



One image can provide data for many claims

Most visual products contain both images and texts. The two forms of expression are often juxtaposed in a more or less comprehensible manner. But it makes sense to think of this juxtaposition in terms of arguments. The result can be combinations of images and sentences that can be read just as clearly as sentences in succession. Here's a suggestion for how to achieve this. Try it for yourself and see how it works.

By Niels Heie

I took the photo of the old man on Oxford Street in London when I visited the city in the spring. I fell for his outline, the position of his body. It made me think about whether age is a burden. That's how his body looks. As if existence can be measured in kilos. And you die because you can't carry any more weight.

But I also took it because of the stunning light. Backlighting creates exciting areas of underexposure. As silhouettes it is visually clear, but also provocative as you feel they are hiding something.

When I looked at the picture later, it also contained the young man on the left. I didn't notice him when I took the picture. But he's interesting. It seems as if he's looking at the old man's legs and thinking about what it's like to be old. Maybe he's shuddering at the thought. I did. That's why I took the picture.

I'm an amateur with a camera. A trained photographer would have got down on his knees to get a lower perspective and to put together a different composition. So the man's head was placed against the background of the clear blue sky and not against the red bus, whose colour is so dark that it reduces the contrast between the man and the bus – a fact that undermines the fundamental relationship between foreground and background and makes the image content difficult to make out, i.e. perceive as a clear unit.

But I can easily like pictures of this type, pictures that show reality, pictures that show existence as something profound, unique and demonstrated. A sign of here and now.

Maybe it's not a good picture, but the subject is important and for me, it's an example of making photographs a means of existential expression.

This introduction has been written with the express purpose of causing you, my reader, to experience that while reading, you moved your eyes from the text to the picture and back again, once or several times, because you were looking for details in the picture that could be linked to the content of the text.

When you found what you were looking for, the linking process was successful and created cohesion across the two forms of expression: parts of the content of the text coincided with parts of the content of the image.

When you didn't find what you were looking for, the linking process didn't work as it should have: no connection was made between the two forms of expression in terms of content.

Where the linking process is possible, it creates cohesion, i.e. a connection in terms of content between image and text. The process works in more or less the same way as the one that makes a reader perceive such a connection between two sentences.

In order for there to be cohesion between two sentences, the same element must appear in both, as it does here: *A man was walking. He was barefoot.* You link *the man* in the first sentence with *he* in the second and understand the content of the two as one and the same.

It would be a major advantage when reading visual products containing both texts and images if you demanded as great an immediate connection between the content of the images and the sentences as you would expect between sentences in a text product without illustrations.

When do you move your eyes from the text to the image and back again? You probably do this when there is a claim in the text that you wish to know the background of. This can be found in the details of the image that make it likely that the claim is reasonable.

If those details cannot be found, therefore making it unlikely that what is being said is reasonable, the reader does not perceive a connection. The link is unsuccessful and there is no cohesion.

Reader behaviour consisting of shifting your gaze from one mode of expression to another can be described using terminology taken from Stephen Toulmin's basic model of argument, consisting of data, claim and warrant; the reader perceives the text's sentences as claims and the image as a container of latent data of some of the claims in the text.

The text thus becomes a filter through which the image is viewed. The filtering qualifies certain parts of the image's content so that they give meaning as data for the claims in the text.

A couple of examples:

At the start of this article, I claimed that the man was old. There is data to support this in the picture and can be seen from his physical expression.

There is data supporting that the picture was taken with backlighting, which you can see from the relationship between light and shade, and from the angle of the light – the light comes along the street in the opposite direction to the man walking, it falls on him from the front.

There is data to support that the composition is poor: a good composition allows the correct elements to be in a correct contrasting relationship to each other. This is not the case here – it is difficult to make out the man's head from the bus behind (in front of) him, which makes it difficult to read an important element of his body language.

Generally, therefore, you can argue that images and text can relate to each other like elements in a Toulminian argument, where images contain data while text contains claims and warrants. The advantages of deciding to use images as part of the arguments being conveyed are firstly, that this provides a visually logical relationship between the images and the text they are presented with, and secondly, that the structure of the argument is divided into three parts that you 'jump' between. In this way, the argument has a structure parallel to the way we move our eyes, namely in jerks known as saccades.

Naturally, there may also be linguistic data, neutral descriptions of the object of the claims. Data can therefore be both iconic and linguistic. But iconic claims do not exist – an image cannot claim anything because a claim is a generalisation. Nor can we talk about iconic warrants. Warrants are likewise dependent on language.

An image can convey something concrete and unique and be a sign of an uncategorised assertion. In this way, the image can function as a sign of something that a claim can be made about.

Images used in arguments can be of different types. The two most important classifications are photographic images and non-photographic images.

Photographic images convey an impression of the concrete and unique in what you see, in what exists or what has actually occurred, while non-photographic images convey an impression of seeing something that someone has envisaged.

The difference between the two image forms means that their quality as data holds different amounts of weight. A claim coupled with an image of something that has actually occurred as data – e.g. a documentary photo – has a different significance for the tenability of an argument than a claim that has a preconception as data – e.g. a caricature.

