

MIYUSCULES

BEYOND SANS SERIF...

MY MUSCLES

Carolina Short

MIYUSCULES

Typography 3, 1993

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Miyuscles is a typographic project done in the context of an undergraduate level 3 elective paper of the Graphic Design degree, FADU, Buenos Aires, Argentina. After 25 years, I have decided to translate my work, originally written in Spanish, in order to share it to a broader community. A part of the original work has been published a couple of times in 1994 (tipoGráfica) and 1996 (Pensamiento Tipográfico) but the complete project has never been published.

This project was performed in the context of the early 90s in Buenos Aires, without the easy access to information that the WWW would bring in later years. At the moment I had access to a handful of books that Rubén Fontana shared from his personal library, and I had access to some material that was published in tipoGráfica magazine. Nowadays, an approach to a similar question would probably have more references and a further development.

«The design of minimum typographical units was the real purpose of this ‘step beyond the sans serif’. But the formal experiment rapidly gave way to a question of concepts: what are the limits of typographical innovation, what are the historical experiments related to the proposal, and what can we learn from them, to use as a basis for the construction of new structures, and of a new formal convention to identify the same letters we have been handling since the Phoenicians devised phonetic signs. The complete methodology of the process of design was recreated in the definition of each character, on the basis of diverse formal styles: five different families contributed structures on which an independent style was subsequently built. Apart from defining the essence of each character, the job entailed the side issue of the concept of black and white typography introducing a new structural concept, which totally avoids the separation of letterforms and counters.» (Extracted from *Typographic Thought*. Buenos Aires, Edicial, 1996)

From the technological side, *Miyuscles* was produced as a font using Fontographer 3.5 on a 6100 Power Macintosh computer. It was probably the first digital font ever created in Argentina.



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BEYOND SANS SERIF

«For the creator, both the creative act and desire are permanent and they are a consequence of the rebellious instinct that impels us to make something different, something unique and personal; as a consequence of the necessity of showing our own ideas and get them to be accepted, as well as our own conception of aesthetics. Perhaps its origin is also a way of expressing our own thoughts, taken as different or preferable, as well as confirming our own sensibility.

But does pure creation exist? We feel the temptation of answering negatively. The plans remained the same for centuries, and to create new forms is like dressing the existing ones: an uppercase A will always be two oblique strokes that are joined in the upper part with a linking bar.»

Gerard Blanchard

If each letter of our alphabet is different, and if letters combined form words that create particular sentences, that articulate specific messages, is because each character has singular attributes; it is unique.

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It is often the case that a simple paragraph from a book can inspire people and nurture our creativity.

As we read a text, we compare almost ostensibly the new information with our internal memory. Blanchard questions whether there is a pure creation process, a question that we are tempted to answer negatively. As an uppercase A will always be two oblique strokes join together with a horizontal stroke. But we can also inquire whether an A could be just one oblique stroke with a crossbar, as that indicates it is an A and not an H, for example.

Sans serif typography was born as an answer to new functional and communicational

BEYOND SANS SERIF

needs that could not be covered by the existing serif typefaces. They constitute a step toward synthesis, and to expressing a message in a different way. This evolution is often not isolated from the problems of a particular moment in time, as William Morris explains the art of an era cannot be estranged from its social system, at least in theory. **9**

How, then, would the evolution of the sans serif typography be if we follow the outlined synthesis coming from serifs typefaces?

This question was formulated before by other designers, and answered with different approaches. My response, at this historical moment, proposes to reduce the characters to the limit of legibility and generate a system of glyphs that relates to the alphabet, and, at the same time, minimizes it to its simplest expression.

ALL SANS PROPOSAL

«All modern movement in the history of the graphic design has been supported by new alternative typography that has the virtue of renewing the form adapting it to the present time and contributing as well to give epistemological content to the corresponding ideology.»

Enric Satué

The typographer dresses the word with a visible form and preserves it for the future. The technique, the function and the form are integral fields in typography. This task of shaping words with a visible form fascinates man from the early days in history. But the birth of printed text and the growing desire for reading transformed the complex relationship between form and function.

To start with the development of this work I decided to depart from *Futura*, as its geometric structure contributes to reducing the glyphs to basic shapes. The uppercase letters represent a return to ancient Phoenician, Greek and Etruscan forms.

This typography, designed by Paul Renner in 1927, became immediately popular because it represented the principles of the New Typography proposed by Ian Tschichold.

ALL CAPS PROPOSAL

At the same time, these geometric attributes matched the simple and elementary style of functionalism, a contemporary movement that influenced both art and design in that historical period.

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Nevertheless, Renner used his experience in editorial design to improve the legibility of *Futura*, breaking at times the pure geometry of forms of the typeface he designed. It resulted in an adequate combination of strong abstraction with proper legibility. These glyphs fulfilled the rationalist principles of simplicity, clarity and modernity of the sign, and the neoclassical spirit that influenced them (the presence of the Greek alphabet in its formal structure is unequivocal).

Designers of all times are exposed to the influences of their social and historical period.

**RAINES
SOUVE**

Acier Noir, Cassandre, 1929.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Bruno Munari, 1935.

a b c d e f g h i j k l
m n o p q r s t u v w x
y z 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
+ , - . : ; ' " ' " ' " ' "

Neue Alphabet,
Wim Crouwel, 1967.

«Experimentation is a very personal reflection of your ability to think and create. To begin, you must become thoroughly familiar with your subject. Research your subject and its relation to the past, for the past can be inspirational as well as informative. Reviewing the movements and the artists who were instrumental in establishing a concept provides the background necessary to intelligently correlate your own ideas.»

Martin Solomon

The goal of this work is to approach a synthesis of the alphabet and, at the same time, preserve an adequate type criterion that serves communicational needs.

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Alphabet synthesis precedents can be tracked down to Herbert Bayer's *Universal* alphabet (1925) that proposed to unify and simplify the glyphs reducing its complexity to minimal lowercase characters. The idea was to have "a unique sign for a unique sound", and the base was a circular structure where all the letters were encrusted. Even if it fitted the Bauhaus program and style, it lacked visual harmony and legibility, together with optical corrections.

In 1929, Cassandre creates *Bifur*, that ignores parts of each character to allow the differential parts of each glyph, replacing the missing portion with a greyed section, that helps the eye reconstruct the shape of the letter.

MINIMALISM

Later in 1936, he designs *Acier Noir*, in which some portions of the character are solid and some outlined.

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Bruno Munari designs in 1935 the experimental typeface *Essential*, influenced by Cassandre's *Bifur*, and he also pursues the concept of emphasizing only an essential portion of each letter.

In 1967, Wim Crouwel creates *Neue Alphabet*, a minimized alphabet reducing the form of the letters to essential elements. The result is an exclusive typeface, optimized for screen use.



First selection of sectors and glyphs
from different typefaces

CHARACTERS

«We experience with the personality of the shapes of the letters, its measurements, its associations, as semantic elements. We can say that we are amplifying the design's visual vocabulary.»

