

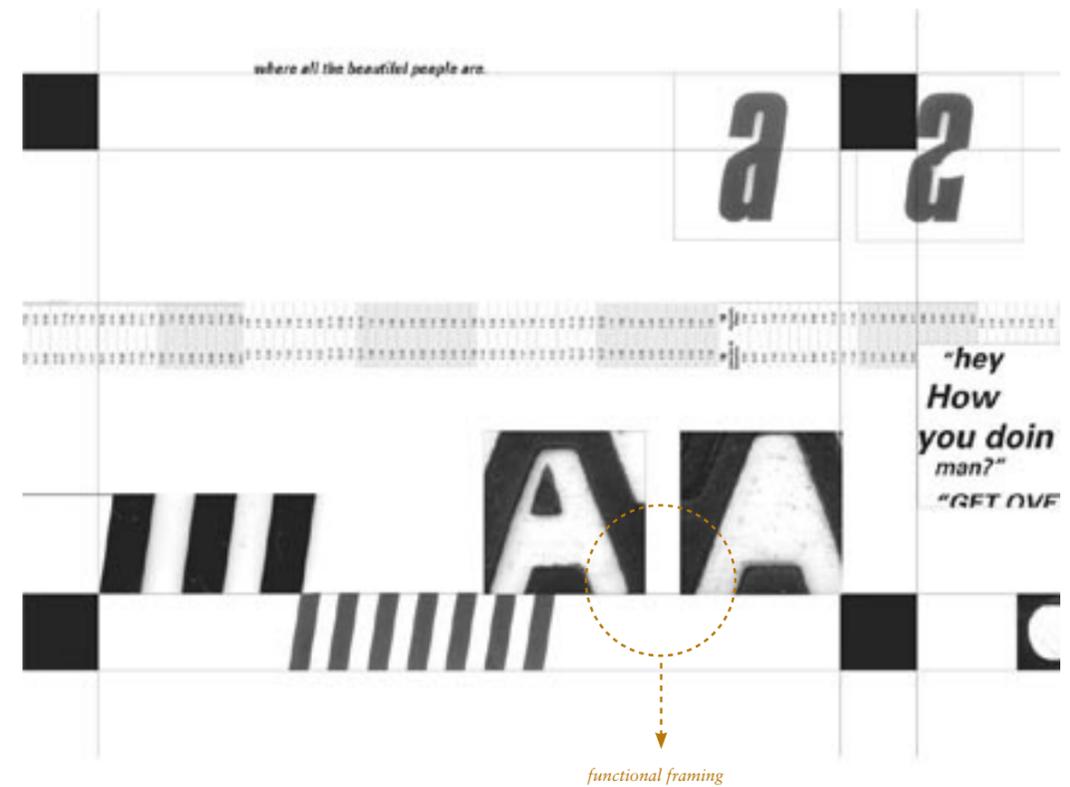
frame 'kennedy plaza'

A project that drew from an utterly different source content; the experience of walking through Kennedy Plaza bus terminal in Providence. As per the project brief, we were asked to use some comic book conventions as a way of creating the visual narrative. I realized there was rich potential in using comic book 'frames' to help me organize the narrative content I was dealing with. This adaptation began with a real-life experience; the challenge was to create visual language and system that could re-enact this story.

