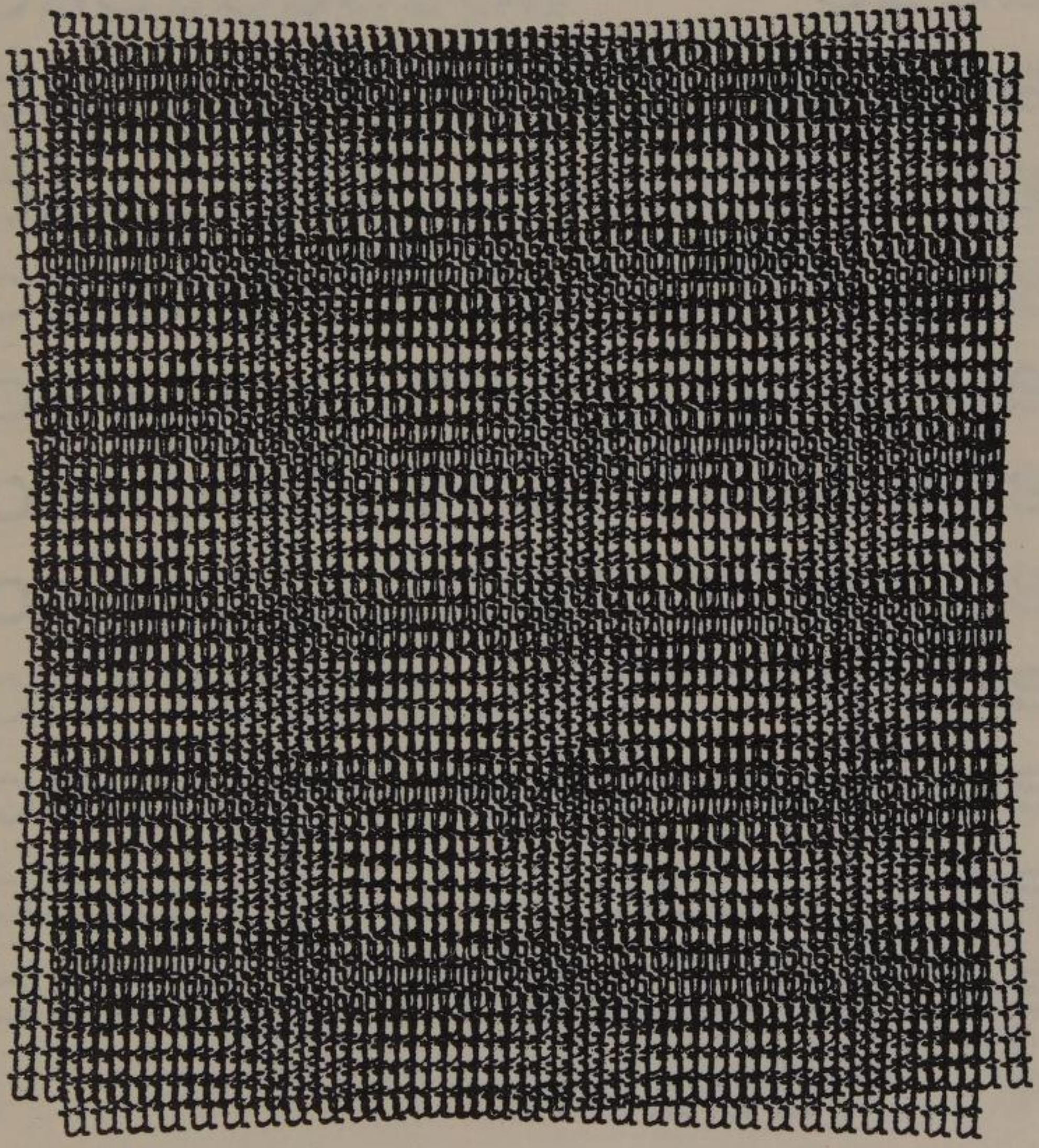

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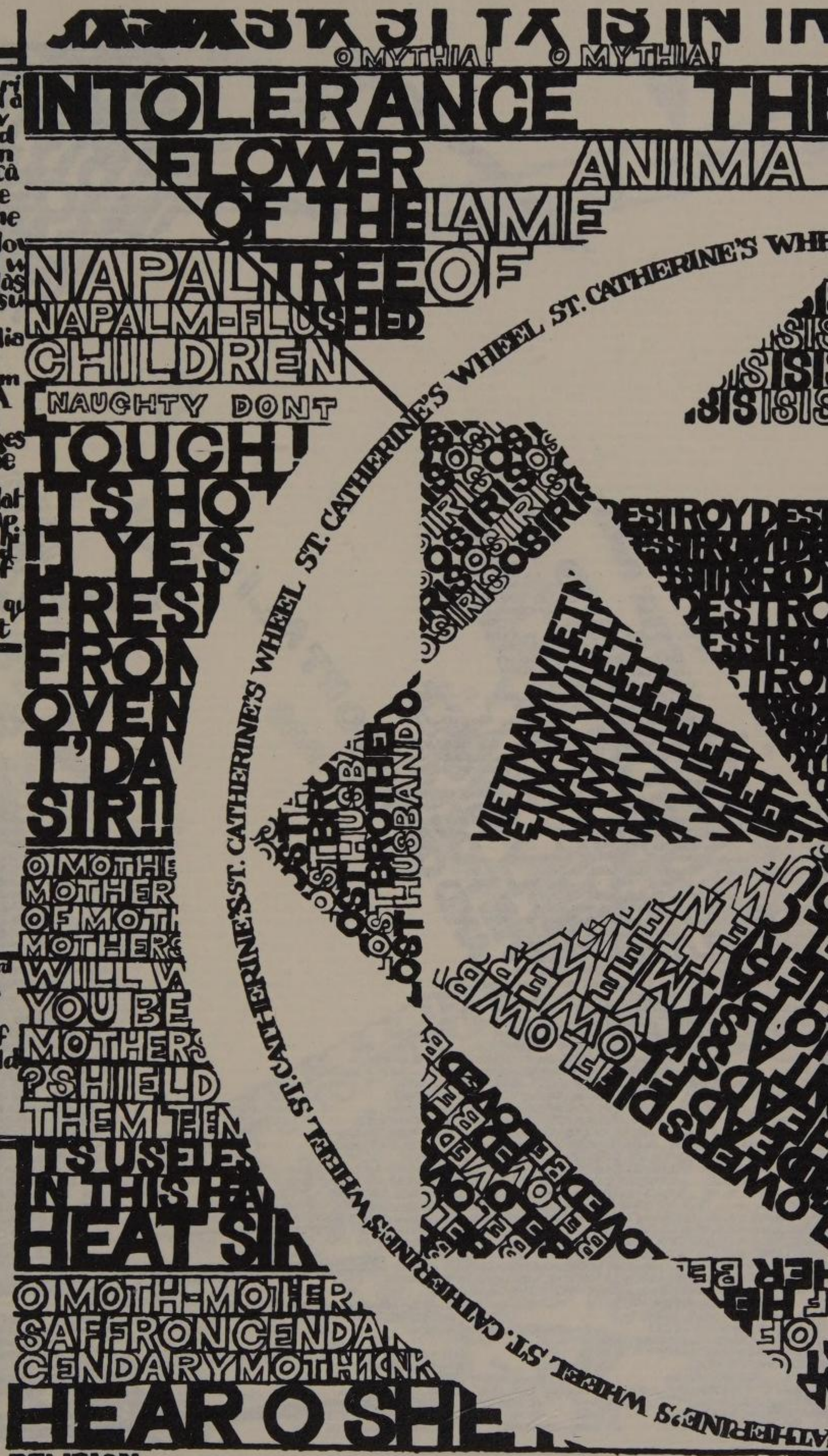

RELIGION

VATICAN SHELVES 'NOT GUILT

"FOR IT OF ALL MAKE THE POEMS
THE THINKING, THEY ARE TO BE
POEMS MOST SPIRITUALL
AND I WILL MAKE
THE POEMS OF MY BODY
AND OF MORTALITY
FOR I THINK I SHALL
THEN SUPPLY MYSELF
WITH THE POEMS
OF MY SOUL AND OF IMMORTALITY"

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PRESENT - A PLATE

BY ANSWERING A "DAILY MIRROR
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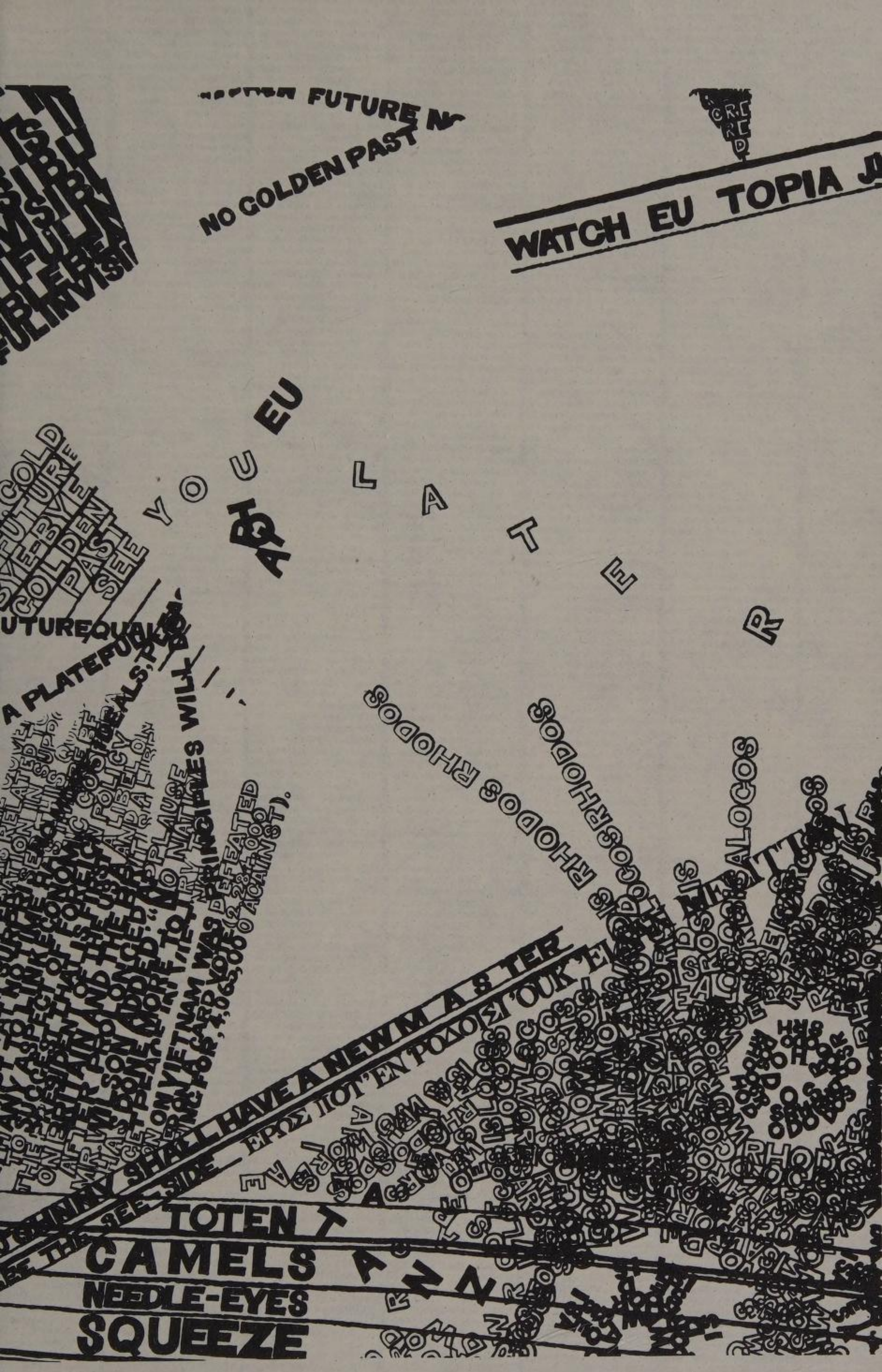
MR WILSON

