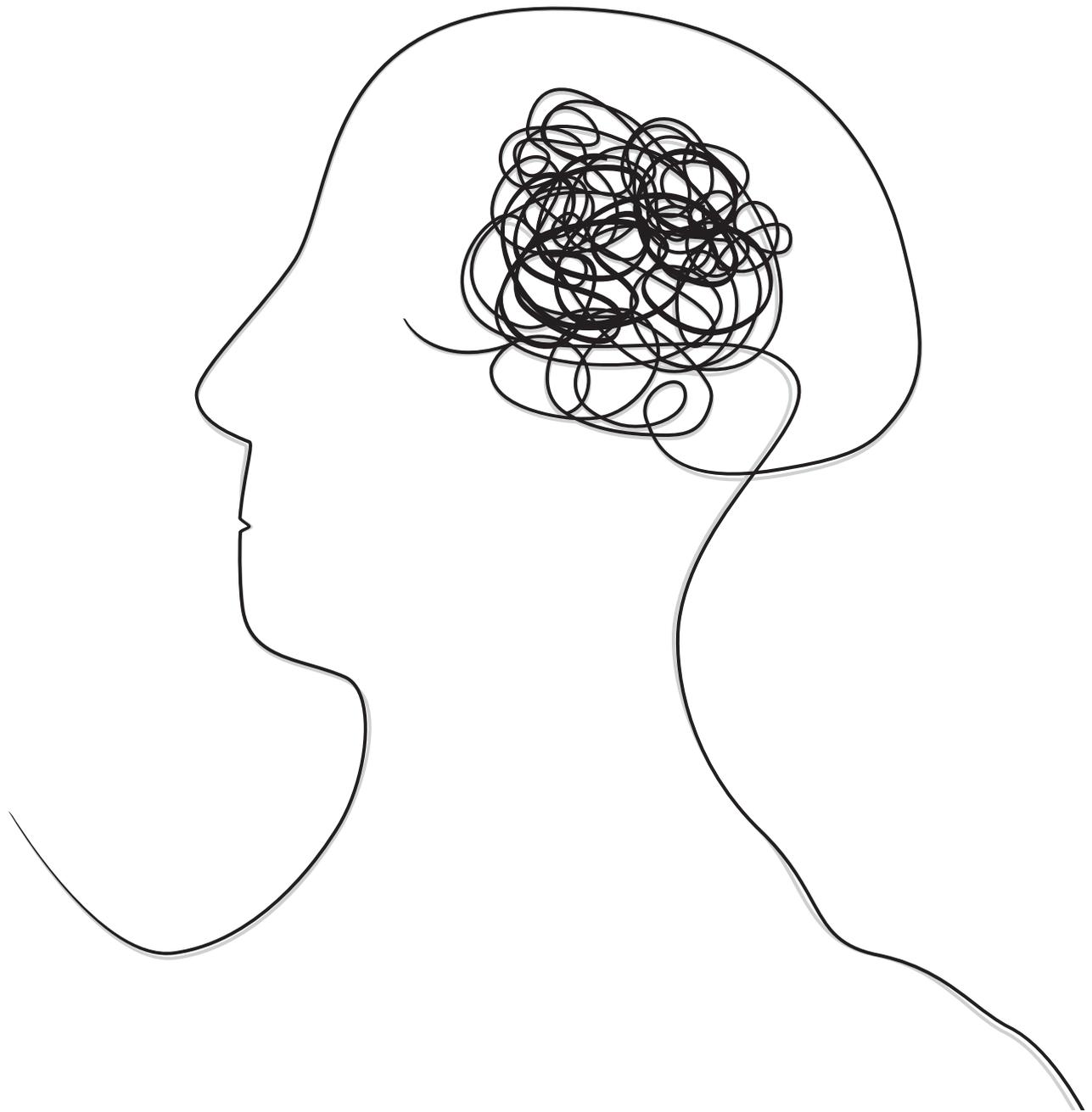