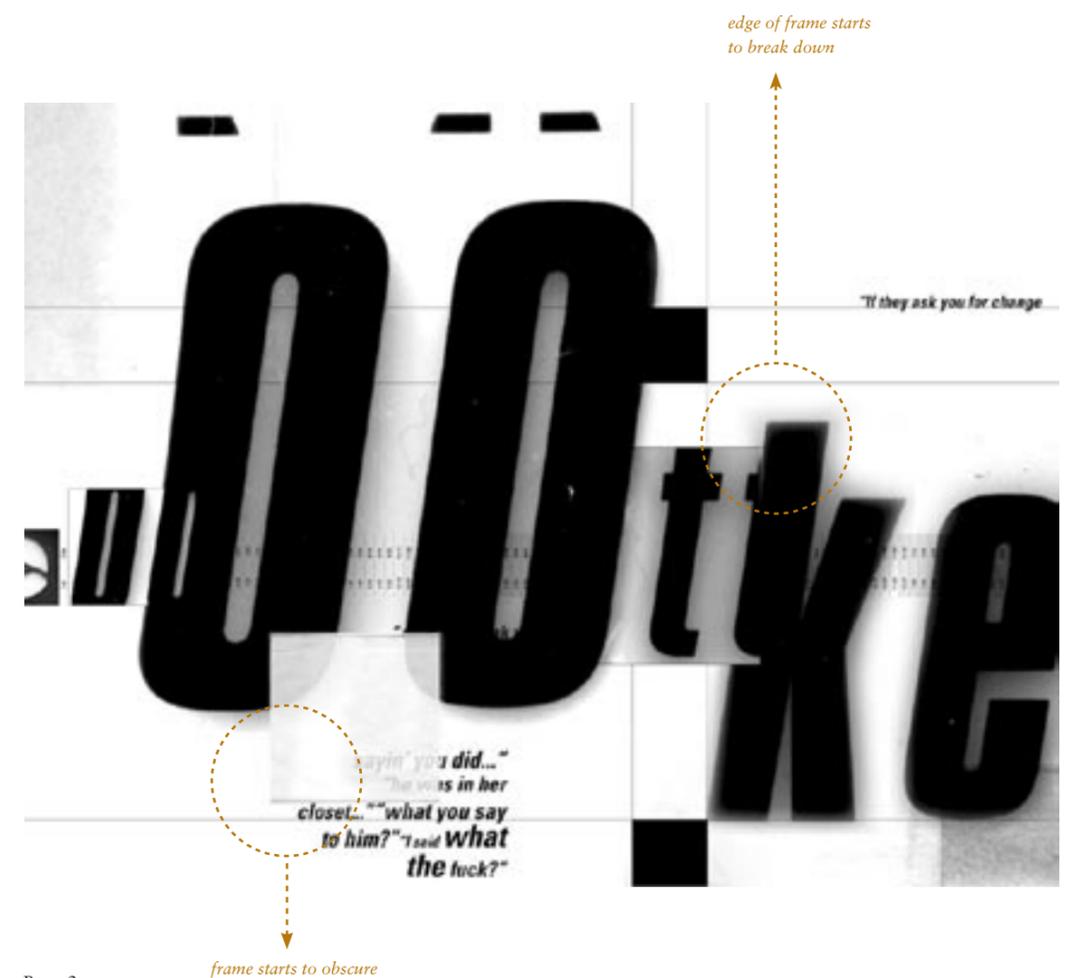
This was a study in telling a story over time; immediately sequencing became a paramount consideration. The nature of the story I was telling was highly fragmented and transitional. The story/experience was actually a story of transition, a tracking of the movement through a place; a physical movement and a psychological progression. The experience begins getting off a bus, and moving through the terminal. I decided conversation and voice was the means by which I would tell this story. I physically located myself in the terminal by the voices I was surrounded by, the snippet of conversation I was privy to. These conversations are initially audible and therefore visible on the page. Gradually, conversations overlay upon each other and interrupt each other, creating a strange flow of sentences and phrases. Sequence becomes non-sequential. By the end of the sequence; voices merge into what became a solid mass of white noise – almost a hum that blots out all location and orientation.

Framing; Building and Breaking a System

The notion of the frame concealing as well as revealing was adapted literally and visually. In other words, I worked with purely formal qualities of fragmentation and obscuring via the literal frame. The frame became the primary tool with which I built a system and then allowed it to break apart. This was an exercise in allowing the frame to start by revealing and end by concealing the visual matter of the narrative. In the opening spreads of the sequence (see right); I used frames to build a system. Frames create points of focus on the page. They lead to eye to read the most important bits of dialogue. While the letterforms within frames might seem non-sensical, the audience learns to recognize the frame as an organizing principle of some sort; a way of organizing the page and the 'story'.