MARJORY DAW


NO GOLDEN PAST
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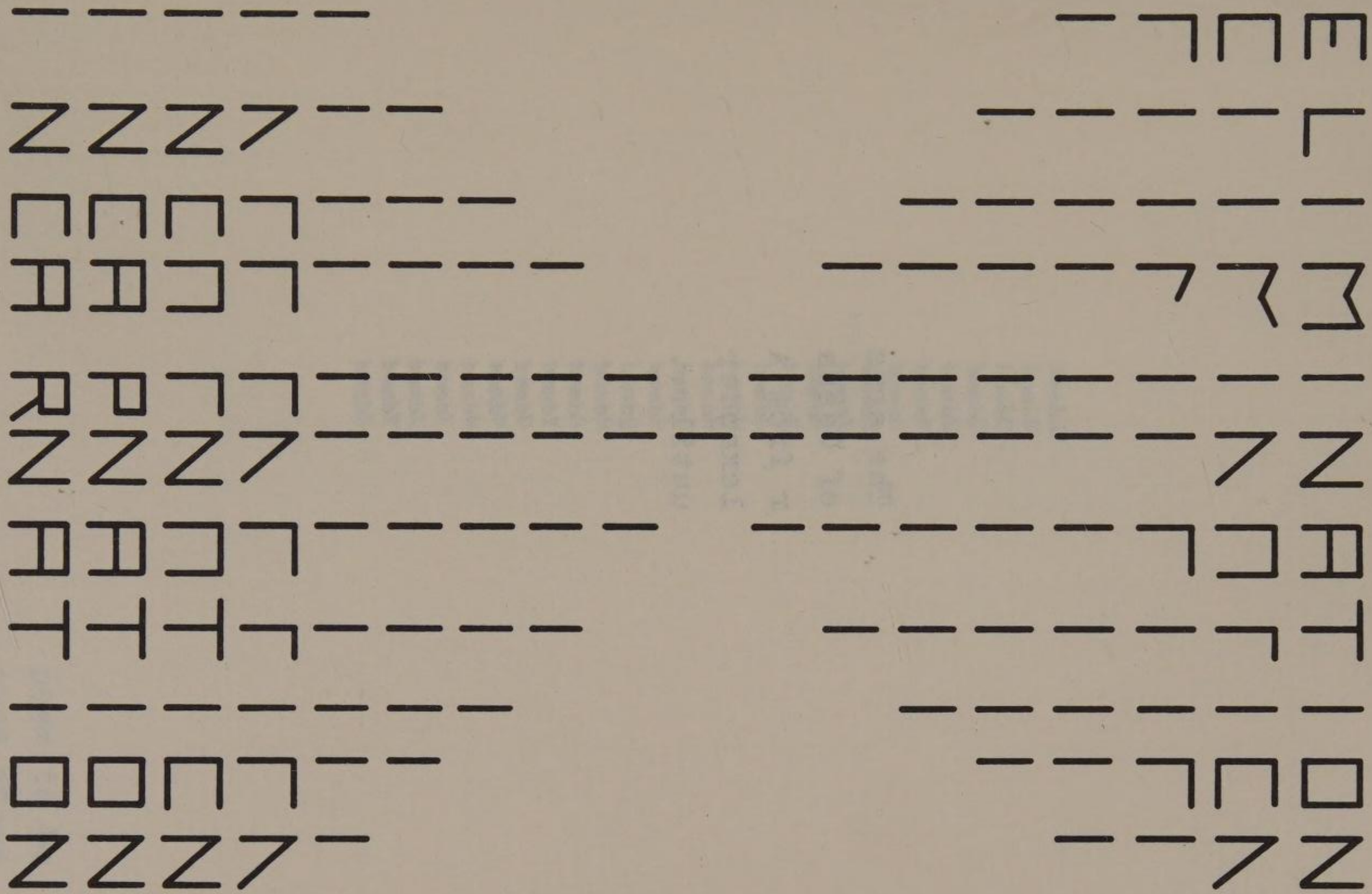

The arms
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poem to be
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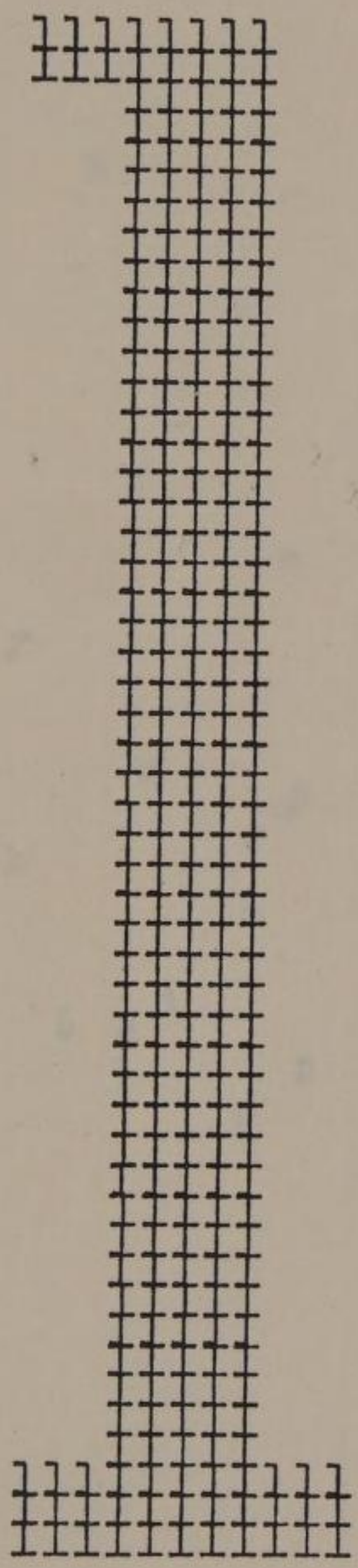
l as a language



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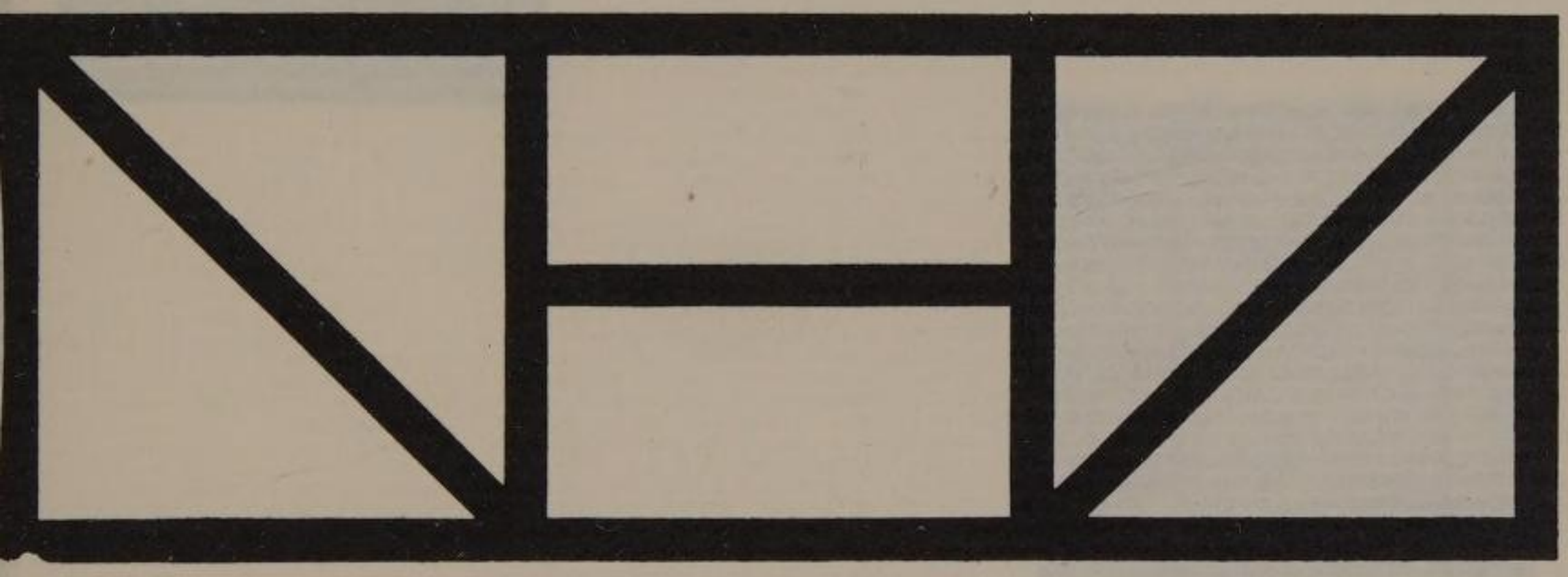

