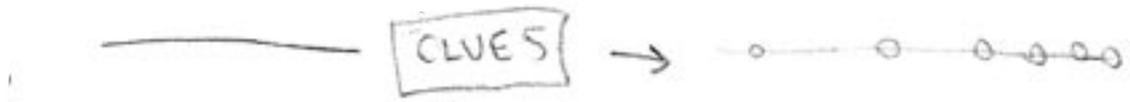# clue cataphor/foreshadowing

A staple in every mystery narrative is the clue. The strategy of using clues is the strategy of breaking a complete narrative into pieces that are only revealed to the audience gradually. Clues fuel the notion of stalling action – they re-enervate still points in the narrative flow and peak audience interest, make sense of confusion, and hint at what is to come. They are localized points of clarity amid a blurry landscape – that should function to give meaning to that blurry landscape, make some sense of what has passed and impel the audience to venture on.

The clue can be seen as foreshadowing – and may take many forms. The use of clues can vary from an informational clue (footnote, caption), a clue to orient the audience (page number, street sign, chapter heading), or a more subtle clue to evoke emotional/tonal state (typographic treatment, colour, texture. The power of the clue can be less about the content of the clue itself, and more about its placement and recurrence in the narrative whole. In graphic design, as in film and literary narrative, how clues are slipped in and built up is of central concern –and repetition is the prime method by which clues can build meaning within a narrative system.

Converse to the notion of imbuing an object with significance is the idea of red herring also - when an object audiences are made to believe is a clue actually becomes repeated and distorted to the point that it becomes black and white marks on the page – ultimately meaningless.

"Suspense depends upon highly specific advance references."

- Alfred Hitchcock

Hans J. Wulff discusses how Hitchcock created the experience of suspense in his films essentially through visual clues; what he called cataphors, *"...the spectator's recognition of specific future-related narrative cues...an advance reference signaling some event or action that could occur later in the story."* [90] Interestingly, the cataphor may be an object, but can also be thematic or stylistic. The use of visual clues goes beyond simple creating visual/aural motifs in a narrative – it is about imbuing these motifs with a sense of significance, through their placement and pacing in the overall sequence.

Hitchcock was a master of creating object cataphors. Importantly, more often than not what appears to be a significant object or motif turns out to be a red herring. The cataphor's potential role is that it makes the audience envision a future event, an event which might never take place. In fact, the power of the well-used cataphor is its power of suggestion. From the glass of milk in "Suspicion", to Guy's lighter in "Strangers on a Train" – Hitchcock has a way of giving objects an eerie resonance in the viewer's mind.

Guy's lighter; 'Strangers on a Train'

The glass of milk; 'Suspicion'

Object and stylistic clues; Alfred Hitchcock

The use and effectiveness of cataphors is reliant on the notion that suspense is ultimately about the audience's interaction with the narrative form. They can function less as the traditional clue in a detective story, and more as a method for intensifying audience involvement with a narrative. The thematic cataphor essentially directs the viewer's imagining of how a situation can play out – but as with his use of object cataphors – often the first use of a thematic cataphor works to create expectation in the viewer that is never actually met. In other words – the hint of a bomb under a table about to go off affects the way audience's watch every movement in that room from that point onwards – even though the bomb never goes off. It never has to – the suspense has already been implanted. Hitchcock also played with blurring the line between the situational and prospective clue; "*Hitchcock's cataphors reveal the internal logic of his suspense films, it is not surprising that what seemed to be merely situational has a progressive aspect to it.*" [91] An example of this is "North by Northwest" – when Cary Grant's character is plied with alcohol and made to drive his car down a dangerous road. On the surface this cataphor of the protagonist's imminent death seems to create a suspenseful sequence within the narrative whole. When Grant survives the ordeal, the possibility that he might be killed stays with us for the rest of the film, and therefore imbues all the successive action with a heightened suspense.

