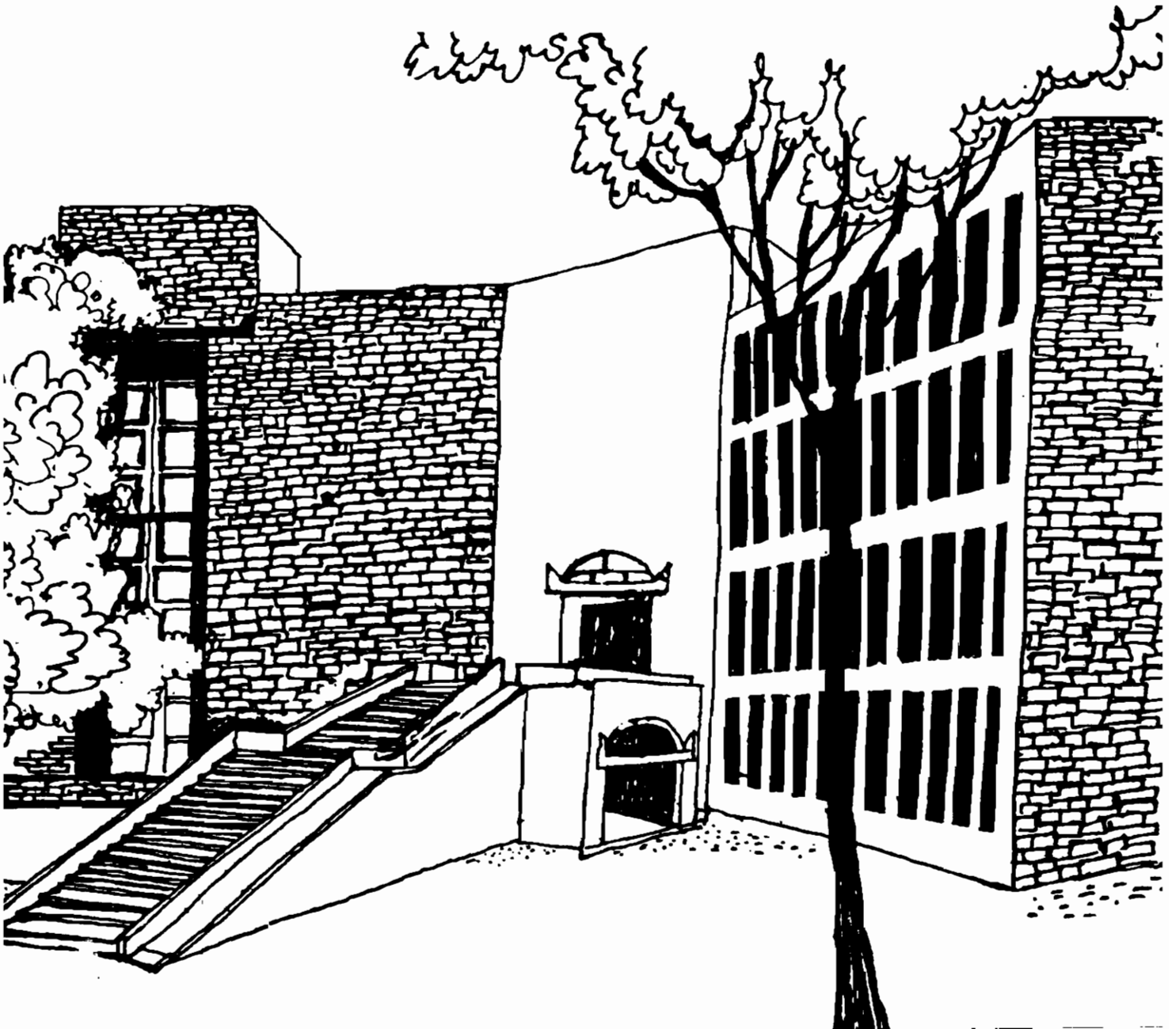




Working Paper



SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

By

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ABSTRACT*

The present study is an application of the principles of semiotic analysis to the content and the expression of the advertisement of Horlicks produced in 1994. The study derived a framework for semiotic analysis, which included, observing the traits of focal character, the technical aspects, surroundings and the background. On the basis of this framework, the meaning of the advertisement (as emerging from cultural stereotyping by Indian audience) was understood. It was concluded that the advertisement appealed only to traditional Indian housewives.

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is defined as production of signs and interpretation of its meanings. The term 'Semiotics' is traceable to Greek word 'Sema'. The word 'Sema' is rooted in semantics, which means study of meaning. Semiotics originated from linguistics. Saussure (1857-1913) and American Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) contributed a lot to the study of Semiotics.

