



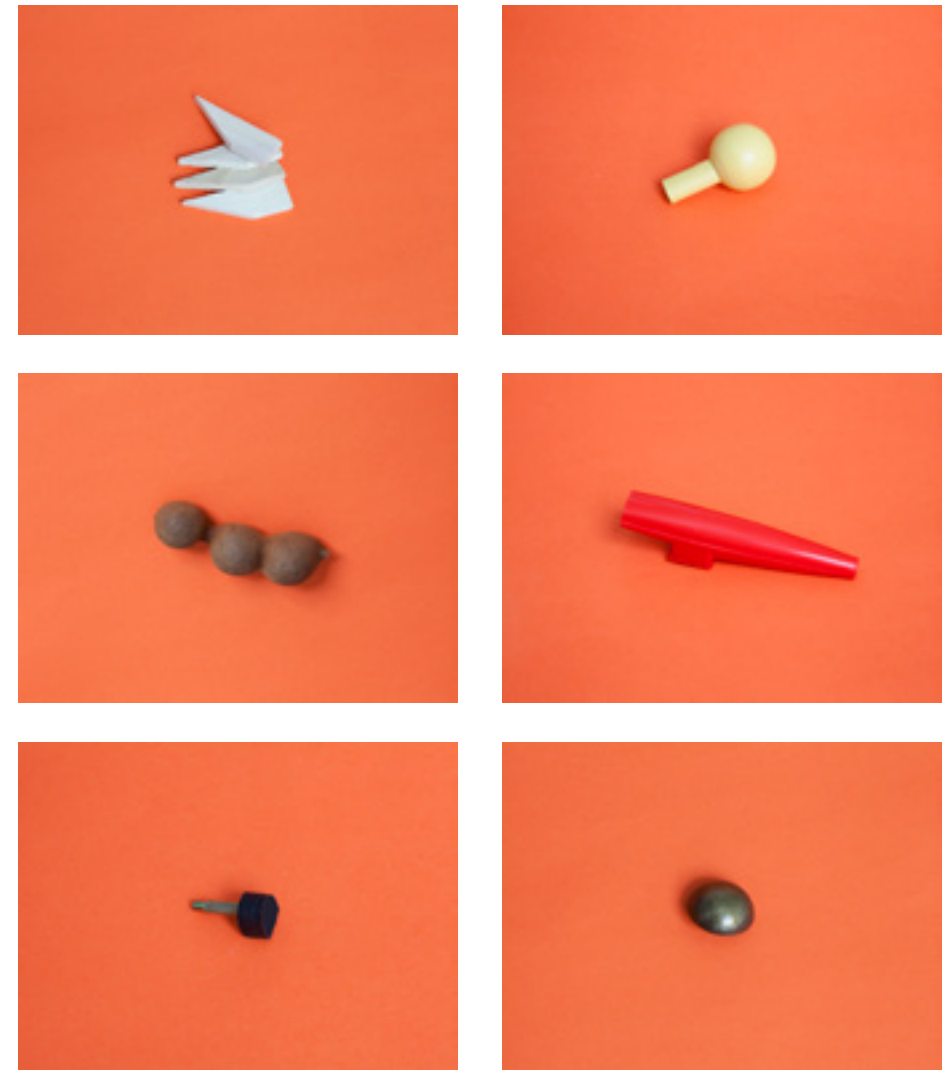
Pragmatics in visual literacy focuses on the ways context contributes to the meaning. It explores how the transmission of meaning depends not only on the formal and the descriptive characteristics or on the context of the appearance and presentation, but also on the knowledge about the status of those involved, the cultural background, traditions and other factors which stand apart from the actual appearance of the objects shown on the picture. An important aspect of pragmatics is that it becomes difficult to unify the experience of visual information because of the multiple possible influences involved. There are many factors which could form our perception of the image like social environment, the socialization process, the values system etc., but it is possible to talk about some of the elements where we can look at pragmatics in detail.

In *Figure 40* we can see a set of images, some of you might recognize them but I am sure that not everybody will. If you are a lady then there is a bigger chance you would recognize tap of the heel, but at the same time, if you are a lady, but you do not like heeled shoes, then the chance that you recognize it, is smaller. If you are a musician then you probably might be familiar with the looks of a kazoo. All of these need to have some context or something else next to it which would help to get some meaningful information out of it. This example illustrates the disability to comprehend the meaning without prior knowledge about this object or the additional context to support it.

