

THE ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET I cuneiform scripts of sumerians

Our currently used alphabet is placed at the end of a long historical evolution beginning from the **cuneiform scripts of Sumerians**. Their pictograms was made by inscribing wet clay with a wedge-shaped reed. Later the Akkadians adopted the cuneiform writing but reduced it to 60 symbols and used them phonetically, to represent syllables.



STARS

GROUND

MAN

WOMAN

MOUNTAINS

SLAVES

HEAD

MOUTH

BREAD

EATING

WATER

THE ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET II the poenician script

At the other side, the **Phoenician Alphabet** first appeared in the Sinai region. This alphabet proved to be such an efficient system for transcribing spoken language that it spread from one culture to another, being modified each time to suit each language. The Proto-Sinaitic and Phoenician alphabets only recorded consonants, as the Semitic languages did not need to write vowels. The Phoenician character set first gave rise to other West Semitic alphabets: **Hebrew, Aramaic, and later Arabic**. More later, it also became the root of the Greek and Roman alphabets.

	Ahiram	Asdrubal	Gézer	Eliba'al	Méša	Samarie	Siloe
א	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆
ב	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊	𐤋	𐤌	𐤍
ג	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔
ד	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗	𐤘	𐤙	𐤚	𐤛
ה	𐤜	𐤝	𐤞	𐤟	𐤠	𐤡	𐤢
ו	𐤣	𐤤	𐤥	𐤦	𐤧	𐤨	𐤩
ז	𐤪	𐤫	𐤬	𐤭	𐤮	𐤯	𐤰
ח	𐤱	𐤲	𐤳	𐤴	𐤵	𐤶	𐤷
ט	𐤸	𐤹	𐤺	𐤻	𐤼	𐤽	𐤾
י	𐤿	𐁀	𐁁	𐁂	𐁃	𐁄	𐁅
כ	𐁆	𐁇	𐁈	𐁉	𐁊	𐁋	𐁌
ל	𐁍	𐁎	𐁏	𐁐	𐁑	𐁒	𐁓
מ	𐁔	𐁕	𐁖	𐁗	𐁘	𐁙	𐁚
נ	𐁛	𐁜	𐁝	𐁞	𐁟	𐁠	𐁡
ס	𐁢	𐁣	𐁤	𐁥	𐁦	𐁧	𐁨
ע	𐁩	𐁪	𐁫	𐁬	𐁭	𐁮	𐁯
פ	𐁰	𐁱	𐁲	𐁳	𐁴	𐁵	𐁶
ק	𐁷	𐁸	𐁹	𐁺	𐁻	𐁼	𐁽
ר	𐁾	𐁿	𐂀	𐂁	𐂂	𐂃	𐂄
ש	𐂅	𐂆	𐂇	𐂈	𐂉	𐂊	𐂋
ת	𐂌	𐂍	𐂎	𐂏	𐂐	𐂑	𐂒

' (A)
 B
 G
 D
 H (E)
 W
 Z
 H.
 T.
 Y
 K
 L
 M
 N
 S
 ' (O)
 P (PH)
 S.
 R
 K.
 S^
 T

ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET III egyptian writing

Egyptian writing started almost at the same time and developed parallel. They developed a system of hieroglyphics, which were at first purely ideographic, as symbol representing an idea. This writing system died, because the alphabet mostly remains under the control of the priests and was not used for the communication between people.



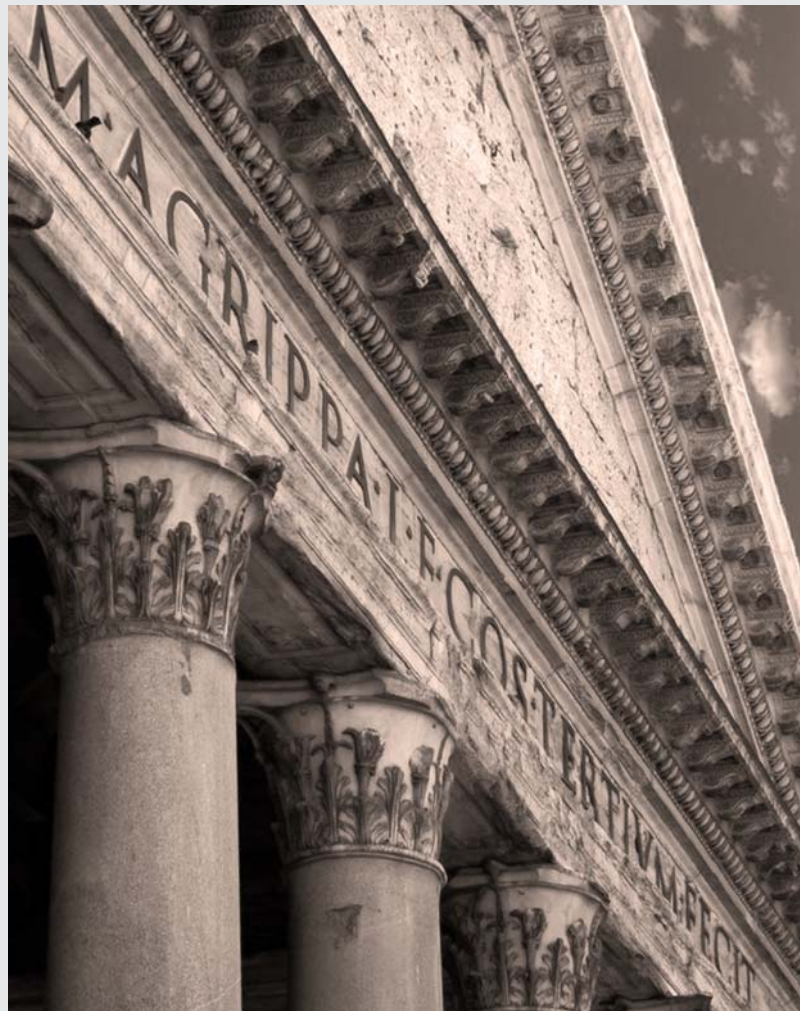
ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET IV how the greeks writed

The Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet to their language. For the first time the symbols became completely abstract. Before, characters were pictorial, they had evolved from a relationship between their shape and the sound of what they represented. A = alpha in Greek, does not mean anything, but the Semitic symbol “aleph” carried the meaning of “ox”.



ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET V from the roman alphabet to the contemporary fonts

Finally, the **Roman alphabet** was developed by the **Etruscans**, borrowing from the Greek alphabet and changing certain shapes and sound values for writing their own language. **The contemporary used alphabet** in the western world didn't reach its present form until the end of the 18th century. After the fall of the Roman empire, Europe lapsed into illiteracy, and only monks in monasteries were literate. Writing became chaotic, and one monk could not read what another had written. Before the invention of the printing press, there existed many different alphabets, according to each scribe.



THE CHINESE SCRIPT I space codes like logograms

The **chinese script**, also known as a Han character is a logogram used in writing Chinese, Japanese, and less frequently Korean. The number of Chinese characters is approximately 47,035, although a large number of these are rarely used. Full literacy in chinese language requires a knowledge of only between three and four thousand characters. In the chinese writing system, the characters are morphosyllabic, each usually corresponding to a spoken syllable with a basic meaning.



THE CHINESE SCRIPT II

characters have origin in pictures
























































Chinese characters are also the world's longest continuously used writing system. Contrary to popular belief, pictograms make up only a small portion of Chinese characters. While characters in this class derive from pictures, they have been standardized, simplified, and stylized to make them easier to write, and their derivation is therefore not always obvious.