The role of the stylistic cataphor is fascinating in that it shifts the conventional view of what a clue is and how it works. Hitchcock's stylistic clues are more than simply repeating camera angles or types of lighting – they are power but subtle clues into character state of mind and underlying thematic aspects of the film. Their impact is derived from how they are paced throughout the narrative sequence – the distance of the foreshadowing. Vertigo is a wonderful example of stylistic cataphors – with the visual clue of downwardness being alluded to from the film's opening as Scottie hangs from the side of a building. Falling is a stylistic motif that recurs "*...as a figure for the fate of both Madeline/Judy and, metaphorically, for Scottie himself.*" [92]

'*Vertigo*'

Reading about Hitchcock's use of cataphors in his films is highly suggestive of how visual clues can be used in graphic design work. The strategy of imbuing objects with certain significance, creating a codified system with parts that reference certain meanings – seems to almost be the definition of how a typographic system operates. Cataphors in film are very much about how parts relate to the whole – how one piece of the puzzle can point to larger motifs, or to other corresponding pieces that we only see later. Visual references of this kind can work just as powerfully in graphic design visual narratives.
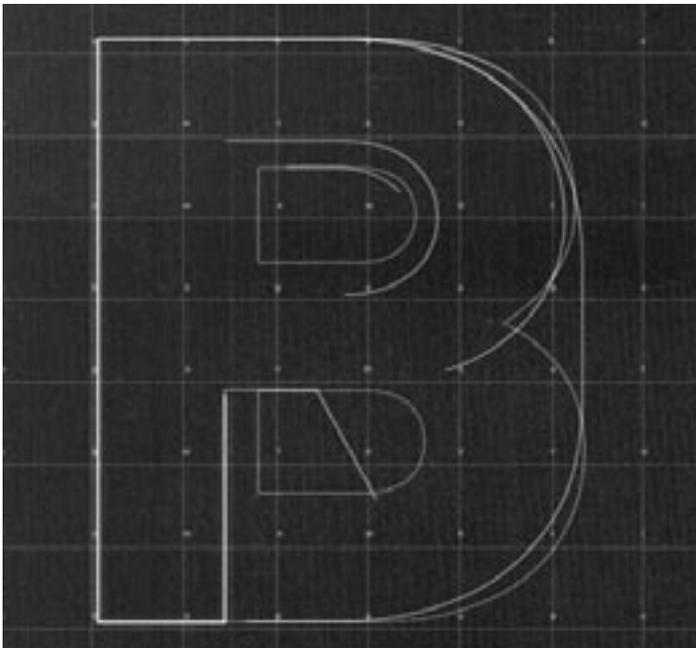
clue **'type families'**

The strategy of using visual clues was applied in this project as a way of relating parts to the whole – in the build up of a system and a narrative. This project grew out of a semiotics class; and essentially involved bringing together the seemingly disparate themes of connectivity and family. My choice of a typographical language actually fleshed out the theme of family – in that type is organized as a family and in many ways behaves as a family does.

My objective in "Type Families' was to create a systems generating system - one that begins to function on its own and inspire new ideas and new directions from within, rather than me applying these ideas upon it. The construction of a visible system was central to my thinking - by using the concept of written language - and having family as an interpretant factor - my representamen was very much about building up a system before the audiences eyes. Looking back now over the work I did on this project - I feel I did create the beginning of a system that was beginning to function in a generating way.

Understanding whether the visual language I created is working yet as a visual system involves checking against some criteria of systems. Rather than just having a systematic appearance, I wanted this sequence to operate as an interaction among parts - to function as a 'kit of parts with rules to combine them'. In my understanding - a system involves a strong interplay between semantic and syntactic languages - a fluid movement between the two.

clue 'type families'

The narrative was organized in two generalized parts – the first being a sort of embryonic stage where we see pieces that don't yet form the whole. I visually translated these as pieces of letterforms. The overall flow of the sequence is parts, that then break into the smallest element, and then builds back up into letters that form a system; a family. I used the grid motif as structural link between the various stages of the narrative. It is a foundation upon which connections occur. This allows for a logical transition from the first section (which I saw as pre-family, or pre-connection) to the second phase the beginning of the continuity phase. When the grid flips - its connection points are made of many tiny new letters.