Wolfgang Weingart

The work departed from the meticulous observation of the formal characteristics of each letter, in positive as well as in negative. This observation leads to the fact that the selected part needed a conventional container, as the data required to identify each letter was not always preserving the same proportions.

The starting point was a square, derived from a quarter of an uppercase O (*Futura* font). The glyphs were constructed as white strokes inside the solid black square.

As the work progressed, *Futura* was limiting the task as in some cases the result was an unpleasant form. The project was conducted by the idea of considering a typeface as a landscape where the characters are portraits.

C J L M N Ñ Q R Z

“Portraits” selected as an inspiration for the future “landscape”: first line *Gill Sans*, second line *Frutiger*, third line *Futura* and forth line, *Helvetica*

D E F S V W X Y

A B G H I O P T U

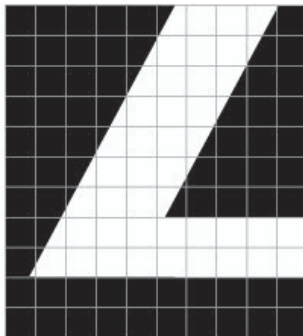
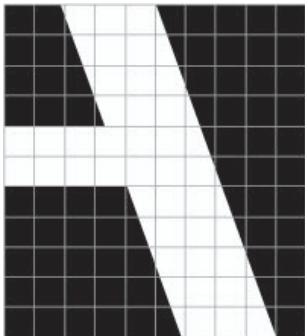
K

CHARACTERS

Some other fonts came to fulfil this need of finding unique attributes for the “portraits”. The selection included *Gill Sans* for R, Q and J, *Frutiger* for D and S, *Helvetica* for K, to mention some examples.

21

The characters were grouped using formal similarities and differences, and finally, the definition of the parts was performed looking at the equilibrium between white and black areas within the square.



System of glyphs inside the final
grid of 10 horizontal modules by
11 vertical modules

«'Visible language' is a term which has found favour in recent years and more appropriately incorporates handwritten, drawn or mechanically constructed letters, all the orthographic forms, in fact, perceived by the eye. It is distinct from the term visual language because it is a system of arbitrary symbols which correspond to the smallest units of sounds in the spoken language, as opposed to more general images representing an expression of objects or concepts.»

Cal Swann

Once the 27 different glyphs that will serve as a base for the system were selected, each individual character was drawn as a new independent sign.

The system needed constant tuning as the glyphs were created and the results observed, always keeping in mind the idea of simplifying each letter to its minimal form.

After the set was finished, some extra refinement included the decision of using slightly different width for the strokes (as observed in humanist sans serif fonts).

The modular structure within the solid square helped to define two modules for the thinner strokes and three for the heavier ones. In a later iteration, the height of the square was increased in one module, ending with 10 by 11, after observing the first version was not stylized enough. With this addition, the alphabet looked more dynamic and legible.

SERIPENITHNA

24

FRASQUITO

PRESENCHA

TRAMPOSA

ALLERQUE

ARGENITHNA

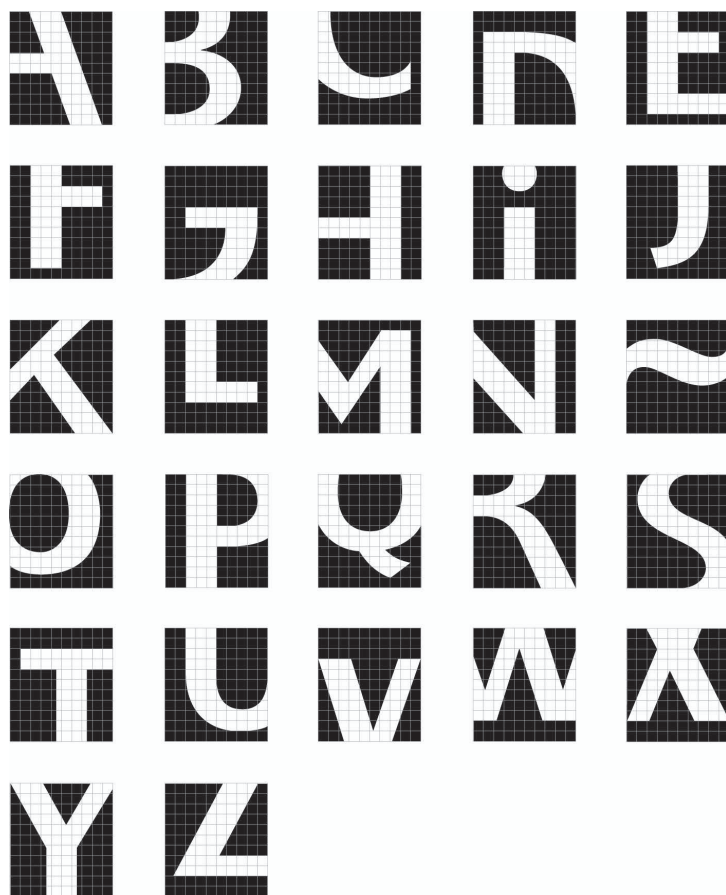
Combination of letters to form words.
After watching combinations like E-R, F-
R, P-R and T-R the shape of R was
modified. When observing the pair F-E,
the F was changed, same as when
watching G-E that G had to be
modified

SYSTEM

The following step was to combine the signs to form words, and after this step, the characters needed further tuning, as the forms required more legibility and functionality.

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The characters are not isolated and working by themselves, they are elements of a system that combined will give birth to words and, ultimately, meaning. At this point, some radical formal decisions that at the start would have been too drastic were taken, as the form was meant to follow semantic.