I CHING ALPHABET

chinese confucian codes

In addition to being considered the world's first book, the **I Ching** is also considered to be the world's first computer language. German philosopher **G.W. Leibnitz** (1646-1716), the founder of symbolic logic was fascinated with the I Ching's binary mathematical structure. The I Ching may have inspired Leibnitz to develop the binary number system of **0** zeros and **1** ones that all modern computers are based on.

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	&	!	?	\$	€	£	¢
										
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
										
l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v
										

ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY a script in evolution

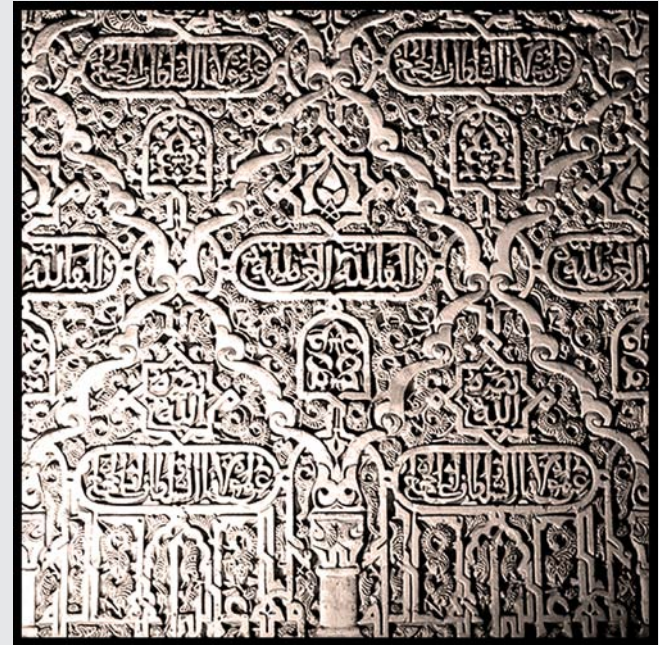
While many religions and cultures have made use of figural images to convey their core convictions, **Islam** has instead used the **shapes and sizes of words or letters**. Leaders saw in figural arts a possible implication of idolatry, Islam's early theocracy looked to the artistry of calligraphy for religious expression. In this way, islamic scripts are used like a space alphabet, without using any images. Arabic is a script of 28 letters and uses long but not short vowels.





ARABIC SCRIPTS
space codes without images

The letters of the arabic script are derived from only 17 distinct forms, distinguished one from another by a dot or dots placed above or below the letter. Short vowels are indicated by small diagonal strokes above or below letters. Written from right to left, the Arabic script can be a flowing continuum of ascending verticals, descending curves, and temperate horizontals. On a traditional Islamic building, a number of different writing styles may appear on, for example, the walls, windows, or minarets. An inscription can give meaning to the building by clarifying its function. **At the end, script is used to define a space.**



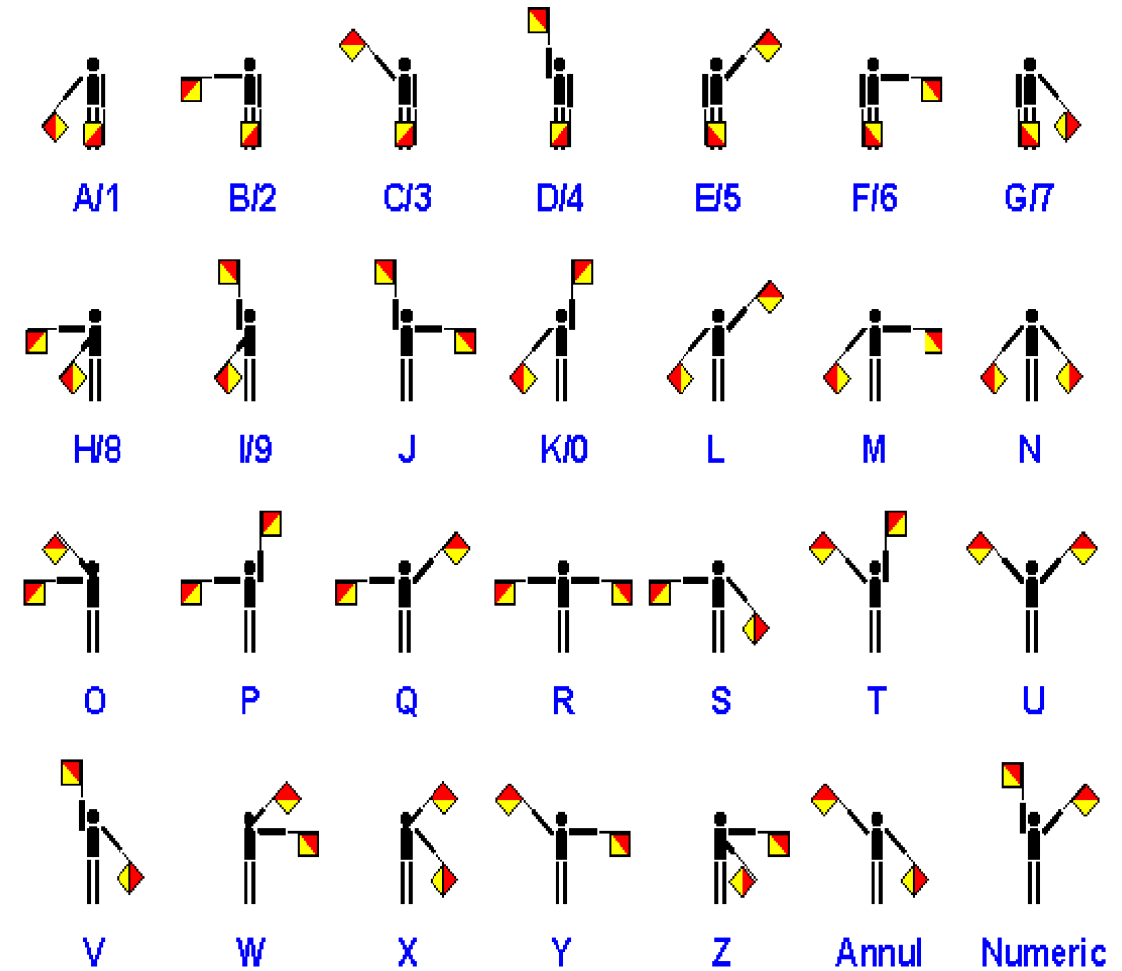
THE BINARY CODE a simplified, digital language

Binary code is the system of representing text or computer processor instructions by the use of a two-digit number system. This system is composed of only the number **zero**, representing the off state, and the number **one**, representing on state, combined in groups of 8. These groups of 8 bits can represent up to 256 different values and can correspond to a variety of different symbols, letters or instructions. For representing texts in the Latin alphabet often a fixed width 8-bit code is used. This block of 8 bits is called a byte. The Unicode standard defines several variable-width encodings and the fixed-width 32-bit (4-byte) UTF-32 code, potentially having room for billions of characters.