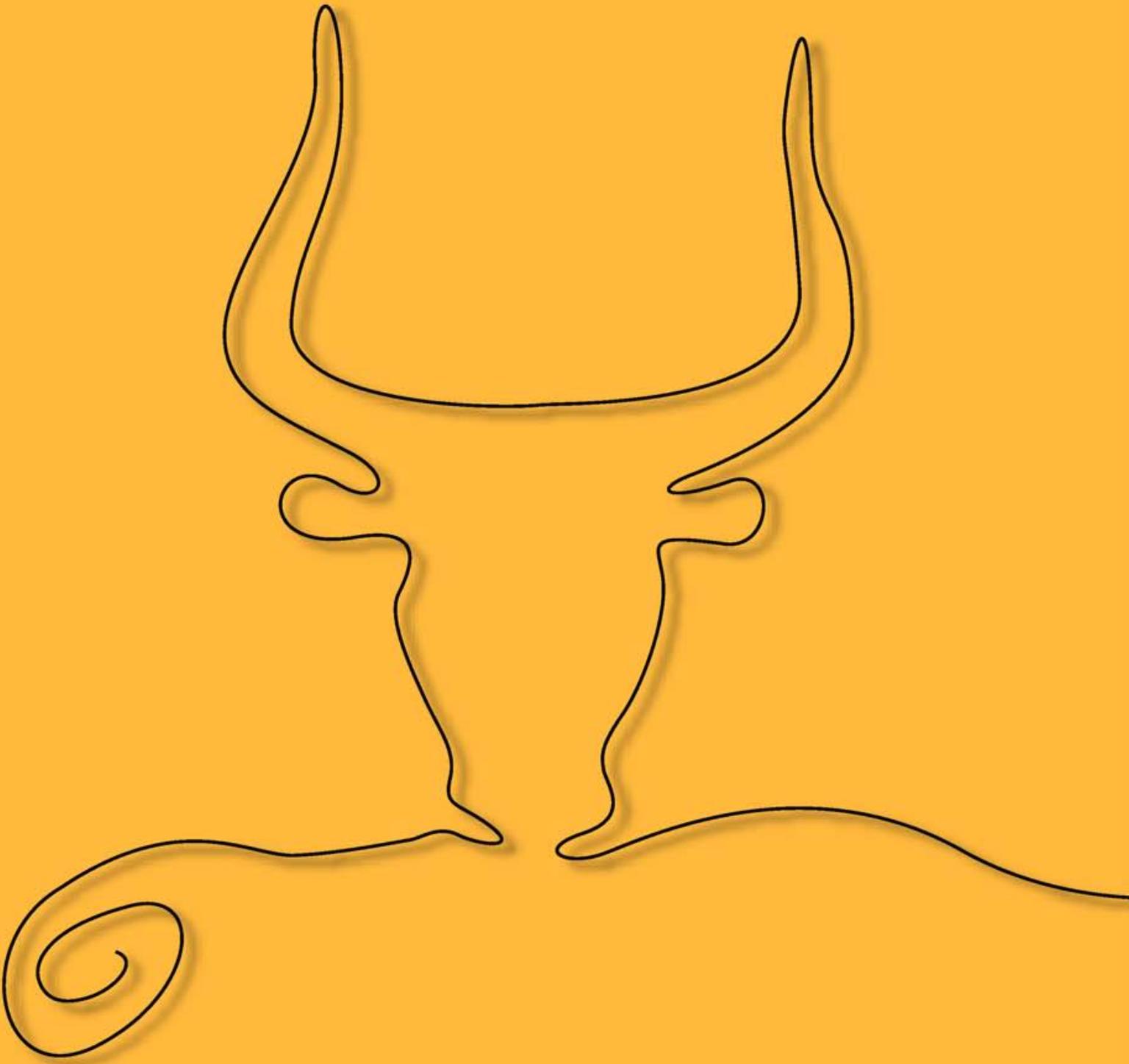