Let us see if anything changes, if we add context to it.

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*Figure 40: Various undefined objects.*



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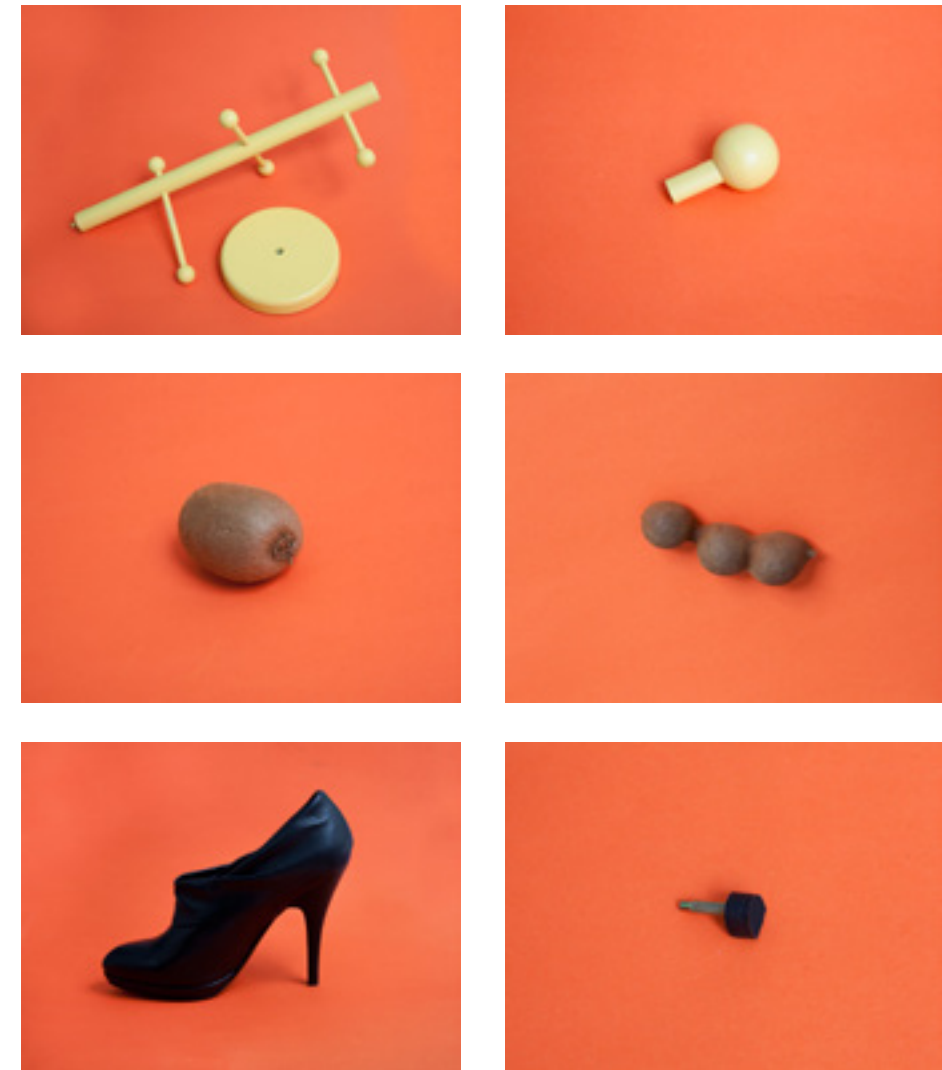


Figure 41a: Consistent patterns.

Figure 41b: Consistent patterns (continued).



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In *Figures 41a* and *41b* another image is added next to the previous one. This additional information is supposed to help us understand what we are looking at. Let us clear it up.