A	B	C	D	E	F
01000001	01000010	01000011	01000100	01000101	01000110
G	H	I	J	K	L
01000111	01001000	01001001	01001010	01001011	01001100
M	N	O	P	Q	R
01001101	01001110	01001111	01010000	01010001	01010010
S	T	U	V	W	X
01010011	01010100	01010101	01010110	01010111	01011000
Y	Z	1	2	3	4
01011001	01011010	00110001	00110010	00110011	00110100
5	6	7	8	9	0
00110101	00110110	00110111	00111000	00111001	00110000

SEMAPHORE ALPHABET codes made out of flags

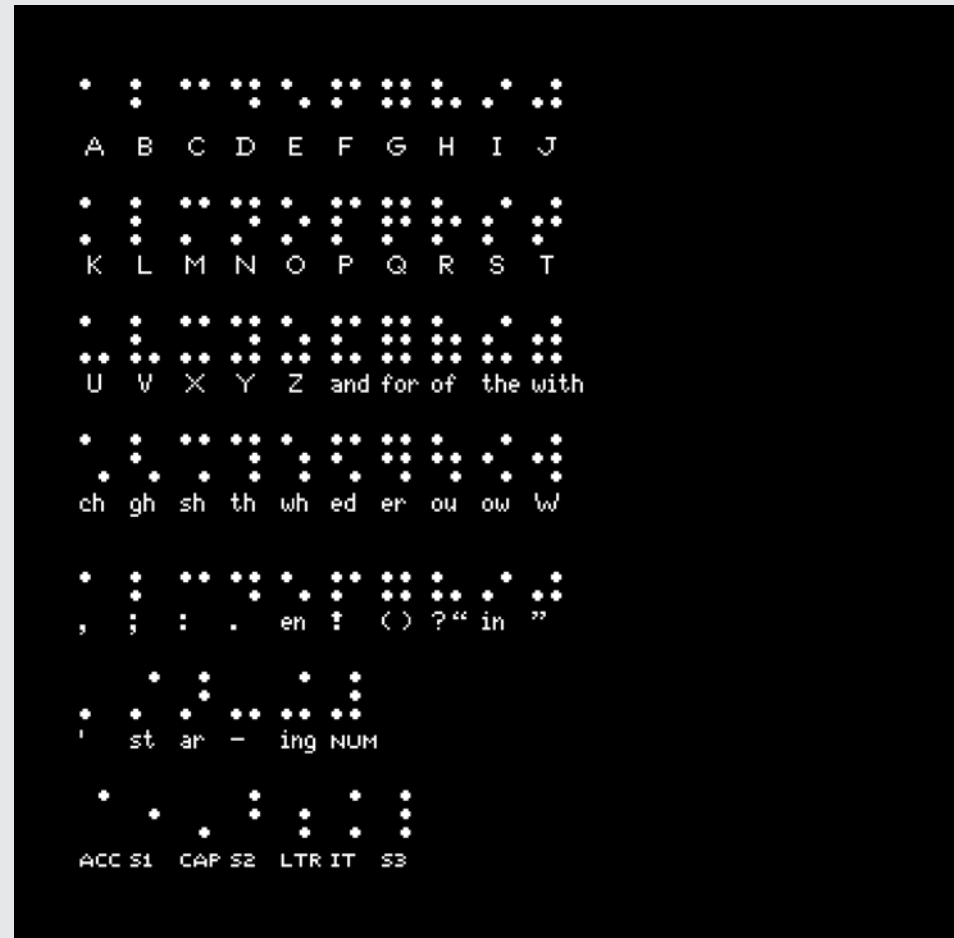
The semaphore flag signalling system, designed by the **Chappe brothers** in France in the late 18th century was used to carry despatches between French army units. This visual based system we use today uses flags, usually square and divided diagonally into a red and a yellow section with the red in the uppermost triangle. The signaller, with arms extended, holds the flags in various positions to represent the different letters of the alphabet. There are eight positions for each flag. For six of the positions (letters H, I, O, W, X, Z see below) the signaller is required to hold one or other of the flags across the body so that both flags are on the same side.



BRAILLE FONT

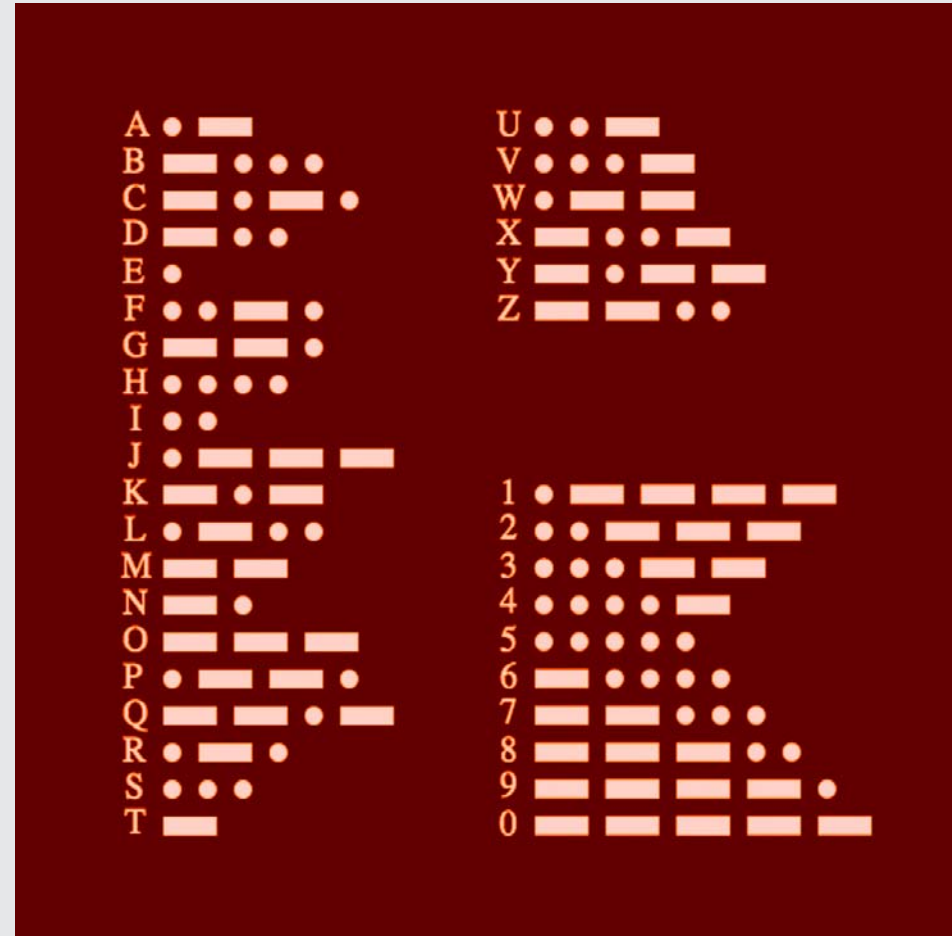
blind people reading space code

The Braille system, devised in 1821 by **Louis Braille**, is a method that is widely used by blind people to read and write. Every Braille character or “cell” is made up of **six dot positions**, like in a binary space code system, arranged in a rectangle containing two columns of three dots each. A dot may be raised at any of the six positions to form 64 combinations. To enable any script for Braille, all the characters including letters, numbers and symbols of the script should be mapped to these 64 cells. There is also a **eight-dot Braille** but it is not widely used as six-dot Braille.