The letter 'B' was used as an object clue in this sequence – in that it recurs in different incarnations and to create new meanings throughout. It first appears as one of the letterforms trying to build itself but is thwarted. Later, Here, the elements that have been separated into different layers merge into a space where they speak to one another and push the narrative further. The 'B' is then used in the sequence that explores the continuity between the faces of different letters. Now the 'B' as a part is used in a different visual metaphor. The letter functions as parent/originator - spawning little b's that sit next to it. In this way, one part of the system performs different functions depending on the context it sits in. I was trying to enfold many meanings within one letter form - and allow that form to work as a signifier for many meanings as the piece develops.
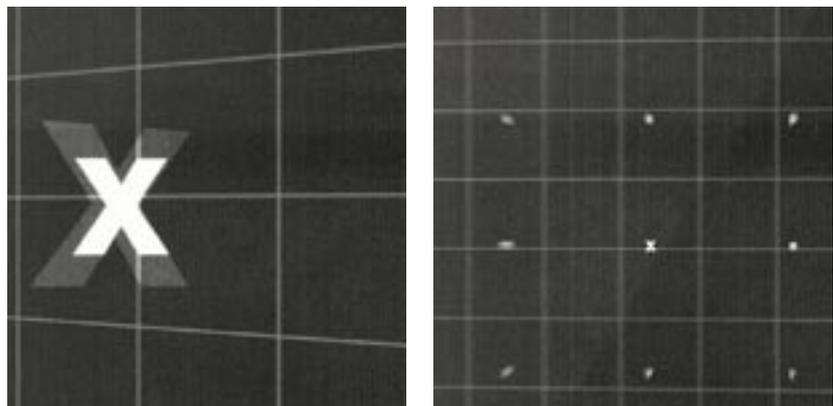
The letter 'X' functions similarly; it is both a subplot in the larger narrative flow, and a way of transitioning from one part of the narrative to the other. The 'X' is at one stage just a tiny point on the grid - and then becomes its own character with a storyline when we zoom into this letter and see it rotate before our eyes. It then returns back to the system/family structure.

The first appearance of 'B' is in the 'fragmented' section of the sequence; when it is a trying to become a letterform. This letterfrom allowed me to transition towards the second part of the sequence.

The 'B' breaks into two pieces which form a small circle. I saw this as the amoeba - the smallest part from which a system can be built up from.

To make the transition from fragmentation to continuity/connectivity obvious to the audience - I literally inverted the entire system. The grid created around the one dot spins 180 degrees, from day to night. We enter a new space - where the second half of the narrative plays out. The story setting is now the mirror image of the original space.
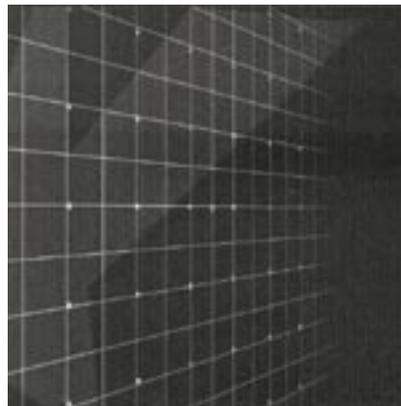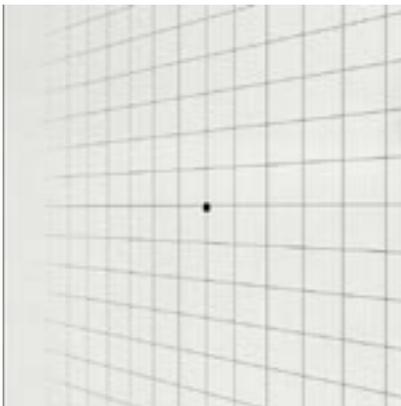
The final storyline for the letter 'B' begins with the face of the letter growing from the face of other letterforms. This visual clue then shifts one final time to function as the parental letter - spawning baby 'b's which line up beside the larger letterform.