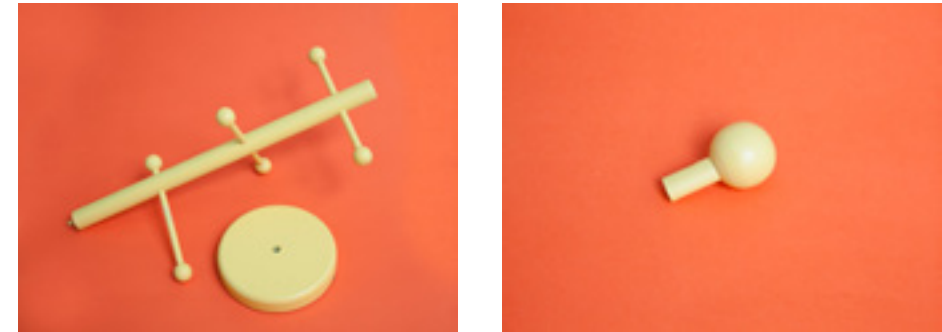
The first pair in *Figure 42a* makes a string of logic which assumes that we are looking at musical instruments. The musical triangle is more common, more people are familiar with it and therefore are able to recognize the object. So we can say that the more elements are present in this string, the clearer the message becomes. As we can see in the last pair of images in *Figure 42a*, they both share material qualities, both are made of wood, this feature connects them and generates certain logic in their appearance. In the case with musical instruments, the feature which they share is functional and with wooden pieces it is material. I mention these differences to stress the fact that there are many different ways to generate context around an image. It could be different things or actions which act as a link and help comprehend a meaning or communicate a message.

*Figure 42a: Musical instruments and pieces of wood.*

In *Figure 42b* is another way to do so. Theoretically we can still feel confused about the objects we see, but we can definitely make more out of these two than from only one fragment of it. We can assume that our initial image depicts a detail of some bigger structure which has a certain function. If we do not have previous experience with this object we cannot say what function it has, but we certainly are not totally disorientated reading these images. By adding another element to this string we would be able to understand the function of the given object without even knowing what it was in the beginning. So by narrowing down the possibilities of interpretation we can get closer to a unified message. Here we can see how from a small detail we moved to a bigger structure and finally to a seemingly unrelated object, the set of cups, and we arrived at the original function of the object.

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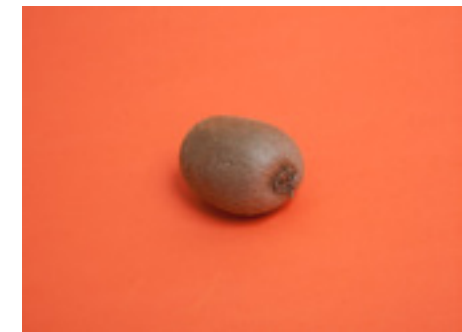
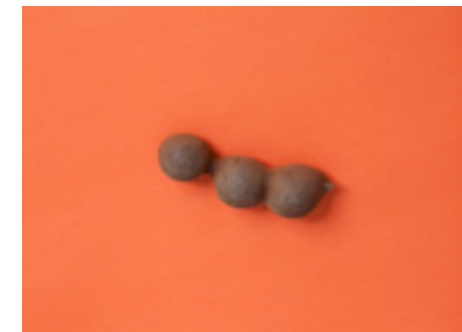
*Figure 42b: A cup holder and cups.*

The second pair in *Figure 41b* illustrates the dilemma that can appear in the context generating process. Both of the depicted objects could be placed in two categories. We can consider them as a brown object and as exotic fruit. So the third added element would be important for the whole reading process. We say that the whole string is about exotic fruits as in *Figure 42c*. However, if we show just the round ones as in *Figure 42d*, or just the brown ones as in *Figure 42e*, it would open up a possibility for an incorrect interpretation. We may be led to assume that it is about the shape rather than about the content. Thus, the more shared qualities between the objects, the bigger the chance it would be interpreted in different ways.

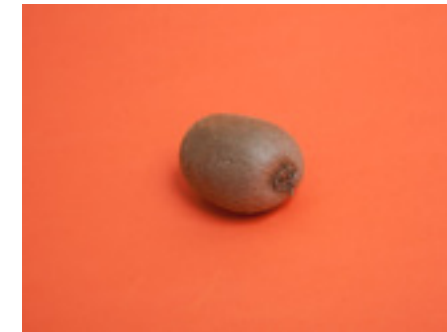
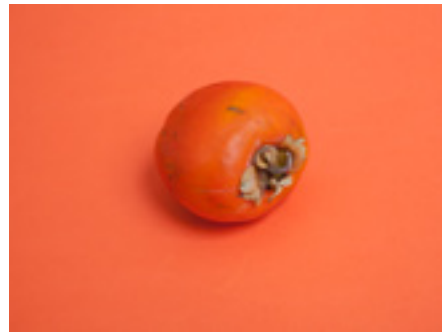
Another important conclusion could be made from this example. Our reaction to the formal qualities is quicker than to the qualities related to the content.