MORSE ALPHABET sound and light codes

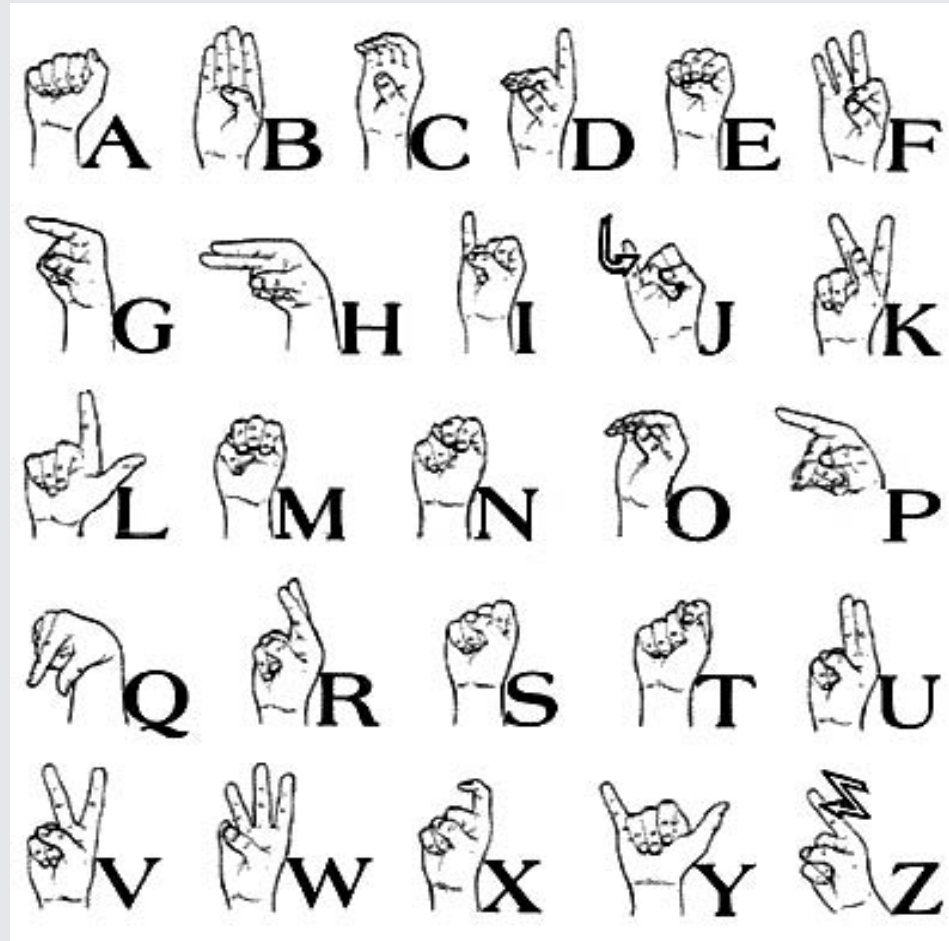
A telegraphic alphabet in very general use, invented by **Samuel F.B. Morse**, the inventor of Morse's telegraph. The letters are represented by dots and dashes impressed or printed on paper, as, .- (A), - . . (B), -.. (D), . (E), .. (O), . . . (R), -- (T), etc., or by **sounds, flashes of light**, etc., with greater or less intervals between them.



MANUAL ALPHABET

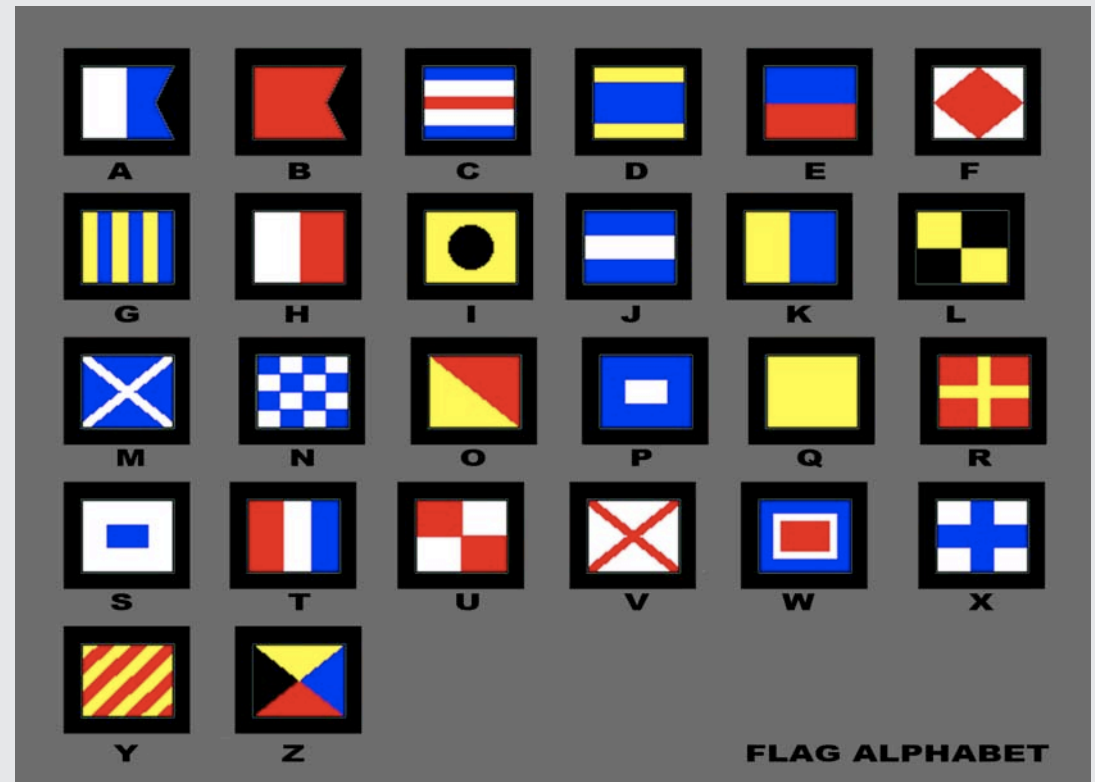
manual signs and codes for deaf people

The **Manual Alphabet for the Deaf** is used to spell out names and places for which there are no signs. Most words are not spelled out, however, but are communicated with a sign that represents the whole word or idea. **Sign Languages** have many advantages. In certain codes you can talk to any other insider person without an outsider knowing or understanding. It makes conversation easy in places when you must not speak aloud, as in school, during music, or by the bedside of the sick. It is universal. It deals not with words but with ideas that are common to all mankind.