Characters inside the grid

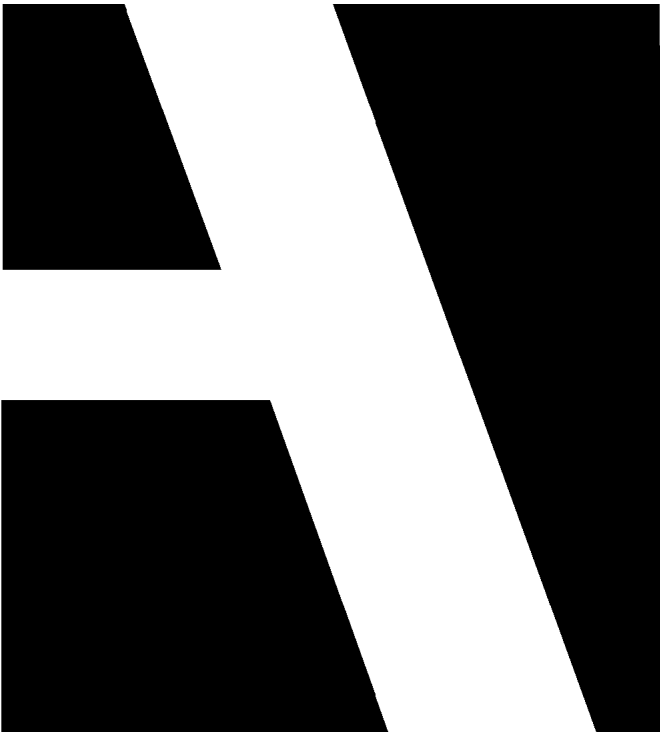
COMPLETE ALPHABET

"Miyuscles" size 60

A B C D E
F G H I J ²⁷
K L M N O
P Q R S
T U V W X
Y Z

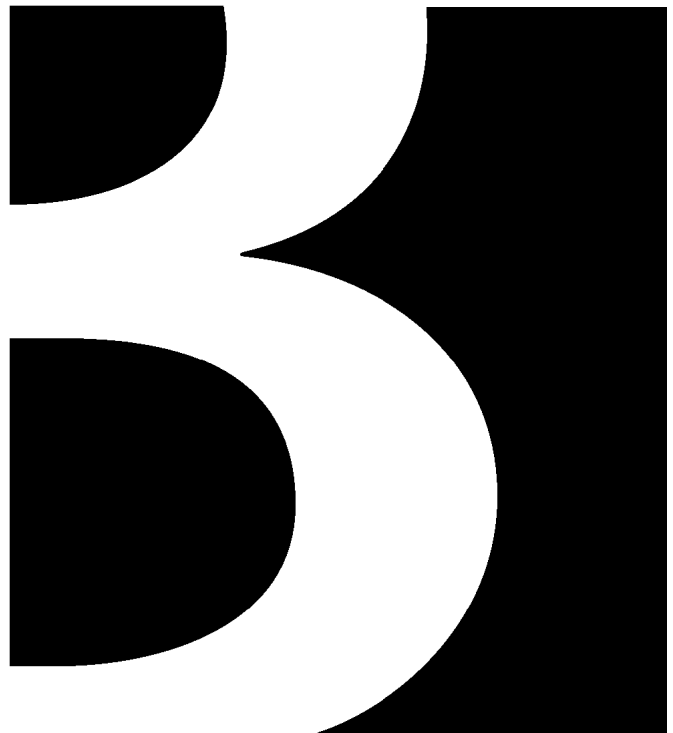


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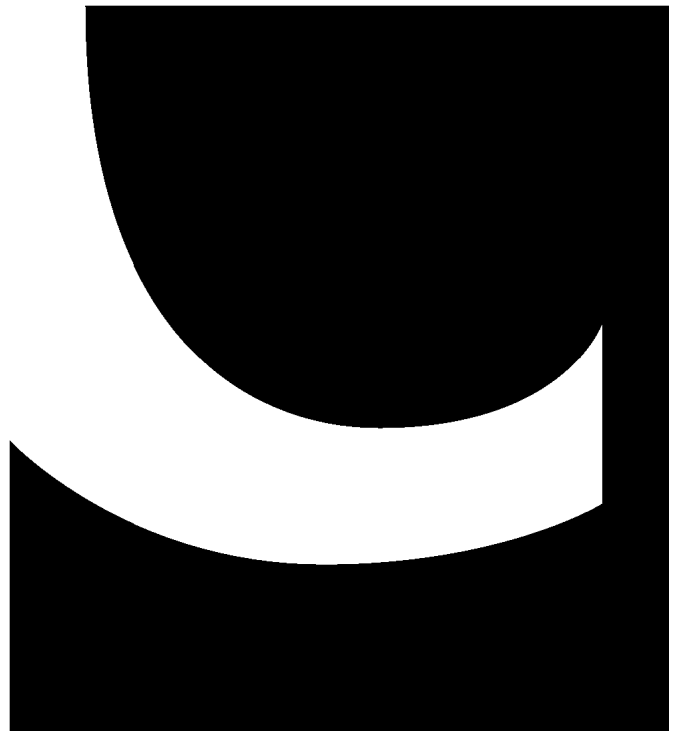


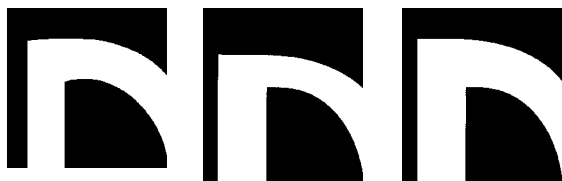
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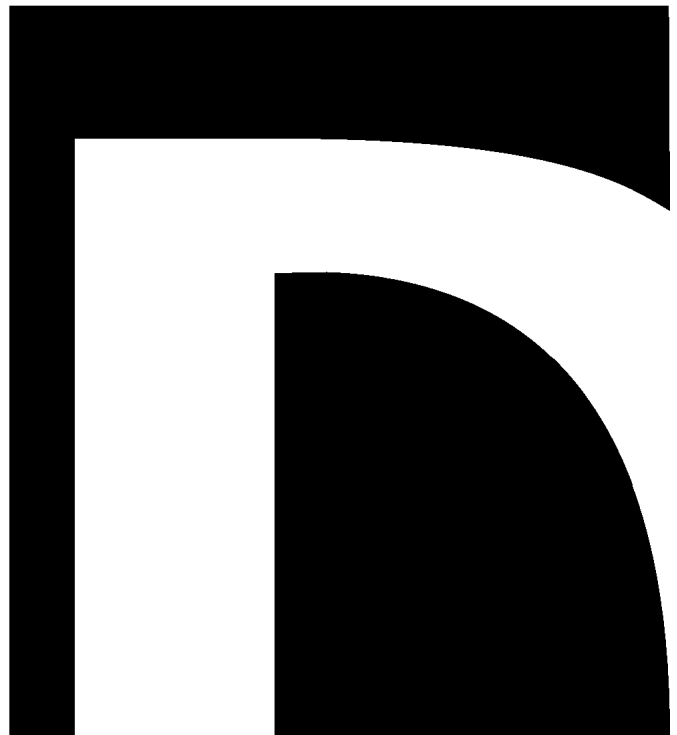
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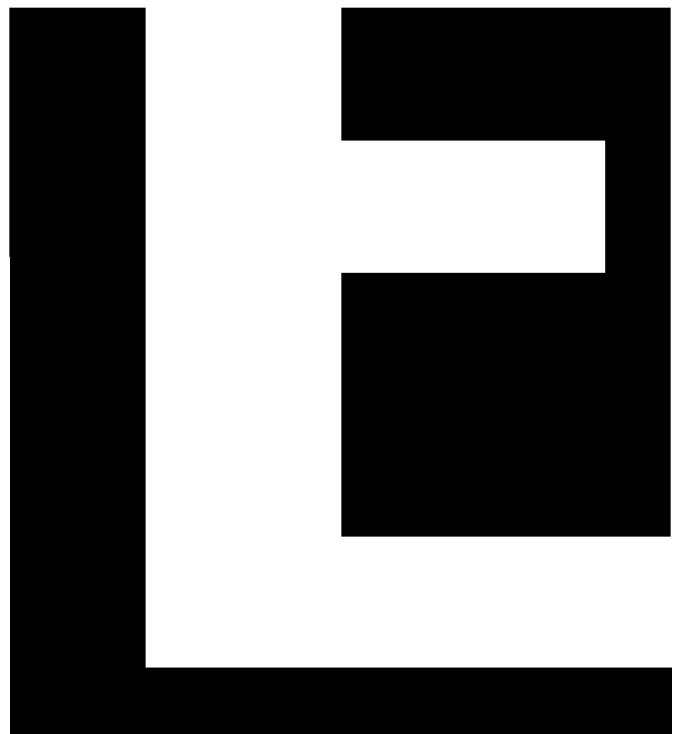
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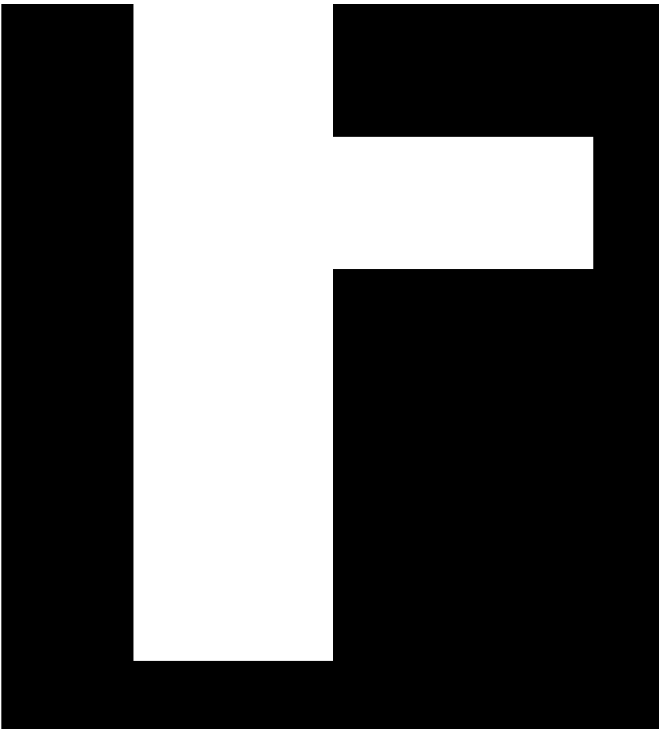