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*Figure 42c: Inconsistent pattern.*



*Figure 42d: Round fruits.*

*Figure 42e: Brown fruits.*



The rest of the example pairs in *Figures 41a* and *41b* illustrate the mechanism of visual perception in a similar way. Introducing another object next to something creates more context around it and drives our attention.

Naturally we are interested in the process of looking for some connection between objects, turning them into a story. We try to find an explanation for the things we see around us through this process. After all, skills in visual literacy are meant to increase our level of understanding. It is not about the form, but more about how to get to the context through the form, and how different factors and influences on the form influence our interpretation of visual information. We should remember that our investigation, even though it is based on simple examples, is made to point out problematic issues of visual communication and increase the level of critical thinking towards an image. In my opinion, pragmatics illustrate the necessity of such thinking in the best way possible.

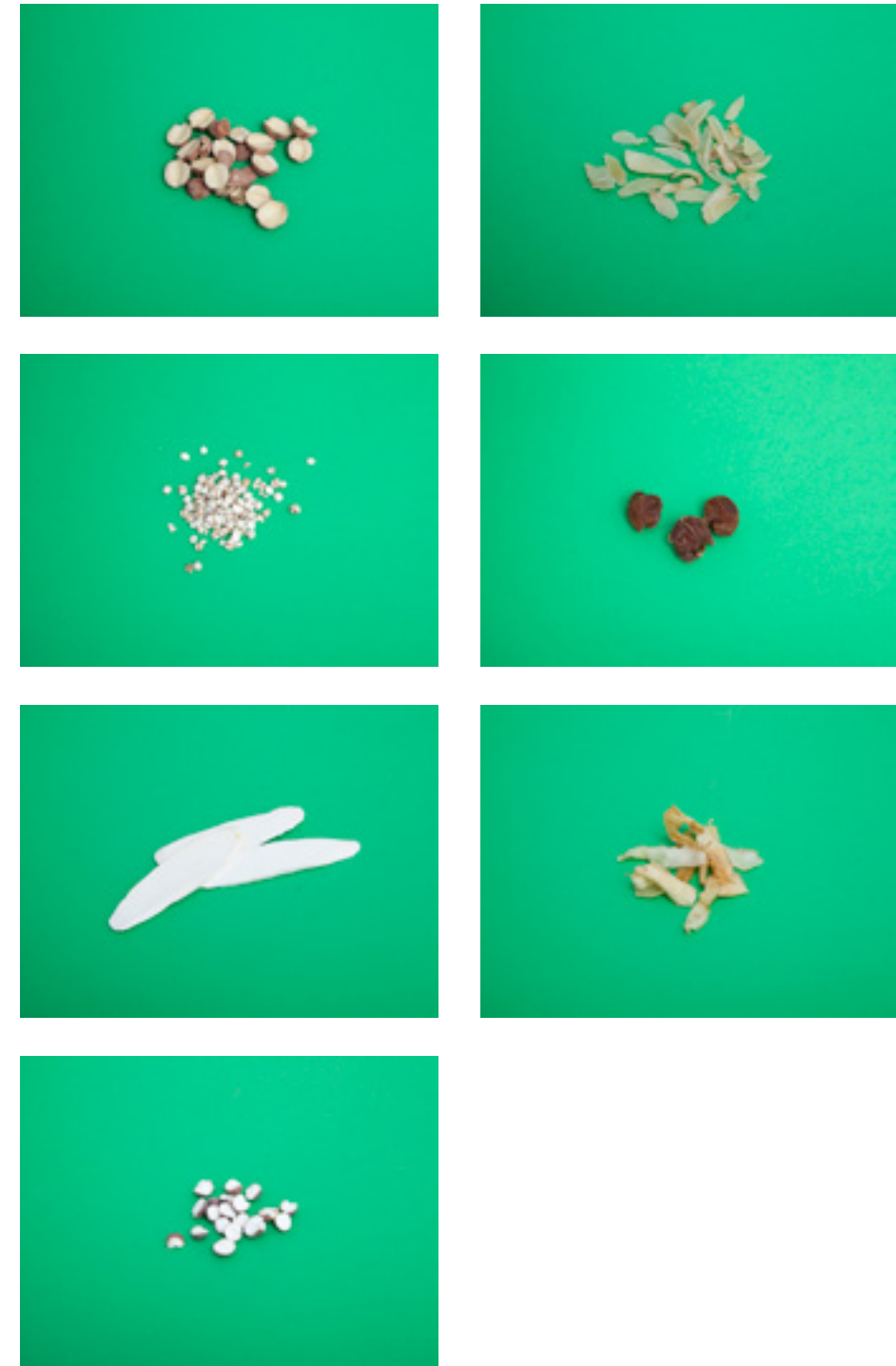
In pragmatics there is no attempt to unify and systematize our perception mechanisms, but to simply point out the different ways available to interpret an image. For example, the way image is presented can shape our interpretation.