FLAG ALPHABET codes through maritime flag signals

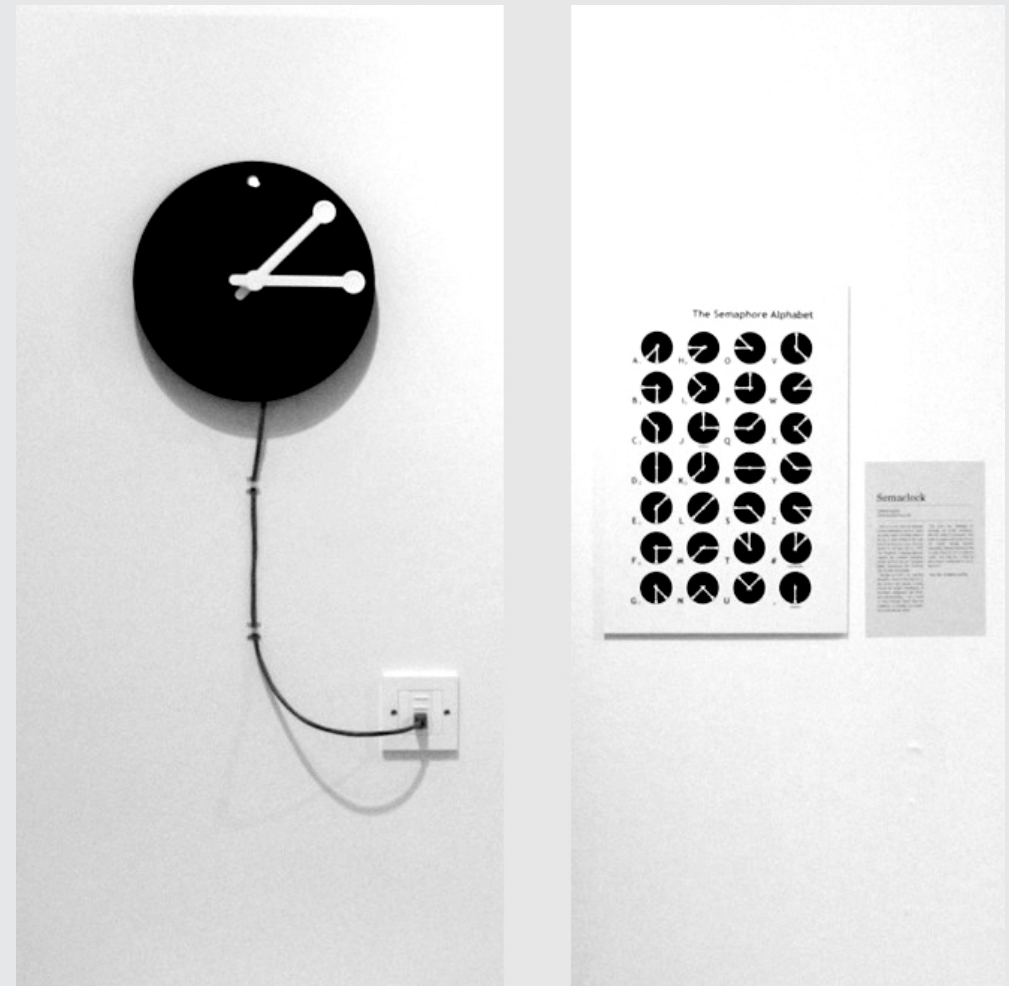
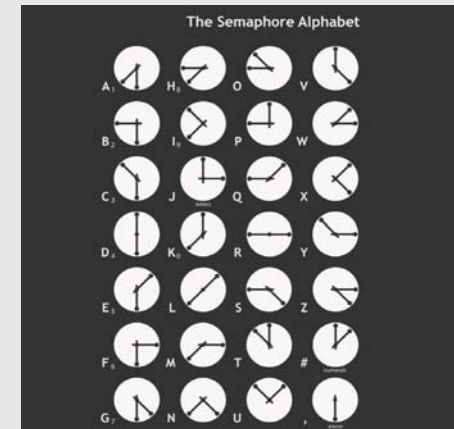
The **flags** in the image on the right are **international signals** used by ships at sea. They can be used to spell out short messages, or more commonly, used individually or in combination they have special meanings. Strung end to end and hung bow to stern from the rigging they are used to dress the ship for ceremonial and festive occasions.



SEMAPHORE ALPHABET

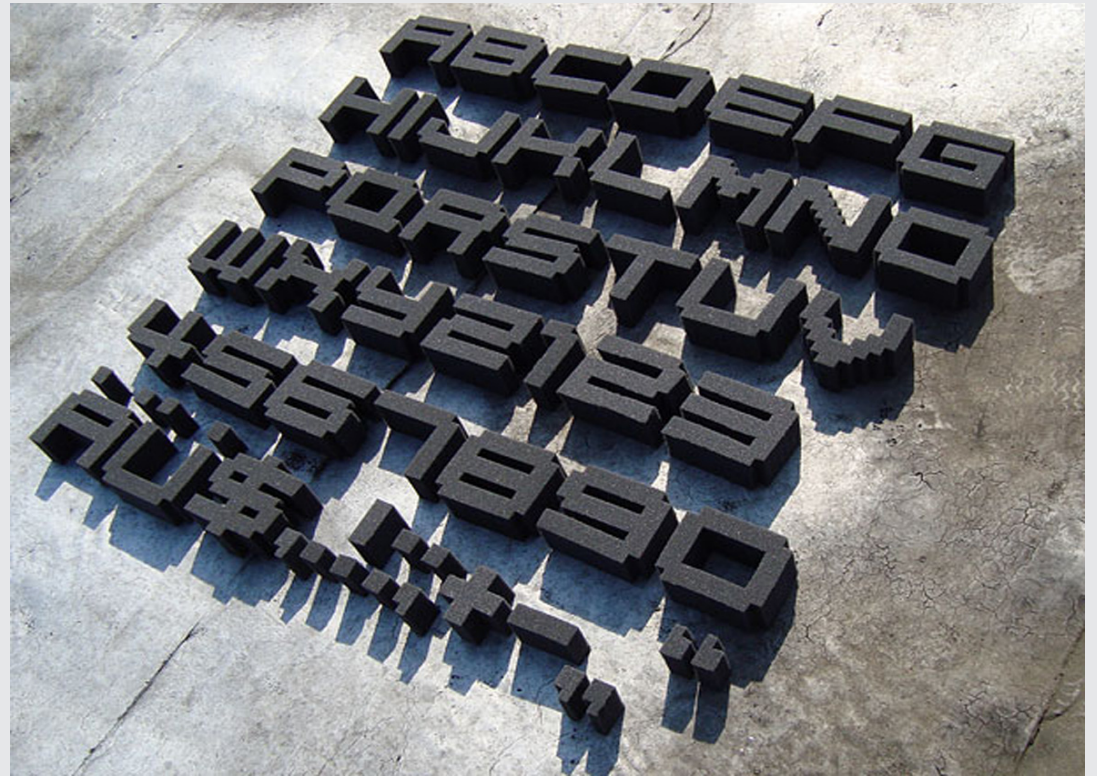
new original applications

Semaclock is an Internet device for people with **deipnophobia** or other social anxiety disorders. Plugged into a home, hanging on a visible wall, Semaclock connects to the Internet to retrieve news and topics of interest from one of the thousands of freely-available RSS feeds, and then displays them using the **semaphore alphabet**. Seating your guests with their backs to the Semaclock allows you to easily read the incoming items of interest without them noticing. The device on display here shows the three most recent headlines from the BBC Entertainment News website, although this can easily be changed by the device's owner to suit personal preferences.



