

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL FOR INTEGRATING GENERATIVE AI INTO THE ANALYSIS OF COLLAGES

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AGENDA

- A common challenge in creative research
- Using GenAI to transform image to text
- Case: Analysis of collages
- Discussion: GenAI and qualitative analysis

A COMMON CHALLENGE IN CREATIVE RESEARCH

TRANSFORMING VISUAL DATA INTO TEXT

- Academic practices such as analysis and reporting largely rely on language.
- This is a challenge when the research output is not in the format of written text (Colucci 2017, Kara 2020). The research output must then be “translated” into writing.
- This process can be tedious and time-consuming, and the interpretive space is wide.

”Given that written text is so dominant in research outputs, it is perhaps not surprising that creative analytic practice is also dominated by written art forms.” (Kara 2020, p. 169).

USING GENAI AS AN ANALYTICAL ASSITANT

GENAI CAPABILITIES

“At their core, LLMs are advanced machine learning systems trained on vast text datasets to process and generate human-like language (Chang & Bergen, 2024). They rely on prompts – natural language inputs (sometimes referred to as queries) – to produce outputs ranging from summaries to detailed text generation that resembles, mimics, or demonstrates complex reasoning.” (Overton et al. 2025, p. 2)

- Using GenAI as an analytical assistant implies drawing on GenAI’s multimodal and generative capabilities, such as
 - image to text
 - generating descriptions, interpretations, and arguments

GENERAL APPROACH FOR USE OF GENAI FOR ANALYSIS

- Human-led analysis
- AI as an assistant or collaborator, not a replacement
- Entering into a dialogue rather than asking for answers
- Ensuring data security and GDPR compliance
- Attentiveness to hallucinations and bias
- Aiming for slow scholarship

“I want to advocate a perspective where these advanced technologies serve not as accelerants to quicker publication or faster analysis as ends in themselves, (...) but as tools to foster the deliberation, reflection, and depth inherent in slow scholarship and the richness of what rigorous qualitative research has to offer.” (Nolan 2025, p. 6)

CASE: ANALYSIS OF COLLAGES

CASE: CONTEXT

- 4 collages were created at a monthly meetup for relatives to persons with developmental disabilities as a question to this answer: “What should the municipality understand about being a relative to a person with developmental disabilities?”
- An art-based approach (collage) was used to capture experiences and emotions that are difficult to articulate through language (Kara, 2020; Pain, 2012; Gauntlett, 2004). Collage is valued for its ability to convey ambiguity and multiple perspectives (Powell, 2010) and has a low skills threshold.
- Analysis assisted by ChatGPT-5 Plus (training on content deactivated)



CASE: ANALYTICAL APPROACH

- An adapted version of Kress & Van Leeuwen's visual social semiotics.





STEP I: CLOSE DESCRIPTION OF THE VISUAL ELEMENTS

- **Prompt:** List all the visual elements in this image (objects, people, colours, text). Only describe the content of each element, not the layout or composition. Present the output as a simple bullet-point list without subheadings.

- Text: "Sæt gang i samtalen" (black text on beige background)
- Text: "2025" (orange numbers on white background)
- Text: "SAMARBEJDE OG FÆLLESSKAB GAV STORE FREMSKRIDT" (black text on beige background)
- Text: "FÅ SMAG FOR MERE" (black text on grey background, vertical)
- Text: "På en ny måde" (red cursive text on beige background, vertical)
- Text: "PÅ VEJ MOD EN" (white text on dark blue background)
- Text: "FREMTID?" (white text on dark blue background)
- Text: "ET TRYGT HJEM" (white text with light outline on dark blue background)
- Photograph: Glass bottles and jars in different shapes used as vases, with flowers (purple, white, pink, cream-coloured) and green leaves/stems, placed on a blue surface with a blurred green background
- Painting/illustration: One expressive artwork showing three stylised human figures in light tones with red and yellow brushstrokes, a large black form in the middle, and a background in dark red, green, and brown with broad brushstrokes
- Photograph cut-out: Cocktail glass with a pink drink and a lemon or lime twist, white border around the cut-out



STEP 2: INTERPRETING THE VISUAL ELEMENTS

- **Prompt:** Based on the previously described visual elements, suggest possible meanings or connotations for each of them individually. Consider cultural, social, emotional or symbolic associations, and avoid interpreting the collage as a whole. If some of the elements have a narrative dimension, mention this. For each visual element, list 1–3 possible interpretations that someone might infer, depending on cultural or contextual knowledge.

- **Photograph: Bottles with flowers on a table, blurred garden background**

1. Symbol of beauty, life, and renewal (flowers).
2. Associations with hospitality, celebration, or memorial rituals.
3. The glass bottles may suggest simplicity, repurposing, or fragility.

- **Painting/illustration with stylised figures and dark form**

1. Figures could symbolise struggle, suffering, or vulnerability.
2. Dark central form may connote threat, chaos, or an overwhelming force.
3. Narrative dimension: interaction between the figures (one lying down, others crouching or reaching) might suggest conflict, care, or entrapment.