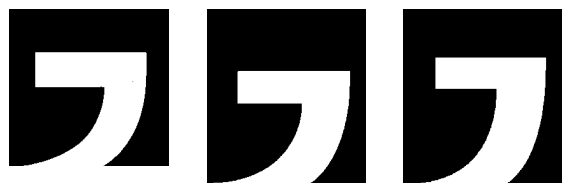
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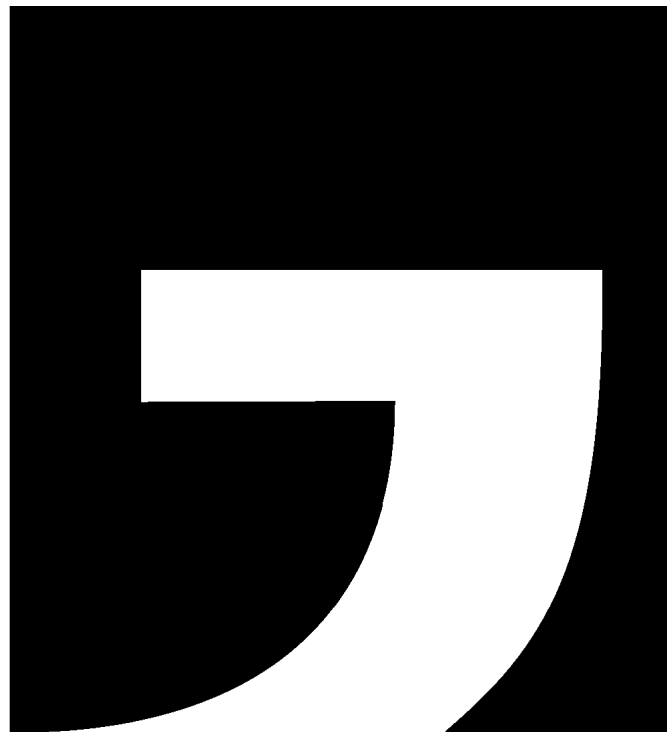
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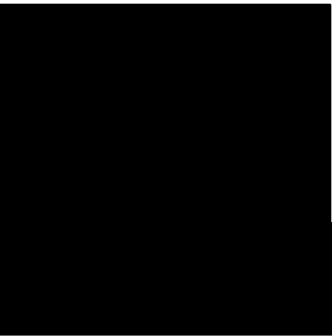
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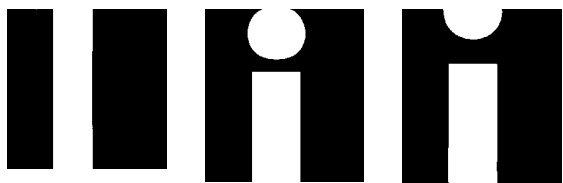
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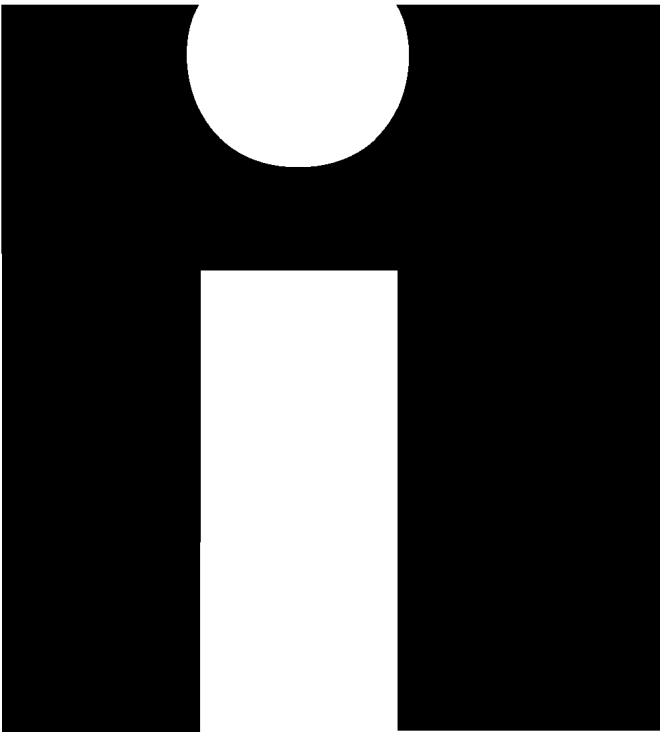