RAKETENTIM a font is just a 3d code

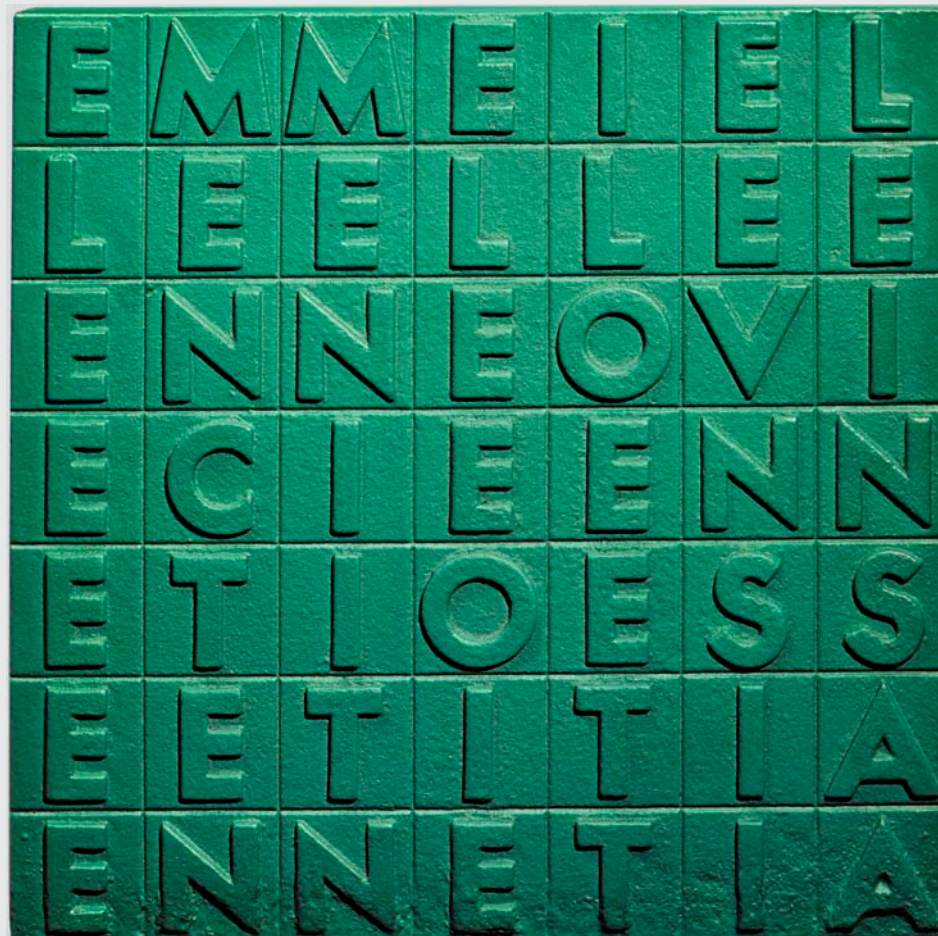
The font designer **Markus Schaefer**, from *raketentim*, a design-office operating in Berlin, designed a group of 3d fonts (see below a font created with the different positions of a tool-knife) based on real objects (even furniture) and their shapes corresponding to the 26 letters of the current phonetic alphabet.



typography can be a
multi function tool,
the quick brown fox
jumps over a lazy dog.

ALIGHIERO BOETTI
codes, ciphers and letters

In 1970, Alighiero sprayed a cast iron relief with green paint. It consisted of seven times seven square fields of letters. In Italian, the year 1970, *millenovecentosettanta*, what means “thousand nine hundred seventy”, was spelled out in horizontal and vertical rows that could be read from left to right. The transcription of numbers into letters is the **encoding** of a simple information. This creation, together with a knitted work which was completed shortly before, exemplify another basic concept found in Boetti’s work.



ALIGHIERO BOETTI
killing time describing letters

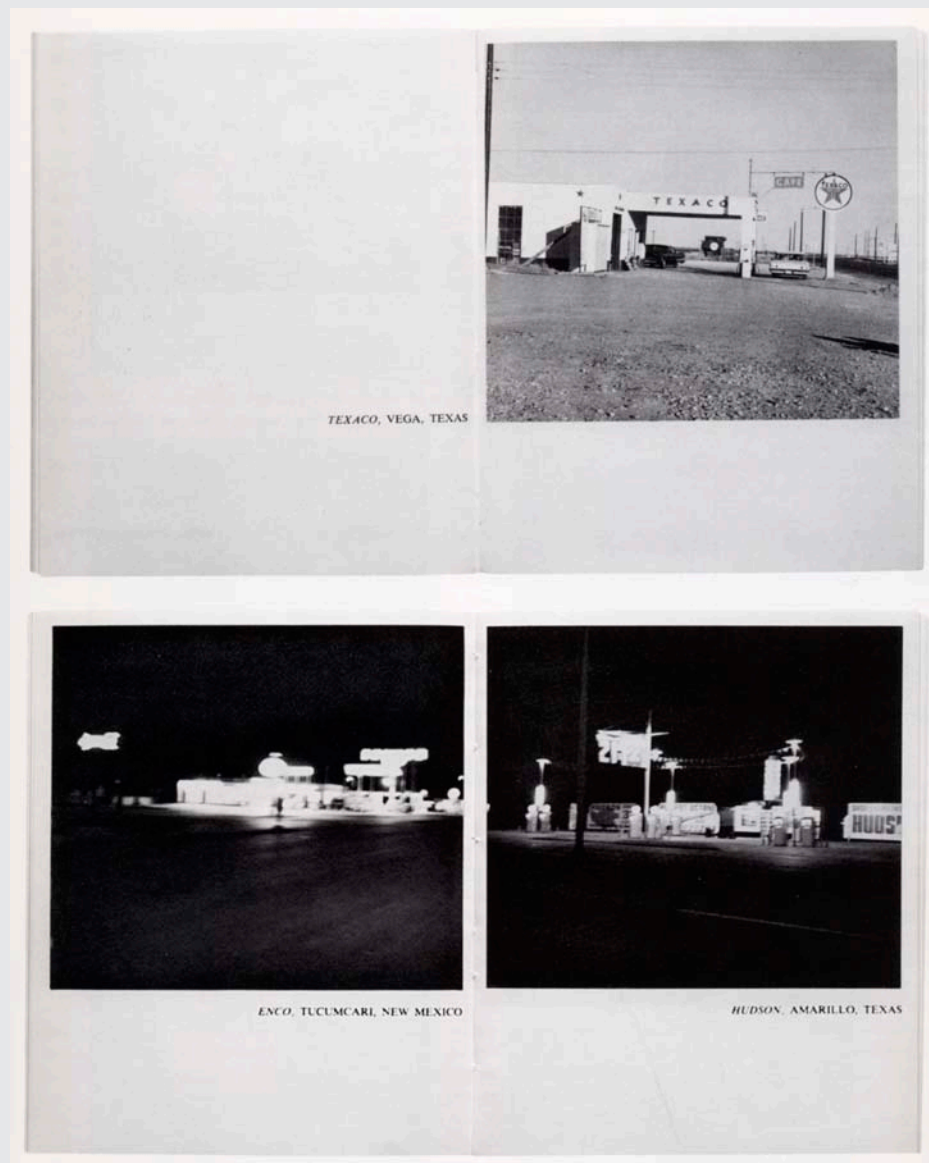
A is a nice, architectonic, male letter. *B*, by contrast, has female curves on a spine. *C* is the wing palace. *D* is a sail. *E* is not a letter but a conjunction. *F* is the renunciation exacted from *E* for it to become a letter. *G* is a spiral letter. *H* is the bridge. *I* is the bridge's support. *J* is a young lad (boy). *KLM* is an airline. *MN* are a couple. *O* is the mouth that forms it. *P* is a flag. *Q* is doubled in wild disorder. *R* is a walking letter. *S* the meanders and *T* the roof. *UVX* and *Y* strive towards *Z*.

(Alighiero e Boetti, *insicuro non-curante*)



ED RUSCHA
the alphabet in 26 gasoline stations

In a significant artwork of the american artist Ed Ruscha suggests the 26 letters of the alphabet. In his work **twentysix gasoline stations** he composes an alphabet book, indeed. Yet, if one plots all twenty-six gas stations sequentially from A to Z along a map of the route 66 from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City, one finds that in the book this alphabet becomes jumbled. The sequence of images reads instead: A B E C D I G H J K L F M N O R Q S T U R X Y Z V. It is easy to guess why the twenty-second gas station has been placed at the end, even though it is in Texas. Artist's freedom anyway.



ED RUSCHA

fascination of letters in the urban landscape

Ed Ruscha's work is reflecting a deep interest in the **details of the urban landscape**, like commercial scripts on walls, billboards, advertising and the shape of commercial buildings, as we could see in his important work of the 26 gas stations. It is an original way to follow the mainstream of his younger period of works, influenced by the pop-art.