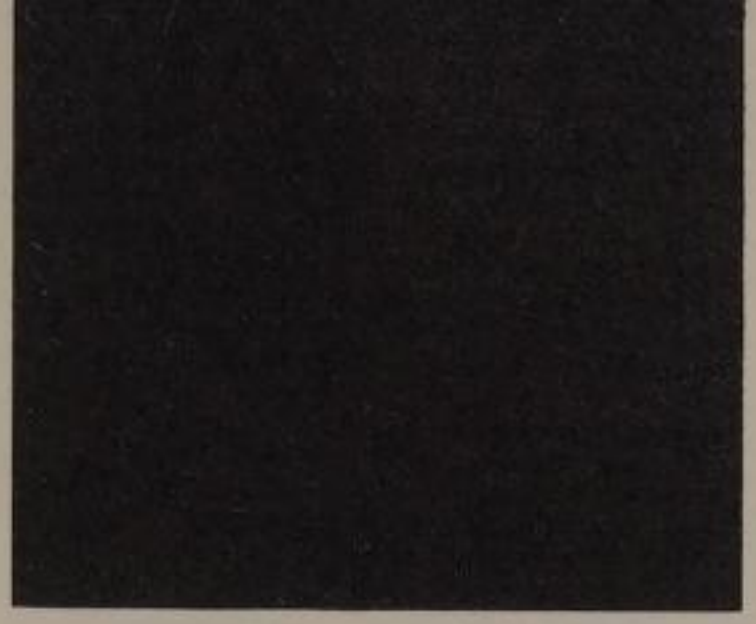

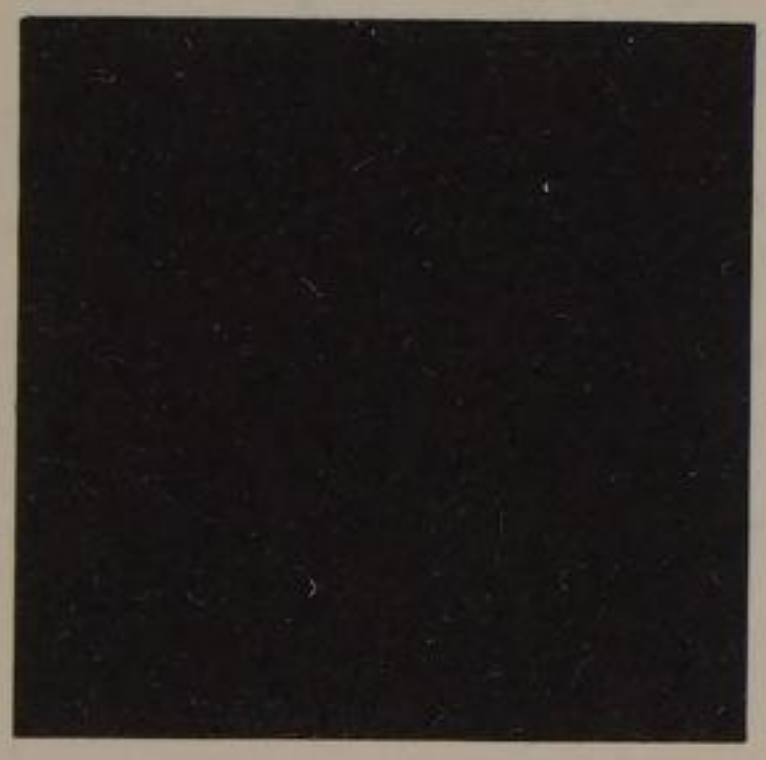

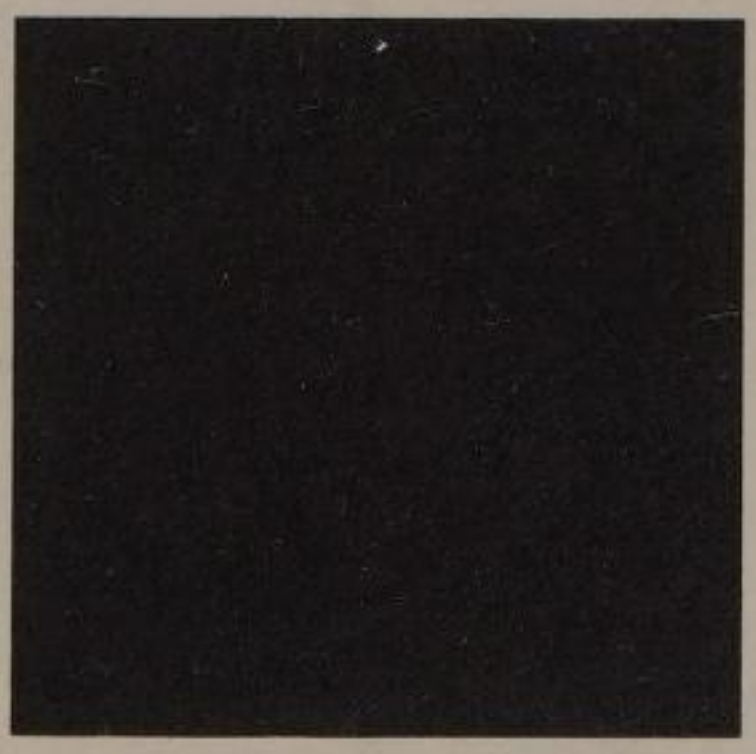

Mirror Field inside
Random Field

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thread rock a flower water rain face a child water clouds atmosphere go
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woman water boat silence a man water sky medusa moon water horizon
eye fish water ship water men water palm sun voices voices sun palm
water men water ship water fish eye horizon water moon medusa sky
water a man silence boat water a woman leaves sun water an eskimo
crystal ice water a village echo wall water goods atmosphere clouds wat
child face rain water a flower rock water a house river plain water
a mouth sky vertical water a hand sphere drop sea water voice and voice
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sfera una mano **acqua** verticale cielo una bocca **acqua** piano fiume una casa **acqua**
filo roccia un fiore **acqua** pioggia volto un bimbo **acqua** nubi atmosfera dèi **acqua**
pozzo eco un villaggio **acqua** ghiaccio cristallo un esquimese **acqua** sole foglie una
donna **acqua** barca silenzio un uomo **acqua** cielo medusa luna **acqua** orizzonte
occhio pesce **acqua** nave acqua uomini **acqua** palma sole voci **voci sole palma**
acqua **uomini acqua nave** acqua **pesce occhio orizzonte** acqua **luna medusa cielo**
acqua **un uomo silenzio barca** acqua **una donna foglie sole** acqua **un esquimese**
cristallo ghiaccio acqua **un villaggio eco pozzo** acqua **dèi atmosfera nubi** acqua **un**
bimbo volto pioggia acqua **un fiore roccia filo** acqua **una casa fiume piano** acqua
una bocca cielo verticale acqua **una mano sfera goccia mare** acqua **voce e voce**
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to keep silent in order not to hear oneself speak
to speak in order not to hear oneself keep silent

instant juan, a description

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STRODOME

As real grass withers in the Astrodome (at Houston, Texas), it has been replaced by Astrograss.'

(news item)

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hat grass is not all astrograss
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ll that glass is not astrograss
hat is not all astrograss glass
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ot all that fibreglass is glass
ibreglass is not all that glass
s that not all fibreglass glass
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ORIGINAL SIN AT THE WATER HOLE

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hlas

voice

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    a           l       l           a
  l               a   a               l
h                   s                   h
  l               a   a               l
    a           l       l           a
      s a l h               h l a s
    a           l       l           a
  l               a   a               l
h                   s                   h
  l                                   l
    a                               a
      s a l h               h l a s
    a                               a
  l                                   l
h                   s                   h
  l               a   a               l
    a           l       l           a
      s a l h               h l a s
    a           l       l           a
  l               a   a               l
h                   s                   h
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    a           l       l           a
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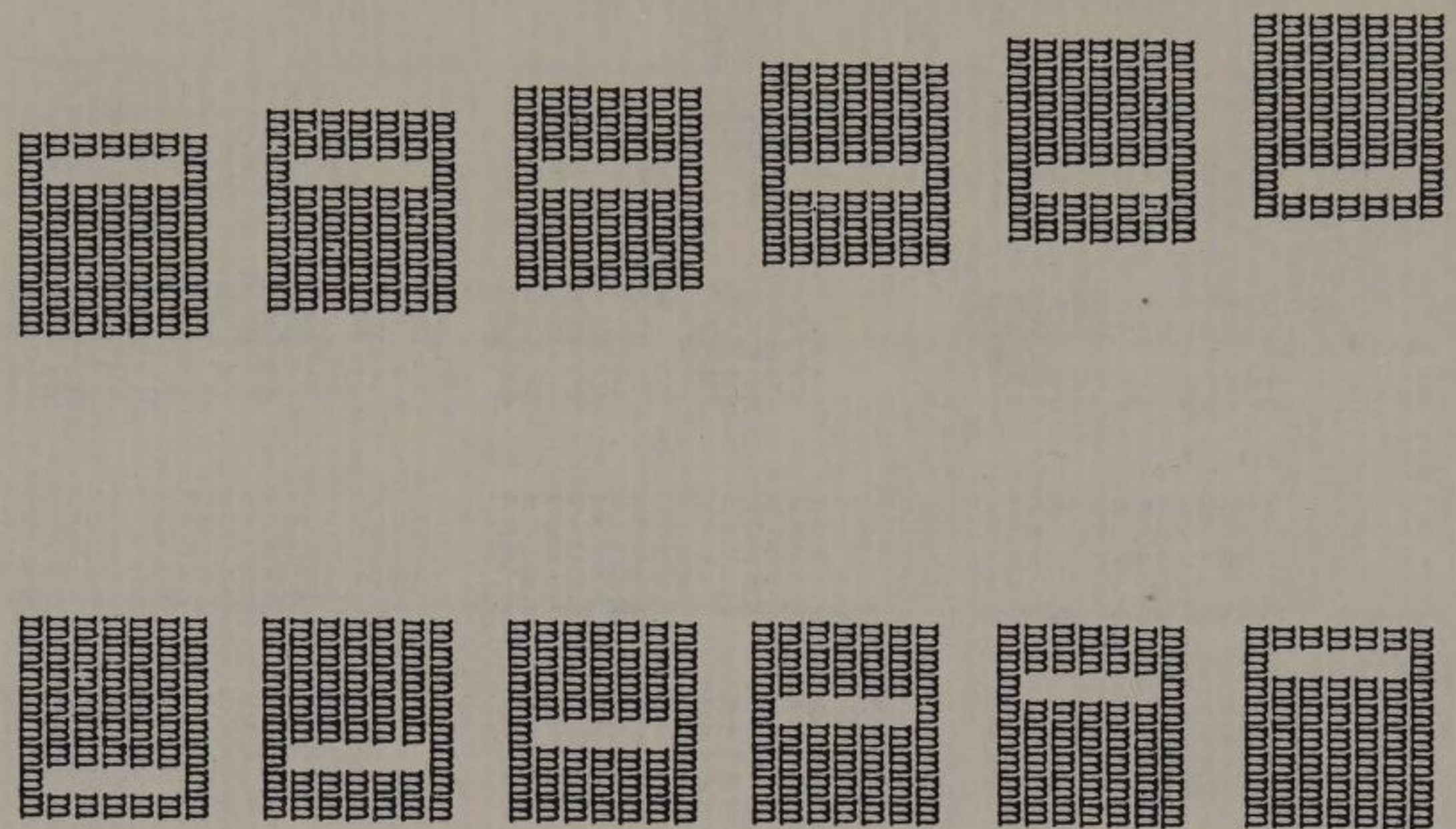
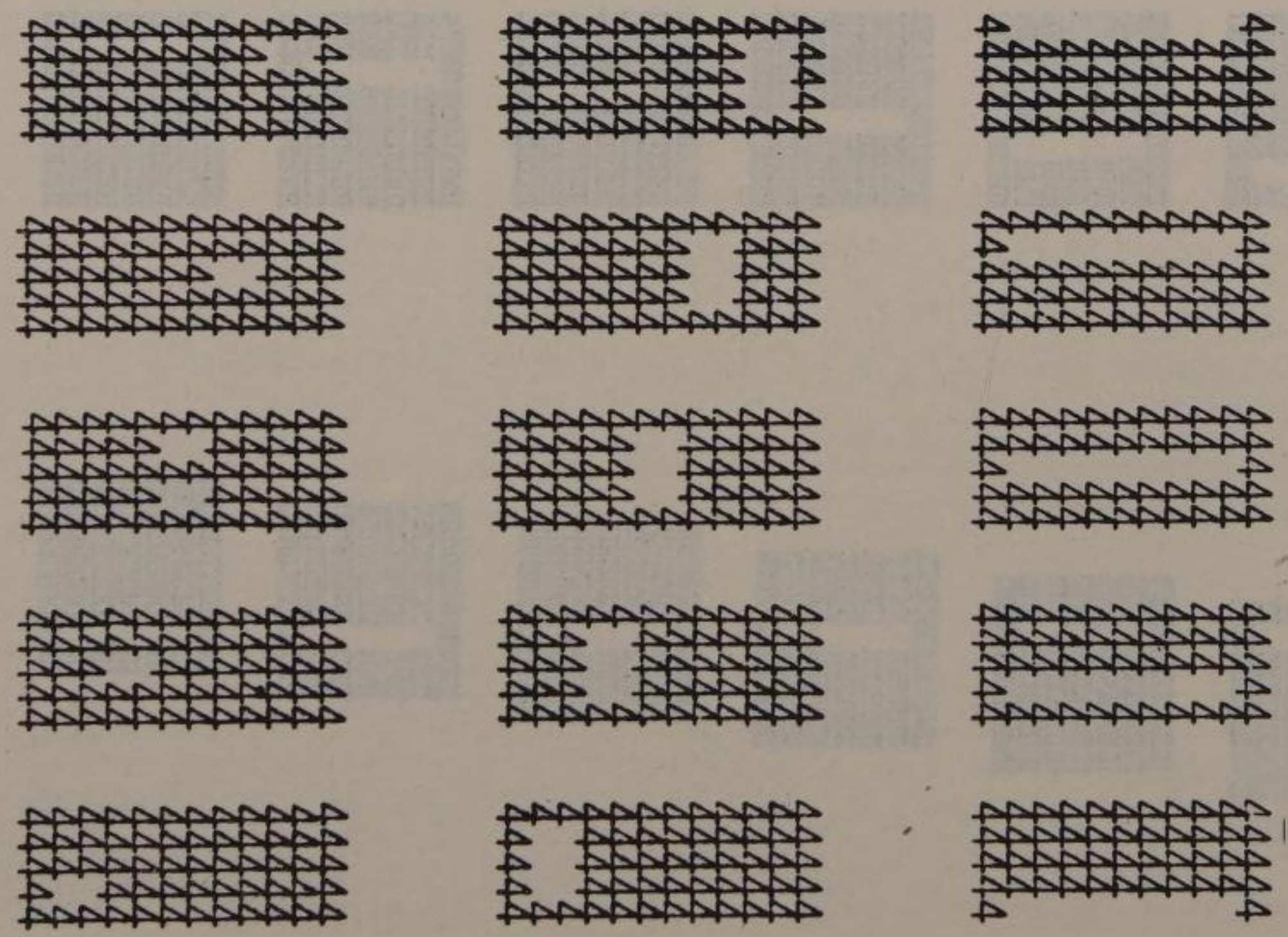