The process in which something acts as a sign is called Semiosis. According to Peirce, four components of Semiosis can be called sign vehicle, designatum, interpreter and interpretant. **Sign vehicle** refers to what acts as a sign. According to Jiri Veltrusky (1940), all that is on the stage is a sign. While in real life utilitarian function of an object is more important, on screen the signification is all-important. On screen, practical function is suppressed in the favour of symbolic function. Also on screen, an actor's body acquires mimetic and representational powers. This applies to his speech also. **Designatum** refers to what the sign vehicle represents. **Interpreter** is the effect of sign vehicle on the interpreter, by virtue of which the thing in question is a sign. It, thus, means the effect by which sign and object are linked together by association.

For Saussure however, a sign has two parts - the signifier and the signified. For example, the word "word", the connection of letters and sounds, is a signifier. What it represents is the signified.

Advertisements manage to communicate meaning essentially in two different manners - denotatively and connotatively.

- a. Denotation is the primary content of expression. It is what is and one does not have to strive to recognize it. Thus, a denotation is audience members recognition of form (For example, this is a commercial, this is a music video and so on) and its characterization (its a Horlicks commercial, its a Pink Floyd Video) based on audience social knowledge regarding the text.
- b. Connotations are member's extension and elaboration of the denotation. They are audience members' evaluations, judgments, and assessments of the signification of an expression. Denotation are the content of expression while connotation are always meanings and signification produced as members link expression with cultural contents. Because films/advertisement are also product of culture, they go beyond its diegesis (sum of its denotations). These are culturally determined connotations. In addition to these influences from the general culture, film has its own specific connotative ability. The filmmaker has made specific choices. For example, the rose is filmed from a certain angle, the camera moves or does not moves, the color is bright or dull, the rose is fresh or fading, the background clear or vague, the shot held for a long time or briefly, and so on.

Borrowing a 'Trichotomy' of the Philosopher C.S. Pierce, Wollen in his highly influential book, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), suggested that cinematic signs be of three orders:

- The Icon: a sign in which the signifier represents the signified mainly by its similarity to it, its likeness.

- The Index: a sign in which the signifier represents the signified mainly because it has an inherent relationship to it;
- The Symbol: an arbitrary sign in which the signifier has neither a direct nor an indexical relationship to the signified, but rather represents it by virtue of a law. Usually it is an association of general ideas, which operates to call the symbol to be interpreted as referring to the object.

Although Wollen doesn't fit the cinematic signs into the denotative/connotative categories, Icon, Index, and Symbol can be seen as mainly denotative.

The present study builds on the basic concepts given by Saussure and Pierce, and combines it with concepts from various behavioral studies to arrive at a framework for semiotic analysis of advertisement. In this study, Semiotic analysis is treated as an analysis technique (where analyst plays a major role), as opposed to a research technique (where audience plays a major role in evaluation).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To delineate the elements of an advertisement with the help of Semiotic Analysis.
2. To understand what the advertisement is communicating by studying by above mentioned elements.

METHODOLOGY

Following steps were followed for the analysis:

1. First of all an advertisement was broken down into various parts on the basis of number of shots in an advertisement. This yielded a number of short and long units depending upon the length of the shots in the advertisement.

2. These were further broken down into four categories. These four categories were focal character of the advertisement, surroundings, technical aspects and background. The following table gives a glance over the main parts of these four categories.

Focal character	Technical aspects	Surrounding	Background
Expression	Camera	Props	Information
Makeup	Sound Effects	Lighting	Verbal cues
Verbal cues	Angle of shot	Decor	Proxemics
Kinetics	Space-time continuum	Architecture Color	Paralinguistic
Paralinguistic			

Table 2: Categories for Semiotic Analysis

This scheme is not intended to be exhaustive, and certainly is not so. It is only meant to be a skeleton to give a general survey. The details on the four categories are given in step four.

3. As the advertisement were broken down into categories, the basic idea of the advertisement emerged clearly. The basic idea/concept was noted down. No of sequences / shots and number of focal characters will also noted down.

As described earlier four categories of elements present in the advertisement were analyzed.

The first of these categories was Focal character. This most often refers to the main model in the advertisements. Facial expression is the first area and focus in this category. The face is rich in communicative potential. It is a primary site for communicating emotional states. For some, it is source next to human speed in giving information (Knave, 1972). Facial expression of the model / focal character revealed his/her emotional states happiness, fear, surprise,

sadness, anger, disgust, contempt and interest. Exaggeration, understatement and masking of emotions through facial expression give additional information about the focal character.