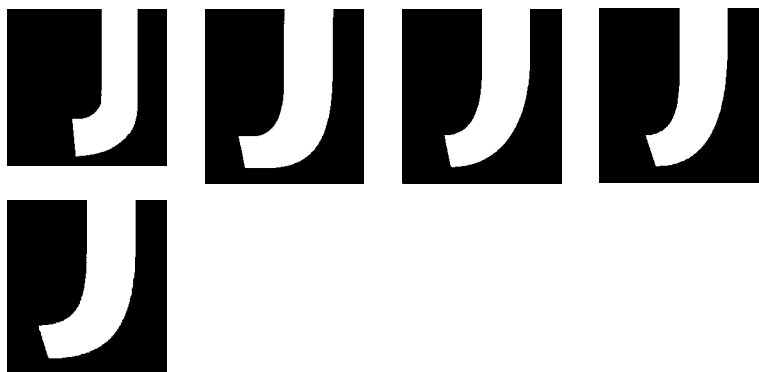
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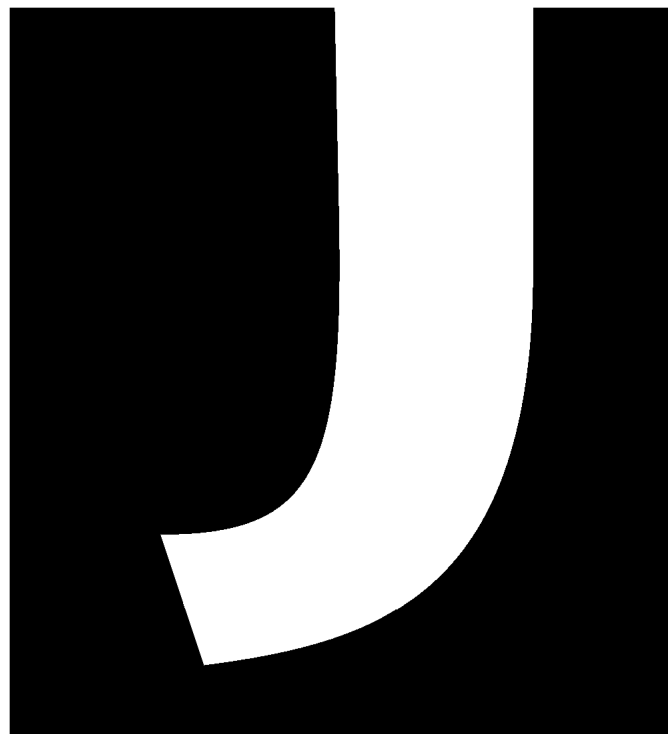


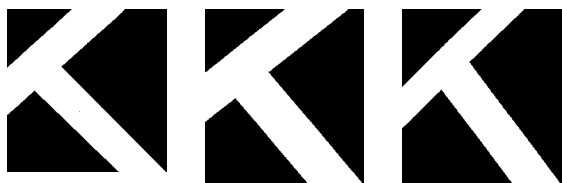
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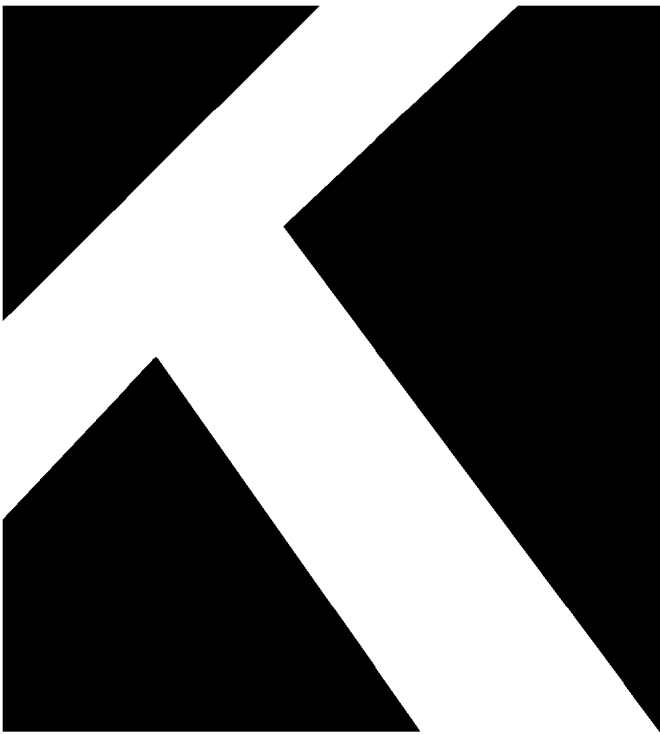


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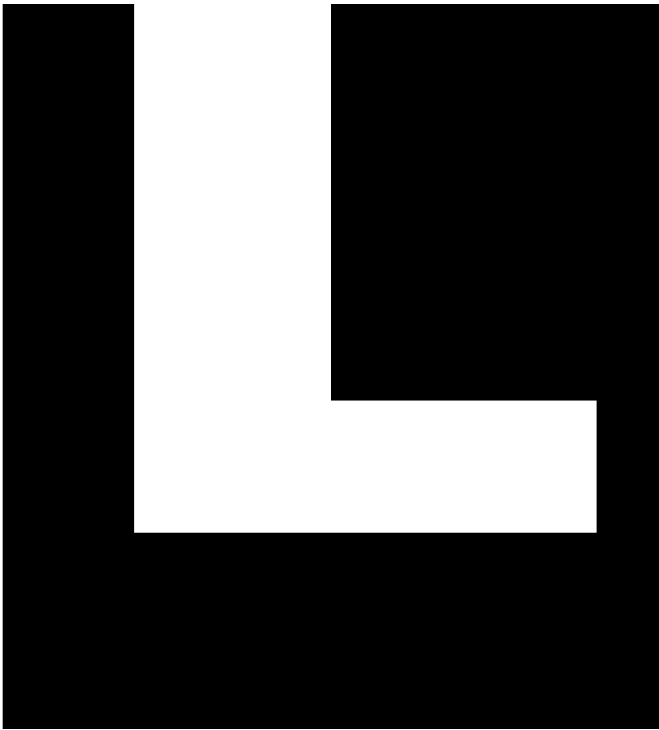


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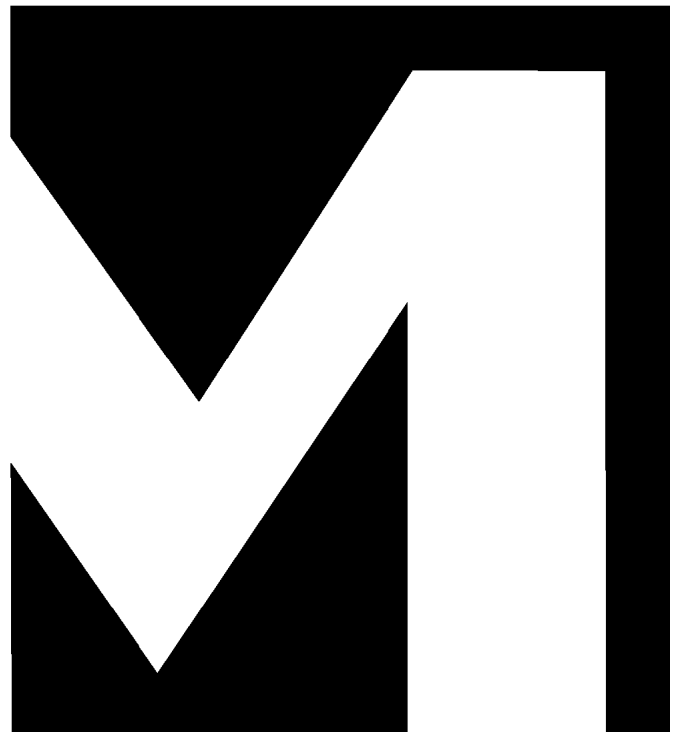