The A to B of wayfinding

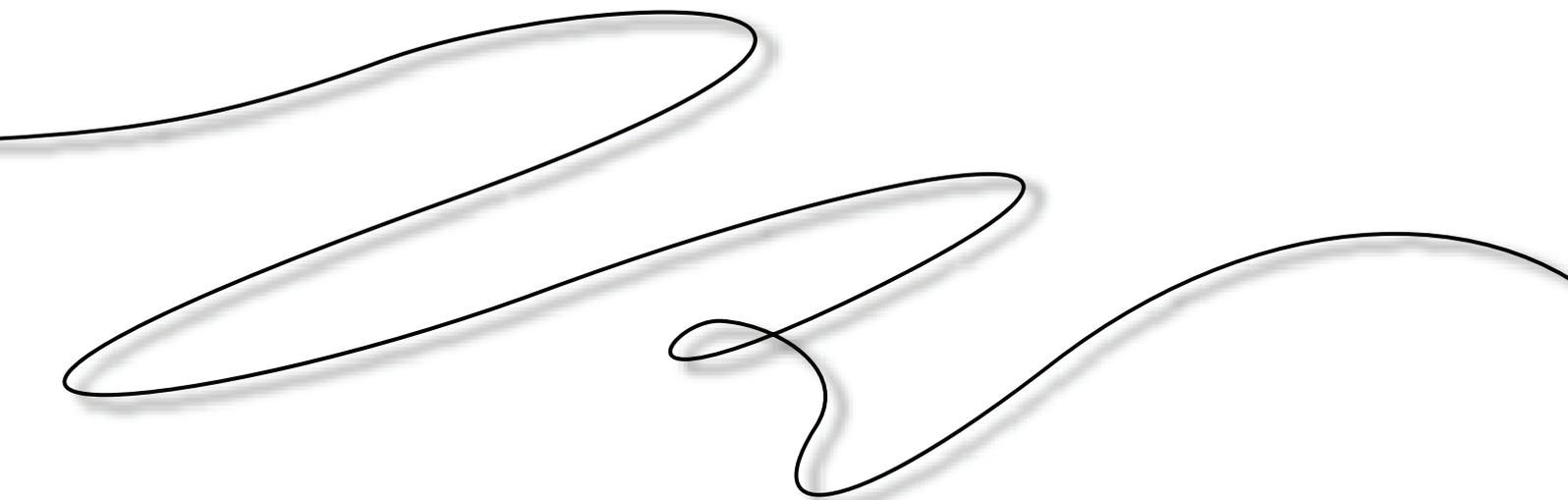


insideinformation
wayfinding design for spaces and places



Early beginnings

One of the earliest examples of wayfinding to be found in literature is the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur - Theseus cunningly found his way out of the Labyrinth by following a trail of string he'd laid earlier.

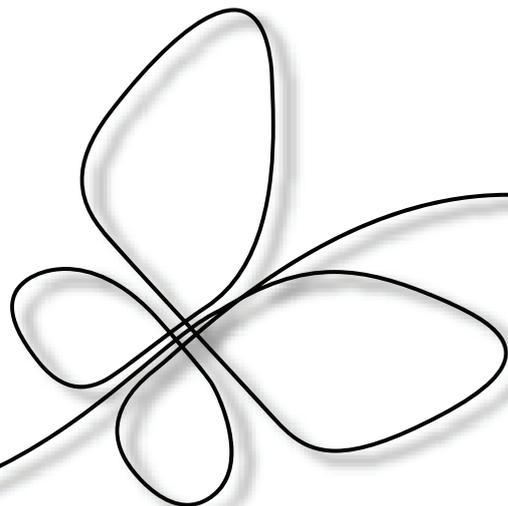


Where to?

Getting lost is unnerving. When we accidentally lose our bearings in the course of our day-to-day business, we're suddenly out of our comfort zone, and react by becoming flustered and anxious. Just imagine... you're late, you're in an unfamiliar, intimidating environment like a hospital or faceless corporate HQ, and you've no idea how to get to where you need to be – it's enough to make anyone break into a cold sweat.

Which is where 'wayfinding' comes in – it's a highly specialist design discipline that blends science, psychology and graphics. By feeding us the information we need, it takes the stress out of unfamiliar surroundings, guiding us gently to where we need to be, on time and at peace.

