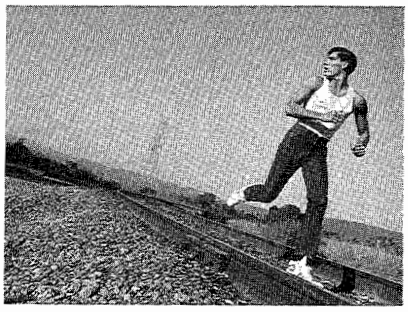


Figure 7.9 Tilting the Horizontal Plane—People
By tilting the horizontal plane, you can intensify the feeling of physical or mental stress of someone running from acute danger.

Magnetism of the Frame

The borders of a picture field act like magnets. They have a tendency to attract objects near them. This magnetic pull can be so strong that it counteracts our natural reaction to gravitational pull. Take a look at Figure 7.10a–c and note how the black disc seems to be "glued" to the upper border (7.10a). The gravitational pull comes into play only after we have moved the disc a considerable distance away from the upper border and its magnetic attraction (7.10c).

The sides of the screen also exert a strong pull. As you can see in Figure 7.11, the discs do not seem to be pulled down by gravity as you might expect; instead they are attracted by the magnetism of the frame's sides.

The screen corners are especially magnetic and tend to pull objects near them right out of the frame. Obviously, you should avoid compositions whose dominant lines lead directly to the corner of the screen (Fig. 7.12).

The most stable position for the disc is clearly screen center. Here it is farthest away from the magnetic pull of the screen edges, and the force of the pull, however weak, is equally distributed (Fig. 7.13).

If the disc is large and wedged into the screen, it is subjected to the magnetism of all four edges. As viewers we have the feeling that it wants to burst out of the frame's confinement in order to expand (Fig. 7.14a). Of course, the magnetism of the screen edges is not the only

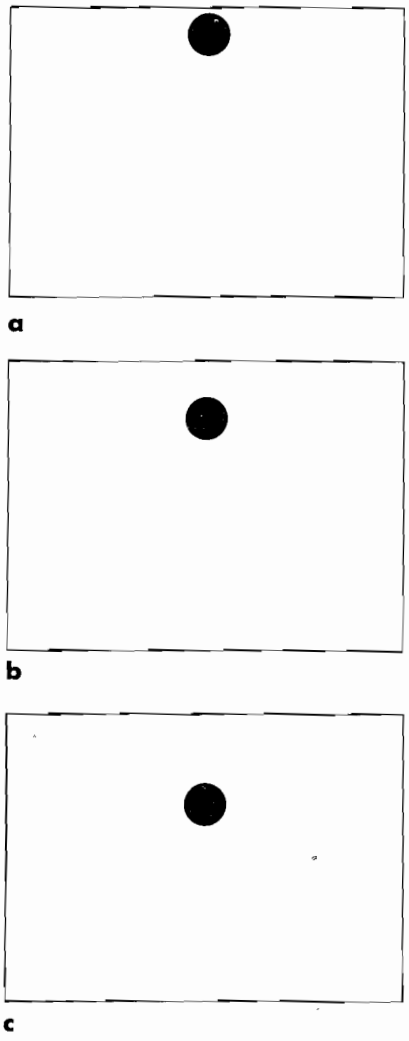


Figure 7.10 Magnetism of the Frame—Top Edge
The edges of the screen exert a strong pull on objects near them. The disc in (a) seems to be glued to the top edge despite the normal downward gravitational pull. The pull of the frame is strong enough to hold the disc up even when there is more space between the disc and the edge (b). Only when the distance between top edge and disc reaches a certain point does it become too great and gravity takes over.

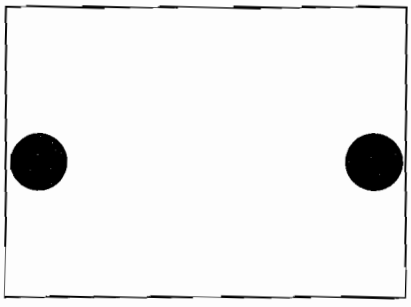


Figure 7.11 Magnetism of the Frame—Sides
The pull of the side edges is so strong that it easily overrides gravitational pull.

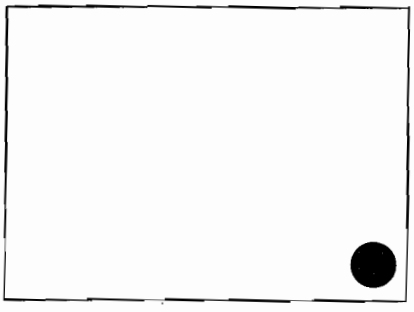


Figure 7.12 Magnetism of the Frame—Corners
The screen corners exert an especially strong magnetic pull.