- **Photograph cut-out: Cocktail glass with pink drink and citrus twist**

1. Associations with leisure, indulgence, nightlife, or escape.
2. Could symbolise luxury, celebration, or distraction.
3. Bright, playful tone contrasts with heavier imagery, creating tension or irony.



STEP 3: DESCRIBING THE COMPOSITION

- **Prompt:** Describe the overall visual composition of this collage. Focus on layout, spatial arrangement, proximity, symmetry or asymmetry, salience (what draws the eye), balance, and how the different elements relate to each other on the page.

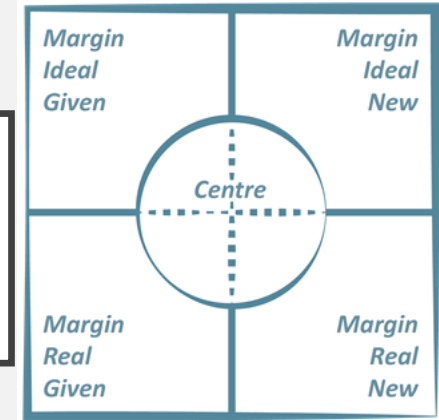
Compositionally:

- There is a strong **vertical axis** created by the bottles/flowers, flanked by vertical text strips.
- There is **asymmetry** in the placement of text and cut-outs: left-heavy text columns vs. the off-centre cocktail image.
- The collage balances **light/bright top** (flowers, sky-blue surface, white backgrounds of text) with a **dark/heavy bottom** (painting, dark blue text strips).
- **Salience:** the eye is first drawn to the flower photograph (colourful, natural, central), then to the contrasting black-and-white bold text strips, and finally to the anomalous cocktail cut-out which interrupts the darker painterly field.



- **Prompt:** How might the collage as a whole be interpreted in light of its visual composition? Assume that the top half represents the ideal, the bottom half the real, the left side the given, and the right side the new. In your interpretation, also discuss how the centre and the margins contribute to the overall meaning. Provide me with some alternative interpretations.

STEP 4: INTERPRETING THE COMPOSITION



1. Social/collective reading

- The top with flowers and cooperative slogans symbolises *what society aspires to*: community, collaboration, progress, and a safe home.
- The bottom painting with its distorted figures and dark mass represents *social reality*: inequality, struggle, and vulnerability.
- The cocktail glass hints at leisure or consumer culture as a distraction from harsh realities.
- Left-side slogans are the *established narratives* (given: cooperation, community, dialogue), while the right side (new) suggests uncertain futures that may not align with these ideals.

3. Political/ideological reading

- Top: aspirational rhetoric of progress and collective achievement (slogans, flowers as flourishing community).
- Bottom: the weight of systemic issues or crises that underlie such ideals (chaotic painting, vulnerable figures).
- Left: established political discourse ("collaboration," "conversation," "safe home").
- Right: emergent or disruptive forces challenging the given order — uncertainty about the "future," consumer culture, individual indulgence (cocktail).
- The collage as a whole may critique how lofty ideals are framed while underlying tensions remain unresolved.



STEP 5: INTEGRATING THE PARTICIPANT'S PERSPECTIVE

- **Prompt:** This collage was created by the mother of a woman with developmental disabilities. She explained that the flower and the vases represent relatives, community, and collaboration. The cocktail glass represents relaxation, such as going away on a holiday. The painting represents the daughter (reclined), the municipality (left), exhausted parents (right) and chaos. Integrate these subjective meanings into your previous interpretations and explain how they twist, expand or change the interpretations.

The collage narrates a caregiver's world shaped by contrasts between ideals and lived reality. At the top, flowers in glass vases symbolise relatives and community, an image of collaboration and support that the mother aspires to. In stark contrast, the lower painting depicts her daughter lying vulnerable amid chaos, flanked by the municipality on one side and exhausted parents on the other, capturing the weight of care and bureaucracy. A brightly coloured cocktail glass cuts into this darker field, representing the rare but essential possibility of respite, such as a holiday or moment of relaxation. Around these images, bold text strips evoke broader societal promises of dialogue, cooperation, progress, and security, which frame but do not resolve the tension between aspiration and daily struggle. The collage thus portrays a life lived between fragile beauty, systemic challenges, and fleeting moments of relief.

DISCUSSION: THE POTENTIAL OF INTEGRATING GENAI INTO THE ANALYSIS

WIDENING THE INTERPRETIVE SPACE

“When AI is added to the equation, it does not replace the researcher but becomes part of a triadic interpretive space, one in which the LLM’s outputs act as provocations that the researcher responds to, questions, and situates. The act of understanding becomes a process of navigating between perspectives: that of the participant, the AI model, and the researcher’s own evolving framework. The hermeneutic circle is not broken but widened.”
(Friese, 2025, p. 6, pre-print)

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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