Page 1



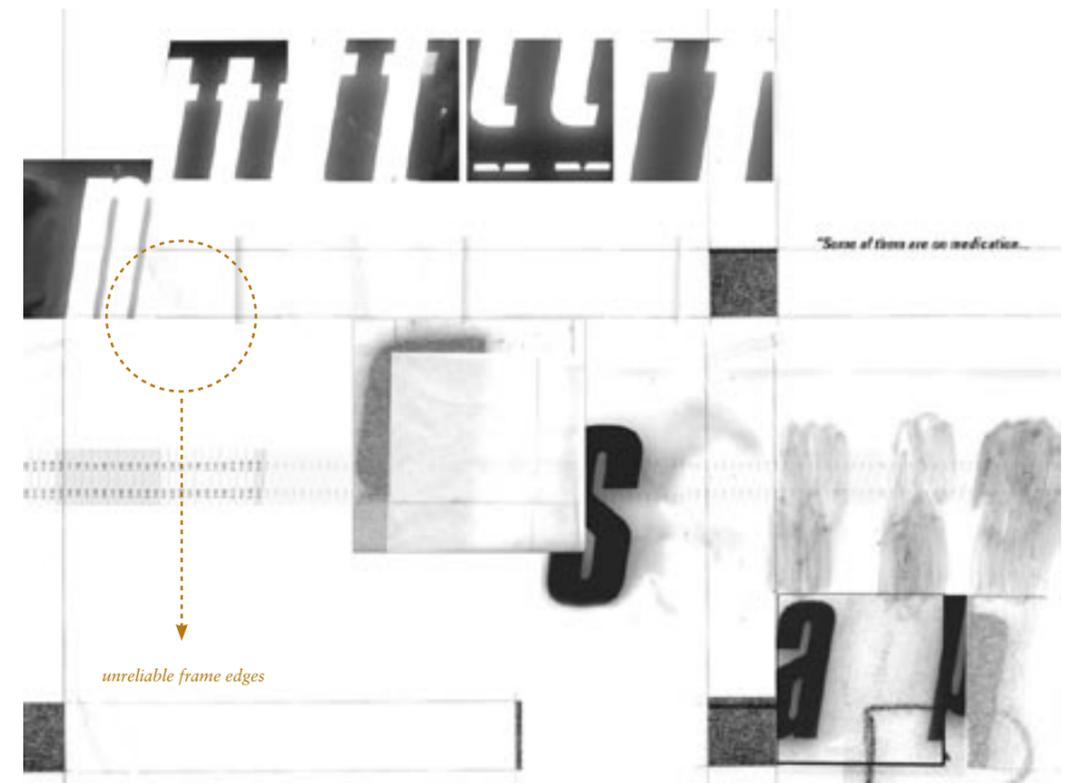
Page 2

frame 'kennedy plaza'