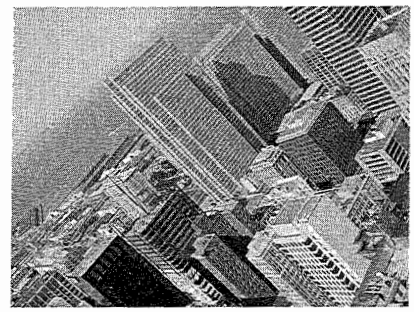


Figure 7.7 Tilting the Horizontal Plane
By tilting the horizontal plane within the screen, we can create an intense feeling of discomfort, if not actual disorientation.

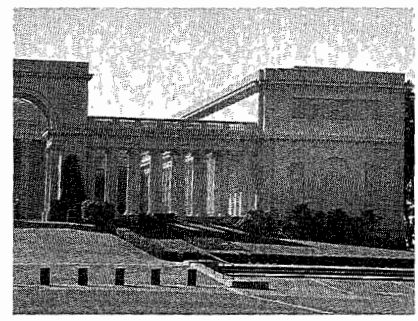
Tilting the Horizontal Plane

Our sense for vertical and horizontal accuracy is so keen that we can, for example, judge whether a picture hangs straight or crooked with uncanny precision even without the aid of a level. No wonder that when we see a tilt to the horizontal plane within the screen, we become somewhat disturbed, if not disoriented. Our normal and so-secure upright position on a level horizontal plane is threatened by what we perceive. As the horizon starts tilting, we lose our usually reliable and stable reference—the earth. When this happens, we desperately seek a new and more stable reference regardless of whether or not it makes sense. For example, when sitting in an airplane that banks sharply, we assign stability to our immediate environment, the airplane, and not to the earth. Consequently, the horizon, rather than the airplane, seems to be doing the tilting (Fig. 7.7).

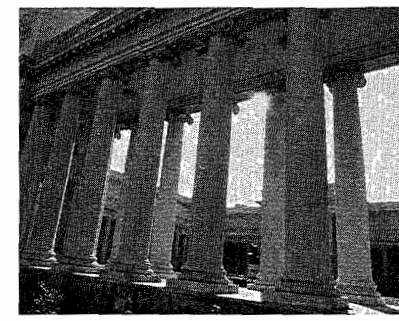
Lacking a new stable reference, such a tilting effect may cause considerable psychophysical discomfort in us. For example, when we sit close to a large movie screen, the tilted horizon effect can, in extreme cases, cause nausea.

Simply by canting the camera and so tilting the horizontal plane, you can destabilize a scene quite easily or make an otherwise rather uninteresting building or other object look dynamic (Fig. 7.8a–b). You can also suggest the extreme physical or mental stress of people by having them operate on a tilted horizontal plane (Fig. 7.9).

Figure 7.8 Tilting the Horizontal Plane—Objects
There is little doubt which building looks more dynamic. But we must be careful about overemphasizing the dynamism of a scene through disturbing the horizontal orientation. If we want to suggest energy, activity, progress, and the like, the dynamic rendering of a building as in scene (b) is appropriate. But if we want to emphasize stability, conservatism, reliability, we may want to show the building more securely oriented as in scene (a).



a



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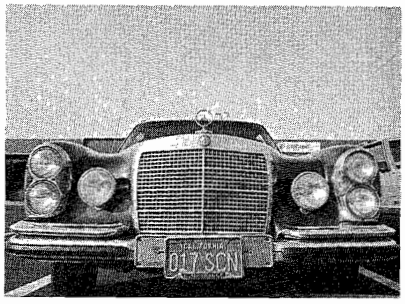

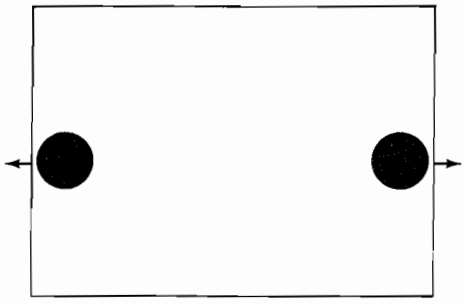

Figure 7.19 Positive Pull of Side Edges
When you want to emphasize the width of an automobile, the pull of the screen edges becomes a definite graphic asset.