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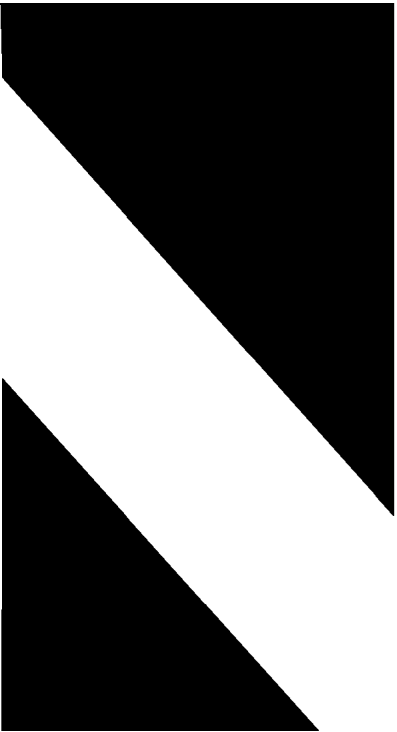
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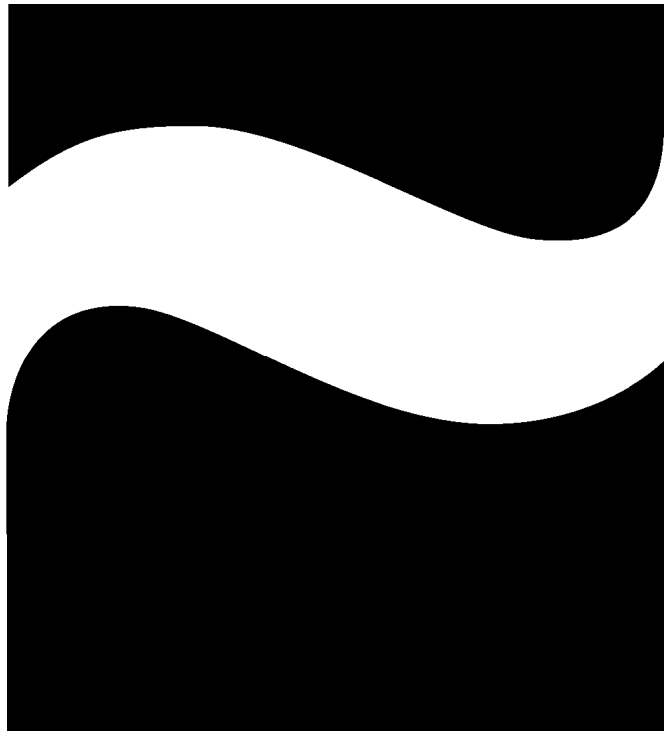
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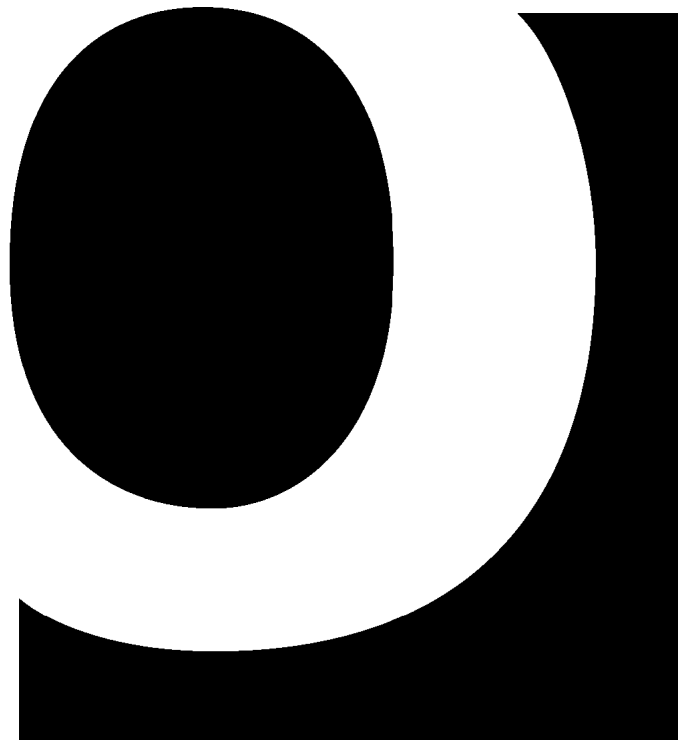
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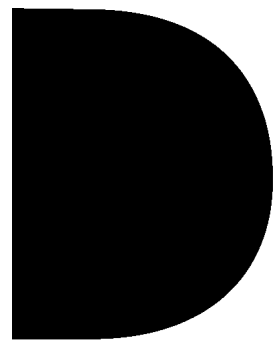


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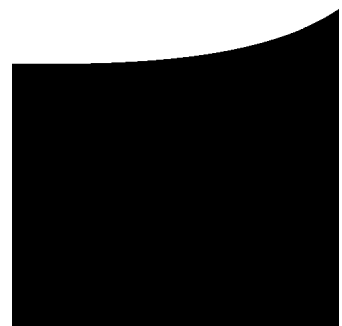