But now we shall look at another example on introducing context and explore its abilities to form our opinion of an image. The context also deals with the cultural background and its ability to shape our perception, but on the other hand it can illustrate how adding context can minimize these cultural differences.

What we see in *Figure 43a* is Chinese soup, a mixture one should soak in water for 10 minutes and get a cup of delicious and healthy bouillon. We can see poly gonatum, Chinese yam, dried fox nuts, lotus seeds, longan, pearl barley and lily bulb. Yes, this makes a Chinese soup! I guess even text explanation wouldn't help most of us to relate to it as ingredients for soup.

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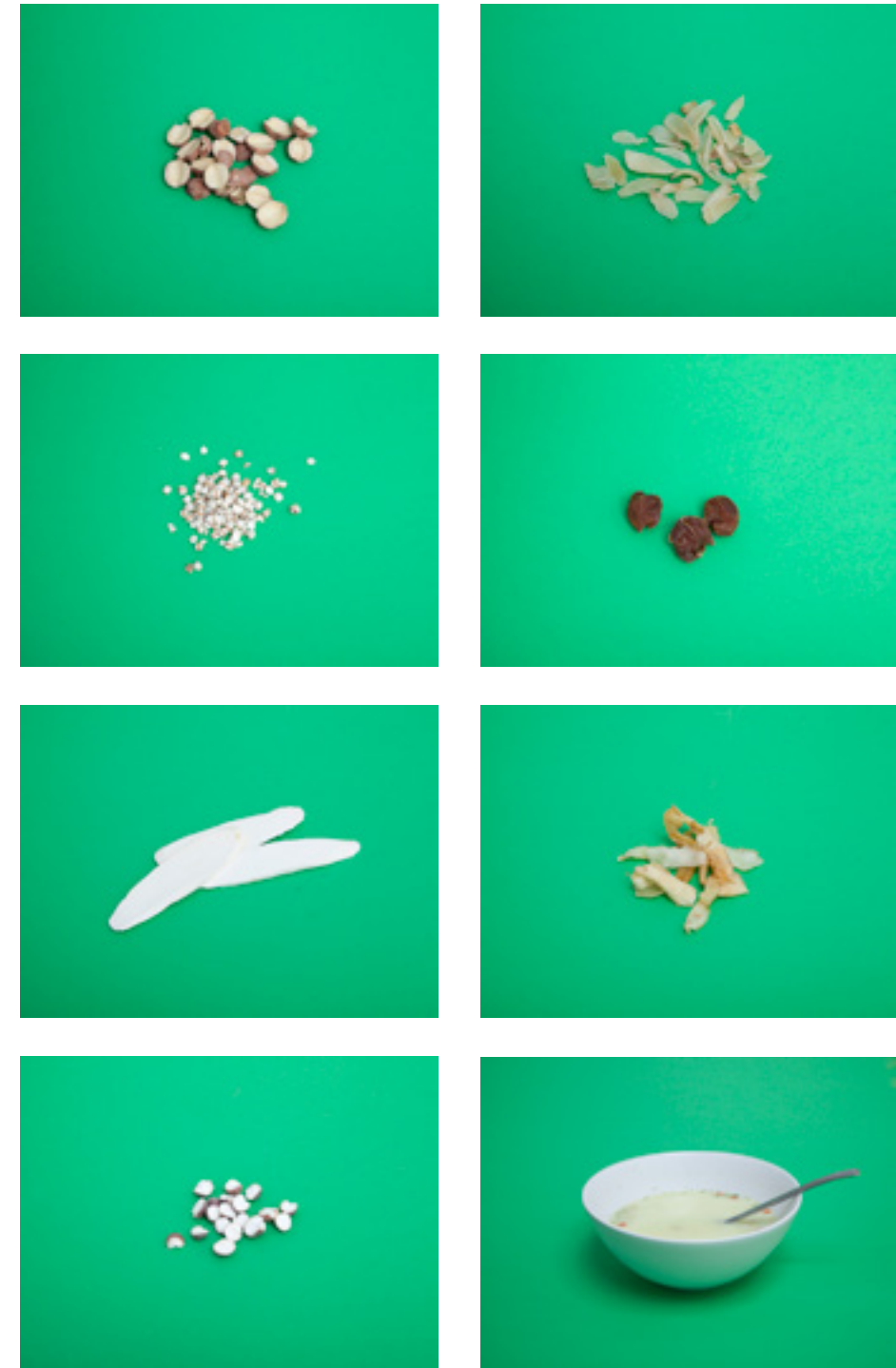