耳目口上
工三日月

plastic poem 1
plastic poem 2

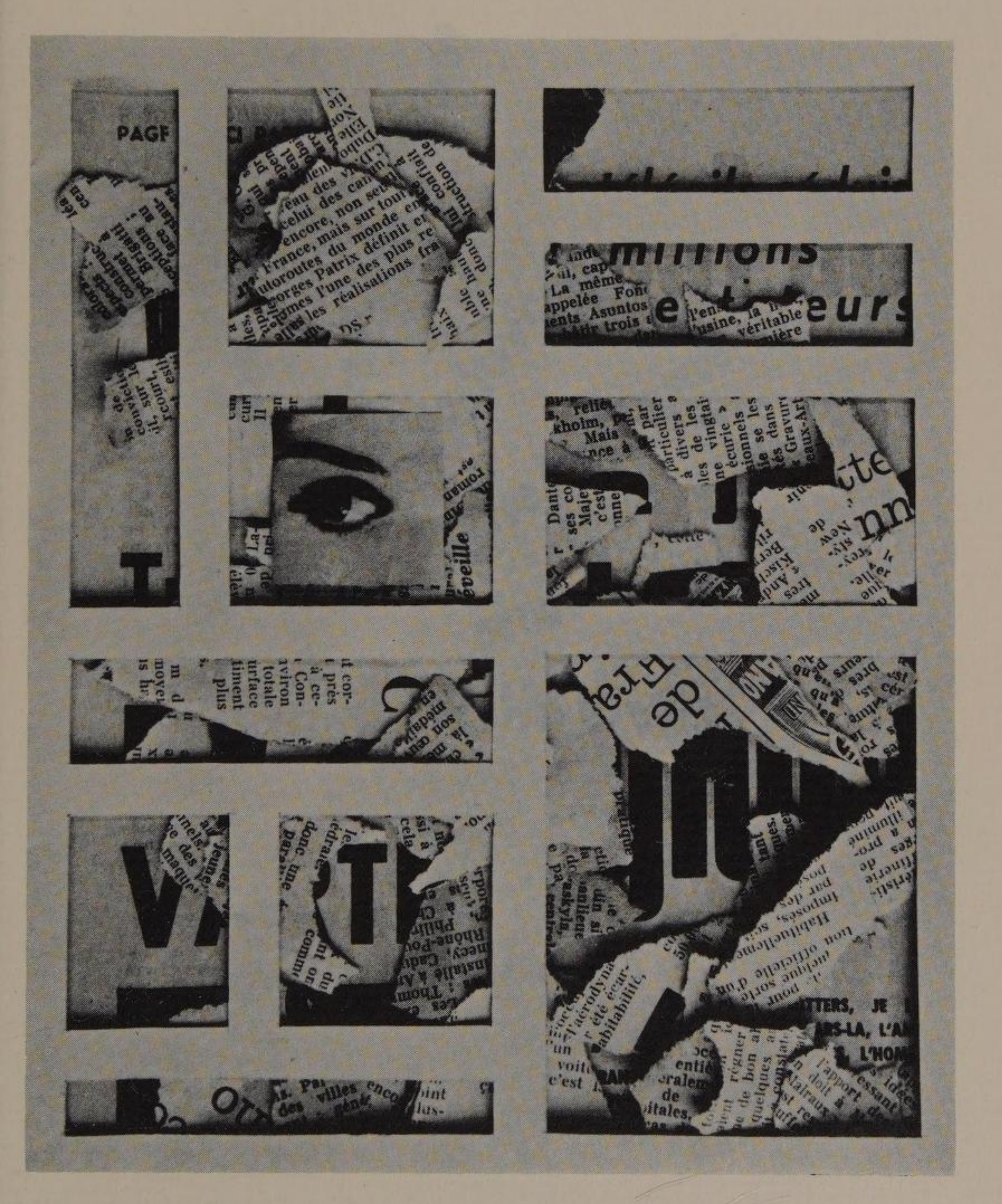
kitasono katué

l come, and all the summe
d brimming with life. Ther
cheer in every face. The tree
nce of the blossoms filled th
walk with a bucket of white
He surveyed the fence, and th

STUVWXYZÆŒ&ABCD

MÉRIDIEN

Y morning had come, and all
world was bright and fresh
ng with life. There was a song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she loves me

she loves me not

she loves

she loves me

she

she loves

she

light circle light circus
I seek light light I seek
I seek circus I seek circle
light

cerco circo luce cerco luce cerchio

luce

cerco cerchio cerco luce luce circo

EPITHALAMIUM—II

& = e	S = serpens
he = êle	h = homo
she = ela	e = eva

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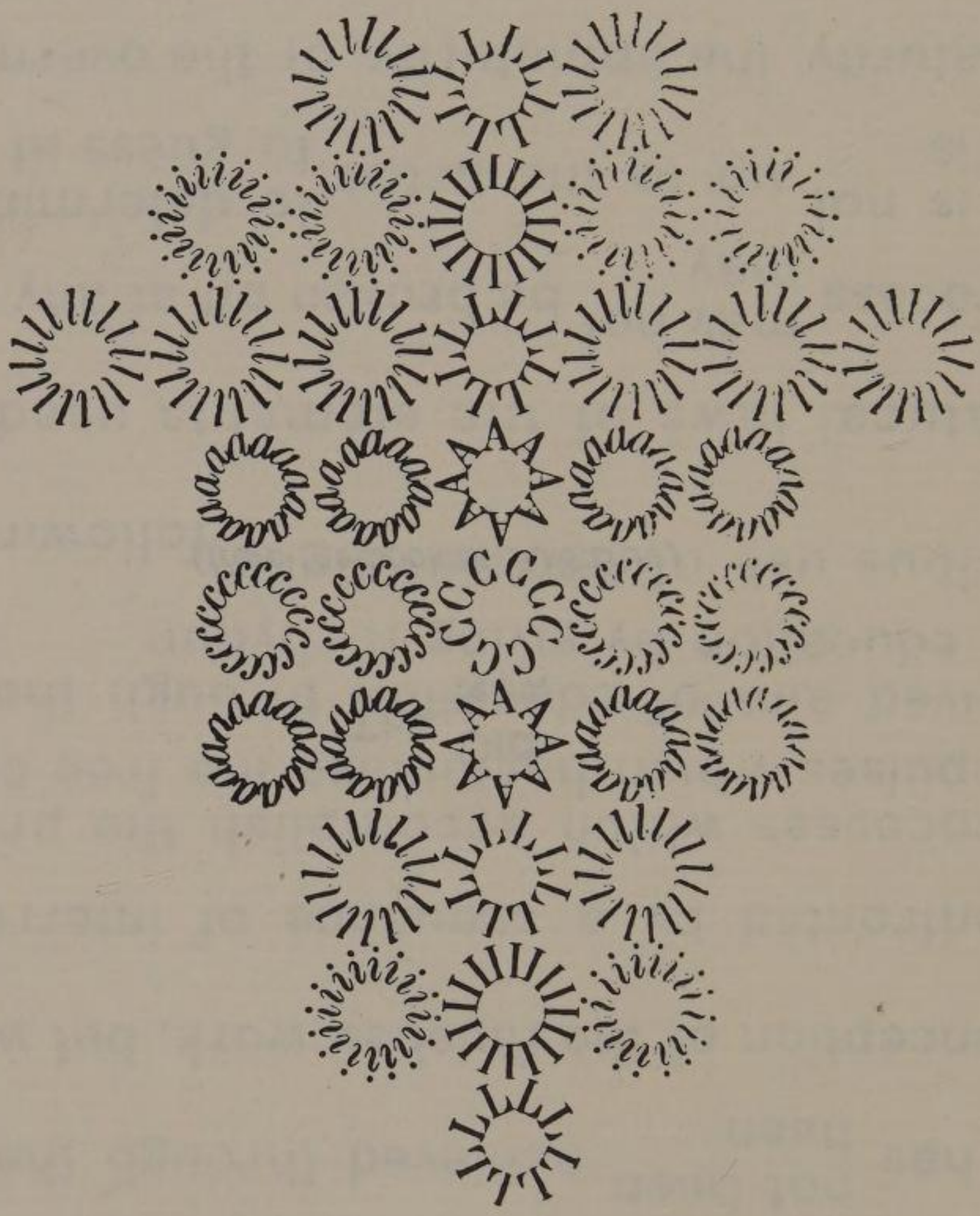
lilac



The Old New

(from the book of JOB:BOJ)

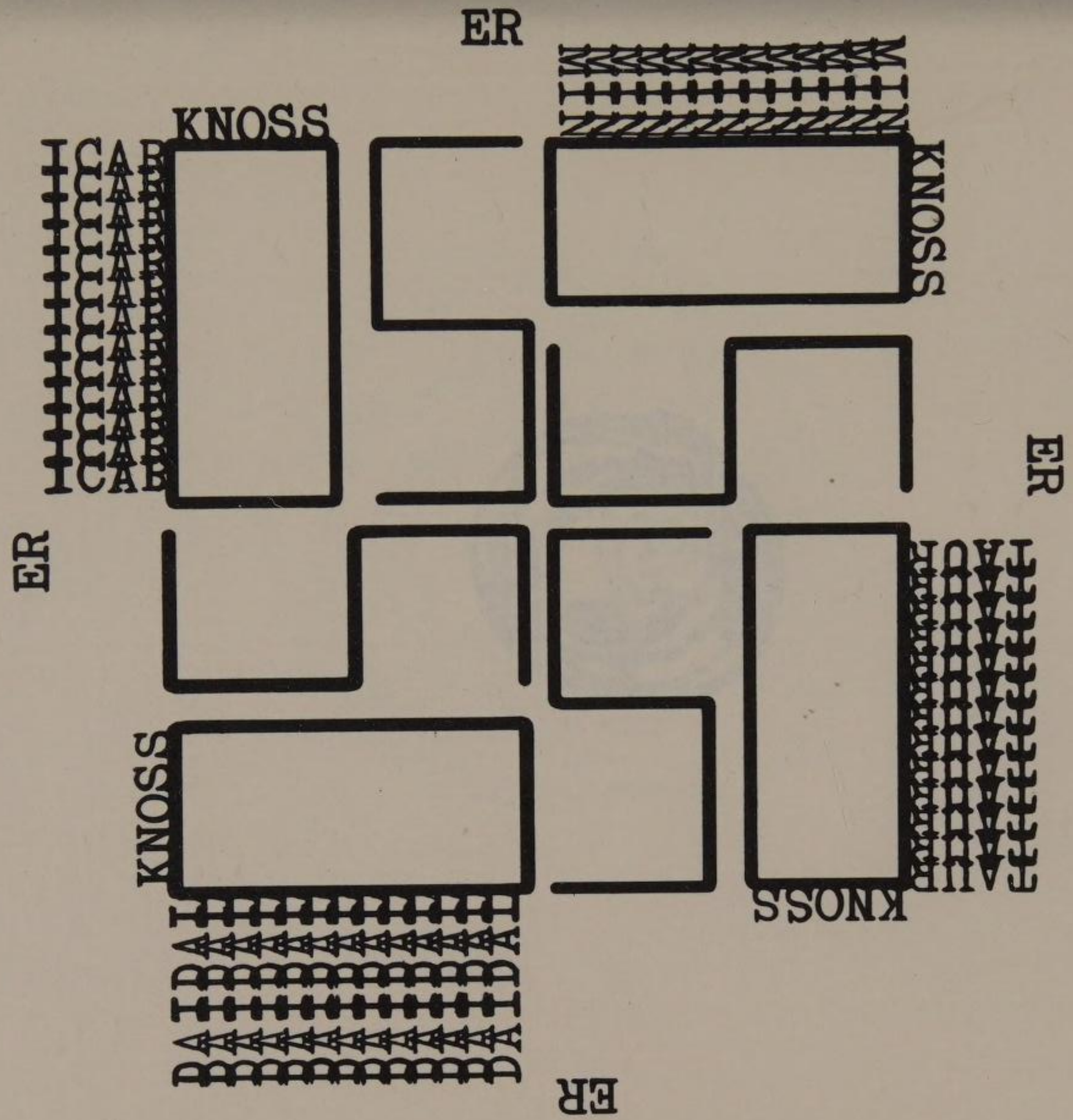
JOSEF HIRŠAL—BOHUMILA GRÖGEROVÁ

(translated independently and simultaneously by Elizabeth Herrmann)

The aesthetics of the old/new work of art are mainly determined by the subject matter./material. We are therefore not dealing with creation in the old/new sense of the word, meaning that it has not been/been achieved through the final conception of the finished work, but we are confronted by a sequence of interrelated processes which accomplish the preconceived aim of education through the conscious use of learned signs/impulses which harmonize the free course of education by giving it rhythm following the natural laws of the elements used. The process may not/may be broken off at any point. It is not/is up to the artist to determine/to guess at the maturity, the immaturity, or the overmaturity of the work and its subject matter./material. Beginning, work,/giving rhythm, and ending could well describe the role of the old/new artist. It is an occupation leading to expression of ideology/human state by means of traditional/individual form.