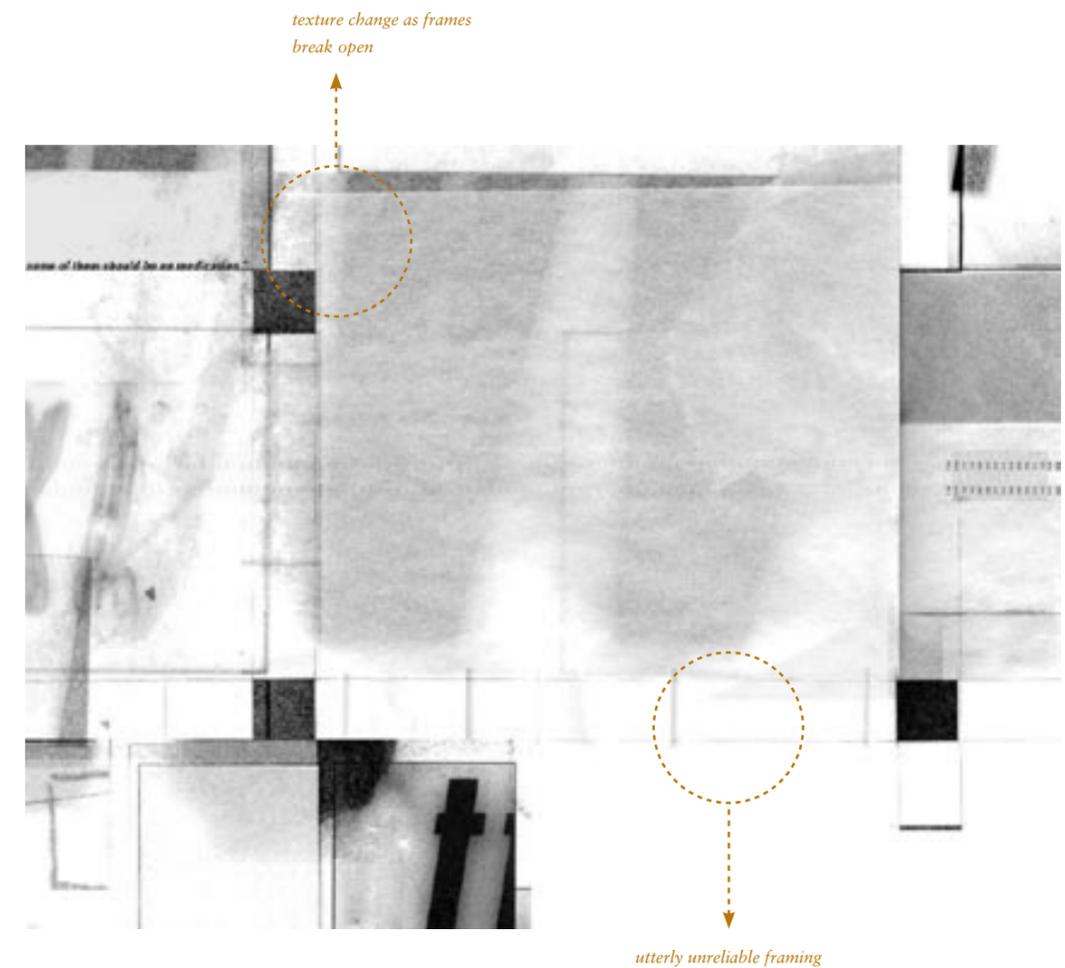
Framing; Building and Breaking a System

By the middle of the sequence (see Page 3) the frame no longer 'frames' information logically; it instead crops and therefore distorts the words/letterforms. I used the frame to emphasise this distortion, as seen in the 't' sequence in Page 3 where the small t's are repeated horizontally, the frame cropping them differently each time. The negative space created by letterforms also works to break apart the frame; as the 'm' on the far left is doing. What remains consistent in this and all spreads is the voice of bus driver; "Some of them are on medication", the bus schedule, and the grid structure that mimics a bird's eye view of the plaza itself and its bus stops.

By the end of the sequence (Page 4) – all aspects of the system I have built up start to break down. The frames break apart entirely and content spills out of them and all over the page. They frame nothing – the system has completely deteriorated. Layering tracing paper was a way of giving these frames a depth while imbuing them with a sense of emptiness. This was a way of creating a solid white mass on the page - a visual equivalent of white noise. Subverting the traditional notion of the frame allowed me to subtly create a breakdown of logic and sequence.



Page 3



Page 4

juxtaposition formal tensions



As with the method of ‘framing’ – this term functions both literally and metaphorically. The most literal form of juxtaposition is visual juxtaposition, when two elements are brought together into some kind of interaction on the page/screen. The ensuing formal tension can work metaphorically to imbue the narrative with a deeper sense of suspense. This can also be applied to other elements of the visual narrative; creating a tension between the aural and visual qualities of a sequence, or even between two aural elements, such as two voices or two soundtracks. Usually – different levels of juxtaposition occur within the one narrative simultaneously. Just as Hitchcock created localized and meta-suspense within the one film – formal tensions also work on multiple levels to create points of focus within the sequence as a whole.

Juxtaposition can also be applied to less visible aspects of a visual narrative; a tension between story and plot. Subtle renditions of juxtaposition are created by playing with the clash between the narrative and the mode of narration. Manipulating narratorial point of view can create suspense by bringing to the audience’s attention the friction between a story and the telling of the story. Juxtaposing two tones/genres/styles in the one narrative creates a similar effect.

Juxtaposing two or three points of view creates this tension even more overtly. By re-telling the story from various perspectives, the breadth of the original tale gets cracked wide open. The audience can tread the line between the fictional novel and non-fictional story at its core – and then be pulled back once again to realize they are hearing the voice of the author talking about his own life. This is reminiscent of the final scene in “The Wizard of Oz”, when Dorothy wakes up in Kansas and realizes the world she thought existed was in fact fictional, though overlapped with the real world being inhabited by non-fictional characters. Through different projects, I experimented with testing out different modes of juxtaposition in the service of creating visual narrative.