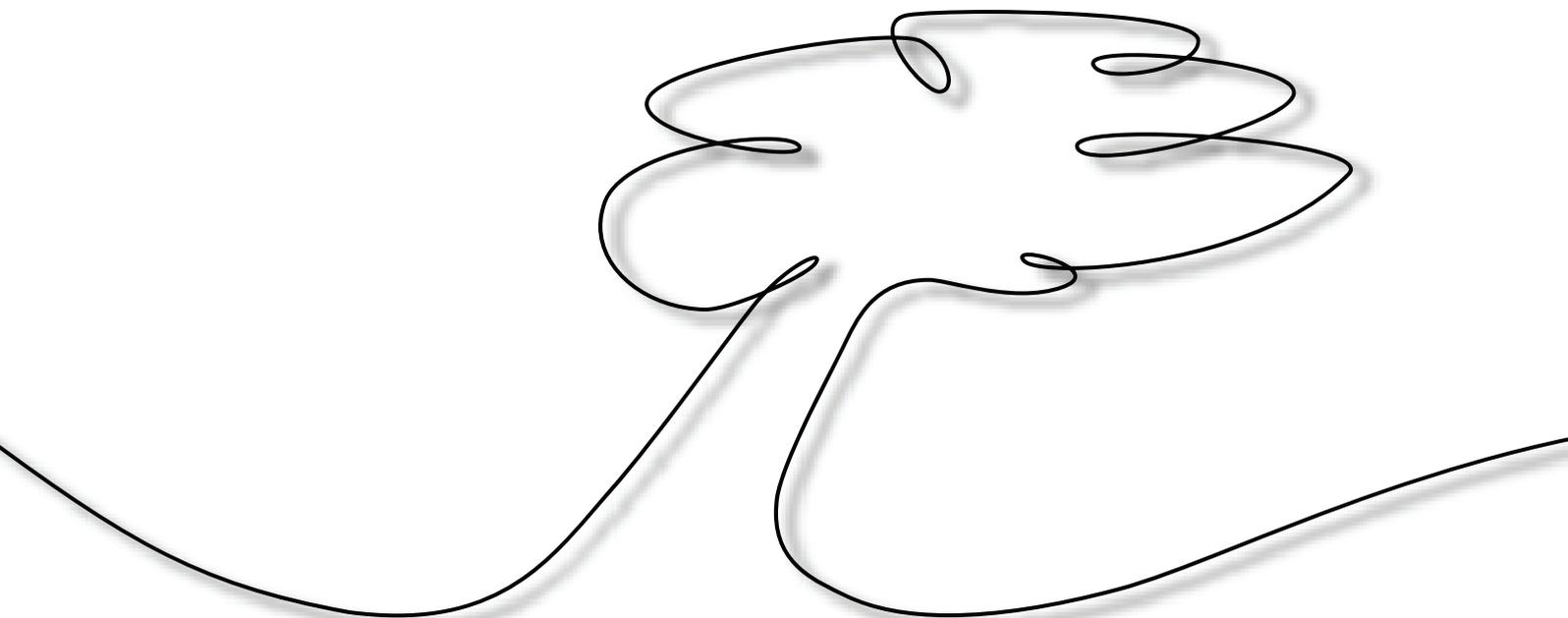
Wayfinding was born of necessity. Unfortunately, we humans aren't blessed with the innate sense of direction of our animal cousins. Cats, dogs, birds – even bees and butterflies – have highly developed homing instincts that can get them back across significant distances to their bones, nests or hives. Instead, we've had to develop our own means of navigating through unfamiliar terrain, based on basic memory and logic.