The subject matter / material and the corresponding process / form provide few / many possibilities for constructive or destructive interference, thereby creating harmony or disharmony, creating that which has been premeditated or that which is coincidental.

eros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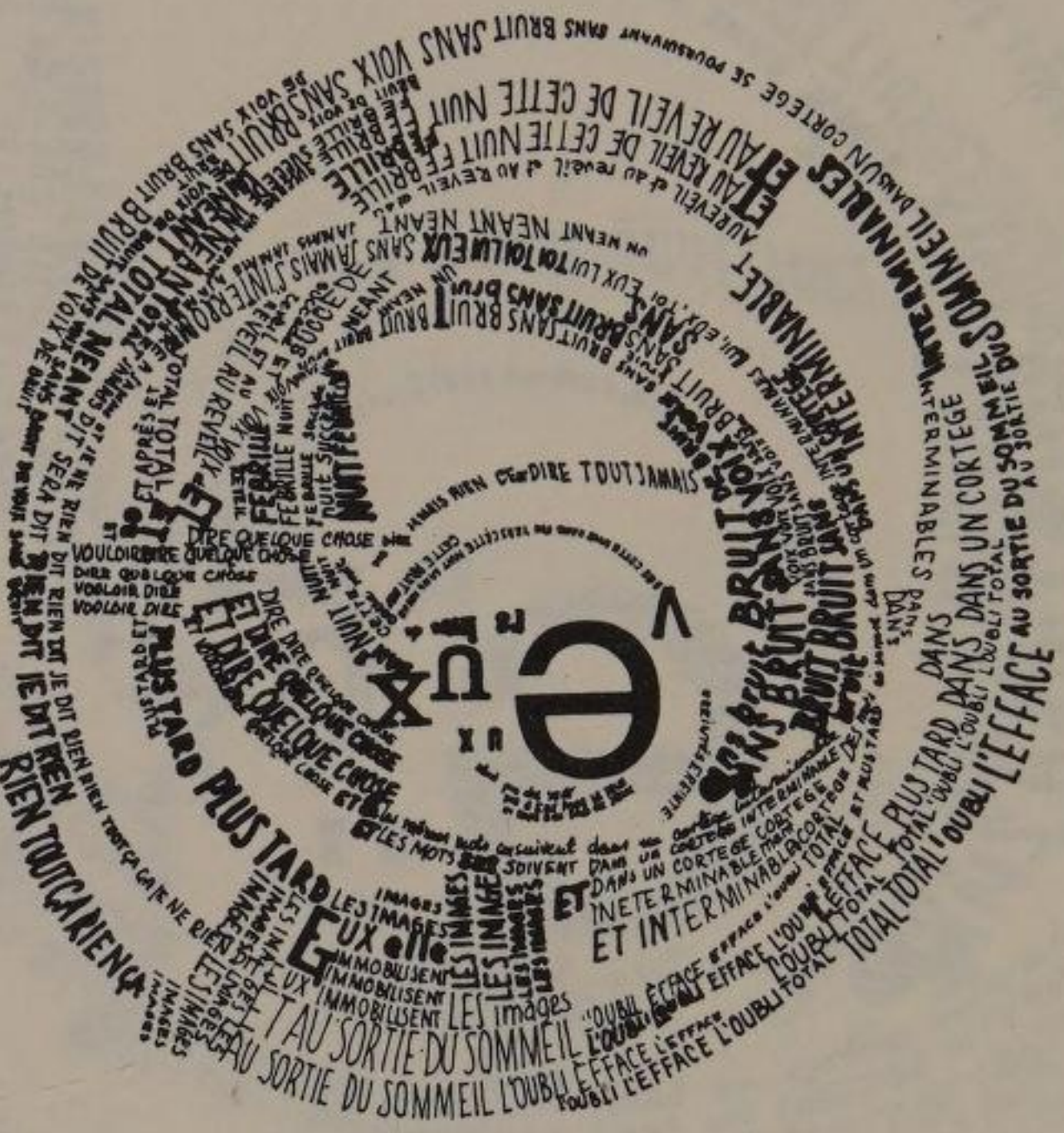
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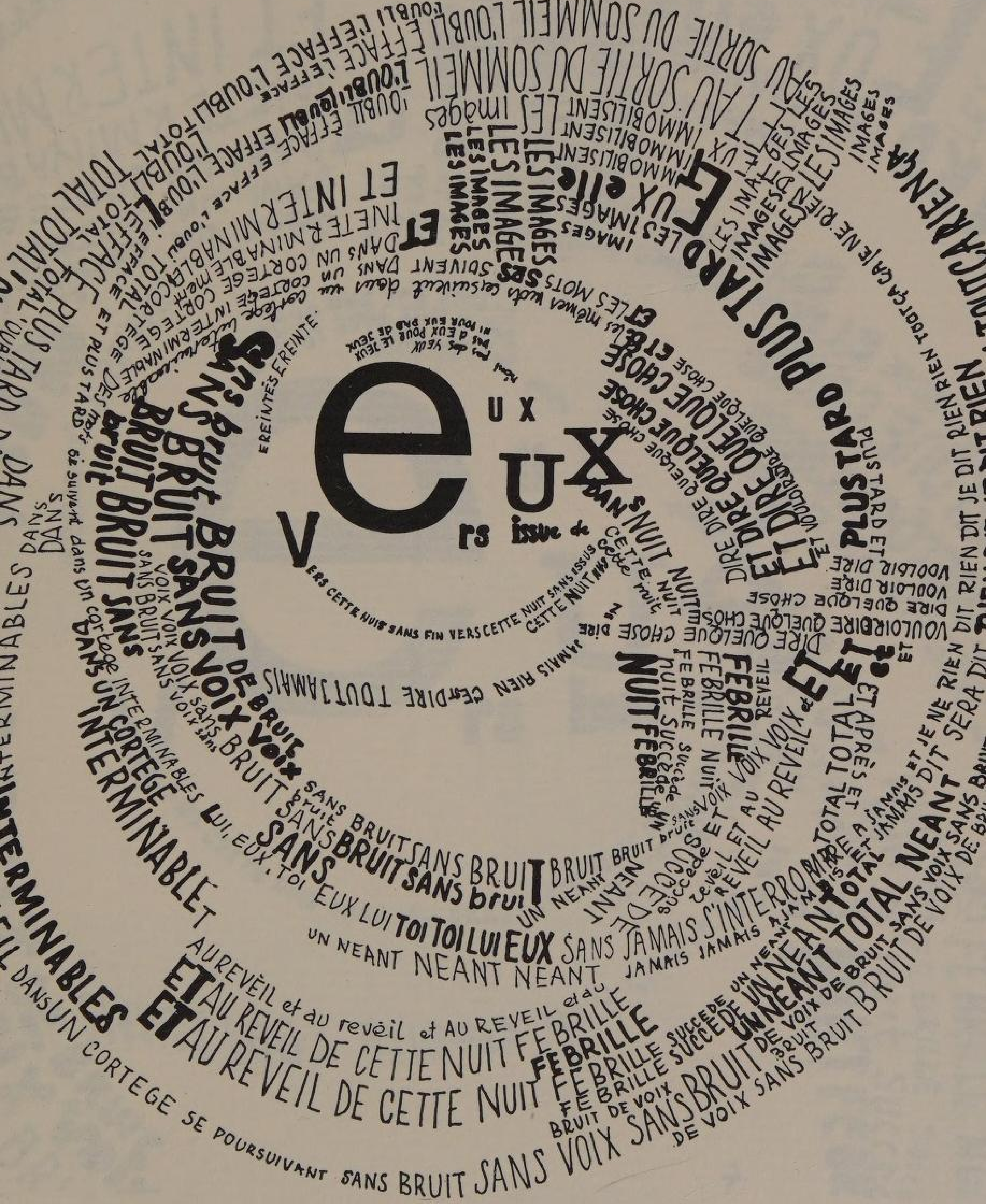
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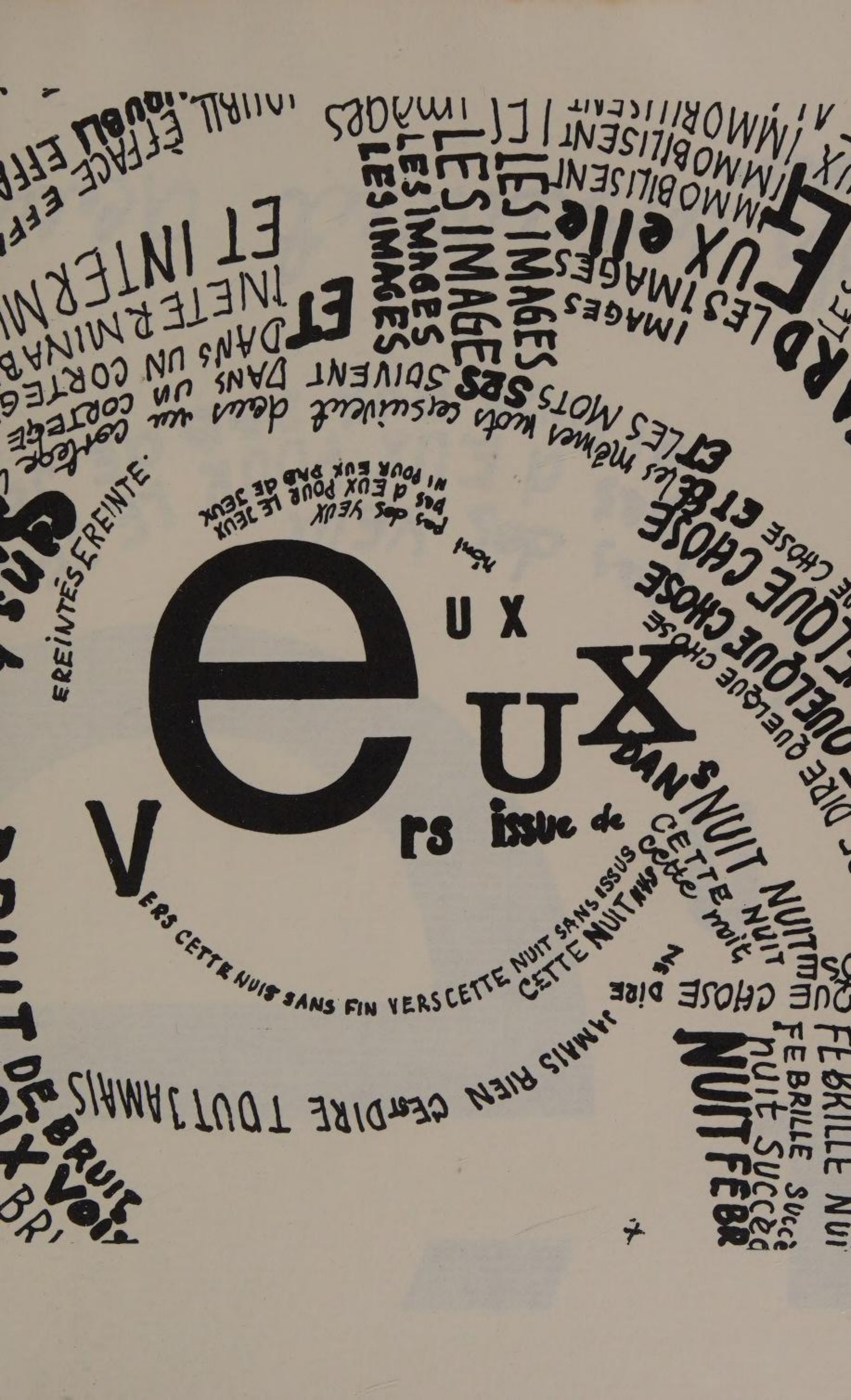
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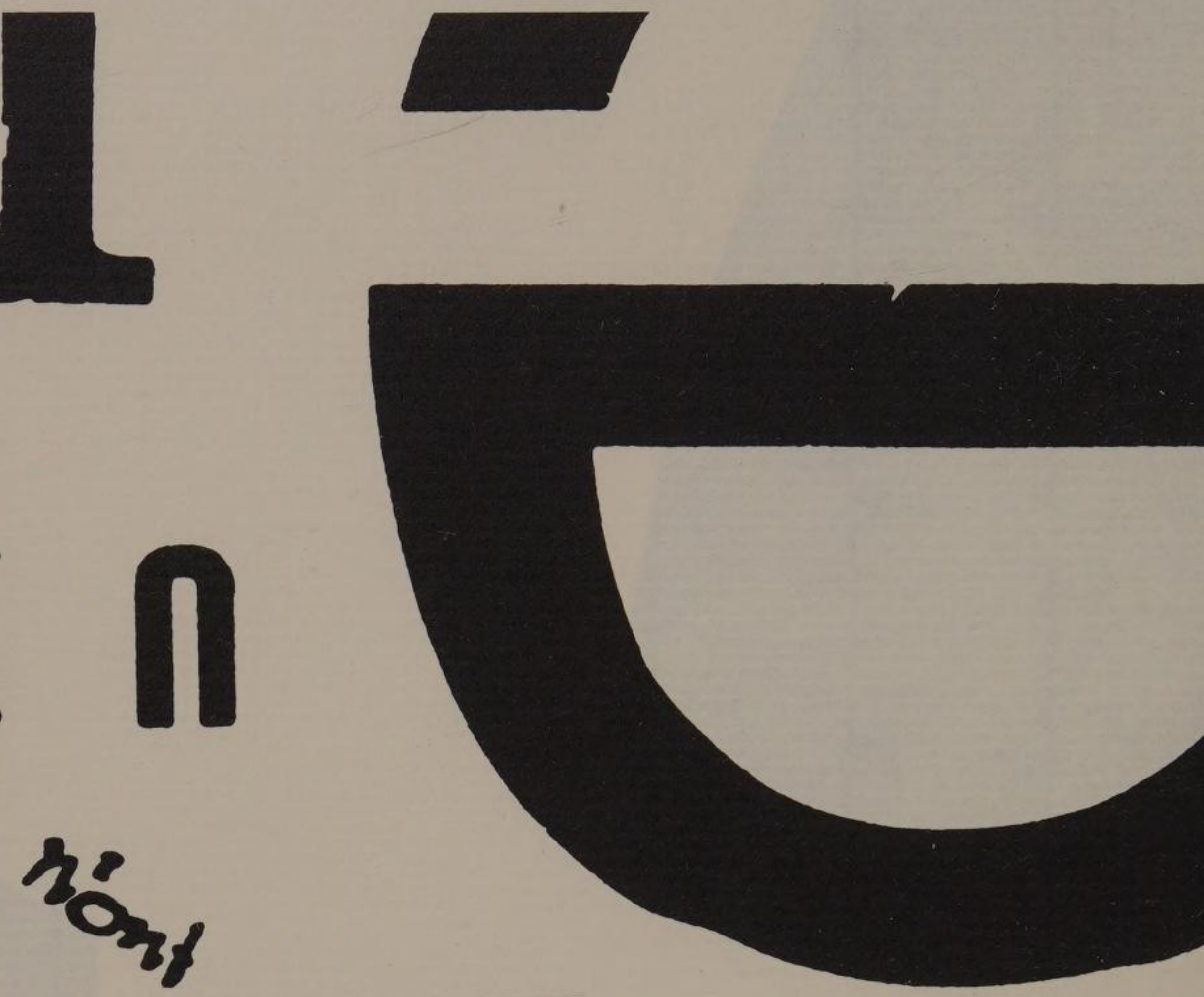