FACE ALPHABET letters made from portraits

In an art-exposition at the Palais de Tokyo in the city of Paris (2005) the french graphic-design team M/M shows a new work: an original alphabet based on b/w photographs of human faces (portraits). Here the phrase: **these are the astronauts.**



"THESE
ARE
THE AS-
TRON-
AUTS"

LISA RIENERMANN
writing with buildings and the sky

In this project-work for a semester on the university of Duisburg-Essen (Germany) the student Lisa Riemann presented a new alphabet using photographs taken by exploring the **urban landscape** of Barcelona. The particular shapes of courtyards, street crossings etc. are used in a sight from bottom to the top, looking to the clear dividing lines between the facades and the blue sky.



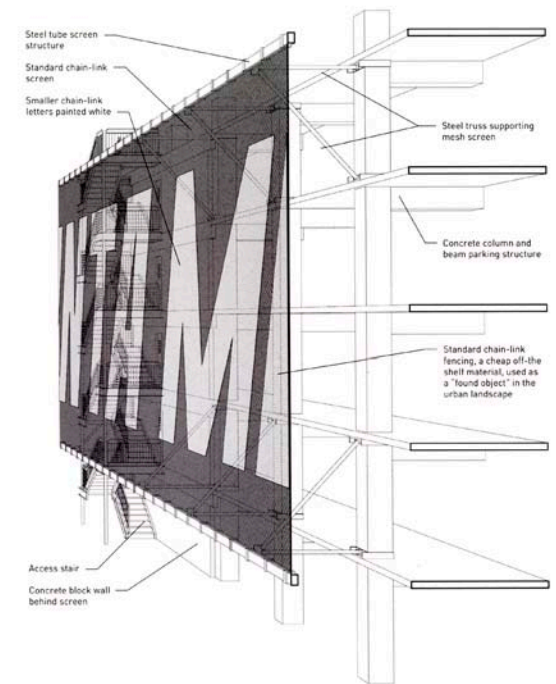
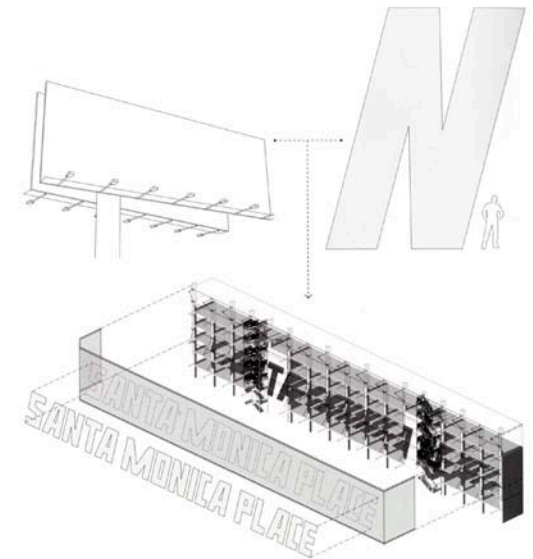
WIM CROUWEL
new tools, new letters

In the early 1964, at the first beginning of **computer-based working** on monitors, the dutch graphic-designer Crouwel launched a new alphabet wich proposed new letter-forms suitable for reproduction by a type composition system using a cathodic-ray tube.

_ j 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 k y
 _
 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

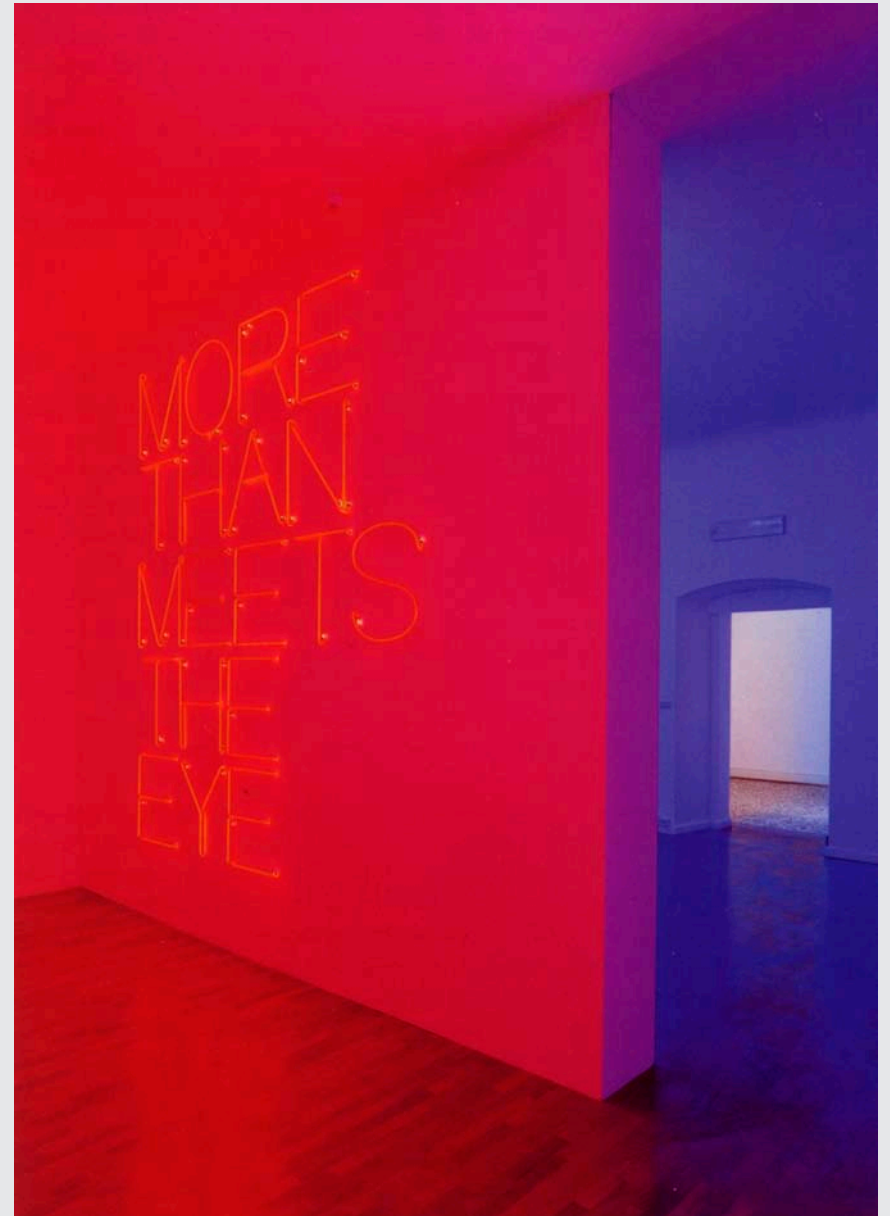
FRANK O. GEHRY giant letters forming a facade

The garage of **Santa Monica Place** uses a metal mesh screen to turn the surface of the building into a billboard at the scale of the city, screening the parking structure with large-scale lettering that signifies the name and presence of the shopping mall in an urban context. The shadows of the south facing screen move across the floors of the garage over the course of the day, producing an effect deeper than the thin surface of the facade.