Lost in history

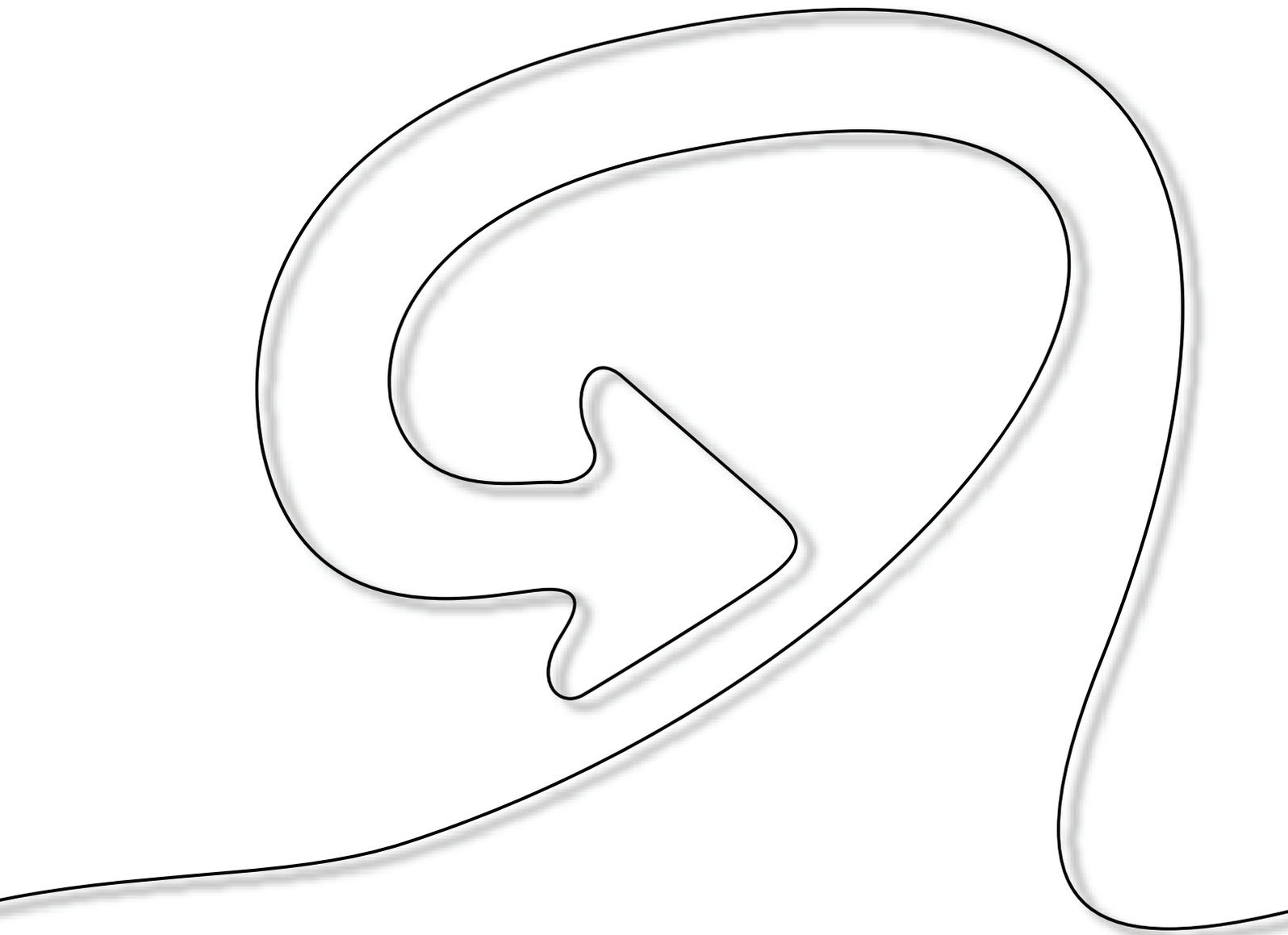
In ancient times, our hunched, hairy ancestors would have scanned the horizon for a large boulder or crooked tree; later, a church or castle might have provided orientation; even now we use familiar landmarks – “just past Pizza Hut on your left” – to determine our next movement. The Australian aborigines still use an ancient tradition of “song-lines” to describe and list the physical features along their nomadic pathways through the outback.

But as our lives have become more complex and sophisticated, a more structured, analytical approach to ‘wayfinding’ has evolved. From finding the right platform to board a train, to knowing where to find sausages at a supermarket – wayfinding information systems guide us through the maze of everyday life. They’ve become so embedded in our culture that, so long as they don’t inadvertently send us on a wild goose chase, we barely notice them.