pas des YEUX
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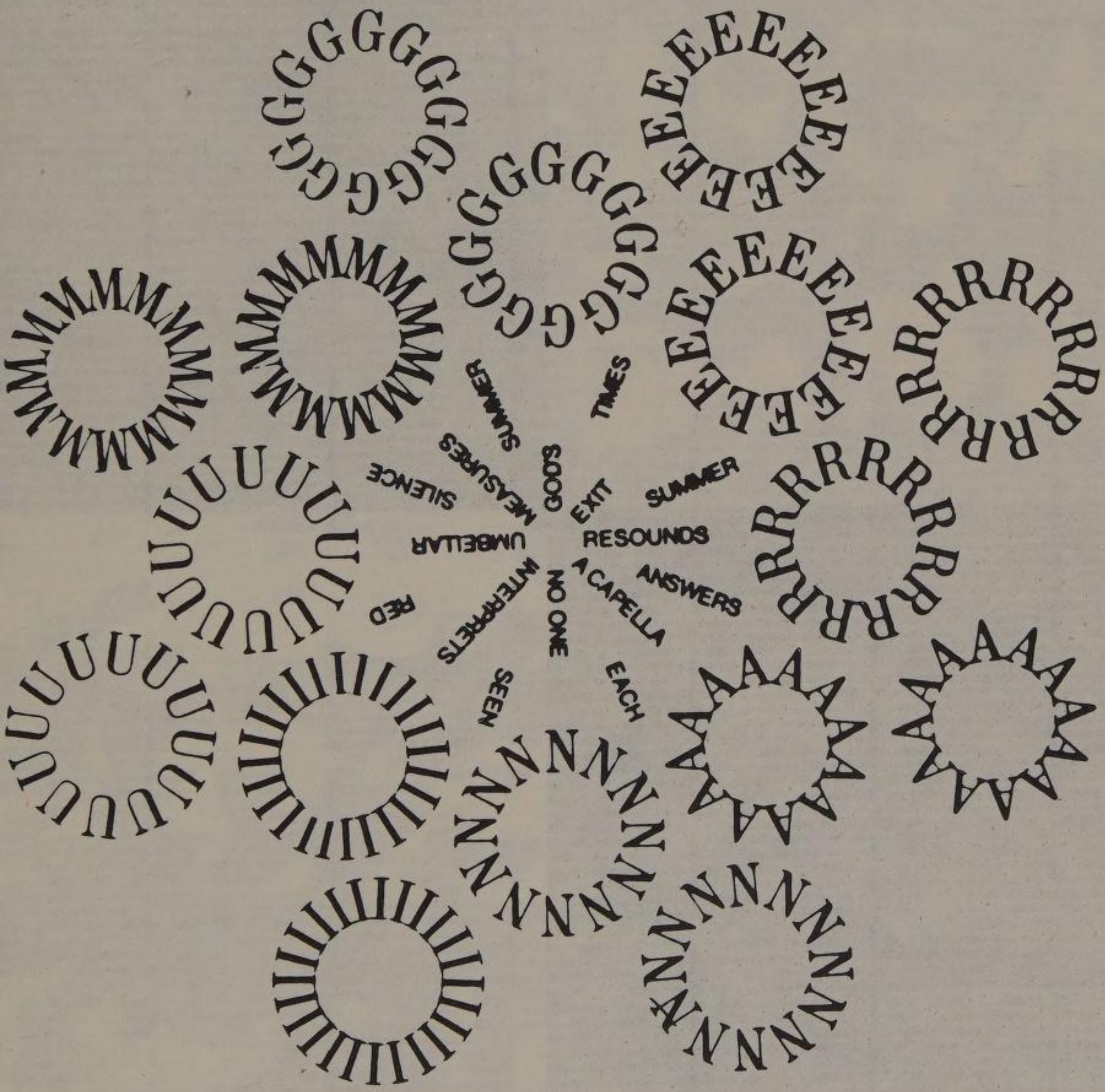
NI POUR EUX PAS DE JE

JAROSLAV MALINA

MARY ELLEN SOLT

THE DECAY OF CAPITALISM

God's summer
Exit times
Resounds summer
Acapella answers
No one each
Interprets seen
Umbellar red
Measures silence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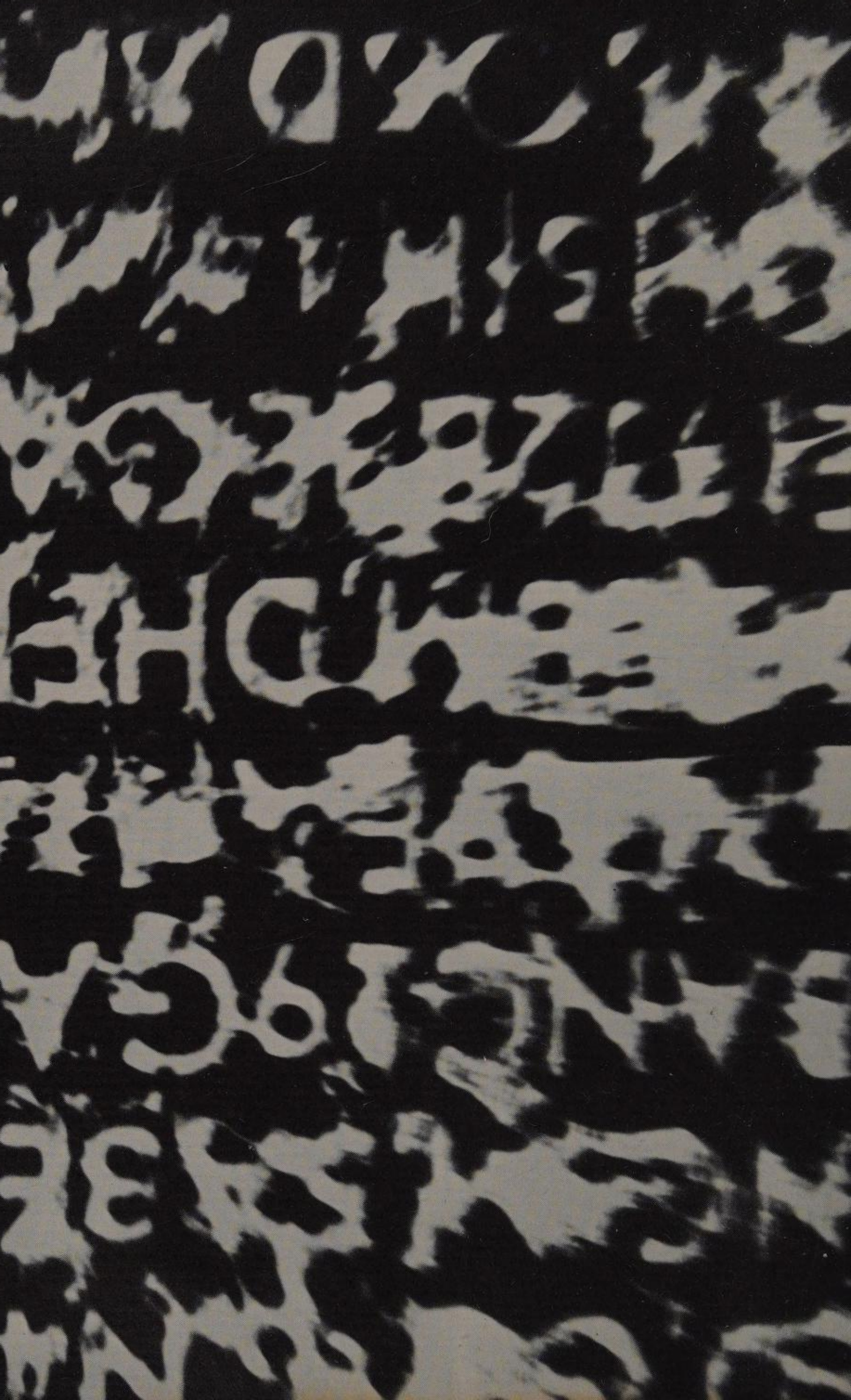
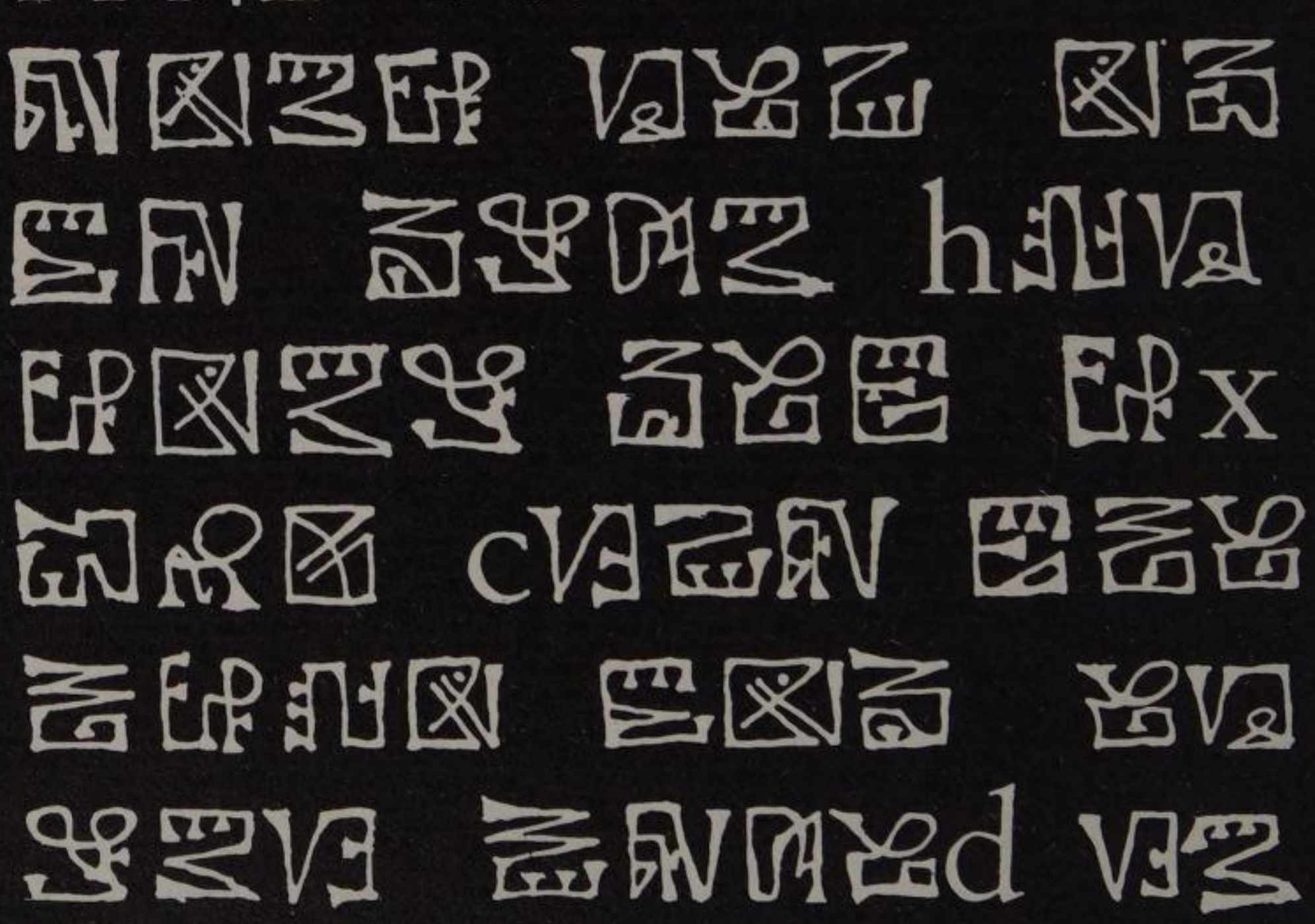