Second area of focus while analyzing the advertisements was the makeup that included dress, adornment, hairstyle etc. Dress provides the data from which inferences can be drawn relative to basic facts of our personalities. In addition, specialized jewelry such as wedding or engagement ring or necklace or religious symbols may also serves to provide information as to ones status, identity, group or even organizational affiliations.

The third category of verbal area includes both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. These shall be discussed in the section on background information.

The fourth and very important category is that of kinetics. The first area of focus here is gestures of the focal character. Desmond Morris, an anthropologist who has written a good deal in this area suggest that gestures are acquired through inheritance, discovery, imitation and training. There are various ways of classifying signals. Morris, in his book, *Manwatching*, (New York, Abrams 1977) gives the most exhaustive list of gestures that formed the basis of present analysis.

Visual Behavior of the focal character is also taken into consideration. (For details refer Table 1 in the Appendix).

Body movement (Limbs, hands, head feet, leg, etc.) were also observed.

Technical Aspects:

Movement of camera reveals a lot about the plausible perception of audience. (Refer Table 2 in Appendix for details).

Sound Effects in an Advertisement also add to its impact.

Absence of space - time continuum can present characteristic feature of the scene by showing select portions of it.

Surrounding: is the third important area of focus. Surroundings can reveal a lot about the era, the taste of focal character, socio-economic status etc. It broadly includes colour, lighting, decor, architecture, props.

Three dimensions of colour are hue, value and intensity. Hue is the name of the colour. Value means how light or how dark the colour is and intensity indicates the colour's degree of purity, strength and saturation. Colours can have a number of effects on audience, such as arousing emotions, catching attention, influencing apparent size and distance, affecting outline and finally colour preference.

Background: Finally background is also a store of information where analysis of an advertisement is concerned, the background voice in particular. This voice has two parts-linguistic and paralinguistic. Paralinguistic features are divided into 'Voice set', (the 'background' vocal characteristics deriving from physiological factors, gender, age, build etc.), 'Voice qualities' (pitch range, lip control, glottis control, rhythm control, articulation control, tempo, resonance etc.), 'Vocalizations' (actual sound, emitted). Vocalizations are further divided into 'Vocal characterizes' (laughing, crying, giggling, shouting, whispering, moaning, groaning, yawning etc.), 'Vocal qualifiers' (intensity, pitch height and extent) and 'Vocal segregates' (distinct, but extra-phonemic sound like click, 'uh-huh', 'sh', etc).

Study of space called proxemics, includes size, shape, use of space, decor. These have symbolic significance, for example, body positioning, the way space is used etc. serve as significant factors in inference as to nature, duration and intensity of relation between individuals.

The above elements for the sake of comprehensibility are characterized into four categories. This is not meant to imply that they yield a lot of information only when isolated. On contrary, a lot of information is generated by combination of one or more elements. For example, gestures often combined with verbal cues contain more information.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

The following table gives the result and the interpretation as derived on the basis of semiotic analysis.

ADVERTISEMENT: HORLICKS (1995, HINDI, FREQUENT USERS) BASIC MESSAGE OF THE ADVERTISEMENT: INTRODUCTION OF NEW AND BETTER HORLICKS

No. of Characters in the Advertisement. : 2 No. of shots in the advertisement: 7

SCENES	DENOTATION	CONNOTATION
1. Brand Window	<p>Focal Character (FC) None</p> <p>Technical Aspects: Camera focuses on brand package Close shot</p> <p>Background: Voice - Husky and high resonance Aur Ab</p> <p>Music: continuous pitch New Horlicks (Left top)</p> <p>Surroundings: Yellow - Rd Background</p> <p>Bottle emerging out of milk</p>	<p>Familiarity</p> <p>Emphasis</p> <p>Confident tonal expression.</p> <p>Flow of communication. Introduction of something new Concentration Morning Time implying that Horlicks is a morning drink.</p> <p>Horlicks is a substitute of milk.</p>
<p><i>Inference</i> : It can be inferred from the first scene that audience possibly would understand that horlicks is a morning drink. It can be substituted for milk. "Aur" as a opening word given an impression that the conversation was on ever, before the add was shot.</p>		
2. Model Appears on the screen	<p>F. C.: Middle party, loosely tied here</p> <p>Mangalsutra, Sari, red border, golden earring, kohli, nose pin</p> <p>Verbal: emphasis on "Khas"</p> <p>Body communication: excessive nodding</p> <p>Eyebrows raised (Bhai Manna naya Hai)</p> <p>Eyebrows lowered (Khas Baat kya hai)</p> <p>Expression: Charming & smiling</p> <p>Background: Music of 70s</p> <p>Surroundings: Indoor shot</p> <p>Change in colour from yellow to green</p>	<p>Sober</p> <p>Married Indian women.</p> <p>Goes in for worth not variety</p> <p>Model is not conscious of herself</p> <p>Inquiry</p> <p>Surprise</p> <p>Confident</p> <p>Traditional taste</p> <p>Horlicks is part of family</p>
<p><i>Inference</i> : Model is shown to be confident and traditional Indian women. She is a woman who values work of a product. Model's eyebrow movements are contradictory.</p>		
3. Brand Window	<p>Surroundings: With background been insignificant, the focus is on horlicks label and protein, calcium Abel's overlapping</p>	<p>Well blended nutrients</p> <p>New horlicks much more effective for health</p>