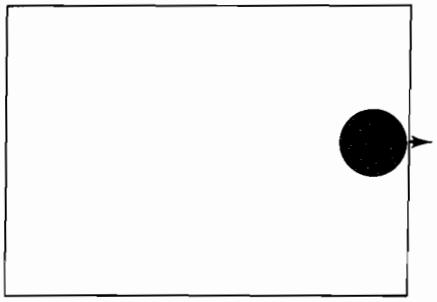

Figure 7.20 Positive Pull of Side Edge
Here, the pull of the frame works for you. The girl has no chance to run away; the magnetism of the frame holds her firmly glued to the screen edge.

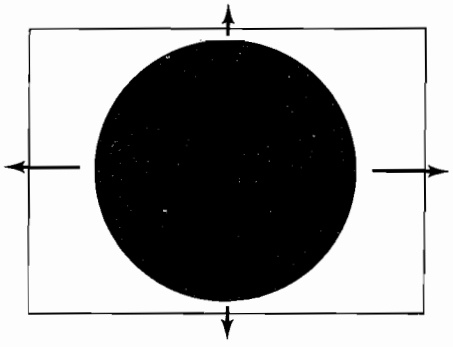

Figure 7.21 Negative Pull of All Screen Edges
Unless you want to intensify the roundness of someone's head and the coarseness of her features, do not frame it like this. As you can see, the pull of the frame makes the head appear so large that it no longer fits the restricting confinement of the screen. Her head seems so big that it bursts the frame.

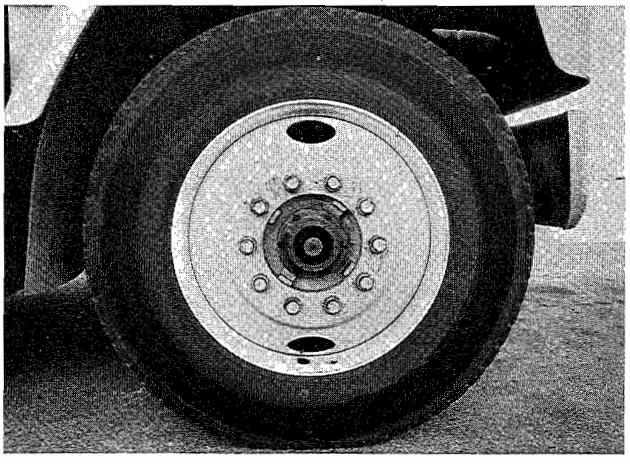

Figure 7.22 Positive Pull of All Screen Edges
In this case, the magnetism of all four edges helps you emphasize how huge this tire really is.

Figure 7.18 Pull of Side Edges
a In this establishing shot, these people seem to be sitting at a comfortable distance from each other.

b But when you move in for a close-up, the people are pulled apart. The magnetism of the side edges intensifies this separation. (Photos by Jack Fullmer.)

shot will often look too far apart in a subsequent close-up. As you can see in this establishing shot of an interview, the host and the guest seem to be sitting comfortably close to each other (Fig. 7.18a). But as soon as you move in with the camera for a tighter shot, the two people now look too far apart, seemingly glued to the left and right edges of the screen. They have become a secondary frame, emphasizing the empty center portion of the picture (Fig. 7.18b).

But when you want to emphasize the width of an object, such as that of a big automobile, the pull of the screen's side edges becomes a definite graphic asset (Fig. 7.19). You can also use the magnetic force of a screen edge to arrest motion and keep someone glued to the spot (Fig. 7.20).

Pull of Entire Frame

As pointed out in Figure 7.14, all four edges pull if a disc is wedged into the picture frame. The same thing happens when you frame a close-up of a head as in Figure 7.21. Due to the magnetic pull of the frame, the head seems unusually large, as if it's trying to burst out of the screen. Obviously, you should not frame a head in this fashion.[2] Yet you can use just such a framing technique to dramatize the large size of an object, such as the huge wheel and tire in Figure 7.22.

We encounter a similar problem if you hang pictures at a "normal" distance from one another in a set. The edges of the screen attract the pictures. They appear, therefore, pulled apart. To make pictures look normally spaced, you must crowd them. The attraction of graphic mass (among the pictures) then counteracts the pull of the frame.