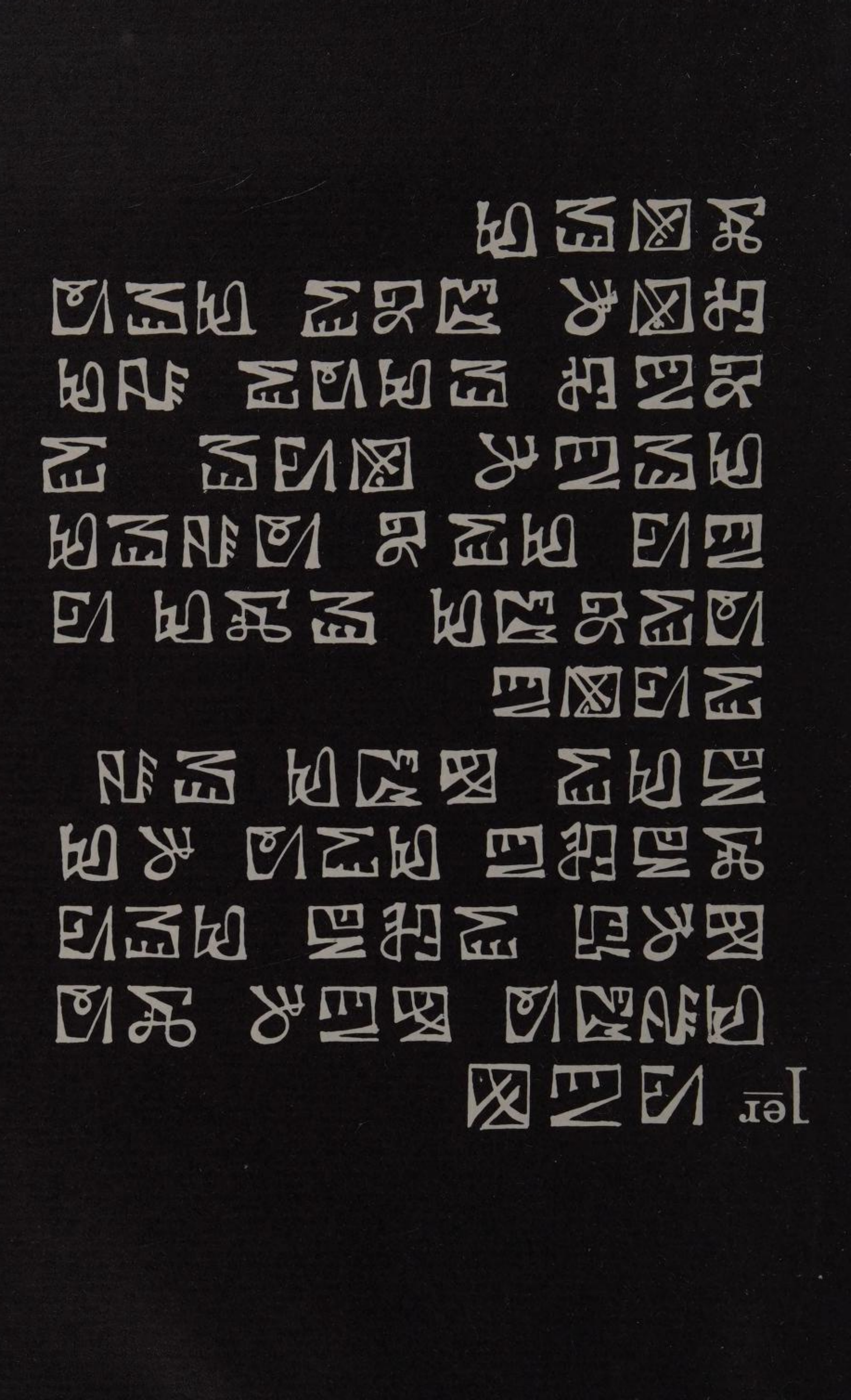
18 octobre

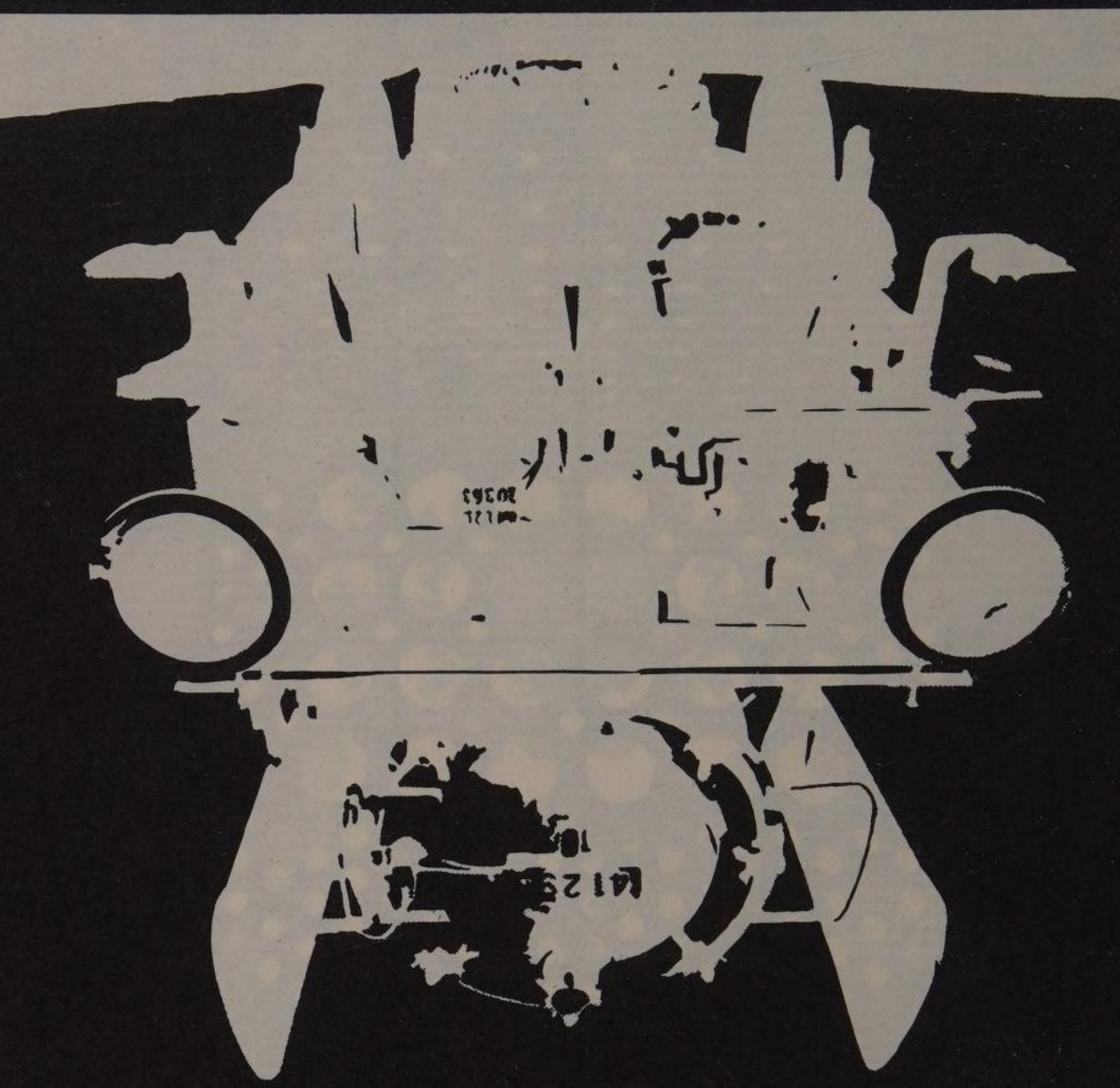
Je ne sait plus tres bien quand ça a com mencé. Depuis quel ques temps appara issent des signes é trꝫnges.
Peut-être qu'il y en avait ꝫpuis toujours et que je les vois seulement main tenant.

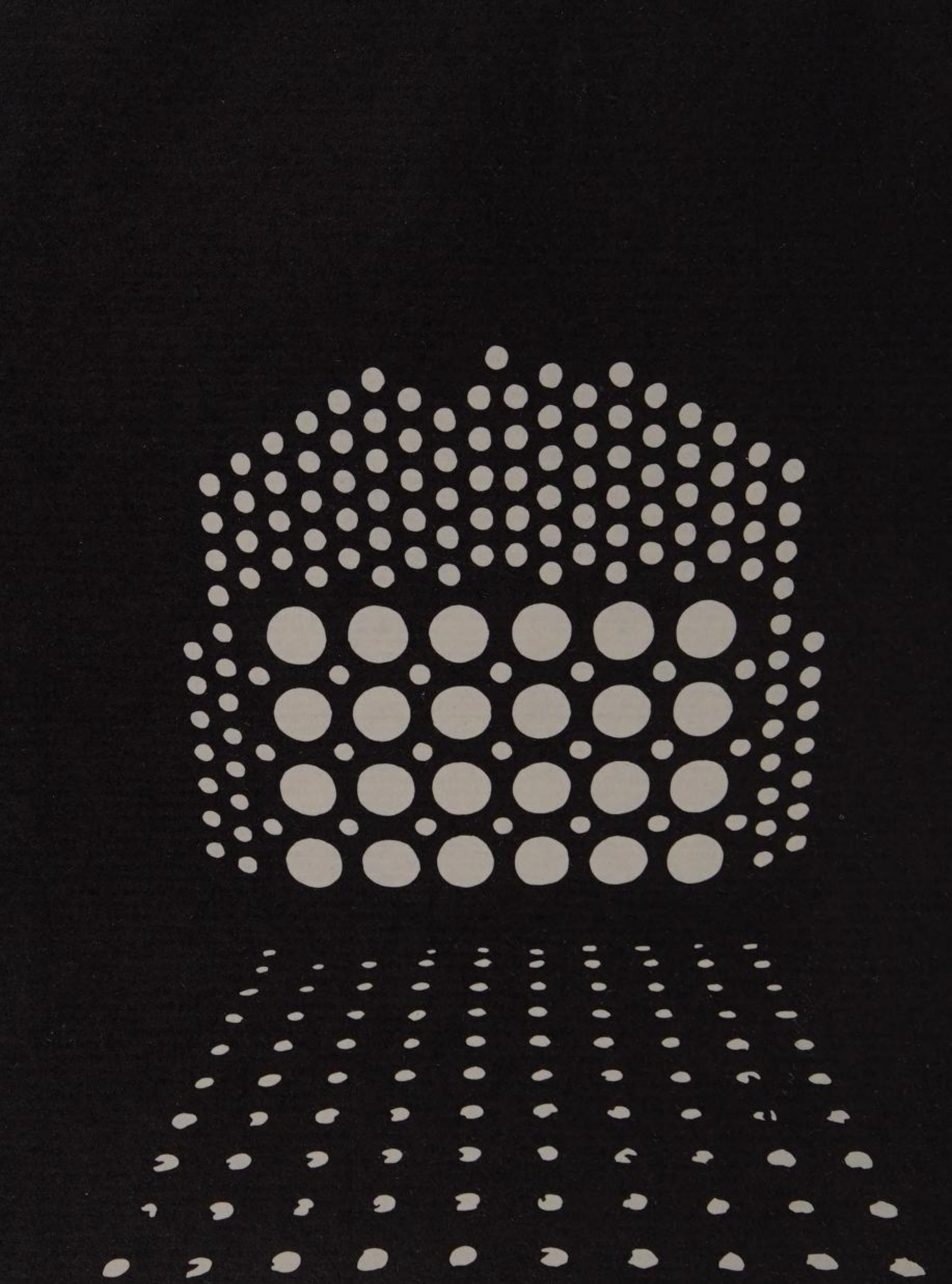
25 oc [illegible]