*Figure 43a: Chinese soup ingredients.*

But if we place it in a context in *Figure 43b*, adding a soup bowl, it becomes clear that we are looking at soup ingredients. Even knowing nothing about these goods we are able to assume that if you combine these, and add water, we will get soup.

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*Figure 43b: Chinese soup ingredients and a bowl of soup.*

Let us get closer to our everyday life and have a look at the example in *Figure 44a* and see if this one will be clear to read. It is difficult to say whether we would recognize a bouillon cube, if we would not have talked about soup before, but that does not really matter. We would see what it is, but not what it consists of. We know this object as a semantic unit. We know what to do with it and how to use it. It is determined by the cultural surroundings we live in. In the same way the Chinese version of the soup is preset and determined by their cultural surrounding. Just to baste one's curiosity here is what it consists of: salt, cottonseed oils, monosodium glutamate, yeast extract, dehydrated vegetables (onion, cabbage, carrots, parsley, garlic), sugar, corn starch, spices, caramel for the color, disodium inosinate, citric acid. Would it make any difference in our interpretation of this object if we were to break it apart into its components? And would that make it more clear what exactly we are looking at?

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*Figure 44a: A bouillon cube.*



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Figure 44b: Ingredients of a bouillon cube.

Figure 44c: Ingredients of a bouillon cube (continued).

The pictures in *Figures 44b* and *44c* probably confuse rather than clarify, and in this example enlarging the context takes us farther from the starting point. It does not contribute to our comprehension, but it certainly raises new questions which might be intentionally produced by this action of deconstruction. More than half of the ingredients are unrecognizable. However, the form and look of a bouillon cube, which does not have any resemblance to any ingredient, presented in a familiar shape has a certain level of credibility and it seems to have it even more than in the unfolded appearance.

Meeting the unknown makes us doubt, which causes insecurity and inability to form an opinion about what we see. Recognizing a bouillon cube as something we know makes us feel comfortable, even when we accept the fact that we actually do not know what it is made of. This can draw attention on the food industry. Due to our illiteracy and the possibility of false assumptions, we can fall into a trap and not notice the danger that can be hidden inside an image. On its own, one image does not give the opportunity to transfer the meaning. It gives only a fragment, the top of the iceberg.

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As we can see on the next example, the situation where no context is given prevents us from reading the image properly. We are not able to do so, not due to the absence of knowledge or experience, as we stated before, but because of a mechanism called framing as a purely technical influence on the image that would shape our opinion of the depicted object.

In *Figure 45* we see that without a wider scope we can barely understand what we are looking at. We cannot evaluate the object's size and place it within a context. We need more information from outside the frame to be able to understand what we are looking at. And if I would tell you that on the left image we are looking at tagliatelle and on the right the size of the hole is not bigger than a cherry, I bet that you wouldn't have guessed that at first. So, it is not only a meaningful context that is important in our reading process, but also the actual surroundings, the physical context. To direct our attention several techniques can be applied to an image, these can increase the desirable effect or mislead from the original intentions. These mechanisms are also related to the making of content around the image. They are the text and the emotional value put on top of an image.

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*Figure 45: Undefined objects.*

Text could be used in combination with an image and completely switch our perception of the object we are looking at. In a way the examples we have seen before could also be accompanied by text and it would work in the way we are about to explore. Let us assume that despite our illiteracy we are able to recognize a meaning just from a single medium. We would also rather use text as an example of another order of visual comprehension.