In my work on this problem I have devised a matrix for the juxtaposition of text and images. I assert that
· you can put forward two types of claim: objective and subjective
and that

· an image has four aspects that can function as data

which means that, taken together, you can use an image as data for eight different claims.

OBJECTIVE CLAIM

The claims are objective, understood from the perspective that all those who share language most likely would conceivably have been able to make the same assertion about the image and subject. This is therefore a warrant in a common sense perception of things.

SUBJECTIVE CLAIM

The claims are subjective, understood from the perspective that the person making an assertion about an image or subject is doing so on a subjective basis, that is using their own experience as a warrant.

THE MOTIF AS DATA

It is possible to make an assertion about the image’s subject, i.e. that what is ‘occurring’ in the image – the image’s story – is what provides data to support claims.

THE MOTIF AS AN EXAMPLE OF DATA

It is possible to make an assertion about the image’s subject as an example, i.e. that what is ‘occurring’ in the image is an example of what provides data to support claims. It shall thus be conceivable that the image could have a different content.

THE IMAGE AS DATA

It is possible to make an assertion about the image, i.e. that you are asserting something about the image as a product, almost independently of the image’s subject, e.g. about the circumstances when the picture was taken.

THE IMAGE AS AN EXAMPLE OF DATA

It is possible to make an assertion about the image as an example, i.e. that you assert that the image is an example of a type of image that is therefore conceivable in other versions.

An overview of the variations is shown in this matrix:

Objective claims about...	
the motif	the motif as an example
the image	the image as an example
Subjective claims about...	
the motif	the motif as an example
the image	the image as an example

At the start of this article I wrote about the image, which means that I made different claims about something that, in addition to the language, also existed in the image, and that could therefore serve as data for these claims.

If you categorise the text based on the matrix, it contains examples of all eight types of claim:

There was an OBJECTIVE CLAIM ...

... about the subject at the start of the article: “...*the old man on Oxford Street...*” This claim makes the reader focus on the subject, as the claim is about this.

... about the subject as an example in the second paragraph: “*Backlighting creates concealed areas ...*” This claim makes the reader see the subject as an example. This means that the reader is to think that the claims could also apply to other similar subjects. He is to conjure up ideas, so to speak, of a category of

similar subjects and thereby make further interpretations.

... about the image at the start of the article: "...*the photo* (of this old man on Oxford Street...)" This claim asserts something about the image in question, e.g. its technical nature.

... about the image as an example in the main heading of the article: "*An image can provide data for many claims ...*" This claim makes an assertion about the image as one among others of the same kind.

There was a SUBJECTIVE CLAIM ...

... about the subject in the second paragraph: "... *the stunning light ...*" This claim is subjective; warrants can be limited to being personal prejudices and idiosyncrasies, but are about the subject.

... about the subject as an example in the last paragraph: "...*but the subject is important...*" This claim is based on experience, but illustrates the subject as one of several possible subjects.

... about the image in the fourth paragraph: "*A trained photographer would have got down on his knees ...*" This claim can, for example, be about some of the photographer's thoughts while taking the picture.

... about the image as an example in the penultimate paragraph: "... *I can easily like pictures like this ...*" This claim may be asserting something about the image as a type, i.e. as one of several similar images.

The essential difference between objective and subjective claims is that subjective claims require empathy on the part of the reader. He or she must be able to put themselves in the position of the claimer and thereby understand what motivated this person to make the assertion.

Objective claims can be made by anyone because they are common sense claims and therefore do not require so much identification with the other person's way of perceiving things. An individual's own perception grounded in common sense is sufficient for understanding the relationship between data and claim.

What I mean is that this method of understanding cohesion between text and images can be applied generally, and therefore contribute to improving the use of texts and images where they are presented side by side in terms of layout in communicative products. This is regardless of whether they form the content of articles, reports or readers' letters, or are found in newspapers, brochures, magazines, adverts or on book covers and so on.

The advantage of this method of combining texts and images is that the reader perceives the linking process as effective. The reader understands why a text with precisely *that* composition of words and images with exactly *those* details have been juxtaposed.

The result is that the reader perceives a better flow while reading, despite the fact that he or she is placed in a complex situation in which they are required to gauge the link between two essentially different forms of expression.

But why use images at all when you have words that make the reader conjure up their own images? You need to use images because you want to convey that the message you are asserting contains reality, but in a completely different way to the reality presented by the text. Images illustrate that what they show can be touched. They show something that is experienced, as if it can be seen. Words 'show' something that you have to imagine. The difference between seeing something and imagining it is great.

When text and images form a unit in terms of content, specific understanding arises in the awareness of the claim's relationship with the subject of the claim. And, in this way, the reader is provided with a more concrete starting point when he has to draw conclusions and clarify the importance the argument and message have to him.

The views of this article on the content relations between texts and images can be used without problems in editing and designing routines. The choosing and ordering of photos and illustrations, the writing and trimming of headlines and captions can be qualified through the method I suggest. The result is articles containing both images and texts with more and better cohesion between the content of the elements. The result of using this way of thinking – which of course has to be learned – in the daily routines can increase the readability of the articles because it will be easier for the reader to saccade from one element to the next without losing grip of the gradual mental construction of the overall comprehension of the elements as a whole. Less confusion in the readers' minds created by better cohesion between elements will result in more satisfied readers.

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