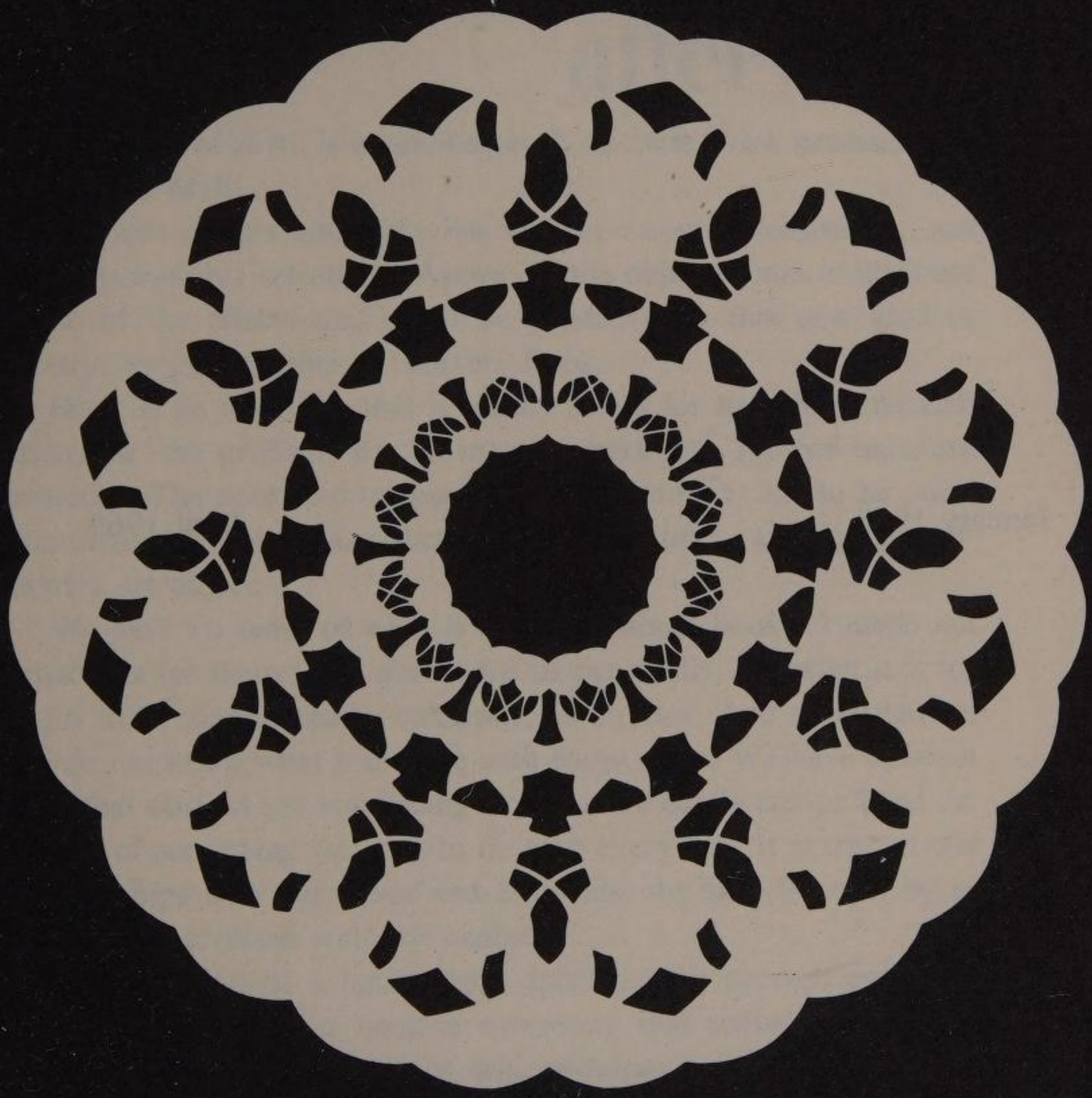
Non! Je suis sûr
qu'il y a [illegible]ne inv
a [illegible] ce [illegible] Signe
cor[illegible]pondent a
rie[illegible] il [illegible]











January 1968

April 1969

afterword

The heart of myth is in substance. A concrete Book necessarily is a concrete Myth.

The aim of this anthology has not been comprehensiveness, nor even (primarily) selectivity. Above all, the objective was to illustrate some of the effects that could be produced by this new kind of poetry, to put together a concrete Book.

Book is an invention that is ideally suited for narrative material; therefore the problem was to make it work also for non-narrative material. The book had to become an environment, had to be made transformable, out of its structure as a book, into a kinetic and generative art object.

We have no sense of what it is to be without books. I mean not what it is for them to be absent for us personally, but what it is for them to be absent totally, culturally, as an idea. And so in the end we do not know what it is to be with them either. We have to begin with that obvious yet astonishing fact, that we barely comprehend the nature of something we have to do with every day. It is true of our relationships with our wives and husbands; we have learned, by as little, to be civilized with our artifacts.

So the notion of a book needs defining. The concept employed here is simply this: a book is something that unfolds itself. It is always offering portions of its self, withdrawing others, suggesting still others. Emerging, present, receding: there is *how* a book is. It is a manufactured thing. It works in certain ways; it cannot work in others. It has pages. There is the embarrassingly primitive essence of it.

We do not do nearly enough with what we have invented. Our sense of event, of plot, ought to be keyed to that, to the simple fact that a book is a thing of pages, and to the fact that a page will turn.

The turning of a page is an aesthetic event; or at any rate, it should be. Anyone who writes will know how oddly crucial it can be that a certain page end with a certain word, that the next one begin with a certain other.

If we turn the page, space will become time. Now there is magic, the magic of technology. There is the key to the new poetry. Now you know how to read "etwas," or "LIFE." Science may be magical, but art is always logical. Imagine the "etwas" poem on a single page, as it was in the original. Extend the white space; transfer the black rectangle to the following page. What has happened is that we have developed a plot. We have added suspense—that is, time. Play with the space in "LIFE." Midway through the word, change the side of the page the letters can appear on. You have altered the periodicity of the poem; you have changed the velocity, the rhythm, in which the poem is immersed. And "immersed" is precisely the word, too. The poem must be grasped as expressing time. What the reader does is enter the time of the book.

What Aristotle has done for our culture has been to make us think of the artist's subject matter as being nature rather than material. If art is mimetic, plot must follow the ups and downs of the hero and heroine. But what if we keyed everything to a movement of presentation? Verisimilitude, degree of fidelity (or even degree of distortion) to physics, to psychology, to sociology, to history, would no longer be relevant to the subject of aesthetics. What would matter far more would be whether there were pages, film, canvas; light, dark; movement, stasis. At any rate, criticism would now have to begin with material as its basic value.

Literature, as it has developed so far, and this includes so-called non-realistic literature, is tied to verisimilitude in that it uses language symbolically. "Door," in any non-concrete work, stands always for something outside the word. There is little about it, as word, as visual and phonic construct, that makes it aesthetically important. It is useful as a reference to something else. Perhaps it may sound pleasing, and in a given poem the number of its syllables may make it usable or not. But ultimately the word has only referential value. It is quite unlike an ideogram ("stream," for example) in which the sign and the thing signified are equatable.

Concrete poetry aims, in general, at the ideogrammic state. The

poets pattern the letters of words in much the same way that a Japanese calligrapher patterns the strokes of a character. By no means, however, are all Chinese characters pictures of the things they represent. Language is not that simple, and this is a too-popular fallacy about ideograms. In the poem "rain," the calligrapher Seiichi Niikuni became the poet Seiichi Niikuni when his design was able to *achieve* the identification between the-word-as-picture and the-word-as-sign. A Chinese character is not, by itself, a concrete poem. It requires the presence of an artist who will *do something* with the material.

Where a non-ideogrammic language is involved, the poet achieves an equivalent effect when a design is presented by means of which a word, say "rose," is put through a set of changes which enable it to convert into, say, "eros," as in the Timm Uhlrichs poem. Or, as with John Furnival, when a geometric pattern of phrases and catchphrases forms. There are no metaphysical implications; the integrity of the word as a set of visual elements in no way is violated.

Thus concretism begins where literacy begins. If we got used to literature being keyed to a movement of presentation, how much more intense an experience would be possible than anything poetry and prose now offer. Every turn of every page would be crucial. There would be, for the first time really, a non-oral tradition. For what we have had till now has been hardly more than the transferring onto paper, with not a great deal of essential difference, of what could just as easily have been the work of an oral poet.

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Do you see what I mean? Printed poetry is not like oral poetry; it is not oral poetry set in print. Print is something by itself. The poems in this anthology depend for their effect on the special quality of the printed letter and of type spread across a page. It is profoundly literary, for it deals expressly with the effects of writing (as opposed to

telling). Entirely different techniques and conventions are required, for in telling it is the ear that must be appealed to. Here it is the eye that must be caught.

The peculiarities, the necessities, the possibilities of *written* forms are what the contemporary writer must be aware of. Most books which we have are only minimally literary. They eliminate, merely, the need for those formulaic helps to memory which the oral poet depends on. The *Odyssey* can be remembered by a normal person; Yugoslavian bards remember poems similar in length and complexity. *Ulysses* could be remembered only by an idiot savant. Yet we have not gone far with our literacy in the 3,000 some years we have had it; and not far even in 400 years, if we wish to go back only to Gutenberg.

This anthology has attempted always to be both concrete *and* a book. The arrangement, while it was largely a felt, intuitive, rhythmic thing, does clearly move in configurational blocks. The symbolic, that is mimetic, content is greatly reduced, and an effort is made to have each section evolving out of or advancing from a preceding one; this though the metaphor for the entire book might be the labyrinth or the checkerboard, and though a climax of sorts may be said to have been reached in the final symbolism of the flowers, the flames, and the mandala.

The University of California historian Carl Schorske wrote, in response to the original *Chicago Review* anthology, ". . . I'm a fan. Brain-worker's *Volkskunst!*" It is an exceedingly shrewd insight. There is a definite folk aspect to concretism. Concrete poetry is the poetry of how we think, a poetry that works with what is irreducible in the language that we think in.

The calendar in the office of the *Chicago Review* has remained set at July 1967, where (as if intended to recall to us the words Professor Schorske would soon be writing) a photograph of a bridge with the following legend has unceasingly offered itself.

Un nuovo ponte sul *Biferno (Molise)*
Un nouveau pont sur la riviere *Biferno (Molise)*
A new bridge over the *Biferno (Molise)*
Eine neue Brucke uber den *Biferno (Molise)*
Un puente nuevo sobre el rio *Biferno (Molise)*

The italics are mine. But is this not a concrete poem? Is concretism not indeed a kind of folk art? It is all around us; it expresses what is truly fundamental in our lives. Anyone who feels that concretism is necessarily cerebral has only to look at the work of John Furnival, or Seiichi Niikuni, or Jaroslav Malina. There is, after all, a basic convertibility, and little there to be cerebral over, in the triple metaphors of the circle, the checkerboard, and the labyrinth.

The end of life is the mythic end of substance.

Eugene Wildman

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"Concrete poetry makes demands upon the reader, particularly upon his way of seeing. Vision is tied to form, language, and not to what [the poet] thinks, but to how he thinks. . . . Experimentation with shape, type, design, and form does not preclude the fact that today's concrete poets are firmly rooted in current matters. . . .The collection is recommended for public, college, university, and swinging high school libraries." *Library Journal*