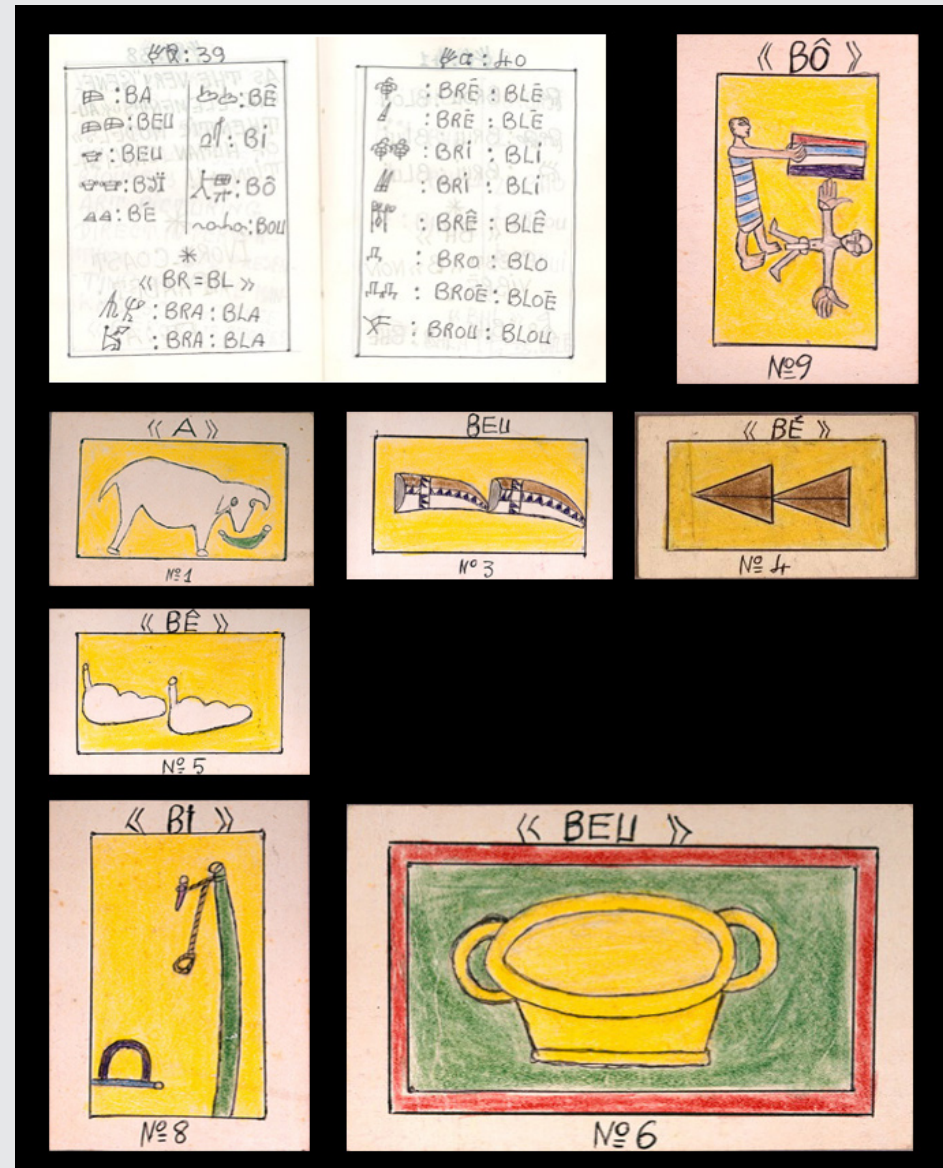
MAURIZIO NANNUCCI
colors, light and letters

For his **neon-light-lettering** works Nannucci uses an alphabet based on his handwritten poetic scripts. As capital letters (*more then meets the eye* - right) ore as more hand-written italic type (*deepblue* - top) wich is signalling subjectivity and individuality.



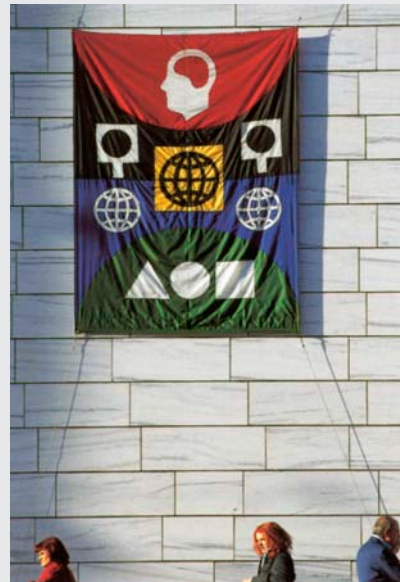
FREDERICK BOULY BOULABRÉ an alphabet on 448 cards

Frédéric Bouly Bouabré, an artist native from the african Ivory Coast, invented an alphabet of **448 monosyllabic pictograms** to represent phonetic syllables. This endeavor earned Bouabré the legendary reputation of being another Champollion, in reference to the great scholar and linguist Jean-Paul Champollion (1790-1832), who discovered the key to understanding Egyptian hieroglyphs. Bouabré's alphabet, which can transcribe all human sounds, reflects the essence of his thought: to achieve universality and to unite mankind.



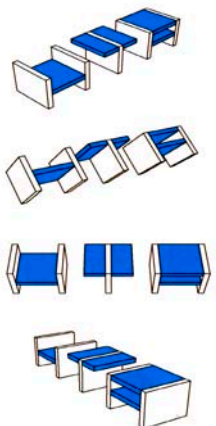
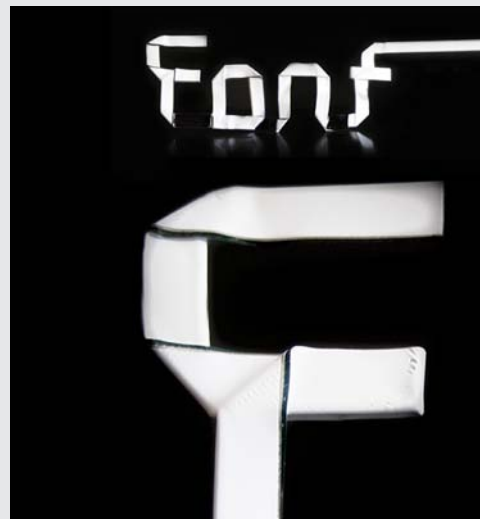
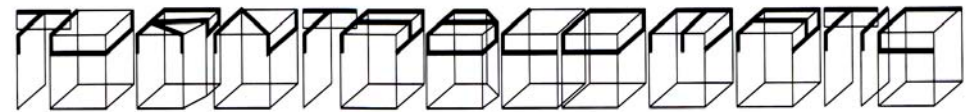
MATT MULLICAN
objects, codes, signs and symbols

The artist uses five basic symbols on flags to describe five different worlds : *elements*, *world unframed*, *world framed*, *subjective*, and *sign*, bringing together a whole system through an artistic view of the planet earth in his different aspects, using a real synthetic sign-language to communicate it. Like a shaman of the contemporary world, Mullican creates an alphabet to write and speak about his point of view on the human being in our days.



FONTS IN THE 3TH DIMENSION works of graphic designers

On the right above an alphabet of the swiss design group led by **Martin Woodt** made by the different surface-views in the 3 axonometric axes using a simplified version of letters. The german group **Augenbluten** created the logo (right, middle) using the axonometric rendering of a cube organising the letter-lines on his three visible faces. Below left the font of a polish designer, **Lukaks Samiez**, using a aluminium stripes to compose the different letters. Below right, at least, a work of **buffet fuer gestaltung**, working on letters to transform in furniture.



SPACE LETTERS axonometry and perspective

Julie Gayard with the graphic-design team named **jutojo** from Germany develops in a deeper way all the aspects of axonometry and perspective in representing the letters in the space. *Aspekte* (based on the axonometry) and *Jazzanova* (a sophisticated use of the perspective) are the more significative examples of this works, including a complete corporate identity of the clients.