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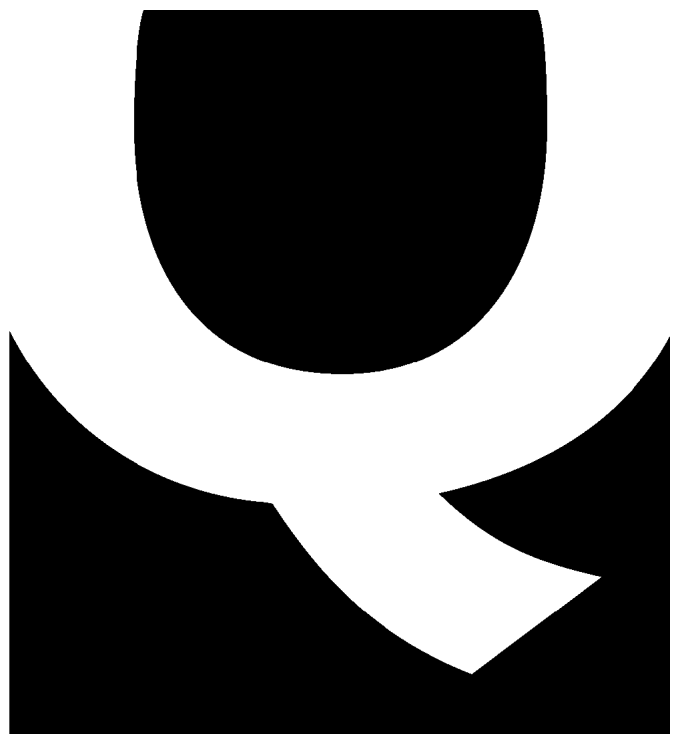
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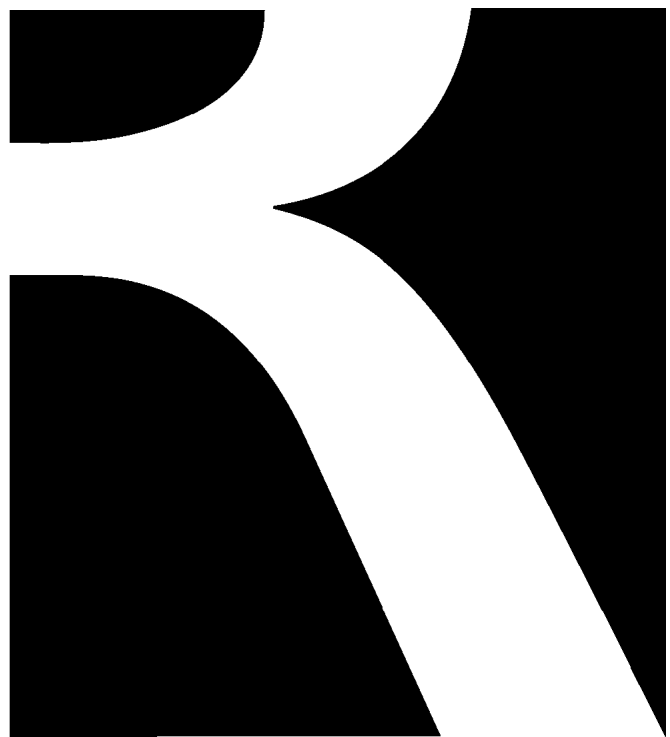
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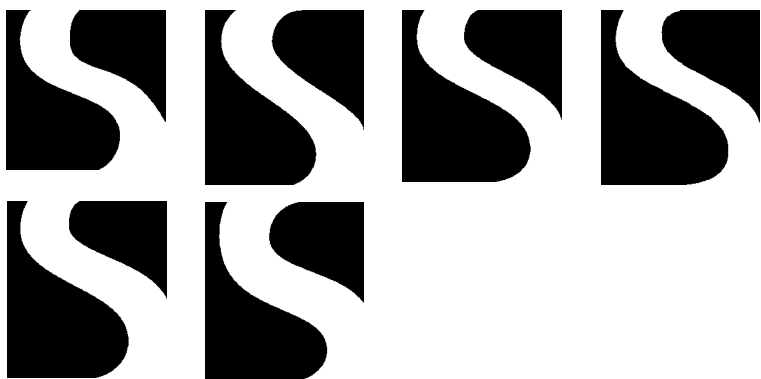
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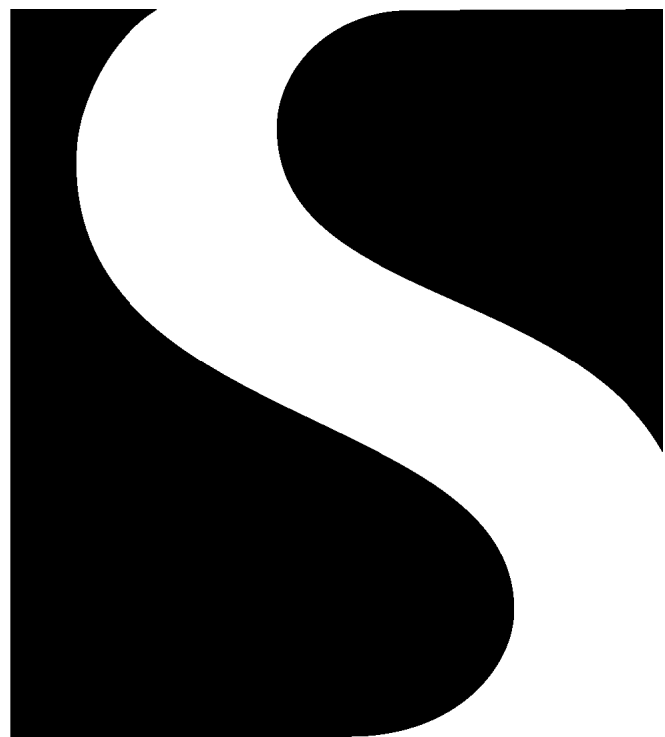


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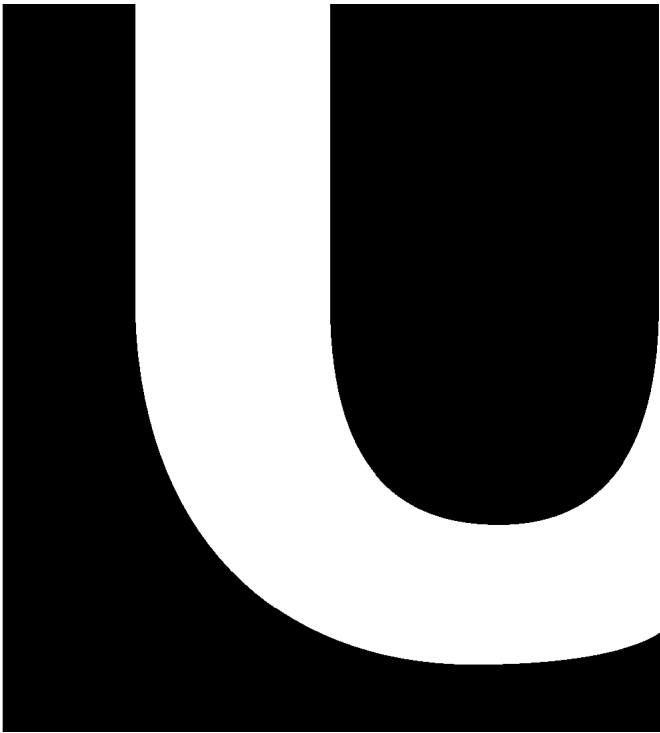




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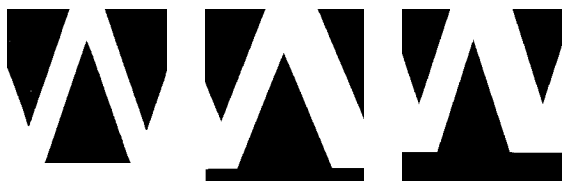
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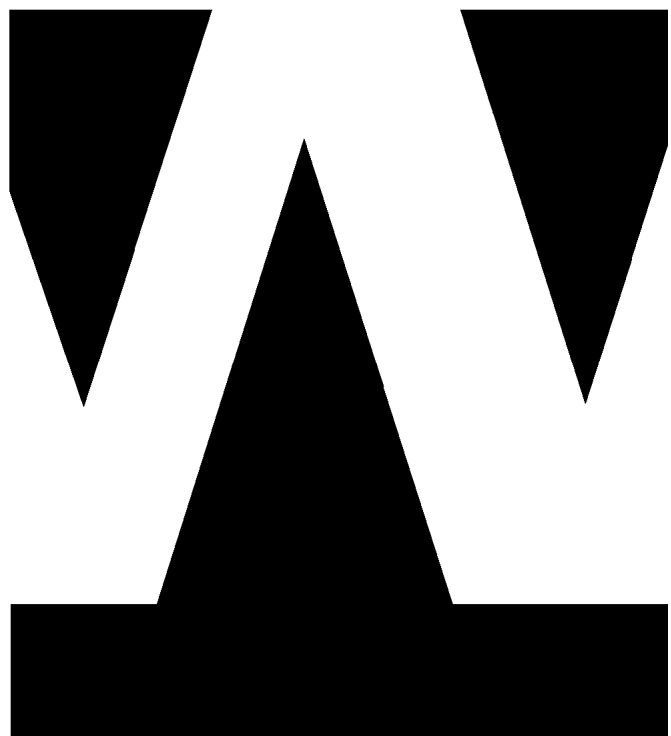