To clarify this point, we need an example of both approaches in the text and image relationship. We will not go into a very deep analysis of the next example, but it would be a shame not to mention it at all, because it is important to our investigation. What we are trying to deal with here is the famous example of the Magritte statements. The pipe is just an image, a representation of a real-world pipe, and has nothing to do with its original. They share formal qualities, but semantically they have not much in common. Using text in such a manner does not give us the satisfactory effect in exploring the relationship between image and text. We are interested in another way of combining these.

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This is not a pipe.

*Figure 46: A pipe*



Let us look at text more in the way we do at an image. In *Figure 47* we can see sets of medicines. What can they tell us without any context? This sequence could be a contact sheet of a photographer who got an assignment to make a nice illustration. It could be an example of the rules of grouping, which we reviewed in the chapter on syntax. But could these guesses be narrowed down somehow?

Doesn't the way the images are presented remind us of something? Seven rows and five lines. It is supposed to look like a calendar or at least reminds a bit of one. These sets are sets of medicines which are taken by a person during one month of treatment. Their function is unknown, but their amount and frequency refer to a serious disease.

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*Figure 47: Sets of medicines.*

One image of this sequence would not give the desirable effect and increasing this amount or giving it a more consequent nature would make the effect even stronger, as we can see in *Figure 48*. The repetition of these sets also refers to repetition of the daily medicine intake, the daily routine where all days look the same and the only thing which stays important is to not forget to take the pills. Still, even with this in a way tragic image, we hardly feel anything towards it. It stays an illustration without a human face. So let us see what would happen if we give it one.

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*Figure 48: A year.*



Martha

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Suzie

Figure 49a: Personal calendar #1.

Figure 49b: Personal calendar #2.

Look at Martha, illustrated in *Figure 49a*. She is neat, she keeps everything in order. She had her long happy life and there is nothing we can do against the power of nature. Martha should just keep taking her medicines and let us hope it will keep her with us for a few more years. But we know that she cannot live forever and we are ready for it.

What happens if this story is about Suzie, shown in *Figure 49b*? We can assume that this name is meant to be for a little girl rather than an old lady. Suzie is a shorter version of Suzanne or Suzan and this name in general sounds more modern. So Suzie is a girl of 7 years old. Even at such a young age she should pay attention to dates, times and the daily schedule. There is an illness or lifelong medicine intake. Both cases are unpleasant, but there is a certain submission to the situation. The display of one month assumes that there is more to see and refers to a fragment in time rather than a finished timespan.

From these examples we can see how crucial the context and the means of presentation can be for our interpretation on an image. Text, in this case the title, can direct our perception in different ways and change the way we judge the information we look at. By context here I mean the layout of the presented pictures. The calendar form would refer to the passing of time and repetition. Here we saw how text gets an extra layer of meaning and I would say it gets more complex and can be considered, on the principle we applied before adding an extra image to another one, as context generator.

A curious effect can be observed looking at the written text being photographed. Using the previous example to illustrate the change of the role of text, we also introduce another mechanism of presentation which influences our interpretation of an image in the field of pragmatics: reproductions of printed images. When a picture is re-photographed in different ways, it introduces a different effect to the viewer and generates certain shortcuts to the right interpretation. Here we are interested in the influence of presentation on meaning.

The text in *Figure 50* becomes an image and an artifact of memory. In a strange and to me mysterious way, the older the picture becomes, the less specific it gets: the people we see on the picture could be your family or friends. Maybe it happens because we know our relatives just from the photos and never got to know them, so all old photographs remind us of them.

Or because of the unified style of photography, similar setting and depicted situations, we are able to just mix our personal memories about aunt Sonya and uncle Stephan with photographs of Bob and Julie from Canada in *Figure 50b*. But whatever the reason may be, one thing is clear: old photographs work on us not in the same way as the rest. Physicality and uniqueness of these pictures touch upon other senses, but the visual and rational perception respond to the stimuli. The emotional reaction plays a crucial role in our interpretation. Even the fact that the text is written on the back of these photographs in a foreign language does not take this feeling away. We cannot understand what is written there and it is unimportant in this case; we all share the same history recorded by these artifacts. These pictures became meaning bearers which could be read, or better, felt by different people. The content of an image is replaced by its emotional value and attachment to the material presence of the image. Certainly, this experience will be shared only between the groups who share the history of photography.