Attraction of Mass

All screen images have a certain graphic mass. Usually, larger images with highly saturated colors have a larger graphic mass than smaller ones with less saturated colors. The larger the graphic mass, the "heav-

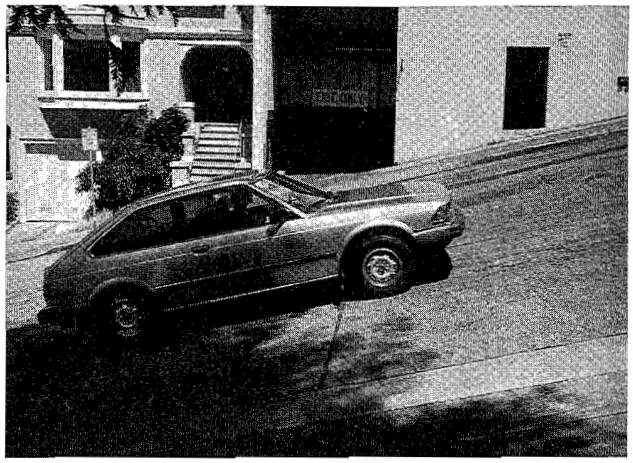

Figure 7.25 Graphic Up-Diagonal
The up-diagonal helps pull this car to the top of the hill.

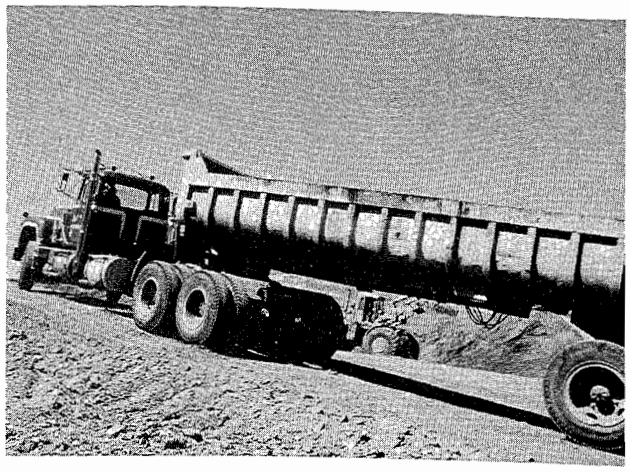

Figure 7.26 Graphic Down-Diagonal
This truck has to overcome the graphic down-diagonal, which therefore emphasizes the truck's power.

when looking at a picture, we usually start at the left side of the screen and finish at its right side.

Although any movement along either slant can override this graphic up-down sensation, you can nevertheless use the up-down slants to intensify certain movements. For example, if you would like to show the ease with which a car moves up a hill, you should have the car go from left to right. This way, the uphill diagonal helps to pull the car to the top of the hill (Fig. 7.25). On the other hand, heavy trucks or bulldozers seem to need more power and effort to climb a hill from right to left than from left to right because they now have to overcome the natural flow of the graphic downhill slant (Fig. 7.26).

Screen-Left and Screen-Right Asymmetry

We tend to pay more attention to an object when it is placed on the right rather than the left side of the screen. Although considerable academic controversy exists about this aesthetic phenomenon,[3] we can use the up- and downhill diagonal as a partial explanation of why the right picture area seems to be more conspicuous. Just as with the diagonals, we seem to feel more comfortable looking at a television screen by starting at the left side and finishing on the right side than the other way around.[4] See for yourself whether you feel a shift of emphasis from one person to the other when the picture is flipped (Fig. 7.27a–b).

Somehow we seem to ascribe more presence, if not importance, to a person on the right side of the screen. Although we know that the picture in Figure 7.27b is simply the mirror image of Figure 7.27a, we still shift our attention according to *where* the persons are located on

and that "objects placed on the left assume special importance."[8] In an extremely thorough experimental study, Metallinos and Tiemens come to the conclusion that there is "some evidence that the retention of visual information in a newscast is enhanced when the visual elements are placed on the left side of the screen,"[9] but that there is in general "minimal support to the asymmetry of the screen theories."[10] However, very much aware of the contextual nature of aesthetic communication, they warn that "no final conclusions can be made on the basis of mere placement of the visual elements" and that "such factors as size, color, shape, vectors (directional forces), and how individual subjects perceive these qualities must also be considered."[11] It may well be that our attention relative to screen-right and screen-left varies with the screen size. When looking at a large frame, such as the proscenium opening or the cinemascope screen, we may well look first at the more comfortable left side and then wander over to screen-right. But if the frame is small enough to allow an overall, iconic view, such as the television screen, relatively small paintings and etchings, or magazines, the right side seems definitely more conspicuous than the left side.