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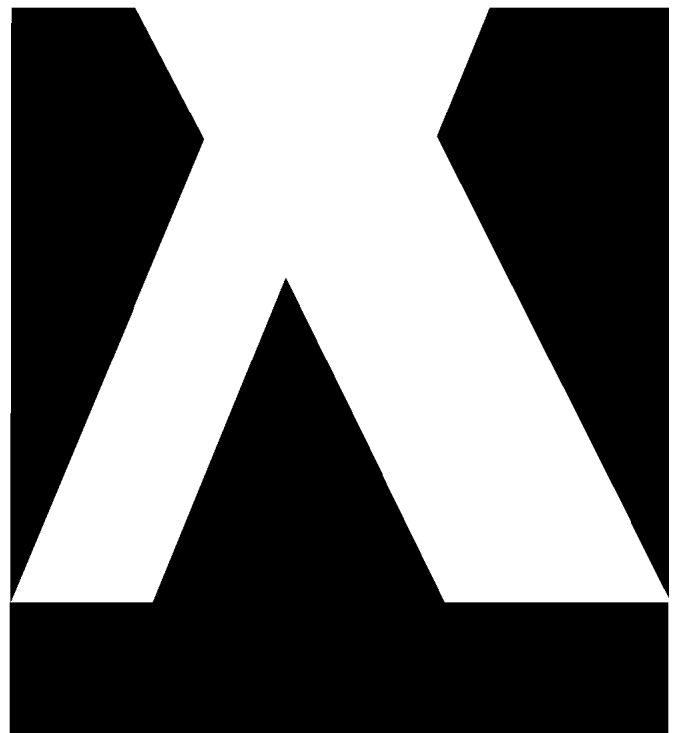
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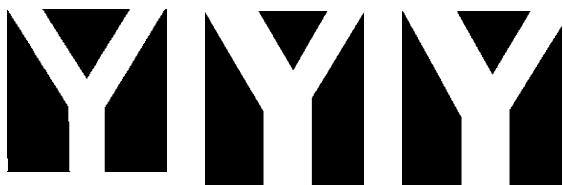


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COMPLETE ALPHABET



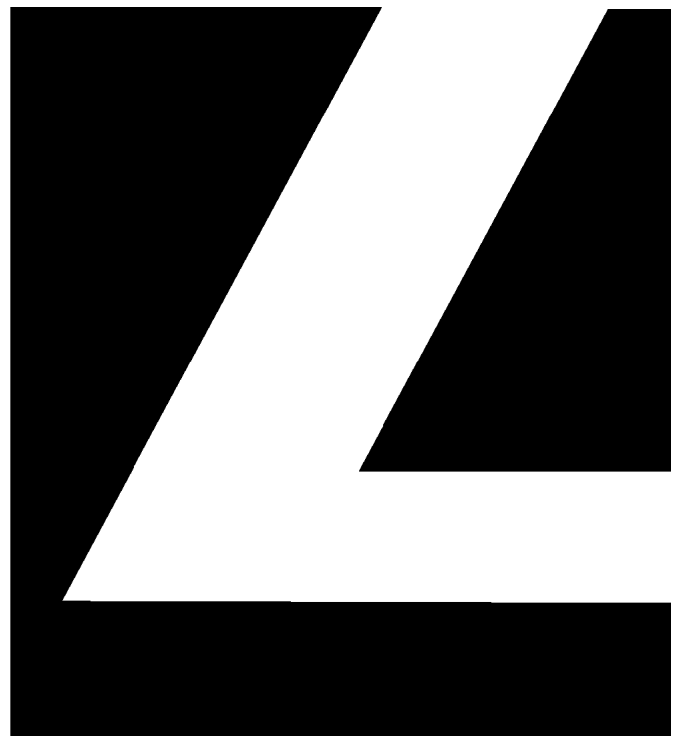


COMPLETARE ALPUBBLICAZIONE





COMPLETARE ALPUBBLICAZIONE



CHISPERO

Tracking tests: +30

82

GOLOSHNA

Tracking +20

PLANTONIMO

Tracking +10

YUXTAIPUESTO

Optimal Tracking =0

NLEWTONIANO

Tracking -10

VANGUARDIA

Tracking -20

ASFIHANITE

MEMBRLETTE

83

UBHULHAR

NIELESHTAR

PENISAMHLENITO

GRANILEZA

LEU HNITLERIES LES LA MLETHRA RE LA NUCHON

Size 10

LEU HNITLERIES LES LA MLETHRA RE LA NUCHON

Size 12

84 LEU HNITLERIES LES LA MLETHRA RE LA

Size 14

LEU HNITLERIES LES LA MLETHRA

Size 18

LEU HNITLERIES LES LA

Size 24

LEU HNITLERIES

Size 36

LEU HNITLER

Size 48

LEU HNIT

Size 72

JOLGORHO

ANIMACIONES

85

MOZALBETE

GRACK ZINIC

ANULETIMO

PRESENCHA

NO PUERO PAKTHCHIPAK LENI
CONTROMERISHAS NIH LENI
HISCUSSIONES PORQUE NE
ANTEMANO SE QUE NO
TIENGO RAZON NI ESTOY
ERUIMOCANDO

EUGENIE MONESCO

Short text (size 18, leading 30)

ZANZO

KABUKI

SENTENCHA

AQUARIUM

MESQUITA

ALFENQUE

«An innovation developed through experimentation is often looked upon as an oddity – a statement that shocks the viewer through unconventionalism. Most oddities are rejected. If, however, an oddity is exciting enough and makes a sufficiently powerful statement, it will gain momentum and be developed and perfected. If an oddity withstands the test of time, it is embraced as an innovative part of history.»

Martin Solomon

Due to formal constraints and to the fact this alphabet is an experiment that answers a theoretical question, the use of this font can be limited to a certain extent. It is not recommended for long texts as it was conceived as a non-conventional typeface.

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From here on, the system of basic glyphs (28 letters for Spanish alphabet) can be completed with numbers and punctuation marks.

This proposal has the intention of opening new ways of thinking a synthesis of the letters rather than imposing a unique point of view. It is only one of many possible steps beyond sans serif. The challenge is permanent.

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tipoGráfica #8
Apuntes de tipografía, typography 3, Fontana
Chair, FADU