	<p>on it.</p> <p>Background:: Aur Jyada (emphasis on : Aur)</p> <p>Yellow background</p>	<p>Emphasis on blue to create brand familiarity.</p>
4. Model reappears	<p>F. C.: Verbal - "Calcium, Protein To Tha Hi".</p> <p>G. Body communication - Eyebrows raised further with every Excessive eye blinking</p>	<p>Horlicks is better now</p> <p>Overwhelmed by goodness of horlicks already aware of the fact</p>
<p>Inference : Model is a frequent user who is aware of the goodness of the horlicks.</p>		
5. Camera Zooms in	<p>F. C. : Verbal - "Doctor To"</p> <p>"Yeh Hai"</p> <p>"Main Prescribe Karti Hoon"</p>	<p>Authenticity/reliability</p> <p>Traditional who doesn't address her husband by name</p> <p>In family matters, I am reliable and experienced</p>
<p>Inference : Advertisement gives an impression that the focal character is not only experienced in householding but is also reliable being a doctor's wife.</p>		
6. Camera Zooms in Further	<p>F. C.: Verbal - Main Horlicks</p> <p>G. Jab pilayo</p> <p>H. Technical: Camera zooms in</p>	<p>Including family members the wife in particular also take horlicks.</p> <p>Non-working lady, much liked drink and light drink.</p> <p>talking about self (personal)</p>
<p>Inference : Horlicks is a much liked and light drink</p>		
7. Brand Window	<p>Background: Sun vision</p> <p>Cup and horlicks</p>	<p>Hot drink</p>
<p>Inference : Horlicks is a morning, hot drink.</p>		

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to understand what the advertisements communicate with the help of semiotically derived elements of the advertisement. For this purpose, a horlicks advertisement aired in 1996 was taken as a case study.

The basic message of the advertisement is the **introduction** of new **horlicks**. This is one of the three tasks for saliency approach in message production (Kochler, Anabol, applbaum, 1978). When the task involves an attempt to entice the audience with forming a new attitude or favourable bias towards an issue, one should point out how our point of view enhances those particular value premises. However, that does not seem to happen here. the advertisement does not give the benefits of Horlicks, in terms of its effect on health. In a lot of sense, the advertisement has informational perspective i.e. it assumes that audience can be led to "right" conclusion if all the facts are presented clearly and objectively. But since it doesn't give the impact of horlicks on audience health, it is rendered incomplete.

As seen in scene 1, the verbal ones give an impression that the conversation was already on. The background voice says "Aur ab" implying a shift in the normal flow of conversation. This is validated when the focal character of the advertisement says, "Bhai, Maana Naya Hai". This leads to **familiarity** with the conversation and also helps in introducing the model as familiarity.

- The **model** or the focal character is very cheerful and smiling. She seems to be very **confident** (scene 2). There is a two-way interaction between the attractiveness of the model and the identification by audience (Chebat et al., 1995). Thus, since, the model is **confident** and cheerful she is identified with. In addition, she is also exhibited as a warm person. This is seen in her behaviour. Her movement towards the individual, frequent smiles, happy face, affirmatively nodding the head, raising the eyebrows and using hand gestures while speaking are the traits of warm behavior(Glove et al, 1915).

However, some of her behaviours, such as, excessive nodding are not appreciated in the middle class. Some other gestures though warm contradict her verbal expression. This can be seen in scene 2. In that sense, she loses on some of her source credibility.

The model creates identification among **traditional middleclass housewives**. The source/receiver similarities can be put into two categories.

1. Dispositional similarities

2. Membership groups

Here the first category, dispositional similarity is applicable. This concerns the beliefs, the attitudes and the values we share with our receivers. When the source and receiver share similar experiences, speak the same language, belong to the same class they hold similar values, attitudes, beliefs, it increases the receiver's understanding of the source. Here the dress code, makeup, jewelry, appearance creates identification. A mangalsutra, Big Bindi, Nose pin etc. are instrumental in it (as seen in scene 2). Another observation is that the model addresses her husband as "Yeh", which is very peculiar of traditional Indian woman. This also contributes to the identification. On the flip side, however, the model **fails to appeal to the younger crowd, the working women and the high-class women**.