Spaces and places

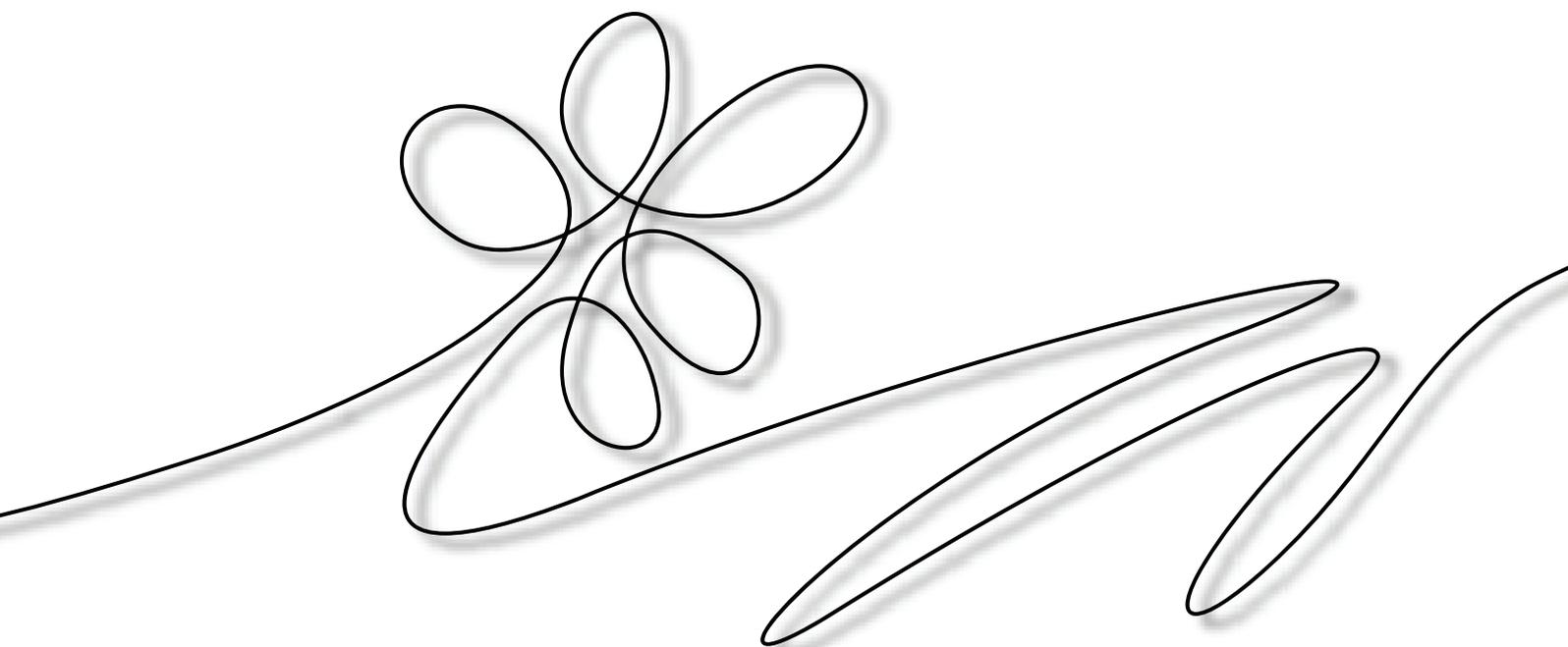
The key to its success is devising a graphic language that the man in the street (literally) understands instantly, that rationalises spaces and places, and gives people relevant information when and where they need it. As well as being technically demanding, wayfinding carries real responsibility; in emergency situations, where every second counts, people need to know where to head – and quickly.



Character building

Wayfinding works by giving people the visual information they need to build a 'mental map' of a building or environment. The problem – particularly with institutional buildings – is that there's very little to distinguish one floor or corridor from the next. By giving areas a distinctive character, they become easier to identify, and people can start to develop a mental picture of how one zone relates to another.

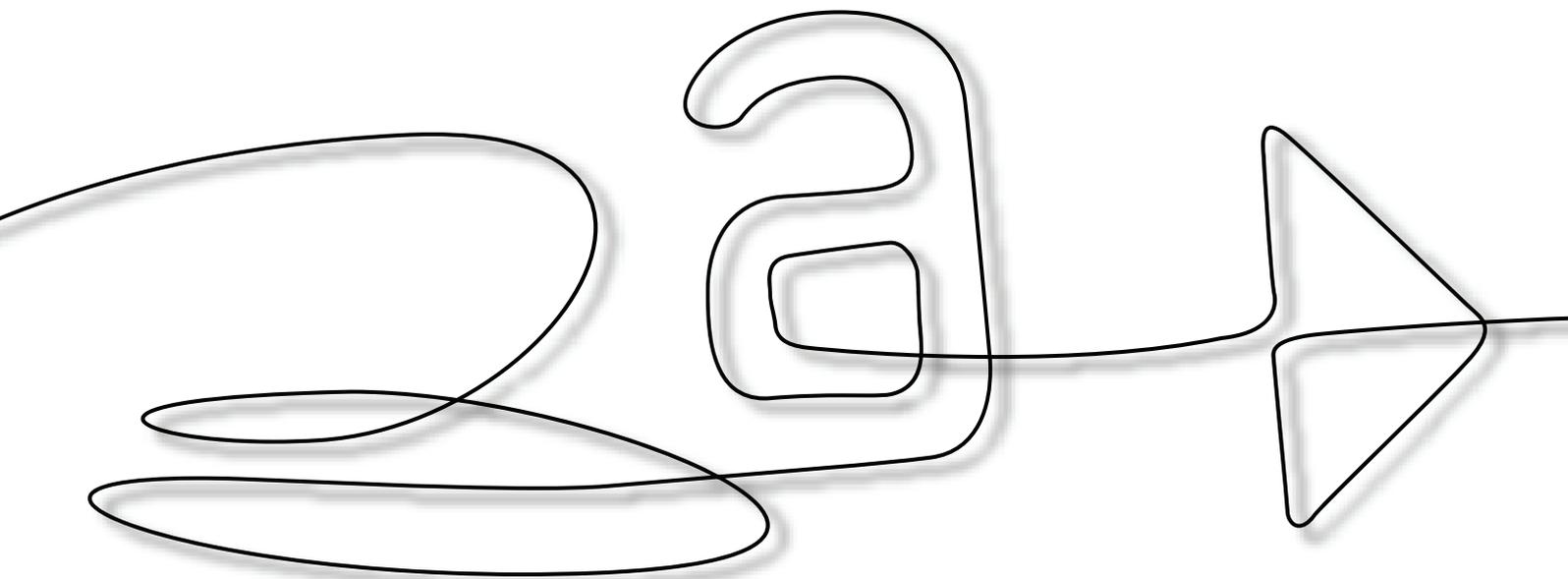
In a way, this harks back to the concept of the large boulder or crooked trees. A variety of visual clues like different lighting, wall colour, floor finishes, furniture, prints – even foliage and sculpture – can be used to create differentiation and sense of place. Numbering and nomenclature (giving zones memorable thematic names) further reinforce the evolving 'mental map'. And the final piece of the jigsaw is directional signage – a considered system of information, icons and arrows to point people on their way.