Juxtaposing point of view; Modernism, Cinema and Kurosawa

“Modernism in the cinema may be said to begin with a re-examination of a structure based on flashbacks in order to bring out the ambiguity inherent in the construction of a narrative out of images derived from different points in time or differing personal viewpoints.” 85

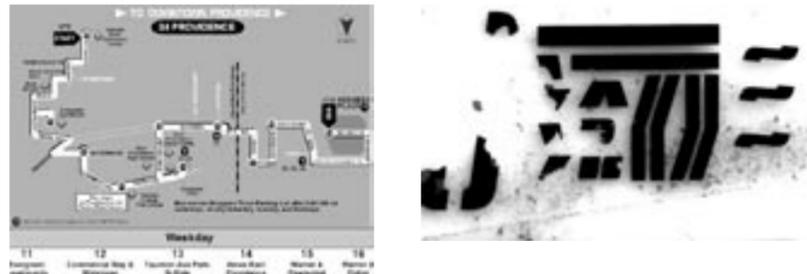
The method of telling a story through multiple perspectives is a modernist narrative practice (see 2.1; Modernist Narrative Forms). In Akira Kurosawa’s masterpiece *Rashomon* – one can observe the principles of fragmentation and multiplicity in shaping the film’s story. Following the first plot re-telling in *Rashomon*, “each subsequent plot reconstructs major story elements and implicitly deconstructs the other versions. Thus the progression of plot constructions also traces implicit forms of rebuttal.” Kurosawa plays with different forms of juxtaposition – by not only re-telling the same story through different narrators, but also shifting the mode of narration of these speakers. The three narrators at the gate, the priest, the commoner and the woodcutter tell the same story with their own motives - bringing up the paradox of representation for the viewer. Each character’s re-telling becomes a sort of intertext in the next character’s re-telling.

Kurosawa therefore uses the juxtaposition of modes of narration to create a sort of conversation of voices, rather than a cacophony. In other words – multiple viewpoints do not overlap confusingly; this multiplicity actually works to ‘construct’ the story and flesh out its dimensionality. It becomes a three-dimensional object the viewer can walk around and see from different perspectives, rather than a closed system.

‘*Rashomon*’



juxtaposition 'kennedy plaza'



While this project used framing as a method to control and generate narrative; it equally used the method of juxtaposition. It was entirely about creating friction between elements; this fitted the nature of the content – a journey from calm to panic, from voices to white noise, from orientation to utter disorientation.

Juxtaposing Tone and Story

The perfect was to create an underlying tension in a piece is to create a friction between the tale, and tone of telling – in other words, between the narrative and the narration. The story I was working with was action; it was physical plot, physical movement and events. Using a purely typographic language to try and capture a real experience was a challenge. It involved a level of abstraction – of abstracting events and actions down into visual metaphors of themselves. In designing this sequence I learnt this has the effect of both heightening and muting the action. An abstracted re-telling of an event renders it into an allegory of sorts, it becomes generalized and less recognizable – simply due to the fact that instead of seeing the face of the man telling the story, we only see his words. The type therefore, must embody that man's face, that man's tone, the sound of his words. It must perform. When done well – this can heighten the action, render the original events into an even more engaging and compelling performance than they were. This was my driving impulse in designing this sequence. The clash between the story and how I was telling it, needed to heighten the drama.

Juxtaposing Voices

The other fundamental juxtaposition I was working with regarded the voices/characters of the story. While I initially felt I should be the narrator; I quickly realized this was not 'my' story – rather it was the story created by a large cast of disparate characters whose lives I passed through. This story needed to be told by multiple narrators. My own narratorial function was to invisibly choreograph this cast of voices into a sequence that the reader/viewer could logically be moved through. Within this typographical language I had limited myself to; I needed to create vocabulary that could encompass all the characters, voices, and emotions of the experience of Kennedy Plaza. I decided to work with two basic levels of type; one to represent the actual conversations heard and one to function as atmosphere, the way staging, lighting and music add tone to a script. The interaction between these two voices would create the drama of the sequence.



nuance in the type language



negative spaces

letra-set and tracing paper

These two type languages are initially kept separate on the page, divided by frames (see Framing) that represented to some degree the physical separations of the place itself; benches, fences, bus-stops. The letra-set language begins visually echoing the type language of those speaking – in terms of scale, placement and texture they are fairly uniform. This is when the place is calm, when the physical action and atmospherics are harmonious. As the sequence builds, the letra-set language visually deviates from the rules of the system; no longer sitting within the grid lines, blowing up in size to obscure lines of conversation. By the end, the size and texture of these visual type elements overwhelm all other elements on the page – literally covering all other sound. If the relationship between these two type elements is originally a tense interaction, by the end the nature of this juxtaposition is hyperbolic. One completely sublimates the other. Narrative resolution is achieved in this way. Wipe out.