The advertisement forms an image for horlicks with the help of three brand windows. The first brand window shows horlicks bottle with blue lid emerging out of a white liquid and against yellow-red background. Since the focus in the shot is on the blue lid of the bottle, which is against white, yellow and red backdrop, it catches quick attention. (Reference to table 2.6) where effects of the colours are described validates these claims.

The yellow-red background gives an impression of a morning, implying that horlicks is a **morning drink**. Also in the same shot as the horlicks emerges out of white liquid (presumably milk), horlicks gets associated with the image of a milk substitute. Second brand window equally adds to the image of horlicks. Firstly, the blue is again emphasized by focusing of the blue label again, this evokes brand familiarity. On the blue label of the horlicks, overlap the

labels of protein, vitamins, calcium. This seems to portray that all the ingredients mentioned about are **well-blended** in horlicks. The sixth shot of the advertisement where the focal character claims to be Eveready to drink horlicks gives an impression is a **much-liked drink**. It takes no extra effort to drink horlicks and probably that horlicks is a **light drink**.

The cup in the last shot of the advertisement implies that horlicks is a **hot drink**.

Thus, the advertisement depicts horlicks as a liked, easy digestible, hot drink.

CONCLUSION

The advertisement would attract traditional Indian housewives only. It would fail to attract the younger generation and the working women. In addition, it portrays a positive image of horlicks (light, well blended, nutritious, morning, hot drink).

SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for Improving the Advertisement

1. A change in dress code and way of talking can be introduced to attract the younger and less traditional women.
2. Instead of shifting camera (zoom in, zoom out), change in the posture of the model is suggested to make the advertisement interesting.
3. Attention should be paid to gestures, which at various points contradict their verbal expression.

Suggestions for Research

1. Being an analysis technique, the present study does not take into account audience opinion. A research can be done on the lines of this analysis.
2. The categories in technical aspects and nonverbal communication can be broken down further and their effects analysed.

References:

1. Arnheim, Rudolf (1957), *Film as Art*, University of California Press, California.
2. Monaco, James (1981), *How to read a film - the art, technology, language, history and theory of film and media.*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford.

Appendix

Table 1: Description of Visual behavior

<i>Concepts</i>	<i>Definition</i>
One-sided Look	Gaze by one person in direction of another's face.
Face-gaze	Directing of one person's gaze at another's face.
Eye-gaze	Directing of one person's gaze at another's eyes.
Mutual look	Two persons gaze at each other's face.
Eye contact	Two persons look into each other's eyes and were aware of each other's eye gaze
Gaze avoidance	Avoidance of another's eye gaze
Gaze omission	Failure to look at another without intention to avoid eye contact.

Table 2: Technical aspects and their applications. (Source: Film as Art, Rudolf Arnheim & How to read a film, James Monaco)

Technical Aspects	Applications
The camera is mobile	a) Representation of subjective states such as falling, rising, swaying, staggering, giddiness, etc. b) Representation of subjective attitudes such as the individual being always the center of the scene (i.e. of the plot).
The film can run backward.	a) Reversal of the direction of movements. b) Reversal of events (fragments join to make a whole object).

Acceleration	<p>a) Visible acceleration of a movement or an event. change in the dynamic character (to symbolize bustle)</p> <p>b) Compression of time.</p>
Slow Motion	<p>a) Visible retarding of a movement or an event; change in dynamic character (laziness, gliding).</p> <p>b) Lengthening of periods of time (showing more clearly events that pass very rapidly).</p>
Interpolation of still Photographs	Sudden stopping of movement; paralysis (Lot's wife)
Fading in and out, dissolving	<p>a) To mark breaks in the action</p> <p>b) Subjective impressions, waking up, falling asleep.</p> <p>c) Stronger contact and coherence between two pictures by dissolving one into the other.</p>
Superimposition (Multiple Exposure)	<p>a) Chose, confusion</p> <p>b) Indication of relationships by juxtaposition and superimposition.</p> <p>c) Indication of symbolic similarities.</p> <p>d) Modifications of reality (wraiths)</p>
Special Lenses	Multiplication, distortion.
Manipulation of Focus	<p>a) Subjective impressions: waking up, going to sleep.</p> <p>b) Suspense by gradual exposition ("appears slowly").</p>

	c) Directing the spectator's gaze to the back or the foreground.
Mirror Images	Destroying, distorting an object (or the "world").

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