The early bird

Wayfinding specialists are a vital part of any major development project. Their strategic input at an early stage can dramatically affect the way a building or public space works – saving people time, minimising potential bottlenecks, improving accessibility, making optimum use of on-site facilities. They work closely with architects, project managers, space planners, interior designers, landscape designers and traffic designers to influence the way people perceive and interact with their space, helping them to make the most of their surroundings.

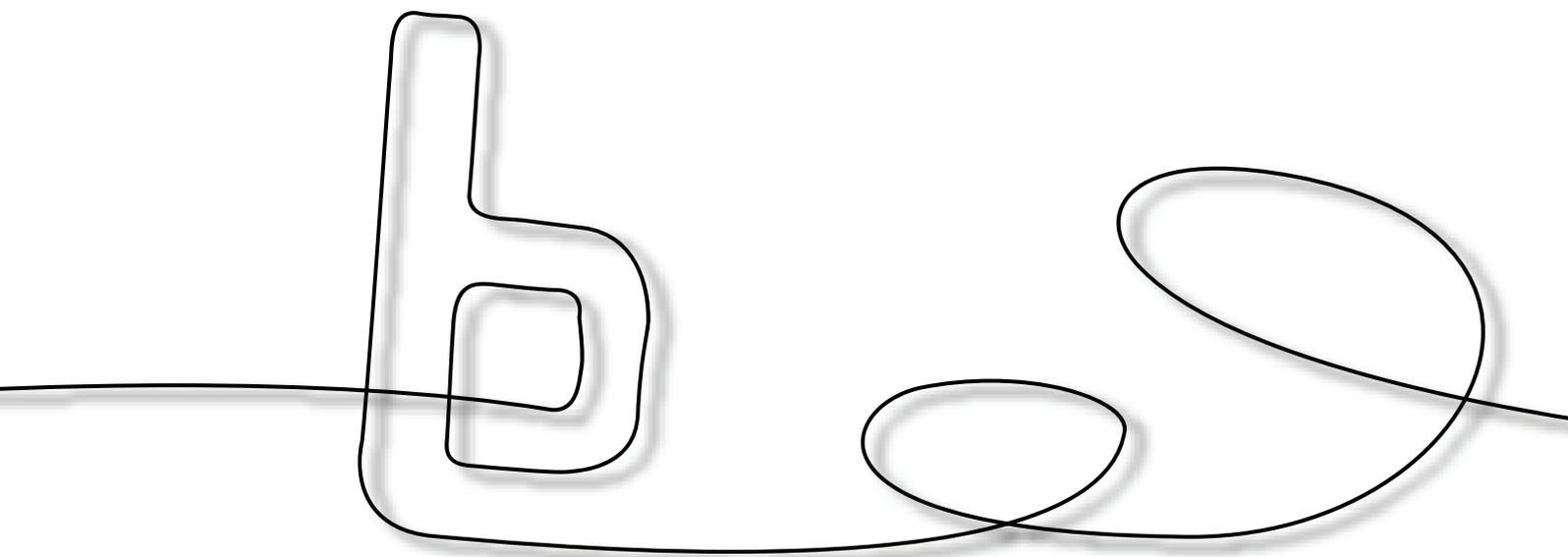
The sooner critical information design issues are addressed the better. Early adoption helps to co-ordinate the roles of the various interested parties, focus thinking, and refine the overall design brief, to achieve a coherent, hard-working wayfinding system that benefits each and every user. This way, it becomes an integral part of the space, woven into its fabric, rather than an unsatisfactory afterthought.