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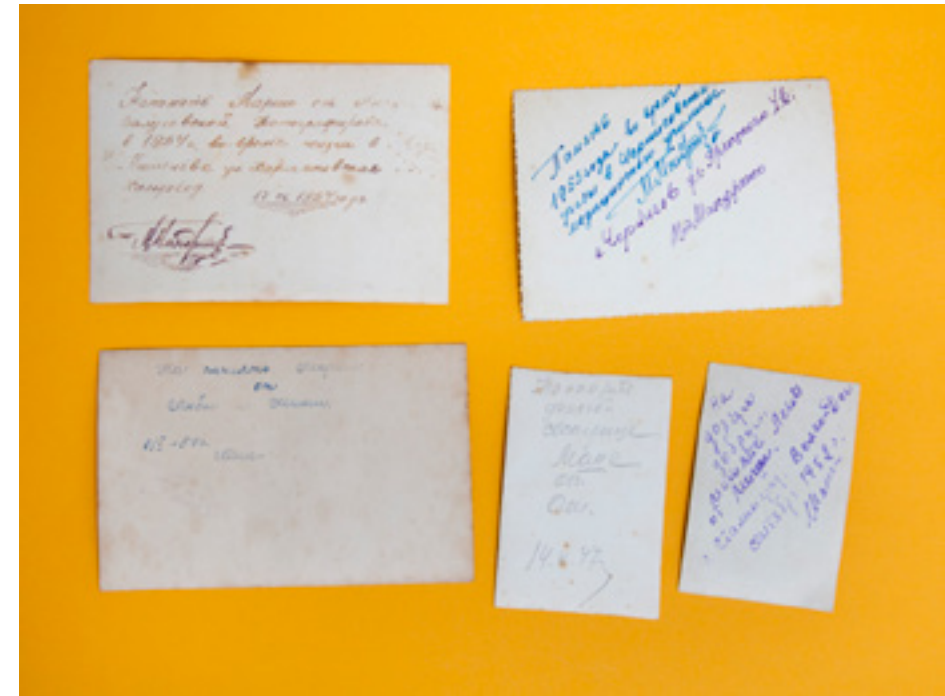


Figure 50a: Back side of family photographs.

The photographs in *Figures 50a* and *50b* come from my family album, actually, from my family shoebox. For some reason there was not much attention paid to preserving the old memories; my grandparents and parents kept them quite neglectingly, and so do I, but there is still something very attractive about these pictures. Most of the time I don't even know who the people on the photos are. I know some close relatives, but we have quite a small family so there are not that many photos. Instead I have photographs of complete strangers with a few words on the back, like 'For a long memory! With love, Maria' or 'To the best friend from the best friend, forever! Lena' and so on. Sentences full of naive and fabulous statements which one does not come across so often nowadays. But there is something else to these photographs. I do not want to take the position that old photos lose their representative function and just work as unified nostalgic artifacts, but I guess this is at least partly true.

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*Figure 50b: Family photographs.*

The two depicted women in *Figure 51*, for you as an outsider of my family history, look the same and communicate the same. They can refer to fashion of that time, youth, tradition, joy, decency, friendship and other things. This photograph could have been found in an ethnographical magazine, a fashion magazine or somebody's family album. In all these cases they would bear different meanings. But the interesting part is that the woman on the left will always be my grandmother. Not that it would make any difference to you, but I would never be able to see this image apart from this fact. This obstacle or advantage makes me forget this other lady, all my attention would be focused on the sight of my grandmother and her smile. I never saw her that way, on this picture she is seventeen years old, and I cannot recognize this look. But because the photograph relates to something that actually happened somewhere somewhen I assume it was her who acted like that and it makes me wonder how she was. But these thoughts have no relevance to you and can only be shared on the emotional level. I can describe it and try to explain but then your rational process comes in and it gets another reaction from this picture.

So in this example we see a combination between the mechanism of semantics and pragmatics rather than a clean case of the latter.

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*Figure 51: Women.*

In this investigation we deal with a complex system of psychological, social and physical environment which shape our ability to read an image and get closer to the meaning, understanding how we react and respond to the things we see. This complexity makes it difficult to structure the factors which influence us. In pragmatics the area becomes even wider. The environment, the method of presentation and the context as additional attributes contribute to a meaning anyway. These can direct our attention, strengthen some points or weaken them. The awareness of these processes becomes essential in our ability to read an image.

Summarizing this chapter we should have realized that an image always exists in a particular surrounding. The surrounding completes an image, so underestimating it can lead to misunderstanding and incorrect reactions. This chapter finalizes this structural study of visual grammar which aims to develop skills in visual literacy.