Good company

As well as its obvious practical benefits, wayfinding also has a vital role to play in corporate identity and branding. If you want guests, staff and clients to feel positive about your organisation, it makes sense that they should feel comfortable and at home while they're on your premises. Getting them from A-B without circuitous alphabetic diversion goes some way to achieving this. Then there's the look and feel. Graphic elements like corporate typefaces, colours and imagery should also be incorporated into the wayfinding system – creating a powerful physical manifestation of the identity.

Though wayfinding systems are highly visible, if they're working well, we use them intuitively. They become ingrained into the overall architectural and branded aesthetic, and we follow them on an almost subconscious level. It's only when we're lost, late and have broken into a cold sweat that we curse the inadequacy of the information. And heartily wish the management had commissioned a wayfinding specialist.

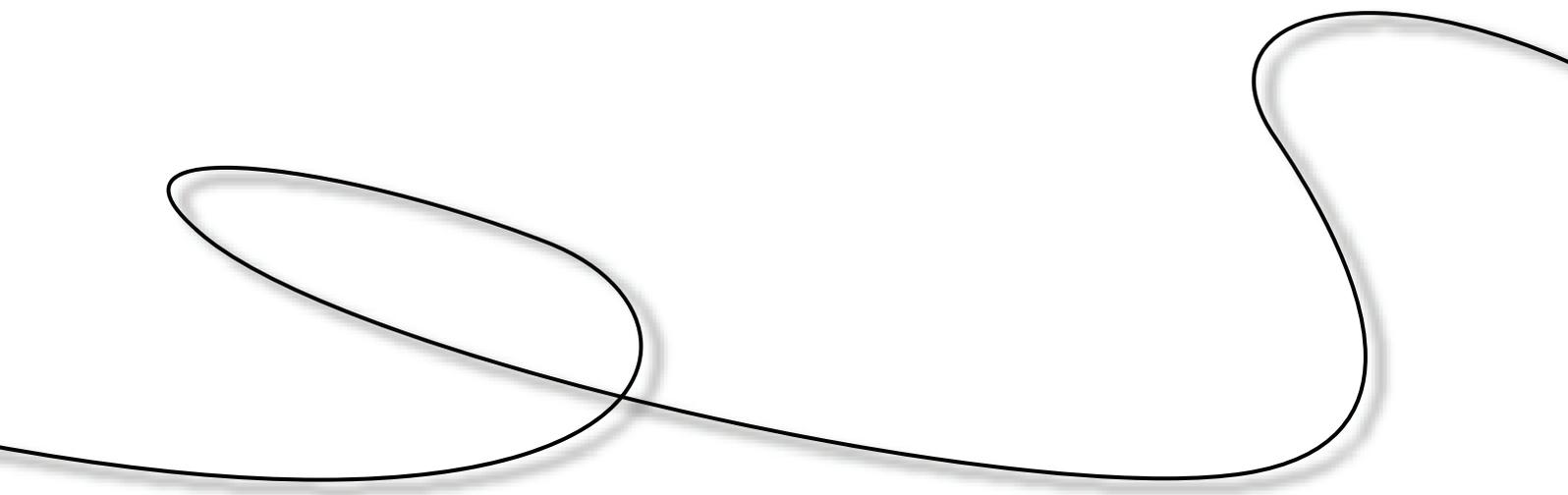


Inside Information

Inside Information is a specialist wayfinding and graphic design practice that develops and implements wayfinding strategies for the built environment.

We're experts in helping people *not* get lost.

See examples of our work on
www.ininfo.co.uk





Contact us

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